

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

A CASE STUDY IN LANGUAGE: JOHN BARTH'S

THE END OF THE ROAD

by

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A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

WINNIPEG, MANITOBA



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## INTRODUCTION

This thesis is ostensibly about a single novel, John Barth's The End of the Road.<sup>1</sup> In fact, it is about the effect language has on reality--and about the implications this has for literary criticism. Because I have taken this approach some of the conclusions which I attribute to Barth may seem overblown. But to show the effect language has on reality I have had to show that language can and does run the character's lives--I have had to make that suggestion credible--and I have done whatever I thought I had to, to get the idea across.

What is to come is an analysis, often a word by word analysis, of the novel. For The End of the Road is a good vehicle for a study of the way language structures reality. First, it is a personal narrative told by the book's main character, Jake Horner. Secondly, the book talks about language itself at great length.

In this book Jake Horner is recollecting how he has been more or less responsible for the death of another man's

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<sup>1</sup>John Barth, The End of the Road (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1958). Barth published "revised" editions of all his novels. My quotations and page numbers are from the revised Bantam edition.

wife--how he made her pregnant and how she died during an illegal abortion he arranged for her. That is what Jake is really remembering. But how can he bear to remember such an event? That is what Jake's narrative is all about. For finally, it is impossible to tell whether Jake is trying to remember his past wrongs or whether by contrast, he has found that the best way to try to forget about them is to talk about them. The contrasting pair of ideas, "remembering" and "forgetting" don't really matter--Jake is just telling his side of his story, getting himself used to it. And the only thing keeping him honest is language--though it will seem clearer if I say that the honesty of Jake's story will depend on the kind of language his conscience will let him accept. Unfortunately, I don't see how using the idea of "conscience" adds anything to the discussion.

Conscience, to me, is just an emotion, that arises when something I am contradicts something else I am. So when part of me says "I couldn't have done that act--how could I possibly have done that?!" it works like conscience but it feels like a contradiction. It feels like a contradiction in language. I then try to "express" myself differently to get rid of the contradiction. But there are obstacles to resolving the contradiction this way, for I must find a way out--an explanation--that doesn't contradict any part of me--I must find an explanation that I believe is "true".

In deciding what is true however, I can rely on all

the ambiguities, all the "grey" areas, I have accepted before. I can, for example, doubt that I have any real substance and thus throw the whole question of whether "I" could have "done it" into so much confusion that my deed no longer troubles me. Or, for another example, I could claim my environment conditioned me and "caused" me to do what I did. In this case I will have a ready out so long as I can bear the idea of not being able to enjoy what I do because it is not a part of my life. My point is, that regardless of the problem language breathes life into it, and when the problem is snuffed out language writes its obituary. Now, whether language "causes" its death is a question I can't answer. But I do know that the only time a man is really trapped by a problem, the only time it is really insoluble, is when that man believes language only fashions lies. There is one more thing. Everything Jake does and decides in this book remains uncertain. Jake never really knows whether he has learned anything and he never really knows who he is. So the book is uncertain. This means that for certain parts of the book distinctions can't be made and definitions can't be given. This, in turn, brings language itself into question. For the main character is himself the narrator, and so it is the language itself rather than the character presented which seems to require explanation.

Almost all personal narratives do not so much present a personal appraisal of a certain experience as they present a complex argument about the nature of experience

itself. I believe that The End of the Road can be treated as an example of such an argument. This thesis will treat the book as a case history of such an attempt to reconstruct an experience by putting it into words.

My study will examine Jake's narrative reconstruction of a period in his life and try to show the way he gradually builds up a picture of himself during the course of the novel. Further, it will examine the problems involved in such a project and specifically, the place of language in these problems. I will discuss the events in the order the novel describes them and make no assumptions beyond what the novel has to say about those events. Initially this will point up the painful incoherence of what Jake has to say. But eventually, I hope it will show how Jake seems to be piecing together an argument at the same time as John Barth's novel is piecing together the makings of a story.

## CHAPTER I

### IDENTITY

The End of the Road introduces itself with the provocative sentence:

In a sense, I am Jacob Horner.<sup>1</sup>

As soon as a reader encounters this first sentence he begins to feel uncertain about the identity of Jacob Horner. The use of "In a sense" before what he would usually take to be a simple assertion of existence makes it apparent that nothing can be taken as established at this point. Without some additional information there is really no way of knowing how this first sentence ought to be taken. As it is, the sentence seems to indicate there is a man, role, narrative voice or something which is "Jacob Horner". Yet it is in no way clear which of these alternatives applies, and the inclusion of "In a sense" finally makes the sentence seem contradictory.

If "In a sense" is used in its traditional capacity as a non-specific qualifier of whatever follows it, then the rest of the sentence "I am Jacob Horner" is placed in a semantically untenable position. It is difficult to make sense of a sentence which allows the possibility of someone's

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<sup>1</sup>John Barth, The End of the Road (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1958), p. 1.

not being himself "in a sense". Because of this the "I" becomes set apart as though it might not always be "Jacob Horner". Under such circumstances, "I" might refer to the novel itself, insofar as the novel is a part of Jake Horner's history. Alternately, if the novel is treated as something in process, "I" may represent a momentary and therefore partial assertion of Jake Horner's present being which is in the process of reconstructing the history of Jake Horner's life. The point is that there is an uncertainty here, and this uncertainty makes it impossible to discover the man, or the role, or the narrative voice, or whatever in the name "Jacob Horner".

Because of this uncertainty the single word "sense" is also kept alive as a possible way to explain the sentence. If the word "sense" is the crucial word in the phrase "in a sense", that is, if it is assumed the phrase might refer to notions like "making sense" or one's "senses", then the sentence must indicate that the story exists and is told from within Jacob Horner's mental processes. But then, is Jake's opening statement the cause or the effect of the awarenesses he presents later? The answer to this question remains uncertain. The most likely possibility seems to be that Jake's statement is a case of his own mental processes speaking about themselves. Thus, in this case, "in a sense" would establish Jake's mind as the source, substance and perspective of the story which is about to unfold.

Clearly, because it comes at the beginning of the



novel the first sentence is a discrete installment of information. Because it is a confusing bit of information however, two interpretations appear possible. In fact, both these interpretations must impress themselves on the reader, because only further increments in information will make it clear whether the key here is the idiom "in a sense" or the word "sense". However, in further point of fact, there is never any information provided later on to decisively show which interpretation is "better". But is one of the two necessarily better? And are these interpretations not merely ways of turning the uncertainty of this statement into the certainty of a series of concrete alternatives? It is my belief that in the confusion of its language the opening statement is in fact a synthesizing expression of what Jacob Horner is: a locus of active uncertainty which allows for either of the two interpretations presented above and also does not preclude ironic overtones in the novel. Moreover, I believe that the curious language Jake chooses is grounded in this active uncertainty. In short, it is the uncertainty involved here which glues together and continues to glue together the many alternative facets and perspectives of Jacob Horner.

The next bit of information provided in the novel is a description of the physical arrangements necessary in the Progress and Advice Room of the so far undescribed "Doctor". It is stated in addition that it is the "Doctor" who has "brought" Jake to the point of this history's narrative

beginning through a series of "therapies". Jake describes the restricting nature of these physical arrangements, using the example of what must be done with one's knees, and observes that "your position" is one

which has the appearance of choice, because you are not ordered to sit thus, but which is chosen only in a very limited sense, since there are no alternatives.<sup>2</sup>

The arms are another matter, however, and Jake observes,

Arms folded, akimbo, or dangling; hands grasping the seat edges or thighs, or clasped behind the head or resting in the lap--these (and their numerous degrees and variations) are all in their own ways satisfactory positions for the arms and hands, and if I shift from one to another, this shifting is really not so much a manifestation of embarrassment, or hasn't been since the first half-dozen interviews, as a recognition of the fact that when one is faced with such a multitude of desirable choices, no one choice seems satisfactory for very long by comparison with the aggregate desirability of all the rest, though compared to any one of the others it would not be found inferior.<sup>3</sup>

The focus in these two passages seems to be upon the concept of choice and its meaning. Jake seems to dispute the attitude that one's choice is a concrete alternative which one prefers over one or more other concrete alternatives, and acts to obtain. He seems to claim, instead, that things are really much more complicated and uncertain than this. He points out, in the first passage, that in some cases the idea of choice can be a mere appearance. In the second passage Jake disputes the notion of willing commitment to a choice, by working from the truism that a preferred alternative

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 2. Brackets around this passage in the novel.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 2.

before the choice becomes simply the least inferior single alternative after the choice has been made. In short, the advantages of a particular choice are only really apparent when the disadvantages of making a single choice have been accepted. And no one really wants to be limited to a single choice. Jake brings this aspect to the forefront by observing that "should you choose to consider that final observation as a metaphor, it is the story of my life in a sentence . . ." <sup>4</sup> Thus a perspective based on inferiority and the insecurity that that implies becomes the first guide provided to understanding Jake's later reactions.

The chapter concludes with the "Doctor" instructing Jake to take a job at Wicomico State Teacher's College with the following provisos:

There must be rigid discipline, or else it will be merely an occupation, not an occupational therapy. There must be a body of laws. . . . You will teach prescriptive grammar. . . . No description at all. No optional situations. Teach the rules. <sup>5</sup>

Here the reason or inspiration for Jake Horner's initial situation in Wicomico is established. By initiating the narrative with this scene Jacob Horner the narrator is providing Jacob Horner the character with a certain amount of potential rationalization. These rationalizing possibilities exist because it might well appear that Jake's later problems were simply the effect of following the Doctor's

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

orders. For the orders have the effect of placing Jake in a highly repetitive and highly artificial environment. And on the surface this seems to provide an open-ended explanation for the main character, so that all his later actions might seem to have actually been inspired by the Doctor. But on the basis of what Jake presents here it is impossible to tell to what extent Jake might be misrepresenting the Doctor.

Yet exactly similar orders are employed in psychoanalysis, and it is useful to point out the parallels. In standard analytic therapy the purpose of such orders is to pre-empt the patient's sense of freedom and thereby, make everything he does seem to take place under the cover of the orders. Thus the patient feels himself to be acting in a circumscribed and restricting context, with the result that he feels his actions to be artificial, as one does in ritual activity or when acting out a fantasy. The patient's awareness of this entrapment aids in reducing the commitment he normally feels to his situation, and this in turn allows him to alter his pattern of behavior with less of a sense of compromise than he might otherwise experience. There seems to be no reason to assume that the Doctor's orders have any greater effect than this. Moreover, such a therapeutic parallel makes it seem unlikely that the Doctor's remarks were distorted very much, and leaves Jake in a no more misguided situation than people in analysis have to cope with.

In effect, Jake is being placed in a standard

analytic situation which will allow us to observe his personal idiosyncracies as they show up against this standardized backdrop. Moreover, because of the therapeutic parallel, it seems reasonable to assume that the description given of the Doctor's orders is accurate and thus that Jake's idiosyncracies will be displayed accurately. As far as Jake's own narration is concerned the uncertainties still exist, but from this parallel it is clear that the uncertainties do not necessarily prevail except from within Jake's own perspective. Jake the narrator seems to be setting up the Doctor as the man who inspired his later actions and here I have tried to show that this impression is not necessarily warranted.

The effects of the Doctor's orders show up in the next bit of information provided in the novel, which deals with Jake's physical circumstances in Wicomico. But unlike most descriptions of physical environments, Jake's relationship with his environment neither projects a complete range of good and bad symbolic values, nor is it neutral. Because he has entered into a comprehensive ritual prescribed by the Doctor, Jake's attitude towards selecting a room seems to be a reserved and demanding one. He says for example,

The first thing that went wrong was that I found an entirely satisfactory room at once. As a rule I was extremely hard to please in the matter of renting a room.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 8.

And after listing his exacting requirements for a room in this rather superior way, Jake concludes,

Because I was so fussy, it usually took me a good while to find even a barely acceptable place. But as ill luck would have it, the first room I saw advertised for rent on my way out College Avenue . . . met all these qualifications.<sup>7</sup>

The significance of this description derives from the fact that Jake has entered into a prescribed situation, an adventure not of his own making but one of which he submits because it is supposed to do him good. His statement reflects his attitude towards that adventure now that he is inside of it. From Jake's claim that trying to rent a room was "the first thing that went wrong" and that it was "ill luck" that the first room he tried "met all . . . [his] qualifications" it is apparent that something has gone awry for him here. And the implication of this disappointment seems to be that Jake was in some sense looking forward to having trouble finding a room. In fact, he has run into the same problem he described in talking about choices. And because Jake seems to be expressing disappointment in an expected adventure, it seems reasonable to say that now that Jake is in therapy he feels he has a right to enjoy it as much as possible. Therapy has the appearance of a choice to Jake now and he is starting to measure it against the aggregate desirability of all his other apparent choices.

Later, Jake details the qualities of the furniture

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 8.

in his newly acquired room and his feeling towards that furniture, concluding that;

. . . one felt as if one had wandered into the odd pieces room of Winterthur Museum--but every piece was immensely competent. The adjective competent came at once to mind, rather than, say, efficient. This furniture had an air of almost contemptuous competence, as though it were so absurdly well able to handle its job that it would scarcely notice your puny use of it.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to the defensiveness displayed in this remark about the furniture "scarcely noticing your puny use of it" what is intriguing is the personification of the furniture in the use of "competent . . . rather than, say, efficient". The furniture seems here to possess a certain attitude, and this air of "contemptuous competence" in turn seems to indicate an adversary relationship between Jake and his environment. Is it reasonable to assume the Doctor's orders have given Jake a sense of superiority which makes him feel hostile towards his environment? But in that case we would expect Jake to reject this room.

Jake does not reject the room however. Quite the contrary, he observes "In short, the place left nothing to be desired".<sup>9</sup> He seems to expect, even perhaps to hope, to be forced finally to capitulate to such might as the furniture represents for him. In short, to be compatible the room had to seem hostile to Jake. But such a quick defeat makes Jake feel inadequately prepared for the adventures

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

which are to come. In effect, it makes him feel that he is not properly involved in his own adventure.

With the introduction of Joe Morgan, the novel completes the description of the external forces Jake will have to contend with. In narrative terms, the novel has established Jake in what he treats as an antagonistic environment. And yet there is nothing in what Jake has encountered which unambiguously seems to have caused this reaction, or to have justified it. Jake simply approaches the situation as an antagonistic one. And there seems to be no reason to believe that if Jake couched the situation in different terms, it would not take on a different complexion entirely. The point is that in Jake's personal narrative the face on the situation will be Jake's, and its complexion will be formed out of his logic and his language.

The next section of the narrative is the earliest one in the sequence of presentation which examines Jake's moods and their relationship to events at any length. Jake presents his moods by observing,

There's something to be said for the manic-depressive if his manics are really manic; but me, I was a placid depressive: a woofer without a tweeter was Jake Horner. My lows were low, but my highs were middle-register. So when I'd a real manic on I nursed it like a baby, and boils plague the man who spoiled it.<sup>10</sup>

One can see how useless it is to doubt Jake's reliability as a narrator after reading this passage. For while it is possible to dispute Jake's

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 23.



characterization of his moods here, the result is simply that Jake's feelings are ruled out of the discussion. But doing so would create a void in analysis where clearly none exists.

