

JYVÄSKYLÄ STUDIES IN THE ARTS 15

DOUGLAS ROBINSON

JOHN BARTH'S GILES GOAT-BOY

A STUDY



UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ, JYVÄSKYLÄ 1980

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FOR HELJÄ

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ABSTRACT

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This study seeks to rectify some of the prevailing misconceptions about the nature of John Barth's fiction by offering a comprehensive analysis of his fourth novel, *Giles Goat-Boy* (1966). The study delineates two dialectics that together create the paradoxical tensions of Barth's work. The first operates between *metaphor*, which seeks and affirms patterns in language, and *irony*, which invokes metaphor in order to deny its validity; the second operates within metaphor, between *metafiction*, which self-reflexively examines language and fiction, and *metaphysics*, which focuses attention on man and his universe. Contrary to established critical opinion on Barth, which tends to stress the role played by irony in his work, this study argues that Barth seeks to operate as freely as possible within the possibilities of metaphor for narrative pleasure and tentative truth, while still maintaining the skeptical perspective of irony. Thus the study analyzes four narrative levels in Barth's novel along the metaphorical dialectic (from metafiction to metaphysics): parodic language as style, contemporary American history as setting, the hero myth as story, and allegorical philosophy as theme (plot, character, idea). The vision of the novel, the study suggests, must be seen in a holistic perception of these dialectics and their paradoxical confrontations.

contemporary American fiction / postmodernism / literary theory / paradox

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PREFACE

"The mind," as the Renaissance thinker Pico della Mirandola once claimed, "can compose all contradictions" - but while *Giles Goat-Boy* seems unquestionable proof of the claim, there are times when the critic of Barth's novel, awash in the flux of paradox, has doubts in the power of his own mind to compose anything. Tackling *Giles Goat-Boy* in many ways resembles Barth's image of Menelaus tackling Proteus on the beach at Pharos, and desperately holding fast as the shape-shifter changes from leopard to serpent to salt water to tree, on the slim chance that, if he holds on long enough, Proteus will assume his true shape and divulge his wisdom. Having held fast to Barth's protean novel for over five years, first in a Master of Arts thesis, next in a Licentiate of Philosophy dissertation, and now in this completed book, I still hear the voice of doubt whisper, "You haven't got him yet." I hope, however, that though with Proteus one can never be sure, the portrait I have drawn at least bears a certain resemblance to his true form.

The number of family and friends who have listened patiently to my thinking aloud on *Giles Goat-Boy*, or have even read various drafts of the manuscript, is too large to bear listing here. They know who they are. Of the teachers who have in some way abetted my work, I would especially like to mention two, Arthur Kimball, whose lively and creative approach to American literature first directed my interests into that sphere, and Sirkka Heiskanen-Mäkelä, who supervised my Master's thesis on Barth, and whose insistence on clarity of style and a coherent theoretical framework helped to make this book what it is. The manuscript was read in part or in whole by Thomas Brown, Kari Sajavaara, Michael Coleman, Niilo Peltola, and Tarmo Kunnas, and their comments and questions on both content and style helped considerably to sharpen and direct the force of my arguments. The continuing effort to

make sense of Barth's labyrinthine novel has first and foremost been an invaluable learning experience; and my primary debt, I believe, is to John Barth himself, for providing the twin pleasures of intellection and what he has called the joy of "sheer extraordinary, marvelous story."

PART I GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 John Barth and Postmodernist Fiction

John Barth was born May 27, 1930, in Cambridge, Maryland, the territory he has since cultivated in virtually all his fictions, and the region in which he lives and teaches today. Upon graduating from high school, Barth had an ambition to become an orchestrator,¹ and for a year he attended the Juilliard School of Music. The cost of tuition and living in New York was high, however, and his funds were low, so when at the end of his first year Johns Hopkins University offered him a scholarship, he transferred there, graduating with a Bachelor of Arts degree in creative writing in 1951 and a Master of Arts in 1952, with a novel entitled "Shirt of Nessus" (unpublished) for his M.A. thesis. He began work on a doctorate in the aesthetics of literature while working as a Junior Instructor in the Hopkins Department of Writing, Speech, and Drama; but by 1953 the cost of supporting a family while studying had become too much, and he applied

¹Joe David Bellamy, "Algebra and Fire: An Interview with John Barth." *The Falcon* 4 (Spring 1972), p. 7.

for and received a position at Pennsylvania State University, teaching freshman composition. Here he abandoned his doctoral studies and settled down to serious writing, working on a project he called "Dorchester Tales," a project he never completed, though some of the better tales were later included in *The Sot-Weed Factor*, and one was published separately as "Landscape: The Eastern Shore."² Following this decision, Barth's career has been marked by seven novels (or "fictions," as some must be called), and various university teaching posts. Leaving Penn State in 1965, he moved to the State University of New York at Buffalo, where he served as professor of English and writer-in-residence; during the academic year 1972-1973 he taught as visiting professor at Boston University; and from there he moved to his alma mater, Johns Hopkins University, where he teaches at present.³

Barth has published seven books to date: *The Floating Opera* (1956), *The End of the Road* (1958), *The Sot-Weed Factor* (1960), *Giles Goat-Boy* (1966), *Lost in the Funhouse* (1968), *Chimera* (1972), and *LETTERS* (1979).

Barth's fiction, along with that of such contemporaries of his as Robert Coover, Thomas Pynchon, Donald Barthelme, William Gass, Kurt Vonnegut, and John Hawkes, has been variously described as "postmodernist" or "neomodernist." The critical disagreement over the appropriate descriptive term for this fiction itself reflects a fundamental disagreement over the relation of this body of writing to its historical predecessor, modernism. Is contemporary fiction of this sort essentially only a working out of aesthetic assumptions already present in the great works of modernism, or does it involve a dis-

²*Kenyon Review* 12, no. 1 (Winter 1960), pp. 104-10; David Morrell, *John Barth: An Introduction* (Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, 1976), pp. 123-6.

³Morrell, pp. 123-6; Gerhard Joseph, *John Barth* (University of Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers no. 91, Minneapolis, 1970), p. 5; Israel Shenker, "Complicated Simple Things," *The New York Times Book Review*, September 24, 1972, p. 38.

tinct shift away from modernist aesthetics? Taking the former position, Frank Kermode and others have preferred to call this body of fiction "neomodernist," while others, headed by Ihab Hassan and Leslie Fiedler, have argued persuasively for the use of the term "postmodernist."⁴ It will perhaps require the passage of time before we can gain the necessary distance on contemporary fiction to judge between the two interpretations. In the meantime, however, while "postmodernism" contains the unfortunate implication of "everything that temporally follows modernism," it at least has the advantage of suiting the aesthetic notions of contemporary writers themselves. John Barth, for example, has said:

my ambition has been to write splendidly engaging stories without turning my back on the history of what's happened in our medium and in our culture since the decline of realism at the turn of the century. Some critics have called this postmodernism, and that seems to me a useful term to describe it, so long as it's not a mindless atavism or regression which denies that the first half of the century happened.⁵

And Philip Stevik, in an illuminating essay on what he calls the "new fiction," notes:

⁴Frank Kermode, *Continuities* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1968), and Gerald Graff, "The Myth of the Postmodernist Breakthrough" (in Malcolm Bradbury, ed., *The Novel Today* /Fontana, Glasgow, 1977/, pp. 217-49), constitute the best arguments for a clear continuity between modernism and recent fiction, and thus for the term "neomodernism." Ihab Hassan argues for the use of "postmodernism" in *The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward a Postmodern Literature* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1971) and *Paracriticisms: Seven Speculations of the Times* (University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1975). See also Leslie Fiedler, "The New Mutants," collected in *Unfinished Business* (Stein and Day, New York, 1972), pp. 187-208.

⁵Shenker, p. 36.

"Post-modernist" is an epithet that I, for one, find annoying and unhelpful. But it is true, all the same, that recent fiction no longer orients itself according to its own relations to the modernist masters and that this sense of discontinuity with the dominant figures of modernism is one of the few qualities that unite new fiction.⁶

A study of cultural history or literary history would necessarily concern itself with the validity of this "sense of discontinuity" experienced by contemporary writers between their writing and that of the modernists. Because I am here interested primarily in the form and content of a single contemporary work of fiction, rather than the social or historical reasons for the nature of that work, my major concern will be to discern the theoretical considerations offered by these writers as a motivation for their writing. Rightly or wrongly, contemporary writers do see themselves as postmodernist, and I shall consequently adopt that term for my discussion.

It is natural that, just as the son must seek to define himself against the father, writers in every literary generation define their artistic aims in reaction to the work of their immediate predecessors. Thus the postmodernists' reaction against the modernists was preceded by the modernists' reaction against traditional realism (which in turn was a reaction against romanticism, and so forth). The modernist reaction against traditional realism involved the perception that the latter was based on an essentially nineteenth-century notion of the knowability of the material world: realism assumes the existence of a reality "out there" that can be comprehended by the human mind and portrayed in fiction objectively. This notion, the modernists argued, was no longer tenable in the intellectual climate of the twentieth century. Drawing on the work of Freud and

⁶Philip Stevik, "Scheherezade runs out of plots, goes on talking; the King, puzzled, listens: an Essay on New Fiction." In Bradbury, *The Novel Today*, p. 191.

William James in psychology, Husserl, Bergson, and Wittgenstein in philosophy, and Heisenberg in physics, these writers claimed that the straight-forward epistemological optimism of nineteenth-century realism was unfounded, and began to write a literature characterized, in Malcolm Bradbury's words, by "the distortion of the familiar surface of observed reality."⁷ Our perception of reality, the modernists claimed, is problematic, and therefore our portrayal of reality must be similarly problematic. Psychological and philosophical developments of the early decades of the century suggested that "reality" as we think we know it is in fact more accurately to be described as an imaginative construct shaped - and probably distorted - by the human mind. As Gabriel Josipovici writes:

Primarily modernism was a calling into question of the norms and values not just of the nineteenth century, but of Western art and culture since the Renaissance. What all the moderns have in common - perhaps the only thing they have in common - is an insistence on the fact that what previous generations had taken for *the world* was only *the world seen through the spectacles of habit*.⁸

The postmodernists too would grant the validity of this claim. The philosophical base for both modernism and postmodernism is a radical epistemological skepticism, which asserts the essential unknowability of "reality." This commonality of philosophical base has in fact contributed to the notion that postmodernism is no more than an extension of modernist principles, as has also the fact that divisions between literary periods are never sharp or abrupt. In addition to postmodernists, there are neomodernist and even

⁷Malcolm Bradbury, "The Novel in the 1920's." In Bernard Bergonzi (ed.), *The Twentieth Century* (Sphere, London, 1970), p. 181.

⁸Gabriel Josipovici, *The World and the Book: A Study of Modern Fiction* (Macmillan, London, 1971), p. xiii.

neorealist writers writing still today. While postmodernists retain and enlarge upon the epistemological skepticism of the modernists, however, the conclusions they draw from that skepticism and the resultant aims for their art are quite different from those of the modernists.

According to postmodern writers, while the modernists no longer strove for surface realism, a fidelity to *things*, their writing constitutes not a rejection but a refinement of realism. A typical example of this refinement is the stream-of-consciousness technique. Where the nineteenth-century realists attempted to portray the human psyche through detailed psychological and behavioral description, the modernists moved a step closer to the psyche and sought realistically to imitate thought-processes themselves.

Two of the most distinctive tendencies of modernist writing illustrate this realistic tendency clearly. The first, exemplified by the epiphanies and cosmic patterns of Joyce, and the pagan, romantic visions of Yeats and Lawrence, is the visionary or metaphysical strand of modernism. Reviving the romantic concept of the artist as seer, many modernist writers saw surface reality, the subject of traditional realism, as a mere veil which, torn away, would reveal metaphysical truth to the artist's sensitive eye. These writers reject traditional surface realism only to seek in its place a deeper, metaphysical realism, striving to find an absolute of beauty or truth through art.

Perhaps an even more distinctive feature of the modernist rejection of traditional realism is the attempt to eliminate what Josipovici calls the "spectacles of habit," i.e., all imaginative constructs of reality, and represent life in its pristine disorder. Robert Musil's monumental *The Man Without Qualities*, for example, seeing life as lacking the simple order of narrative, seeks to become as multidimensional and fragmentary as life itself. The hero of the novel has no qualities because *no one* has qualities: character is a creation of fiction, not a reality. Ihab Hassan, in *The*

Dismemberment of Orpheus, traces the development of this essentially realistic attack on artificial patterns from the works of Sade, through Hemingway, Kafka, Genet, and Beckett, and points out the clear parallels of these works with other neomodernist fiction, such as that of Sartre, Camus, Robbe-Grillet, Ginsberg, and Burroughs. Believing that plot, character, time, metaphor, and other literary elements have no place in fiction due to their anthropomorphic (i.e., unrealistic) nature, these writers weed them out of their works.⁹

The postmodernists, for their part, see this subtractive tendency of modernism as the inevitable deadend of realism. In seeking to refine the unrealistic out of fiction, contemporary writers claim, the modernists painted themselves into a corner. Art is by definition artificial; words are words, not reality. As in Zeno's paradox, a writer can infinitely approach reality if he so chooses by a process of elimination, paring off artifice bit by bit, but he can never make his fiction become reality without causing it to cease being art. In order for art to be understandable at all, it must to some degree be lifelike, mimetic; but mimesis, the postmodernists point out, is itself an artistic - and there-

⁹Hassan suggests that Joyce and Beckett, the greatest representatives of these two tendencies, prefigure the two extremes of postmodernist fiction, Beckett moving toward a literature of silence, Joyce toward a literature of plenum, of language and vision exuberantly self-parodied (*Paracriticisms*, pp. 63-94). Hassan's analysis is penetrating and highly fruitful to studies of postmodernist fiction, providing we bear in mind the distinction between *prefiguring* that fiction and actually being it. Hassan, it seems to me, weakens his thesis by implying that *Finnegans Wake* and *The Unnamable* are themselves the first great postmodern works, and also by focusing his discussion of postmodernism on such strivers for realistic silence as the Theater of the Absurd, the *nouveau roman*, and aleatory art. Postmodern fiction, as we shall see, deals with the problem of epistemology not realistically, as Beckett does, by eliminating false patterns, but fantastically and metaphorically, by creating (and subtly undermining) elaborate narrative metaphors for the inadequacy of art.

fore artificial - device. Improving the quality or the extent of a work's mimesis does not bring that work closer to reality; it merely stresses one artificial mode instead of another. Furthermore, not only is it impossible to eliminate artifice from art, the postmodernists say, it is also unnecessary. Such artificial narrative elements as successiveness, causal plotting, and character may not exist in reality; but this is no reason to dispose of them. Instead, the writer can accept the genre for what it is, accept artifice, and tell exuberantly artificial stories in a full awareness of their artifice. Barth's reaction to the French new novel is characteristic of this approach:

From what I know of Robbe-Grillet and his pals, their aesthetic is finally a more up-to-date kind of psychological realism: a higher fi to human consciousness and unconsciousness. Well, that's nice. A different way to come to terms with the discrepancy between art and the Real Thing is to affirm the artificial in art (you can't get rid of it anyhow), and make the artifice part of your point instead of working for higher and higher fi with a lot of literary woofers and tweeters. That would be my way¹⁰

As is the case with most literary "periods," postmodernism is characterized as much by diversity as it is by similarity; there are as many kinds of postmodernism as there are postmodernists. And yet certain theoretical principles and practical approaches, such as Barth's idea of making artifice part of one's point, could be accepted by a wide range of contemporary writers, both Americans (including the Russian-Swiss-American Vladimir Nabokov and the South American Jorge Luis Borges) and such Europeans as Italo Calvino in Italy, Günter Grass in Germany, Muriel Spark in England, and Flann O'Brien in Ireland. These shared approaches, while often more individual de facto solutions than concerted

¹⁰John Enck, "John Barth: An Interview." *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature* 6 (Winter-Spring 1965), pp. 5-6.

manifestos, might be summarized as follows:

1. *Postmodern fiction is an attempt to understand and artistically demonstrate the proposition that art has no loyalty to anything outside itself.* Too often fiction has been criticized as bad history, bad politics, bad theology, bad philosophy, or bad psychology, and the writer of fiction has frequently found himself in the absurd and unnecessary position of defending the artistic autonomy of his work. Traditionally it has been easier to deny artistic autonomy to prose fiction than to other art forms, largely because it shares the prose medium with historical and philosophical forms and thus is vulnerable to demands that it share their aims. Composers are not normally accused of writing historically inaccurate symphonies, politically retrograde fugues, or psychologically unconvincing minuets. The same should apply to prose fiction.

2. *Postmodern fiction is an attempt to break down all arbitrary external restrictions on the writing of fiction:* for example, that fiction must realistically mirror experience, or even that it must *not* realistically mirror experience. Due to the dominance of realistic restrictions in the history of the novel, the postmodern attempt to extend and open up artistic possibilities has tended to involve antirealism (or, in Borges' term, which Barth prefers, irrealism), to the point even of an unhealthy fear of realistic narrative. But the best postmodern writing accepts all narrative modes as equally valid, and freely mixes fantasy with high realism: compare, for example, Thomas Pynchon's phenomenal ability to evoke a realistic sense of setting in *V.* (1960), or Robert Coover's detailed use of historical fact in *The Public Burning* (1977), or Barth's brilliant détente with realism in his latest novel, *LETTERS* (1979).¹¹ Where modernism sought to

¹¹All contemporary novels mentioned in the text but not footnoted will be listed with full publication date in the Bibliography.

purify or refine fiction by restricting the scope of its permissible narrative modes, postmodernism is an attempt to affirm fiction in all its various forms.

3. *Postmodern fiction is based on the recognition that there are no absolute distinctions, among forms of verbal discourse, between the "artistic" and the "scientific," the "fictional" and the "factual."* If "reality" is ultimately unknowable, all human characterizations of reality are not factual depictions but fictional constructions, artifice. Thus history may be conceived as "real" action couched as realistic fiction; criticism is metafiction; and philosophy is ideas presented as allegorical fiction.¹² Artifice is not a lie or a distortion of which fiction should attempt to be rid; it is the basic building block of human expression, and may be used and enjoyed for its own sake without regard for its referential "truth" or "falsehood."

4. *Postmodern fiction, in its affirmation of artifice and its emphasis on the autonomy of fiction, involves a return to the fundamental forms of fiction: to plot, for example, to character, setting, action, suspense - in a word,*

¹²William Gass, a postmodern novelist and practicing philosopher, has written eloquently on this head: "So much of philosophy is fiction. Dreams, doubts, fears, ambitions, ecstasies ... if philosophy were a stream, they would stock it like fishes /ellipsis Gass's/. Although fiction, in the manner of its making, is pure philosophy, no novelist has created a more dashing hero than the handsome Absolute, or conceived more dramatic extrications - the soul's escape from the body, for instance, or the will's from cause. ... /Ellipsis mine/ With what emotion do we watch the flight of the Alone to the Alone, or discover that '*der Welt ist alles, was der Fall ist,*' or read that in a state of nature the life of man is 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.' ... /Ellipsis mine/ Is it not exhilarating to be told that the 'desire and pursuit of the whole is called love'? And if we wish to become critical we can observe that Descartes' recourse to a gland in the skull to account for our intercourse with ourselves is a simple failure of the imagination, and that for the philosophers, God is always in His machine, flying about on wires like Peter Pan." *Fiction and the Figures of Life* (Nonpareil, Boston, 1971), pp. 3-4.

to *story*, which in modernist prose had gone the way of other "unrealistic" aspects. "The element of story," Barth has remarked, "- just sheer extraordinary, marvellous story - is not what we value Joyce for, for example, or Hemingway, or Faulkner, as a rule."¹³ Robert Martin Adams has shown that there were good reasons for this:

In "traditional" fiction it is the stream of a story, a narrative, that balances the reader on each fresh moment of revelation, as the story moves forward; the reader exists, within such a fiction, in a moment of ever-advancing time, and reacts at his best - with astonishment, dismay, anguish, anticipation - as he is caught up in the moment. Modernist writing is (or was, for we are now into something else) relatively static as far as events go; one would go mad reading Proust, Kafka, or Joyce to "find out what happens next." The story gets, and is intended to get, nowhere; at least, where it gets is relatively unimportant. Its point is the process by which it gets there - that is, the incidental revelations available through a retrogressive arrangement of its episodes. Instead of moving steadily forward, the reader of a modernist fiction reads back and forth, comparing, contrasting, analyzing, and reassessing his response to what he understood one way when it was presented but must now see "in a different light."¹⁴

According to the postmodernists, the approach Adams describes misses the mark. Fiction, they claim, should be not only intellectually challenging but also pleasureable, and the greatest pleasure in fiction comes precisely from *being* balanced "on each fresh moment of revelation," from reacting "with astonishment, dismay, anguish, anticipation" as one is "caught up in the moment." And so the postmodernists have argued, both in interviews and in their fiction, for a return to story.

In order to return to story, of course, one returns to the

¹³Enck, p. 4.

¹⁴Robert Martin Adams, *Afterjoyce: Studies in Fiction After Ulysses* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1977), p. 17.

great story-tellers: to mythology, to legend, to the great artistic collections of folk tales such as *The Arabian Nights* and the *Decameron*, and also to the patterns of contemporary popular romance, penny novels, television serials, comic books, and the like. What these tales have that much of modernist and even traditional fiction did not have is a gripping story, a story that engages the reader, willy-nilly, in the desire to learn "what happens next." And yet, as a contemporary writer one could not simply reproduce these traditional stories naively. One's self-conscious awareness of one's position in literary history, in the epistemologically skeptical twentieth century, makes naive story-telling difficult, even impossible (although fantasists such as J.R.R. Tolkien and science fiction writers seem to be discovering new and intellectually challenging ways of returning to unself-conscious story-telling). Instead, many postmodern writers have turned to a comic treatment - to parody.

Barth discusses the postmodern use of parody in an essay that has become a central document of postmodernism, "The Literature of Exhaustion." Here he suggests that the postmodern writer can avoid the dilemmas created by the epistemological skepticism of our century not by eliminating the unmodern elements from fiction, but by using those elements parodically. Instead of imitating life, he can imitate the novel. He continues:

If this sort of thing sounds unpleasantly decadent, nevertheless it's about where the genre began, with *Quixote* imitating *Amadis of Gaul*, Cervantes pretending to be the Cid Benegali (and Alonso Quijano pretending to be Don Quixote), or Fielding parodying Richardson. ... /These are/ imitations-of-novels, which attempt to represent not life directly but a representation of life. In fact such works are no more removed from "life" than Richardson's or Goethe's epistolary novels are: both imitate "real" documents, and the subject of both, ultimately, is life, not the documents. A novel is as much a piece of the real world as a letter, and the letters in *The Sorrows of Young Werther* are, after all, fictitious.¹⁵

¹⁵ John Barth, "The Literature of Exhaustion." In Bradbury, *The Novel Today*, p. 79. Originally published in *Atlantic* 220 (August 1967), pp. 29-34.

To a large number of writers in America and Western Europe after the Second World War, the parodic approach has sounded not unpleasantly decadent but both fun and fictionally resonant. A wide variety of popular and traditional genres have been shaped into comic vehicles for serious fiction: the detective or sleuthing or crime novel, in works such as Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966) and many of Jorge Luis Borges' short fictions; the science fiction novel in most of Kurt Vonnegut's works, in Italo Calvino's *Cosmicomics* (1965) and *t zero* (1967), and to some extent in Barth's *Giles Goat-Boy*; the sports novel in Robert Coover's *Universal Baseball Association* (1968); the Gothic and Western forms of romance in Richard Brautigan's *The Hawkline Monster* (1974); the comic strip and animated cartoon (particularly Walt Disney's contribution) in the general postmodernist approach to character and setting, evident for example in John Gardner's *Grendel* (1971); the sentimental love story, in Nabokov's *Ada* (1969) or *Lolita* (1955), and the scholarly commentary in his *Pale Fire* (1962). Ancient myths, legends, and traditional narratives are used comically not in order to shed a mythic light on modern society, as was the case in Joyce and Yeats, but to form a delightful structure for the story to rest upon. Contemporary history, both sociopolitical and intellectual, is turned into a comic narrative structure that is made to seem as "lifelike" as the ancient myths: a brilliant example of parodic intellectual history is Donald Barthelme's *The Dead Father* (1975), which parodies the contemporary myth of the death of God. This historical parody is in fact best exemplified by Barth's middle novels, *The Sot-Weed Factor* and *Giles Goat-Boy*, and I shall return to a detailed discussion of the subject in Part III.

The postmodernist writer uses parody partly out of a sheer joy in the forms of art. Partly, also, however, parody is made to transcend pleasure into a serious vision of the nature of art. These two uses of parody reflect an important aspect of postmodern fiction: its attempt in all areas to fuse or juxtapose the pleasurable comic and the intellectually serious. The range of stylistic and structural devices used to achieve this fusion may, I believe, usefully be illumined through a

discussion of the four rhetorical tropes: metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony.

One of the most influential classifications of the rhetorical tropes in recent years has been Roman Jakobson's delineation of a binary opposition between metaphor and metonymy, presented in his book with Morris Halle, *Fundamentals of Language*.¹⁶ Where traditional rhetorics associates metonymy and synecdoche with metaphor, Jakobson writes, there is a good deal of evidence (for example among aphasic language disorders) for a natural distinction between metaphor and metonymy, if metonymy is understood broadly to include synecdoche and irony as well. Metaphor is a trope of identity, of the substitution of one thing for another; because it imaginatively juxtaposes object-pairs that are never contiguous in nature, Jakobson claims metaphor is the trope of lyric, and most particularly of romantic and symbolist poetry. Metonymy, on the other hand, is a trope which deals in the natural contiguities around us: metonymy proper substitutes the part for the whole, as in "fifty sail" for "fifty ships," and synecdoche substitutes a representative quality contained in the whole for the whole, as in "the deep" for "the sea," since "deep" is a quality of "sea." Irony, also included in Jakobson's concept of metonymy, is a trope of dissociation which dissolves figurative patterns into natural, realistic ones. Thus, Jakobson claims, metonymy, understood thus broadly, is the trope of prose fiction, and particularly of discursive and realistic prose.

Using Jakobson's binary classification, David Lodge has offered a persuasive reading of modernist fiction in an article, "The Language of Modernist Fiction: Metaphor and Metonymy," and a recent full-length study, *The Modes of Modern Writing*:

¹⁶Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle, *Fundamentals of Language* (Mouton, The Hague, 1956); see particularly "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances," pp. 55-82.

*Metaphor, Metonymy, and the Typology of Modern Literature.*¹⁷ Lodge demonstrates, through a detailed analysis of the styles of major modernist writers, that while modernism began to develop metaphorical structures in opposition to the traditional metonymical realistic novel, it still relied most heavily on metonymy. Much modernist fiction, Lodge shows, sought to disintegrate the metaphorical link between art and reality by emphasizing the metonymical contiguities found in "real contexts." Lodge's stylistic research in fact clearly supports the postmodernists' claim that modernism was essentially an extension of realistic principles to their logical end, eliminating the artificial (metaphorical) from art. In his final chapter on postmodernism, Lodge rightly, I think, refrains from classifying contemporary American and French fiction as either metaphorical or metonymical, suggesting that this fiction may in fact be seeking a paradoxical fusion of the two.¹⁸

Despite the many valid insights that Jakobson's bipolar distinction has provided, however, there are certain significant weaknesses in such an approach. Where traditional rhetorics classifies metaphor, metonymy, and synecdoche as "metaphor," for example, and irony as a kind of anti-metaphor, which uses the trope of metaphor to deny metaphorical truth, Jakobson draws what must seem, in literary studies, a rather arbitrary line between metaphor and metonymy. Metaphor, metonymy, and synecdoche bear a family resemblance in that all three seek, create, and affirm *patterns* in linguistic experience, seek and affirm relationships between things: Hayden White points out that these three tropes may be described as

¹⁷David Lodge, "The Language of Modernist Fiction: Metaphor and Metonymy." In Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (eds.), *Modernism* (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1976), pp. 481-96. David Lodge, *The Modes of Modern Writing: Metaphor, Metonymy, and the Typology of Modern Literature* (Edward Arnold, London, 1977).

¹⁸Lodge, *The Modes of Modern Writing*, pp. 220-45, esp. p. 228.

"naive," in Schiller's sense of the term, "since they can be deployed only in the belief in language's capacity to grasp the nature of things in figurative terms."¹⁹ Irony stands as a "sentimental" (i.e., self-conscious) counterpart to these, in that its aim is "to affirm tacitly the negative of what is on the literal level affirmed positively, or the reverse."²⁰ By insisting upon a binary distinction between metaphor, on the one hand, and metonymy, synecdoche, and irony on the other, Jakobson is forced to overstress certain relatively minor differences between the metaphorical tropes and overlook the important similarities between them. The crux of the argument is Jakobson's claim that the relationships drawn by metonymy and synecdoche are found in real contexts, whereas those drawn by metaphor are construed by the imagination. But consider the synecdochic phrase, "He's all heart." Here only the blood-pumping muscle itself is found in a natural context; the *quality* of "heart," on the other hand, that which makes the phrase synecdochic, is not contextual but a culturally-derived metaphorical construct, according to which the heart symbolizes the emotions, especially such abstractions as love, kindness, and caring. Synecdoche, therefore, while possessing certain clear differences from metaphor proper, must, like metaphor, be seen as a trope of imaginative pattern-finding, and thus a subcategory of metaphor rather than its opposite member in a bipolar dyad.²¹

Tied to Jakobson's distinction between "imaginative" meta-

¹⁹ Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1973), pp. 36-7.

²⁰ White, *Metahistory*, p. 37.

²¹ In his defense of Jakobson's hypothesis against the criticisms advanced by Hayden White, David Lodge insists that White overemphasizes the difference between synecdoche and metonymy and underemphasizes that between synecdoche and metaphor (*The Modes of Modern Writing*, pp. 80-1n). Even if we grant the theory its claim that metonymy proper is based on "real contexts," however, the element of "quality" involved in synecdoche must necessarily entail culturally-derived imaginative associations rather than contextual contiguities, establishing the clear affinity between synecdoche and metaphor for which White argues (*Metahistory*, pp. 31-3n).

phor and "contextually-based" metonymy is his insistence upon an absolute or near-absolute difference in kind between figurative and discursive or realistic language - between the poetic and scientific modes of thought. Jakobson's binary distinction is in fact dependent upon some such absolute notion of realistic description, since without it metaphor and metonymy are no binary opposites but simply two alternative modes of figuration. Thus Lodge devotes nearly one-fifth of his book to a defense of the premise that realism is not a relative concept, but absolute, since it describes the phenomenal reality we all perceive around us.²² It is clear, however, that metaphor is not the only figurative trope. All four tropes, irony included, are figurative, indeed all language is figurative, inasmuch as it gives *a priori* structure to experience. Putative "realistic" portrayals of experience are not absolutes based on natural contexts; they are figurative constitutions of experience which imitate not reality directly but conventional notions of reality.²³ Lodge effectively refutes his own argument for the absolute nature of realism by characterizing both George Eliot and Alain Robbe-Grillet as metonymical realists:²⁴ in the century that elapses between these two

²²Lodge, *The Modes of Modern Writing*, pp. 22-71. See esp. p. 46: noting that "the historical description of reality ... provides the principal nonliterary model for literary realism," Lodge continues, "It is because the norms of the historical description of reality have remained remarkably stable for the last two or three hundred years that I cannot accept the argument that 'realism' is a completely relativistic concept." But three hundred years is also a remarkably short period in the history of human culture, and the same three centuries have been the only historical era in the West in which realistic norms have maintained an extended cultural acceptance. "Reality," Barth once remarked, "is a nice place to visit but you wouldn't want to live there, and literature never did, very long" (Enck, p. 11). The predominance of realistic norms in the centuries following the Renaissance, a period characterized by positivist and materialist approaches to phenomenal reality, is certainly no refutation of the relativism of realism.

²³White, *Metahistory*, pp. 31-3n.

²⁴Lodge, *The Modes of Modern Writing*, e.g., pp. 87, 237-9.

writers, conventional notions of reality undergo a revolutionary change, and realism changes accordingly, eliminating plot, character, and successiveness, the basic building blocks of Eliot's fiction, as "unrealistic."

I would argue, then, that a more workable classification of the four rhetorical tropes is the traditional one: into metaphor, including metaphor proper, metonymy, and synecdoche, which affirm their own figurative patterns, and irony, as a trope which uses figuration to deny the truth of metaphorical relations. In this classification, all art is metaphorical in form, for it substitutes words for reality; some art, however, disbelieves its own substitutions and thus ironically dissolves them. This, as White points out, is closest to the "realistic" tendency in art:

Irony presupposes the occupation of a "realistic" perspective on reality, from which a nonfigurative representation of the world of experience might be provided. Irony thus represents a stage of consciousness in which the problematical nature of language itself has become recognized. It points to the potential foolishness of all linguistic characterizations of reality as much as to the absurdity of the belief it parodies. . . . In Irony, figurative language folds back upon itself and brings its own potentialities for distorting perception under question. This is why characterizations of the world cast in the Ironic mode are often regarded as *intrinsically* sophisticated and realistic.²⁵

Citing Northrup Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*, White notes that literary history in the West has tended to move from the metaphorical to the ironic mode, subsequently regenerating itself as metaphor.²⁶ Frye's formulation clearly supports the postmodern view of literary history. The element of sheer story as found in primitive story-telling and popular romance,

²⁵White, *Metahistory*, p. 37.

²⁶White, *Metahistory*, pp. 38-42. See also Northrup Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1973), e.g., p. 42.

with its near-allegorical representations of various forms of good and evil and its symbolic plot structure, is metaphorical. At the simplest level of romance, both plot and character entail an unabashedly artificial and symbolic one-to-one correspondence between the fictional representation of a person or an action and a moral force of purpose.²⁷ The realistic novel, at its inception, remained largely metaphorical, but gradually it began to shift from the metaphorical to the ironic mode, questioning its own forms, parodying metaphorical constructions as "unrealistic," and dissolving the traditional structures of literature, especially plot and character. This development toward increasing irony began to reach a deadend in writers like Beckett and Robbe-Grillet, which in part contributed to the notion that the novel is dead.

The postmodern answer to this deadend has involved a resurrection of metaphor, as Frye's theory predicts. Contrary to Frye's schema, however, postmodern use of metaphor has not been a naive rebirth out of deadlocked sophistication, a metaphorical phoenix rising out of the ashes of irony (although science fiction and other contemporary fantasy provide many interesting counterexamples). Instead, while the postmodernists have attempted to make the traditional metaphorical structures of narrative a central part of their fiction, they have not relinquished the critical and skeptical perspective of irony. This ironic perspective in most postmodern writing is deployed as a means of questioning art's claim to capture truth, a function frequently carried by parody, which tends to confer upon parody an aesthetic seriousness far greater than is usually associated with parodic art. Irony in postmodern writing is not, however, limited to parody, but takes a multitude of different forms: self-reflexion in style, a self-conscious discontinuity between the perceived world and the fictional world, peripeteic disappointments of plot expectations, and the

²⁷See Northrup Frye, *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1976), pp. 63-93.

deliberate undermining of metaphysical vision.

All fiction combines the ironic and the metaphorical to some extent. What is unique about postmodern writing is, first, that where traditional fiction seeks to minimize one element and maximize the other, postmodern fiction seeks a paradoxical balance between them. And second, where realistic fiction avoids extremes, postmodern writing deliberately evokes and maintains them, fusing metaphorical structures and the ironic undermining of those same structures. Metaphor and irony are mutually contradictory modes of expression: what metaphor asserts, irony denies, and coexistence between them is normally thought impossible. Thus in seeking a paradoxical balance between the two modes, postmodern writers approach a tenuous complexity that makes criticism a difficult business. In these works resemble prenovelistic fiction such as *Don Quixote* or *Gargantua et Pantagruel*, where the ironic perspective on metaphorical exuberance was not yet spoiled by later realistic developments; and in fact Cervantes and Rabelais have been important models for many postmodern writers.²⁸

²⁸This reading of postmodernist fiction as seeking to fuse extreme modes of narration has been offered in different terms by two critics who have been among the most penetrating and persistent champions of postmodernist writing: Ihab Hassan and Robert Scholes. Hassan, drawing on his reading of Beckett and Joyce as the predecessors of postmodernism, describes the extremes as follows: "Here is my Map of Vanishing Fiction: Imagine two lines meeting at some point in the future. Call the left line the Novel of Silence, or as Barth would say, the Literature of Exhaustion. Call the right line the Fantastic Novel, or as Vonnegut would want, Science Fiction" (*Paracriticisms*, pp. 104-5). "At one boundary," Hassan continues, "that of Silence or Exhaustion, the novel moves toward abolition of its form. At the other, of Fantasy or Science Fiction, it moves beyond itself into vision" (p. 106).

Robert Scholes, for his part, speaks historically of the modes that contributed to the formation of the novel and that have since been incorporated into the novel at various stages in its brief historical span. Scholes suggests that prenovels such as *Don Quixote* and *Gargantua et Pantagruel* unconsciously embodied the extreme forms of satire and romance; later developments in the novel, Scholes says, gradually narrowed the opposition between these two modes, moving from satire through picaresque and comedy to history, and from romance through tragedy and sentiment also to history. Contemporary fiction,

The balance between delightful metaphor and critical irony takes many forms in postmodern fiction. Robert Coover, for example, in novels like *The Universal Baseball Association* and *The Public Burning* (1977), successfully tips the scales in favor of metaphor, and these fictions are accordingly more delightful, more enjoyable to read. Donald Barthelme, on the other hand, like Coover in much of *Pricksongs and Descants* (1969) and Barth in *Lost in the Funhouse*, tips the scales in the other direction, leaning toward irony as the dominant mode. Where irony is dominant, it tends to disintegrate plot and character, and thus we have Coover's and Barthelme's tendency to write stories that are segmented or fragmented, that contain many alternative plot possibilities, or that artificially highlight plot sequence through numbered para-

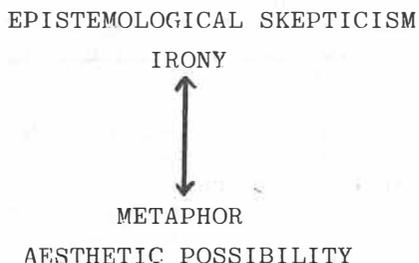
Scholes argues, has been marked by a retracing of this development, until recent writers once again seek to combine the extremes of satire (read "silence") and romance (read "fantasy") in a self-conscious return to Cervantean and Rabelaisian modes of fiction (Scholes, *Structuralism in Literature* /Yale University Press, New Haven, 1974/, pp. 132-8). In a recent book Scholes notes that "metafiction," or fiction about fiction, has two resources similar to my two poles: fantasy and irony (*Fabulation and Metafiction* /University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1979/, p. 117).

It is interesting that Hassan and Scholes, who identify essentially the same two poles of postmodernist fiction, in their personal predilections and therefore also critical appraisals tend toward opposite ends of the dichotomy they describe. Hassan prefers the literature of silence, and has written three books on its centrality in postmodernist fiction (*Paracriticisms*, *The Dismemberment of Orpheus*, and *The Literature of Silence: Henry Miller and Samuel Beckett* /Knopf, New York, 1967/), relegating what he calls the fantastic novel to a few paragraphs in *Paracriticisms* (pp. 107-9). Scholes' preference, on the other hand, is for the fantastic novel, in Hassan's term, or for fabulation, in his own; and he argues, as I have above, that the literature of silence is not postmodernist at all, but a late version of modernist realism (*Fabulation and Metafiction*, p. 128). Hassan favors fictions that dissolve their own forms, Scholes those that glory in them, that take pleasure in narrative design. My own personal tastes, like Scholes', run to the latter: to Barth and Coover over Beckett and Robbe-Grillet, and I have consequently found Scholes' work on postmodern fiction much more useful than Hassan's in dealing with Barth's novel.

graphs; and thus also Barth's self-conscious difficulty in ending a story or keeping it going in "Autobiography," or "Lost in the Funhouse," or "Life-Story." Barth's longer novels, *The Sot-Weed Factor*, *Giles Goat-Boy*, and *LETTERS*, on the other hand, are more subtly ironic and more exuberantly metaphorical, and these are consequently his most engaging books in terms of what he called "sheer extraordinary, marvellous story."