Like the idiosyncratic faces Jake has put on earlier happenings, this description is marked by an idiosyncratic logic and confusing language. Instead of talking about being happy or being miserable, Jake has turned clinical on us by calling himself a manic-depressive. Yet when he says that he was a person whose "lows were low" but whose "highs were middle register", he seems to be contradicting himself. For, if his "highs were middle register" why not call himself a depressive person who sometimes had a remission from that state and moved up to a neutral or "middle register" state? Because he resorts to such a forced kind of language, it seems likely that Jake wants to be treated as a member of a great class of people, namely, that class known as manic-depressives. This not only allows him to be representative of a large number of people. It also obviates the conventional technique of colouring feelings with words like "happiness" or "bitterness". Instead, Jake substitutes a toneless perspective dealing in intensities ("low-middle register-high). Jake does not feel happy or sad or rotten, he simply feels, more or less intensely. Considering that this is Jake's narrative and considering also that he makes no attempt to explain his attitude towards his own moods, one is inclined to conclude that Jake finds attitudes

towards feelings to be ill-advised or meaningless.

As a matter of fact, Jake gives an example of his opinion of people with attitudes towards feelings by telling the story of his initial encounter with Peggy Rankin. Jake is almost brutally casual towards their relationship and particularly towards Peggy's sensitive feelings about it. This finally leads to Peggy's angry claim that

"You're the one that's doing the hurting. . . . You go out of your way to let me know you're doing me a favour by picking me up, but your generosity doesn't include wasting a little time being gentle!" . . . This last piece of self-castigation, while it choked her completely for a moment, made her mad enough to sit up and glare at me.<sup>11</sup>

Jake seems to think that Peggy's attitude reflects a regrettable kind of consciousness of self on her part, in that he considers her outrage a form of self-castigation. Peggy's attitude, by contrast, seems to be that she should be allowed to maintain a higher opinion of herself than this situation implies for her. Moreover, Peggy's nagging self-consciousness about this unacceptable implied opinion drives her to her expression of anger. But it is also possible that saving face is all she hopes to accomplish with this tirade.

However Jake finds Peggy's emotions theatrical. He treats them as a self-indulgence, used more for comfort and control than for accomplishing one's purpose. As Jake observes, in Peggy's case at least, he thought these feelings

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

on her part were an unnecessary hindrance to what he thought was their mutual goal: "One would not pick . . . up [a woman] in order to witness a theatrical performance: one would purchase a theatre ticket."<sup>12</sup> Jake shows, however, that his feelings on this matter are not confined solely to Peggy Rankin's case, when he goes on to theorize about the attitudes of others in general. Jake's opinion about feelings is that they should be understood on the basis of what he has concluded are the only intelligible vehicles for feelings, namely, roles. He says that,

. . . as a rule, and especially when one is in a hurry or is grouchy, one wishes . . . [a] man to be nothing more difficult than the Obliging Filling-Station Attendant or the Adroit Cab-Driver. These are the essences you have assigned them, at least temporarily, for your own purposes, as a taleteller [does] . . . and while you know very well that no historical human being was ever just (his role) . . . You are nevertheless prepared to ignore your man's charming complexities--must ignore them, in fact, if you are to get on with the plot, or get things done according to schedule. Of this, more later, for it is related to Mythotherapy. Enough now to say that we are all casting directors a great deal of the time, if not always, and he is wise who realizes that his role-assigning is at best an arbitrary distortion of the actors' personalities; but he is even wiser who sees in addition that his arbitrariness is probably inevitable, and at any rate is apparently necessary if one would reach the end he desires.<sup>13</sup>

Jake seems to think of roles as a way of treating personalities whether his own or someone else's. And because Jake reveals a predisposition here to treat roles as the inspiration and substance of feelings rather than as their containers, it is clear that he is distorting the

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

actual situation for his own benefit. By speaking in terms of roles he eliminates the hurt that could come from really being involved in the situation.

Jake treats these things called roles as neither empirical facts nor as primitive intuitions. He starts out believing that roles determine what happens in a situation, insofar as his ability to deal with it is concerned. But he does not present the concept of roles first and then show how they apply on the basis of what he has noticed about the situation. In fact, he uses up all the evidence demonstrating the sense in which roles exist. For him, in short, roles work like language, and the problem is that any role or word applied to a situation is personal and idiosyncratic. And while Jake concedes roles are "arbitrary" he tries to show that they are in some sense indispensable and universal. Moreover, Jake's musings must be a rationalizing distortion of the original state of affairs since the theory of role-assignment is part of the "Mythotherapy" taught to him by the Doctor after this first encounter with Peggy Rankin. Whether this rationalization is ultimately to Jake's advantage is uncertain however.

Jake frames everything Peggy says, the entire episode in fact, in the terms of his own anti-sentimental psychological make-up. But why? Is he trying to understand the situation or is he trying to gain advantage, perhaps to protect himself? Indeed, within the framework of a subjective perspective, can this kind of distinction between the

two types of rationalization be made? Can one distinguish between rationalizing to understand something and rationalizing to protect oneself from the consequences of that something? The answer will always be unobtainable. In this respect however, it is clear that in his remarks about role assignment, Jake treats the entire encounter with Peggy as an entirely episodic one and in effect cancels out or precludes any long term possibilities or expectations in his own mind by invoking notions like "The Obliging Filling-Station Attendant" and "The Adroit Cab-Driver". Both these terms imply one is dealing with inconsequential interactions of brief duration which will not be extended or repeated.

Also there seems to be a connection between Jake's attitude towards feelings, discussed earlier, and his theory about roles. But unfortunately there is even more uncertainty here. Because Jake's motives are so obviously obscured by the kind of presentation employed, it is impossible to isolate Jake's actual motives at the time, and so, it is impossible to see Jake in any clear context. It is only possible to say that as far as the narrative is concerned, Jake reconstructs the episode in such terms that his own predispositions towards people and emotions are implicit in his understanding of the roles that people must take on. In short, the difficulty involved in the meaning of roles is cancelled out by Jake's ability to control role assignment and by the selective understanding of roles which he possesses. So for him there is no difficulty.

On another plane, this statement of Jake's, in the very process of revealing some of the channels in which his mind operates, reveals as well some of the restrictions within which the narrative operates. When he says, in speaking of the roles of "Obliging Filling-Station Attendant" and "Adroit Cab-Driver", that "these are the essences you have assigned them, at least temporarily, for your own purposes" and then adds the catch or hook line "as a tale-teller [does]", it is clear that tale-teller applies to Jake himself. The notion of essences used here shows not only the selective understanding of "roles" Jake has, but speaks to the selective understanding most people hope to obtain from books. After all, what is the difference between the formulas Jake wants to use to categorize people with and the formulas for assessing and understanding human conduct which the reader hopes to obtain?

Jake further explains that with roles "you are prepared to ignore your man's charming complexities--must ignore them in fact, if you are to get on with the plot". Since Jake is the one telling this story, it is quite clear that he may not only ignore the "charming complexities" of Peggy Rankin and Rennie Morgan, but also may ignore his own "charming complexities", which any other narrator might consider less dispensible. Indeed, the disturbing thing about "charming complexities" is the possibility that Jake "must ignore them" because this is the only way it is possible for him to "get on with the plot". For what can

it mean for someone who is immobilized every time he encounters "complexities" to speak about the difficulties which are the result of "complexities"? Jake is talking around the real issue and this is a kind of rationalization. But again, is it rationalization to allow understanding or is it rationalization used to protect oneself? I believe in fact that the two forms of rationalization must be indistinguishable under these circumstances.

By setting things up in such a manner, the book makes it clear that what is presented is not complete enough to allow one to say, for example, that an indication Jake is not moral means he is amoral or immoral. Jake controls what is brought to our attention and what is not, and nobody but Jake has sufficient control over the perspective and data available to make ex cathedra statements about which conclusions are justified. Jake has control over, and thus must be allowed to provide, not only the premises but also the rules of inference. This is not to say one cannot test the premises or the rules of inference, but it does mean one cannot deny what Jake says and claim to do it on the basis of what he says. And significantly, such an indication that Jake is constructing an argument in his own behalf clearly parallels John Barth's task of fabricating a story entitled The End of the Road.

The language Barth has used in this book indicates that his task has been to produce a story, and his responsibility has been to show he has a limited understanding of

the world and a limited capacity for expressing it. This is important not because of the possible oversights or omissions it acknowledges, but because there are tacit and unconscious features which are always part of an author's general perception and understanding without his ever being aware of their presence or influence. For example, Barth's description of roles may neglect certain things which might be operative in a real life situation. But the important thing is that roles really seem to exist as soon as he starts talking about them. In fact whether what Barth says is accepted or not, it has to be accepted or rejected in his terms before one can claim to have understood the book. One must, in short, use Barth's terms if one wants to reject his argument. The end achieved by Barth in pointing out this unassailable and irreducible authorial domain then is that it reveals the enormous prerogatives and powers available to the author--powers and prerogatives which provide the tempting ability to pre-empt issues and prescribe what may be debated in their place. In addition, Barth is showing that the story and its construction is something he experiences, and that he himself must be guided by his experience in constructing the book. By contrast, the reader is encountering an expression made out of language and he would do well to be guided by the fact that it is language he is dealing with in reading a story.

In any case, after its discussion of roles the book talks about the substance of Jakes experiences, that is, his



moods. Jake provides a more complete expression of how his moods work here by showing the relationship between his moods in themselves and the actions those moods produce in the world. This comes at the end of his interlude with Peggy, when he says that

. . . there was a length of time beyond which I could not bear to be actively displeased with myself, and when that time began to announce its approach . . . I went to sleep. Only the profundity and limited duration of any moods kept me from being a suicide: as it was, this practise of mine of going to bed when things got too awful, this deliberate termination of my day, was itself a kind of suicide, and served its purpose as efficiently. My moods were little men, and when I killed them, they stayed completely dead.<sup>14</sup>

Jake's description of his moods here, involves a strange use of the word "moods" and the word "suicide". Jake says that the "limited duration" of his moods "kept me from being a suicide" and then turns around and says that he was always killing off his moods and that "this was itself a kind of suicide". But what is the difference between this state of perpetual suicide and a permanent and final one? The difference seems to be a very small one, though it is a revealing one.

Jake views his intellectual and analytic self as continuous here and views his emotional self as discontinuous. And because only his analytic self possesses the continuity necessary to make comparisons, it is easy to see why Jake's moods are so curiously uncoloured. After all, how can he compare his moods in their own terms when each one is a

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

discrete and independent entity? And it must be apparent by now that everything about Jake and the book has to be understood in its own terms. Working through the scattered bits of information this book presents leaves no alternative.

To my mind Jake may be concentrating on one of two things here. First, he may be primarily interested in asserting his ability to strike moods from his mind, thereby implying that he does not compare good moods with bad moods but rather simply compares a particular mood with a state where he has no moods at all. In this case Jake is implying that he periodically experiences a kind of nothingness which extends to every conceptual and emotional level and has the effect of wiping out his awareness.

Also, since Jake's thinking being seems to be the only part of him which has some kind of continuity, the only part of his emotional being which persists is that part which is registered in thought during the times when moods are present. This is true by definition because Jake's emotional being is discontinuous, and thus must be incomprehensible to itself--it is completely regenerated with the onset of each new mood. As a result, it is what Jake thinks and not what he or other people feel that Jake recognizes and is sensitive to. His theory of roles is a concrete illustration of this state of affairs.

But why suggest that Jake is forced into adopting intellectual abstractions like roles to explain emotional situations? Because while roles may well be an anti-

immobilization device for Jake, they are much more than that. Roles, whether you assume them or assign them, tend to carry you away and to motivate you in a way which has more to do with the role than with the normal attitude of the actor. In Jake's case for example, his attitude towards moods is subordinate to his idea of roles. As a result, Jake's moods are treated as "little men" possessing only the fact of their existences and the intensity of their existences --all the rest is simply part of a person's role.

His moods are the basis of his personality and each time he kills off a mood he is confining himself to a more limited range of possible personalities than were available to him previously. Later, when the psychological touchstone of weatherlessness is encountered, this limited range of Jake's personality will show up in stark relief on the basis of what is precluded in and thus missing from Jake's personality and world-view.

Jake's description of the relationship between Joe and Rennie Morgan causes similar problems. While Jake does not state any opinions about this relationship, his description of it seems to be couched in a kind of language which will make the relationship seem contrived and fraudulent.

Jake says, for example, that many of Rennie's traits

were borrowed directly from Joe, as were both the matter and manner of her thinking. It was clear that in spite of the progress she'd evidently made towards being indistinguishable from her husband, she was still apprehensive about the disparity . . .<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

But Jake's language has the potential of being even more self-serving when he describes Joe Morgan, because he sets the description up as a contrast to his own personality.

He says,

I was continually impressed by his drive, his tough intellectuality, and his deliberateness--and, like any very stimulating thing, it was exhausting. . . . Indecision . . . was apparently foreign to him: he was always sure of his ground; he acted quickly, explained his actions lucidly if questioned, and would have regarded apologies for missteps as superfluous.<sup>16</sup>

It is clear that a very complicated argument is being presented here. What can Jake be up to? There is an implied contrast between Jake and Joe here, which becomes clear cut when it is realized Jake seems to be most interested in Joe's defences. Joe is "always sure of his ground", he can afford to "act quickly", he is sufficiently prepared to be able to explain "his actions lucidly if questioned", and his rationality is so unswerving that he can be uncompromising and regard "apologies for missteps as superfluous".

Then Jake decides to cite his own failings, such as "shyness, fear of appearing ridiculous, affinity for many sorts of nonsense, and almost complete inconsistency . . ." <sup>17</sup>

Now, it seems important at this point to start interpreting this book against Jake so to speak. For because of the way these failings are presented, as contrasts to the self-possessed rationalism of Joe Morgan, they do not really

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

seem to be failings at all. In short, because Jake seems to be pointing out his failings in the same terms that an unsympathetic character like Joe Morgan would employ, his failings are made to seem quite human and attractive. But if someone who was more personable were to articulate Jake's failings, we might be more ready to condemn them. And assuming that Jake is aware of his inadequacies at this point, we may be identifying one of the advantages for Jake in having Joe for a friend here. Indeed, this comparative analysis also keeps so far unknown faults from being exposed, though they might have seemed clear from the outset with a more methodically probing analysis. And this kind of challenge to what Jake says is a useful indication of how this book works. For because this book must always be its own final source of adjudication, and creates its own context rather than defining it, the idea that Jake may have cast himself in a favourable light by befriending Joe Morgan can be no more than a remote possibility at this point. It is the kind of possibility one can be open to and aware of, but because of the nature of the narrative it will also invariably be made to seem remote.

When Jake is accepted for the job at the teacher's college, it marks the final filling in of the picture of his environment. As we have seen this environment gives rise to a number of perspectives. The environmental details are at once a true psychic landscape revealed in accordance with the needs and awarenesses of the narrator, and an external

environment for the main character. And the descriptions which have been inserted can thus be considered to represent the tensional as well as the physical backdrop for the story, since Jake the narrator and Jake the character have to deal with every important environmental factor there is in this book; Jake the narrator sets out the important factors and Jake the character demonstrates their importance by wrestling with them. But in addition, because Jake has satisfied the Doctor's preconditions for therapy at this point, the environment, events and encounters can be considered to represent therapeutic situations, even if Jake only sees them as personal challenges.

With the setting out of the environment he must live in completed, Jake gets down to a serious examination of the decisive features of his personality. He says;

Perhaps because the previous day had been, for me, so unusually eventful, or perhaps because I'd had relatively little sleep (I must say I take no great interest in causes) my mind was empty . . . it was as though there were no Jacob Horner today. After I'd eaten, I returned to my room, sat in my rocker and rocked and rocked, barely sentient.<sup>18</sup>

It is interesting to note that specific details are being presented here, even though Jake maintains "my mind was empty" during the entire scene. In short, what Jake describes here is something which he should have been unable to remember. What this does to the logic of his presentation is very interesting, because it adds a new level to it.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

Jake must have figured this scene out in order to present it at all, for he was "thinking of nothing" and was not aware of either feelings or events. Also, Jake gives as possible causes for the condition described, the "unusually eventful" "previous day" or "relatively little sleep", and then wipes out both these alternatives with the remark "I take as great interest in causes". The rest of the book shows Jake has great difficulty in thinking causally and prefers to avoid such thinking. But what is important is that the alternatives Jake offers here seem to be the result of a reflective approach requiring alternatives. And he treats these alternatives as mere hypotheses produced at a level at which, for him, all discrimination represents nothing more than judgements applied to the situation. Thus, rather than presenting personal impressions and inclinations, the narrative has moved on to the level of judgements applied to the situation.

Jake's statement of taking no great interest in causes seems further to imply that he does not think in terms of, and therefore is not interested in, the successfulness of results. For to be really indifferent to "causes" and "effects" Jake would have to feel this way. And in that case, we are dealing with a man who never tries to act across time towards some kind of personal satisfaction. In short, he is a man who does not know how to need, who does not even register results because his psychic moments when killed stay completely dead.

Jake then tells of a dream of his which climaxes with the unexpected but compelling assertion "there isn't going to be any weather tomorrow". But isn't it unlikely that a chief weather forecaster would predict such a thing, in a dream or anywhere else? Well, one does in this case. And in the dream he is able to do it because he is an expert who knows all about it--knows things that only an expert can know. Jake must accept the prediction as information, and believe it is his own ignorance which makes it seem impossible rather than improbable.

This situation is like the one Jake was in with the Doctor. For the Doctor seemed to possess the secret and "inside" information of an expert. His expertise allowed him to see things and to make predictions about things which Jake could not even think about. For Jake became immobilized as soon as he tried to probe the same personal uncertainties which the Doctor was ready to cure him of. In short, Jake's problem is that he cannot comprehend "weatherlessness" even though he can experience it. It is just like a bad dream. He feels himself cut off from a crucial body of information about himself--and being cut off from this information is both the substance of his problem and the basis of its power over him.

Jake then says his dream can be used to illustrate a difference between moods and the weather, their usual analogy: a day without weather is unthinkable, but for me at least there were frequently days without any mood at all. On these days, Jacob Horner, except in a meaningless metabolistic sense, ceased to



exist, for I was without a personality. Like those microscopic specimens that Biologists must dye in order to make them visible at all, I had to be coloured with some mood or other if there was to be a recognizable self to me. The fact that my successive and discontinuous selves were linked to one another by the two unstable threads of body and memory; the fact that in the nature of Western languages the word change presupposes something upon which the changes operate; the fact that although the specimen is invisible without the dye, the dye is not the specimen--these are considerations of which I was aware but in which I had no interest.<sup>19</sup>

Here again, the language Jake uses seems to pose a problem. He says there is a difference between moods and the weather, and then gives the example of one of his moodless experiences. Yet his discussion does not make any real difference apparent. For doesn't moodlessness remain just as incomprehensible as weatherlessness? And this, surely, is the point: Jake has experienced moodlessness and thus must acknowledge its existence, even if it is incomprehensible to him, just as a day without weather is "unthinkable". And even if moodlessness is unthinkable, must one always conclude for that reason that it is impossible? Like what happens to him in his dream, the fact is that Jake experiences it and thus it is possible. When one is dealing with experience and starts making such claims about the impossibility of certain experiences, one is only trying to compromise the experiential fact by disputing its right and ability to constitute and be called a fact. But one does not really make the fact impossible by this means, one only makes it inexpressible.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

The process is that much more disquieting in Jake's case however, since he is saying not only that he experiences weatherlessness but that this is also the kind of experience which makes him feel weatherlessness is often all there is of Jacob Horner. When Jake says he often has no "mood at all", he is saying that he experienced a kind of nothingness which engulfed every bit of his being. This is tantamount to saying that Jake's existence is based on a premise which is inconceivable, and the real difficulty with language in this book is neatly contained in that conclusion.

Moreover, when Jake says that "like those microscopic specimens that Biologists must dye in order to make them visible, I had to be coloured with some mood or other if there was to be a recognizable self to me", he is implying that he requires an unreflected awareness, a mood, if any reflective awareness, any identity, is to be possible. Jake is clearly at the mercy of his capacity for having moods. As he notes, his self-consciousness, his objective being, and all the rest of him "ceased to exist" when no mood existed to animate his objective self. So at this point another meaning for the opening sentence of the novel begins to emerge, where "I" refers to a subjective being which "in a sense" is Jacob Horner. There is an "I" and there is an objective "Jacob Horner"--and the two seem to be connected, but only "in a sense". This is a very cautious way of explaining the opening sentence. Yet in my opinion this barrier between subjective and objective being is crucial to

the novel because the uncertainties and troublesome language noted so far seem to spring from it. It is the nothingness of the gulf between experienced subjective being and articulate self-conscious being which the book seems to have been trying to establish, and only within the context of this gulf is it possible to understand Jake's claims to "exist" or not to "exist" according to his moods.

Earlier it was suggested that Jake's attitude towards time seems to imply the presence, inside the "Jacob Horner" shell, of a man whose psychic vocabulary does not include needing. For example, Jake notes that "my successive and discontinuous selves were linked to one another by the two unstable threads of body and memory" and then casts off "body and memory" with another statement of indifference ". . . these are considerations . . . in which I had no interest." "Body and memory" are the instruments of desires, and as such, are very tangible agents of continuity. But since Jake experiences his identity differently it comes as no surprise that he ignores such continuity as there is in his life--it seems to him to be something whose applicability to his life is artificially created by language. In addition, his statement that he has no "interest" in this artificial continuity then takes on an added meaning. The word "interest" then comes to mean "in which I had no part or stake".

Jake also refers to something persisting through "change" when he says ". . . in the nature of Western

languages the word change presupposes something upon which the change operates". This statement suggests that language could be a subject of central importance in the novel, and confirms a suspicion to that effect which has probably lingered in the alert reader's mind for some time. In addition, Jake's disinterested attitude towards the nature of language provides a significant insight into his notion of himself. For Jake is saying, in effect, that his being represents a restricted form of language. After all, "moodlessness" by itself surely involves the use of a special kind of language by its mere usage.

In his discussion of "moodlessness" Jake is, in effect, restricting the range of his own being, for he is implying that his identity represents a restricted form of language. It represents this because the statement seems to reveal a kind of being which is somewhat in conflict with language, and since language is used to express this conflict, a kind of being which is to some extent trapped within language. This is probably the most fundamental aspect of Jake's problem with his identity and it is an inevitable problem for anyone who wants to lay claim to a strictly personal identity. Later on of course, the question will become whether or not Jake's problem is a universal problem.

Furthermore, Jake's statement about "weatherlessness" implies that the narrative is describing a subjectivity (an "I") detached from a self-conscious identity ("Jacob Horner") in such a way that self-consciousness can neither

control that "I" nor even act as an intermediary in reconciling it to language. That is, self-consciousness can neither maintain some kind of sentient "Jacob Horner" on a "moodless" day, nor even make Jake show an interest in adhering to the principles of "Western languages". In fact, Jake feels alienated from language, and it is this alienation which decides his attitude towards events.

There is one final point to be made about the "weatherlessness" passage. From what I said earlier, it should be clear that this whole passage represents a pretty daring departure from the narrative preceding it, since it details a situation whose facets Jake could not have known during the course of the events presented. Also, it seems likely that something very important must be involved, for otherwise why would the author of the narrative be willing to put such a strain on credibility and on the desire for consistency? But given the selective sensibilities and sensitivities which were apparent in the description of moods in the role assignment section, it seems likely that "weatherlessness" is more than an "essence which you assign temporarily" and is rather a formative and constitutive part of Jake's make-up. As such it shows the boundary lines Jake accepts between where individual volition leaves off and roles begin, and it shows how all the other biases of vocabulary he displays are crucially important to the picture of identity he has. He doesn't feel free to act because the freedom to act may be abruptly cut off by the onset of

"weatherlessness". So Jake's personal identity doesn't include a sense of the freedom to do and be what he wants-- and he has no real sense of personal sovereignty as a result. Thus Jake's worry about his identity is given real power with this passage, because his "weatherlessness" makes it clear that the uncertainty of his identity is much more important to his identity than any facet of his identity which he can put a name to.

Behind Jake's intent however, there is always the question of Barth's intent. In presenting weatherlessness in this way, Barth seems to intend this passage to be almost one of the operative points of origin for Jake's character. This seems to be the case because "weatherlessness" is constructed with so many points of reference that it seems to be a factor against which inferences made in the course of the narrative can be measured. This seems reasonable because points of reference like "body and memory", "Western languages", "successive and discontinuous selves" and definitional phrases like "meaningless metabolistic sense" are usually marshalled only when it is essential they be marshalled.

Barth shows by using this device of weatherlessness, that a word or situation is not a metaphor for something else. To treat either words or situations as symbolic is to assume a position which must ignore one of the central features of the entire work, namely Jake's "successive and discontinuous selves". Jake's discontinuous moods point out

the primacy of moments, and everything he knows or is inimical to the freely symbolic situation. Barth takes such narrative steps because the whole purpose of the novel requires that the experience of dismay or grief not direct us to "motivation" or anything else. An expression of dismay in this novel is not the product of anything, it is a rock bottom awareness--regardless of the circumstances surrounding it and even if its duration is only momentary.

The boundaries of most novels are considered to be linguistic. But Barth seems to want to shake this attitude with the introduction of weatherlessness, to serve notice that while the book may be restricted by the semantic conventions of language, that it is disastrous to see that as the final over-riding restriction, the only one deterring the instinctual predilection towards acceptance of the most unbounded interpretations possible. In this book it is Jake's uncertainty about his identity which determines the boundaries, and because of the incomplete psychic vocabulary it possesses this very identity leaves semantic conventions all askew time after time. At the most fundamental level then, Barth's intent seems to be to make it clear that interpretations must see Jake's experience as the only legitimate substance of this book and in a sense the only articulable reason for it.

I have chosen to treat the discussion of weatherlessness as the last statement about Jake's basic problems. This description is invaluable for this purpose in that it makes

it clear that Jake's reactions now and later on depend on a limited range of sensitivities in him, a special vocabulary which he creates and applies to events. But this special vocabulary presents some problems, because it enforces a division between subjective experience and self-conscious expression, which in turn leaves Jake with an uncertain identity. Indeed, this gulf between subjectivity and self-conscious being is crucial because it takes so little to convert the resultant uncertainties into self-deceptions, and by this means, to convert existence into a trap. This, I believe, is what the various character's imaginations do to them in the sections of the novel which are examined in the second chapter of this paper.



## CHAPTER II

### IMAGINATION

At this point in the narrative, the novel seems to move off in another direction. Before this point we might have expected the novel to move further into Jake's head, to show the workings of his mind and to show how his mental eclipses feel. We might also have expected to see some kind of test application of specific roles to specific people, or to see a discussion of how Jake's psychic vocabulary was revised by the Doctor. But instead Jake is brought into close personal contact with Joe Morgan and his wife and the uncertainties and distortions which operated in the earlier parts of the book are sharply focussed upon.

The second chapter of this paper will mostly consider the way the characters deal with the uncertainty of their own identities and with the special vocabulary which their fragmented sensitivities give to them. But how might one deal with such things? There are many answers to this question, but they all seem to depend on how much imagination the individual possesses, and they all seem to try to get rid of the problem without solving it. In short, the imagination can only have the effect of trapping the individual within self-deceptions which he knew were at least partially illegitimate even at the outset.

Joe Morgan for example, has a system. But he also requires a system. Joe shows a striking lack of imagination throughout the book and it seems likely that as a result he has devised one final statement complete with definitions about what Joe Morgan thinks and what he therefore is.

Joe first talks about his system in speaking of his marriage. He treats his marriage as something upon which he confers value rather than as something which is inherently valuable. He says this definition is important because it deals with

the fallacy that because a value isn't intrinsic, objective, and absolute, it somehow isn't real. What I said was that the marriage relationship isn't any more of an absolute than anything else. That doesn't mean that I don't value it; in fact I guess I value my relationship with Rennie more than anything else in the world.<sup>1</sup>

The language used here seems to completely obscure the answer to the one crucial question involved in Joe's statement. Why does Joe value his marriage with Rennie so highly? Because it is more "real" than anything else? Or is it because Joe loves Rennie? But what kind of a love is it that one talks about in such terms--what kind of love can and should be set out rationally?

But finally the problem is that Joe's system seems to be circular. In short, Joe seems to possess no awareness that if values attributed to an object are not in that object, then whatever values there are must live in the relationship between the person and that object. He concedes

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 44.

that for him the "value" of his marriage isn't "intrinsic" without acknowledging that the value must then exist in him as his attitude towards it. But if the value of the marriage exists in him then it is preposterous to say that Joe values his relationship "more than anything else in the world". Presumably, it is Joe's "system" itself which keeps this problem out of Joe's mind. The system itself is all important.

The idea that the system itself may be more important to Joe than the marriage becomes apparent in Joe's overwhelming interest in the defensibility of his system:

. . . in (any) case, if you're going to defend these ends at all I think you have to call them subjective. But they'd never be logically defensible; they'd be in the nature of psychological givens, different for most people.<sup>2</sup>

Joe's whole system here is being advanced in terms of logic. He seems to want to give the impression that he examines things in an objective and logical manner, though at the same time he is claiming that his ends would have to be called "subjective". But because Joe demands that he be logically persuaded to give up a position which he admits is not logical but subjective, it seems clear that only something which could shake him free of his limited and selective sensitivities towards value systems would be of any use. In devising his system Joe has effectively prevented the problem of his own identity from occurring to him or getting through to him--because the problem is invisible to

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 46.

him he doesn't know there is any problem at all. And thus he is in a sense trapped inside his identity, confined by the psychological givens which his system incorporates. Indeed, even though he is not thinking of being hemmed in, he shows how trapped he is when he says that

. . . the givens [are] the subjective equivalent of an absolute, one of the conditions that would attach to any string of ethical propositions I might make for myself.<sup>3</sup>

Joe admits here that if he puts his imagination to work producing ethical propositions, his imagination is always going to be boxed in by the "givens" which are the reference points of his identity. But in addition, as the book progresses it becomes more and more clear that in ethical matters Joe talks a very much better game than he plays. And from Barth's point of view, the most important thing about Joe is probably the extent to which the state of entrapment which his system places him in forces him into talking a better game than he plays. Joe's sense of being able to do things is based on the security of his identity and that security is exactly equal to the protection he is able to give to the web of words which is his system. Thus any "string of ethical propositions" which Joe might make for himself is only as effective and binding as Joe's inconsistent system is--in short, Joe would probably let his "ethical propositions" be cast adrift before he would let his system be dismantled and the inconsistencies removed. Joe is caught in the trap of his own system.

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 46.