This balance between irony and metaphor in postmodern fiction, then, constitutes a kind of dialectic or tension within which contemporary writers operate. A systematic diagram for this dialectic might arrange irony and metaphor on a vertical axis, with irony above and metaphor below, representing the postmoderns' attempt to move from the ironic skepticism of Kafka and Beckett, which they find compelling, to a more complex synthesis:

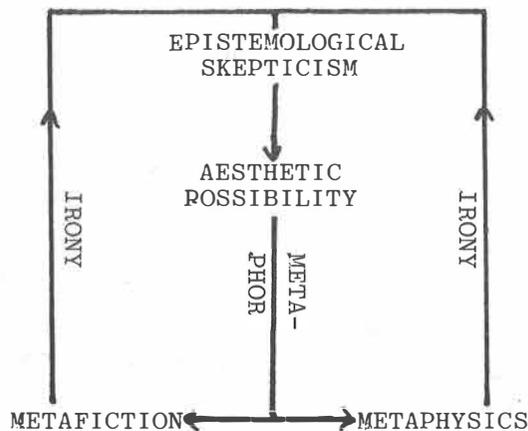
Figure 1: *The irony-metaphor dialectic*



But postmodern fiction contains another central dialectic within metaphorical possibilities that may be plotted along a horizontal axis. The poles of this second dialectic might be organized according to a very simple criterion: whether the writer at any given point looks "in" or "out." Looking "in" means the postmodern tendency toward introspective, self-reflexive joy in language, in the forms of fiction and the patterns of the imagination, for which we may use Robert Scholes' term "metafiction." On the other hand, postmodern

fiction is also characterized by an outward-looking concern with human life and the nature of man's universe, with both ontology and cosmology, a concern which has traditionally been called metaphysics.²⁹ These two dialectics, arranged along perpendicular axes, begin to account for the complexity of postmodern fiction:

Figure 2: *The irony-metaphor and metafiction-metaphysics dialectics*



The more the writer inclines toward the metaphoric mode in his fiction, the more the horizontal dialectic between metafiction and metaphysics is allowed to reign sovereign. Fictions approaching this extreme are not common among the best postmodernist writing: Coover's *Universal Baseball Association* or Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, however, might be contemporary

²⁹It will be noted that this dialectic between metafiction and metaphysics is reminiscent of the modernist strands of ironic dissolution and metaphysical vision; but note also the important difference. Where the modernists dissolved artistic forms and constructed visionary patterns out of a realistic impulse to portray the world as it is, the postmodernists see both language and cosmologies as metaphorical, figurative, i.e., *artificial* constructs that are enjoyable as artifice rather than as realistic representations of reality.

examples of this tendency, and among earlier writers, perhaps Rabelais is the best example. In most contemporary fiction, the metafictional and metaphysical poles immediately lead to ironic questions. At the metafictional pole, delight in language prompts the question: if language has no referent outside itself, why are we going on like this? Isn't this all a meaningless activity? And at the metaphysical pole, ontological and cosmological concerns prompt a similar question: if this vision of man and the universe purports to tell no truth, to refer to nothing except its own patterns, doesn't it collapse in upon itself? These questions return us to the epistemological skepticism with which we began.

It is important to note that neither of the dialectics outlined above involve either taking sides or mutual destruction, as has so often been argued in postmodern criticism. Rather, as the term "dialectic" implies, both poles are maintained simultaneously, suspended in a highly productive tension. Not surprisingly, the metaphysical visions of the postmodern writers are frequently visions of paradox, for paradox permeates their fiction. The temptation of the critic is to retreat from the intellectual rigor of paradox and say, either, "Ah, *here* the writer is serious, the rest is camouflage," or, more commonly, "The paradox cancels itself out, since you can't have your cake and eat it too. The whole thing's a hoax." But this sort of response to postmodern writing is inadequate. These writers seek above all to operate as freely as possible on as many fictional levels as possible, without tying their hands by adopting a final position. Their trick is to build a complex web of tentative belief and ironic disbelief in an many interlocking and mutually contradictory positions as possible, and, in the words of a character from a Thomas Pynchon novel, "Keep it bouncing."³⁰ Any critical attempt to retreat from the multiple paradoxes too soon is

³⁰Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49* (Bantam, New York, 1972), p. 134.

doomed to failure.

And, as might be expected, the body of criticism on post-modernist works is studded with such failures. Literary criticism, like all sciences, is a collective process of trial and error. A brief discussion of the criticism written on Barth's fiction will serve both to illustrate this process and to outline the critical framework in which the present study operates.

The most common critical reading of Barth's fiction retreats from the paradoxes on the left side of my schema: along the vertical dialectic between metafiction and irony. In its most simplistic form, this reading sees Barth's work as sheer delight in design, i.e., unironic metafiction. Dante Cantrill, for example, claims that for Barth

nothing is ultimately important or useful; but the world of make-believe is a joy in itself, and to be joyous in the face of that fiction is to possess the key and the treasure. That is why Barth's virtuosity with language - his multiple punning, his fluid, euphonious phrases - is not a matter of exhibitionism. Every message has a meaning for him, but deciphering it demands as much from the reader as it does from the author, for the meaning is relatively significant and requires an adroit partner-in-creation. His wish is to provide his mistress, the reader, with as many varied and harmless pleasureable arrangements as he can, and simple, harmless pleasure is, in the end, the whole point. If the hero panics in the funhouse, or dryly asks the meaning of it all, he has missed the meaning of the tale of his life.³¹

While this sort of description captures a part of Barth's fiction, as a whole it is better suited to the unconscious and especially unself-conscious story-telling of *The Arabian Nights*, inasmuch as it fails to do justice to Barth's central

³¹Dante Cantrill, "Told By an Idiot: Toward an Understanding of Modern Fiction Through an Analysis of the Works of William Faulkner and John Barth" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Washington, Seattle, 1974), pp. 249-50. See also John Stark, *The Literature of Exhaustion: Borges, Nabokov, Barth* (Duke University Press, Durham, 1974), pp. 118-75, and Morrell, p. 99.

cognitive concerns, which control the narrative designs rather than being controlled by them.

A more sophisticated version of essentially the same critical approach is advanced by critics like Tony Tanner and Richard Poirier, who claim that Barth's intention is to create elaborate literary hoaxes which will question the authenticity of narrative art: i.e., to approach ironic dissolution of form through metafiction. Tanner writes: "we become aware of a writer going to perverse lengths ... not only to demonstrate what he can invent - and that is prodigious - but to demonstrate how he can equivocate about, trivialize and undermine his own inventions."³² Ihab Hassan, too, stresses the ironic-metafictional aspect of Barth's fiction, characterizing it as a "literature of silence" and underplaying the aspect of "fantastic" metaphysical vision.³³ Unquestionably, this drive to question the validity of narrative is a central part of all postmodern fiction and Barth's works in particular; but to say that these works parody themselves out of existence, that they disappear in a poof of smoke and a raucous guffaw, is to simplify them unnecessarily.

A somewhat less common critical reading of Barth's fiction retreats from the paradox on the other side of the schema. This reading claims that Barth's vision leads from metaphysics to irony, that it is pessimistic and nihilistic, a bitterly

³²Tony Tanner, *City of Words: A Study of American Fiction in the Mid-Twentieth Century* (Cape, London, 1976), p. 247. See also Tanner's "The Hoax That Joke Bilked," *Partisan Review* 34 (Winter 1967), pp. 108-9; Richard Poirier, "The Politics of Self-Parody," *Partisan Review* 35 (Summer 1968), p. 339, and his "WESCAC and the Messiah," *Book Week*, 7 August 1966, p. 12; Jerome Klinkowitz, *Literary Disruptions: The Making of a Post-Contemporary American Fiction* (University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1975), pp. 4-11; Earl Rovit, "The Novel as Parody: John Barth," *Critique* 6, no. 2 (1963), p. 77; Beverly Gross, "The Anti-Novels of John Barth," *Chicago Review* 20 (November 1968), pp. 95-109; Martin Seymour-Smith, *Who's Who in Twentieth Century Literature* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1976), p. 45.

³³Hassan, *The Dismemberment of Orpheus*, pp. 250-1; *Paracriticisms*, pp. 111-2; and *Contemporary American Literature 1945-1972: An Introduction* (Ungar, New York, 1973), pp. 56-60.

farcical attack on all knowing. "Ultimately," Jac Tharpe writes, "Barth says nothing - positively. There is nothing positive to say. No truth to tell. All one can do is tell the story. By implication, one says a very great deal, of course, about all that need not be said. But it is all negative."³⁴ Undoubtedly, Barth's metaphysics is pessimistic: he leans, he has told us, toward the tragic view of life.³⁵ But tragedy is not nihilism. The error of both approaches lies in assuming that ironic undermining must destroy vision. This simplistic assumption will not work with postmodern fiction. Barth's fictive vision is always a precarious balance between mutually contradictory propositions: a tragic view of life and a comic vision of the possibilities of art; metafictional pleasure in art and the irony that undermines it; a metaphysics and its ironic attenuation. These elements all intertwine to form a complex and multidimensional fictional fabric.

By far the most satisfactory reading of Barth's fiction is that offered by Robert Scholes. Scholes approaches postmodern fiction with two descriptive terms: "metafiction" and "fabulation." Metafiction, in Scholes' work, refers to that aspect of postmodern fiction which I have described as the ironic-metafictional dialectic, i.e., a complex pattern of elements in tension rather than a single element. I have limited the meaning of Scholes' term due to a common confusion. There are two distinct motivations for writing fiction about fiction, and thus two opposing poles of what Scholes calls metafiction: the purely pleasureable aspect, which finds self-conscious but unironic joy in design (as in Nabokov's *Pale*

³⁴Jac Tharpe, *John Barth: The Comic Sublimity of Paradox* (Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale, 1974), pp. 116-7. See also Raymond Olderman, *Beyond the Wasteland: A Study of the American Novel in the Nineteen-Sixties* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1972), p. 72.

³⁵Quoted in Morrell, pp. 133-4. Barth has his character in *LETTERS* called "The Author" make a similar statement (L, 431).

Fire or Coover's *Universal Baseball Association*), and the skeptical, ironic aspect, which seeks intellectual seriousness rather than delight, undermining the validity of fiction by stressing artifice (as in Barth's "Title" or "Life-Story"). In this study, metafiction will refer to the former, irony to the latter, and the "ironic-metafictional dialectic" to Scholes' concept of metafiction.³⁶

"Fabulation," Scholes' second term, forms the basis of his influential book, *The Fabulators* (1967). By fabulation Scholes means fiction which combines delight in design with a serious vision of life. Reminding us that traditionally fables are exquisitely structured, unrealistic tales that are frequently put to didactic purposes, Scholes suggests that "modern fabulation, like the ancient fabulation of Aesop, tends away from the representation of reality but returns toward actual human life by way of ethically controlled fantasy."³⁷ Fabulation, then, balances instruction and delight, a balance Scholes describes in another book as one between a cognitive examination of man's existential situation and a sublimative re-creation of the world.³⁸

Clearly, my approach to Barth's fiction is very close to, and is in part modeled on, Scholes' concept of fabulation. Scholes' description of sublimation, or delight in design, for example, on a broad level resembles my discussion of metaphor, with its artistic re-creation of the world, and more specifically it suggests the metafictional pole of metaphor, with its self-conscious delight in language and the patterns of fiction. Cognition, on the other hand, the serious vision of life, on the broadest level covers my entire diagram:

³⁶See Scholes' discussion of metafiction in *Fabulation and Metafiction*, pp. 105-13.

³⁷Robert Scholes, *The Fabulators* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1967), p. 10.

³⁸Robert Scholes, *Structural Fabulation: An Essay on Fiction of the Future* (University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, 1975), pp. 4-6.

the complex web of interweaving dialectics is in fact a cognitive vision of life expressed in fictional form, if we define life broadly, as Barth does, to include man, his universe, his language, and his art. More specifically, Scholes' concept of cognition resembles what I have described as metaphysics, Barth's tragic view of life.

My one argument with Scholes' analysis is a relatively minor one: because it attempts to place a complex body of fiction along a single dialectic, it is forced to retreat from much of the complexity. This problem is most evident in Scholes' final chapter of *The Fabulators*, where he deals with *Giles Goat-Boy*. Despite his introductory definition of fabulation as a balance between instruction and design, here Scholes reduces *Giles Goat-Boy* to mere design, claiming that whatever apparent instruction or cognition the novel contains is in fact simply part of the delightful narrative pattern. "Actually," Scholes writes, "the philosophical dimension of the narrative functions mainly as a story within the larger story of George's adventures."³⁹ With this, we are back to Cantrill's claim that Barth's work is to be read as sheer pleasure in narrative pattern, simple metafiction. Interestingly, Scholes' reading of Barth's fourth novel has conditioned many critics' understanding of fabulation: universally one finds the concept cited, with the proper references to Scholes' book, as simple delight in design.⁴⁰

One of the striking aspects of postmodernist fiction is its attempt to emphasize the exuberance of metaphor to as great an extent as possible while still maintaining an ironic perspective in the background. Thus Barth's novels, too, while undermined ironically throughout, most strikingly operate along the horizontal metaphorical dialectic on the diagram, between metafiction and metaphysics. Along this dialectic, Barth's fictions individually evidence a clear

³⁹Scholes, *The Fabulators*, p. 167.

⁴⁰See for example Stark, p. 7, and Morrell, p. 99.

movement from right to left, from metaphysics to metafiction, as he develops as a writer. His early novels show an overriding interest in ironic metaphysics and are only very subtly qualified by budding ironic-metafictional concerns, while his later fiction begins to shift to forms which both take a tragic metaphysical view for granted and overshadow that view with a strong ironic-metafictional element. In addition, in Barth's most recent fiction a new dimension begins to take shape on the diagram, diminishing the role of irony for a concern with ethics and values, in a search for a meaningful way to live.

Barth's metaphysics does not change appreciably from novel to novel. In this fictional world change is the only constant, a condition which makes moral absolutes impossible. Because there is no absolute morality, no one action is more meaningful than another, a perception which causes Barth's heroes considerable anguish as they seek to answer the question, how am I to live? Because there is no God, there is also no afterlife to give meaning to death, and consequently the brevity of man's life and the inevitability of death take on tragic overtones.

Barth's metaphysics also contains a suggestion that the universe, though meaningless, may be ordered. It may be, of course, that the order man perceives around him is only a construct of his own imagination; but it is not necessary to settle on a definite "truth." A metaphysics is sufficient, whether or not that metaphysics actually portrays reality. The two most significant aspects of this ordered world view are, one, that there is a structural parallel between ontology and cosmology - between the nature of man and the nature of the universe - and two, that all things, great and small, develop according to a single pattern. The two aspects are summed up in *Giles Goat-Boy*, in Max Spielman's revision of Darwin: "ontogeny repeats cosmogeny."⁴¹ The patterns of

⁴¹John Barth, *Giles Goat-Boy* (Fawcett, Greenwich, 1966), p. 41. All subsequent references will be to this edition and will be made parenthetically in the text. References to Barth's other works will be made similarly, but with abbreviations listed in Appendix 1.

ontogeny and cosmogeny serve to structure both Barth's fictions individually and his *oeuvre* as a whole. In addition to individual heroes, whose ontogenies provide the thematic structure of each novel or tale, it would be possible to speak of a collective Barthian hero, whose progress along the path to understanding is marked by the lessons learned, the insights gained, by the heroes of each story. Each hero figures as the specific manifestation of a composite learner; taking the insight of his predecessor as his *donnée*, he develops the new understanding that will serve as *donnée* for his successor. In Barth's fictional metaphysics, ontogeny and cosmogeny are both repeated by bibliogeny.

That Barth's fiction is unified by a consistent metaphysical structuring is just beginning to be recognized by critics. David Morrell, in his brief but excellent full-length study, *John Barth: An Introduction* (1976), was the first to describe the thematic paradigm. The Barthian hero, says Morrell, is initially enamored of the world and filled with curiosity; then too much thought or some frightening aspect of existence destroys his innocence, and he must devise masks, or roles, to hide the horrible truth from himself - the truth being usually the fact of his own mortality. Ultimately the masks themselves are depleted, forcing the hero into a crisis in which he must learn to live without masks, facing courageously the truth of his own inevitable death.⁴² Morrell stops here, but he might have gone on to describe the hero's next step: to find some way of living meaningfully - and, if possible, joyfully - with the awful facts of human existence. Barth's answers to date seem to be a combination of art and love, which he sees as parallel and intertwining pursuits.

At the same time, Barth's fiction is interlaced with metafictional concerns, focusing on the nature of art and especially of prose fiction. What, Barth asks, are the conventional patterns and assumptions with which we write? In

⁴²Morrell, pp. 101-6.

developing these concerns Barth leans heavily on the literary device which Tony Tanner has called foregrounding, the laying bare of fictional devices which normally operate below the surface, invisible to the reader.⁴³ Barth is also interested in the *validity* of narrative art: can it say anything worth saying? Are there any truths which it can express? These questions lead us, on the diagram, back up to epistemological skepticism, and Barth's central device is, accordingly, irony.

Barth published his first book in 1956; his seventh and most recent novel appeared in 1979. Asked in an interview about the development of his work shortly before the publication of *Chimera* in 1972, Barth replied:

When I look at my work, I see it falling into sets of twos. The two little novels in the beginning were both relatively realistic. Then there were two big fat ones, both relatively fantastical or unrealistical. Then there will be two volumes of related short narratives: that book of short pieces for taped voice, live voice, and print and then the current series of three novellas.⁴⁴

LETTERS, 772 pages long, appears to be the first of another "two big fat ones;" five or six years will tell.

The first two novels, *The Floating Opera* and *The End of the Road*, deal with two naifs who face a crisis situation in life, more or less fail to handle that situation in the way they would have liked, and perhaps learn something in the process. The hero of *The Floating Opera*, Todd Andrews, has a heart condition which may kill him at any moment; this constantly reminds him of his own mortality, and in an attempt to overcome his fear of death he decides to commit suicide by blowing up a floating minstrel show with himself and the entire town on board. The suicide attempt fails, and he discovers that his only recourse is to go on living and attempt to cope

⁴³Tanner, *City of Words*, pp. 20-1.

⁴⁴Frank Gado, "John Barth." In Gado (ed.), *First Person: Conversations on Writers and Writing* (Union College Press, Schenectady, 1971), p. 132.

with a valueless life. Jacob Horner, the hero of *The End of the Road*, begins with Todd's problem of a world without meaning. The lack of meaningful alternatives for action leads him into a kind of paralysis which Barth calls "cosmop-sis." He is a nihilist who believes that his nihilism provides him with a *carte blanche* - he can do anything he likes, since nothing is more meaningful than anything else. His counterpart in the novel, Joe Morgan, is a nihilist who takes the opposite position: that in a valueless world one must create an ethical code and stick by it inflexibly. These two extreme forms of human irresponsibility lead to the brutal death of Joe's wife, Rennie, and Jake retreats from the world to turn his experience into the novel, in the hope that "Scriptotherapy," as the book calls it, will teach him. Metafictional concerns in both novels are limited to relatively traditional comments on Todd's part on the difficulty of writing a novel, and Jake's remarks on the importance and the falsity of articulation.

Barth's next novels display a marked change in form and tone: as Barth says, a change from realistic to unrealistic, from relatively traditional fiction to densely plotted and complexly structured extravaganzas with all the exuberance of Rabelais or Cervantes. Metafictional concerns begin to rise to the surface here, in the deliberately anachronistic form of *The Sot-Weed Factor* - it is a huge parody of the form of the eighteenth-century novel, complete with period prose - and the increasingly prominent self-referentiality of *Giles Goat-Boy*. Metaphysically, in terms of Barth's bibliogenic recapitulation of ontogeny, the novels begin to develop new themes:

The two novels I wrote in my twenties had to do, or thought they had to do, with the problem of nihilism. Then I realized that what those novels were really about was not nihilism but innocence, and that promptly became the major theme of "The Sot-Weed Factor."^{4 5}

^{4 5}Shenker, p. 37.

The Sot-Weed Factor, therefore, asks the question: can clinging to innocence lead to meaningful action? The novel answers No, and adds that meaningful action requires involving oneself with the world, living life rather than simply observing it. And *Giles Goat-Boy* asks: is heroism, and particularly heroic action, possible in a world with no moral absolutes? The answer this time is a qualified Yes: heroic action may be "meaningful," insofar as the hero accepts his (insignificant) place in the cosmos, but it can redeem neither himself nor his society. In this novel the hero gains from his vision a resigned peace but no lasting joy; and this becomes the central question in the next three books. *Lost in the Funhouse*, *Chimera*, and *LETTERS* all ask: once one has learned the "awful facts of life," how does one find joy?

The answers Barth offers to this question now begin to shape out the new dimension to my diagram: a dimension extending down from the horizontal axis of metaphor, which we may call "axiology," the traditional branch of philosophy which considers questions of value and ethics. For Barth, in these books, begins to suggest that joy in life may be found through the twin pursuits of art and love - that where before it seemed that the best man could hope for was to be able somehow to cope with a frightening reality by maturing and learning about it, now perhaps there is a kind of meaning, even happiness. This constitutes a tentative ethics, and one which is, for Barth, uncomfortably traditional and sentimental.

Of all Barth's books, these three are the most strongly oriented toward metafiction, although only in *Lost in the Funhouse* is special stress placed on ironic metafiction, the undermining and questioning of narrative validity. Despite the central role played by metafiction in these books, the temptation to see them as purely or even primarily metafictional should be resisted. The balance between metafiction and metaphysics is maintained in Barth's later fiction, and the low profile given metaphysical concerns is due less to decreasing importance than to the fact that they are by now largely

taken for granted. In the *Funhouse* volume, one should note the strong metaphysical bent of stories like the title story, "Lost in the Funhouse," "Echo," and "Two Meditations," all of which stress the awful facts of life; and the beautiful balance between metafiction and metaphysics in "Glossolalia," "Menelaiad," and "Anonymiad."

Barth's most recent fiction, *LETTERS*, is also in many respects his best. It is his first novel in the traditional sense of the word since *Giles Goat-Boy*, and in it he has renewed his efforts to revive outworn novelistic modes (the historical novel in *The Sot-Weed Factor*, allegory in *Giles*) by writing an old-fashioned realistic epistolary novel. Barth's earlier opposition, even aversion, to literary realism is here transcended, and once again he demonstrates the postmodern idea that all fictional modes, even the most historically retrograde or philosophically untenable, are equally valid. The result is a tale told by seven epistolary narrators that possesses all the exuberance of style and characterization typical of Barth's unrealistic works, yet is sunnily, serenely, charmingly realistic.

The realism of the novel is, as might be expected, not the modern ironic realism of the French *nouveau roman*, but the older, more naively metaphorical realism of the age of Richardson's *Pamela* or Goethe's *Werther*. The novel's metafictional concerns are made prominent by the inclusion, among the seven letter-writers, of a character called "The Author," who is realistically modeled on an actual person (Barth himself) and who comments on his plans for the work in progress throughout the novel. In this character Barth is playing with the fictional device known as the authorial aside to the reader, which was found in early realistic novels but was eliminated by modernist writers such as Henry James. The novel's metafiction seems intended less to undermine the validity of the narrative than to provide unironic pleasure in fictional form.

The novel's metaphysical content follows Barth's previous fiction in evoking the tragic view of man's existence. Where

the earlier works posed metaphysical question, however, or sought elusive metaphysical solutions, *LETTERS* seems less of a search than a solution in itself. For Eben Cooke, George Giles, and the anonymous bard at the end of *Lost in the Funhouse*, the tragic view seemed largely an unsmiling matter of accepting a grim, unhopeful vision of human existence without rage or recrimination. A new synthesis was tentatively outlined in the strivings of Menelaus, Dunyazade, and Perseus of *Lost in the Funhouse* and *Chimera*, all of whom sought a lasting mystical affirmation of love that would not retreat from the rigor of their tragic perceptions. The fusion of love and suffering, mysticism and tragedy, which these characters reach toward but only equivocally attain is achieved by the central characters of *LETTERS*. As a consequence, the uncomfortable grappling with paradox characteristic of Barth's earlier fiction is gone from *LETTERS*, and the novel takes on a tranquility unprecedented in Barth's fiction, as it lovingly traces the contours of a paradoxical acceptance of life.

It would, of course, be equally possible to argue that in relaxing the paradoxical tension in *LETTERS* in favor of a more holistic affirmation, Barth has also slackened the dialectics that lend his earlier fiction its power. If this is a weakness, *LETTERS* does not appreciably suffer from it. Unquestionably, *LETTERS* is a different sort of novel altogether from *Giles Goat-Boy*; for, as we shall see, the main thrust of the latter is to stretch the tension between paradoxical extremes to near the breaking point, forcing the formal and thematic concordance of opposites to yield up supreme fictive intensity.

Chapter 2 *Giles Goat-Boy*

Fleat Heraclitus, an rideat Democritus?
 in attempting to speak of these symptoms, shall I laugh with Democritus, or weep with Heraclitus? they are so ridiculous and absurd on the one hand, so lamentable and tragic on the other: a mixed scene offers itself, so full of errors and a promiscuous variety of objects, that I know not in what strain to represent it.

Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*¹

In examining any of Barth's novels in detail, a striking incongruity immediately confronts one: each novel offers what is essentially a tragic view of life, yet each is couched in a farcically comic form. This apparent incongruity is one of the most insistent characteristics of Barth's work, and as such it has proved one of the greatest stumbling blocks to criticism. Much as one wishes Barth well, much as one would like to believe that he is a serious writer, there is always the farcical tone: how is it to be justified?

In part, the phenomenon is explainable in terms of the times. Much postmodern writing shares the tendency to treat serious subjects in a comic vein without thereby detracting from the seriousness. The black humor of Kurt Vonnegut and others is one form; the peculiar kind of nonsequitous humor of Donald Barthelme or Richard Brautigan is an entirely different form of it. But Barth's particular brand of humor is a separate problem altogether. Black humor is so obviously a contemporary version of traditional moral satire that it has not proved overly difficult to deal with.² Neither Barthelme

¹Quoted in Rosalie Colie, *Paradoxia Epidemica: The Renaissance Tradition of Paradox* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1966), p. 440.

²For an excellent discussion of the role played by black humor in postmodern fiction, see Scholes' *Fabulation and Metafiction*, pp. 141-9.

nor Brautigan have sought the extremes of either laughter or sorrow, but have tended to play instead with the little pathoi of art and life. Barth, on the other hand, does seek extremes; he would like to combine Sophocles and Aristophanes - *King Lear* and the Marx brothers. In a passage from the "Anonymiad" story of *Lost in the Funhouse* he has his narrator state this aim clearly:

Tragedy and *satire* both deriving, in the lexicon of my inventions, from *goat*, ... I came to understand that the new work would combine the two, which I had so to speak kept thitherto in their separate amphorae. ... I saw too much of pity and terror merely to laugh; yet about the largest herø, gravest catastrophe, sordidest dead there was too much comic, one way or another, to sustain the epical strut or tragic frown. In the same way, the piece must be no Orphic celebration of the unknowable; time had taught me too much respect for man's intelligence and resourcefulness, not least my own, and too much doubt of things transcendent, to make a mystic hymnist of me. Yet neither would it be a mere discourse or logic preachment; I was too sensible of the great shadow that surrounds our little lights, like the sea my island shore. Whimsic fantasy, grub fact, pure senseless music - none in itself would do; to embody *all* and rise above each, in a work neither longfaced nor idiotly grinning, but adventuresome, passionately humored, merry with the pain of insight, wise and smiling in the terror of our life - that was my calm ambition (LFH, 190-1).

Tragedy, satire, mysticism, humanism - the "new work" could almost have been *Giles Goat-Boy*. And Barth has commented in an interview:

I'm delighted by the old spurious etymology of the words *tragedy* and *satire*, both of which have been traced back to the root word for goat. Because what I was after in */Giles Goat-Boy/*, as in most of my work, is a way to get at some of the passion and power of the tragic view, which I share, through the medium of farce and satire. To fuse those elements has been an inspiration of mine from the beginning.³

³Quoted in Morrell, p. 71.

Barth's desire to fuse tragedy and satire in his writing suggests a parallel desire to write fiction that is at once serious and humorous; and to a limited extent, this rather simplistic characterization is indeed accurate. Humor and wit lend themselves to the kind of pleasureable fiction Barth wants to write; yet he does not find the prospect of writing simple joke books appealing, and so he uses the farcical tone to explore serious metaphysical questions.

Yet Barth's fusion of satire and tragedy is not as simple as this. His "satire" (or parody, as I have called in it Chapter 1) is not wholly comic, but serves important serious aesthetic functions; and his tragedy is couched in the form of *comic* allegory, which attenuates the didaxis normally associated with that genre. At this point it will be useful to examine the complexities of satire (or parody) and allegory as they appear and overlap in Barth's work.

The first question is one of terminology: satire or parody? What, in fact, is the difference between them, and which more aptly applies to Barth's fiction? Noting the wide disagreement among scholars over the terms used to describe the forms of comic exaggeration, Leonard Feinberg summarizes some of the more common categorizations. David Worcester, he notes, does not speak of parody at all, but uses the word burlesque to cover all comic exaggeration of another work of art: "High burlesque treats a trivial subject in an elevated manner, and low burlesque treats an elevated subject in a trivial manner."⁴ R.P. Bond divides high burlesque into parody and mock-heroic, and low burlesque into travesty and Hudibrastic, saying further that the object of parody and travesty is a particular work, whereas that of mock-heroic and Hudibrastic is the manner of an entire genre. Yet another writer, Edgar Johnson, claims that "parody ... burlesques the style of its original; travesty

⁴David Worcester, *The Art of Satire*, quoted in Leonard Feinberg, *Introduction to Satire* (Iowa State University Press, Ames, 1972), pp. 185-6.

retains the original subject-matter and throws the style overboard."⁵ Gilbert Highet, in *The Anatomy of Satire*, while throughout using parody virtually synonymously with satire, at one point defines parody in much the same terms as Johnson does burlesque, calling Johnson's category of "parody" "formal parody," and "travesty" "material parody."⁶

In the midst of this terminological confusion, certain patterns do begin to appear. At least implicitly, satire is generally taken to mean a literary exaggeration of *life*, of the actions, words, and personalities of men and groups of men, while parody is used to refer to exaggerated comic imitations of literary or other artistic constructs. Thus Leonard Feinberg claims that "Satire is a 'quintessence of realism', an art which reproduces the substance of life without necessarily reproducing the precise form of life."⁷ And elsewhere: "But the great bulk of parody, for obvious reasons, consists of literary satire, imitating either individual writers or literary genres."⁸ Satire, in other words, is comic realism; parody comic metafiction. I shall make, then, a distinction between *satire*, which mockingly imitates the forms of life, and *parody*, which comically exaggerates the forms of art. The object of a parody could thus be a novel, a poem, a play; a film or a television show; a song or a painting; a public address or other speech; a work of history or philosophy, or other scholarly essay; a myth or a mythology, and so forth. Under this classification, then, *Gulliver's Travels* might be said to be a satire on human foibles, but a parody of the travel novel. Orwell's *Animal Farm* is primarily a satire on revolutions and utopian schemes, but might also be said to be a parody of the utopian novel. *Don Quixote* parodies the chi-

⁵Edgar Johnson, *A Treasury of Satire*; quoted in Feinberg, n. 186.

⁶Gilbert Highet, *The Anatomy of Satire* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1962), p. 69.

⁷Feinberg, p. 99.

⁸Feinberg, p. 188.

valrous romance, but contains little satire: its author empathizes too greatly with the human foibles he laughs at, sees too many of the same foibles in himself, to take the satirist's mocking stance.

The example of *Don Quixote* in fact suggests another important difference between parody and satire. That is, as many commentators have pointed out, satire assumes an ideal world or an ideal man, against which it judges our world and its denizens.⁹ For this reason, satire normally presupposes a superior stance on the part of the satirist, or at least a conception of all humans as inferior to an ideal. Parody, on the other hand, requires no such moral standard. Parody is occasionally based upon an aesthetic standard - ridiculing a work because of its artistic inferiority - but this is by no means the rule. Parody is often simply a humorous way of pointing up some idiosyncratic element of style, with no intention to denigrate the author concerned. An apprentice writer can often learn to develop his own unique style through parodying older writers. Most importantly, by operating in a purely aesthetic world, the parodist avoids taking a moral stance, which is the requisite for satire. This makes parody a genre well suited to our age, in which moral values have lost their force, and realism, the concomitant to satire, has been superceded by metafiction.

While it is clear that Barth, in these terms, would prefer parody to satire, we might well ask whether he uses satire in his fiction. In fact, it would seem he does. In *Giles Goat-Boy*, for example, we find a whole cast of characters who have real-life counterparts: John F. Kennedy, Eisenhower, Khrushchev, the Beatniks, and others appear in the novel in fictional guise, and this comic imitation of life would appear to be an obvious case of satire. But is it? We note immediately that

⁹See for example Moelwyn Merchant, *Comedy* (Methuen, London, 1972), p. 42, and Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1975), p. 112.

though these figures are comically portrayed, they lack the scorn and ridicule typical of satire. The same is true of some other apparently satiric constructions: the counterparts to America, the Soviet Union, the university, and so forth. Why are these things comically imitated and exaggerated and yet not ridiculed? The reason, I suggest, is that Barth is not concerned with contemporary sociopolitical life; as a writer of fiction, he has nothing to say about Kennedy as a President, or America's role in world politics. His interest lies in parodying the genre of the historical novel, specifically in this case the historical *roman à clef*. Further, when Barth "satirizes" John F. Kennedy, in an important sense he draws not on the "real" Kennedy, not on life, but on a media image of Kennedy - a fiction, a creation of art. Lucius Rexford is just as much a parody of a "Kennedy-type" as Peter Greene is a parody of literary types like Huckleberry Finn and Davy Crockett. While seeming to fulfill the requirements of satire, then, these characters are in fact parodic.

Parody is also a traditional means to what the Russian formalists call "defamiliarization." Pointing out that habit and familiarity deaden our perception of the things around us, Viktor Shklovsky, for example, claims that art's function is to defamiliarize our surroundings for us, make us see them again - in his words, to "make the stone *stony*."¹⁰ Art, too, is subject to the deadening power of familiarity, and must also be renewed through a process of defamiliarization. "Conventional devices," Boris Tomashevsky writes, "usually destroy themselves. One value of literature is its novelty and originality."¹¹ Thus the importance of parody:

In the evolution of each genre, there are times when its

¹⁰Quoted in Scholes, *Structuralism in Literature*, p. 83.

¹¹Boris Tomashevsky, "Thematics." In Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (eds.), *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays* (University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 1965), p. 82.

use for entirely serious or elevated objectives degenerates and produces a comic or parodied form. The same phenomenon has happened to the epic poem, the adventure novel, the biographical novel, etc. Naturally, local and historical conditions create different variations, but the process itself exhibits this same pattern as an evolutionary law: the serious interpretation of a construction motivated with care and in detail gives way to irony, pleasantry, pastiche; the connections which serve to motivate a scene become weaker and more obvious; the author himself comes on stage and often destroys the illusion of authenticity and seriousness; the construction of a plot becomes a playing with the story which transforms itself into a puzzle or an anecdote. And thus is produced the regeneration of the genre: it finds new possibilities and new forms.¹²

Having quoted this passage in *Structuralism in Literature*, Robert Scholes remarks: "It is as if, in 1925, Eichenbaum could envision Borges and Barth and a host of contemporary writers."¹³ Indeed Eichenbaum's view of generic development strongly resembles Barth's argument in "The Literature of Exhaustion," in which he suggests that if contemporary writers and critics all feel that the novel has exhausted its possibilities, novelists can profitably turn this feeling itself into fiction: write novels *about* the exhausted possibilities of fiction, and thereby create new possibilities.¹⁴ And Eichenbaum's description of the role played by parody as a device of defamiliarization in literary history as a whole is particularly apt when applied to the novel, Barth's genre. Asked about his parody of the eighteenth-century novel in *The Sot-Weed Factor*, Barth told an interviewer:

I don't believe that /parodying the novelistic genre/ is necessarily a sterile or unproductive thing to do. I don't think that it is a particular sign of decadence, especially in the novel, because (as Leslie Fiedler is fond of saying) the novel has always been dying. It was "dying" from the time it was conceived, and it begins with parody. Not just

¹²Quoted in Scholes, *Structuralism in Literature*, pp. 87-8.

¹³Quoted in Scholes, *Structuralism in Literature*, p. 88.

¹⁴Barth, "The Literature of Exhaustion," pp. 78-9.

with Fielding, whom I was parodying to some extent - I mean Fielding parodying Richardson - but with Cervantes parodying the chivalric romances. The first novels that we have are already parodies of things in the literary tradition; the mode seems congenial to the genre.¹⁵

There is one further aspect of parody to consider before turning our attention to allegory, and that is parody's relation to and reliance upon irony. It is clear that parody and satire alike must contain irony in order to achieve their respective ends: their object is to create a work which is even more ridiculous than the object of their imitation, and which the audience *understands* to be a deliberate exaggeration. Without irony, parody would be taken simply for a creation inferior to the original. Parody, like irony, "postulates a double audience, one of which is 'in the know' and aware of the speaker's intention, whilst the other is naive enough to take the utterance at its face value."¹⁶

And in terms of my schema, this reliance of parody on irony is highly appropriate, for metafiction, the concomitant to parody, leads from a delightful playing with the forms of fiction to an ironic awareness of the intellectual invalidity of that very playing. Hayden White elaborates on the nature of irony in terms that strongly suggest the parodic and ironic-metafictional concerns of Barth's fiction:

Thus Irony tends in the end to turn upon word-play, to become a language about language, so as to dissolve the bewitchment of consciousness caused by language itself. It is suspicious of *all* formulas, and it delights in exposing the paradoxes contained in every attempt to capture experience in language. It tends to dispose the fruits of consciousness in aphorisms, apothegms, gnomic utterances which turn back upon themselves and dissolve their own apparent truth and adequacy. In the end, it conceives the world as trapped within a prison made of language, the world as a "forest of symbols." It sees

¹⁵Joe David Bellamy, "John Barth." In Bellamy (ed.), *The New Fiction: Interviews with Innovative American Writers* (University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1974), p. 7.

¹⁶H.W. Fowler, *A Dictionary of Modern English Verse*. Quoted in Geoffrey Leech, *A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry* (Longman, London, 1969), p. 171.

no way out of this forest, and so contents itself with the explosion of all formulas, all myths, in the interest of pure "contemplation" and resignation to the world of "things as they are."¹⁷

The opposite pole of the metaphorical dialectic on my diagram was designated metaphysics, a branch of philosophy which in literature is traditionally explored through the vehicle of allegory. Much contemporary literature, however, has evidenced a certain embarrassment regarding allegory, seeing it as a rather simple-minded device belonging largely to the past. Northrup Frye explains that "allegory, where literature is illustrating moral or political or religious truths, means that both the writer and his public have to be pretty firmly convinced of the reality and importance of those truths, and modern writers and publics, on the whole, aren't."¹⁸ Because allegory is a highly patterned literary device, however, Barth finds it fascinating, and he obviates the contemporary objection to it much as he obviates Robbe-Grillet's objections against plot, character, and the rest: through parody. If one parodies allegory, the patterns of allegory can be used for fictional pleasure, and at the same time it may be possible to couch in it a measure of tentative truth.