Joe Morgan is a person who believes everything must have a name. As one might expect from this, Joe is constantly engaged in confronting things and his system is designed to facilitate such confrontations. This feature of his system is apparent, for example, in Joe's statement that

. . . it's silly for anybody to apologize for something he's done by claiming he didn't really want to do it: what he wanted to do, in the end, was what he did. That's important to remember when you're reading history.<sup>4</sup>

This statement reveals a retrospective perspective to be operative in Joe, providing the over-riding context for the way he looks at all events. This seems to be the case because a perspective such as Joe's probably applies only "when you're reading" or seeing things in "history". Joe's perspective is one that is always looking back upon events to declare that what anybody "wanted to do, in the end, was what he did". But in effect, there is also an implicit partial definition of "what he (anybody) wanted to do" and what it is to "want to do". For on the basis of Joe's statement, that which is wanted can be determined with absolute certainty because it will be done. But then it follows that no one could want anything where no action was undertaken. Joe's system simply makes no allowance for the idea of someone failing to do, neglecting to do or doing inadvertently, what he "wanted". In short, Joe's system is written in the perfect tense.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

At the same time, because Joe's remarks about "history" are included in a narrative which is Jake Horner's history, it can be expected that Joe's remark about history will carry certain narrative implications. Clearly, the problems apparent in Joe's retrospective view will also serve to point out the problems Jake faces in constructing a retrospective narrative. For from a retrospective point of view the only kind of wanting which comes clearly into view is the kind which is an exact replica of the results produced. And in this case, the agony of turning desires into action is not important in itself, but has importance only as a reflection upon and explanation of, the events which finally took place. Still, these ideas are only concrete indications of how the process of perspective works. Barth's purpose here seems to be to show what perspective is--to show how it processes and organizes things into existence or non-existence. And perspective's ability to identify what is meaningful and oblivate the rest applies to any history, whether it be a personal history or the history of a society--perspective is always a self devised and unavoidable trap.

One final observation can be made about Barth's intent. It is apparent in Joe's final remark about "wanting" that Jake is, in effect, being presented with a paradigm for that process. But while it is clear that this paradigm is fallacious, it is also clear that Jake is not able to refute it or provide an alternative to it. And considering that

the paradigm is thus allowed to prevail, it seems likely that Barth wished to establish it as a symbol of what the disease of thought could do. By allowing the paradigm to persist, despite the fact it is both inappropriate and in large part invalid, Barth is able to show that Jake is trapped, just as Joe is, within a trap of his own.

This shows up in the course of Rennie and Jake's talks during a series of horse back rides. Jake tries to shake Rennie's confidence in Joe's theories, presumably in an indirect attempt to get at Joe himself. The gist of these discussions is contained in Jake's rhetorical question: ". . . Where did you and Joe get the notion that things should be scrapped just because they're absurd?"<sup>5</sup> and his observation on it that,

. . . I know very well what Joe would have answered to these remarks: let me be the first to admit that they are unintelligible. My purpose was not to make a point, but to observe Rennie.<sup>6</sup>

Jake's "observation" here has a double edged significance. Jake says Joe would answer these arguments by dismissing them because "they are unintelligible". But, given the flaws in Joe's system, it seems clear that in fact he would not answer this challenge at all. The only way Joe could have truly "answered to these remarks" is if there were provision made in his system for refuting or neutralizing the "unintelligible". But in fact there is no

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

explicit provision in Joe's system for determining what is unintelligible and for dealing with it accordingly: the "unintelligible" in Joe's system is simply anything which is not readily incorporated into that system. Barth's irony is that while Joe would not really have answered Jake's question, Jake has been trapped into believing that a claim that "these remarks . . . are unintelligible" would in fact be a satisfactory answer. In short, Jake is placed in the position of dismissing his own most valid arguments as a result of the distorting effect produced by Joe's invalid arguments.

But there are other distortions involved here. For if we follow Joe's theory, because what a person did must have been what he "really wanted to do", any act which was unplanned would be unintelligible. And in that case, the appearance of the unexpected would be disastrous for Joe and Rennie. For them, the unexpected is not absurd but "unintelligible" because it will seem unplanned and inadmissible to them in retrospect.

But before the unexpected is put to the test, there is a moment when Rennie gets a chance to talk about the virtues she sees in Joe as a result of his system. She says the first thing he told her was that

. . . he thought I could probably be wonderful, but that I was shallow as hell as I was, and he didn't expect me to change just for his sake. He couldn't offer me a thing in return that would fit the values I had then, and he wasn't interested in me as I was, so that was that.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 57.



Rennie explains that there was a period of soul-searching she and Joe went through in order to decide whether the more or less permanent relationship Joe demanded had a chance. Finally she tries to express the essence of Joe's strength and virtues when she says, "He's so strong he can afford to look weak sometimes . . . he's so strong he can even afford to be a caricature of his strength sometimes, and not care."<sup>8</sup>

But I believe there is something irrational at work here which Rennie has omitted. In short, Joe seems to have won Rennie by inviting her to make what for her would be the most irrational choice possible--he invites her to commit psychic suicide. He demands that Rennie allow him to completely regenerate her. His "strength" lies simply in his refusal to accept anything less. But because in Joe's system the irrational is inadmissible, the inconsistency here is only apparent to the external observer, namely Jake. Presumably, if an irrational influence is at work Joe would not be aware of it as such. Only Jake would be able to see that Joe's marriage is based on a lie. For Joe's imagination "rationalizes" everything he runs up against in exactly this way, and the result is that every emotional situation is either converted into an intellectual situation or an invisible one.

Jake is aware of all of this, though he also knows

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 63.

it cannot be communicated to either of the Morgans. And the notion of things being incommunicable is enormously important in this book, because it is so central to the question of what language establishes and how imagination can in effect act like blinkers. This whole complex of forces is what leads to Rennie's remark to Jake that, "What scares me is that anybody could grant all of Joe's premises--our premises --understand them and grant them and then laugh at us."<sup>9</sup>

What Jake understands by virtue of his greater distance from the situation is the operative but ungranted premises in Joe's system. As a result, the only way for Jake to maintain his position is to absorb the discrepancy between his own position and that position which the Morgan's attribute to him through irony. It is only by treating the artificially imposed position he must work from as acutely ironic, and by laughing at the whole relationship, that Jake is able to maintain a position at all. So Jake grants Joe's premises to maintain peace between himself and Joe. Then, when Joe is acting as a caricature of himself, as in some respects he always is, Jake laughs at the caricature. Indeed, it is a measure of how hermetic Joe's system is that Jake is expected not to laugh at Joe Morgan being a caricature of himself.

But these effects are simply the consequence involved on both sides when the mind and imagination must

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 64.

deal with a problem which is incommunicable. Unfortunately, this difficulty with the incommunicable is obscured because it is almost never recognized and acknowledged as such--the imagination too often works on it until it turns into a communicable certainty of some kind. For example, there is Rennie's complaint that Jake seems to be "different all the way through, everytime". She explains this complaint by saying that

Whenever his (Joe's) arguments were ready to catch you, you weren't there any more, and worse than that, even when he destroyed a position of yours it seemed to me that he hadn't really touched you--there wasn't that much of you in any of your positions.<sup>10</sup>

Rennie seems to be claiming that Jake is being perverse when in fact she is encountering Jake's ironic posture. But because Jake's irony is incommunicable, just as his position is incommunicable, Joe Morgan's arguments can never come to grips with Jake's real position. But then again, Jake never comes to grips with the incommunicable gulf between them which breeds his irony--all he sees is an amusingly absurd situation which promises to provide some entertainment. Similarly, there is a problem with the incommunicable involved in Joe's thesis "on the saving role of energy and innocence in American political and economic history" which his imagination glosses over. The problem arises because the alternative to innocence is disillusionment,

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

and there is an irreducible gulf between the two concepts. For, what disillusioned person can talk about innocence with an innocent person and make it seem meaningful and important? The same applies, of course, to an innocent person trying to make pronouncements about disillusionment. So, just as Jake could never really have a genuine "position" in dealing with the Morgans, Joe is involved in a solipsism from the moment he assumes it is possible to assess something called "innocence". The imagination takes over in both cases, so that Jake sees an ironic situation instead of an incommunicable one, and Joe sees an abstract one instead of an incommensurable one. And in addition, instead of travelling in admittedly separate universes Jake and Joe experience the difficulties of each other's society.

Because of all these obstacles to communication, Rennie is finally driven to tell Jake that "Joe's real enough to handle you. . . . He's real enough for both of us."<sup>11</sup> Once again, we are being presented with what is in effect a solipsism, for Rennie implies here that if Jake lived up to the requirements for being "real" he would necessarily be destroyed by Joe's arguments. In short, she makes judgements about what kind of challenges to Joe's system are reasonable and this is based on certain restrictions on "reality" which she has incorporated into her view of things. But the real question is whether such solipsism

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 69.

is simply an effect of presuming oneself to have a personal identity and of trying to communicate with others on the basis of it. And in this case what is usually considered an "evil" position would simply become a comment on the necessities imposed by life.

Jake's search for the shortcomings in Joe and his system comes to a remarkable conclusion when Jake and Rennie witness the spectacle of Joe masturbating. For masturbation is not consistent with Joe's claim to a rational life style. And one might expect that it struck Rennie as "unreal". But the judgement of "unreality" once made would bring Joe further into question as the source for any definitions or judgements.

Yet what we see is Rennie's visible emotional reaction. She shakes "from head to foot", and her feeling for her bond with Joe is similarly shaken. Because her marriage was based on the idea that she and Joe shared a secret domain predicated on aspiring to rational living, it is clear that Joe's irrational behavior has in one fell swoop denigrated that aspiration and given the lie to that bond.

At the same time, it is this emotional effect which makes it so appropriate to the situation, because Joe's action is the action of an innocent doing something innocently of which he will remain innocent. And Rennie recognizes here, perhaps for the first time, the fragmentary perspective in Joe which would allow such actions. She sees

that Joe's system, rather than being an objective vision, is based on the blindness of innocence. For Jake and Rennie spy on the hidden side of innocence, in which innocence stays and must remain innocent despite the nature of the secret actions which it inspires and in which it engages. But this does not really describe what secrets or innocence are accurately. For the only thing which the revelation of a secret can expose is the process of becoming disillusioned which the bearer of the secrets has undergone, and thus Joe doesn't really have any secrets because he hasn't yet been disillusioned. In short, Joe's reality is consistent and the only problem is that he sees the language he uses to communicate that reality from within a different context than the one within which Rennie must understand him.

Barth has shown in this sequence of passages how perspective is, in a sense, reality. He has further shown the difficulty involved in claiming to put one's identity into words in an explicit system. But finally, what Barth has shown about the language of Joe's system is that it represents a channeling of Joe and Rennie's imaginations. And the values which Joe's ideas seem to have in the context of his system are in effect rationalizations of that system, designed to perpetuate it. Claims of objectivity are simply whitewashing because the only use of communication is to negotiate a "reality" which works to one's own advantage.

And Jake's problem is similarly with "reality", in that he wants to be able to express his identity without

contaminating that identity with the solipsism of explanation and rationalization. Jake wants to remake his identity in such a way that he can believe in it and feel certain of it, and that is where his imagination and the therapies of the Doctor come into view.

Because the Doctor's therapies cause one of the few changes in Jake's affairs, they are an important point of reference in the novel. And the therapies are based on something which sounds a lot like what Ibsen in The Wild Duck called "the saving lie"<sup>12</sup>

. . . access to the truth, Jacob, even belief that there is such a thing, is itself therapeutic or antitherapeutic, depending on the problem. The reality of your problem itself is all that you can be sure of.<sup>13</sup>

The language the Doctor uses here is a little confusing partially because no definition of "truth" is given and because the Doctor doesn't seem to work with any fixed definition anyway. But it is appropriate to ask why the Doctor speaks so cavalierly of "access to the truth . . . even belief that there is such a thing"<sup>13</sup> with one of the alternatives being that truth or the conviction there is such a thing is potentially antitherapeutic. Obviously to be making such claims the Doctor sees "reality" in a very fluid way.

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<sup>12</sup>Henrik Ibsen, The Wild Duck, trans. by Una Ellis-Fermor, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1950), p. 243.

<sup>13</sup>Op. cit., p. 80.

To my mind the most attractive interpretation here is to assume that the Doctor sees reality as a synthesis of its emotional and intellectual aspects, and that he feels the "problem" carries with it its own "reality", which reality may be antithetic to truth. For if the purpose of the therapy should be to resolve the conflict embodied in the problem, there is little to be gained from seeking to find a neutral "truth" about the condition involved. There is nothing neutral in Jake's "problem" and the Doctor wants Jake to realize that the affective part of reality may be much more important to him than the conceptual part.

Next the Doctor describes the kind of orientation in and towards the world which is the basis of his former remarks;

The world is everything that is the case and what the case is is not a matter of logic. If you don't simply know . . . you have no real reason for choosing [one thing] . . . over another, assuming you can make a choice at all . . .<sup>14</sup>

The Doctor's statement here is quite close to Joe Morgan's idea of choosing, except that he says one always "knows" if one makes a choice rather than saying one "really wanted to do" it. The Doctor makes "choice" into an almost strictly linguistic phenomenon determined by the imagination with this remark--he is saying that a choice is a choice when and only when one "knows" a "reason for choosing" and

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<sup>14</sup>Barth, p. 81. The phrase, "The world is everything that is the case" is the first proposition in Ludwig Wittgenstein's Tractatus Logico Philosophicus.



that there is no truth about choice beyond this. And when someone has a "reason" for making a choice, he is invariably asserting his own sense of identity in the process.

But if as the Doctor says the world must exist as something which "is the case" before conscious "choosing" can ever begin, then it can further be said that the understanding is, by implication, that which formulates the choices we see as available to us. In short, the "reality" of the situation, and "reality" in general, for that matter, is a decision of the imagination. And the Doctor insists on the importance of believing in this process, even if it is a kind of self-induced delusion, by equating it with existence itself; "Choosing is existence; to the extent that you don't choose, you don't exist."<sup>15</sup>

What seems to me to be the most crucial aspect of this statement is not made clear here. For the Doctor seems to mean conscious choosing here, and in speaking in such categorical terms, seems to imply that there is only conscious choosing. The Doctor is saying in effect that there is no distinction to be made between unconsciousness and non-existence, and that to exist without being conscious of choosing is not to avoid choosing but to choose unconsciousness or non-existence. Thus when the Doctor "explains" this view, he merely articulates what was unstated but present in his first statement;

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 83.