Allegory can be defined simply as metaphor extended into narrative. Metaphor is the discovery of parallels between different levels of being or thought, and allegory is the ordering of those levels into a coherent narrative pattern. C.S. Lewis even goes so far as to claim that "every metaphor is an allegory in little."¹⁹ Allegory traditionally operates on many hierarchical levels simultaneously: the literal, the

¹⁷White, *Metahistory*, p. 283.

¹⁸Northrup Frye, *The Educated Imagination* (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1964), p. 67.

¹⁹C.S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (Oxford University Press, London, 1959), p. 60.

historical or political, the religious or mythological, the philosophical, and so forth. Thus Dante's *Divina Commedia* on one level is a literal tale about a journey through hell, purgatory, and paradise; on another an historical event at Easter in the year 1300 A.D., with topical commentary on contemporary political life; on yet another an adapted set of tales from classical mythology; and on the most important level in terms of Dante's intention, it is a Christian parable of man's path from the carnal, sinful state to divine perfection in heaven. Intertwined into these hierarchical levels are a number of other metaphors; as Gabriel Josipovici explains:

Dante's universe is built on a series of analogies: between the physical and spiritual worlds; between secular and sacred history; between the history of the universe and that of each man; between the natural cycle and the Christian year; between the days of the week and the ages of man. Underpinning all these is the analogy of God and man, man made in God's image and able, through Christ's mediation, to recover that image ...²⁰

Allegory is in many respects well suited to the aesthetic aims of postmodernist fiction. First, allegory allows and demands strict authorial control: each individual detail must be capable of operating on many levels simultaneously, and must be subordinated to a carefully controlled whole. The stricter the author's control over his fiction, the more obvious it is that it *is* fiction and not reality - and this well serves contemporary writers' metafictional concerns. Second, allegory traditionally tends toward unrealistic visions of truth: like Robert Scholes' concept of fabulation, allegory "offers us a world clearly and radically discontinuous from the one we know, yet returns to confront that known world in some cognitive way."²¹ And third, as mentioned above, allegory

²⁰ Josipovici, p. 29n.

²¹ Scholes, *Structural Fabulation*, p. 29.

requires complex narrative patterns and levels of meaning, which appeal to the postmodern temperament. Allegory seeks to imitate God and create a universe - and the very comprehensiveness of such a fictional design makes allegory the perfect vehicle for a metafictional examination of narrative creativity.

As I noted earlier, however, the contemporary writer cannot approach allegory straight-faced. The sanguine metaphorical assumptions basic to allegory are unacceptable to the postmodern novelist, and so he must treat allegory comically, parodically, ironically. "It is only because the universe is itself seen as a book, written by God, that the books of men can imitate it. Once the universe ceases to be seen in this way, then the criteria both for understanding it and for understanding the 'real' meaning of books or pictures seem to disappear."²² The postmodernist writer resolves this dilemma by replacing the metaphysical portrayal of the cosmos, as in traditional allegory, with the ironic metafictional portrayal of a cosmology. By seeking to describe not reality but imaginative arrangements of reality, the postmodern writer stresses the artifice of his vision while still retaining some vestigial and tentative belief in it.

Giles Goat-Boy, Barth's fourth novel, is a masterful performance in which parody and allegory are fused in patterns that are both complex and thematically rich. The novel tells the story of a boy who wants to be a mythic hero: to conquer the dragon that guards the treasure, find atonement with the father, and marry the mother, bringing redemption to his troubled people. George Giles the Ag-Hill Goat-Boy, as his name reads by the end of the tale, lives in a University which, though apparently on some other planet, is a small-scale model of our universe, with the Founder for our God and the Dean o' Flunks for our Satan, Passage for salvation and Failure for damnation. Within that University are many individual colleges,

²²Josipovici, p. 46.

which correspond to our nations: New Tammany College for the United States, Nikolay College for the Soviet Union, and so forth.²³ In order to become a hero, George is required by WESCAC, the ubiquitous computer, to pass certain tests and complete a seven-part Assignment; in the process of completing these requirements, George takes the liberty to teach or "Tutor" the other characters in the story, and out of these activities arise the novel's central philosophical concerns. The tone of the novel is comic, the style extravagant, and throughout Barth has carefully placed reminders of his story's artifice. The plot ranges from George's late childhood to his thirty-fourth year, when, old and misunderstood, he predicts his death on a tree at the top of a hill.

The best study of the novel's allegorical structure is that of Robert Scholes in *The Fabulators*; and his insightful reading will serve as our point of departure.

Scholes suggests that the allegory might best be approached not in the traditional terms of hierarchical levels, but rather as a complex web of "facets" or dimensions, each of which is more or less equal in its structural significance, depending on the angle of one's approach. Scholes notes three such dimensions: the first is what he labels the *historical* dimension, referring to the allegorical reproduction in the novel of modern American social and psychological reality. The second is the *philosophical* dimension, including the central metaphysical concerns of the story and constituting its "moral." And the third is the dimension of *fiction and myth*, the aesthetic joy in pure story and imagination that corresponds to the "delight-in-design" half of Scholes' definition of fabulation.²⁴

There are certain problems here. Despite Scholes' explicit

²³For a detailed presentation of the novel's allegorical correspondences on the historical level, see the Glossary in Appendix 6.

²⁴Scholes, *The Fabulators*, pp. 150-73. Scholes reproduced this chapter in *Fabulation and Metafiction*, pp. 75-102.

rejection of hierarchical structure, for example, he has clearly ordered his dimensions hierarchically. The historical dimension, in his reading, is the most superficial and least important in the novel; philosophy is deeper in import but not yet wholly serious ("the moral," Scholes says, "evaporates in our hands"²⁵); while the book's fictional dimension is its deepest and most significant element. But in fact there is much to be said for a hierarchical reading of the novel's allegory. Allegories are traditionally read in terms of levels, and whether or not this approach is justifiable as a "realistic" description of those allegories is irrelevant to Barth's purpose: his idea is not to create a better or more complex allegory, but to parody traditional allegories, and thus it is appropriate that he adopt a traditional approach to allegorizing. Furthermore, one of the central ordering themes of the novel is the analogy between macrostructure and microstructure - "ontogeny repeats cosmogeny" - and so thematically, too, a hierarchically layered allegory is best suited to Barth's fictive aims.

A second problem in Scholes' analysis lies in the terms of his hierarchy. The historical dimension, for example, contains two elements, social and psychological mimesis: Barth's imitation of modern American sociopolitical life and his highly convincing creation of character. Consequently, Scholes finds himself analyzing the superficial and parodic links between Lucius Rexford and John F. Kennedy side by side with what he describes as the profoundly serious characterization of Anastasia Stoker. In classifying these two widely different aspects of the novel under one heading, Scholes has apparently been guided by the traditional focus of realistic fiction, for, as he says, "I mean the term 'history' in this sense to include every aspect of *Giles Goat-Boy* which points directly to the visible world as we know it."²⁶ But while the novel's

²⁵Scholes, *The Fabulators*, p. 167.

²⁶Scholes, *The Fabulators*, p. 152.

social mimesis clearly constitutes a kind of parody of realism, its serious characterization just as clearly belongs in another category.

Scholes' linking of fiction and myth in the third dimension is also unsatisfactory. The term "fiction" is misleading; by it Scholes apparently means the sublimative and unrealistic aspect of the story, but fiction in its general sense means simply prose narrative, and Scholes does not define it otherwise. Similarly, "mythology" and "myth" are used somewhat confusingly as synonyms, which tends to blur the important distinction between a body of traditional narratives used consciously and self-consciously as raw material (mythology) and something which is actually believed (myth).²⁷ The link between fiction and myth is never made quite clear: is it, for example, that Barth has selected the hero myth as his vehicle for proclaiming the artifice of the story? If this is the case, the same would apply to the historical and philosophical dimensions as well - indeed, to the entire novel. Like the Kennedy period and the dualisms gleaned from philosophy, the hero myth serves as allegorical raw material; and this, it seems to me, is a different matter altogether from the fictional, unrealistic *nature* of the novel as a whole.

Finally, I would disagree with Scholes' ordering of his hierarchy, with his analysis of philosophy as "evaporating in our hands" and fiction and myth remaining as the only meaning of the novel. If Scholes' description of fabulation does in fact apply to Barth's novel, there must be a cognitive element in it somewhere; simple sublimation is not fabulation at all but naive romance, pretty design without intellectual substance. To a certain extent, Barth's metafictional concerns carry cognitive import (though this is not made clear in Scholes' discussion of fiction and myth); but in Scholes' sense of leading away from fantasy to a vision of human life, cognition

²⁷I draw the distinction from John White's definitive study, *Mythology in the Modern Novel* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1971), pp. 7-11.

appears most obviously in the philosophical dimension. In fact, if we gauge the extent to which philosophy and mythology are parodically undermined in the novel, it becomes clear that philosophy is treated with greater seriousness than is mythology. The parodic alterations in the hero myth are considerable: apotheosis and societal redemption, the two primary tasks of the hero, are not achieved by George. Mythologically, he is a failure. But his very failure has serious philosophical ramifications: in a universe with no God controlling and lending meaning to life, there can be no apotheosis or redemption. Furthermore, Barth adapts the hero-path from a simple story of adventure into an ontogenic process that parallels the serious philosophical concerns of all his fiction: George's path to herodom becomes a path to maturity and self-discovery, and from there to death. The comic mythological universal round becomes in Barth's metaphysics a tragic cycle of growth and meaningless death. Thus it is the mythology, not the philosophy, which "evaporates in our hands."

I suggest, then, that the novel's allegorical structure moves hierarchically from history, involving the parody of the *roman à clef*, through mythology, containing George's failed heroic quest, to philosophy, where through George's path to self-discovery, and through allegorical ideas and characters, Barth evokes his tragic metaphysical vision.

It will be noted that this hierarchy also suggests a movement from parody to allegory and from metafiction to metaphysics. But history is not the most parodic or metafictional element in the novel; and to complete the hierarchy we must add *language*, Barth's fun with the linguistic medium through George's narrative point of view and multiple frame-tales. What we have, then, is a more specific cline of the metaphorical dialectic as it is manifested in *Giles Goat-Boy*.

In addition to structural levels in the novel, the various levels on the cline also correspond to the conventional components of narrative as organized in the book. In the *Poetics*, Aristotle isolated six narrative elements of Greek tragedy:

lexis, *melos*, *opsis*, *mythos*, *ethos*, and *dianoia*.²⁸ These Northrup Frye translates in *Anatomy of Criticism* as they apply to narrative prose: *lexis* is both diction, or the narrative sequence of words, and imagery, which forms a simultaneous pattern of meaning. *Melos* in prose is the musical aspect (cf. melody), not in the sense of fluid and euphonic but as complex, driving rhythm. *Opsis* is spectacle, the visual or pictorial aspects of narrative art. These three elements in English criticism are generally categorized together as style or rhetoric, and Frye accordingly deals with them together in his Fourth Essay on "Rhetorical Criticism."²⁹ I shall refer to all three as "style."

Mythos is simply the story or plot, which Aristotle calls the soul of narrative, and which for Frye involves conflict and recognition.³⁰ *Ethos* is normally translated as character, but Frye notes that a better translation would include setting, for *ethos* is the representative image of the world, both individual (psychological) and environmental (social and naturalistic).³¹ Finally, *dianoia* is the "thought," the controlling thematic structure or vision of the narrative.

Lexis, *melos*, and *opsis* I grouped together as style. Within *mythos*, it will be useful to make a distinction drawn by the Russian formalists, between story and plot: "Plot is distinct from story. Both include the same events, but in the plot the events *are arranged* and connected according to the orderly sequence in which they were presented in the work."³² The story, or "fable," is the simple chronological

²⁸ Aristotle, *The Poetics*. In James Harry Smith and Edd Winfield Parks (eds.), *The Great Critics: An Anthology of Literary Criticism* (Norton, New York, 1967), p. 35.

²⁹ Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, pp. 243ff.

³⁰ Aristotle, p. 35; Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 286.

³¹ Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 286.

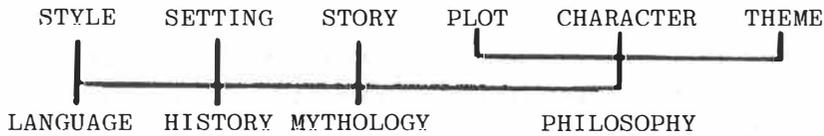
³² Tomashevsky, p. 67; see also Scholes, *Structuralism in Literature*, p. 78.

sequence of events which forms the bare outline of the plot; the plot, or *sujet*, is the *thematic* reconstruction of that sequence in more meaningful order in terms of the narrative as a whole. Thus *mythos* may be divided into two parts: story and plot, with the latter standing one step closer to *dianoia*.

Under the category of *ethos*, Barth has rearranged the elements of character and setting in a way suggested above in my discussion of Scholes' concept of the novel's historical dimension. While *ethos* in its most superficial and conventional form is parodied entire in the metaphor of the University-as-universe, the novel's serious characterization is controlled not so much by parody as by theme. Thus I suggest the separation of setting (including those superficial characters who serve primarily as background) and character, with the latter moving to *dianoia*.

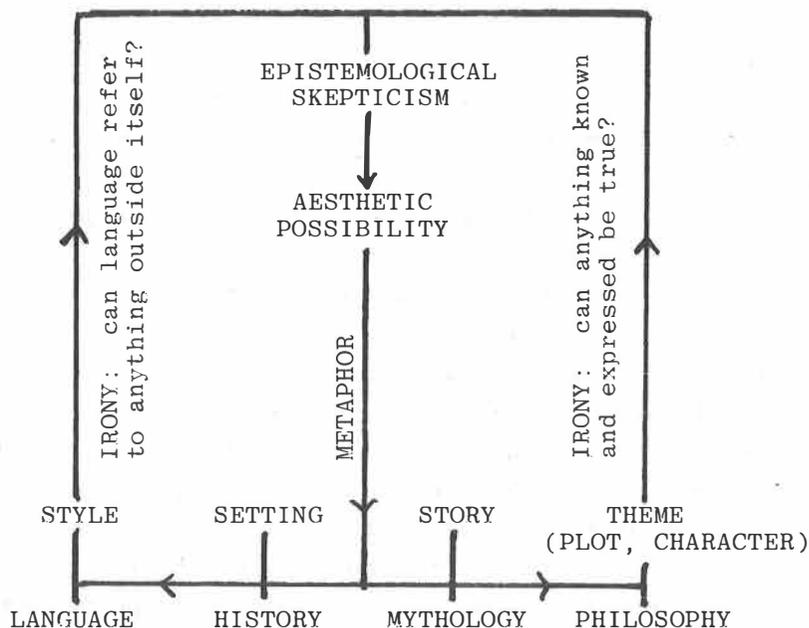
Finally, under *dianoia* I would like to make a distinction between individual themes appearing in the narrative, and the overall vision or "meaning" that does not appear there but must be apprehended from a hypothetical point outside the narrative. This permits vision to be used to mean not a straight-forward didactic message which the writer has embedded in his work, but the narrative in its entirety, holistically perceived by the imagination. Thus defined, vision would apply not only to overtly didactic narratives but to all writing, even to such genres as popular romance commonly thought to lack vision. In addition, this distinction provides a lever on the extreme complexity of a work like *Giles Goat-Boy*, and lets us ask, "What does the novel mean?" without needing to fall back on a trite notion of "message."

The components of narrative as organized in Barth's novel, then, consist of style, setting, story, plot, character, theme, and vision, with vision containing all that goes before. These can be arranged, with the exception of vision, along the metaphorical dialectic on my diagram, with their counterparts in the novel's structure:

Figure 3: *The metaphorical dialectic in Giles Goat-Boy*

This dialectic must then engage in another dialectic on the vertical axis with irony; and in *Giles Goat-Boy* each element operates individually and collectively on the irony-metaphor dialectic. Style operates on this dialectic through the superimposition of opposing layers of viewpoint: George-as-actor, George-as-narrator, and the author. This involves the rhetorical figure called irony, which I have been using to cover a broader range of phenomena than the purely rhetorical. Setting operates on the dialectic through a distortion of metaphor: through an anti-realistic destruction of the link between the book and the world, emerging both self-consciously, in the Publisher's Disclaimer at the beginning of the book, and internally, in the exaggerated artifice of the University metaphor. Story enters the dialectic with irony in the process of becoming plot, specifically through the disappointment of the reader's expectations as to the final outcome of the tale: Barth leads his reader to expect the happy ending of romance, but through the structural device called *peripeteia* disappoints that expectation and substitutes a tragic ending instead. Finally, theme operates in the dialectic through paradox: through George's ultimate acceptance of the paradoxical nature of human beings and cosmic abstractions, but also, on a higher level, through the novel's paradoxical juxtaposition of serious metaphysical concerns with metafictional parody.

The completed diagram for the unifying vision of *Giles Goat-Boy*, then, would look like this:

Figure 4: *The vision of Giles Goat-Boy*

The arrow moving downwards from epistemological skepticism to aesthetic possibility represents the postmodernist answer to the epistemological dilemma of twentieth-century literature. Through a process of metaphorization, the writer creates setting or time and place - the conventional metaphorical link between the fictional and the real worlds - and narrative sequence, the conventional narrative patterns of the human imagination. These are converted in *Giles Goat-Boy* into the parodic University-universe metaphor and the hero myth, which would appear to be the base pattern for all human narrative. Significantly, Barth's original inspiration for the novel involved precisely these two elements, the University and the hero myth. Story is rearranged into plot and fleshed out with characters and cognitive considerations; and the replacement of reality with an imaginative re-creation of reality in setting is given verbal form in style. Style and theme in turn provoke the ironic questions that lead us back up to epistemological skepticism, at which point the process of metaphorization

begins again.

It is, of course, only for the sake of illustrative convenience that this process may be described in linear terms; in fact the metaphorical dialectic is a highly complex web of forces and counterforces, pulls and counterpulls largely inexpressible except by means of oversimplified schemata. If one bears in mind that the diagram, to use Scholes and Kellogg's terms, is "illustrative" rather than "representative,"³³ it may be considered accurate.

Parody and allegory, metafiction and metaphysics operate along the same metaphorical dialectic. The style of the novel is primarily parodic and devoted to metafictional concerns, but it also contains, syntactically and semantically, echoes of metaphysical content. The setting constitutes an historical allegory much like Spenser's allegorical link between the Land of Faerie and England, but it is almost entirely parodic. The hero myth is treated parodically for metaphysical reasons: the novel rejects the transcendent supernatural vision of mythology. In parodying the story, also, the novel develops a metaphysical vision of ontogeny, in which George moves from innocent childhood, through mature understanding, to death. And while the metaphysical allegory is given largely serious treatment, it too contains elements of parody, both for the sake of humor and delight in design, and for the sake of an ironic reservation regarding the possible truth of any fictional world view.

In dealing with the novel in this study, I shall proceed across the metaphorical dialectic from left to right, considering individually style, the historical metaphor, the hero myth, and the novel's philosophical concerns. In addition, in each section I shall attempt to show how the structural level under consideration is ironically undermined, in the vertical dialectic on my schema. In the concluding section of

³³ I.e., superficially unlike the object described but symbolically expressive of its inner nature. Scholes and Kellogg, pp. 84-9.

the study, I shall briefly summarize the overall unifying vision of the novel, showing how the conflicting and contradictory strands of the story come together to form a coherent whole.

PART II "SPLENDROUSLY MUSICKED OUT":
THE JOY OF LANGUAGE AS STYLE

"As for *style*, it is everywhere agreed that the best language is that which disappears in the telling, so that nothing stands between the reader and the matter of the book. But this author has maintained ... that language *is* the matter of his books, as much as anything else, and for that reason ought to be 'splendrously musicked out.'"

Editor B, Publisher's Disclaimer

PART II "SPLENDROUSLY MUSICKED OUT": THE JOY OF LANGUAGE
AS STYLE

Prolegomenon

All fiction is dependent on the linguistic medium, on words. Through words the writer of fiction must convey ideas and perceptions which, in their original state in the chaos of the unconscious, defy verbal expression. Due to its nature, language must inevitably do violence to that which the writer would express; yet language is fiction's only tool for dealing with the world. The simultaneous falsity and indispensability of language in fiction occasions an exclamation by Jake Horner, the narrator of *The End of the Road*:

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 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 (EOR, 119).

In *The End of the Road*, a relatively realistic novel, Jake must feel slightly uncomfortable with his linguistic betrayal of experience, and thus mentions it almost apologetically.

By the time Barth came to write *Giles Goat-Boy*, Jake's appraisal of his linguistic ordering of the world was a given. It is essential to deal with the world, fashion a metaphysics, for example, in order to feel "alive and kicking;" but because linguistic arrangements of the world are always a betrayal, one must be careful not to take a metaphysics for reality. In the tropic terms outlined above, one must deal with the world metaphorically to live, but maintain an ironic perspective on metaphor in order to see and think clearly. Confronted with this situation, the writer of fiction has two alternatives. Either he may attempt to minimize the betrayal by paring off the imaginative constructs that lie between himself and reality, as writers like Beckett and Robbe-Grillet do; or he may accept the betrayal as one of the rules of the game, as an inevitability that can itself become the subject of fiction. Once the writer sees himself as trapped inside a prison of language, he must choose between escaping it through a desperate means like silence, and accepting, even affirming one's imprisonment, and finding true joy in describing it.

The latter is the course chosen by Barth and many of his contemporaries: their fiction is "splendrously musicked out" because "Language *is* the matter of /their/ books, as much as anything else." Relieved of the burden of writing realistic prose, these writers are freed to fill their styles with ornamental flourishes that have been gradually weeded out of the novel since the time of Rabelais or Fielding. They are freed to play with the conventions of language through multiple punning, elaborate metaphors, experimentation with rhythm and stress, and the like. An important model for writers of this bent has been the later work of James Joyce, whose comic linguistic creativity also served the dual purpose of providing delightful entertainment and drawing attention to the nature and the patterns of language.

This kind of style has been called baroque: it is, as Robert Martin Adams has described it, "complexly allusive,

radically metaphorical, and highly elaborate syntactically."¹ Adams' descriptions apply particularly well to Barth's language - his many styles. The complex web of allusions traditionally preferred by baroque style suits Barth's love of erudition, and allows him to operate on many fictional levels simultaneously. The metaphorical quality of this kind of writing fits in well with the postmodern attempt to achieve a return to delightful metaphor, and metaphor seems to be a figure to which Barth takes naturally. Both his works and his interviews are filled with extended metaphors, and in a number of places he has described his difficulties in settling upon an appropriate metaphor for his activity as an artist: a laughing Cassandra, the Florentine assassins in the *Inferno*, Echo, and Scheherezade.² And elaborate syntax is, first of all, rigorously unrealistic - the well-constructed or periodic sentence is the opposite pole in writing to stream of consciousness, on the one hand, or semi-articulate Hemingwayesque on the other. Second, complex syntax provides both the writer and the willing reader great pleasure in the patterns of language itself.

Another term that might be used to describe Barth's style is "macaronic." Rosalie Colie describes macaronic as the mode of all paradoxical wit:

Macaronic involves the kind of wit demonstrated in puns, calumbours, conundrums, clerihevs, and even limericks: its violation of linguistic convention and expectation depends upon profound control of just that convention. Macaronic is only occasionally *serio ludere*, but its play derives from a great deal of serious application in the past.³

Professor Colie goes on to point out that Rabelais's great

¹Adams, p. 180.

²See John Barth, "Muse, Spare Me." *Book Week*, September 26, 1965, pp. 28-9.

³Colie, p. 44.

Gargantua et Pantagruel is macaronic not only in this sense, due to its juxtapositions of language, but also as a "ludic combination of different styles, episodes, tones, and genres in addition."⁴ The same clearly applies to *Giles Goat-Boy*: witness the combination of styles and tones in the opinions of the Editors, in J.B.'s mock-literary pomp, in the slangy doggerel of *Taliped Decanus*, in the snake-oil chicanery of Bray's lecture, in the wide variety of speech styles created in the dialogue, and so forth. Where the realistic and much of the modernist novel held up an ideal of stylistic unity - one need only think of the styles of Henry James, Hemingway, or much of Faulkner - Barth's fiction deliberately develops as many extravagant styles as possible, throwing all in the same pot to make, as it were, a macaronic stew.

Much of the stew, of course, is parody of other stews: *Taliped* is the most obvious example, but the novel is filled with multiple stylistic parodies of various sorts. There is, for instance, what Gilbert Highet calls "material parody," in which the original content is maintained but is couched in a style too light-weight to support it, most clearly in *Taliped Decanus*. The other extreme, or "formal parody," involves the retention of the original style and the reduction of content to an absurdity: thus the content of the Glosses on Harold Bray's lecture is too insignificant to justify the serious, self-important style. George's narrative voice parodies the lofty style of heroic romance by juxtaposing, in Cervantean fashion, the hero's romantic posturing and self-glorifying against a strong low mimetic element, i.e., George's comic goatish outlook on life and a hint of modern American slang.

Barth's language is distinctively directed at the ear. He tends to ignore verbal description of settings and characters, and his prose - "that unmodern, euphuistic, half-metrical bombast" (xvii), as he has his Editor C describe it - sounds best when read aloud. The result is, again, rigorously unreal-

⁴Colie, p. 44.

istic. The modern reader has certain expectations of visual verisimilitude, a certain desire to feel as if he were "there," and Barth disappoints this desire. Where the reader of a realistic novel is given a powerful spatial and textural sense of his imagined surroundings, Barth largely deprives these senses and immerses the reader in a verbal environment, an almost surreal world of words. This is one reason why many readers feel trapped in Barth's fiction: Bernard Bergonzi, for example, calls it "aesthetic totalitarianism," and likens *Giles Goat-Boy* to a concentration camp.⁵ There is, however, nothing particularly revolutionary about Barth's approach in this respect. It might even be argued that the verbal medium is better suited to creating verbal than visual effects, and while some writers have sought to stretch the force of language to imitate painting,⁶ many of the most memorable effects in literature, from Homer to Joyce, have been nonvisually verbal. This is a case where the realistic tradition has so prejudiced our reactions that Barth can be "radical" by simply returning to the roots (*radici*) of narrative prose.

At the same time, it is important to note that Barth does operate parodically with other senses than the auidial, such as the olfactory (George, who is part goat, is particularly sensitive to odors), and most especially the visual sense. All of the characters in *Giles Goat-Boy* are given a single visual description, usually an outlandish one; significantly, however, one visual description is not enough to provide the reader with a complete visual sense. In the realistic novel, the writer must constantly remind the reader of a character's appearance: just as when a gong is struck only once the effect quickly dies away, so also a visual description is quickly forgotten by the reader, and to create a realistic visual

⁵Bernard Bergonzi, *The Situation of the Novel* (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1972), p. 112.

⁶See Jean H. Hagstrum, *The Sister Arts: The Tradition of Literary Pictorialism and English Poetry from Dryden to Gray* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1958).

sense one must keep the gong ringing. Thus by giving us only one brief visual description of his characters, Barth plays with, parodies the novelistic tradition. The result is that one frequently forms an image of a character on the basis of his or her voice, and then is startled on a second or third reading to find that when first introduced the character was described entirely differently. My own image of Maurice Stoker, for instance, as tall, dashing, and handsome - a Burt Lancaster figure - was dashed when I discovered on my second reading that he was short, stout but not fat, and ruddy-cheeked: like a stocky banker or baker. Similarly, I had pictured George as slight, whereas he is tall and sturdily built; Lady Creamhair as rather pretty, while she is a typical old-maid librarian with carefully coiffured hair and cat-eye glasses; Greene as of insignificant stature and rather childish in appearance, while in fact he is strikingly tall, with orange hair, a grey woolen suit and a racoon hat, a boyish forty-year-old - a red-headed Li'l Abner.

The same is true of the novel's visual surroundings: each new scene is granted a two-line visual description, and then promptly ignored. Yet it is interesting to note that these visual descriptions are extremely vivid, brightly colored and full of spectacle, resembling nothing so much as a Hollywood extravaganza; and it may serve to illustrate one of Barth's parodic concerns in the novel to imagine what Hollywood would do with the novel.

The opening scene would be the pastoral green of the goat-barns, with forest surrounding the pasture and a few ramshackle buildings at the center. From there we would move to George's Gorge:

I guessed we had gone a dozen kilometers, no more, by late afternoon, when abruptly we came upon a gorge or strait defile between two mountains. "The backdoor to West Campus," Max described it; a river debouched from the canyon's throat into a valley west of us, where I saw a considerable lake. We tarried some while on the cliff-edge to watch the play of late light on the rocks, the more impressive as the sun descended quite into the chasm's mouth (151).

Reaching the river, they are confronted with more spectacle: the rushing river, Anastasia on the opposite bank with her shift hoisted above her waist, and eight yellow-robed Orientals carrying a ninth across on a platform. From the Gorge we proceed to the Powerhouse, where George experiences the colorful turbulence of the Furnace Room and the Living Room; from there to Great Mall:

Certainly I was not prepared for the spectacle before and beneath us. Sparkling in the purple dusk, it stretched out endlessly, endlessly. Avenues, towers, monuments; corridors of glass and steel; lakes and parks and marble colonnades; bridges and smokestacks, blinkers and beacons! (266)

Here George attends a Greek tragedy in an open-air theater, at the end of which Harold Bray swoons in, apparently on wires. Consider what Hollywood could do with the Trial-by-Turnstile, Rexford's speech, the awesome Clockworks, Main Detention, the two lynchings, the rout of Bray at the Shaft - the list goes on and on. It would appear as if Barth had fashioned his visual descriptions in a direct parody of Hollywood spectacle, for excepting the lengthy dialogue, there is not a scene in the novel which would not lend itself to treatment like that of *The Ten Commandments*, for example. Once again, this overt parody of cinematic *opsis* contributes to the irrealistic nature of the novel.

The novel's visual setting lends itself to another interesting consideration. Having decided to replace our universe with a fictional University, Barth had to make certain decisions as to the linguistic features of that University. Should the denizens of the University speak English, for example, or should Giles Stoker imply to J.B. that his copy of the *Revised New Syllabus* is an English translation? Further, in providing University terminology for the ideas and objects in our world, where does one draw the line between complete fidelity to reality and complete linguistic fantasy. With little effort, Barth could have gone *Finnegans Wake* one better by creating

an entirely unique language for New Tammany College. Instead, he created a *sense* of irrealism by changing a few key terms, but avoided the opacity of Joyce's book by retaining for the remainder of the book a reasonably understandable English diction. Thus we have campus riots, deans, and alma-matriots for world wars, kings, and patriots, but a word like "inn" remains inn, rather than becoming cafeteria, for example. Here again, Barth rebels along traditional lines, in his own phrase:⁷ ultimately, his language in *Giles Goat-Boy* is less reminiscent of Joyce than it is of the radical creativity of Rabelais.

⁷Barth, "The Literature of Exhaustion," p. 71.

Chapter 1 Narrative Frames and Framed Narratives

One of the most striking features of *Giles Goat-Boy* is its tendency to indulge in lengthy parodic passages of only tenuous importance to the main narrative: *Taliped Decanus* takes up forty pages of small print, and while the story of Oedipus is of central importance to the novel's thematic structure, Sophocles' play is familiar enough to all readers that there was no pressing thematic need to rewrite the entire play. The apparent gratuitousness of such passages has provoked a good deal of critical irritation, which Barth himself anticipated in the Publisher's Disclaimer, where the ostensibly sympathetic Editor B writes: "The fact is, I happen to agree - I think we all do - that *Giles Goat-Boy* is tough sledding in places, artistically uneven, and offensive ... to certain literary and moral conventions" (xv).

The difficulty we tend to have with this sort of writing is that we are conditioned by the realistic tradition to believe that every element of a fiction should pull on the same oar - that the entire fiction should contribute to a single purpose. But Barth is working in a different mode altogether. Rejecting modern fictional strictures, he has turned to cultivate an earlier story-telling tradition, in which frame-tales, and particularly parodic frame-tales, were enjoyable for their own sake. One cannot, for example, read Rabelais with modern prejudices against gratuitous story-telling. Rabelais loves nothing more than digression for digression's sake, and most of his digressions are parodic: the language of Sorbonne theologians, indigent students, monks, and so forth are parodied with complete stylistic abandon. The picaresque narrative structure of Rabelais or Cervantes lends itself to this sort of writing, and it is significant to note that *Giles Goat-Boy* bears a certain resemblance to the picaresque novel. The loose, episodic nature of Barth's narrative allows him, like Rabelais and Cervantes, to indulge his love of parodic frame-tales freely.

In addition to the framed narratives within the novel, Barth has wrapped the novel itself in two parodic frames: the Publishers, who begin the book with a Disclaimer and end it with an editorial footnote, and J.B., a comic persona of Barth, who introduces the novel as a found manuscript and comments on the novel in a Postscript. These contribute little to the framed novel within, but serve an almost purely metafictional, parodic function: the Publisher's Disclaimer parodies (and anticipates) critical opinions on Barth's work as well as pokes fun at book publishers themselves, and J.B.'s Cover-Letter parodies the device of the author's preface.

One of the most important functions of the Publisher's Disclaimer is ironic-metafictional: it is extremely plausible, in fact one of the most plausible and realistic-seeming parts of the book, and yet it is exaggerated enough to point up the artifice contained both in itself and in the book for which it is providing so convincing an introduction. The Disclaimer begins:

The reader must begin this book with an act of faith and end it with an act of charity. We ask him to believe in the sincerity and authenticity of this preface, affirming in return his prerogative to be skeptical of all that follows it (xi).

But of course, this request in turn implies an extension of that prerogative to include the preface: like a magician who uses one illusion to make his audience disbelieve in another, then withdraws the first and reveals empty space, Barth has in two short sentences destroyed the illusion of reality and established the artifice of everything that lies between the book's two covers. The Editor-in-Chief and at least one of his editors share with the unsuspecting reader a basic realistic prejudice: we unthinkingly expect fiction to create an illusion of reality, and unthinkingly stigmatize a book which "fails" to do so. And so Barth parodies that prejudice: Editor A, a conservative moralist who comes close to anticipating Bernard Bergonzi's reaction to the novel, exclaims, "The characters, especially the hero, are unrealistic. There

never was a Goat-boy! There never will be!" (xiii). The Editor's sentiments are in fact too close to our own prejudices for us to perceive the irony at once: they are based on the assumption that there are two kinds of fiction, that which creates a likeness of reality and that which, through inferior writing, fails to do so. In a slightly more extreme form, this attitude becomes low comedy: the bishop who said of *Gulliver's Travels*, "I personally believe this book to be a pack of lies,"¹ for instance, or Northrup Frye's example of people who send checks to radio stations for the relief of suffering soap-opera heroines.²

The Publisher's Disclaimer, along with the Cover-Letter and the two closing frames at the end of the novel, contribute to the ironic undermining of the realistic illusion in yet another respect: the uncertain authorship of the book and its many stages of editorship. The Publishers claim J.B. wrote it; J.B. claims that Giles Stoker or Stoker Giles, son of the master, wrote it; and Giles Stoker claims that WESCAC the automatic computer wrote it, but WESCAC also denies authorship (xi). The Editors go on to state that

In the absence of any response from the author, whom we repeatedly invited to discuss the matter with us, we have exercised as discreetly as possible our contractual prerogative to alter or delete certain passages clearly libellous, obscene, discrepant, or false. Except for these few passages (almost all brief and of no great importance) the text is reproduced as it was submitted to us (xx).

J.B., in turn, informs us that parts of his book *The Seeker* were mixed in with the *R.N.S.* by a careless janitor, and says that he has made "only certain emendations and rearrangements which the Author's imperfect mastery of our idiom and his avowed respect for my artistic judgment encouraged me to make"

¹Quoted in G.W. Turner, *Stylistics* (Pelican, Harmondsworth, 1975), p. 208.

²Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 76.

(xxxvi). Giles Stoker says that the text is based on tapes read into WESAC by George Giles himself, and WESAC then was programmed to "assemble, collage, and edit this material, interpolate all verifiable data from other sources such as the memoirs then in hand, recompose the whole into a coherent narrative from the Grand Tutor's point of view, and 'read it out' in an elegant form on its automatic printers!" (xxxii). Following this, Giles Stoker "proofread the text that WESAC read out and corrected the mistaken passages" (xxx). What, then, is the truth? What is the definitive text? Barth's point is clear: our notions of reality come to us at many removes, and to believe that we *know* what happened yesterday, not to mention in the historical past, is hopelessly naive.³

Stylistically, the Publisher's Disclaimer is for the most part standard discursive prose, with a touch of colloquialism due to the small and familiar audience. Editor A is conservative, and his prose style is somewhat more formal and pompous than that of the others; Editor B is an up-and-coming young man with an eye to advancement, and he is both calculatingly enthusiastic and subtly cynical; Editor C is a fairly sensible and realistic businessman who thinks more of salability than literary greatness; and Editor D, who may be a parody of Leslie Fiedler, is both acute and despairing in his criticism. Editor D is in fact the only exception to the general description of the Disclaimer as discursive prose: like Fiedler, Editor D makes criticism as creative linguistically as post-

³A number of critics have made this point. See for example Morrell, pp. 65-6n, and James L. McDonald, "Barth's Syllabus: The Frame of *Giles Goat-Boy*," *Critique* 13, no. 3 (1972), pp. 5-10. The novel closes on a similar note, as J.B. "proves" the spuriousness of George's Posttape by pointing out the difference in type, and the Editor, in a final Chinese box that seems to swallow all that went before, points out that the typescript of J.B.'s Postscript is different from that of his Cover-Letter. The reader's immediate response is to see the whole as a self-cancelling hoax; but in fact it only serves to remind us that the "truth" of every linguistic statement is suspect.

modern fiction, and despite his despair he perceives the nature of that fiction better than any of the others:

And yet I say that the guller is gulled, hoist is the enginer: the joke's on the joker, that's the joker's joke. Better victimized by Knowledge than succored by Ignorance; to be Wisdom's prey is to be its ward. Deceived, we see our self-deception; suffering the lie, we come to truth, and in the knowledge of our failure hope to Pass (xix).

Evidence that Barth's parody hit its mark is a statement by Anne Freedgood, Barth's editor at Doubleday, who writes:

We taped a reading Barth gave of the introduction to *Giles*, the part where he pretends that various editors have looked at the book and are making their criticisms of it. And we ran that tape to a group of salesmen. The passages are full of trade jokes and no one around here could write a book report for three weeks without identifying himself with one of Barth's invented editors.⁴

The novel's next prefatory entry, the "Cover-Letter to the Editors and Publisher," is written by one J.B., who bears a striking resemblance to Barth himself. In it J.B. explains that the novel he is sending is not the one he has promised, and is not in fact a novel at all, but a sacred text recounting the life of George Giles, Grand Tutor. He tells of a visitor named Giles Stoker, son of George Giles, who arrived in his office during a lengthy period of writer's block, and presented him with the manuscript entitled *The Revised New Syllabus*. Barth read the Cover-Letter to the faculty of the English Department at Penn State about a year before the novel's publication, and explained that he had himself been beset by the writer's block mentioned in the letter until he hit upon the idea of using the hero myth as a basis for a novel; and "looking back on that dark interval a few hundred pages later, it occurred to me that fictional use might be made of it in several ways at once."⁵ David Morrell paraphrases:

⁴Quoted in Morrell, p. 170n.

⁵Morrell, p. 66n.

The university of *Giles Goat-Boy* is, after all, unlike any in our experience, and a false preface, involving an imaginary Author who disavows ownership of the story, might serve he thought to mediate between Giles's campus and the reader's, between himself and his first-person narrator. Furthermore, it would give him a chance to work with what he called "a quaint sub-genre of literature - the Author's Preface, bonafide or fictitious - and a couple of novelistic standbys, such as the cliché that inspiration is a love-affair with the Muse, and the Authorial pretense that his manuscript is a factual chronicle inadvertently happened upon - not a very bad metaphor for the truth, in *Giles's* case."⁶

This idea is essentially a variation of the same theme developed in the Publisher's Disclaimer: drawing an artificial distinction between a "true" preface and a "fictitious" text in order to point up the artifice of both. The advantage of the Cover-Letter over the Disclaimer is that J.B. is a fictional caricature of Barth himself, giving it an additional level of irony. Self-reference, or the creation of a persona of oneself, has long been a favorite device of artists of a certain temperament. Painters destroy the illusion of reality in their works by inserting into a painting a shadow or mirror-reflection of the artist at his easel; filmmakers such as Hitchcock and Fellini are well-known for appearing momentarily in their own films, as Francis Ford Coppola does in *Apocalypse Now*. In literature, the list is long: Rabelais appears in his books anagrammatized as Alcofribas Nasier; Erasmus of Rotterdam puts himself into his "Praise of Folly;" John Donne and William Shakespeare repeatedly make puns on their own names in their poetry; Joyce created a caricature of himself in Chapter 7 of *Finnegans Wake*, as Shem; Nabokov and Borges both appear in their own works, as does Kurt Vonnegut in *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *Breakfast of Champions*. The device is, and has always been, a way of reminding the reader of a fiction or the viewer of a painting or film that what he is reading or seeing is not reality but art. By drawing attention to himself,

⁶Morrell, p. 66n.

the artist destroys the illusion of reality and metafictionally emphasizes the artifice of his own creation.

Importantly, however, J.B. is also *not* Barth, but a comic distortion of him. Close as some of the descriptions come to Barth's biography, not all of them fit, and one should not make the mistake of taking J.B. for Barth's mouthpiece. Most importantly, of course, Barth never became a professor of Gilesianism, as J.B. does. The reason this is an important point to stress is that at the end of the book, J.B. contests the authenticity of George's Posttape on the grounds that its gloomy tone belies the romantic ending expected by the reader; and at least one critic has taken this to be Barth's own comment.⁷ J.B.'s comic misinterpretation of the novel serves as another ironic comment on the patterns of narrative in general and this narrative in particular, and strengthens both the force and the complexity of the peripeteic shift in the Posttape.

Another factor distinguishing Barth from his comic persona is style. J.B.'s prose style is markedly different from that to be found in Barth's interviews and essays. Where Barth's discursive style is characterized by a knack for charging complex syntactical structures and esoteric diction with a contagious buoyancy, J.B.'s style reveals a cautious, perhaps weary, perhaps small-minded pedant who lacks the confidence and the wit to make wild and woolly claims. Reading the Cover-Letter, one is reminded almost of Melville's lawyer-narrator in "Bartleby the Scrivener":

I think no one may accuse me of hauteur or superciliousness. In truth I reproach myself for being if anything over-timid, acquiescing too easily, suffering presumption to the point of unmanliness, and provoking contempt in my eagerness not to displease (xxv).

Here are none of the startlingly fresh juxtapositions and the

⁷Olderman, p. 72.

alliterative rhythms typical of Barth's discursive style. Nowhere does the tone rise above the mundane; it is characterized by an almost stubborn refusal to "turn a phrase," to give the reader a stylistic surprise. This is the style of a small mind - a mind perfectly suited, in fact, to a naively wholehearted conversion to Gilesianism.

Within these two outermost frames lies the novel entitled *The Revised New Syllabus of George Giles, Our Grand Tutor*, a lengthy tale which itself contains numerous framed narratives. Each of the characters George meets tells him the story of his or her life, in much the same way as Don Quixote and Sancho Panza listen to the life-stories of all they meet on their travels. Of these multiple framed narratives, I shall here be concerned only with those in which Barth was primarily interested in writing a parodic tale-within-a-tale and only secondarily in tying it to the themes of the novel. These are *The Tragedy of Taliped Decanus* and Harold Bray's lecture, with Glosses.

Taliped, which George sees performed upon his arrival on Great Mall, is a brilliant scene-by-scene parody of the entire *Oedipus Rex* in doggerel heroic couplets. Its inclusion in the novel in full serves two main purposes: the first purely metafictional, in the pleasure it takes in imitating other art and exposing artifice, and the second operating along the entire dialectic between metafiction and metaphysics, an attempt to fuse tragedy and satire or parody. At this point in the novel, before George has had a chance to learn greatly from experience, tragedy is largely subsumed in the parody, and the comic tone reigns; however, the play raises important thematic considerations which George recalls and learns from later in the novel.

The parody itself is highly complex in *Taliped*. What Highet called a material parody, the play retains the tragic content of *Oedipus Rex* - the plot is unchanged - but is couched in flippantly cynical modern American slang. As the play opens, Max Spielman comments: "A modern translation ... I hate it" (312), and one might argue that Barth's version of the play

constitutes a parody of modern translations of ancient drama. On the other hand, the flippant tone has a devastating effect on the tragic content, and it could be argued (as a number of critics have done⁸) that it is a demonstration of the impossibility of a tragic view in our time. The slangy doggerel is so heavy-handed that the play might also be seen as a comic attack on modern speech, or on verse doggerel; and the university milieu is also apparently satirized in the play. What is interesting in these various possibilities is the fact that it would be entirely impossible to choose between them were we to find *Taliped* in a journal, for instance, isolated from its context in *Giles Goat-Boy*. The most relevant consideration in analyzing the precise nature of the parody and its possible meaning is that it is a play-within-a-novel. Let us, then, look first at the connections between the frame-tale and its frame.

There is, first of all, a complex relationship between the characters of the play and the characters of the novel. As in Bernard Shaw's *Man and Superman*, certain key character motifs are carried over from the main narrative into the frame-tale, and the characters in the narrative proper gain new insight into their own personalities by seeing certain aspects of their character dramatized. Thus *Taliped* suggests both George and Lucius Rexford, whom George has not yet met; Gynander suggests Kennard Sear; and the Committee Chairman, the learned pedant, suggests Max Spielman. Unlike Shaw's dream version of Don Juan, however, *Taliped* is a performed play attended and commented on by the characters, which serves to multiply the irony. The innocent George is contrasted with the even more innocent Peter Greene, and unaware of the outcome of the play, George identifies strongly with the hero, *Taliped*, who is himself portrayed as naively trusting in his own intelligence. Max and Dr. Sear, on the other hand, who like the reader know how the play turns out, occupy an ironic position above George just as the prescient Gynander and the

⁸See for example Peter Mercer, "The Rhetoric of *Giles Goat-Boy*," *Novel* 4 (1971), p. 155.

sarcastic Committee Chairman occupy an ironic position above Taliped. Barth extracts low comedy from George's naive literalist appreciation of the play, but by placing the reader in an ironic position above both fictional levels of understanding, he also succeeds in creating comedy out of Max's unhumorous tragic view and Sear's jaded aestheticism. Thus at the beginning of the play, when the Committee Chairman mentions a danger of hoof-and-mouth disease, George automatically feels sympathy for the endangered livestock (as for a suffering soap-opera heroine), and Sear characteristically mistakes his meaning: "I clutched Max's arm. 'That's terrible!' 'Oh well,'" sighed Dr. Sear, 'at least the tickets didn't cost us anything'" (313). In this way the parody of *Oedipus Rex* serves as an excellent arena for developing ironic perspective on the various characters in the novel.

In addition, the play has other important thematic ties to the narrative, most importantly in establishing for later use, albeit comically, the tragic view. The Committee Chairman's list of current woes at the beginning of the play corresponds to the plague in Sophocles' *Thebes*, and to the societal need for redemption that always, according to Joseph Campbell, leads to the birth of the mythic hero.⁹ In Sophocles' play it is implied that Oedipus' exile from the city ends the plague, but significantly, this result is never made explicit; and in *Taliped*, as in *Giles Goat-Boy*, the hero's sacrifice does not redeem society.

The second important thematic tie concerns the fate of the mythic hero. Until this point, despite Max's warning that heroes always die tragically, George has retained a romantic notion of his task as ending in ultimate glory. But *Taliped* provides him with a counterimage to this conception: despite the flippancy of the play, the ending must, in the context of the novel, be taken at least partly seriously, and the last

⁹Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1973), pp. 15-6.

lines of the play warn:

*Don't be too optimistic, vain, or proud;
every silver lining has a cloud.
Let no man be called passéd from this day
until he painlessly has passed away (354).*

Shortly afterward, George has his first real insight into the tragedy that awaits him:

While the demonstration was in progress I regarded Lucky Rexford's sapphire eyes and thought grimly of Taliped's - dark in the sockets of his mask and then bloodily extinguished. . . . Dean Taliped, in the horror of his knowledge, was passéder than they /Rexford, Stoker, and the others/, as was I in my clear confoundment; he was as passéd as one can be who understands and accepts that in studentdom is only failure. If anything lay beyond that awful Answer; if Commencement was indeed attainable by human students; then the way led through the dark and bloody Deanery of Cadmus, there was no getting round it; not through the clean, well-windowed halls of Rexford's Chancellory. Alas for that! (417).

In addition to these serious metaphysical concerns, the parody of Sophocles' play also serves an important metafictional function. The joy of comic imitation is great in itself, and Barth adds to that joy a metafictional element of foregrounding, of drawing attention to the fictiveness of the play and thereby of the novel as a whole. The play-within-a-play device itself is a traditional means of exposing artifice: it creates a series of Chinese boxes, in which each box contains an audience that is also performing a play of its own, until the final box, the audience of the novel, perceives that it too is involved in an aesthetic activity. The Chinese boxes in the production of *Taliped* are given an interesting twist when, at the end of the play, Harold Bray swoops onstage from nowhere and "the actors who had played the roles of Taliped and Agenora thrust their heads out from the Deanery to see what was causing the commotion" (354). In this the illusion of reality is broken for the audience inside the novel, and the audience outside it is granted a multiply ironic insight into

the fictiveness of the whole.

This same function is also served by the extreme nature of the verse doggerel in which the play is written. Northrup Frye has noted that metafiction is a traditional function of deliberate doggerel, or Hudibrastic:

We can see in doggerel how words are dragged in because they rhyme or scan, how ideas are dragged in because they are suggested by a rhyme-word, and so on. Deliberate doggerel, as we have it in *Hudibras* or German *knittelvers*, can be a source of brilliant rhetorical satire, and one which involves a kind of parody of poetic creation ...¹⁰

Barth has accordingly filled the play with as many "dragged in" rhymes as possible: at one point this is even made self-conscious by having Dr. Sear draw our attention to a particularly bad rhyme. Taliped exclaims, "*Look here, by Neddy! / You tell me nothing I don't know already*" (314), and Sear comments, "'By Neddy!' ... That is a bit far!"

The play is highly self-reflexive throughout. Barth plays on classical interpretations of the play, notably Freud's and Aristotle's, by having the characters refer to "*tragic flaws*" (334), and remark that Taliped's "*got some sort/of complex!*" (334). Linguistic foregrounding takes the comic form of the Committee Chairman's pedantic corrections of the other characters' grammar: because this is a College, everyone must speak hypercorrect English, and even Taliped is self-conscious: "*Then come on and tell/me who I've got to fire, man! Whom, I mean*" (316).

This sort of grammatical self-consciousness is in fact a device that was long ago developed by vaudeville, and used brilliantly by the cinematic comedians whose cynical comedy *Taliped Decanus* most closely resembles: the Marx brothers. Particularly the Shepherd, who appears toward the end of the play, is a Groucho Marx figure: the big-city cynical wit who is big on brave words ("*Okay, so we're pals. Congratulations./ So what?*", 343), but is an unabashed coward in the face of physical abuse. But the Shepherd is not the only character

¹⁰Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 277.

in the play to share this resemblance: all of the characters in Barth's parody possess Groucho's cynical wit and quick repartée, and the farce of both *Taliped* and Marx brothers comedies has the same effect of disintegrating human dignity. Just as Groucho reduces the stuffy, dignified college president, or the fearsome dictator, or the brave and glorious explorer to his own farcical cynicism, so also does Barth reduce the dignity of Oedipus to the ridiculous farce of *Taliped*. Unlike the Marx brothers, however, Barth is not interested in destroying the pathos of the story; rather, he wants to diminish the tragic stance in order to make it more amenable to a cynical age, while at the same time maintaining a balance between those two spurious derivations of goat, tragedy and satire.

The outstanding characteristics of the style of *Taliped* are the lexical reduction of Thebes to an American university, and the emphasis on sexual puns. Dean Labdakides, the play's equivalent to King Laius, was killed by *Taliped* on his way to head a symposium, which he had agreed to attend because of the excellent fee he was promised; and he was accompanied by his valet, PR-man, speech-writer, and girlfriend. As I mentioned above, Barth has squeezed an astonishing amount of modern American slang into the play; on a single page of the play (321), the following words and phrases are found: "knows his stuff," "swishy," "something fishy," "faggot," "screw," "shack up," "hump," "lay," "I don't trust the blind old fag as far as I could throw him," "right on cue," "good for a laugh," "took you out of mothballs," "hi," "selling us a bill of goods." Sexual punning, always a favorite of Barth's, is constant in *Taliped*. Agenora (Jocasta), who is portrayed as an aging nymphomaniac, insists on hearing "peace" as "piece," and suggests they have one right now (327). At the end, *Taliped* expresses his deep sorrow at having to part with his children by saying:

*Leaving my pretty girls behind is quite
the hardest thing on campus! (352).*

glosses for an explicitly artificial text, thus questioning the validity of all criticism while at the same time asserting the primacy and delight of art. Thus Nabokov's *Pale Fire* takes the form of a poem written by Nabokov for the express purpose of being criticized by the book's mad editor-narrator; Flann O'Brien's *The Third Policeman* juxtaposes a surrealist journey through hell against absurdly mundane footnotes on an invented writer named De Selby; and Borges writes footnotes to his fictions which mix references to existing texts with wholly fictive references. That the footnote format appealed to Barth as well is clear from the three discarded fragments from the novel that he published as "Test Borings": there the substance of Bray's lecture is printed as a monologue by a character much resembling Eierkopf, with footnotes by an anonymous editor.¹¹

In the final version of the novel, George enters a lecture hall, where he is told that all teaching is done by WESCAC by means of teaching machines; the helpful instructor shows George to a booth and demonstrates the use of the machine for him. The technical impersonality of the scene, as we shall see, is appropriate in terms of Barth's parodic historical allegory, and eventually George leaves the room with the determination to find his way on his own, without the aid of mechanical instruction.

Bray's lecture deals with the student's goal of passing the Finals, which in the novel's world represents salvation. Bray attacks the secularization of this aim into mere scholarship, and urges the student to get the Answers any way he can: no matter what the Answer is, how you get it, or whether you understand it, just so long as you have it. This opportunistic approach to learning is characteristic of Bray's metaphysical function in the story, as a champion of mystery over tragedy.

Listening to the lecture with a mixture of indignation and admiration, George experiments with the Hold and Gloss

¹¹John Barth, "Test Borings." In Philip Rahv (ed.), *Modern Occasions* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1966), pp. 255-63.

buttons on a vague concept, and hears a gloss prepared by the Department of Philosophical Semantics. Returning to the lecture, he again pushes the Gloss button, and this time hears a gloss by the Department of Agricultural History; to avoid what he thinks is an advertisement for the department, he glosses this gloss, and listens to a gloss by the Sub-Department of Comparative Philosophical History, which in turn glosses itself with an elaborate schema. Both buttons pop up, and George is returned to the Agricultural History gloss, which finally returns him to Bray's concluding words. The frame-structure of the passage, then, looks like this:

Table 1: *The frame structure of Bray's lecture*

- 1) Bray's lecture
 - 2) Gloss: the emptiness of the term "cheating"
- 1) Bray's lecture
 - 2) Gloss: Milo's "one way to raise a cow"
 - 3) Gloss-upon-the-gloss: scholarly commentary on Milo's deed
 - 4) Gloss-upon-the-gloss-upon-the-gloss: schematic illustration of commentary
 - 2) Gloss: Milo's "one way to raise a cow"
- 1) Bray's lecture

The parody in Bray's lecture is partly internal, i.e., self-parody: for where Bray attacks the writing of dissertations on such limited subjects as *The Navigation of Sinking Vessels, Coastwise and Celestial*, or *Foundation Planting for Crooken Campaniles* (447), the glosses on his lecture go to even greater scholarly extremes, reviewing such invented works as Yussuf Khadrin's *De Vacae in Arbores* and Hugo Krafft's *West-Campus Cattle-Barns from Pre-History to the Thirty-Seventh Remusian Chancellory*. Aside from this, the parody is of the type Gilbert Highet calls "formal parody," in which the style of the original is retained but given a content too absurd to justify it. Thus the style of the glosses is irreproachable scholarly prose; the parody lies in using that prose to produce an interminable amount of impressive detail about a single event, in which an ag-student killed the calf

he was supposed to raise and lifted it into a tree. The insignificant content of the commentary cannot sustain the self-important prose in which it is written. This is the kind of parody, in fact, which makes the critic's task an uneasy one: there is always the possibility that the same discrepancy exists between my own style and content, with the result that in writing about Barth's parody I am parodying myself. But this multiple irony is precisely Barth's point: by foregrounding the basic assumptions of criticism, he makes us aware of processes hitherto wholly unconscious and taken for granted.

These four parts of the novel, then, the two outermost frames and the two inner frames least tied to the narrative, constitute the story's most extreme form of metafiction turning to irony. In them Barth uses style to parody various fictional concerns of interest to his story, and in so doing points up their underlying fictional processes. Next we shall turn to another aspect of style in which the parody is more closely related to the narrative development: Barth's use of voice to create character.

Chapter 2 Stylistic Characterization

The dialogue is generally unnatural and wanting in variety from speaker to speaker - everyone sounds like the author!

Editor C (xvii)

I didn't think after *The End of the Road* that I was interested in writing any more realistic fiction - fiction that deals with Characters From Our Time, who speak real dialogue. I never could write realistic dialogue very well anyhow, and so I decided it was a bad thing for writers to write realistic dialogue.

John Barth in conversation¹

In his book on *Speech in the English Novel*, Norman Page notes that "In the creation of illusion in a work of fiction, the presentation of speech has a distinctive role, for it is in this element that the closest 'imitation of reality' is likely to appear to take place, if only because the author's presence appears (and it is again, of course, no more than an appearance) to be least obtrusive."² Conversely, clearly one way to emphasize the artificiality of narrative art is to write unrealistic dialogue: dialogue which is so clearly literary rather than real, parodic rather than straight-faced, that the reader is constantly reminded of its artifice. This reminder of artifice is what Barth accomplishes in his characters' voices in *Giles Goat-Boy*, as in all his fiction since *The Sot-Weed Factor*.

As Page implies in the above quotation, the notion of an "illusion of reality" is an elusive one where character is con-

¹Enck, p. 11.

²Norman Page, *Speech in the English Novel* (Longman, London, 1973), p. 3.

cerned. We have been given a number of highly convincing realistic characterizations, but the body of Western prose fiction also contains a remarkable number of unrealistic, even deliberately unrealistic characters who nevertheless succeed in creating an "illusion of reality," such as Fielding's Parson Adams, Sterne's Uncle Toby, and Dickens' Sam Weller. These characters are partly parodies of character-types, and partly unique individuals whose uniqueness is roughly sketched out with a few idiosyncrasies of linguistic and behavioral habit. The reason we tend to remember these characters as "realistic," then, is not that the author successfully imitated a psychological reality, but that the pattern of linguistic and behavioral motifs created by the author "works" so well within the fiction that the reader is able himself to create an illusion of reality. Our experience of people in the real world is most often that they are psychologically unique, perhaps, but unstriking, unprepossessing, even anonymous. Thus the more realistic the character, the fewer his striking and memorable characteristics, and the more he sinks into the grey anonymity of "real people." Those striking and memorable characters of literature whom we remember as "real," however, such as Parson Adams or Sam Weller, are highly unrealistic but *seem* real because they stick out from the grey anonymity. The best realistic writers have traditionally sought a delicate balance between striking and anonymous features: Madame Bovary and Isabel Archer work as characters at least partly because their creators successfully risked making them larger than life, while still maintaining the mass of unextraordinary psychological detail that ties them to our experience of "real people."

Considerations such as these create an important perspective on Barth's parodic characterization in *Giles Goat-Boy*, especially in light of critical attacks on Barth's supposed failure to create character. Webster Schott, for example, in his review of the book in *Life*, wrote: "Long, boring, frustrating, *Giles Goat-Boy* cultivates tedium. ... /Barth/ develops

no characters. He creates no drama. He finds no emotional ranges and searches no human depths."³ The novel contains some two dozen characters, most of whom undergo some form of personality growth within the course of the narrative. Schott can only mean that Barth develops no realistic characters; but if this qualification is accepted, it must be concluded that Fielding and Dickens "develop no characters" either, which is obvious nonsense. Barth creates and develops characters in a different tradition from that sought by Schott, a tradition of comic characterization through the medium of parodic voice; and it is in terms of this other tradition that we must approach the characters of the novel.

Parodic voice in the novel serves two functions in the creation of character: first, it serves to identify the character within the story, and second, by imitating comically the stylistic features of similar characters in other literary works, it acts as an allusive tie to the body of narrative art in general and a certain character type in particular. The first of these functions involves a creation of internal uniqueness, while the second establishes a general literary pattern of comic similarity. In terms of both functions, Barth's characterizations belie Editor C's comment that all the characters sound alike and like the author: one primary difference between Barth and such writers as Henry James or Hemingway is precisely that Barth creates an entire range of voices which are distinct within the fiction but allude to patterns outside it, whereas his predecessors create characters who so frequently sound like their authors that there is little internal stylistic differentiation between characters and few links to the body of literary tradition in terms of voice. Given a line from a Jamesian character without the attribution to speaker, one could not begin to determine who was speaking; given a line of dialogue from Peter Greene, there could be no question.

³Quoted in Morrell, p. 68.

One of the traditional comic devices for establishing the uniqueness of a character within a fiction is that of emblematic accompaniment, whereby a character never appears without a certain linguistic or symbolic emblem. Thus we have, in Dickens, Uriah Heep's "'umble," Mrs. Gummidge's "always thinking of the old 'un," and Sam Weller's dentalization of *w* into *v*. Barth uses this device throughout *Giles Goat-Boy*, frequently in lieu of attribution to speaker. Peter Greene, for example, is immediately recognizable by his "I'm okay" and adverbial suffix "-wise," Leonid by his mangling of inflectional endings, and Virginia by her "A-plus." These linguistic emblems serve the multiple purpose of establishing the character's uniqueness, creating humor through parody, and reminding the reader of artifice through the overt imitation of literary devices.

The establishing of patterns of similarity between a given work of fiction and other literature has traditionally been achieved by associating a character with a given linguistic variety, such as a regional or social dialect. Until the last century or so, writers used the device to order meaning in their fiction as well: "serious" characters were given a lofty, literary prose style, and low comic characters spoke a dialect, and it was relatively easy to pick out the hero or heroine on the basis of his or her language.⁴ In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, realistic tendencies in fiction led writers to reduce this complex pattern of meaning to a relatively limited structure in which everyone, especially the serious hero or anti-hero, spoke a dialect or some other "lowly" variety of language. Thus we have Huck Finn and Lady Chatterly's lower class lover, but also Isabel Archer, who speaks American English in Europe, and all of Hemingway's inarticulate heroes. In postmodern fiction there has been a tendency to reverse this pattern once again and return to older, more complex orderings of linguistic varieties within fiction, though without the value judgements previously made between "high" and "low" varieties. In *Giles*

⁴Page, p. 54.

Goat-Boy Barth has taken great pleasure in arranging speech patterns: the dialect speaker and the foreign speaker of broken English - Peter Greene and Leonid Andreich - have become low comic figures once more, but the intelligentsia speak not lofty prose but versions of educated foreign speech, predominantly German accents in the voices of Max and Eierkopf, and a British accent in that of Sear. The hero himself, on the other hand, speaks an odd combination of "epic hero," in a parody of the old lofty language of the serious protagonist, and "goat."

As we move through the analysis of parodic voice in this chapter, it will be important to remember that Barth's creation of character is not limited to voice; rather, the characters in the story contain elements of all four fictional levels, style, history, mythology, and philosophy, and I shall be considering the significance and nature of characterization separately on each level. The two levels on which character is most significant are style and philosophy; interestingly the thrust of these two levels of characterization is quite different, the features of voice not meshing with metaphysical content but contributing solely to parodic metafiction. Here, again, the novel is constructed of contradictions - irony and metaphor, metafiction and metaphysics - that are never resolved but remain in tension throughout the story.

Taking the characters in order of appearance in the novel, the first voice we meet in George's narration is Max Spielman, George's keeper. Max is a German Jew whose history is partly based on that of Albert Einstein, and his voice combines comic German and Yiddish distortions of English with a caring and upright personality. The latter is revealed through exclamations showing emotional warmth, in which he is contrasted with Sear, and syntactical simplicity, in which he is contrasted with Eblis Eierkopf. Interference from German appears phonologically, in the replacement of English /ʒ/ with /d/, and /æ/ with /ɔ/, represented orthographically as "Der goats" and "dot" for "that." Syntactically, interference from German appears in a subject-verb disagreement ("the Siegfrieders was learning," 94), a tendency to omit the object with transitive

verbs ("Ach, forgive," 83), incomplete prepositional phrases ("Come down off," 48), and the overgeneralization of the simple present tense to cover statements of intention normally expressed with "will" in English ("Get on in, or I put a ring in your silly nose!" 51). Lexically, there are a number of words which Max uses directly from German or Yiddish: "ja," "stillstand," "ach," "yi," "verboten," "shiksa," and "goyim." The influence of Yiddish is also evident in certain idiomatic peculiarities, which seem to be a parody of the speech of such Jewish characters as Malamud's Morris Bober: for example, the omission of the connective "is that" between main clause and subordinate clause, which serves to transform the main clause into a kind of sentence modifier. Thus: "All I want, you don't make yourself unhappy" (56) or "What I know, now you wish you didn't say it" (62).

Virginia Hector, alias Lady Creamhair, is the next character George meets, and her voice constitutes a parody of the motherly tones of an old-maid librarian. More articulate than her foster-daughter Anastasia, Virginia nevertheless reduces her language to euphemisms befitting her old-maidish notions of propriety, puzzling George with her talk of "going to the bathroom" out of doors. Like mothers and librarians she tends to address people as if they were naughty children, and she uses the patronizing "we" to correct their behavior:

So that's how it is! Well, you needn't grab, young man, it's not a bit mannerly. You march yourself back and say "Please," and you shall have all you like. . . . Now, that does for the title-page and end-papers, doesn't it! We mustn't eat the others till we've read them" (54).

The next character George meets is Anastasia Stoker, whose voice is another reworking of a favorite of Barth's, first appearing as Rennie Morgan in *The End of the Road*: the sincere and well-meaning but rather inarticulate woman who, because she cannot convey her depth of feeling in words, tends to indicate sincerity through exaggerated stress. Anastasia's voice differs from Rennie's only in that where Rennie

had to pretend to be articulate to satisfy her husband, Anastasia has perceived that men prefer dumb women, and like many another co-ed exaggerates her own inarticulateness. Thus her speech is full of admissions of her lack of intelligence, and her hesitating, broken syntax adds to the impression:

"Really - excuse me, George, I'm sure you're a *thousand* times brighter than I am, but I really don't think ..." (173).

Lexically, two striking features of Anastasia's speech are technical jargon related to her occupation as a nurse, and typically sorority-girl words and phrases such as "jilted," "'fess up," "darn," and "thrilled to pieces." Anastasia's kind and loving nature finds expression in words showing sympathy for any pitiful object, no matter how unlikely: "Those poor girls he attacked, and that dear little poodle, and we didn't know *what* he might do next!" (163).

Across the river, George meets Maurice Stoker, Anastasia's husband. Stoker is a ribald devil's advocate whose greatest joy lies in satirizing the weaknesses of those around him; and like most satirists, he has a facility for language. His most frequent satiric pose is that of the amiable story-teller who ingenuously and apparently without malicious intent strikes right to the heart of his hearer. He greets Max Spielman, whose conscience had so troubled him over his pushing of the EAT-button that he had amputated the finger that pushed it, by saying: "It *is* Max Spielman, the fingerless proctologer! Who're we going to EAT this time, Maxie?" (194). Describing his visit to the Siegfrieder crematoriums during Campus Riot II, he is asked by the liberal Moishian Max whether he actually enjoyed the visit:

Enjoyed it! I never had so much fun - except the day you and I pushed the EAT-button. What a party! This one chap in particular, we couldn't wait to try: biochemist named Schultz - maybe you've heard of him? He'd decided the only way to keep West Campus culture from going up in smoke was to fireproof the Moishians. So he invented some kind of asbestos bagel, I believe it was, and ate nothing else for three months before he was picked up. When the Bonifacist scientists heard about it they put him straight

in the oven - they don't miss a trick! You know, it's surprising how *thirsty* you got, around that place! Siegfrieder beer is the best in the University, and they had two kegs of it down by the ovens: one for enlisted men and one for officers and guests (196).

An interesting feature of Stoker's voice is that it changes dramatically as a result of George's Tutoring, becoming kind and sincere to the point of self-parody. In the course of one page (557), he uses the following words and phrases: "Please," "surely," "*do* be careful, "really quite concerned," "Does either of you gentlemen ...", "I'm relieved," "Perfect disguise!", "And a clever idea too," "Thanks *ever* so much." From this point Barth gradually modifies Stoker's voice back to its original form, ending the novel with Stoker as a satirist who is now less able to conceal his own true feelings.

In Stoker's Living Room, George meets Kennard Sear and his wife Hedwig. Hedwig shares with Anastasia a tendency to communicate through heavy stress, but where Anastasia's emphasis is sincere, Hedwig's is affectedly chic: "Beautiful, beautiful. Figures on a vase. ... I *wish* I could paint it" (235). Kennard Sear is a parody of the literary type of the jaded aesthete, and his voice contains the phony British accent associated with intellectuals and high society in the 1950's:⁵ "bloody bore, taking sides" (305), "all this blather" (306), "all these hero and Grand-Tutor chaps" (306), and so forth. Much of his language has an effeminate and effete ring to it, traits also associated with intellectuals in the 1950's: "dear me,"

⁵Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (Random, New York, 1962), p. 12. Hofstadter also quotes Louis Bromfield's 1952 definition of "egghead," which applies in significant ways not only to the novel's literal egghead, Eierkopf, but to all its intellectuals: "*Egghead*: A person of spurious intellectual pretensions, often a professor or the protégé of a professor. Fundamentally superficial. Over-emotional and feminine in reactions to any problem. Supercilious and surfeited with conceit and contempt for the experience of more sound and able men. ... A self-conscious prig, so given to examining all sides of a question that he becomes thoroughly addled while remaining always in the same spot. An anemic bleeding heart" (pp. 9-10).

"pity," "gracious no!", "dreadful," and so forth. And a third distinguishing characteristic of his speech is an element of what might be called counselling jargon, from his work as a psychiatrist: the kind of cultivatedly honest and open speech that encourages all conversants to speak their minds freely. Thus: "I respect your position on the *social* aspects of the Commencement question" (308), or "If you mean do I believe they *exist*, of course I do" (309). All these features of style contribute to a linguistic wall Sear has erected between himself and the world, allowing him the pleasant sense of being experienced without the unpleasantness of being affected by experience. Despite these features, however, Sear is a sympathetic character: he is disarmingly sincere in his aestheticism, and Barth does not overemphasize the British, effeminate, and counselling aspects of Sear's speech. Rather, as with his other characters, he gives us a page or two of heavily idiosyncratic speech to establish the voice, and then relies on relatively unmarked speech with only occasional spicing throughout most of the novel. Sear's speech is, after the first few pages, essentially standard educated English prose.

Having left the Living Room, George meets Peter Greene, stylistically the most colorful character in the novel. Greene is a parody of such literary and legendary figures as Huck Finn and Davy Crockett, and his speech reveals the unshorn rural dialect of Western wilderness heroes. He is also a modern businessman, soldier, and patriot, and rural dialect is mixed in his speech with advertising jargon, military terminology, and patriotic clichés. The dominant strand in his voice is, however, rural dialect. It is manifested syntactically in a tendency to use a non-emphatic "do" ("If it's a thing I do love, . . . it's fooling with motors," 260), the use of "that" as a non-restrictive personal relative pronoun ("Now you take me, that's just a plain poor flunker like the next," 259), and a wealth of features which might also be described as substandard: third-person "do" and "were," present-tense "he got," "I says," double negatives ("no time for

lally-gaggin' round no drive-ins," 270), replacement of the past tense with the perfect form ("I run" and "I come" for "ran" and "came"), "that there," "ain't," "yourn," attributive "them" ("them days"), and so on. Lexically, Greene's rural dialect takes such forms as "my own self" for "myself," "y'all," "ever whichaway," "reckon," "figure," "pert'" (as in "pert' near"), intransitive "set," "fetch up," "a-drinkin'," "doggone," attributive "right" (meaning "downright"), "directly" (meaning "as soon as," as in "directly I get to ..."), "onliest" ("only"), "uppity," and "cottonpicky." Greene's rural dialect idioms are among his most characteristic sayings: "What the heck anyhow," "When all's said and done," and "When you come right down to it." As with Sear and other characters, Barth creates the effect of Greene's rural dialect by using throughout a relatively readable vehicle, in this case substandard colloquial American English, and spicing it with terms and topics suggestive of a wilderness lifestyle.

Juxtaposed against this rural dialect component is Greene's advertising jargon: "P.R. team," "we played that on the old kazoo" (263), "Sent the whole team to the showers" (264), and so on. Not just an advertiser, Greene is also a modern man, and his speech is full of words and phrases from modern America, including his favorite phrase, "I'm okay," and others such as "My life is an open book," "you can bet your boots," "heads will roll," "and like, I'm busy, sure," and "all by my lonesome." Greene's voice is a complex fusion of the modern and the rural archaic, a mixture reflected in the name of his firm - Greene Timber and Plastic - and the double vision that is his most distinctive allegorical characteristic.

Harold Bray, appearing next, is George's opponent in the novel. Through most of the tale, Bray's voice is characterized not so much by linguistic features as by the mechanical sound of his voice, which Barth cannot reproduce orthographically but must describe in the "stage-directions": "It was a voice I knew that pierced the clamor, and my heart: hard, clickèd, like a thumbnailed flea, a hoof-cracked tick" (685-6). But

particularly in his lecture to the students on Matriculation Day, Bray's voice takes on a distinctive quality that Robert Scholes has described as the "rhetoric of hucksterism."⁶ Here Bray adopts an eminently reasonable and reassuring tone which conceals the swindle in his words, which is, as we shall see, that his answers are no answers at all, but merely a wish-fulfilling opiate for studentdom. Bray tells the students what they want to hear, then gives them a sense of self-satisfaction by pretending to convince them of it with an authoritative tone.

Bray is an emanation of WESCAC, the automatic computer, and WESCAC too is given a parodic voice at one point in the novel, although that parody cannot properly be represented in print. The voice is that of Walt Disney computers, which inevitably talk in a grating monotone:

there was a sharp click and a whine which I'd come to recognize as of loudspeakers warming. A mechanically inflected voice, more neutral than Bray's, said crisply: *"Hear this: all holders of ID-cards please exit through the side doors and enroll in the regular curricula. No one with an ID-card is a Candidate for Graduation"* (419).

Here, the parody, directed at Hollywood stereotypes, must be imagined; but part of the fun of parody, in any case, is the imaginative effort required to recognize the parodic object, and the sense of achievement felt when recognition takes place.

Leaving the Amphitheater on Croaker's shoulders, George is taken to Eblis Eierkopf's observation tower. Eierkopf is, translated into our terms, an ex-Nazi scientist who now works for the United States, and in his speech Barth seems to be parodying the German-accented, lovably absent-minded professor who is plagued by an incompetent assistant. Most of the distinctive features of Eierkopf's speech reflect a German accent: "'So,' he said, Z-ing the sibilant as Max did" (359). His speech is sprinkled with German words and phrases, both the stock ones - "ja," "nein," "kaput," "nicht wahr" - and inven-

⁶Scholes, *The Fabulators*, p. 157.

ted phrases which comically develop the metaphorical aspect of the story: "*Ziegenblöbe*," "*Geissblöbchen*," and "*Zickelchen*" for Goat-boy, "*Grosslehrer*" for Grand Tutor, and "*Durchfall und Vertreibung!*", Eierkopf's expletive meaning failure and expulsion. His speech contains a few words directly translated from German - "dumbhead" and "dumbstick," from "Dummkopf" and "dummes Stück" - and two syntactical interference errors found in Max's speech as well: incongruence of number between noun and verb (the overgeneralization of the third-person singular to plural nouns), and the use of the simple present where English would use the continuous present (-ing) or "will."

The next central character George meets is Lucius Rexford, Chancellor of New Tammany College and modeled after John F. Kennedy. His speech is distinguished by a linguistic two-facedness traditionally associated with politicians, in that in public he is cheerful, full of light and optimism, while in private he is a ruthless realist, even a cynic, although his cynicism is a weakness that he barely allows himself to see except in times of stress. Thus the hopeful and brotherly tone of his Matriculation Day speech contrasts sharply with his reaction when the lights go out: "'Tell Bray to make a statement,' Rexford ordered. '*No panic, everything's in order*, that sort of thing. Somebody find out if my flunking brother has anything to do with this. Let's get back to the Chancellory" (420). The style of the address is itself a close parody of Presidential Inaugural Addresses in general, and of Kennedy's in particular. Compare these two excerpts:

In this chess-game with our dangerous brother, only very long-range strategy will win; when you read about our setbacks in the Boundary Dispute or trouble on the Power Line, remember that pawns and even an occasional Dean or Don-Errant may have to be sacrificed to draw our opponent out of position; to overextend him, so that in the endgame we can turn what appeared to be a stalemate into a checkmate. I happen really to believe it can be done, and for that reason I'm not afraid either of the present or of the future. Thank you very much, and welcome to New Tammany! (416)

In the long history of the world, only a few generations have been granted the role of defending freedom in its hour of maximum danger. I do not shrink from this responsibility - I welcome it. I do not believe that any of us would exchange places with any other people or any other generation. The energy, the faith, the devotion which we bring to this endeavor will light our country and all who serve it - and the glow from that fire can truly light the world.⁷

Rexford's image of the chessgame does not derive from Kennedy's address, but it does approximate the spirit of Kennedy's description of U.S.-Soviet conflicts. Kennedy's image of "lighting the world" is parodied in Rexford's Christian name, Lucius, Latin for "light," as well as Rexford's campaign slogan, "Light up with Lucky."

Having passed Scrapegoat Grate, George meets up with a band of unshorn undergraduates who he discovers are Beists, modeled on the beatniks, who speak a language which parodies current undergraduate slang: "He's putting us on," "No, man!", "It's the Form-in-the-Void thing," "I'm with you!", "The Transcendence bit!" (441-2). They are lackadaisical in their objection to the "establishment," which is "a drag," but love heated discussions of abstract questions, usually along vaguely Oriental-mystical lines.

George finds the Beists pestering an old man whose name he learns is Ira Hector. Ira is the wealthiest man on campus, but also the stingiest, and in Ira's speech Barth parodies the stereotyped miser as well as the old-school self-made millionaire, who took pride in his honest, uneducated speech. Ira is comically mercenary, charging the Beists for the time of day and George for wanting to know why he charged the Beists. He repeats the stock phrases of the self-made man: "Nobody paid *my* way! ... All I know today I learned the hard way, by myself. Coddle the crowd, they'll trample you down!" (437),

⁷John F. Kennedy, "Inaugural Address." In *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: John F. Kennedy: Containing the Public Messages, Speeches, and Statements of the President January 20 to December 31, 1961* (United States Government Printing Office, Washington, 1962), pp. 2-3.

and when George fails to understand the classical mottoes of capitalism - "*Caveat emptor!* ... *Laissez-faire!* *Sauve qui peut!*" - he offers to translate them at a cut rate, three for the price of two.