There's no reason why you should prefer it (choosing) and no reason why you shouldn't. One is a patient simply because one chooses a condition that only therapy can bring one to, not because any one condition is inherently better than another. All my therapies . . . will be directed towards making you conscious of your existence.<sup>16</sup>

On the basis of what the Doctor says it seems clear he intends to make Jake believe he is making choices all the time. This interpretation is consistent with what the Doctor says about "the distortion that everyone makes of life";

In life . . . there are no essentially major or minor characters. To that extent, all fiction and biography, and most historiography, are a lie. Everyone is necessarily the hero of his own life story . . . suppose you're an usher in a wedding. From the groom's viewpoint he's the major character; the others play supporting parts, even the bride. From your viewpoint, though, the wedding is a minor episode in the very interesting history of your life, and the bride and groom both are minor figures. What you've done is choose to play the part of a minor character: it can be pleasant for you to pretend to be less . . . than . . . you are, as Odysseus does when he disguises as a swineherd. And every member of the congregation . . . sees himself as the major character, condescending to witness the spectacle. So in this sense fiction isn't a lie at all, but a true representation of the distortion that everyone makes of life.<sup>17</sup>

The key distinction here between the major and minor characters is essentially that between actor and witness. And the advantage of choosing to be a minor character or witness is that it allows complete control over "the distortion which everyone makes of life". Thus where some kind of violation is seen as being involved in "the

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 88.

distortion" that one "makes of life", the witness at least is only at the mercy of his own imagination in trying to decide what kind of distortion has occurred. This freedom is the advantage for Jake in choosing not to be what the Doctor comes to next, the hero of his own life story, but the spectator to it, the passive witness--in a sense, the victim of it;

Now, not only are we the heroes of our own life stories--we're the ones who conceive the story, and give other people the essences of minor characters. But since no man's life story . . . is ever one story with a coherent plot, we're always reconceiving just the sort of hero we are, and consequently just the sort of minor roles that other people are supposed to play. This is generally true. If any man displays almost the same character day in and day out, all day long, it's either because he has no imagination like an actor who can play only one role, or because he has an imagination so comprehensive that he sees each particular situation of his life as an episode in some grand over-all plot, and can so distort the situations that the same type of hero can deal with them all.<sup>18</sup>

With this passage it is possible to see that what the Doctor has been advocating is at once an imaginative technique and a perspective. Because Jake's role as a "witness" went on so long he couldn't tell any more whether he was listening to the pulse of the world or the hum of his own mind--and he was unable to do anything about it without giving up the role--the Doctor has decided to put Jake's imagination in charge of his life and reality. And because the imagination is engaged in "reconceiving just the sort of hero" one is by "distorting the situation" for

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<sup>18</sup>ibid., p. 89.

one's own purposes, the process is truly rationalization in both senses of the word. For the Doctor is teaching Jake how to leech the ambiguity and uncertainty out of the language of events and thus satisfy that necessity of sense which requires that an uncertain identity be recognized as a certain identity. The Doctor teaches Jake a process for structuring his perspective so that he will feel the certain "sense" of identity he has simply as a certain identity. He explains this imaginative process when he says,

This kind of role-assigning is myth-making, and when its done consciously or unconsciously for the purpose of aggrandising or protecting the ego--and its probably done for this purpose all the time--it becomes Mythotherapy.<sup>19</sup>

In short, the Doctor denies that a mask is a strategy, treating it rather as something which encompasses identity and language. In other words, one cannot say that a mask is something that hides identity or that the mask is hidden within identity. In this regard, the Doctor tells Jake to assume masks as an unthinking habit, so that he won't find it necessary to manipulate language to make his uncertain reality cohere. What he will see through the mask will then be an unquestionable reality, and what can't be questioned can't seem illusory.

The Doctor uses this technique to show that the personality is an integrity, an integrity which in spite of its multiform perspectives always allows the entire psyche to be enclosed by the self-consistent domain of the chosen

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

mask. The mask contains both a sense of identity and its own special vocabulary to activate that identity. As a result, a certain grammar is imposed upon every event that is encountered, and the identity which the mask designed that grammar for is re-inforced every time it is used.

In explaining this to Jake the Doctor throws out the concepts of sincerity and insincerity as being just as much distortions as the feelings and expressions they might judge and condemn as fraudulent. He thus seems to imply that what is called "self-doubt" can only exist as part of a mask and not as a free operation performed at will on a mask. But at the deepest level, the implication of the Doctor's talk on myths and masks must be that language as it exists in the mind is as much the master as the servant, and it must be treated carefully and seriously because of its decisive function in letting an individual mesh with his "reality" in such a way that he will have a conscious sense of his own identity.

To my mind the significance of the Mythotherapy scene lies in the link it establishes between the imagination and language. For by including the Doctor's advice, the narrative has made it clear that Jake's problem of trying to handle his inabilities and snarl-ups is the central concern of the narrative. Jake is to use imagination to structure his own life story, and to manipulate language and "distort the situation" in order to make it fit into a satisfactory perspective. And it is obvious that the format of personal

narrative is the only one which could possibly be used to show such an undertaking. For only personal narrative shows language as a flexible and changing thing. Language under these circumstances becomes the stuff with which "reality" is negotiated rather than the medium which names reality for what it is--the process of identifying things becomes integral to the process of identifying oneself, and perspective and conception become only falsely distinct.

Jake Horner puts the newly recognized power of his imagination for fashioning masks to work immediately. First he uses it to lure Peggy Rankin into bed with him, by assuming the mask of Joe Morgan. Then his imagination is really put to the test when he commits adultery with Rennie Morgan. In terms of the Doctor's theories, Jake seems to have decided that one must expect violent upheavals in one's own affairs as a part of "choosing" one's existence. Perhaps this is what "conscious" "existence" is all about--and as such it may involve awarenesses which are undeniably present, whether they are fantasy or not. But there is a violence which seems to be conceded in the Doctor's notion of choice and action and, to my mind, this notion is akin to the contention that men only feel an acute awareness of selfhood through acts of violation, co-incidentally finding a definitive awareness of their position in the world imposing itself upon them in and through the process.

Initially Jake shows how his conceptions and his perspective have become entwined when he attempts to prove

that desire had nothing to do with the adultery and that in fact, "The initial act (with Rennie) had been a paradigm of assumed inevitability."<sup>20</sup>

The language here is misleading, but significantly, it is selectively misleading. For the claim is being made that the act was "a paradigm of assumed inevitability" without any indication of what was inevitable about it, or how and by whom it was assumed, or indeed, why that "assumed inevitability" should be considered paradigmatic. But it does make it seem like the adultery just "happened". Jake explains that,

The point I want to make is that on the face of it there was no overt act, no word or deed that unambiguously indicated desire on the part of either of us . . .<sup>21</sup>

Then Jake claims that the situation was confused because,

. . . if we had been consciously thinking of first steps . . . I'm sure we both would have assumed that the first steps . . . had already been made. I mention this because it applies so often to people's reasoning about their behavior in situations that later turn out to be regrettable: it is possible to watch the sky from morning to midnight, or move along the spectrum from infrared to ultraviolet, without ever being able to put your finger on the precise point where a qualitative change takes place; no one can say, "It is exactly here that twilight becomes night," or blue becomes violet, or innocence guilt. One can go a long way into a situation thus without finding the word or gesture upon which initial responsibility can handily be fixed--such a long way that suddenly one realizes the change has already been made, is already history, and one rides along then on the sense of an inevitability, a too-lateness, in which he does not really believe, but which for one reason or another he does not see fit to question.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 100.

This somewhat casuistical description is significant since it is the way Jake chooses to remember the adultery, and, if it is an accurate description of his sensations, shows how selectively sensitive he is towards the various features of his deeds. Secondly, Jake's description assumes that as with colours, no standards have been established for the situation. What Jake says seems in fact like a wilful attempt to fuzz up and deny Joe Morgan's strict definition of wanting.

But the second passage cited tries to relate the question of responsibility to the moment of the act. This passage is a description of someone trying to absolve himself of responsibility in an act by living a paradox.<sup>23</sup> But infinitely divisible time spans do nonetheless allow finite acts to absorb every moment of the entire time span, to produce finite and real consequences and finite and real responsibilities: the imperceptibility of the effects of successive moments is an indication of the limits of human perception rather than a justification of involvement in the act. Nonetheless, on the basis of what has led up to it, it is easy to understand and sympathize with Jake's rather far-fetched characterization of the act as an accident of sorts. For Jake's expression reveals the desperation which "applies

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<sup>23</sup>For those familiar with Zeno's paradoxes about Appollo racing the turtle, and the arrow being shot into the air, what Jake says here will be familiar--for his description of the adultery uses the time paradox which those two stories exemplify to advantage.



so often to people's reasoning about their behavior in situations that later turn out to be regrettable."

But there are consequences even to such rationalizing descriptions. For not only is Jake claiming the right to produce his own definitions for words like "desire", "guilt" and "inevitability", but by implication he is rejecting everyone else's definitions and rejecting in advance any right on their part to apply their definitions to him. Unfortunately, given the absoluteness of Joe's previously stated ideas, Jake has no option of compromise--to maintain the credibility of his definitions he will have to fight for them again and again--even though he risks losing Joe and Rennie as friends in the process.

But what is really crucial is the strain of Jake's situation. Every point along the way in his thinking out of a justification is finally unacceptable to him. Not only is Jake's end of trying to justify himself impossible but also, the means he has used are self-defeating. For by their natures paradoxes are contradictory and in order to try to live one, Jake will have to keep working at it and working at it, knowing all the while that when he stops he will either have to accept permanent separation from the Morgans or the humiliation of begging forgiveness. And only when the mind is forced to keep on racing from one such psychic prison to another with only an illusory sense of escape, is it likely to surrender, as Jake's mind surrenders when he says,

. . . I was somewhat irritable, not a bit desirous; felt commonplace, conventional; wanted to feel conventional; didn't want to think about myself. Perhaps as a result, for the very first time since I'd met the Morgans, I experienced a sudden, marvelous sensation of guilt.<sup>24</sup>

It is clear from this passage that what Jake wants his imagination to lead him to is a kind of secure and anonymous restfulness rather than a constant and irritating thinking-about-himself. For constant thinking about yourself seems to be equivalent to being uncertain about your identity. And Jake implies there is a correspondence between feeling "commonplace, conventional" and not thinking about yourself. In effect, convention allows Jake to be unreflective because its definite standards bring things to a conclusion and at the same time, its impersonal and mechanical assignment of praise and blame does not make him feel he is yielding to Joe in changing his position. So Jake relies on the vocabulary of society rather than on an interpersonal vocabulary in characterizing his deed, and thus shows how he manipulates language to build the myth of Jacob Horner.

Then Jake confronts his next problem, which is that, Such guilt as I felt could not be sustained, nor could such self-contempt. Killing it with sleep was out of the question, because I couldn't sleep, except fitfully. No great activity or overwhelming new mood appeared, to remove it from my mind.<sup>25</sup>

One can see Jake's ambivalence about feeling

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 107.

conventional and feeling the guilt that goes with it here. He can't stand the psychological strain of trying to live a paradox and yet his self-contempt implies that he feels a certain lowering of himself in his conversion to commonplaceness, and also implies that he wants to escape his feelings of guilt. And Jake is dissatisfied with his impoverished imagination which has left him no way to get out of this situation. This same irritation shows up, in addition, in the accusation scene with Joe.

In this scene it becomes apparent that the basis for Jake's guilt is completely alien to the substance of Joe's accusations. Here Joe contributes to the assuaging of Jake's guilt, by depicting the transgression which has occurred in personal and to that extent selfish terms. And yet, if Joe contributes by this means to Jake's release from his guilt, it is nonetheless also true that Joe's remarks have this effect because Jake's whole attitude is directed towards escaping from his guilt.

Immediately after Joe accuses Jake of adultery, Jake observes that Joe should not threaten to "knock the crap out of you" if he wants an explanation;

although the threat of violence frightened me, it also put me immediately on the defensive, and if defensiveness is an indication of guilt feelings, it is at the same time a release from them: a murderer bent on escaping punishment has little time to contemplate the vileness of his deed.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 109.

The point in this case must be that Jake's attitude is as ruthlessly self serving as a murderer's might be. And the implication is that Jake sees little use in acts of contrition either in the form of confession or punishment.

But the way Jake's train of thought develops is the most perplexing aspect of his statement. For while he goes in for analogies with criminal behavior and thus shows how his attitude is based on a combativeness towards Joe Morgan, it is also clear that Jake develops his metaphor about the murderer and then uses this metaphor as a justification for his subsequent acts. He does not understand his own metaphor metaphorically, but rather understands it as an applicable and real fact which has entered into his deliberations. And by such a technique, motives, conventions--everything--all evaporate as a truth if they are not consistent with Jake's position in opposing Joe. So he tells Joe, rather unconvincingly,

"I don't know what unconscious motives I might have had, Joe, but whatever they were, they were unconscious, so I can't know anything about them." And I was thinking, can't be held responsible for them. "But I swear I had no conscious motives at all."

"Don't you want to be held responsible?" Joe asked incredulously.

"I do, Joe, believe me," I said halfheartedly.<sup>27</sup>

Jake seems to be behaving like the criminal who is willing to undergo a certain amount of punishment but unwilling to be responsible for remedying the wrong he has committed. When he claims, with whatever honesty "I swear

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 110.

I had no conscious motives", he seems to be considering motives as autonomous emotional drives which must be absolutely unambiguous. But Jake is then ignoring or lying about what he has been told, for he is going directly against the Doctor's precept that there is "nothing behind" the mask which is ego.

But the reason Jake goes against the Doctor is probably that his sense of identity is never more secure and his conscience is never more clear than when he is struggling in opposition to Joe Morgan. For Jake could in fact take care of his own inability to specify his motives and doesn't do so. Presumably, the "unconscious motives (Jake) . . . may have had" would become clear to Joe if Jake's candid impression of events, and particularly a description of the masturbation scene, were to be placed before Joe.

But because his secret awareness of the masturbation scene represents a victory over Joe Morgan and because he doesn't want to get along without Joe Morgan, Jake doesn't provide this candid description of his impressions. For what is at question here is accountability, and Jake defeats Joe's project in this at the outset by keeping his secret. Jake's existence here is devoted to negating Joe Morgan's, and Jake seems glad that Joe's reactions serve to get rid of both his guilts and the feeling that those guilts were deserved. He explains his own rather oblivious state of mind by claiming first that,

What had been done had been done, but the past, after all, exists only in the minds of those who are thinking about it in the present, and therefore in the interpretations which are put upon it <sup>28</sup>,

and also shows the catalytic effect of Joe's presence when he says,

The Jacob Horner that I felt a desperate desire to defend was not the one who tumbled stupidly on Joe Morgan's bed with Joe Morgan's wife or the one who had burned in shame and skulking fear for days afterwards, but the one who was now the object of Joe's disgust--the Horner of the present moment and all the Horners to come.<sup>29</sup>

But Jake lacks the "ability to explain" his actions only in a very limited sense. And his remarks about having "no desire to defend what I'd done" shows not only that Jake realizes he cannot defend his actions successfully in front of Joe Morgan but also implies that he feels having to defend himself in front of Joe Morgan is "unreasonable" in the first place.

The "difficulty" Jake refers to here thus seems to be nothing other than the mental problem of how much he should rationalize "reality". For example, Jake's claim to be unable to explain seems spurious since it is always possible to amplify upon events--but this is only true where one is willing to suffer the consequences of one's explanation. Where Jake is placed at odds with himself is in trying to provide an explanation which could at once fit into his "reality" and at the same time, fit into Joe's

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 112.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 112.

"reality".

For Joe is faced with something he is unable to explain just as Jake is; the habituated Morgan value system and world view has so far not only seemed out of step with events but also has not been able to explain them. The problem is that given the transgression against it, Joe can't see any way of maintaining his marriage relationship, and this is especially upsetting because, "that relationship was the orientation post that gave every part of our lives--everything we did--its values."<sup>30</sup> Because only the marriage relationship as set out by Joe's own intractable definition is going to be acceptable to him, Joe finds the problem created by the adultery unresolvable. As he says to Jake;

. . . if you could convince me that very much of what Rennie did was under your influence, it wouldn't be good, because she shouldn't have been in a position to be influenced very much. And if you convinced me that very little if any of it was your influence it still wouldn't be good, because by our picture of her she couldn't have chosen to do it. . . . The thing is, I can't be sure just what the problem is that has to be solved until I know just what happened and why each thing happened.<sup>31</sup>

It is clear after this speech that not only is Jake's relationship with the Morgans finished the moment he takes a position or attempts an explanation, but that Jake's strategy of claiming to be unable to "explain" is precisely the thing which stands between Joe Morgan and "a problem that has to be solved". And depending on what Jake's

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 117.

position or explanation is, there is a good chance that the moment Joe has a definite problem, Joe's relationship with Rennie is also going to be finished. Thus Jake's uncertain, confusion-generating response is the only thing keeping the Morgan's together. For Joe makes it quite clear how apocalyptic anything but an unknown problem would be in stating that;

If that has to be your answer, I can't see how to deal with you, and if it's got to be Rennie's I can't see how to deal with her either. That answer simply doesn't come up in the Morgan cosmos. Maybe I'm in the wrong cosmos, but it's the only one I can see setting up serious relationships in.<sup>32</sup>

Joe's project is to try to extract coherence and rationality from a situation which is essentially emotional. And Jake has responded in a manner appropriate to that attitude in Joe, co-incidentally serving not only his own ends but Joe and Rennie's marriage as well, by allowing that marriage to continue. Yet the circumstances under which each of the principals must live are almost unbearably taxing. In short, Jake's response is an escape route to nowhere for everyone involved, Jake, Joe and Rennie.