Ira's brother Reginald is the former Chancellor of New Tammany College, and is modeled on Dwight D. Eisenhower. In Reginald's speech Barth has not attempted to parody Eisenhower's notoriously clumsy syntax, but limits himself to a certain military brusqueness and a tendency, aped by all his aides, to abbreviate titles into first initials: "The P.-G.'s in the P.P.F.O., sir" (566), one secretary tells George. Reginald's military demeanor appears in his false generosity to the Beists: "Take *this!*" and "*There*, by golly!" (567) he says, sounding more as if he were delivering blows than desk barometers. His brisk soldierly camaraderie comes out in his manner of addressing George, who he thinks is Bray: "Good to see you, G.T.!" (568), and of referring to Greene: "Pete Greene's lost his head over her too - fellow served under me in C.R. Two, heck of a fine Joe" (574).

At the Boundary Dispute George meets the Russian defector Leonid Alexandrov, in whose speech Barth plays most extensively with the old comic device in fiction of the foreigner speaking broken English. Norman Page lists a number of the characteristics of this device as it is commonly used: the inclusion of a few familiar words from the source language ("*da*" and "*nyet*" in Leonid's case); mispronunciations, which are rarely suggested in Leonid's voice; syntactic confusions (Leonid's most distinctive speech characteristic, in his mangled suffixes); and a speech style indicative of the speaker's national character - thus Leonid's tendency to elliptical exclamations, suggesting the stereotype of the Russian character as impulsive, expansive, and excitable.⁸ Of Peter Greene, Leonid says: "Ha! ... A baby. But unselfish, Goat-Boy! And loves Mrs. Anastasia! But stupid! But okay, I like, and shouldn't fight with. A good man! But bah!" (503). And his trouble with English suf-

⁸Page, p. 54.

fixes - "Greatnesshood! ... Splendidacy!" (501) - culminates in his last word on campus: "Gratituditynesshoodshipcy!" (758).

The last character whose speech I shall consider is also a foreigner, Leonid's stepfather Classmate X, alias Chementinski. His speech is a deliberate attempt at self-effacement, and as a consequence he speaks in the neutral tones of a book of Student-Unionist doctrine. Talking literally through his hat to avoid being photographed, he says: "To be the agent of the general will ... is an honor exceeded only by being its instrument. If the will of the Union is that the button be pushed, then the one thing better than being the presser is to be the button" (508). This same striving for impersonal, unemotional speech is reflected in his replacement of the first-person pronoun "I" with the third-person impersonal pronoun "one." Classmate X, though a foreigner, speaks otherwise irreproachable English, for he is the novel's comic equivalent not only of Khrushchev, but also of the naturalized British citizen Klaus Fuchs.

All of these stylistic characterizations constitute experiments in parodic voice which identify the characters both within the novel and in their larger literary and stereotypical contexts. But the most important voice in the novel, of course, is George's narrative voice, comic and parodic, yet containing more contradictions in the dialectic between metafiction and metaphysics than the other voices in the novel.

Chapter 3 George's Narrative Voice

The computer's assumption of a first-person narrative viewpoint, we are told, is one ... "basic artifice." The reader will add others, perhaps challenging their "necessity" as well.

Publisher's Disclaimer, xi.

The "basic artifice" of the first-person narration in point of fact seems "necessary" not only to the *Revised New Syllabus*, but to most of Barth's other fiction as well: excepting *The Sot-Weed Factor* and a few of the *Lost in the Funhouse* stories, the teller of the tale is a character within that tale whose narration revolves around his own inner development. Barth's use of the first-person narrator is so common that one might well ask, in a writer so given to experimentation with a wide variety of fictional devices, why this overwhelming preoccupation with a single narrative approach? A number of good reasons come to mind.

First, consider Barth's metaphysical concerns: given a central interest in portraying man's development from innocence to maturity to ultimate death, the literary genre best suited to the cultivation of that interest is that of the autobiography or confession, and the first-person narration as used by Barth constitutes a fictional parody or imitation of that genre.

A second reason is to be found in the metafictional potential contained in the first-person narration, specifically in the form of the first-person narrator most commonly used by Barth: the unreliable narrator who is clearly not a spokesman for the author. This device serves to create, as does no other narrative approach, the multiple irony Barth seeks to evoke in his fiction. As Gabriel Josipovici writes, "The creation of a narrator who is other than the author is only the most obvious way of calling attention to /the/ tone /of

the fiction/, of reminding us of the fact that we are in the presence not of 'the truth,' but of a story being narrated."¹ Fiction has built into it a complex series of ironic gaps: between the narrator and the characters, and between the narrator and the audience.² When to this complexity we add a third ironic gap between the narrator and the author, we are not only adding a new dimension to the novel, but we are also creating, by implication, an Archimedean point outside the novel from which to view the whole. By perceiving the author's ironic undermining of his own narrator's vision, the reader is able to step outside the fiction and view it whole.

Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg discuss the importance of the unreliable narrator at some length in *The Nature of Narrative*. They note that the multiple ironies involved in the use of the device serve to present the reader with a pleasureable puzzle:

This device lends an especially ironical cast to an entire narrative, laying on the reader a special burden of enjoyable ratiocination, as he seeks to understand what the character telling the story cannot himself comprehend. Because of its intellectual possibilities, this has become a favorite device in didactic and satiric narratives such as *Castle Rackrent* and *Gulliver's Travels*.³

The writers go on to point out that the unreliable narrator has become especially popular in contemporary fiction due to the skeptical relativism of modern thought:

A narrator who is not in some way suspect, who is not in some way subject to ironic scrutiny is what the modern temper finds least tolerable. It is not the narrator's narrating that disturbs the modern reader, nor his employment of multiple perspectives. We are willing to let Ford's Dowell or Conrad's Marlowe or Faulkner's Quentin or Proust's Marcel go on and on, because all their attempts to resolve the multifarious facets of their tales

¹Josipovici, pp. 82-3.

²Scholes and Kellogg, p. 240.

³Scholes and Kellogg, p. 263.

are performed before our eyes. In this kind of fiction the author has not disappeared. He is often highly visible behind his surrogate. But by gaining himself a fictional shape he has entered the ironic gap, which now lies not between author or narrator and characters but between limited understanding which is real, and an ideal of absolute truth which is itself suspect. This irony cuts in two directions simultaneously.⁴

Briefly, then, the use of the unreliable narrator allows the contemporary writer to maintain, through irony, an intellectually serious perspective on the compelling yet debilitating epistemological skepticism typical of our times, and at the same time to work freely with the metaphorical forms of fiction. Barth discusses this freedom as an important discovery he made regarding the arguments offered by Robbe-Grillet, in a lengthy passage in an interview:

One of Robbe-Grillet's points, which I believe he borrows from Roland Barthes, is that the novel of character, such as *Madame Bovary*, for example, or Tolstoy's work, belongs to the *age* of character, to the age of the individual. And in mass society, for example, when individualism as a philosophy is historically discredited, the novel of character is a kind of anachronism. I find that to be a most persuasive argument, but I note to myself that, for example, the simple device of telling a story in the first person obviates almost all those objections.

What I mean is that you and I still imagine ourselves to be characters, and our lives are influenced by other people around us whom we see as characters and our relations to whom we perceive in a dramatic, in a dramatical, way. As individuals we still live in calendar and clock time; and no matter how that time may be discredited by physicists, it's nevertheless the kind of time we live in during most of our waking experience. "Microscopes and telescopes," Goethe says simply, "distort the natural focus of our eyes." The metaphysics of cause and effect, for example, may be extremely debatable. But the fact is that we live our lives most of the time with a very simple, crude, and perhaps old-fashioned understanding of cause and effect. We *have* to.

Now, if you write a novel with an "I" narrator, none of these things that Robbe-Grillet objects to as being obsolete or anachronistic can be charged against the *author*, because they only reflect the anachronistic pre-

⁴Scholes and Kellogg, p. 277.

suppositions of a first-person narrator, who is no more responsible for them than the rest of us are as we go through our lives. So such a simple device as working in the first person, such a simple premise as the comic mode, or the parodic mode, it seems to me, unties you, sets you free from some of these objections - which otherwise are quite compelling.⁵

Applying these considerations specifically to *Giles Goat-Boy*, we can see that in the figure of George Giles Barth has made successful use of the unreliable narrator. Yet we must ask: in what sense and to what extent is George's narration unreliable? It is clear, for example, that his narration in the Posttape is more reliable than that during his first round of Tutoring. No single standard of "reliability" or "unreliability" is established in the narrative; instead, the narrative becomes steadily more reliable as George learns about life. This development of narrative voice has been well described by Scott Byrd, in a penetrating review of the novel. Drawing the important distinction between George as narrator and George as character, Byrd notes that the stylistic movement of the novel involves the narrowing and finally the disappearance of the ironic gap between the two. At the outset of the novel, the gap is great: "The reader is likely to be most comfortable with the early sections of the book because of this disjunction between the absurd adventures of the naive hero and the sophistication of the narrative hero."⁶ Byrd continues:

As the story progresses, however, Billy Bocksfuss becomes George the Undergraduate ... , and since he gains sophistication in the ways of the world ... , the narrative voice blends with that of the hero. By the time George meets the test of heroism, but faces the problem of creative action, George's narrative voice and his voice in dialogue have become identical. When he explains to a guard, "I'm busy being lynched," there is still irony,

⁵Bellamy, *The New Fiction*, pp. 15-6.

⁶Scott Byrd, "Giles Goat-Boy Visited." *Critique* 9, no. 1 (1966), p. 109.

but no longer a distancing between character and point-of-view. Essentially, the reader has been placed on an equal footing with George and finds it more difficult to judge his actions.⁷

Byrd concludes that "the shifting confessional distances between reader and character create a movement from mockery to faith as George moves past manhood to a curious deification."⁸ This reading, which sees the novel's metaphysical concerns as dominant, as a "message" in which we can have "faith," suggests that George is not in the end an unreliable narrator; that he speaks for Barth, at least in the Posttape.

Several counterarguments may be offered to such an analysis. First, George does not have the final word in the novel: his bathetic Posttape is followed by J.B.'s comic misinterpretation of the story's import, which is followed by the Editor's questioning of the authenticity of J.B.'s Postscript. The novel, that is, ends on a metafictional, not a metaphysical, note. Second, Barth's constant reminders of the artifice of the novel throw an ironic light on any "truth" couched therein. It would thus be more accurate to state that George is a reliable narrator of the novel's metaphysical content, but he is unaware of the parallel and conflicting metafictional concerns developed in the story, and thus he is ultimately unreliable in terms of the overall vision of the novel. While the ironic gap between George as character and George as narrator is narrowed until it disappears altogether, the ironic gap between George as narrator and Barth as author never disappears, and it is through this gap that the novel's vision is given its paradoxical edge.

Barth took great pains to develop a voice which would suit his conception of George. David Morrell, noting that the novel took five years and three months to write, or twice as long as *The Sot-Weed Factor*, cites Barth's explanation for the long writing period:

⁷Byrd, pp. 109-10.

⁸Byrd, p. 110.

"The reason it took so long," he said, "was that while the matter of *The Sot-Weed Factor* was more complicated, the manner of *Giles* was more difficult. But once the narrator's voice was worked out, the writing came swiftly." There was, for example, the problem of diction. Giles the Grand Tutor narrates his own story, but how does a Grand Tutor speak? There ought to be something sacred and mythic about his voice, Barth decided, and he achieved that effect by occasionally accenting final *ed* syllables, by making his sentences heavily rhythmic, by carefully balancing his sentences, by introducing archaic-sounding words and arrangements of words.⁹

The best study of George's narrative voice to date is to be found in an article by Peter Mercer entitled "The Rhetoric of *Giles's Goat-Boy*." Mercer distinguishes four main elements of that voice, which he arranges in two sets of two conflicting elements each: the heroic and the bathetic, which he calls "styles," and the academic and the goatish, which he calls "registers." The presence of these elements in George's voice Mercer illustrates in a detailed analysis of the opening paragraph of George's narrative; and we may discuss them on the same basis:

George is my name; my deeds have been heard of in Tower Hall, and my childhood has been chronicled in the *Journal of Experimental Psychology*. I am he that was called in those days Billy Bocksfuss - cruel misnomer. For had I indeed a cloven hoof I'd not now hobble upon a stick or need ride pick-a-back to class in humid weather. Aye, it was just for want of a proper hoof that in my fourteenth year I was the kicked instead of the kicker; that I lay crippled on the reeking peat and saw my first love tugged by a brute Angora. Mercy on that buck who butted me from one world to another; whose fell horns turned my sweetheart's fancy, drove me from the pasture, and set me gimping down the road I travel yet. This bare brow, shame of my kidship, he crowned with the shame of men: I bade farewell to my hornless goathood and struck out, a horned human student, for Commencement Gate (41).

Mercer points out that the most obvious aspect of the rhetoric in this paragraph is a portentous archaism, reminiscent of the style of heroic romances. This appears syntactically

⁹Morrell, p. 67.

in archaic constructions ("I am he that was called in those days ..."), and in a strong tendency to parallelism and metrical regularity. The diction of the passage is also markedly archaic: "deeds," "chronicled," "cloven," "tupped," "fell," "gimping," "kidship," "bade," and "goathood." But this heroic style, Mercer notes, is invaded by a comic bathos that reduces the hero's strut to absurdity: the archaic rhythm of each sentence collapses in a shift to the bathetic, in "the *Journal of Experimental Psychology*," in "Billy Bocksfuss," in "humid weather," and so on. Mercer explains that the bathetic style is most dominant in the novel in Barth's parody of *Oedipus Rex*, and the effect of the bathos is in fact to balance the solemnity of the heroic style against low comedy.

Mercer also describes a second antithesis in the rhetoric of the novel, that between "the traditional polarities of human nature, the animal and the intellectual, and specifically dramatized in the superficially articulated allegory of the goat farm and the university."¹⁰ Within George's voice, Mercer claims, this antithesis takes the form of a clash between academic and goatish elements, or "registers," as he chooses to call them. The academic "register" is developed by Max during George's prepping, and involves an intellectual ability to deal with abstraction; the goatish "register," on the other hand, is bred into George from the start, and entails a fundamental acceptance of the sexual in human life.

Mercer further suggests that the tension and the synthesis between these polarities reflect the themes of the novel: "All this is immediately comic and parodic and yet it prefigures, in its stylistic inclusiveness, the whole synthesizing effort of the book: an effort to relate the traditional dimension of human experience - the intellectual and the physical, the heroic, tragic, and comic."¹¹ And Mercer notes that our

¹⁰ Mercer, pp. 148-9.

¹¹ Mercer, p. 150.

ironic reservations regarding the content of George's first two Tutoring positions is partly prepared through style: "We naturally resist Giles' fanatical attempt to exclude and deny kinds of experience that the rhetoric has happily, not to say exuberantly, accommodated."¹²

This analysis, with its strict faithfulness to the text and its strong emphasis on the synthesis so central to the vision of the novel, has much to offer. Let us consider some of the implications of Mercer's approach.

I have, first of all, some difficulty with Mercer's terminology. He notes that linguists are divided in their definitions of the term "register," and thus he has felt free to use it flexibly, as in "goat register." However, the disagreements among linguists over the definition of the word concern specifics, not principles, and the accepted general definition is rather different from Mercer's usage. Register is that part of a person's language which changes with changes in situation: "Usually we identify registers by taking the speaker as the invariable element in overlapping situations, and discussing how he adjusts his language to a situation."¹³ Thus George could have a "goat register" only in the event that he talked like a goat in certain limited situations and nowhere else. This is obviously not the case, as the goatish element in George's voice is an indication of a certain outlook on life that is applied to every situation George meets. Similarly, the academic element is an approach to life which shapes George's perceptions and thus contributes to the shaping of each sentence. If, as Mercer suggests, there is "no agreed term in critical use for this kind of language situation,"¹⁴ it may be advisable to avoid specifically descriptive terms which might be misleading and use a more general term, such as "element" or "component."

Just as potentially misleading is Mercer's use of the term

¹²Mercer, p. 150.

¹³Turner, p. 165.

¹⁴Mercer, p. 149.

"style" to describe the heroic and bathetic elements in George's speech. Defined linguistically, style is not a literary "kind" of language like heroic or comic, but a measure of the relationship between speaker and hearer, and is divided into categories like formal, colloquial, and slang, or, using Martin Joos' classification, frozen, formal, consultative, casual, and intimate.¹⁵ Defined in a broader literary sense, "style" may be said to be synonymous with Mercer's use of the word "rhetoric." Here again, a more general term like element or component might be preferable.

Apart from terminological considerations, Mercer's analysis of George's narrative voice lacks the antithesis described by Scott Byrd, between the ironic point of view of the narrator and the relatively naive point of view of George as a character. This antithesis is clearly present in the text. While the narrative begins and ends with George's ironic voice, throughout most of the book George's naive voice dominates, and it is only upon a second reading that one perceives the irony reigning between the two voices - the one actively vocal, the other dormant but powerfully influencing the first. At two points in the narrative, the ironic voice of the adult George breaks in: once during George's arguments with Max over interpretations of dreams ("Clear-seeing keeper in your tomb: forgive me that I disputed your grave wisdom," 119), and once during George's introspective walk from the Living Room to where he meets Max. Significant is the change in verb tense in the last clause of the latter: "Not impossibly, too, I was aware that to be 'captured' by Stoker (for whatever reason) could mean seeing Anastasia once again, and her good escutcheon - but I have little patience with this sort of analysis" (249). A more subtle intrusion on the naive by the ironic voice takes the form of repeated exaggerations of the naivety to such absurd extremes that the reader is forced to

¹⁵Martin Joos, *The Five Clocks*. Cited in Thomas Pyles and John Algeo, *English: An Introduction to Language* (Harcourt, Brace, and World, New York, 1970), p. 204.

recognize the presence of another, more sophisticated point of view. This is evident in the following passages:

With the train of guards and assistants I gimped after him /Rexford/ through elegant corridors, pleased to be photographed in his presence, though I knew that the mightiest deans and chancellors were as pallid candleflames beside the radiance of Truth, which from the sun of Grand-Tutorhood warmed and lit the University (490).

With humble pride, not unmixed with awe, I remarked how clearly each new task, so far from exhausting me, left me stronger for the next; how, for the man of true vocation, nothing is gratuitous, and the merest happenstance is fraught with meaning (534).

Let us add, then, a third pair of antithetical components to Mercer's analysis, components containing the novel's point of view and gradually approaching each other before finally merging in one.

Finally, while Mercer's article accurately outlines the skeletal structure of George's narrative voice, the brevity of his treatment necessitated neglect of the complexity of detail found under each component. Expansion, therefore, is in order. A striking feature of the heroic component, for instance, is George's predilection for archaic comparatives: "meaningfuller," "blissfullest," "less long standing," "less beloved of ma," and the omission of "as" in "as good as" ("His eyes were wide as on the day I had first seen them . . .," 152). In the first sentence of George's narrative, Mercer notes the archaic, Latinate emphasis of the subject: "I am he that . . ." But this sentence also illustrates another archaic aspect of George's voice, i.e., the schoolmarmish correctness of his grammar, in this case in using the appositive pronoun in the nominative rather than using the more colloquial accusative ("him"). The novel is full of hyper-correct forms: "She remained she, I I" (743); "who" is never used where "whom" is correct, "that" is never used for "which," prepositions are never dangled, infinitives are never split, and so forth. In adhering to a pedantically prescriptive grammar, Barth has created a voice which is emphatically un-

modern and unrealistic, stressing the archaic aspect of George's voice.

The most striking feature in the archaic component is one which Mercer mentions in passing but does not discuss in detail: syntactic parallelism. The novel's most memorable passages are characterized by a parallel syntactic construction. Geoffrey Leech has described the central role played by verbal parallelism in all ritualistic language, such as the Sermon on the Mount or liturgical language:

verbal parallelism says the same thing twice over: the expression hammers home the content. To this quality of "sound imitating sense," it owes its declamatory force, the power of emphasis which makes it a stock device of political oratory and of emotionally heightened language generally.¹⁶

Since George's narrative is the autobiography of a Messiah, it is apt that the emotional heightening power of parallelism is evoked so regularly. But note, in the following examples, how the heroic or archaic element of parallelism is balanced by, or synthesized with, a bathetic, low comic element, taking the absurdly solemn edge off George's self-glorifying:

I nonetheless demanded, blushing, to know what could be objected against as simple and intense a joy as Being, wherein every creature in the University clearly pleased? A mere couple of this to that, the business of a minute, but which lent zest to any idle pass or chance encounter; among strangers a courtesy, toward guests a welcome, between friends a bond. A meal's best dessert; a tale's best close. What hello more cordial, bye-bye more sweet? What gentler good-day or soothinger good-night? (76)

What was it I held, and called *Anastasia*? A slender bagful of meaty pipes and pouches, grown upon with hairs, soaked through with juices, strung up on jointed sticks, the whole thing pulsing, squirting, bubbling, flexing, combusting, and respiring in my arms; doomed soon enough to decompose into its elements, yet afflicted in the brief meanwhile with mad imaginings, so that, not content to

¹⁶Leech, p. 85.

jelly through the night and meld, ingest, divide, it troubled its sleep with dreams of *passédness*, of *love* ... (672).

A final area of expansion within Mercer's analysis is the set of relationships that exist among the various components of George's voice. More specifically, while the heroic, academic, and ironic components are in no clear way associated, there is a strong tie among the bathetic, goatish, and naive components. Much of the bathos in the novel is created through the medium of George's naive voice, and a significant part of his naivety stems from his upbringing as a goat. All three components would seem to be linked to a traditional device of satire, in which an innocent narrator unwittingly draws attention to a corrupt world by contrast (e.g., Huckleberry Finn), or in which a naive narrator illustrates the absurdity of the philosophy he espouses through his own naivety (e.g., *Candide* or *Gulliver's Travels*). This would suggest that in addition to the thematic functions of emphasizing human sexuality and establishing an ironic point of view, Barth's use of goatish and bathetic elements in George's voice serves a satiric or parodic, specifically a metafictional function. By making his narrator grow up thinking himself a goat, Barth is able to defamiliarize certain aspects of our everyday language, foreground them, make us see them again. Thus when George - as Billy Bocksfuss - urinates on a bush and is told by Lady Creamhair that "it's simply not nice to go to the bathroom where people can see" (58), he is puzzled: "This latter wanted some explaining; the ancient narratives had not taught me what *bathroom* meant, and given its definition I could still not grasp how one 'went to the bathroom' out-of-doors, where no bathroom was" (58-9). George speaks of "udderless women," compliments Anastasia on the formation of her teats, and inquires into her breeding and milk yield. By defamiliarizing our language from the perspective of a goat, Barth opens up new possibilities for verbal expression, and guides our perceptions of language in the direction he desires, toward

a franker, more goatlike acceptance of sexuality.

There is one more observation to make regarding the various components of George's voice. That is, while the archaic, bathetic, and goatish elements of the narrative serve to highlight it, the basic vehicle for the narrative, the foundation on which all the other components are built, is a relatively familiar form of academic writing: the writing of memoirs. George's style, for all its peculiarities and idiosyncracies, is essentially that of the memoirist, the polished, carefully balanced periodic prose style of a great man setting down his memoirs after a rich and active life. That this is at bottom a personalized and enriched mode of academic prose is made clear by the following excerpt:

The herflooiness of things, it developed, had a bearing upon Mr. Greene's return to Great Mall, and consisted of reverses both professional and domestic. He had in fact put home and business behind, and had now to choose whether to return or make the breach final. Yet things had not after all gone kerflooeey in an instant of time: rather they had slipped into that condition by degrees, over a period of many semesters (270).

The style is obviously academic here: "It developed," "had a bearing upon," "consisted of," the postmodification in "reverses both professional and domestic," "in fact," "rather," "by degrees," and "over a period." Unlike the scholar, however, the memoirist is not bound by strictures of neutrality and self-effacing objectivity, but must make his style personable and enjoyable, and George does this by coloring his style to suggest the style he is paraphrasing: "the kerflooiness of things." George's narrative voice is predominantly a parody of the style of autobiography or memoir; it is only on this stylistic foundation that his voice finds its various elements of heroic romance, bathetic comedy, goatish defamiliarization, and so on.

Barth's style in *Giles Goat-Boy*, then, is complex and multidimensional, serving primarily a metafictional function of parody and irony, but also, in George's narrative voice,

displaying signs of metaphysical concerns as well. The vehicle for all literature, of course, is language; and it is language that provides the key to the metaphor examined in the next chapters, the replacement of our universe with a University.

PART III "THE WAY IT *WAS*" AND "THE WAY IT *SHOULD* HAVE BEEN":
HISTORY AS SETTING

"It defied all narrative logic that a fearless geographer could survive every peril of storm and savage in his circumnavigating of the campus, only to succumb to a stupid illness during the last leg of the voyage; what mortal difference did it make that 'That's the way it *was*,' as Max insisted? It's not the way it *should* have been, and since names and dates were as beside the point for me as the color of Willie Gruff's eyes, I was inclined either to forget the whole business or amend it to suit my taste."

George in prepping, 116

PART III "THE WAY IT WAS" AND "THE WAY IT SHOULD HAVE BEEN":
HISTORY AS SETTING

Prolegomenon

Giles Goat-Boy is a novel that strives to be many things at once; and one of the things it strives to be is a *roman d clef*, or a comic imitation thereof. Fairly obviously, many of the characters in the novel are comic imitations of prominent people in the early sixties, such as John and Jackie Kennedy, Eisenhower, and Khrushchev. This is in fact a form of allegory, but a superficial one, and it constitutes the novel's most parodic allegorical level. And yet, as David Morrell's research shows, this was the element that the reading public initially found most attractive, and one of the factors that made *Giles Goat-Boy* a financial success. Morrell describes the adverse criticism leveled at the novel in reviews, and continues:

Yet these adverse reviews did have an immense positive effect on how well *Giles* sold. The dissenting critics, by concentrating on the most obvious allegory, convinced many book buyers that *Giles Goat-Boy* was almost purely a *roman d clef*, a novel in which real persons and actual events figure under disguise; a who's who contest. ... Partly on this basis, *Giles* attracted customers, just as novels by commercial writers like Harold Robbins are in demand partly because their main characters are admittedly

based on such public figures as Howard Hughes, Frank Sinatra, former television mogul James Aubrey, and the like. The rich seasoning of sex definitely helped also to promote the book. But readers who bought the book for these reasons very soon learned that the identification and the sex were only incidental to what *Giles* was about and lost interest. Other, more serious readers found the pattern of the book and its ideas hard to follow, and many of them gave the book up as well. It seems the least read of Barth's work.¹

The confusion of these readers is easy to understand. Provided the reader has a sense of humor which enjoys reading Rabelais, for example, the novel is a joy to read even without attempting to make sense of it; but the simplest explication of such a basic matter as the novel's relationship to our world, our reality, is a problematic affair. Is the University our universe? Or is it pure fantasy? Or if it is a little of each, to what extent are they mixed? Or if they are not mixed but superimposed, who precisely does that work? The realistically inclined reader may conclude that the novel is sheer fantasy; such an interpretation has been offered, for example, by Bernard Bergonzi: "In general Barth manifests a perfect contempt for humanity, which is perhaps the penalty for desiring to construct one's own model of reality; human life, being part of the original, rejected version, is inevitably swept aside."² Bergonzi makes explicit his prejudices against what he calls the "comic apocalyptic" school of contemporary fiction, which he says requires no more than "verbal skill and inventiveness and not much experience of life"³ - and suggests that Barth and Pynchon, his two examples, write fantasies out of a basic naivety, that if they only knew more about reality they would settle down and write "efficient,

¹Morrell, pp. 70-1.

²Bergonzi, p. 111. See also Dante Cantrill (p. 208): "Whereas Eben Cooke possesses a reasonable degree of reality and undergoes a recognizably-human experience, George Giles is pure fantasy, a mechanical re-enactment of systematic ideas in a surrealist world."

³Bergonzi, p. 118.

realistic" novels.⁴

Bergonzi's position is, of course, a commonsensical one: everyone knows what reality is like, and everyone knows that the purpose of the novel is to teach us about that reality; and if a given novel fails to address reality in a commonsensical way, or fails to portray reality in a way to which we are accustomed, it is simply an inferior work that might have been improved upon had the author had more skill. This commonsensical view is, however, questionable, at best, at worst comparable to the belief that the earth is flat. In the intellectual climate of the twentieth century, fiction can no longer be seen quite so blithely as a weaker version of something history does better; indeed, it now appears that history itself may be fictional. As Scholes and Kellogg note:

Science seems to have demonstrated that Aristotle's distinction between history and fiction was one of degree, not of kind. All knowing and all telling are subject to the conventions of art. Because we apprehend reality through culturally determined types, we can report the most particular event only in the form of a representational fiction, assigning motives, causes, and effects according to our best lights rather than according to absolute truth.⁵

The historian, much like the novelist, possesses in his organizing imagination a complex system of plotting and explanatory patterns, and in converting the chaotic mass of detail which is his source material into coherent history, in assigning motives and causes, he uses these patterns as ordering principles. Sheer facts do not constitute history; history must provide an interpretation through a careful selection and organization of the facts. This is essentially the same process as is undergone by a fiction writer when he organizes the chaotic details of experience into a fictional narrative. Northrup Frye, following F.H. Underhill, has termed the historian's explanation of history through the invention of

⁴Bergonzi, p. 118.

⁵Scholes and Kellogg, p. 151.

narrative patterns "metahistory,"⁶ and this term has provided the title for Hayden White's seminal work, *Metahistory*, in which he applies structuralist methods to the historiography of four nineteenth-century historians. White explains:

It is sometimes said that the aim of the historian is to explain the past by "finding," "identifying," or "uncovering" the "stories" that lie buried in chronicles; and that the difference between "history" and "fiction" resides in the fact that the historian "finds" his stories, whereas the fiction writer "invents" his. This conception of the historian's task, however, obscures the extent to which "invention" also plays a part in the historian's operations. ... In the chronicle, /the/ event is simply "there" as an element of a series; it does not "function" as a story element. The historian arranges the events in the chronicle into a hierarchy of significance by assigning events different functions as story elements in such a way as to disclose the formal coherence of a whole set of events considered as a comprehensible process with a discernible beginning, middle, and end.⁷

White's evidence is, in fact, incontrovertible; his work amply refutes the notion that history is, or should be, or can be, the objective record of absolute fact. History, as Scholes and Kellogg put it, is a subjective interpretation of the facts, presented in the form of representational fiction. If this is true, realism, like history, is but one of many alternative modes for portraying experience.

Moreover, if it is not possible to portray experience so as to be perfectly faithful to reality, neither can there be such a thing as pure fantasy. All fantasy, all the most distant reaches of the human imagination, are tied to our experience. Robert Scholes notes that "No man has succeeded in imagining a world free of connection to our experiential world, with characters and situations that cannot be seen as mere

⁶Angus Fletcher, "Utopian History and the Anatomy of Criticism." In Murray Krieger (ed.), *Northrup Frye in Modern Criticism: Selected Papers from the English Institute* (Columbia University Press, New York, 1966), p. 56.

⁷White, *Metahistory*, pp. 6-7.

inversions or distortions of that all too recognizable cosmos."⁸ And C.S. Lewis suggests: "Try to imagine a new primary color, a third sex, a fourth dimension, or even a monster which does not consist of bits of existing animals stuck together. Nothing happens."⁹ Our imaginations operate with a wealth of detail that is partly lifelike, partly unlikelike, and the two are never kept separate, but mix freely. History and realism consciously strive to pare this imaginative detail down to those items most resembling the world of the senses; fantasy, on the other hand, distances the sensory world and seeks to develop the world of the unlikelike. Literature has generally tended to fall between these two extremes; as Scholes observes, "All fiction contributes to cognition, then, by providing us with models which reveal the nature of reality by their very failure to coincide with it."¹⁰ Fiction is a complex mixture of the realistic and the fantastic: it seeks to create a new "model of reality," in Bergonzi's words, but that model is intended, at some level, to reflect back on reality in a cognitive way. Barth once remarked that "My argument is with the facts of life, not the conditions of it."¹¹ Realism concerns itself with the conditions of life; Barth re-creates the universe as a University, but returns, in his metaphysical vision of man's tragic mortality, to deal with the facts of life.

A further aspect of the fiction writer's traditional desire to create a new model of reality is that, paradoxically, the artistically re-created world inevitably *seems* more real than our own, a paradox Oscar Wilde observed long before postmodern fiction: "It is the function of literature to create, from the rough material of actual existence, a new world that will be more marvellous, more enduring, and more true than the world which common eyes look upon, and through which common natures

⁸Scholes, *Structural Fabulation*, p. 7.

⁹W.R. Lewis (ed.), *The Letters of C.S. Lewis* (Geoffrey Bles, London, 1966), p. 203 (February 20, 1943).

¹⁰Scholes, *Structural Fabulation*, p. 7.

¹¹Enck, p. 13.

seek to realise their perfection."¹² Life no more than hints at beauty, Wilde says; it is the artist's task to heighten these hints, order them, and thereby create a world more real than "reality" itself. In a published conversation, Barth and William Gass discuss this power of art to create an image of the world that is more real than reality. Gass claims that this is true because reality has a low ontological power to move us compared with fiction; fiction, which is a meaningfully ordered concentration of experience, takes on a greater ontological force, and thus the picture the writer paints is more striking and vivid than any painted by reality. A carrot, Gass explains, is by itself uninteresting; but if we stick the carrot in a snowman and call it a nose, we transform it ontologically, creating in the viewer both a shock of recognition and a new awareness of noses and carrots. This is what the fiction writer seeks to achieve as well: to transform our often uninteresting experiential world ontologically and make it striking and vivid - to defamiliarize familiar reality and make it real.¹³

In order to accomplish this, the writer of fiction must search his own experience as well as the experience of others as recorded and ordered in other literary works, for the kind of details which will lend themselves to this sort of ontological transformation; and then find some way of achieving the transformation which is fictionally resonant. This process necessarily involves a treatment which does an injustice to the original meaning or context of the details so used: the interests of fictional resonance and fidelity to life are normally, if not always, in direct conflict. But the writer's loyalty, should such a conflict arise, is, unlike the historian's, to his fiction, not to reality. Asked about his parodic use

¹²Quoted in A.E. Dyson, *The Crazy Fabric: Essays in Irony* (Macmillan, New York, 1966), p. 140.

¹³James McKenzie, "Pole-Vaulting in Top Hats: A Public Conversation with John Barth, William Gass, and Ishmael Reed." *Modern Fiction Studies* 22, no. 2 (Summer 1976), p. 143.

of the historical setting in *The Sot-Weed Factor*, Barth remarked:

The choice of place, for instance, in stories like that, as in many other aspects of writing fiction, I'm sure, is a compromise between facts that happen to be on hand and have a voltage that makes them appealing to your imagination, and the necessities of the imaginative project you've set yourself.¹⁴

Actually, this process is only a "compromise" from the historian's point of view; from the viewpoint of the fiction writer, it is only the arrangement necessary to the creation of a meaningful fictional structure. Talk of "divergence from the facts," then, in a fictional work, is a *non sequitur*: it assumes that there is a narrow path of realism from which to diverge, and there is not. The fiction writer creates his new model of reality as he chooses.

There is one further consideration to examine before turning to an analysis of Barth's parodic creation of historical setting in *Giles Goat-Boy*. If Barth wishes to reject the realistic approach associated with historiography, why does he deal with history at all? There are two answers to this question, one related to Barth's ironic-metaphysical designs, the other to his metaphysical content. First, Barth deals with history because in parodying it he can play with its patterns, defamiliarize them, and expose them to our consciousness. History is an imaginative collection of beliefs just as literature, mythology, and philosophy are, and as such it provides an interesting subject for metaphysical investigation. Second, history is, if fictional, still our only mode for determining and assimilating where we have been; and if we do not know where we have been, we cannot know where we are, or, much less, where to go next. "The culture of the past," Northrup Frye writes, "is not only the memory of mankind, but our own buried life, and study of it leads to a recognition scene, a

¹⁴McKenzie, p. 150.

discovery in which we see, not only our past lives, but the total cultural form of our present life."¹⁵ Barth expresses the importance of the same idea metaphorically:

There's a marine animal I'm fond of. (I don't think I invented him, though maybe I improved on him.) He's a crustacean who creates his spiral shell as he goes along. The materials he encounters are assimilated into it, and at the same time he more or less intuitively directs his path toward the kinds of material shells are best made of. How I love that animal! He's the perfect image for me. He moves at a snail's pace (and I do, too). He wears his history on his back all the time, but it's not just a burden; he's living in it. His history is his house. He's constantly adding new spirals, new rings - but they're not just repetition, for he's expanding logarithmically. Its volume becomes more capacious as new material is added from the present. What he comes across is cemented with his own juices (now I know I'm making him up), and yet it's not just blind aleatoric construction because of the instinct that guides him toward the appropriate stuff for his particular shell.¹⁶

In *The Sot-Weed Factor*, Barth attempted to bore down into the shell of his crustacean and study the texture of an innermost ring of the spiral; in *Giles Goat-Boy*, he considers the layer most recently laid down.¹⁷ Each approach has its own peculiar advantages and difficulties: the vast amount of research required in writing *The Sot-Weed Factor* was counterbalanced by the fact that the reader would not be likely to possess enough knowledge of the period to be able to accuse Barth of "distorting" history. This effectively freed his hands to do with the material as he liked (although apparently the source material was itself incredible enough to require very few alterations). *Giles Goat-Boy*, on the other hand, required no extensive research, since the most casual memory of current events from newspapers and television would easily

¹⁵Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 346.

¹⁶Gado, p. 129.

¹⁷Barth started writing the novel in January, 1962 (Morrell, p. 68), and the main action of the novel seems to begin in the equivalent of March of that year.

suffice. But here the reader was in a position to challenge Barth's portrayal of history - a challenge Barth anticipated comically by having his Editor A call "the interpretation of history shallow and patently biased" (xiii). At the same time, this very reaction could be used to advantage: a parody of history that outrages is naturally far more effective than a parody of history that is not even recognized as such.

But parody was not Barth's only objective in creating the historical setting. He also wanted to make the novel credible enough historically to convince the reader that this was no woolly fantasy (or not merely a woolly fantasy), but a story based solidly in the "facts," though not the "conditions," of our time. The characters of *Giles Goat-Boy*, while certainly not very much like people of our time, nevertheless experience their world with the same apocalyptic anxiety as we do in post-World War II mass society. Death and destruction threaten; mankind contrives masks and roles to conceal from itself its fear of annihilation; and gradually, reluctantly, individuals begin to grope toward patterns of thought which allow them both to cope with and to transcend apocalyptic fears. These metaphysical concerns underlie the entire narrative; and it is the historical level of the allegory which, despite its superficiality and parody, ties the story to our own existential state in the latter half of the twentieth century.

I propose to deal with the parodic historical allegory in three separate chapters. The first will consider the superficial equivalencies between University and universe, largely in terms of the fun Barth has had with the *roman d'clef*. The second will deal more deeply with Barth's re-creation of the mythic and semi-mythic American past in the figure of Peter Greene; and the third will approach the thematic concerns of Part V with an analysis of that dynamic aspect of the novel's historical setting which reflects George's philosophical misadventures, i.e., Lucius Rexford and the Boundary Dispute.

Chapter 1 The Universe and the University

In 1964, in his book *Waiting for the End*, Leslie Fiedler devoted an entire chapter to a genre he called the anti-college novel, which grew up in the nineteen-forties and -fifties as an indirect result of the mass migration of writers to the universities. Fiedler noted that with a few exceptions on the order of Nabokov's *Pale Fire* or Malamud's *A New Life*, the anti-college novel, unlike the anti-war novel of the twenties and the anti-Hollywood novel of the thirties, had failed: "we do not yet have a college novel to compare with West's account of the artist in Hollywood or with Hemingway's of the writer at war."¹ Fiedler considered various possible explanations, but found none to his satisfaction.

Perhaps Fiedler wrote too soon. For two years later, a college novel was published that was to fulfill all his requirements: Barth's *Giles Goat-Boy*. Like *Pale Fire* and *Lolita*, Barth's novel had a university setting but did not focus its thematic concerns on faculty squabbles and sexual escapades with students, which Fiedler noted was one of the most debilitating aspects of the college novel in its commonest form. Indeed, the book was as much a parody of the college novel of the forties and fifties as it was of the *roman à clef* and of the realistic novel in general. While Mailer was busy parodying the crime novel and Pynchon the sleuthing novel, Barth took on the college novel and, in so doing, created a brilliant specimen of the genre he was parodying.

Barth's inspiration was in part linguistic: the similarity of the words "universe" and "university" suggested a metaphorical association of the two, and this association became the basis for the novel's setting. George Giles lives in a University which *is* our universe, a place of infinite space filled with campuses (planets) other than our own, and itself perhaps

¹Leslie Fiedler, *Waiting for the End* (Stein and Day, New York, 1970), p. 140.

only one of a great many universities: "And Max maintained - but how was one to swallow it? - that our whole University was but one among an infinitude of others, perhaps quite similar, perhaps utterly different, whose existence in the fenceless pastures of reality, while as yet unconfirmed, had perforce to be assumed" (267). Robert Scholes offers an excellent introduction to the multiple significances of this metaphor in *The Fabulators*:

But there is a meaningful connection between these two worlds. If the universe means *everything* - our whole world from the innermost piece of the smallest particle, outward to the ends of space, including those heavenly and hellish realms discerned only by poets and prophets - then the university means the place where *everything* is present as an object of inquiry and concern. For the thoughtful person, the world *is* a university, and his education always in process. For Barth, the university must have had the great virtue of including everything, already organized in terms of inquiry and quest. And beyond that, the American university of the present, though it strives to preserve an atmosphere of critical scrutiny and contemplation, is by no means an Arcadia studded with ivory towers where detached mandarins think beautiful thoughts. Despite its heritage from pagan academies and Christian cloisters, the modern American university is a brawling market place where CIA men mingle with student leftists, and careering business majors jostle with poets and painters. Not only is a university involved in the study and practice of politics in the statewide, national, and international spheres; it has its own internal politics, too. At some points, in fact, the two begin to merge. Men move back and forth between university posts and positions in government with increasing freedom. Concepts like "multiversity" emphasize this particular penetration. And when a new governor of our most populous state, a man with Presidential aspirations, makes his first significant official act the firing of the head of that state's university system, who can say that the world is not in the university and the university in the world? Is it precisely because the directors of universities, foundations, and corporations have become virtually interchangeable with high government officials - many of them serving Caesar and Socrates almost simultaneously - that Barth is able to get so much allegorical leverage from his selection of the university as his universe.²

²Scholes, *The Fabulators*, pp. 146-7.

The use of the university as setting in the novel has the further advantage that a university is a place of intellectual concerns, and intellectual concerns, ideas, philosophical concepts occupy a central position in all Barth's fiction. The importance of this element in guiding Barth's selection of setting becomes clear if we compare the novel's University to the baseball stadiums of Malamud's *The Natural* or Coover's *Universal Baseball Association*. Barth, Malamud, and Coover were all interested in creating stories that comically imitated certain mythological and ritualistic patterns, specifically the hero myth in Barth and Malamud's case. Baseball provided the perfect comic setting for Coover and Malamud because, as Earl Wasserman has demonstrated, baseball is one of the most, possibly *the* most ritualistic activity in America, and has itself developed a hero mythology.³ This consideration would be significant in Barth's creation of setting as well, were it not for the fact that baseball is an entirely unintellectual activity, even an anti-intellectual activity. Coover successfully skirts this problem by making his protagonist a statistician who *creates* the baseball game with dice, but even this solution allows only limited intellectual concerns. The university, while it has not the ritualistic force of baseball, was better suited to Barth's purpose in that it permitted the development of an entire range of philosophical and other intellectual considerations.

The other side to the universe-university metaphor is that, while the novel's University is *like* our universe, it ultimately is *not* that universe. This is established in J.B.'s Cover-Letter, where Giles Stoker tells his host: "I'm not from this campus /planet/ (you've guessed that already). My alma mater is New Tammany College - you couldn't have heard of it, it's in a different university /universe/ entirely" (xxx).

³Earl Wasserman, "*The Natural*: World Ceres." In Leslie A. Field and Joyce W. Field (eds.), *Bernard Malamud and the Critics* (New York University Press, New York, 1970), pp. 45-7.

J.B. also checks on the possibility of there existing a computer so sophisticated as to be able to write the *R.N.S.*, and is told by a cybernetics expert that while the possibility exists, no such computer has yet been built. And having checked on Giles Stoker, he discovers that "no such name is in our Student Directory, nor is a 'New Tammany College' listed in the roll of accredited institutions of higher learning" (xxxv). The otherworldly setting of the novel, then, serves to establish it as science fiction: Giles Stoker is an interplanetary apostle of Gilesianism who has "other colleges to visit - even other universities" (xxxiv).

This science-fiction setting, while it is given no particular emphasis in the novel, opens up several interesting possibilities for Barth. Science fiction is, first of all, rigorously unrealistic, and the renaming of our universe in University terms frees Barth to write his story as he likes without the restraints of lifelikeness. Moreover, by parodying an unrealistic genre like science fiction, Barth is able to focus metafictionally on the overall problem of mimesis in fiction, much as Nabokov does in his own parody of science fiction, his story called "Lance."⁴ Another parallel in this sense is a science fiction novel by Barry N. Malzberg called *The Destruction of the Temple*, which shares with *Giles Goat-Boy* the re-creation of the Kennedy period (not from the spatial distance of another universe, as in *Giles*, but from the temporal distance of 53 years in the future), and also the self-conscious artifice. Malzberg's novel employs the sci-fi props that make surface realism unnecessary - the futuristic setting, complete with the ruins of New York City ' and he successfully dissolves both time and realistic preconceptions by making Kennedy's 1963 assassination and its 2116 reenactment equally "real" within the novel, and therefore equally fictitious.

In order to illustrate what *Giles Goat-Boy* is not, we

⁴Vladimir Nabokov, "Lance." In *Stories from the New Yorker 1950-1960* (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1965), pp. 17-28.

might compare it to another novel that questions the validity of realism through rigorous fantasy: C.S. Lewis' *That Hideous Strength*. This novel begins with a superficially realistic university setting, and then gradually widens its perspective to include a larger, supernatural reality appropriate to Lewis' Christian vision. Realism is naive in Lewis' view because it only touches on surface appearances, on the shard of matter called Earth which is but a tiny part of a divinely planned cosmos. Barth, on the other hand, takes a superficially fantastic university setting and ties it, albeit paradoxically, to our world, saying that while we cannot know anything definite about the world and our lives in that world, we have nothing else and should attempt to understand what we have. Fantasy for Lewis serves a metaphysical function; for Barth, it serves a purely metafictional one, pointing up the artifice in *all* our visions of reality.

The universe-university metaphor stands at the furthest metafictional edge of the novel's historical allegory, and thus specializes in exuberant parodies of the traditional components of historically-based realism: "real" places, "real" people, and "real" events. I begin, then, with a discussion of the novel's comic creation of setting in this order: places, people, and events.

The geography of New Tammany College corresponds, at the simplest level, not to the United States of America, but to the specific university campus on which Barth based his novel's setting: the campus of the Pennsylvania State University. As David Morrell describes it,

Readers from Penn State had one other extra-literary reason to be intrigued by *Giles Goat-Boy*. Nearly all of it was written while Barth was teaching English there (he moved to teach English at The State University of New York at Buffalo in the fall of 1965), and he used the Penn State campus as the source for his book's geography: East and West Campus, the bell tower, the infirmary, the prominent mall, the goatbarns far off from the center of campus, the motto inscribed in the stone front of the library "A True University is a Collection of Books," the elevator in the core of the library, the immense confusing registration, the omnipresent computer. Barth lived near the man in

charge of Penn State's goatbarns. He remembered that Milton Eisenhower was President of Penn State while his brother Dwight was President of the United States, and he combined them into the character of Reginald Hector, former Chancellor of New Tammany College.⁵

In terms of our world, West Campus is obviously Western Europe and North America, East Campus Eastern Europe and Asia. The novel simplifies both regions somewhat: West Campus colleges mentioned in the book include only New Tammany and Siegfried (Germany), and possibly New Moishe (Israel), which in our own terminology is neither east nor west but Mid-East. No allusion is made to Great Britain, France, Spain, Italy, or the Nordic countries. East Campus colleges include Nikolay (the Soviet Union), T'ang (China), Siddhartha (India), and Amaterasu (Japan). This list lacks the Soviet satellite countries as well as various Asian third-world countries. Africa appears as Frumentius, but it is not made clear whether it belongs to East or West Campus; and no mention is made at all of South America or Australia. The novel's geography is, then, reduced in size compared to our world, a fact which appears in other ways as well: Lucius Rexford, for example, as Chancellor of New Tammany, addresses a large portion of the students and teachers in the college personally in his Matriculation Day speech, and George is able to buttonhole Rexford and Classmate X at the Boundary Symposium - both unthinkable events when applied to Kennedy and Khrushchev. This spatial reduction serves much the same metafictional function as does Swift's reduction and enlargement of humans in *Gulliver's Travels*: by creating a new and unrealistic perspective on our familiar environment, Barth makes us see it afresh.

Within New Tammany College, Great Mall is a capital city which combines Washington, D.C., and New York, the location of the United Nations building. The White House seems to be divided into two separate buildings in the novel: into Tower Hall, the location of the "administration" or our White House Office, and used generically as we use "the White House" to

⁵Morrell, pp. 70-1n.

refer to the administration; and the Chancellor's residence, commonly called the Light House. Like Kennedy, Rexford keeps the Light House illuminated at night; as a result of George's first two rounds of Tutoring, however, Rexford turns the lights off, an event with symbolic significance in the novel, which in turn suggests Pat Moynihan's — himself one of Rexford's "forelocked aides" — description of Johnson's residence in the White House:

There was one thing I always resented about Lyndon Johnson — that shortly after he took over in the White House, he ordered the floodlights that illuminate it turned off. He said it was an economy measure. And everybody thought this was clever. Half the fathers in this country go around telling their children, "Will you turn out the goddamn lights in the closet?" I resented it bitterly. I took it as a sort of symbolic action of the lights going out. And I don't like government where the lights are out.⁶

Several other buildings in Great Mall are also familiar landmarks, such as the University Council Building (the U.N. building) and the Political Science Cube (the Pentagon).

Most of the correspondences between people in the novel and people in our world have been discussed by Robert Scholes, John Tilton, and David Morrell;⁷ what I shall do is to describe some of the ways in which Barth works his correspondences.

Rexford, of course, imitates John F. Kennedy, and his wife imitates Jackie. Ira Hector describes Rexford as having inherited his wealth, and as therefore likely to put principle before interest (183), which is in fact a sentiment that was felt about Kennedy. Rexford is also, like Kennedy, sexually active, with a strong inclination to covet his brother's wife, Anastasia. Rexford's brother, or half-brother, Maurice Stoker, is head of the New Tammany secret service, and his relation to Chancellors is described as follows: "even the

⁶Richard Meryman, "Playboy Interview: Pat Moynihan." *Playboy*, March 1977, p. 73.

⁷Scholes, *The Fabulators*, pp. 152-5; John Tilton, "Giles Goat-Boy: An Interpretation," *Bucknell Review* 18, no. 1 (1970), pp. 93-119; Morrell, pp. 70-1.

best-intentioned, most high-minded administrators ... seemed unable to do without Maurice Stoker; fear and despise him as they might, all came at last to terms with him" (166). In this, though in no other respects, Stoker suggests J. Edgar Hoover, head of the F.B.I.

Among scientists, Max Spielman clearly suggests both Einstein and Robert J. Oppenheimer. Max, like Einstein, grew up in Siegfried or Germany, where he played the violin (124); he did all his most important scientific work in the space of a few months (43), just as Einstein published his four most important papers in 1905; both escaped Nazi Germany to America, where they became known for their contributions to the atomic bomb or EAT, and also for their humanitarian views. And Max, like Oppenheimer, lost his security clearance during the Eisenhower/Hector administration due to suspicions of Communist or Student-Unionist sympathies. One of the key figures in the Oppenheimer scandal was Edward Teller, the "father of the hydrogen bomb," who is imitated in the book in the figure of Eblis Eierkopf. Like Eierkopf, Teller came to America from Germany, and although he never was a Nazi, he was and is an outspoken opponent of Soviet Russia and an equally outspoken advocate of nuclear weaponry as a deterrent to the Soviet threat, both of which characteristics are repeated in Eierkopf.⁸ A third scientist in the novel is Chementinski, who stole the secret of EAT and defected with it to Nikolay College: he is a parody of Klaus Fuchs, the scientist who took the secret of the atomic bomb to the Soviet Union. As a high-ranking official in the Nikolay government, Chementinski assumes the name Classmate X, and becomes a parody of Khrushchev, although physically, "a slight and pinched man" (506), he does not greatly resemble the Soviet leader. Classmate X's stepson, Leonid Alexandrov, suggests Khrushchev's son-in-law Aleksei Adzubei, especially in his excitable nature. Pierre Salinger describes Adzubei in his memoir of Kennedy:

⁸Gina Berkowitz, "Playboy Interview: Edward Teller." *Playboy*, August 1979, pp. 59-60.

Adzubei had a fierce temper. At the Austrian Youth Festival in 1959 he got into a violent argument with an American.

"You Americans are finished and you don't know it," he shouted. "We are so strong we could crush you like this " And he broke the neck off a wine bottle.⁹

Leonid, of course, excitable as he is, is normally affable and easy-going; but at the end of the novel he and Peter Greene get into an argument over Anastasia and cut each other's eyes out with broken liquor bottles.

The last character in the book that is clearly recognizable as a parody of a real person is The Living Sakhyan, who "had been rescued from the East-Campus Student-Unionists by his protégés" (308), just as the Dalai Lama, the spiritual leader of the Tibetan Buddhists, fled his country to the United States in 1959, when Mao took over. Various other correspondences have been suggested, such as Timothy Leary and Norman O. Brown for Dr. Sear, or Bernard Baruch for Ira Hector.

An interesting question related to the novel's comic imitation of various post-World War II political events is the extent to which the dates match. Barth gives the reader just enough carefully planted hints to determine George's precise age and the precise day of the year for all of the central events in the novel (see Chronology, Appendix 4), but pairing these up with the equivalent dates in history is another matter. Hints are given here as well; but while the time-sequence of George's life is highly consistent, the historical development of his surroundings is riddled with inconsistencies, both with regard to our world and internally.

The most obvious touchstone is Rexford's term of office, during which most of the novel takes place: we cannot go too far wrong if we tentatively place the period from George's

⁹Pierre Salinger, *With Kennedy* (Avon, New York, 1966), p. 238.

departure to his enlightenment in the Kennedy years, between 1961 and 1963. Yet here our first inconsistency arises: while at one point we hear Anastasia say she married Stoker "a couple of years ago" (188), just after Rexford's election to office - corroborating my tentative dating, and even pin-pointing the year of narration to 1962 - at another Max explains that Rexford took office just after George's birth, not two but 20 years before (103). And in fact Rexford is still Chancellor when George predicts his own death, some 12 years after the novel's main action.

Nevertheless, other historical landmarks are given us. First, in the Livestock Library scene, when Max relates the history of the past 20 years to the then 14-and-a-half-year-old George, we are given the following information: (a) the Amaterasus were EATen 10 years before (89); (b) G. Herrold was EATen in WESCAC's Belly some 14 years before, rescuing George (84); and (c) the Bonifacists attacked the neighboring quads 20 years earlier (85). Counting from the date of the Hiroshima bombing, August 6, 1945, we may set the year of Max's library narration as 1955, and the year of George's birth as 1940; and while Hitler did not actually attack his neighbors until 1938, there was an attempted Nazi coup in Austria as early as July, 1934, lending this reference a rough accuracy as well. By this reckoning, the year George turns 22 - his age at enlightenment - would be 1962, as estimated.

Second, the current events in the papers during George's Tutoring clearly correspond to actual events that took place during Kennedy's term of office, including suggestions of the recent Berlin Wall crisis (August, 1961) and new Soviet atmospheric testing of nuclear weapons (September, 1961, and March, 1962). Rexford's March speech announcing the resumption of New Tammany ANTEATER testing corresponds to Kennedy's March 2, 1962, speech announcing the resumption of U.S. atmospheric ABM testing. In that same speech Kennedy promised to take up the matter again at the 17-nation United Nations disarmament conference in Geneva on March 19; Rexford promises to take it

up in the U.C. Boundary Symposium with Nikolay College later that same day. If, as it seems from the above, George turns 22 in the equivalent of December, 1962, his predicted death at age 33 and a third would occur in April, 1974.¹⁰

This is clearly the most satisfactory matching of dates in the novel's historical metaphor. Yet there is another set of historical references which conflicts with this reading. First, G. Herrold could not have been EATEN in rescuing George from the Belly of WESCAC in the equivalent of 1940, since EAT was not developed until the end of the Riot, five years later. Second, the Cum Laude project that ultimately created the GILES was initiated after the Riot, during the equivalent to Joseph McCarthy's Red scare (99-101), in the early 1950's, and George was born after the end of the scare (103) - i.e., after McCarthy's Senate censure in 1954. Max was defrocked and exiled to the goatbarns at about the same time, as a "Student-Unionist," victim to the novel's equivalent to McCarthyism. Shortly after George's birth, Lucius Rexford is elected Chancellor (still some five or six years before Kennedy), and invites Max back from the goatbarns, but Max refuses, staying instead to rear the infant George as a goat. This second series of dates in effect constitutes a *parallel* chronology, which clashes with the former at several points:

¹⁰ *LETTERS* further ties the action of *Giles Goat-Boy* to 1962, as Jerome Bray, the insane descendent of Harold Bray who claims Barth pirated his authentic manuscript of the *R.N.S.*, writes in a letter dated March 9, 1969: "Nearly 7 years have passed since the *true* Giles delivered to our trust the Revised New Syllabus of his ascended father Harold Bray, Grand Tutor of the universal University" (L, 30). If Bray was routed on the equivalent of December 21, 1962, he could have read *his* sacred book into WESCAC (as George did 12 years later) in the autumn, and "the *true* Giles" (Bray's son?) could have brought the manuscript to Jerome Bray (J.B.) immediately following the rout. Interestingly, Jerome Bray also points out that Barth published *Giles Goat-Boy* on the anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima, 21 years later (L, 638).

Figure 2: *The parallel conflicting chronologies of New Tammany history*

A	B
Bonifacists attack (1934-8)	Bonifacists attack
George born (1940)	
G. Herrold EATen	
(1945)	EAT developed Amaterasus EATen
(early 1950's)	Student-Unionist witch-hunts Cum Laude Project Max exiled
(1954)	witch-hunts over George born G. Herrold EATen Rexford elected
George 14½ (1955)	
Max tells about past	
Rexford elected (1960)	
George 21-22 (1962)	
main action	
(1969)	George 14½ Max tells about past
George predicts death (1974)	
(1976)	George 21-22 main action
(1988)	George predicts death

If, as in Chronology B, George is born in 1954, the main action of the novel would not take place until 1976 - not very likely, certainly, in light of the events linking it to the early sixties, but this causes no *logical* inconsistency. Barth is in control of his own novel. The difficulty is that the two chronologies are mutually inconsistent: in one the Amaterasus are EATen five years after George's birth, in the other ten years before.

Now Barth, a meticulous planner of his novels, must certainly have been aware of the inconsistency; why, then, did he allow it to remain? Why not simply hold to Chronology A, since that brought the main action of the novel into the Kennedy period? The reason, I suggest, was that Barth wanted to have WESCAC develop the power to EAT only at the close of Campus Riot Two, to correspond to nuclear weaponry. In this way EAT could represent the threat of imminent annihilation that is the bane of post-World War II civilization, and George, the mythological world-redeeming hero, could be born in response to that threat. But if George must be born after 1945 to suit the hero myth, he would still be too young in 1962 to suit Barth's thematic purposes; and given the choice between sacrificing temporal consistency and severely limiting the novel's thematic power, Barth rightly chose the former. A serious novel depends for its seriousness on the thematic reverberations it creates; and a few trifling dates are nothing compared to this. Barth, being neither historian nor writer of popular historical novels, need not worry about chronological accuracy and consistency: dates in fiction, whether consistent or not, are but artifice, to be manipulated as the writer chooses. In terms of Barth's overall fictional aims, of course, it would have been more consistent to make the characters of his novel *aware* of the chronological inconsistencies (George to Max: "But Max, didn't you just say that ... ?"). This approach would have made the artifice part of the point, in Barth's own words. As it stands now, the novel's chronological development looks simply like a mistake.

Looking more carefully at only those historical events which form part of the background for the main action of the novel, one significant problem in the air during the Kennedy period was the difficulty experienced in persuading the Soviets to allow outside supervision of disarmament. This is mentioned in the novel: "But the Nikolayans refused to admit outside surveyors, even from 'neutral' colleges, to enter their Control Room, calling the proposal a mere pretext for cribbing secrets" (489). This problem was one of the reasons for the

Summit meeting between Kennedy and Khrushchev on June 3 and 4, 1961, just as Rexford meets Classmate X at the U.C. Symposium. The Vienna Summit meeting was a relative failure, as hostilities were if anything increased rather than decreased; so also does Rexford's meeting with Classmate X turn into a fiasco, thanks largely to George. The comedy of this scene in *Giles Goat-Boy* is greatly enhanced if one imagines the solemnity, the polite phrases of Kennedy and Khrushchev in Vienna, and then a shaggy young man racing about wildly in a hospital gown haranguing the principals.

Pierre Salinger writes that "the two leaders left farther apart than ever on the most explosive issue - Germany,"¹¹ and the Berlin Wall crisis is mentioned in the novel as well:

For many terms, he said, students and staff from the westernmost East-Campus colleges had "transferred" freely in large numbers, without authorization, across the line to West Campus. More recently, EASCAC had read out that any further unauthorized transferees would be EATEN at the line, - and only the sick or feeble-minded were ever authorized (488).

EASCAC's announcement corresponds to the building of the Berlin Wall in August, 1961; the Western tanks that were called in to stop the construction of the wall take the form of WESCAC's threat to EAT Nikolay if any EAT-waves cross the border, and EASCAC responds in kind. The situation is extremely sensitive, and both sides fear that some minor incident will provoke all-out war. Rexford's aide tells George that "any such incident, both sides feared, might touch off Campus Riot III, the end of the University" (488-9), and Kennedy's press secretary Pierre Salinger writes, "It was JFK's private assessment that the odds were one in five that the Wall and our reaction to it might have ignited World War III."¹²

Another current issue alluded to in the novel is the con-

¹¹Salinger, p. 228.

¹²Salinger, p. 244.

troversty over nuclear testing, briefly mentioned above. Rexford's March announcement of resumed EAT-tests, corresponding to Kennedy's March 2, 1962 announcement of resumed ABM testing, is headlined in a newspaper George reads, and the same newspaper contains references to other current events:

HIGHWAY DEATHS TO BREAK CARNIVAL RECORD, SAFETY COUNCIL WARNS; REXFORD TO ANNOUNCE NEW EAT-TESTS TO UNIVERSITY COUNCIL; TENSION MOUNTS ALONG POWER LINE; THOUSANDS MASSACRED IN FRUMENTIAN INTRAMURAL RIOTS; FAMINE SPREADS IN T'ANG; FLOODWATERS RISE IN SIDDARTHA; NTC RAPE-RATE UP 4 POINTS (308).

Here we have a number of actual events in fictional form: in addition to the ABM testing, there are the continued difficulties on the Berlin Wall, the fighting in the Congo over the secession of Katanga province (December, 1961), the famine in China (December, 1961 to May, 1962), and the flooding in India (November, 1961). This is topical detail of a highly specific and apparently gratuitous nature; if Barth is not interested in historical accuracy, why this detail? The context of the headlines partially explains it: the humorous improbability of "NTC RAPE-RATE UP 4 POINTS," for example, juxtaposed with the detailed factuality of the references to Katanga, China, and India, undermines the credibility of both. Barth's historical detail serves a primarily metafictional function of parodying the demand in history and historical novels for minute factual accuracy.

One way to illustrate the nature of Barth's use of history in the novel is to point out some of the significant events in the Kennedy period that Barth did not use: the troubles in Cuba, for instance, at the Bay of Pigs in 1961 and the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, or the significant achievements in space, with a Soviet manned flight in April, 1961, Alan Shepherd's suborbital flight in May, 1961, John Glenn's orbit of the earth in February, 1962, and Scott Carpenter's flight in May, 1962. Both Cuba and the space race, however, are in

one sense redundant, since both constitute further examples of the East-West confrontation so much more handily illustrated in the Berlin Wall crisis. On the other hand, a flight into space might have opened up interesting thematic possibilities. Nabokov's narrator in "Lance" notes that "Deep in the human mind, the concept of dying is synonymous with that of leaving the earth. To escape its gravity means to transcend the grave, and a man upon finding himself on another planet has really no way of proving to himself that he is not dead - that the naive old myth has not come true."¹³ Barth might, had he so chosen, have developed the space race into interesting areas of realism and science fiction, or he might have sent George into space to deal with the question of life after death; but in fact this would probably have been distracting thematically. Barth is ultimately interested in our lives here on earth, not in space, not in the supernatural. His parody of history and the historical novel serves to point up the problematics of understanding and presenting history, but we should not conclude that he disbelieves in the reality of history and its protagonist, man. Human existence is at the center of his serious - though tentative - metaphysical vision.

Four further aspects of the universe-university metaphor in the novel - religion, money, technology, and the university milieu - involve a somewhat more complex relationship between our world and George's. In his comic imitation of Christianity, for example, Barth has not used the simple one-to-one correspondence model utilized in political history, where the President of the United States equals the Chancellor of New Tammany College. Partly, of course, this sort of correspondence is drawn: the Christian Church in the novel is called the Enochist fraternity, and the YMCA is referred to as the Junior Enochist League Inn, or JELI. More important than this, however, Barth has taken our present notions of academic success in terms of passage and failure and, through an ingenious parodic etiology,

¹³Nabokov, "Lance," p. 26.

suggested that these notions are but the atavistic secular survivals of earlier sacred concepts of salvation and damnation. Thus registration and matriculation formerly meant the entrance into a chosen elect, and graduation or commencement admission into heaven; since then, however, these rituals have become secularized:

Today it was strictly forbidden in the by-laws of colleges such as NTC to disqualify a man for matriculation and campus office by reason of his pedagogical beliefs, and in lieu of the old Degrees of Wisdom, the administration conferred upon anyone who completed his course-work successfully and passed certain "technical examinations" a Certificate of Proficiency in the Field; such men were called "graduates," were said to have "commenced," and were eligible either for employment in their "fields" or for further study beyond the C.P.F., at the end of which they became "professors" in their own right - a far cry from the original meanings of those terms! (296-7)

This establishes a web of meaning far more complex than the simple correspondence between Christian Church and Enochist fraternity could have done. By suggesting that our concepts of passing and failing are the atavistic survivals of outworn religious categories, Barth creates an etiological myth, which explains the present by reinventing the past. Modern educated man is driven by a need to "pass," to succeed in life, and by a fear of failure, although there seems to be no rational explanation for this drive. In *Giles Goat-Boy* the drive is placed in a fictional context that gives it meaning, that highlights its importance in our own lives, and thus, through the ontological heightening power of fiction, it becomes real to us. Here, then, is a comically portrayed but tentatively serious metaphysical aspect of the historical metaphor.¹⁴

¹⁴Olderman (p. 86) has excellently described the significance of the emphasis placed in George's world on "passing": "to 'Pass' or to 'Fail' means to arrive at certain abstract states of grace or damnation, but as secular equivalents for religious concepts the words have no meaning because they are tied to no real value system. Passing represents that longing in us to 'make it,' to get a good grade in life-living so we can, for some reason unknown to us, have a better record than the other guy. Knowledge has replaced religion and mythology,

A more parodic aspect of the religious metaphor appears in the figure of Harold Bray, the false Grand Tutor, whom John Tilton has persuasively associated with the Christian Church. Bray's Certifications from the Bible indiscriminately promise salvation to all, and he "satisfies the people's desire for mystery and for miracles as signs of supernatural agency beyond their world."¹⁵ He "establishes himself as an authoritarian figure and father image" who represents conventional morality;¹⁶

And like the church, Bray forms an alliance with the government and is granted recognition, powers, and privileges on the tacit assumption that he will in no way disturb or contravene established domestic or international policies; and to him, like the church, is committed the supervision not only of religious services but of the educational system as well. Bray's power over New Tammany is an apt representation of ecclesiastical power.¹⁷

The secularization process of salvation into proficiency and power is paralleled by another, equally complex association in the novel: that between knowledge and money. In the University, knowledge *is* money, and thus private enterprise becomes "private education" and free enterprise "free research," and capitalism becomes "Informationalism" or the hoarding of information, and the Industrial Revolution the "Informational Revolution." Thus also Ira Hector, the richest and stingiest man on campus, is most visibly stingy with his knowledge of the time of day. Barth has deliberately allowed certain inconsistencies to remain here: if Ira Hector is the richest man

and has produced a consciousness that is not content to simply *be*, but seeks to *pass*. ... Barth's parody of passing and failing demonstrates what proportions the American Dream has shrunk to - aspiration in a world with no values and no ends becomes an end in itself, a substitute for meaningful life."

¹⁵Tilton, p. 99.

¹⁶Tilton, p. 100.

¹⁷Tilton, p. 100.

on campus, he should also be the most knowledgeable, while aside from the time of day he has very little knowledge at all; Peter Greene, too, is described as rich, and he is one of the most ignorant characters in the novel, whereas the knowledgeable Max is penniless. These inconsistencies serve to allow flexibility in characterization: it would have restricted development of character unnecessarily had the richest and most powerful people on campus also been the most intelligent (though it certainly would have been unrealistic enough to suit Barth's tastes). At the same time, Barth had much to gain in terms of fictional resonance by making knowledge equivalent to money. Not only is knowledge an important currency in any university, but in information theory information is one of the mainstays of society:

An environment is a field of energy that supports the individual organism; information is the individual's means of storing energy and thereby controlling his relationship with the environment. Since information is a control of energy, a society is only as large as its capacity to store information. The grain stored in the Sumerian temple depended upon that urban society's ability to record and distribute that energy through the new informational system of cuneiform. Tribal man's memory is prodigious, but the amount of information an urban society can control is thousands of times greater. Yet individual man pays a price for this new collective achievement, for in many ways the move from individuals to institutions is a fall from unity to multiplicity.¹⁸

In an important sense, then, in human society information is capital, and Barth's metaphorical link between information and money serves to highlight that fact fictionally. Significantly, in modern industrial society we store our information not in cuneiform but in computers, and in *Giles Goat-Boy* the automatic computer is the final controller of all existent information, even to the point of writing the narrative itself.

¹⁸William Irwin Thompson, *At the Edge of History: Speculations on the Transformation of Culture* (Harper and Row, New York, 1971), pp. 110-1.

This leads us to the next metaphorical aspect on the novel's historical level, which is technology. Except for WESCAC, George's University is technologically rather backward compared to present-day industrial society: their most sophisticated weapon, apart from EAT, is the pistol, and their most sophisticated means of transportation is the motorcycle - no automobiles, no airplanes, no space rockets, no napalm or plastic explosives. But WESCAC makes up in technological sophistication for what the University otherwise lacks. WESCAC can think like a human, but with such greater speed and sophistication that it amounts almost to the mind of God; and despite the sham existence of governments and academic institutions, all political and educational control of life in the University is in the hands, so to speak, of WESCAC.

This sense of technological control of our lives, particularly in the form of computers, is universal in modern society. Leo Marx points out in *The Machine in the Garden* that technology has always been viewed with both fascination and alarm, and notes that in the nineteenth century the locomotive was the primary symbol for technology;¹⁹ in our day the central symbol would be the computer. What makes this symbol of technology even more awesome than the locomotive is that where the locomotive was superior to but different from man, the computer is both superior to him and *like* him, creating the pervasive sense that the computer is an improvement on *homo sapiens* - and, by implication, that the latter is now obsolete. Langdon Winner, in his recent book entitled *Autonomous Technology: Technics-out-of-Control as a Theme in Political Thought*, notes that some thinkers see this development as a positive advancement along a technological evolution toward a Nietzschean superman:

Support for this hypothesis is found in what its prophets

¹⁹Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1964), e.g., pp. 27, 191.

believe to be the convergence of men and machines. Machines, computers in particular, are becoming more and more human and are, according to some estimates, on the verge of a consciousness and intelligence of their own. Human beings, on the other hand, are becoming more and more like the cyborgs - cybernetic organisms - of science fiction. They now require an increasing number of technical support systems to keep them running efficiently: cardiac pacemakers, artificial kidneys, computer-aided systems of inquiry, and so on. Eventually there will be a kind of total man-machine symbiosis in which the organic parts of the human being will be grafted directly to highly sophisticated, miniaturized technological organs, which will assist in all physical and intellectual functions. The world will enter a state in the development of consciousness and physical performance much advanced over anything in our experience.²⁰

This advanced evolutionary creature could almost be Harold Bray, the spooky symbiosis of man and machine who can appear and disappear at will and defy the laws of gravity, and who ejaculates a thick substance like motor oil - no wonder he is seen as the Messiah!

The other side to this argument is the more common fear of technology, and this position was especially current among university students in the sixties, when Barth was writing his novel. In December, 1964, for example, when Barth was three years into the writing of his novel, Mario Savio gave his famous speech on the steps of Sproul Hall at Berkeley, in words that could have been spoken by the young George Goat-Boy:

There is a time when the machine becomes so odious, makes you so sick at heart that you can't take part; you can't even passively take part, and you've got to put your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels, upon the levers, upon all the apparatus and you've got to make it stop. And you've got to indicate to the people who run it, to the people who own it, that unless you're free, the machine will be prevented from working at all.²¹

²⁰Langdon Winner, *Autonomous Technology: Technics-out-of-Control as a Theme in Political Thought* (Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, Cambridge, 1977), pp. 58-9.

²¹Quoted in Winner, p. x.

In precisely the same way, George's intended hero-work when he leaves the goatbarns is to enter WESCAC's Belly, even self-sacrificially, and change its AIM to prevent its EATING mankind - or, barring that, to pull its plug. In this intention George is a child of the student rebellion in the 1960's; his ultimate vision, however, transcends this naively quixotic position for a mature resignation to things that cannot be changed.

The 1960's student rebellion also appears, in embryonic form, in the university milieu portrayed in the novel, my final aspect in this discussion of the universe-university metaphor. Barth wrote the novel in the first half of the 1960's, while the universities were still relatively quiet; had he written it five years later, the novel might have been different. Even so, campus violence and rioting does appear in the novel: there is a small band of student protestors who take hand-outs from Reginald Hector and accept scholarships from Lucius Rexford, but refuse to pay lip-service to the "establishment;" and there are two mob scenes in the novel, in one of which the Library is occupied:

But immense though the building was, and heavily guarded, elements of the mob outside had forced their way in; we heard shouting in a large room at the end of the hallway and were intercepted before we reached it by other uniformed patrolmen, who advised us to retreat (555).

This sounds very much like the invasions of administration buildings on campuses across the country in the second half of the sixties; but note the important difference. This mob is not bent on destruction of the library, nor on challenging authority, but on lynching the student rebel George, who has reduced the college to chaos and perhaps caused Campus Riot III, the end of the University. The tiny majority of student protestors mentioned above do not participate in the lynching; they are George's only backers in his misguided efforts, though they support him from a safe distance from the mob, which is motivated not by a revolutionary but a reactionary drive to

tear up the troublemaker. Half a decade later, the roles would have been reversed: the mob, consisting of student demonstrators, would have stormed the library to get Bray, and carried George, the wrecker of glorious chaos, out on their shoulders. In this rendition of campus violence, then, Barth parodically imitates the university milieu of the early 1960's, and simultaneously begins to work in hints of more metaphysical concerns, hints which take on an even greater importance in the historical characterization of Peter Greene.

Chapter 2 The Past: Peter Greene

One of the difficulties that has traditionally plagued the American writer is the problem of the past, particularly of a "usable past" which gives a sense of meaning and continuity to the present - and which many American writers have claimed they, as Americans, lack. This has often entailed expatriation to Europe, temporary or permanent, and even British citizenship for writers like Henry James and T.S. Eliot.¹ But there exists in American literature another tradition, in which the historical, legendary, and mythic American past becomes the central subject of fiction, and in exploring the "usable American past" these writers create it. The great innovator in this tradition, of course, was William Faulkner, and the tradition has remained largely in the hands of Southern writers, including that "Southern" writer from Maryland, John Barth, in *LETTERS* and *The Sot-Weed Factor*. These novels are in many ways postmodern versions of a Faulkner novel, and Barth himself has remarked that at the time he wrote the latter the mythical American past was very important to him:

Though I was not a patriotic writer, I had feelings about America. In the late 1950s, which means my late twenties, I had a feeling comparable (but ironically) to the one Virgil must have had about Rome in those sections of the *Aeneid* where he describes, lovingly, the marsh that was originally there. I was deep into the idea of the mythical America by that time.²

This feeling was still strong when Barth wrote *Giles Goat-Boy*, and while the mythical American past here does not occupy center stage as it does in *The Sot-Weed Factor*, it is given a highly prominent role in the figure of Peter Greene. Greene is a complex character who acts out American history on a number of different levels simultaneously. He is America as a political,

¹See for example Earl Rovit, "The Jewish Literary Tradition," in Field and Field, p. 3.

²Gado, p. 118.

economic, and social entity, especially as a representation of twentieth-century American history; but he is a composite American literary, legendary, and mythic hero whose soul is parodically the collective soul of America. Barth's vision of America in Peter Greene, if less elaborate than that in *The Sot-Weed Factor*, is a brilliant comic creation that succeeds both in parodying historical figures in allegory and in pointing to deeper metaphysical concerns within the narrative.

In portraying some three hundred years of American history through the life of one forty-year-old character, Barth has mined a rich metafictional vein by inventing personal counterparts to societal events; and the thirty-page chapter in which Greene tells George the story of his life is one of the most spirited and delightful parodies in the novel. Here again Barth has deliberately stretched historical accuracy in order to get the most mileage out of his metaphor: the result of condensing three centuries of American history into the span of one man's life is, for example, that the seventeen years since the end of Campus Riot II has passed in Greene's life in a matter of years. But here the inconsistency is made obvious, and thus part of the point: Greene's parodic history is an artifice used as a part of a fiction, and in drawing our attention to it Barth lets us enjoy it without the restraints of factual accuracy.

Greene begins the story of his life with his departure from home at the age of fourteen, at which point he went into the wilderness, and was soon followed by other adventurers "until at length a small quadrangle was established in the wilds; New Tammany College annexed the territory, and Tower Hall dispatched ROTC units to subdue the redskins, and schoolteachers to educate the settlers" (272). This "small quadrangle" could be virtually any Western state; perhaps the best-known example in American legend is Daniel Boone's Kentucky. Greene married the local schoolteacher, and:

It was chiefly for her sake, to provide her with every comfort known to studentdom, that when not yet twenty he

claimed squatter's rights to vast tracts of virgin timber, formed his own Sub-Department of Lumbering and Paper Manufacture, built sawmills and factories, laid waste the wilderness, dammed the watersheds, spoiled the streams, and became a power in the School of Business and an influence in Tammany Hall (273).

At the same time, Greene was troubled by a black girl he calls O.B.G.'s daughter, with whom he had cohabitated in his younger years, and who had done his cooking and washing for him. In this relationship Barth parodically deals with the history of white-black relations on the American continent, from the slave period, with its complex pattern of sexual exploitation and guilt, to the present. The crucial point in American race relations - and indeed all areas of American life - the Civil War, is not mentioned in Greene's history.