In this chapter it has been shown that each of the characters is, in effect, trapped within his identity. Barth seems to have wanted to show personal identity to be a kind of self-devised trap here, and also to show how the imagination and language combine to perpetuate these traps. In this regard, it has been shown that Joe and Rennie are

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 118.



trapped by their system and also that this system channels their imaginations and language in such a way as to perpetuate that entrapment. At the same time it has been shown that Jake is trapped because he needs Joe Morgan to do for him what his imagination guided by the tenets of Mythotherapy cannot do for him, namely, give him a practical sense of his own identity.

And while in this chapter Jake's association with the Morgans has got his imagination perking but left Jake's identity completely ensnarled in the Morgan's lives, in the next chapter we will see how all this becomes changed utterly. For in the course of the catastrophic events which conclude the book, the focus goes back across the line of language to the opposite extreme, when imagination is superceded by experience.

## CHAPTER III

### KNOWLEDGE

The words sufficed  
To compel the recognition they proceeded.<sup>1</sup>  
Eliot

Unexpected things happen in the rest of The End of the Road. The novel changes direction again, to the point where its final conclusion is that "Knowledge and Imagination . . . grown great in the fullness of time, no longer tempt but annihilate."<sup>2</sup> The job of this chapter is to show what this conclusion means, and more important, how the novel reaches it. And this involves showing how language and life mesh--showing where language leads and what happens when where language leads is no longer of any use.

The "Imagination" part in this conclusion about "Knowledge and Imagination" was dealt with in the last chapter--now it is time to deal with "Knowledge," and to deal with the "annihilation" which both of them together represent. But we are dealing with a problem in language just as Eliot does,

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<sup>1</sup>T. S. Eliot, "Little Gidding," Collected Poems 1909-1962 (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1963), p. 217.

<sup>2</sup>John Barth, The End of the Road (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1958), p. 196.

in wanting to know what this "Knowledge" passage means. And because inquiry (i.e., the role of "searcher") is the only thing in life which allows purpose and possibility, language always leads us from some one question to some other question. Language simply provides the continuity between questions. An answer is simply the termination point of a question, which must lead to the project of another question. So the process is finally part of a pattern as inevitable as the vocabulary we must use. At the same time language and concepts are all tied up in one another with the one maintaining the credibility of the other. For example, "motive", "act" and "end" are words and at the same time concepts--a grammar of events if you like. Ask yourself whether you know anything more about a person's identity than what you learn from examining their motives, acts and ends. Now language and identity can be seen to be fused together here--for any one of the triad always claims the other two as its meaning.<sup>3</sup> So, these words conceal a project of inquiry, which, in turn, carries us to a perspective where "identities" undeniably exist (and it is the uncertainties of language, the ambiguities, which make it all possible).

Yet if we assign these effects to language, we also

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<sup>3</sup>This example is drawn from Sartre's section on Freedom in L'Être et le Néant where it is explained at length. Sartre says we make the illusion of identity seem real by giving it these three dimensions and by giving ourselves a continuous cycle of concepts which we can go through over and over again--until the repetition has gone on so long that doubting the truth of what we find seems preposterous.

have to say that they are effects which usually go unnoticed and then we must say that language is valuable in part because it tends to obscure the fraudulence of its own mechanisms. But what happens when language is no longer of any moment because the reality of the situation is no longer accessible to it? That is what this chapter deals with.

First of all Jake reaches a new psychic plateau when he puts forward his absolute of

Articulation! There, by Joe, was my absolute, if I could be said to have one. At any rate, it is the only thing I can think of about which I have ever had, with any frequency at all, the feelings one usually has for one's absolutes. To turn experience into speech--that is, to classify, to categorize, to conceptualize, to grammarize, to syntactify it--is always a betrayal of experience, a falsification of it; but only so betrayed can it be dealt with at all, and only in so dealing with it did I ever feel a man, alive and kicking. It is therefore that, when I had cause to think about it at all, I responded to this precise falsification, this adroit careful myth-making, with all the upsetting exhilaration of any artist at his work. When my mythoplastic razors were sharply honed, it was unparalleled sport to lay about with them, to have at reality.

In other senses of course, I don't believe this at all.<sup>4</sup>

Jake has moved on to a new level which takes into account all of his imaginary activity, while at the same time marking the end of that activity by going beyond it. For the formula of "Articulation" which Jake now relies on has become his only way of handling the world, his final and absolute technique.

It is probably a good analogy to say that articulation

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 119.

is Jake's mirror of the world. Now, the worst part of looking at yourself in a mirror is that the thought "this is who I am" takes hold of you--you don't think "this is what I look like" for long. The experience too, is impossible to disbelieve--if you try really watching yourself sometimes, you'll find yourself thinking "this is who I am" despite the fact you "know" what you're seeing is a "mere image. Well here, I submit, Jake is running into the same experience except with language.

In this sense Jake's linguistic mirror is the same as the glass one. For in looking at this mirror of his identity in his "Articulation" speech, Jake obviously realizes he cannot contend with reality unless he uses the betraying images formed in language to express his personal identity. And implicit in this is the further realization that the technique of language snarls up our conception of anything--we must understand that human beings who use language exist only as violators of experience and that we are well and truly trapped by our own necessary "betrayal of experience".

But in addition, because language and concepts have a structure which imposes itself on the world and betrays experience, it is clear that all Jake retains, after an experience is over, is his own words. These words are the only permanent thing Jake gets out of his experiences. For the experience as it is finally seen is exactly what Jake feels and is able to turn into "speech", no more, no less.

So, as far as the novel is concerned, the entire mental progression Jake is experiencing is the words he presents and can be nothing more than those words are.

Also, Jake mentions the "artist at his work" in his "articulation" passage. Jake is trying to turn experience into words and in the process he implies that this is what the "artist" does. Presumably, this parallel brings Barth actively into the picture. Unfortunately, the book has also said that turning experience into speech is a "betrayal of experience". And when this is remembered it seems as if Barth is saying his writing is a betrayal of experience. But then, everything Jake Horner is and says would have to be a betrayal of experience also. What then is one to conclude: that Jake is invalidating his own remarks, or that John Barth is discrediting his character, or that the parallel cannot apply? But one further alternative remains and it finally seems more likely than any of these, namely, that Barth wanted to present his own position as a paradoxical one. Indeed, it is logical that Barth would want to do this to make it clear that the problem is precisely that what Jake articulates, exists and is true, and what exists and is true is what Jake articulates--there is no "truth" possible in the novel beyond this personal and personally entangled one.

It is in this special context that Jake questions the believability of his "articulation" statement when he says, "In other senses of course, I don't believe this at

all." Jake's ambivalence towards "articulation" is all that comes across here, for what he says at this point carries no more weight than what he has said before--it all becomes part of the general argument of the novel rather than a contradiction of the articulation statement. Jake's final sentence is thus really an example of the problem he has recognized in his articulation speech.

Jake has denied the possibility of objectivity and then said one must ignore such flaws in objectivity; a person must inevitably accept this "betrayal of experience" because it is the only way the very notions of objective experience and personal identity are possible at all. And after this, the problem with trying to "have at reality" with "mythoplastic razors" is that this project finally involves cutting yourself up in an infinite regression of accepting images as necessary, rejecting them as false, accepting them, etc.

But this problem also makes Mythotherapy inconsistent with Jake's best interests, as he shows when he says that "Mythotherapy, in short, becomes increasingly harder to apply, because one is compelled to recognize the inadequacy of any role one assigns."<sup>5</sup> Then Jake immediately gets himself all snarled up in one of his own interpretations of things, when he agrees to re-enact the adultery with Rennie. He claims he is willing to do this "because I had pledged

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 128.

my co-operation and because I believed one dose of his (Joe's) own medicine would make him change his prescription". But in the past Jake has rationalized his pledges to the point where he ended up doing only what was convenient. And Joe has been absolutely unswerving in sticking with his "prescriptions". Jake seems to get so wrapped up in interpreting that he convinces himself despite the facts of the situation. In short, Jake is "betraying experience" in interpreting the situation as he does, even though he is on his guard and trying to avoid such betrayal. But his interpretation lines him up in opposition to Joe Morgan and this has worked to his advantage in the past by keeping him secure in his position.

What Jake is doing in this statement about the adulteries is using the uncertainties and unknowable "distortions" of language to his own advantage--he has realized that language is a kind of weapon which violates and betrays experience, here he is using it as such. For Jake is free to make reckless statements, because the uncertainty of the situation prevents anyone from knowing they are reckless and not just optimistic. And Jake has nothing better to go on than his own predispositions when making decisions in the midst of uncertainty.

But Jake provides another example of these distortions and how they work as a weapon rather than as an aid to harmony. And this example brings the focus back to language because it begins when Jake is asked, ". . . which



came first, the language or the grammar book . . .?" Jake responds to the question with all the singlemindedness of the Humpty Dumpty in Through the Looking Glass who defines the crucial issue in "meaning" something as, "The question is who is to be master, that's all"<sup>6</sup> [my emphasis]. Jake says,

. . . the significance of words are arbitrary conventions, mostly; historical accidents. But it was agreed before you and I had any say in the matter that the word horse would refer to Equus Caballus, and so if we want our sentences to be intelligible to very many people, we have to go along with the convention . . . you're free to break the rules, but not if you're after intelligibility. If you do want intelligibility, then the only way to get 'free' of the rules is to master them so thoroughly that they're second nature to you. That's the paradox: in any kind of complicated society a man is usually only free to the extent that he embraces all the rules of that society.<sup>7</sup>

What Jake seems in some sense to be doing here is equating freedom with intelligibility. But the real problem is that all of what he says is really about language. And what is wrong with it is wrong with language. For example, Jake says that what words designate is completely arbitrary and then turns around and tries to make the word "intelligibility" into a special case. But there's nothing fundamental or essential about what "intelligibility" covers unless someone, feeling himself to be the Humpty Dumpty style "master", decides to make language work this way. Everyone sees every word he uses as referring to something,

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<sup>6</sup> Lewis Carrol, Through the Looking Glass, and What Alice Found There (London: MacMillan, 1871), p. 47.

<sup>7</sup> John Barth, The End of the Road (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1958), p. 135.

though people do not necessarily agree that the same word refers to exactly the same thing. In short, Jake is claiming that "intelligibility" is and must be seen as a fundamental common denominator. And assuming this is the truth for him, Jake can't give ground on this, or admit that any other suggestion could be better. But for someone else it may not be the truth to say that intelligibility is the fundamental common denominator. Not only is it ironic that Jake's appeal to "intelligibility" would thus be completely unintelligible to some people, but this effect also makes it clear how language acts to block the mere possibility of any real communication in some situations. On the other hand, this block to communication is not inconsistent with Jake's purpose since what he really wants to do is win the argument with the student. And by handling it in this way he does precisely that.

Finally there is no knowledge communicated in Jake's statement; all that can be said is that he shows that language floats around above experience without having any basis in experience. The meaning of anything ultimately resides inside people and their experiences. And for anyone who does not know what a horse is, the claim that the word "horse" refers to *Equus Caballus* is only to substitute one meaningless word for another.

Such linguistic whirlpools further show themselves in the next scene, where Rennie says "I wish I'd been struck blind before I looked in that window. That's what

started everything". Jake thinks about this and observes; "Sweet paradox: Or you could say that's what ended everything. But it would start or end anything only for a Morgan."<sup>8</sup> Here Jake is acknowledging that the meaning of anything is not necessarily universal. And he realizes it is the partiality of human perspective which causes this. Here, the partiality of Rennie's perspective has resulted in an "only for a Morgan" paradox. Then the basis of this relative perspective is made clear when Jake views "the apparent ambivalence of Rennie's feelings" as a "pseudo-ambivalence whose source was in the language";

. . . what Rennie felt was actually neither ambivalent nor even complex; it was both single and simple, . . . but like all feelings it was completely particular and individual, and so the trouble started only when she attempted to label it with a common noun such as love or abhorrence. Things can be signified by common nouns only if one ignores the differences between them; but it is precisely these differences, when deeply felt that . . . lead the layman (but not the connoisseur) to believe he has a paradox on his hands, an ambivalence, when actually it is merely a matter of x's being part horse and part grammar book . . . Rennie loved me, then, and hated me as well! Let us say she x'ed me and knew better than to smile.<sup>9</sup>

Jake seems to realize for the first time that there are "differences between" what people experience and what they are able to express, and that this should be the crucial factor in making judgements about people's reactions. People tend to think that because they are able to name something, they know what it is. But Jake has finally realized that

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 138.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 141.

to know about things, you must understand them as they are experienced. Unfortunately linguistic certainties are the only certainties in the full meaning of the word which it is possible to have. So since Jake realizes that experiences cannot be named, he is putting himself in the position of dealing with nameless things which sweep into the mind when they will and leave the same way. In short, Jake is leading up to saying that the only satisfactory way to experience things is to experience them as uncertainties.

But the implication of this new attitude on Jake's part is particularly significant because words have been the mirror of his identity till now. This book has seemed to be an argument designed to show Jake's identity in a certain way. And an argument of sorts it remains. But here we suddenly have an encounter with words and the concept of identity which leaves the impression that Jake has found the mere concept of identity illusory and destructive at the same time. For Jake has found that the words which express a person's identity irreversibly obscure and contaminate the "feelings" of that person which one wished to know.

Then the narrative jumps to an entirely different experiential context, with the introduction of Joe's Colt .45. And Jake suddenly finds a nameless experience happening to him with all the tangibility and uncertainty which his earlier encounters have lacked. "Once that machine had been introduced . . . into the problem" Jake

admits,

Even in my room it made itself terrifically present as the concrete embodiment of an alternative . . . (it) put the game in a different ball park, as it were; flavoured all my reflections . . . with an immediacy . . . which my isolation . . . had kept me from feeling.<sup>10</sup>

Death is obviously the "alternative" Jake speaks of here and death lingers behind everything he says. But what is significant is that death is not an abstract void and uncertainty here. For the presence of the gun gives the void and uncertainty of death a disturbing tangibility. Death is a powerful and disturbing experience, and it is safe to say that here, for the first time, the gun and the death it represents are seen as they are experienced.

Also, Jake is forced into "feeling" Rennie's problem because this simple alternative makes further thought superfluous. And because experiences like this cannot be covered with a common noun, what death is here is, simply, how it works on people.

Jake's concern about personal identity is short-circuited by this experience of death as a concrete alternative. And the argument of the book changes considerably in the process. We are being brought around to seeing life as something whose significance lies in the fact that it, and not something else, is--its presence makes the question of whether it is a "reality" or an "illusion" seem preposterous. In this context, words only provide points of focus

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 147.

where various forces and feelings are balanced in a certain perspective. But words have no power to show what things are.

The only thing which is alive to Jake in this experiential world is Rennie, for Joe has become nothing more than a petrified embodiment of his ideals by this point. So for Jake, Rennie herself is the only possible vehicle for his hopes. It is Rennie's overwhelming importance to Jake which makes him fear the worst in such dramatic terms, as when he "awakens" to the thought;

The next morning, early, my eyes opened suddenly, and I leaped in a sweat from my bed with a terrible feeling that Rennie was dead. I called the Morgans . . . and could scarcely believe it when Rennie answered. . . .<sup>11</sup>

Rennie has become an object of dread for Jake. And while Jake lives in this mental environment, many other ordinarily real feelings become impossible and thus meaningless for him. For example, Jake tells Rennie not to commit suicide because he loves her, and then observes;

This, I fear, was not true . . . in the sense that any meaningless proposition is not true, if not false either. I'm not sure whether I knew what I was saying when I [had earlier] told Joe I loved Rennie, but at any rate I couldn't see any meaning in the statement now.<sup>12</sup>

Jake has found that some words can have no meaning in the context of certain experiences. But the notion that words can be meaningless goes beyond the idea that some

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 156.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 156.

things are non-communicable. It teaches Jake that experience maintains an independence which emotions and aspirations cannot absorb. As Jake learns here, the best words can do is to test experience, and words can never test some experiences at all.

At this point the narrative becomes simply a description of Jake's attempt to obtain an abortion for Rennie; its significance lies in the extent to which Jake's earlier preoccupations with motive, personal power and personal status are completely absorbed by the task of trying to get some Ergotate for Rennie. But just as he has succeeded in arranging this, Jake discovers that Rennie will not let herself be diminished and depersonalized any further by "pretending to be anybody but myself"<sup>13</sup>--she won't have an abortion at all if she must lie about herself to get it. Yet Jake doesn't try to escape his responsibility when he encounters her response. He gets back to work and thus acknowledges at last that Rennie does have a right to her own personal identity--that she has the right to exist as herself if she is going to exist at all.

Then two completely predictable things happen. First, Jake goes to the Morgan house and notices that "There were books open . . . on the writing table; he'd [Joe had] been working on his dissertation!" Apparently Joe is

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 169.

satisfied enough with the victory his moral order is demonstrating over things to adopt a business-as-usual policy. The second predictable thing that happens is that Jake goes to Peggy Rankin to get the name of an abortionist from her, and she doesn't believe a word he says. Clearly, the only thing Peggy Rankin feels in Jake's presence is the scars left on her by their earlier dealings. He is and will be "past history" to her from now on.

So Jake is forced to go and appeal to the Doctor for help. And the prelude to this is his admission that he can think of no other alternatives;

There was nothing else to do: whether I had been sincere or not . . . [it all] made no difference now . . . I was out of straws to clutch at, and out of energy, beaten clear down the line.<sup>14</sup>

And then Jake describes the feelings that have forced him to dispense with hope because he can offer no more alternatives. He says;

Except for the idea of the gun against Rennie's temple, the idea of the lead slug waiting deep in the chamber--which was not an image but a tenseness, a kind of drone in my head--my imagination no longer pictured anything.<sup>15</sup>

All that remains for Jake is the visceral intimation of Rennie's death, evacuating his consciousness. And all he can do is choose between the self-sacrifice of some act of contrition and the self-sacrifice of being entrapped within the single obsessive idea of Rennie killing herself.

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 176.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 177.



Contrition for Jake is letting the Doctor get his hands on him again. So Jake goes out to the Doctor's farm to let himself once again become a therapeutic object, a slave to the Doctor's theories. But because he obviously has an ulterior motive in doing this, the Doctor gets quite angry at the prospect of being used without being shown any respect in the process;

For a long time you've considered me some kind of charlatan, or quack, or worse. That's been clear enough, and I allowed you to go on thinking so, as long as you did what I told you, because in your case that . . . attitude can be therapeutic itself.<sup>16</sup>

It may indeed be useful to Jake to see the world and the source of his advice about it as fraudulent, for then the only real thing there is is the act of choosing. In that case, uncertainty about the personal significance of things would be absorbed in the act of choosing a fiction to live by. But the Doctor's words in this case are really meaningless, for everything he says is really only posturing. How, for example, could the Doctor have prevented Jake from thinking he was a charlatan? Indeed, the very nature of the Doctor's theory and his technique of communicating it, invites the conclusion he is a charlatan. For given that the theory and the Doctor live outside the examination and the sanction of society, and given also that this position is an indispensable part of the theory, it is inevitable that the possibility of the

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 179.

Doctor's being a charlatan would arise and it is also inevitable that this possibility could not be dispelled. In short, the Doctor wishes for the impossible here, just like everybody else.

But the Doctor carries on as if he could save his position by being able to explain it, and tells Jake about the paralysis he [Jake] felt before and the one he felt this time;

In Penn Station it was inability to choose that immobilized you . . . but this [paralyzing difficulty] was a simple matter of running yourself into a blind alley-- a vulgar, stupid condition, not even a dilemma, and yet it undoes all I'd accomplished.<sup>17</sup>

Then the Doctor tries to explain how his therapy could produce an untherapeutic result;

Mythotherapy--Mythotherapy would have kept you out of any involvement, if you'd practised it assiduously the whole time. Actually you did practise it, but like a ninny you gave yourself the wrong part. Even the villain's role would have been all right, if you'd been an out-and-out villain with no regret! But you've made yourself a penitent when it's too late to repent, and that's the best role I can think of to immobilize you.<sup>18</sup>

The objection to these remarks of the Doctor's is that experiential contexts decide the framework we are able to put upon events. Even the Doctor's own remarks show this to be so. For the Doctor's remarks bear the imprint of a man trying to explain how his own theory could fail when he had claimed that failure was impossible.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 179.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 180.

The problem with the Doctor's theory is that it only recognizes one meaning for the word "choice". You only choose one thing. But treating single choices as the only real thing there is overlooks the fact that choices are never emotionally final. But more, can there be any real emotional advantage in role-assignment if you aren't allowed to bungle it? Can it be a real choice?

In fact, when Jake makes "himself a penitent when it's too late to repent" he is showing himself the freedom there is in choice. But he is also showing how people's emotions can lead them to make such choices. For only in making such disastrous choices are we reassured of the freedom which underlies any choice that really is a choice. And only in making disastrous choices do we recognize the changing emotions which can attach to any given choice in the course of time.

Finally though, the Doctor's speech is just one more speech which doesn't matter. For what difference can any explanation make to Jake now? He is going to have to start all over again, regardless of how things end. And what good will knowing his weaknesses do him? For he is going to have to find a whole new set of strengths before he can begin again, and they will surely hide new and different weaknesses. This mood shows up very clearly in what Jake says after he has finished with the Doctor;

It was not difficult to feel relieved at having finally prevented Rennie's suicide, but it was extremely difficult to feel chastened, as I wanted to feel chastened. I wanted the adventure to teach me this about myself: that regardless of what shifting opinions I held about ethical matters in the abstract, I was not so consistently the same person (not sufficiently "real," to use Rennie's term) that I could involve myself seriously in the lives of others without doing damage all round, not least to my own tranquility; that my irrational flashes of conscience and cruelty, of compassion and cynicism--in short, my inability to play the same role long enough--could give me as well as others pain . . .<sup>19</sup>

Jake's tortured expression here seems to imply there is a lesson to be learned and somehow he is not absorbing it. But the question is, in what sense is there a lesson at all? Has Jake recognized an error and seen a way to correct it, or has he recognized himself and struggled to find a way to erase what he has seen? Jake's statement about wanting "the adventure to teach me . . . about myself" exposes the fear he has that it is his nature to be insufficiently "real". And if experience always passes people by without teaching them anything, then the only reasonable approach to take is one that assumes that by nature they are "not consistently the same person" and thus that they must inevitably cause themselves "as well as others pain". But all of this is a battle against the logic imposed by language. For finally this is an uncertain question, because there can never be an answer either way.

Whether there is a lesson to be learned or an inevitability to be accepted or somehow a little of both,

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 185.

is a matter for personal decision. And like so many other things in this book the decision may be just a game people play with language. But it is not a game that can be avoided, and in order to react to the situation at all you are forced into playing it. In short, language itself finally becomes an experience that catches you somehow unawares and molds you into something you never know or believe yourself to be.

But the passage also gives the impression that Rennie's notion of what is "real" is not something based in language. The decision as to what is real and what is not exists not in language and communication but in her. For communication is not something people use to find out what is "real", it is something they use to search for it. But focussing on the question of what is "real" and how it manages to be "real" prompts some questions. First, what is Jake leading into in making this point about Rennie? And second, what prompts such a search and what inspires such judgements about whether the thing found is sufficiently "real"?

Jake finally shows us the fundamental common denominator revealed through all this: that we are not trying to communicate, but trying to communicate better when we use language. He is simply describing Rennie getting ready to go to the farm for the abortion but in fact he is revealing the primitive context we are all trying to escape when we use language;

The thing that I was sharply conscious of was her loneliness . . . the fundamental, last-analysis loneliness of all human beings in critical situations. It is never entirely true, but it's more apparent at some times than at others, and just then I was very much aware of her as apart from Joe, myself, values, motives, the world, or history--a solitary animal in a tight spot. . . . Lonely animals! Into no cause, resolve, or philosophy can we cram so much of ourselves that there is no part . . . left over to wonder and be lonely.<sup>20</sup>

It is clear from this that the most fundamental things never have to be said--they exist before language is every used, and they give language most of its substance. For Jake is saying that there is a part of everyone which is permanently lonely. And while we try to use all of the creations of language to get rid of this loneliness, we invariably fail to do anything more than dull our awareness of it.

This description seems to sum up all of the alienations which have molded Rennie. And they obviously really have molded her, because it is clear she has been lonely from the beginning and has spent all her time trying to escape from it. Presumably she still wants to escape even though all her previous efforts have been in vain. What Jake describes here is a loneliness marked with despair, and it seems to be the closest thing to Rennie's substance to be found in the book. For loneliness, when deeply felt, brings despair with it. And this is as it should be. For it is only reasonable that when one starts out lonely and finds that he cannot stop being this way, that a desire to escape

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 186.

would nonetheless remain. He has gone nowhere and so the incentive to keep on trying remains. The passage catalogues all Rennie's points of reference "Joe, myself, values, motives, the world . . . history" and indicates they are incorporated into her life as "cause, resolve or philosophy". But the whole process never completely gets rid of the emptiness which makes people go along despite their vulnerabilities and gives them a capacity to love others for reasons which are ultimately worthless.

Beneath the ingenuous psychic surface that Rennie is, these features linger as the risks she has undertaken in ignorance, but in a willing and thus knowing ignorance. Indeed, one can hear her remarks about "being through with lies" resonating through the entire scene.

The scene of her death is all that remains of Rennie's existence at this point. This is the moment when the victimization of all her vulnerabilities becomes complete. But most important is the alteration in perception involved in the transition from life to death. For all the uncertainties that persisted in life suddenly become voids. And all the alienation that built up in Rennie, become a waste of life when death arrives.

The death scene itself is simply a series of clinical details. But if the emotions and activities of onlookers are ignored, the technical apparatus and symptoms of death are all that can be presented anyway. These pitiful details are all one can show of the process of dying;

in effect, death is so recondite that any description must of necessity seem remote and superficial.

Yet the description also reflects Jake's sense of being unable to link himself with the fact of death in any personal way. And it becomes apparent that the impotence of feeling and language in this reflect a previously unrealized flaw in human awareness. For human empathy doesn't extend far enough to be able to turn the agony of death into an understanding of it. Indeed, the worst part of it for Jake seems to be the recognition that not even the anguish or lesson will persist. In addition, nothing Jake can do or feel will improve the situation. Jake is wracked by the thought:

Lord, the raggedness of it; the incompleteness! I paced my room; sucked in my breath; groaned aloud. I could imagine confessing publicly--but would this not be a further, final injury to Joe, who clearly wanted to deprive me of my responsibility, or at any rate wanted to hold his grief free from any further dealing with me? I could imagine carrying the ragged burden secretly, either in or out of Wicomico, married to Peggy Rankin or not, under my real name or another--but was this not cheating my society of its due or covertly avoiding public embarrassment? . . . I could not even imagine what I should feel: all I found in me was anguish, abstract and without focus.<sup>21</sup>

The possibility arises in this passage that Jake may be up to his old tricks of rationalization here. After all, talk or thoughts are cheap in a situation like this. But the point is that it doesn't matter whether he is rationalizing or not; such thoughts as he is having are the only

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 196.



thoughts he can have. For he seems to have searched the "raggedness" to the limit of his powers.

Clearly, Jake has encountered something that even feelings cannot articulate, just as words cannot articulate some feelings. And because words and feelings are both useless in the face of death, they irritate him and make him feel raw about everything. In short, trying to articulate things by finding the right feeling or the right word is shown to be an unsatisfactory approach, as unsatisfactory as all the other available approaches. By its very nature, the fact of death makes life "ragged". As Jake says;

The terrific incompleteness made me volatile; my muscles screamed to act; but my limbs were bound like Laocoön's --by the serpents Knowledge and Imagination, which, grown great in the fullness of time, no longer tempt but annihilate.<sup>22</sup>

This passage seems to assume the concept expressed by the Fall, namely, that Knowledge is mortality. But it goes beyond this. For Jake has realized that Knowledge and Imagination act as tempting illusions which draw him on. And the result of this is that Rennie and him end up being lonely together. So, when the end of it all arrives, there is nothing left to show for it all but a void.

Jake also brings Laocoön into all this. Laocoön is often mentioned as a figure showing that experience is decisive and expression is not, or to quote Lessing, that "the reporting of someone's scream produces one impression

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 196.

and the scream itself another".<sup>23</sup> Yet the significance of a "reported" scream depends on how it works in the context of the report, while the significance of the scream itself depends entirely on its intensity. Jake has moved in this book from the continuity of reporting to the wordless intensity of the scream. But in this same motion the continuity of the book's argument has been lost and the intensity of the moment has become its substance instead. So it doesn't matter that Jake says at the start of the book that he is upstairs in the dormitory (presumably the Doctor's dormitory) writing his story. This moment is what it's all about.

Jake has realized that the fascination of Laocoön, the figure embracing life and death simultaneously, can survive only while the figure acts as a mirror for speculation. But when the scream becomes Jake's own scream, Laocoön only makes him feel the wasting of life which death arranges. So there is a limit to what Knowledge and Imagination can teach him about life. And in the fullness of time what they teach is "annihilation". For when they are followed as far as they can be followed they neither provide any insight into things like death nor do they provide anywhere else to go. Jake can only return for more of the same.

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<sup>23</sup>Lessing, *Laocoön*, trans. by Edward Allan McCormick (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1962), p. 24.

When Jake realizes that he is killing himself off with his own irremovable blindness to life, and is keeping himself and others lonely in the process, the feeling is one of annihilation. Language just carries him along in a kind of vertigo that feels the waste and suspects the principle of annihilation that lies behind it, but never can assimilate either of them.

Language carries Jake through problems without ever bringing him up short and forcing him to eliminate all of the problem. So Jake's sense of annihilation here bears more on his attitude towards the future than anything else. For when a future fear becomes a present problem, language will carry him over it just as it does here, and leave only this feeling of annihilation. But the sorrow of such an awareness is beyond articulation, and it makes one of Jake's last observations inevitable; "We've come too far" I said to Laocoön. "Who can live any longer in the world?" There was no reply."<sup>24</sup> Laocoön's answer of silence is the right one. For from the beginning Laocoön has hinted at the mental seizure that life is. And at the start Jake has felt this latent catatonia welling up in him as he encountered reality. Then for a while he has seen that catatonia being submerged by each succession of new experience. But finally, what he is forced to learn is a staggering idea--

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<sup>24</sup>Barth, ibid., p. 197.

that catatonia is also experience's only remedy. Words have only obscured his conclusion at first, and then proved powerless to protect him from it. Experience has become simply that which "feels" and thus is, beyond remedy.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION

This novel has been used as a case study of a kind of linguistic approach to literature. If the kind of conclusions I have reached about the novel are the correct ones, then it should be clear that the kind of linguistic considerations I have pointed to could be important in reading personal narratives in general. In fact, given the number of passages where Barth is talking about what words mean and what they do, this would seem to be the only satisfactory approach to this novel, perhaps even the only satisfactory approach to any personal narrative.