Greene is, at this point, in his early twenties and America in the late nineteenth century:

The Greens moved from cabin to manorhouse and begot a great number of offspring, whose rearing Mrs. Greene relinquished her profession to supervise; there was no further need for her to work anyhow, and she agreed with her husband that woman's place was in the home. There she gave orders to a staff of domestics, took up the piano and painting on glass, read long novels, and tatted the hems of pillow-slips. They regarded their match as ideal and themselves as blissful in it - but in certain moods, now he was initiated, Greene bewailed his lost opportunities with O.B.G.'s flunked daughter and perhaps even consorted with her secretly, in and out of prison, always however berating himself the while for polluting, or thinking to pollute, his perfect marriage. And Miss Sally Ann now and then complained of spells of faintness and that her life was after all as empty as some statue's in a Founder's Hall (280).

This parodic stereotype of the Victorian period shifts into the twentieth century and the post-World War I period with Greene's loss of Christian faith in traditional moral standards:

Some said he was influenced by disillusioned veterans of the First Campus Riot; others, that this disillusionment in turn was but the popular dramatizing of a state of

intellectual affairs that dated from the Rematriculation Period and had long prevailed "across the Pond" in the famous seats of West-Campus learning (280).

The twenties, of course, was the decade not only of the Lost Generation, with Hemingway, but also the Jazz Age, with Fitzgerald, and Greene and his wife lived right in the midst of it:

they moved from their rural estate to an urban quad; he made his wife a full-time partner in his business; they toured distant campuses, learned to smoke cigarettes, drink cocktails, dance to jazz-music, drive fast motor-cycles, and practice contraception (281).

Part of this life style was a new attitude toward money:

Nay, further, emancipated alike from the stuffy prohibitions of old-fashioned lecturers and the economics of harder terms, they went from twin beds to separate vacations to separate residences and friends, and mortgaged all their assets to extend by daring speculation their business interests and finance their costly extracurricular activities (281).

In the Greenes' lives there was no stock market to crash; rather, the crash comes in the form of a chance meeting with his wife en route from "illegal tavern" or speakeasy to their separate apartments. Drunk, they boast about their extra-marital affairs, and leave in different directions:

They went then their separate ways, but whether that encounter was the trigger, or certain ominous signs that his speculations were overextended and no longer basically sound, there ensued just prior to his thirtieth birthday a collapse of Peter Greene's self-confidence and a lengthy spell of profound depression (281).

Through puns on "collapse" and "depression," Barth is able to capture two historical truths at once: that when the stock market collapses, America's self-confidence collapsed with it, and that the financial depression was a period of depression

for the American psyche as well. Barth's parodic dating of the event through a reference to Greene's age - he is 29, and the year is 1929 - is another *jeu d'esprit* he managed to include.

The period of depression in Greene's thirties is a period of Student-Unionist strikes, with which Greene secretly sympathizes out of his love for rebellious causes. It is also a period of social withdrawal, corresponding to America's isolationism between the wars:

Sexually he became subject to periods of impotence; socially he withdrew, lost interest in the few friends he had left, as in himself. Whether he appeared well or ill in the public eye and his own no longer concerned him; he could not even manage to despise himself much, so thoroughgoing was his sense of futility (282).

The period of depression is ended by "irrelevant circumstance, in the form of Campus Riot II" (285-6).

The impending threat of it reunited him with his wife, ended all picketing, and kept every shop and laboratory open around the clock; the resultant prosperity, together with the climate of emergency, the exhausting pace, and his new indifference to the question of Final Examinations, did away with what limited appeal Student-Unionism briefly might have had for him. He enlisted in the ROTC and became something of a hero. Unfriendly rivals and vanquished adversaries might complain that it was his size and material advantage that accounted for his successes, rather than superior skill and character; he himself was too busy to care (285).

During the Riot, Greene develops a habit of defending himself against criticism by repeating the phrase, "I am okay, and what the heck anyhow," which reflects the confidence laid in bold strokes over a basic inner insecurity characteristic of Greene and America both.

Soon after the Riot, the Greens move into the suburbs. Greene explains:

We bought us a fine house in a suburban quad, with a pool

and a color Telerama and all like that; the kiddies started music lessons; Sally Ann had her own wheels to get around with, and only worked when she felt like getting out of the house. She weren't tied down a speck, what with O.B.G.'s daughter to clean house and me helping with every meal. And like, I'm busy, sure, but George, it ain't as bad as the old days, no sirree Bob, when I was up with the chickens and worked till midnight (285-6).

And yet, somehow, things begin to go "kerflooyey." Greene, "though he was prospering as never before, ... was virtually unemployed, WESCAC having taken over executive as well as labor operations" (285), and his wife and children are as bored as he. In addition, O.B.G.'s daughter begins making trouble again:

She insisted that he confess his past attraction to and maltreatment of her, that he pay her neither more nor less than he would pay a white male for the same work, and that to redeem his past abuses of her he educate her children along with his, in the same classrooms, summer camps, and Founder's Halls (287).

A sharp contrast to this militancy in demanding racial integration is found in the apathy of white adolescents:

His own children showed no such aggressiveness, excepting one son who stole motorbikes for sport and contracted gonorrhea at the sixth-grade prom: they were tall and handsome, their teeth uncarious, their underarms odorless; yet they seemed not interested in anything (287).

And this brings Greene's story more or less up to the present: when his wife has a nervous breakdown and retires to the Faculty Women's Rest Home, Greene sets off to hitchhike in to Great Mall, there to attend some classes and see if he can learn something. As a result of George's first Tutoring position, Greene will later enter a period of depression not unlike that undergone in his early thirties, in which he becomes a "Student-Unionist fellow-scholar" (612), or McCarthy-era Communist fellow-traveler, and "something of a Beist":

He smoked hempen cigarettes, went barefoot and unbarbered, carried a guitar on which with rude skill he played songs of lower-form protest, and said of The Living Sakhyan: "Man, he's got the gosh-durn *most*, what I mean *wisewise*" (612).

And, ultimately, Greene becomes an apostle of Gilesianism, a development which gives Greene's life meaning but (so far, at any rate) has no equivalent in American history.

This comically historical aspect of Greene's past is juxtaposed with other elements of the American past, notably legendary, literary, and mythical ones. In terms of American legend, for example, Greene is a composite figure of a number of American heroes: "real" heroes of the West such as Davy Crockett, Daniel Boone, and Wild Bill Hickock, and folk heroes such as Paul Bunyan, Mike Fink, and Pecos Bill.³ Among American literary heroes, Greene suggests a possible reference to Natty Bumppo, but the clearest allusion is to Huck Finn:

on his voyage into the wild, in a homemade vessel, he'd been accompanied by another fugitive, a Frumentian from a South-Quad chain-gang; ... they'd saved each other's lives more than once, and had become fast friends despite their difference in race (271).

At this point Greene pauses to defend himself against a rumor that has its origin in Leslie Fiedler's commentary on Twain's novel:⁴

³Daniel Hoffman provides a useful overview of the American folk hero in Chapter 3 ("The American Hero: His Masquerade") of his *Form and Fable in American Fiction* (Norton, New York, 1973), pp. 33-82.

⁴Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (Stein and Day, New York, 1975), pp. 270-89. Peter Greene has misunderstood Fiedler, of course, or heard the rumor second-hand, for Fiedler notes in the second edition to his book (p. 349n): "'Homoerotic' is a word of which I was never very fond, and which I like even less now. But I wanted it to be quite clear that I was not attributing sodomy to certain literary characters or their authors, and so I avoided when I could the more disturbing word 'homosexual.' All my care has done little good, however, since what I have to say on this score has been at once the best remembered and most grossly misunderstood section of my book." Needless to say, Fiedler was probably as delighted with Barth's parody of this misunderstanding as was Barth himself.

"But that's *all* we ever was, was pals," he insisted. "Old Black George and me (I used to call him Old Black George, despite he weren't old), we went through thick and thin together 'fore we parted company. I guess no boy ever had a better pal: that's why I bust out laughin' when they say I don't like darkies! But friends is *all*, and them smart-alecks that claim we was *funny* for each other - I'd like to horse-whip 'em!" (271)

Another literary reference in Greene's past is to Uncle Tom and his creator, Harriet Beecher Stowe: "an influential white lady had arranged to have Old Black George paroled into the custody of his /Greene's/ family, all of whom were domestic workers in the boarding-school she operated ..." (272). That Mrs. Stowe is the reference intended is suggested by her own words in an Afterword to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*:

The writer has lived for many years on the frontier-line of slave states, and has had great opportunities of observation among those who formerly were slaves. They have been in her family as servants; and, in default of any other school to receive them, she has, in many cases, had them instructed in a family school with her own children.⁵

In Greene, then, Barth parodies not merely historical America but the literary-legendary American hero as well, America's self-image as expressed in its tall tales and classical literature. The realm of literature and legend is, in fact, very close to myth, to a nation's deepest beliefs about itself; and another recent parody of this literary-legendary American hero does reflect that myth as myth, in a way which will illustrate what Barth does not do with Peter Greene. I am referring to Robert Coover's brilliant characterization of "Uncle Sam, nè Sam Slick, that wily Yankee Peddlar who, much like that ballsy Greek girl of long ago, popped virgin-born and fully constituted from the shattered seed-poll of the very Enlightenment."⁶ Sam incarnates the

⁵Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Nelson, London, n.d.), p. 528.

⁶Robert Coover, *The Public Burning* (Bantam, New York, 1977), p. 7.

rough-and-ready braggadocio of the American folk hero:

I am Sam Slick - I can ride on a flash of lightnin', catch a thunderbolt in my fist, swaller niggers whole, raw or cooked, slip without a scratch down a honey locust, whup my weight in wildcats and redcoats, squeeze blgod out of a turnip and cold cash out of a parson, and outinscrutabullize the heathen Chinee - so whar's that Johnny Bull to stamp his hoof or quiver his hindquarters at *my* Proklymation?⁷

Like Greene, Sam Slick *is* America. Yet unlike Greene, Sam is a mythical being who stands outside history and must therefore work through human agents, by incarnating himself in the U.S. President. This characterization allows Coover to develop a comic vision of American history as a cosmic struggle between God and Satan transmogrified into Uncle Sam, the Champion of Light, and the Phantom, the Prince of Darkness, who works through the Soviet Union. This comic mythic perspective is far from Barth's concerns in *Giles Goat-Boy*, especially as regards Peter Greene. Greene is no supernatural figure but the *average* American's image of his own deeper self. Here, as before, it is clear that Barth is most centrally interested not in universal myths, although these are fun to parody; rather his interest lies with the deeper metaphysical reality of human life. Thus, in portraying Peter Greene he makes him not superhuman but a weak, fallible, conceited, insecure, but engaging and likable human being. This will become even more clear in Part IV, when we turn to deal with Barth's parody of the hero myth, for here again he has given serious treatment to those aspects of the myth which point up man's inner nature and self-discovery, and either ignored the supernatural aspects or treated them, with heavy irony, as childish fantasies of the young George.

There is, however, a side of Peter Greene which might be described as "mythic," and that is his characterization as a self-made millionaire. Here, if anywhere, is true American

⁷Coover, *The Public Burning*, pp. 7-8.

mythology, although once again it is clear that this mythology involves no gods or superhuman deeds, but rather is tied to history and to the rational and pragmatic American ethos. What is most interesting about the American myth of the self-made millionaire is that structurally it closely follows the hero myth, the story of stories that forms the basic narrative pattern of the human imagination, and which Barth used as the skeletal structure of *Giles Goat-Boy's* plot. This close parallel is everywhere evident in the best study of the phenomenon, Irvin G. Wyllie's *The Self-Made Man in America: The Myth of Rags to Riches*, although, his title to the contrary, Wyllie deals not with the *mythos* or plot itself but rather with the *ethos* and *dianoia*, the places, people, and principles of the self-help cult in America. I shall be discussing the hero myth as interpreted by Lord Raglan and Joseph Campbell in detail in Part IV, but let me anticipate that discussion by interpolating the *mythos* of the rags-to-riches story here:

Table 3: *The American "self-made millionaire" hero myth*

1. The hero is of humble origins, born to poor parents
2. in a big-city ghetto, a small town, or a farm in Europe or America.
3. His childhood passes uneventfully, but in early adolescence he conceives an insatiable urge to escape the limited sphere of his parents' home and achieve greatness,
4. and he goes to the big city or the virgin wilderness, there to make his fortune.
5. If he goes to the city, he takes a job in a small enterprise, where he is tested harshly by a merciless employer; if he goes to the wilderness, he is tested by the hostile forces of nature, but ekes out a living as a trapper or lumberjack.
6. Through persistence and clean living he wins the trust of his employer or gains some measure of control over nature;
7. marries the daughter of his employer or the beautiful young schoolteacher,
8. and when his employer dies, he inherits the firm, or in the wilderness establishes a trapping or logging empire,

9. makes a million dollars, donates money to charitable concerns,
10. and becomes President.
11. In old age he retires from business and public life, and lives out his life in solitude at his country estate.⁸

Because Peter Greene is America as well as the self-made American hero, his path leads (in one version, at least) from European city to American wilderness:

"I run away from home at the age of fourteen," he said proudly. "Not that it was much of a home, with Paw a-drinkin' and Maw forever a-layin' the Good Book on me." The actual nature and location of his birthplace I could not discern: sometimes it appeared to have been the meanest hovel /the poor farmhouse/, sometimes a place of ancient grandeur /Europe/. In any case he'd abandoned it, his parents, his patrimony and hied him into wilderness departments, to live off the land. His motives, as he characterized them, were praiseworthy: the pursuit of independence and escape from the debilitating influence of corrupt tradition. "My folks and me, we come to a fork in the road," he said: "they had their notions and I had mine, that's everything there was to it" (271).

Poverty, for the self-made man, was not a sin but a spur to advancement; and, as Wyllie notes, "The eternal boast of the self-made man was that he had overcome every limiting circumstance, and in so doing had won a higher station in life than fate had intended for him."⁹ There is, however, a built-in ambivalence in these sentiments as commonly expressed, which is developed by Barth:

"I was a wild 'un back then," he confessed with a grin. "No flannel pants in *them* days! And no time for lally-gaggin' round no drive-ins, like young 'uns in this Present College of Today."

He seemed now altogether scornful of the students round-

⁸ Interpolated from Irvin G. Wyllie, *The Self-Made Man in America: The Myth of Rags to Riches* (Free Press, New York, 1954), passim, and *Giles Goat-Boy*, pp. 269-93.

⁹ Wyllie, p. 40.

about, whom he'd lately been praising. About his own childhood I found him similarly of two minds, declaring on the one hand his intention to see to it that his children enjoyed all the privileges himself had never known, and on the other that the modern generation was plumb spoilt by the luxuries of life in present-day NTC and would amount to nothing for want of such rigor as had been his lot (270-1).

Wyllie points out that while know-how and a basic literacy were considered essentials for amassing a fortune, education was not: the self-made man must be self-taught,¹⁰ and this aspect is parodied in Peter Greene as well:

Greene himself, from established habit, had declined formal schooling; but he taught himself reading, writing, and arithmetic - with no other light than the fire on his hearth, no other texts than the Old and New Syllabi, no other materials than a clean pine board and a stick of charcoal (272).

Some of the most vehement statements of the great self-made men of the nineteenth century deal with the subject of education, and the style and tone of these remarks, combining as they do vulgar arrogance and extreme insecurity, are clearly a model for Greene's speech. Daniel Drew, for example, once remarked that "Book learning is something, but thirteen million dollars is also something, and a mighty sight more,"¹¹ and Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt makes the archetypical statement about Europe and education:

Folks may say that I don't care about education, but that ain't true; I do. I've been to England, and seen them lords, and other fellows, and knew that I had twice as much brains as they had maybe, and yet I had to keep still, and couldn't say anything through fear of exposing myself.¹²

¹⁰Wyllie, pp. 94ff.

¹¹Wyllie, p. 103.

¹²Wyllie, pp. 105-6.

The self-made man's choice of wife was also important: one should not marry money, but select a wife for her qualities of character, so that she might support her husband in his rise to wealth. The wife of the self-made man, Wyllie writes, "was economical, hard-working, orderly, neat, steady, and firm in disposition. She was never extravagant. . . . She was cheerful, especially in hard times, and never addicted to nagging."¹³ Peter Greene finds this sort of woman in Sally Ann, with the important exception that Mrs. Greene is cheerful and not given to nagging only while they are on their way up; once Greene becomes a millionaire, his wife's personality disintegrates, and things go "kerflooy." But Mrs. Greene has another importance in her husband's life. He is a 'wild 'un" until he meets and marries her, and she civilizes him, a theme common in American literature:¹⁴

"You can talk about your Grand Tutors," he sighed, and set his jaw; "Miss Sally Ann was Enos Enoch and His Twelve Trustees as far as I was concerned, and her words was the pure and simple Answer. Wasn't for her, I'd of been a beast of the woods: the way she prettied up the cabin and the schoolhouse was a wonder! And talk about your Finals: when Sally Ann got done with me I could recite you the Founder's Scroll backwards or forwards." . . .

She herself was the Answer: she had rescued him from the clutches of the Dean o' Flunks, from the way to failure, and he would let no vileness near her. It was chiefly for her sake, to provide her with every comfort known to studentdom, that when not yet twenty he claimed squatter's rights to vast tracks of virgin timber. . . . For her sake too (though it wasn't clear whether she demanded these things or he volunteered them) he eschewed liquor and tobacco, and forbade them to others; left off cursing, gambling, and fist-fighting, of which he'd been fond; and had Old Black George's daughter committed to Main Detention as a common prostitute. By discharging in his office the energies previously wasted on idle pursuits, he grew at an early age more affluent than his neighbors (272-3).

¹³Wyllie, pp. 30-1.

¹⁴This is one of Leslie Fiedler's central themes. See especially *Love and Death in the American Novel*, Part II, "Achievement and Frustration."

Here, in fact, is an interesting comic twist to the boon gained by the mythic hero in the embrace of the world goddess: by forcing her husband, à la Freud, to sublimate his sexual and other physical energies, Mrs. Greene channels them into money-making, and they become rich, just as the mythic hero becomes a god. Miss Sally Ann is the Bitch-Goddess that motivates the American self-made hero myth.

Peter Greene never becomes President, as of course most self-made millionaires also did not, but he does donate money to charitable concerns, and also donates his time, like many self-made men, to work in the church: where John D. Rockefeller taught Sunday School, Peter Greene teaches the "New Curriculum" of Gilesianism, becoming a comic Billy Graham. This end is suggested earlier in the novel when Greene reacts to George's claim to Grand-Tutordom by saying: "More than once I've thought I should of took up Tutoring myself, instead of business engineering. But there wasn't the profit in it then there is now" (259).

Barth's portrayal of Peter Greene in *Giles Goat-Boy* may best be summed up as an American archetype, classified so aptly by H.L. Mencken as "*boobus Americanus*." This archetype has been characterized in numerous ways, comically and seriously, but ultimately it always comes down to a figure not unlike Peter Greene. Compare the following three descriptions, the first from *Giles Goat-Boy*, the second from Henry James' novel *The American*, and the third from Mencken:

As an officer under Professor-General Reginald Hector, ... he led his men to victory and emerged from the riot well-known throughout the campus and generally well-liked, with a reputation for open-handedness, vulgarity, fair dealing, bad manners, good intentions, gullibility, straight-forwardness, lack of culture, abundance of wealth, and sentimentality (285).

It was our friend's eye that chiefly told his story; an eye in which innocence and experience were singularly blended. It was full of contradictory suggestions. ... Frigid and yet friendly, frank and yet cautious, shrewd yet credulous, positive yet skeptical, confident yet shy, extremely intelligent and extremely good-humored, there

was something vaguely defiant in its concessions, and something profoundly reassuring in its reserve.¹⁵

The /American/ peasant has a great practical cunning, but he is unable to see any further than the next farm. He likes money and knows how to amass property, but his cultural development is but little above that of the domestic animals. He is intensely and cocksurely moral, but his morality and his self-interest are crudely identical. He is emotional and easy to scare, but his imagination cannot grasp an abstraction. He is a violent nationalist and patriot, but he admires rogues in office and always beats the tax-collector if he can. He has immovable opinions about all the great affairs of state, but nine-tenths of them are sheer imbecilities. He is violently jealous of what he conceives to be his rights, but brutally disregarding of the other fellow's. He is religious, but his religion is wholly devoid of beauty and dignity...He exists in all countries, but here alone he rules - here alone his anthropoid fears and rages are accepted gravely as logical ideas, and dissent from them is punished as a sort of public offense. Around every one of his principal delusions - of the sacredness of democracy, of the feasibility of sumptuary law, of the of the incurable sinfulness of all other peoples, of the menace of ideas, of the corruption lying in all the arts - there is thrown a barrier of taboos, and woe to the anarchist who seeks to break it down.¹⁶

Interestingly, when the anarchist George succeeds in breaking down Greene's barrier of taboos in his first round of Tutoring, Greene is psychically destroyed. Mencken would have cheered at this, but within the novel Barth sees the acceptance of contradictory ideas and contradictory personalities as centrally important, and he accordingly has George reconvince Greene of his essential "okayness."

The figure of Peter Greene, then, serves a complex function in the novel. Largely parodic, it gives Barth an opportunity to treat American history and the primary American manifestation of the hero myth in a comic, metafictional way, yet it also allows him to explore some metaphysical aspects

¹⁵Henry James, *The American* (Signet, New York, 1963), p. 7.

¹⁶H.L. Mencken (James T. Farrell, ed.), *Prejudices: A Selection* (Random House, New York, 1958), pp. 100-1.

of the mythical America, to explore our own ideas of our past in order the better to determine where we are and where we are going. In Peter Greene, of course, "where we are going" is wholly parodic; certainly Barth sees no future for America in evangelism, especially not in the spreading of the religion his novel creates, the Gilesianism Greene preaches and George Giles rejects.

Chapter 3 Lucius Rexford and the Boundary Dispute

"But it was a *competition* I meant - sibling rivalry, if you like!" /Rexford/ smiled. Admiration for his reasonableness filled the room. "If we're all brothers, then we're all rivals, aren't we? And so surrender would mean submission, obviously. I don't think we New Tammanians are the submissive type."

His words were of course applauded, but I pressed on despite the antagonism I felt in the hall.

"What wrong with submitting to your brother?"

... Then briskly he declared ... that I was carrying the analogy too far. "Submission - to some kinds of brothers, if not all - means annihilation, at least in the Boundary Dispute; and annihilation isn't my idea of University Brotherhood" (418)

The last two chapters have been concerned with what might be called the static historical setting of *Giles Goat-Boy*, in the sense that setting generally is static. Reflecting or enhancing the action but not partaking dynamically of it, setting is most commonly a motionless background against which the events of a novel take place. But there is also a dynamic aspect of the historical setting in *Giles Goat-Boy*, one which in response to the main action undergoes dramatic change and twice takes the world of the novel to the brink of apocalyptic destruction. The political arena in which this dynamic historical setting operates is the Boundary Dispute, or the conflict between East and West Campus; and the "protagonist" of the setting, the leading figure who has both the inclination to carry out George Giles' misguided advice and the power to alter the course of the Dispute, is the Chancellor of New Tammany College, Lucius Rexford. Where the major import of the previous chapters has been in terms of metafictional pleasure, in this aspect of the historical setting Barth addresses

a serious metaphysical question: will human existence survive as it has thus far, or will it be destroyed in a third world war fought with nuclear weapons? Barth's answer in the novel, as in his other novels, is that life will go on, tragically, without meaning. Apocalypse is a tempting release from tragedy, but ultimately it is self-indulgence, and Barth firmly rejects the necessity of cataclysmic destruction.

As might be expected, the novel's metaphysical concern with apocalypse also has its metafictional aspect in the novel. In a parody of religious answers to human problems, Barth has Giles Stoker offer the *Revised New Syllabus* to J.B. as an answer to the apocalyptic signs of *our* world: "Famous men died; the political situation deteriorated. ... The polar ice-cap, scientists warned, is going to melt. The population problem admits of no solution" (xxxiv). And when J.B. protests that he doesn't have time, Giles Stoker laughs, "Indeed you don't! ... It's late, late, late, that's certain" (xxxiv). The end is near, this exchange parodically says: repent!

This dread of the end continues in the main narrative, where mankind is not threatened by nuclear weapons, the population problem, or the polar ice-cap, but by EAT, WESCAC's power to destroy the human mind by amplifying and transmitting a high-intensity brain wave. In a university, of course, the end of mind is the end of life; and the possibility of genocide, lent currency by the increasing hostilities between East and West Campus, is the historical situation that leads to the birth of the mythological hero, George Giles. Consequently, as a young man George sees his quest as the changing of WESCAC's AIM so that it cannot EAT. Apocalyptic anxiety, then, acts as the catalyst that begins the novel's parodic hero-cycle.

Having passed the Trial-by-Turnstile and Scrapegoat Grate, George sets about completing his seven-part Assignment, and Tutoring the people around him in the process. The second task that George must complete as a part of his Assignment is "End the Boundary Dispute," and to do so he goes straight to the top and seeks to influence the principals directly:

Lucius Rexford and Classmate X. Realistically speaking, of course, in our world such a development would be absurd, and this metafictionally stresses the fictiveness of the story. When Rexford actually takes George's advice to heart and forces the entire College to obey it as well, we have an even more unrealistic deviation from the twentieth-century novel, with its powerless anti-hero who fights in vain against a static environment or withdraws from it entirely. George, no anti-hero, influences his environment, and gives the setting of the novel the dynamic aspect mentioned above. Within the novel, George is thus a kind of Hegelian "world-historical figure," an actor rather than one merely acted upon. One could not speak of the dynamic development of Napoleon's conquests apart from a dynamic concept of the setting in which they occurred, since his conquests changed the setting. The setting of Sophocles' Thebes is equally dynamic, since Oedipus' unwitting crime has caused the plague, and only his exile can end it. In the same fashion, George's environment reacts to his Tutoring, but ironically, for by leading to the brink of destruction it illustrates the error of George's teaching and also underlines the futility of changing human society for the better. The metafictionally unrealistic creation of a hero who can change society in this way leads back to a metaphysically cognitive vision of the impossibility of reform and the necessity of tragedy.

The dynamic historical setting in *Giles Goat-Boy* begins with George's first confrontation with Lucius Rexford at the Matriculation Day Address and continues through George's Tutoring until their final meeting in the main narrative, where George and Anastasia have left the Belly of WESCAC and meet the Rexfords in traffic en route to the goatbarns. Importantly, between these two meetings nothing finally changes in the external realm, just as nothing finally changes externally in the novel as a whole. The sole change is internal, in the characters' knowledge of and attitudes toward the unchanged situation. Both George and Rexford undergo a period of intense failure and disrepute, at the end of which they gain a marginal

success which is neither better nor worse than their situation in society than before the failure. Their one gain lies in the fact that in experiencing failure, they have been exposed to their own shortcomings and the shortcomings of all mankind, and this exposure has taught them a mature, tragic awareness of the limitations of life. Because nothing changes, all striving may be seen as futile; but ultimately, striving, acting in the world, involving oneself with life, is not futile, because it is only through involved action that one can come to understand the tragedy of life; and understanding is the prerequisite for finding some form of meaning in life.

In his Matriculation Day Address, Rexford states the official policy on the Boundary Dispute, and while the behind-the-scenes policy, which Rexford explains privately to George on their way to the U.C. Boundary Symposium, is rather more cynical, the two policies are substantially the same. The substance of both is an attempt to keep East and West separate but interdependent:

New Tammany's strategy, he said, had been to do business of every sort on as many fronts as possible with the Nikolayans; to involve the affairs of the two colleges so subtly and extensively that détente would be the actual state of intercollegiate affairs regardless of theoretical contradictions, and riot would become tantamount to economic as well as physical suicide (496).

This policy, then, seeks to maintain the opposition between the two colleges and use it for the good of the entire University: "'Remember what I said this morning about the two sides of the arch,' /Rexford/ said; 'their opposition supports the entire building'" (492).

George's philosophical position in his first round of Tutoring is that opposites should be separated as far as possible: differentiation is the Answer, and East and West should be split, the Power Lines moved a kilometer apart to emphasize the wide gap between them:

"It's like Stoker, or the Dean o' Flunks, or a terrible

disease," I argued; "if you do business with these things, they always win. *Extreme in the mean* is what you've got to be, and not compromise even for a second with Flunkage, or let opposites get confused. An arch won't do between True and False; they've got to be cut with an edge as sharp as the Infinite Divisor, and separated (497).

Thus also if Rexford professes belief in sexual morality but occasionally cheats on his wife with Anastasia, or professes belief in light and order but traffics with darkness and disorder in Stoker, he is not involved in an arch between right and wrong but is entirely wrong. What he must do, says George, is cling to good and eschew evil.

And Rexford does just that: he institutes a series of puritanical prohibitions called the "Open-Book Tests," whereby the appearance of things will be made to correspond precisely to their reality. All immoderation is banned: both adultery and celibacy, both drunkennes and total abstention become punishable offenses, and artistic excess is controlled through a strict censorship. As a result of these new laws, the energy and vitality of New Tammany life disappear, and the population becomes listless, slothful, apathetic. At the same time, Rexford orders the distance between the Power Lines doubled, and the Nikolayans, interpreting this as a move of aggression, ready themselves to attack; WESCAC does likewise, and the situation is ripe for Campus Riot II.

The enormity of George's error is quickly and graphically brought home to him by this state of affairs, and after nine months of brooding about his failure in Main Detention, he conceives a new Answer. This one is the opposite of the first and states that, since opposites cannot successfully be separated, they should be fused in one: Embrace! George urges, and once again Rexford obeys. The prisons are opened and the prisoners released, and the Power Lines are moved so close that an arc leaps across them. This leads to an explosion of chaos: the streets run wild with criminals and mental patients, and the two colleges once again stand at attack-readiness. The slightest provocation will touch off Campus Riot III.

And yet, for whatever reason - perhaps because countries are no more inclined to destroy the world than individuals are - annihilation does not come. The end of the world is postponed, perhaps indefinitely. For this time George has learned the Truth, that is, the novel's tragic metaphysics: that involved opposition, Rexford's original policy, is essential to the proper working of human society. And this time George need not teach Rexford, for Rexford has learned it himself, through the ignominy of double failure:

"I think I see what you were trying to teach me. But I guess Commencement isn't for administrators." In painful sobriety after his debauch, he said, he had resolved to abandon his yen for Graduation and merely "do his flunkéd best" for his alma mater, by his own lights, however benighted. To this end he had reopened secret economic dealings with Ira Hector, much as he deplored that necessity, and made covert overtures to new negotiations with the Student-Unionists. The Power Lines would in all likelihood be restored to their "original" locations, and the Boundary Dispute, he hoped, resumed on its former terms without too great a loss to West Campus because of his recent vacillation (739).

And so apocalypse threatens, but passes. It had threatened only because one man, George, had acted out of a cosmic innocence, without the mature perception and acceptance of the tragic unchangeability of life that both George and Rexford finally achieve. Apocalypse, for Barth, is not the culmination of a long and fulfilling life, but the result of youthful innocence and the short-sightedness which that innocence entails. It is significant that unlike most commentators, Barth views the modern age not as the final one before destruction, but as mankind's adolescence; and to avoid apocalypse, mankind need only grow up. This view is explained to George by Max Spielman:

Studentdom had passed already, he asserted, from a disorganized, preliterate infancy (of which Croaker was a modern representative, nothing ever being entirely lost) through a rather brilliant early childhood ("...ancient Lykeion, Remus, T'ang ...") which formed its basic and somewhat contradictory character; it had undergone a period

of naive general faith in parental authority (by which he meant early Founderism) and survived critical spells of disillusionment, skepticism, rationalism, willfulness, self-criticism, violence, disorientation, despair, and the like - all characteristics of pre-adolescence and adolescence, at least in their West Campus form. ... Its schisms, as manifested in the Quiet Riot, had been aggravated and rendered dangerous by the access of unwonted power - as when, in the space of a few semesters, a boy finds himself suddenly muscular, deep-voiced, aware of his failings, proud of his strengths, capable of truly potent love and hatred - and on his own. What hope there was that such an adolescent would reach maturity (not to say Commencement) without destroying himself was precisely the hope of the University.

"What brings a boy through?" he asked of his four-fingered hand. "Good guidance, for one thing; a character that's stronger than its weaknesses, and flexible; and good luck." ... The *healthy character* he judged to be partly a matter of chance and partly a matter of this "early training," and *luck* he felt involved the possibility of catastrophic accident: adolescents took chances and were by nature strenuous and impulsive; Campus Riot III might occur after all and studentdom be EATEN, as a prep-school boy might resort to delinquency or suicide, or be killed in a motorcycle race.

"So what are the odds?" he asked further, again rhetorically, and paced me more vigorously back and forth before the darkened Turnstile. ... "By George, I think the odds for *survival* are pretty good. Some kids don't make it through adolescence, but most do" (300-1).

This, it seems to me, is a highly serious appraisal of the future of mankind. Apocalypse is not a certainty, but an adolescent accident which is not extremely likely; therefore we should not place our hopes in an ultimate end, should not shrug our shoulders at the problem of existence in the hope that it will be solved permanently for us soon enough anyway. Instead we should seek a mature understanding of life that teaches us the tragedy and the continuity of existence. This is the metaphysical content of the novel as expressed by Max Spielman and ultimately learned by George.

This reading of Barth's novel stands in direct opposition to a certain body of critical opinion that sees Barth's fiction as "comic apocalyptic." The comic apocalyptic interpretation of American literature was first offered by R.W.B. Lewis in

an influential article called "Days of Wrath and Laughter."¹ Lewis argues that since Melville's *The Confidence-Man* an entire genre has sprung up which takes as its basic premise the fact that the world is going to destroy itself and which finds grotesque humor in that fact. These works include, in addition to Melville's novel, Twain's *The Mysterious Stranger*, West's *The Day of the Locust*, Ellison's *Invisible Man*, Barth's *The Sot-Weed Factor*, Heller's *Catch-22*, and Pynchon's *V*. "Contemporary American fiction," Lewis states, "or the vein of it which I have been mining, seems determined to draw us on toward that cliff edge, or to watch with a sort of bitter contemptuous laugh as we draw ourselves on - only to leave us there, swaying ambiguously, just before the sound of midnight."² Lewis' work has been continued by John R. May in *Toward a New Earth: Apocalypse in the American Novel*, a study which contains little that is new but seeks to develop Lewis' interpretations along much the same lines, and with a few, though not many, works not covered by Lewis.

Another approach is taken by Robert Alter in his *Commentary* article, "The Apocalyptic Temper,"³ which uses Lewis' reading of contemporary fiction as an excuse to air his prejudices against postmodern writing. In what is essentially a veiled polemic against Christianity in favor of Judaism, Alter argues that postmodern fiction is inferior because apocalyptic thinking (a Christian mode as opposed to Jewish prophecy) is an inferior mode of human thought.⁴ Alter's one-to-one correspondence between inferior thought and inferior writing is, at best, questionable; a critical prejudice against mystical thought, for example, does not reduce Symbolist poetry to inferiority. Another flaw in Alter's argument is his uncritical assumption that Lewis is right in describing this fiction as apocalyptic; like Bernard Bergonzi, he seizes upon the apocalyptic label and wields it as a somewhat dubious weapon

¹R.W.B. Lewis, "Days of Wrath and Laughter." In Lewis, *Trials of the Word* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1965), pp. 184-235.

²Lewis, p. 234.

³Robert Alter, "The Apocalyptic Temper." *Commentary* 41 (June 1966), pp. 61-6.

⁴Alter, p. 62.

against a body of fiction he dislikes for other reasons than those mentioned in the article. Central among these reasons for both Alter and Bergonzi is the unrealistic, untraditional nature of these novels; as Alter writes:

There is no room for real people in apocalypses, for when a writer chooses to see men as huddled masses waiting to be thrown into sulphurous pits, he hardly needs to look at individual faces; and so it is not surprising that recent comic-apocalyptic novelists should fill their worlds with the rattling skeletons of satiric hypotheses in place of fully fleshed characters.⁵

This is a handy justification of realistic prejudice, but it depends on the premise that postmodern American fiction truly *is* apocalyptic. But is it? Do Barth, Heller, Pynchon, and others see men as "huddled masses waiting to be thrown into sulphurous pits"? Beyond this, what does "apocalyptic" mean? Lewis and May both use the term rather loosely to describe a work of fiction which evinces a belief in the end of the world and uses any one of the various images used in the Book of Revelation to evoke this vision. Thus *The Mysterious Stranger* qualifies as apocalyptic because it contains a Satan-figure ("the last loosing of Satan"), and *Invisible Man* qualifies due to its portrayal of a cataclysmic riot. This, it seems to me, is a serious critical error. The use of isolated apocalyptic imagery does not in itself make a work apocalyptic, any more than Lawrence's creation of a Christ-figure in *The Man Who Died* makes that work "Christian." In addition, most of these images individually are not necessarily tied to apocalypse: Satan, for example, appears throughout the Bible and may, according to Christian theology, be associated with any aspect of life on earth and thus any aspect of Christian imagery, such as the Fall of Man, the trials of Job, the temptation of Christ, and so on. And cataclysm, for it to be apocalyptic, must lead to the end; a disaster which, like King Lear's,

⁵Alter, p. 63.

only serves to suggest that life on earth is a constant hell without promise of end cannot be called apocalyptic. According to the vague definition used by Lewis and May, not only these contemporary novels but all tragedy, and most irony and satire as well, must then be described as apocalyptic; and a definition of this indiscriminate broadness can be of little critical value.

If one were to define apocalyptic literature more precisely, it would necessarily include all or most of the central apocalyptic images - cosmic battle between Good and Evil, cataclysmic destruction, and possible rebirth in the Paradise on Earth - and beyond this evoke a *vision* of life as coming to an imminent end. Under this definition, the term "apocalyptic" might justifiably be applied to Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, West's *The Day of the Locust*, and possibly Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, but it certainly does not apply to any of Barth's works. In *The Floating Opera*, *The Sot-Weed Factor*, and *Giles Goat-Boy*, for example, Barth creates a threat of cataclysm which does not materialize (the destruction of the Floating Opera, the Indian insurrection, and Campus Riot III), leading to the conclusion that life goes on tragically, without the release of an end. A variation of this pattern is found in *LETTERS*, which revolves around a projected "Second Revolution" and other apocalyptic cataclysms designed to initiate the "New Golden Age," in which, however, only certain unsympathetic (nasty, fanatical, even pathological) characters are allowed to believe; the characters with whom the reader is led to identify come to see apocalyptic reenactments as artistically pleasureable and perhaps even instructive, but as having little to do with life, which, happily or otherwise, simply goes on. A second pattern appears in *The End of the Road*, which May selects for analysis;⁶ here the "cataclysm," Rennie's death (tied through comic symbolism to the death of

⁶John R. May, *Toward a New Earth: Apocalypse in the American Novel* (University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, 1972), pp. 174-80.

Mother Earth), is no end but simply a gruesome lesson for the two male protagonists. For Barth, the *threat* of apocalypse and the resultant societal anxiety are undeniable cultural realities that possess considerable potential for fiction; the question of the *imminence* of apocalypse, on the other hand, he sees as somewhat unworthy of man's intelligence. "I am curious," he has said, "about the apocalyptic ambiance */sic/* in which we live, but I'm not at all apocalyptic about the novel. I hate pop apocalypses. It's too easy, too self-indulgent a response. It's like being a phony revolutionary."⁷

Barth's metaphysics, then, is not apocalyptic but tragic, which Frank Kermode suggests is the next step beyond the facile solutions of apocalypse.⁸ Life does not stop at some predetermined culmination to a rectilinear progression, but continues through the cycle of birth, innocent youth, mature adulthood, declining old age, death, repeated endlessly. But the apocalyptic anxiety of our age is interesting material for fiction. Anxiety creates need, and need motivation; and the need felt by modern society for salvation from imminent apocalypse motivates the parody of the hero myth in *Giles Goat-Boy*, which we shall be considering next.