I have tried to make no assumptions about this novel beyond what I could get from the words themselves. In taking these precautions and in approaching the novel coldly and dispassionately, it seemed to me that I was using what was probably the only approach that could work with this novel. But also, whenever one of the "word" passages was encountered, Barth seemed to be making comments about the interpretation of the novel as such, and perhaps he has imposed this approach by systematically denying all others in these passages. This is not to say the novel is exclusively about "words".

I have talked about experience as the root basis of things in this novel. I have concluded that experience has an actual if often unrecognized effect on the kind of language people use. For example, people talk of existence preceding essence but one would expect a person who has experienced existence in this way would stop using the word entirely. And if reality works this way then one must wonder how the word essence came to be part of the language in the first place. Yet essence remains a necessary part of our vocabulary, and one must understand the idea that existence necessitates essence to understand this. I believe The End of the Road shows how existence might do such a thing.

The End of the Road shows how personal narrative can be viewed as an attempt to reconstruct an experience by putting it into words. I have explored this particular concept as much as possible in this paper and I believe I have shown how Jacob Horner builds up a picture of himself through this technique. But is such an approach towards this, the blackest of Barth's novels, given support in the rest of his novels? I think it is.

In Barth's other novels, The Floating Opera, The Sot Weed Factor, and Giles Goat Boy, we still encounter situations where the words are the only things we have to work with. But Barth seems to have recognized somewhere between the writing of The End of the Road and The Sot Weed Factor that if words are the key to the process of

reconstructing experience, then fantasy could have as much of a grasp on us as concrete reality. Much of the material presented in his later novels is fantasy, and yet the forces which draw the characters towards these fantasies are the same one which operate in The End of the Road. For regardless of how concrete the experience may be, it is reconstructed through words and competes for attention with all the other reconstructed experiences present. In short, only Barth's perspective changes, his subject matter does not change. All of his works seem to present the same kind of complex argument about the real nature of experience.

This paper has presented a case study of such an argument. It is my opinion that other personal narratives can be profitably approached in just this way. And I hope this paper will help in making such an approach easier to undertake.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Because this study has been an in depth analysis of one work, I have not felt called upon to refer to other critical approaches to Barth. The bibliography which follows should give some sense of the nature and scope of Barth studies by other commentators.

### Works

"Lilith and the Lion," Hopkins Review, 4 (Fall 1950), 49-53.

An undergraduate story replete with mythic allusions and purple prose. Many commentators say this story was what taught Barth that his forte was comic writing.

The Floating Opera. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1956.

A novel which deals with the way people's lives float between the choice of life and the choice of suicide. In this case the choice of life prevails but only because the hero decides there is no reason to think suicide would be a relative improvement.

The End of the Road. New York: Doubleday, 1958.

The Sot-Weed Factor. New York: Doubleday, 1960.

This is really just a tall-tale retelling the story of early Maryland settlers; the legend of Pocahontas and John Smith takes on a totally new slant in Barth's hands. The substantive part of the novel seems to assert there is a gulf between innocence and experience --nothing of the former is left when one passes over to the dimension of the latter.

"My Two Muses," Johns Hopkins Magazine, 12 (April 1961), 9-13.

A deceptively glib account of Barth's highly relative view of truth and of the value of "sources" in writing or anything else--all this is framed within his description of his two muses, writing and the university.



Giles Goat Boy. New York: Doubleday, 1966.

The story of a goat boy (a "tragos" in Greek) who wants to become a legend in his own time. But he finds that the legend which emerges happens neither by accident nor design--a certain myth is prescribed by human nature--in that sense, new myths are impossible.

"The Literature of Exhaustion", Atlantic Monthly, 220 (August 1967), 29-34.

This is an essay about the somewhat exhausted state of contemporary literature, about how it is coping with that state and about how it should cope with it.

Lost in the Funhouse. New York: Doubleday, 1968.

A series of short stories containing the artificialities and self-consciousness Barth talked about in The Literature of Exhaustion--the stories are more about the difficulty of writing in general than they are stories as such.

### Bibliography

Bryer, Jackson R. "John Barth," Crit., VI (Fall 1963), 86-69.

This piece contains a number of the newspaper and journal reviews for Barth's works up to and including The Sot-Weed Factor.

### Reviews of the Works

There are a large number of reviews mentioned in Bryer's "representative sampling" (see above). A few pieces are included here however since they have provoked comment in the lengthier articles.

Fiedler, Leslie A. "John Barth: An Eccentric Genius," New Leader, 44 (February 13, 1961), 22-24.

This review appeared shortly after The Sot-Weed Factor was published and sparked a lot of comments about Barth's inventiveness, use of parody and use of artifice.

Hyman, Stanley Edgar. "John Barth's First Novel," New Leader, 48 (April 12, 1965), 20-21.

This review seems to have provoked comment because it refers to Barth's "repressed" homosexuality. For those who are fascinated by that sort of thing it may have some significance.

"A Study in Nihilism", Time, LXXII (July 21, 1950), p. 80.

A quite sound review of the book, more incisive than many of the later critical studies.

"Strife and Struggle", Times Literary Supplement, September 28, 1962, p. 757. (review of The End of the Road)

English reviewers were quick to recognize that Jake is a psychopath and were generally repelled by the book. This representative review refers to the "sickness of the novel which transcends the sickness of its hero".

### Critical Studies

Bluestone, George. "John Wain and John Barth: The Angry and the Accurate," The Massachusetts Review, I (May 1960), pp. 582-589.

This is essentially a study of a "genre" and is really only useful in that regard.

Bradbury, John M. "Absurd Insurrection: The Barth-Percy Affair", SAQ, 68, pp. 319-29.

Not very important.

Byrd, Scott. "'Giles Goat-Boy' Visited", Crit., IX, pp. 108-12.

A preliminary examination.

Dippie, Brian W. "'His Visage Wild, His Form Exotick': Indian Themes and Cultural Guilt in John Barth's The Sot-Weed Factor", AQ 21, pp. 113-21.

Pretty specialized criticism--not applicable to Barth's earlier works.

Diser, Philip E. "The Historical Ebenezer Cooke", Crit., 10, iii (1968), pp. 48-57.

Ignores The Sot-Weed Factor entirely and talks about the Maryland pioneer the novel purports to represent.

Garis, Robert. "What Happened to John Barth", Commentary, Oct., XLII, pp. 89-95.

The people who liked the first two novels seem to have thought the later works were tedious and pointless. The people who liked the later two thought the first two were sick. Garis liked the first two (for their "ideas").

Gross, Beverley. "The Anti-Novels of John Barth", ChiR 20, iii (1968), pp. 95-109.

Talks about the way the novels frustrate the reader and challenge narrative conventions. Talks about the novels as games and roles. Then says the novels undercut themselves but that "novels undercutting themselves" is what Barth's books are about. In short, the article overextends itself and loses its thrust.

Holder, Alan. "'What Marvellous Plot . . . Was Afoot?': History in John Barth's 'The Sot-Weed Factor'", Am. Q., XX, Fall, pp. 596-604.

Talks about the way Barth "plays" with history and ignores Barth's other concerns.

Kerner, David. "Psychodrama in Eden", ChiR 13, i (1959), pp. 59-67.

A very intelligent review which says The End of the Road is a novel of ideology where the inflated rhetoric of existentialism confronts the inflated rhetoric of nihilism--under the circumstances mutual deflation is the only possible outcome between the human God and the inhuman Devil involved. I agree with the deflation idea, but I also think the words "existentialism" and "nihilism" lose their contrasting qualities in the process.

Knapp, Edgar H. "Found in the Barthhouse: Novelist as Savior", MFS, 14 (1968), pp. 446-451.

Examines one short story--full of expressions of wonder and amazement. Not helpful.

Lee, L. L. "Some Uses of Finnegans Wake in John Barth's The Sot-Weed", JJQ, V, winter, pp. 177-8.

Barth was a graduate student long enough to have incorporated many, many "influences" in his works. But the import of those influences is a more uncertain matter, the reputations of Homer, Cervantes, Sterne, Wordsworth, Joyce, Borges and the french nouvel roman notwithstanding. This study is a two page example of this problem.

McColm, Pearlmarie. "The Revised New Syllabus and the Unrevised Old", Denver Q., Autumn, I, pp. 136-41.

A study of the new "Bible" which Giles Goat-Boy speaks of establishing.

Miller, Russell H. "'The Sot-Weed Factor': A Contemporary Mock Epic," Crit., Winter 1965-66, VIII, pp. 88-100.

One of the first of the many studies on the use of satire, parody, etc. in Barth's novels--applied first to the later two novels. Later studies examined these subjects in respect to all the works.

Noland, Richard W. "John Barth and the Novel of Comic Nihilism", WSCL, 7, pp. 239-57.

A lucid criticism of the works prior to Giles. Barth said "comic nihilism" was his goal after Sot-Weed went to press--but I submit "comic nihilism" becomes a contradiction in The End of the Road.

Poirier, Richard. "The Politics of Self-Parody", Partisan Review, 35 (1968), pp. 339-53.

This study is the acme of Barth's flirtation with the critics--comparisons with Borges, Joyce and Eliot are quite lavish and unqualified.

Rovit, Earl. "The Novel as Parody: John Barth", Crit., VI (Fall 1963), pp. 77-85.

Seminal examination of parody and satire but not as specific and thus not as useful as Miller's.

Schickel, Richard. "The Floating Opera", Crit., (Fall 1963), pp. 53-67.

A competent job of describing a book by a novelist "who started his career carefully rather than powerfully."

Scholes, Robert. "Disciple of Schenerazade", NYTB, 22 (May 8, ), p. 5.

A brief study on Barth's story telling powers.

Stubbs, John C. "John Barth as a Novelist of Ideas: The Themes of Value and Identity", Crit., VIII (Winter 1965-66), pp. 101-16.

A valuable contribution to the study of these two enduring themes of Barth's.

Tanner, Tony. "The Hoax that Joke Bilked", Partisan Review, 34 (1967), pp. 102-9.

A fine piece of criticism especially in respect to Barth's intellectualism and the way he manipulates language.

Tanner, Tony. "No Exit", Partisan Review, 36 (1969), pp. 293-99.

A study of *Lost in the Funhouse* that concludes, probably correctly, that it represents a kind of narrative self-paralysis--the narrative and game of a truly self-conscious narrator.

Tatham, Campbell. "John Barth and the Aesthetics of Artifices", CL (formerly WSCL), XII (No. 1, 1971), p. 60.

Deals with Barth's idea that since writing has to be artificial anyway you might as well make the artifice explicit. Does quite a good job showing some of the ways this idea shows up in Barth's works.

Tractenberg, Alan. "Barth and Hawkes: Two Fabulists", Crit., VI (Fall 1963), pp. 4-18.

A modest beginning on the idea of fantasy as reality in Barth--mostly a series of examples.

Books - Critical Studies in Books and Theses

Barnes, Hazel. The Literature of Possibility.

A few brief references to Barth and The End of the Road but quite significant ones from this English translator of Sartre's major work L'Étre et le Néant. It says Barth rejects existentialism though the author wonders at times whether he understands it.

Fiedler, Leslie A. The Return of the Vanishing American. New York: Stein and Day, 1968.

Some references to Barth--description of The Sot-Weed Factor as the new kind of adventure novel in the U. S.

Gerhard, Joseph. John Barth. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1970.

One of the ninety-five cent author profile books-- it provides elementary material but it covers the basics.

Havck, Richard Boyd. A Cheerful Nihilism. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971.

A fairly cursory treatment of Barth is included. It claims he is one of the "cheerful" comic nihilists so prevalent among modern authors.

Kennard, Jean E. "Towards a Novel of the Absurd: A Study of the Relationship Between the Concept of the Absurd as Defined in the Works of Sartre and Camus and Ideas and Form in the Fiction of John Barth, Samuel Beckett, Nigel Dennis, Joseph Heller and James Purdy," DA, Vol. 29, Section 3144 (Calif., Berkeley).

One of the pieces omitted to read in the original. The abstract says the thesis is about the way modern literature alienates readers so as to let them experience the alienation of their lives. But this massive topic is covered in two hundred and five pages and I thought Barth would be lost in the shuffle.

Scholes, Robert. The Fabulators. New York: Oxford University Press, 1967.

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Tatham, Campbell. "The Novels of John Barth: An Introduction," DA, Vol. 29, Section 4471 (Wis.)

A very thorough-going and interesting analysis of Barth's of Maryland works, filled with all kinds of

helpful materials--like maps, and the original of the poem The Marylandiad for The Sot-Weed Factor. Unfortunately Tatham treats The End of the Road as something of an embarrassment. He asserts that Barth feels where there are no answers, a comic outlook should be cultivated--otherwise one gets uselessly mired, in the tragedy of the situation.

### Other Materials

Enck, John. "John Barth: An Interview", WSCL, VI, 3-14.

An amusing and useful interview which gave rise to the "comic nihilism" idea and the treatments of Barth's characters as self-conscious narrators--and of Barth as a parodist and fabulator in the Borges tradition.

Goldwyn, Judith. "New Creative Writers - 35 Novelists Whose First Work Appears this Season," Library Journal, LXXXI (June 1, 1956), pp. 1496-1503.

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Peckham, Morse. Man's Rage for Chaos. New York: Schocken, 1965.

Particularly useful for its study of the process of filling in the gaps in identity artificially, and the use of roles and games, and the relation of language to "reality".

Church, David. Language and the Discovery of Reality. New York: Random House, 1961.

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Sartre, Jean Paul. Being and Nothingness. Trans. by Hazel E. Barnes. New York: Citadel Press, 1956.

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Sartre, Jean Paul. The Psychology of the Imagination. New York: Citadel Press, 1948.

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Foss, Martin. Symbol and Metaphor. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1949.

Significant for claim man needs to sustain the project of searching and has made language a means for doing so.

Horney, Karen. Our Inner Conflicts. New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1945.

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Lacan, Jacques. The Language of the Self. Trans. by Anthony Wilden. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1968.

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Watzlawick, Paul. The Pragmatics of Human Communication: A Study of Interactional Patterns, Pathologies and Paradoxes. New York: Norton, 1967.

Studies the idea of paradox as a linguistic trap identity gets caught in--limited value beyond that, but clearer than Lacan.

Cassirer, Ernst. The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms: Mythical Thought. Trans. by Ralph Manheim. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955.

A seminal work on the way perspective works in myth, and on the value of myth-making as a way of controlling perspective.

Whorf, Benjamin Lee. Language, Thought and Reality. Ed. by John B. Carroll. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1956.

The book that really got the controversy going about linguistic relativity and the relative reality it communicates.

Lawal, Sarah N. The Critics of Consciousness. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968.

A study of the novel roman writers of France who have tried to create novels in which the narrative was self-conscious and the artifice was included--often where the project of writing the book is all the book is about.

Brown, Norman O. Life Against Death. New York: Vintage Books, 1959.

I think this book confuses the issue of language vis a vis reality, but it has to be included.

Schorer, Mark. "Technique as Discovery", Hudson Review, 1 (1948), 67-87.

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Booth, Wayne. "The Uses of Reliable Commentary", The Rhetoric of Fiction. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961, pp. 169-209.

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