⁷Gado, p. 137.

⁸Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1967), p. 88.

PART IV "NEVER WAS SUCH A WONDER AS THIS *STORY!*":
THE HERO MYTH AS STORY

"Never was such a wonder as this *story!* Its passion drained me, yet I was bleating for more when Max's shophar hooted in the distance.

"'What's that? Must you go?' She returned the precious volume to her bag. There'd be another tale tomorrow; she knew a host of them."

George with Lady Creamhair, 55

PART IV "NEVER WAS SUCH A WONDER AS THIS *STORY!*":
THE HERO MYTH AS STORY

Prolegomenon

In my analysis so far, I have been moving along the metaphorical dialectic on the diagram outlined in the General Introduction, from the metafictional to the metaphysical pole, perhaps giving the mistaken impression that this is the order of increasing significance, or the order of creation. Neither is the case, as I made clear in the introductory chapter on the novel. Rather, as the diagram illustrates, Barth's initial inspiration for the novel lay in the center of the metaphorical dialectic, with the parodic historical setting (universe-university) and the parodic mythological narrative structure, from which point he worked outward toward the poles that take on the greatest significance in the novel, language and philosophy. To be even more specific, the original idea for the novel concerned a parody of the hero myth, as Barth himself made clear in an interview some eighteen months before the publication of the novel:

Somebody told me that obviously I must have had in mind Lord Raglan's twenty-five prerequisites for ritual heroes when I created the character of Ebenezer Cooke in *The Sot-Weed Factor*. I hadn't read Raglan, so I bought *The Hero*,

and Ebenezer scored on twenty-three of the twenty-five, which is higher than anyone else except Oedipus.¹ If I hadn't lied about Ebenezer's grave, I would have scored twenty-four. Nobody knows where the real chap is buried; I made up a grave for Ebenezer because I want to write his epitaph. Well, subsequently I got excited over Raglan and Joseph Campbell, who may be a crank for all I know or care, and I really haven't been able to get that business off my mind - the tradition of the wandering hero. The only way I could use it would be to make it comic, and there will be some of that in *Giles Goat-Boy*.²

Barth here attributes his interest in the hero myth to a seeming coincidence: seeking only to tell a rousing good tale, he unwittingly hit upon the myth of the world-redeeming hero. But it is reasonable to conjecture that what intrigued Barth most about his inadvertent use of the myth was not the coincidence but that, according to Joseph Campbell's reading of the myth, it was hardly coincidental at all, but almost inevitable that he happen upon the hero-cycle. The hero myth, Campbell claims, is *the* story man always tells, in one form or another; it might, in this view, be described as the natural narrative structure of the imagination. Realistic writers, seeking to portray not imaginative patterns but the phenomenal world, disguise and dissolve these patterns, but cannot rid themselves entirely of them. Barth, on the other hand, rejecting the reductive thrust of realism for "sheer extraordinary, marvelous story," is inevitably and - insofar as his return is unconscious - helplessly led back to the patterns of mythology.

Once he becomes conscious of the direction in which his fiction is headed, of course, the situation changes. Much as Barth admires the story-telling of Scheherezade and Boccaccio, simple sublimative pleasure in narrative design cannot sustain his fiction. Therefore a "naive" or unself-conscious use of

¹The total number of Raglan's prerequisites for the hero is in fact 22, not 25. Of these, Oedipus scores on 21. Lord Raglan, *The Hero: A Study in Tradition, Myth, and Drama* (Oxford University Press, London, 1937), pp. 178-9.

²Enck, p. 12.

the myth, as in *The Sot-Weed Factor*, is now out of the question. The hero myth must be made to serve cognitive as well as sublimative concerns. And so Barth explains:

What I did in the case of the *Goat-Boy* novel was to try to abstract the patterns /of the hero myth/ and then write a novel which would consciously, even self-consciously, follow the patterns, parody the patterns, satirize the patterns, but with good luck transcend the satire a little bit in order to say some of the serious things I had in mind to say. Otherwise it would be a farce, a great trifle - which, of course, some readers found it to be.³

Parody and serious vision - sublimation and cognition. The two elements are everywhere present in Barth's work. In the above description of the respective roles played by these elements in *Giles Goat-Boy*, Barth speaks of "transcending" parody for serious vision. This transcension takes two distinct forms in the novel, which we may plot as two directions on the diagram: the one toward metafiction and irony, the other toward metaphysics.

Metafiction alone, it will be remembered, constitutes a sublimative joy in the patterns of one's own fiction; and this is one of the important functions served by Barth's parody of the hero myth in *Giles Goat-Boy*. The more familiar we are with the patterns of mythology, the more pleasure we can derive from a comically self-conscious presentation of those patterns in fiction. But metafictional pleasure inevitably leads to the adoption of an ironic perspective, as Robert Scholes implies in his discussion of Barth's use of mythology:

some influential critics have been ready to proclaim a new age of myth as the most likely literary development of the immediate future. But this, it seems to me, is the least likely of literary developments. Once so much is known *about* myths and archetypes, they can no longer be used innocently. Even their connection to the unconscious finally becomes attenuated as the mythic materials are used more consciously. All symbols become allegorical to the extent that we understand them. Thus the really per-

³Bellamy, *The New Fiction*, p. 13.

ceptive writer is not merely conscious that he is using mythic materials; he is conscious that he is using them consciously. He *knows*, finally, that he is allegorizing. Such a writer, aware of the nature of categories, is not likely to believe that his own mythic lenses really capture the truth. Thus his use of myth will inevitably partake of the comic.⁴

As the writer ceases "to believe that his own mythic lenses really capture the truth," then, his comic tone will shift into the ironic, and parody will be transcended into a serious vision of the nature of art: its patterns and its falsifications of the world.

What this means at the textual level is that in *Giles Goat-Boy* Barth is not content to follow the traditional model of mythological references and simply allude to an underlying symbolic mythological pattern. Instead, he develops the connections between his novel and the hero myth self-consciously, so that not only the author and the reader but the characters themselves are aware that they are following mythological patterns.

Barth has explained his reasons for this approach in an interview. Traditional mythological novels, he said, such as Joyce's *Ulysses*, Malamud's *The Natural*, or Updike's *The Centaur*, are typically realistic in intent. Finding mythological tales unsuited for direct narration due to their radically unrealistic nature, these writers tend to tell realistic stories about contemporary people and events and then refer symbolically to the myths as metaphors for reality, much as a preacher will use even a pagan tale as a metaphorical exemplum for Christian truth. Barth objects to this kind of mythological reference on the grounds that it neglects, leaves undeveloped, the imaginative vitality of the mythological tales themselves: we learn nothing new about the Odyssey, the Arthurian cycle, or the Chiron myth in the three novels mentioned above, because the myths are merely alluded to, rather than

⁴Scholes, *The Fabulators*, p. 171.

being shaped and transformed fictionally by the writer.⁵ By metafictionally making the hero myth a self-conscious part of the story, Barth is able to examine the nature of the myth itself, and of the relative truth and power of mythological constructs generally. Parody is transcended into serious vision by gaining an ironic perspective on mythological metafiction.

But ironic metafiction is not Barth's only cognitive transcension of parody in the novel: the hero myth is also parodied in what would appear to be a more realistic direction, toward metaphysics. In one direction parody serves as a heightening of artifice that is transcended into a serious vision of art; here parody serves the opposite function, dissolving artifice in order to create a tentative but serious vision of life. *Mythos* becomes *dianoia*; mere successiveness becomes theme; "story" becomes "plot;" and mythology becomes philosophy. This shift from the parody of conventional forms to a vision of reality is one for which we have as yet no critical concept; to account for it, I propose to introduce Northrup Frye's concept of "displacement."

In Frye's analysis, the imagination of man operates on a dialectic between the Pleasure Principle and the Reality Principle, concepts adapted from Freud. On one end of the dialectic, the imagination works with patterns of its own making, with highly conventionalized narrative structures identifiable as the hero myth. This Frye calls the Pleasure Principle, and is roughly equivalent to my use of the term "metafiction." At the other end, the imagination must make its patterns plausible in relation to the world of the senses:

In the course of struggling with a world which is separate from itself, the imagination has to adapt its formulaic units to the demands of that world, to produce what Aristotle calls the probable impossibility. The fundamental technique used is what I call displacement, the

⁵Bellamy, *The New Fiction*, pp. 8-9.

adjusting of formulaic structures to a roughly credible context.⁶

This is the Reality Principle, which insists that the patterns of the imagination have some resemblance to the world of experience. Again, there is a rough correspondence between this concept and my use of the term "metaphysics," or Robert Scholes' notion of cognition. Another statement of this dialectic in art is the tension between the artlike and the lifelike. For Frye, all literature is measureable in terms of the degree of displacement from the conventional patterns of the imagination: myth is nearest to those patterns, next closest is romance, and so on until one reaches the modes with the greatest displacement, realism and particularly ironic realism.⁷ Here, the conventional patterns of art are reduced to a minimum and the chaotic patternlessness of life given fictional form.

Now it is clear that, despite the sense of fantasy one experiences reading *Giles Goat-Boy*, Barth has displaced mythological patterns considerably. Very little happens in the novel that is not in some way plausible: God is reduced to a computer, which, though far superior to the computers we know, is given a highly plausible history that allows us to place it within the miracles of technology that are such familiar realities to us. George, unlike the mythological hero, does not enter a "dark kingdom" in the sense of a physical place parallel to our world of the everyday, but travels metaphorically into himself. There are no fantastic monsters to conquer - no dragons, no ogres - and the novel's dragon-figure, Harold Bray, who with his gravity-defying feats and numerous disappearances is the least plausible character in the novel, could easily be simulated with holographs or other technological tricks. George does not become a god, but is merely illumined. There is, in fact, nothing in the novel that is so implausible as to be classifiable as sheer undis-

⁶Frye, *The Secular Scripture*, p. 36. See also *Anatomy of Criticism*, pp. 136-8.

⁷Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, pp. 33ff.

placed myth.

This use of displacement as a realistic form of parody is particularly important to the novel's thematic development. Almost without exception, where Barth has changed a detail or an emphasis in the mythological source material, it is in the interests of displacing a supernatural element into a metaphysical reflection on human existence. What is perhaps the most important thematic displacement of the hero cycle in the novel is also the most complex, constituting a kind of inverse displacement through peripeteia, or disappointment of plot expectations. The hero myth in its undisplaced form contains the entire cycle of human life, from birth and the high aspirations of youth to the resignation of old age and death. Culturally, however, the hero myth is most familiar to us through the medium of romance, a displaced form of the myth. Here the hero's story ends not at his death, but at the completion of his task and the attainment of glory, at which point, it is implied, he and his partner live happily "ever after." This romantic displacement of the myth has become so deeply ingrained in our cultural imaginations, in fact, that to take the story beyond living happily ever after strikes us as a realistic displacement of the myth. Thus in *Giles Goat-Boy* Barth achieves the necessary shift from simple sublimation to cognition in his treatment of the hero myth by leading the reader to expect the romantic happy ending, but in the Posttape continuing on to the true end of the hero cycle: establishing the novel's tragic metaphysics by displacing romantic patterns *back* into those of the original myth.

Looking more closely at the hero myth as it is described by Joseph Campbell, we see that Campbell's interpretation itself was already well-suited to the sort of metaphysical displacement that would appeal fictionally to Barth. The hero-cycle contained, for example, certain motifs that strongly suggested metaphysical themes Barth had developed in his earlier fiction. One of these was Campbell's description of the world of myth as one in which everything is connected, in

which the microscopic restates the telescopic, microstructure repeats macrostructure.⁸

A second aspect of Campbell's interpretation is even more important, for it exactly parallels Barth's tragic vision of man's existence: the hero path, Campbell says, is one of self-discovery, in which the mythic hero penetrates to the secret of the universe within his own unconscious, and retrieves it to share with all mankind. This path to self-discovery, for Campbell, involves a movement from the innocence of childhood, to the moment of self-discovery in manhood, through a mature understanding of the necessity of decline in old age, to an ultimate tragic death.⁹ Here, the hero myth needed no parodying: by developing Campbell's insights into the ontogenic significance of the myth, Barth paved the way to a smooth transition from parodied mythology to allegorical metaphysics.

This move in *Giles Goat-Boy* from mythology to metaphysics is suggestive of another highly influential realistic displacement of mythology, which Campbell explains helped shape his own conception of the hero myth: psychological theory.¹⁰ Virtually all of the major psychological theorists of the first half of this century turned to the vast body of mythology in search of the patterns of human mental activity, and reinterpreted them in terms of psychic realities. The study of mythology and mythologically based literature guided Freud to his notion of the Oedipus complex, for example; Jung to his concept of archetypes, which correspond to the central characters of the hero myth (ego-hero, anima-mother, shadow-enemy, etc.), and further to his description of the hero-cycle as a process of individuation, in which the individual learns to know himself and becomes balanced and whole.

In adapting Campbell's reading of the hero myth to his fictive purposes, Barth also found this psychological perspec-

⁸Campbell, pp. 261-9.

⁹Campbell, pp. 17, 121.

¹⁰Campbell, pp. 255-6.

tive on mythology intriguing, with certain important qualifications. Barth would probably agree tentatively with Jung that mythological tales are the product of some innate narrative imagination of man, possibly a "collective unconscious;" but unlike Jung, Freud, Rank, and other psychologists, Barth is not interested in reducing those stories to psychic realities. Like the psychologists, Barth gives the tales of myth an allegorical significance; but he is more uneasy than they about absolute realities, and his uneasiness is manifested in the novel's ironic-metaphorical counterbalance to allegorical structure: in the comic, parodic treatment of all visions which profess to reproduce reality. Thus psychological interpretations of the hero myth are also subjected to parody in *Giles Goat-Boy*: they constitute for Barth not a definitive explanation of the myth, but simply a parallel myth that is equally fascinating as fiction but not to be taken at face value. Barth would no doubt concur with Nathanael West's position on psychology:

Psychology has nothing to do with reality nor should it be used as motivation. The novelist is no longer a psychologist. Psychology can now become something much more important. The great body of case histories can be used in the way the ancient writers used their myths. Freud is your Bullfinch; you cannot learn from him.¹¹

Let me now turn to the patterns of the hero myth themselves. Both Lord Raglan and Joseph Campbell have interpreted the myth, in somewhat different terms, Campbell's being generally the more complete and the more suitable to Barth's purposes. In the table that follows, I have combined their descriptions in one long list, to be found in Column 1; and, by way of comparison, in Column 2 I have compiled a rough outline of the way in which Barth has adapted the original myth to suit his fictional requirements.

¹¹Nathanael West, "Some Notes on Miss L." Quoted in Victor Comerchero, *Nathanael West: The Ironic Prophet* (University of Washington Press, Seattle, 1967), p. 95.

Table 4: *The hero myth and its use in Giles Goat-Boy*

THE HERO MYTH

GILES GOAT-BOY

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. The hero's society is oppressed by a tyrant or monster, possibly the hero's father in disguise, who represents Death. | 1. The tyrant in George's society is WESAC, the computer which also fathers George. |
| 2. The hero is conceived, under strange circumstances, on a virgin, who is often the wife or daughter of a king. | 2. George is the result of selective breeding, a testtube of semen being in some mysterious way transfused into the womb of the virginal Virginia Hector, daughter of the Chancellor. |
| 3. He is said to be the son of a god. | 3. George's father is the godlike computer WESAC. |
| 4. The place of his conception is the Axis Mundi or World Navel, the seat of power in the universe. | 4. George is conceived not on the World Navel (Founder's Hill), but in Tower Hall, where WESAC is housed. |
| 5. An attempt is made on his infant life, usually by his mother's husband or maternal grandfather: | 5. George's maternal grandfather, Reginald Hector, attempts to murder him, |
| 6. he is abandoned in a box or a basket, | 6. by placing him in WESAC's tapelift, |
| 7. injuring his leg in the process; | 7. where his leg and foot are injured by the tape cans. |
| 8. but is rescued, | 8. George is rescued by a black librarian, G. Herrold, |
| 9. and is carried away to a distant land, where he is raised by foster parents, often by animals. | 9. who gives him to Max Spielman, a defrocked scientist. He grows up thinking himself a goat, with Max for his father and a goat for his mother. |
| 10. At puberty he receives a call to adventure, | 10. George receives two separate calls: three blasts of Max's shophar, and the sounding of WESAC's EAT-whistle. |
| 11. and sets off for the land of his birth. | 11. George sets off for Main Campus. |
| 12. On the way he meets a helper or guide, | 12. At the first crossroads, George meets Max and G. Herrold. |

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|--|--|
| 13. who gives him advice, instructions, and magic amulets. | 13. Max gives the amulet-of-Freddie and shows him the way. |
| 14. Upon reaching the land of his birth he crosses a threshold into the region of the supernatural, | 14. George and Max cross a river. |
| 15. overcoming or conciliating the guardian of this region. | 15. On the opposite side of the river, George conciliates Maurice Stoker, the director of the Powerhouse. |
| 16. Beyond the threshold he meets with strange yet intimate forces, some of which threaten him, forcing him to pass certain tests; | 16. George meets his enemy, the false Grand Tutor, Harold Bray, who acts as Taskmaster in the three trials George must pass. |
| 17. others give him aid and advice. | 17. George receives assistance and amulets from a total of fourteen different people. |
| 18. Having completed his tasks, the hero symbolically marries the mother-goddess of the world, | 18. George enters the Belly WESCAC with Anastasia Stoker, making love to her there. |
| 19. from whom he receives or steals the boon of enlightened immortality. | 19. George attains enlightenment, but no immortality; rather, his enlightenment is a vision of his own mortality. |
| 20. He is recognized by the father-creator, | 20. George realizes the true nature of WESCAC. |
| 21. and becomes a god. | 21. George does not become a god. |
| 22. The hero now returns to the world, often reluctantly, at the insistence of a representative of society, | 22. George returns to the world, reluctantly, at the bidding of his mother. |
| 23. and the boon he brings restores the world. | 23. George's boon does not restore the world. |
| 24. If he is favored by the gods, he becomes king, | 24. George does not become king, but after driving out Harold Bray, some acknowledge him as the true Grand Tutor. |
| 25. and for a time reigns uneventfully, | 25. For the next twelve years George tries to teach the unteachable, spending, however, most of his time in jail. |

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|---|--|
| 26. prescribing laws. | 26. where Anastasia nags him into recording on tape the <i>Revised New Syllabus</i> . |
| 27. Later he falls from favor, | 27. Only the good offices of the Chancellor have protected him from the righteous anger of the people, and he predicts the Chancellor's eventual submission to popular pressure. |
| 28. and is exiled, after which | 28. George is not exiled, but |
| 29. he dies on the World Navel, often on the top of a hill, | 29. he foresees his execution on Founder's Hill, |
| 30. strapped to the Tree of Life. | 30. on an oak tree. |
| 31. If he leaves children, they do not succeed him. ¹² | 31. George leaves a son, who rather than following in his father's footsteps, sets about spreading "Gilesianism," a religion George himself does not endorse. |

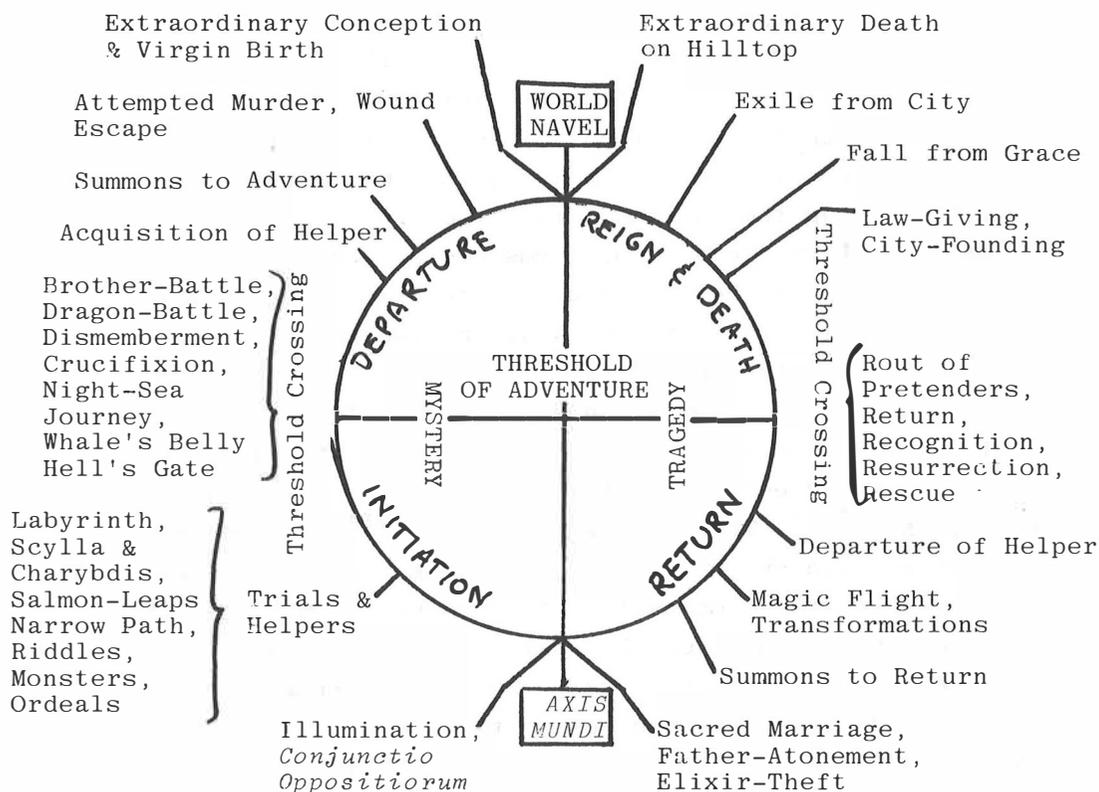
The path of the hero's adventure is, in Campbell's conception, "a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: *separation - initiation - return*."¹³ The path itself Campbell conceives as cyclical: the hero begins at the apex of the circle with birth, then moves counterclockwise through separation at the first quarter, initiation at the nadir, return at the third quarter, to death at the apex, once again on the World Navel.¹⁴

In *Chimera*, Barth has fit the various events of the hero's life into their respective places around the circle, to which his characters then refer as the "Hero Cycle" or the "Pattern" (C, 271):

¹²Raglan, pp. 178-9 (nos. 2, 3, 5, 8, 9, 11, 15, 18, 21, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 31), and Campbell, as follows: no. 1, pp. 15-6; 2, pp. 308-14; 3, p. 39; 4, p. 334; 5-9, pp. 321-6; 10-23, pp. 245-6; 24-6, pp. 345-9; 27-8, pp. 356-64; 29-30, p. 41.

¹³Campbell, p. 30.

¹⁴Campbell, p. 30.

Figure 5: *The hero cycle*

The quadripartite division of the circle corresponds to the four seasons of the year, spring, summer, fall, and winter, respectively. Mythologically, Northrup Frye explains, these are "the type for four periods of the day (morning, noon, evening, night), four aspects of the water cycle (rain, fountains, rivers, sea or snow), four periods of life (youth, maturity, age, death), and the like."¹⁵ Frye extends this cyclical theme to literature, where the four seasonal divisions correspond to four narrative categories: comedy, romance, tragedy, and irony or satire.¹⁶ A similar progression occurs in *Giles*

¹⁵Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 160.

¹⁶Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 162.

Goat-Boy, as the narrative proceeds from comedy in George's childhood, to romance in his adolescence and early manhood, to a mixture of tragedy and irony at the end of his life.

The fourway division may also be thought of as two semi-circular divisions: one along the Threshold of Adventure, and the other along the Axis Mundi. The former distinguishes the hero from ordinary human beings, for the majority of mankind avoids crossing the threshold into the "region of supernatural wonder,"¹⁷ where the hero performs his superhuman deeds. It also separates the hero's secular life from his religious life: above the horizontal axis he is human like the rest of us, and must deal with humans; below the axis he is superhuman, and deals with superhuman and supernatural forces. In psychological terms, this is the division between waking consciousness and deep sleep, the threshold itself representing dream consciousness.¹⁸ These three states in the Hindu religion are represented by the letters A (waking), U (dream), and M (deep sleep), the combination of which produces AUM or OM, silence, the sound of God Eternal.¹⁹ Thus, as George moves down the left side of the cycle, he is symbolically moving deep into his own subconscious. At the nadir he reaches the core of silence, OM, and attains illumination; subsequently he must begin the process of returning to waking consciousness, in order to share with conscious society the truths he has learned at the core of his own psyche.

The second division, that along the Axis Mundi, divides the circle into "Mystery" and "Tragedy," which correspond in the life of the hero, and in Barth's ontogenic framework, to innocence and knowledge, respectively. The innocent child hero is faced with the greatest mystery of all, the mystery of life; at the moment of his illumination he gains knowledge of himself and life, and learns that life itself is tragic: "Late or soon we lose. Sudden or slow, we lose" (763). Ha-

¹⁷Campbell, p. 30.

¹⁸Campbell, p. 266.

¹⁹Campbell, pp. 266-7.

rold Bray, George's enemy and the false Grand Tutor, declares at his first appearance: "Tragedy's *out*; mystery's *in!*" (354). It is George's task to discover and to demonstrate to others the falsity of Bray's claim. Mystery, he learns, is an inevitable part of childhood; but it is man's responsibility to leave childhood behind and reach a full understanding of the tragic nature of life.

Chapter 1 Departure

a. Birth and Childhood

I begin my examination of Barth's parodic use of the hero myth not where the novel begins it, but at the beginning: with George's birth. George, who was raised as a goat and therefore was largely unconscious until just before his fourteenth birthday, begins his narration with the series of events that first led him to an awareness of his destiny. And this in fact fits Raglan's description of the first quarter of the hero's life: "We are told nothing of his childhood."¹ But in this section I shall not yet be concerned with George's life as thematically rearranged into "plot," but rather shall extrapolate backwards from the plot in order to deal with the hero myth as the chronological sequence of events or "story" from which Barth fashioned the plot. Thus my analysis begins at the beginning, with events that remain unknown to George until he is nearly twenty-one years old.

As I have noted earlier, the hero myth is a cycle that is set in motion by a certain state of affairs within the hero's society, which in Barth's novel is evoked on the historical level of the allegory: the population is oppressed by a tyrant, decimated by a plague, or hounded by an ogre that guards the entrance to the city. This oppressor, according to Joseph Campbell, represents Death, which appropriately enough is suggested in the novel by a threat of annihilation by EATING, the novel's equivalent to a nuclear holocaust. The hero is born in response to his society's need: his task is to end the oppression and restore his society to health.²

Barth's development of the ogre-figure in the novel is the

¹Raglan, p. 178.

²Campbell, pp. 15-6.

first illustration of his self-conscious use of mythology. Rather than simply being given an ogre-figure and being expected to make the connection ourselves, we are provided with a scene in which George consciously makes the connection for us: his mother, whom he calls Lady Creamhair before he knows her true identity, reads to him from a book of folk tales, and one of the tales that captures George's imagination is the story of "The Three Billy Goats Gruff," which contains in the troll a classic example of the mythological oppressor who is slain by the hero. It is on the basis of this story that George initially conceives his own life-work as a world-redeeming hero, and the troll becomes his metaphor for the oppressor. Under the tutelage of Max Spielman, George learns to associate the troll-figure with WESCAC, the godlike computer that threatens to EAT mankind; and while George soon grows out of the troll metaphor, it is not until his enlightenment that he rejects the vision of monster-killing and societal redemption that he learned from the heroic tales of his childhood. Here Barth focuses his metafictional lens on the patterns of the hero myth; but at the same time he develops metaphysical concerns by suggesting that our subconscious notions of glory and success are programmed by myth, and through the realistic technique of displacement he replaces those mythically controlled attitudes with George's mature acceptance of failure.

One of the most difficult aspects of the troll-figure for George is that when applied to WESCAC, it only seems to capture half the truth. WESCAC defies simplistic attempts to label it as good or evil: "Nothing about the beast seemed unambiguous; I could imagine it at all only by reference to my own equivocal nature, that had got beyond its own comprehension and injured where it meant to aid" (86). WESCAC is both male and female, which fact prefigures George's sexual illumination; and, even more importantly, the computer is not only ogre but also man's sole protector, not only tyrant but father of the hero whose task it is to end the tyranny. When New Tammany scientists recognize the need for a redeeming hero,

it is WESCAC that collects the semen "from all New Tammany males between puberty and senility" (362), and creates from this matter the Grand-Tutorial Ideal, Laboratory Eugenic Specimen, or GILES. This identity of the tyrant and the benevolent father is common in mythology: "It is also possible," Raglan writes, "that the monster with which the hero fights is merely the reigning king in disguise, that the reigning king had to wear an animal costume or mask in which to defend his title and his life."³

The figure which Raglan calls the king is described by Joseph Campbell as a god, God the Father, the Creating Deity, and this is appropriate both to WESCAC's role as George's mysterious father and to the more spiritual descriptions of the computer:

"Oy, Bill, this WESCAC!" /Max/ said now with much emotion. "What a creature it is! I didn't make it; nobody did - it's as old as the mind, and you just as well could say it made itself. Its power is the same that keeps the campus going - I don't explain it now, but that's what it is. And the force it gives out with - yi, Bill, it's the first energy of the University: the Mind-force, that we couldn't live a minute without! The thing that tells you there's a *you*, that's different from *me*, and separates the goats from the sheeps. ... Like the life-heat, that it means we aren't dead, but our own house is the fuel of it, and we burn ourselves up to keep warm ..." (85-6).

WESCAC's paradoxical nature itself seems also to be based on Campbell's description of God the Father. WESCAC, like the Deity of mythology, is a "totality of inner opposites":⁴ "In him are contained and from him proceed the contradictions, good and evil, death and life, pain and pleasure, boons and deprivation. As the person of the sun-door, he is the fountainhead of all the pairs of opposites."⁵ This deity-figure in Jung's

³Raglan, p. 194.

⁴C.G. Jung, *Answer to Job* (tr. R.F.C. Hull, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1973), p. 7.

⁵Campbell, p. 145.

terms is described as the collective unconscious, and appropriately, WESCAC is made a repository of common unconscious knowledge and belief much like the archetypal storehouse Jung describes.

God, in mythological terms - or the unconscious, in Jungian terms - is the source of Truth. The hero's task is to bring that Truth from the divine darkness of the unconscious to the light of human consciousness. Because the hero is a synthesis of the (divine) unconscious and the (human) conscious, he acts as the essential link between them: only he is capable of crossing the barrier between conscious and unconscious, seeking out the Truth lodged in the depths of the unconscious and carrying it back to the conscious mass of humanity. As both Jung and Campbell explain it, the reason for the ogre-aspect of the unconscious Deity is that it shields the Truth from those to whom a direct confrontation with it would be fatal.⁶ This perspective on the deity-figure is ultimately learned by George in enlightenment: "although it stood between Failure and Passage, WESCAC therefore partook of both, served both, and was in itself true emblem of neither. I had been wrong, I said, to think it Troll. Black cap and gown of naked Truth, it screened from the general eye what only the few, Truth's lovers and tutees, might look on bare and not be blinded" (733-4).

Beyond these mythological equivalencies, of course, WESCAC also operates on the historical and philosophical levels: we saw in the last section how WESCAC represents modern technology, and we shall see in the next that in the computer Barth seems to be suggesting that the universe is determined, but lacks a Determiner.

The virginity of the hero's mother, in both Campbell's and Jung's interpretations, signifies her proud difference from the rest of womanhood: she is special, singled out by God to

⁶C.G. Jung and Karl Kerényi, *Essays on a Science of Mythology* (tr. R.F.C. Hull, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1969), pp. 84-5; and Campbell, p. 89.

be the vessel of his incarnation. The physical purity which is the *sine qua non* of her role as the bride and mother of God is also, according to Jung, an indication that in her is embodied the Divine Mother, Sophia.⁷

Virginia Hector, her name attesting to her virginity, is George's mother. Unlike the mothers of most heroes, Virginia plays a secondary role in the novel: significantly, she is upstaged by her promiscuous foster-daughter Anastasia, evidence that Barth's *Revised New Syllabus* is not a lesson in chastity, as was the old one. The Magna Mater, Goddess-Mother of the Universe, is incarnated in both Virginia and Anastasia; Virginia, however, comically represents the Divine Mother, while Anastasia more seriously embodies the Earth Mother. Because George is a sexual hero - "Enos Enoch with balls" (233), as Stoker calls him - it is appropriate that his female counterpart represents not Heaven but Earth.

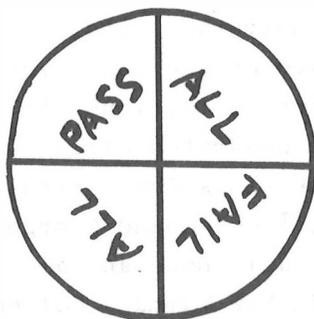
Barth has also hit upon a comic aspect of the immaculate conception in the novel: that is, because the virgin mother carries the child with her hymen intact, it is "the baby itself that /breaks/ it, being born" (544). Here we have a comic suggestion of the Oedipal act of matrophily on which Barth plays throughout the novel: it is George who finally takes his mother's virginity, prefiguring both his adolescent rape attempt on Virginia and his eventual enlightenment in her foster-daughter's arms. Further, the fact that George breaks his mother's hymen after his father WESCAC left it intact suggests an essential chasm between the divine and mechanical computer and its human and carnal son. Just as Virginia is the virginal mother who is eventually replaced by the sexual Anastasia, WESCAC is the divine father that is replaced by the supremely human George.

At birth George is given a PAT-card, for "Prenatal Aptitude Test," by WESCAC. In normal circumstances, this is WESCAC'S readout concerning the newborn infant's future "major" or vocation. In George's case, the readout bears four words only:

⁷Jung, *Answer to Job*, p. 36.

"Pass All Fail All." This mysteriously unpunctuated oracle is later, at Scrapegoat Grate, printed on the back of George's Assignment-card, a circular paper the "size of a cheeseburger plate" (428):

Figure 6: *George's PAT-card*



The quadrated circle will be recognized as Campbell's diagram for the hero-cycle; and indeed this figure is central to mythological descriptions of the hero's quest. In Jung's analysis, the circle, the cross within the circle, and the number four are all universal symbols of unity.⁸ Victor White, in *Soul and Psyche*, elaborates on Jung's interpretation:

Both square and cross present to our perceptions a certain completeness and finality. So, of course, does the circle or sphere, to which God, man and cosmos have also been likened. Indeed, there is considerable evidence that the Greek *telos*, which came to have the very abstract meaning of end, completeness or termination among the philosophers, originally meant a circle or some circular object. ... Although a circumference sets a fixed boundary or bond (and that was another meaning of *telos*) it has itself no beginning or end, and presents no distinction or differentiation whatsoever.⁹

The hero-cycle, of course, has no end either: "Cycles on cycles, ever unwinding: like my watch; like the reels of this

⁸C.G. Jung, *Psychology and Religion* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1962), pp. 64-87.

⁹Victor White, *Soul and Psyche: An Enquiry into the Relationship of Psychotherapy and Religion* (Collins and Marvill, London, 1960), p. 98.

machine ... ; like the University itself. Unwind, rewind, replay" (755). The quadrated circle is "the *complexio oppositorum* on which man must be stretched,"¹⁰ and the substance of George's ultimate insight is that the unity of paradox is the nature of the cosmos and of man.

John Tilton has further noted that when the quadrated circle is used to represent the universe, "its center (the *axis mundi* or world navel) /is/ marked by the intersection of lines drawn from the four cardinal directions."¹¹ Adding to this Jung's association of the quadrated circle with time, in the form of the zodiac and the clock (both circles divided by four and again by three),¹² we expand George's allegorical significance to encompass all space and all time.

The reference-point in New Tammany College for both spatial and temporal measurements is Tower Hall (482), the location of WESCAC and a pseudo-*axis mundi*.¹³ The center of the quadrated circle, traditionally occupied by the Deity, may thus be filled in this case by WESCAC, the godlike computer. On the other hand, the center of George's PAT-card is empty. Jung notes in *Psychology and Religion* that the empty center is a recurring phenomenon in quadrated circles or "mandalas" that appear in the dreams of modern man, and suggests that this indicates a replacement of the Deity by the wholeness of man.¹⁴ The two quadrated circles, the center of one occupied by WESCAC, that of the other empty, are not mutually exclusive: together they point to an important metaphysical paradox developed in the novel, that is, that man is the only force in a deterministic universe.

¹⁰White, *Soul and Psyche*, p. 99.

¹¹Tilton, p. 104.

¹²Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, p. 83.

¹³The true World Navel is Founder's Hill, where George is crucified; but Barth has diffused the locus of the World Navel in some cases to Tower Hall, for example in George's conception and illumination.

¹⁴Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, p. 97.

Having been born and PATted, the infant George is nearly murdered by his maternal grandfather, Reginald Hector. Chancellor Hector's criminal act is prompted partly by a fear of scandal, but more deeply by the threat Reginald reads into the child's PAT-phrase, which "he took to mean I would pass or fail not *everything* but *everybody*" (572). This implied threat appears to be a parody of the oracle that the infant Oedipus would grow up to kill his father and marry his mother, which led Laius to bind his feet and order a servant to abandon him.

The instrument of murder in the novel is to be WESCAC's Belly, entrance into which is fatal to all except the Grand Tutor. This single exception alludes to the Grand Tutor's role as mediator between the source of Truth and mankind. In the Book of Exodus, to look on Yahweh was instant death to all but Moses, who served as the essential mediator, the carrier of the Law from God to man.¹⁵ In the same way, George's ability to survive a direct vision of the Truth in the Belly of WESCAC indicates his role as the Messiah, the teacher of the Truth.

The fell power of WESCAC's Belly is demonstrated in the partial EATING of George's rescuer, G. Herrold. That G. Herrold's entrance into the Belly does not kill him, however, but merely makes him dimwitted, suggests a reference to the mythological "sacred fool," whose insanity was popularly taken to be the result of a vision of God.¹⁶ The figure of G. Herrold is a complex one. As a Negro, he represents "the primitive drives, the archaic powers, the uncontrolled instincts"¹⁷ that whites project onto the black man in their reluctance to admit them to consciousness. Similarly, George mistakes his sweeper for a snake, a chthonic animal associated in Christianity with Satan. That George's rescuer is associated with animals and

¹⁵Exodus 19:12-24 and 33:18-21.

¹⁶Raglan, pp. 216-7.

¹⁷C.G. Jung (ed.), *Man and His Symbols* (Dell, New York, 1971), p. 371.

the world of the instincts points ahead to his rearing as a goat. Snakes in primitive cultures were also associated with the shaman, the only man in the tribe capable of crossing the threshold into the supernatural and returning alive.¹⁸ G. Herrold, however, is at best a poor shaman: his mind is destroyed in the Belly where George attains enlightenment, and he drowns in the river marking the threshold into the land of the supernatural. His role is perhaps rather one of an unwitting shaman required for the rescue of George, whose failure as a shaman serves to point up George's ultimate success.

In the tapelift George receives the leg injury that is a characteristic feature of mythological heroism: his "poor leg and foot were bunged up by the tape cans" (105). According to Peter Hays, ritual lameness traditionally constituted a symbolic castration. This association was derived from the notion widely held in ancient times that ~~semen~~ ~~con-~~ sidered the stuff of life, originated not in the testes but in the marrow, which was thought of as extending from the neck to the ankles. Because leg and foot wounds were considered fatal (compare Achilles' heel wound), any man who survived them must possess supernatural powers. Thus lameness came to symbolize the ritual king.¹⁹

The injury George receives in the tapelift is located in his entire leg and foot. His knees are further damaged by fourteen years spent on all fours; and in his Oedipal struggle

¹⁸Martti Haavio points out that the Finnish shaman Väinämöinen was fed snakes in Tuonela, the land of the dead, and transformed himself into a snake in order to recross the Tuonela River into the land of the everyday. Haavio, *Väinämöinen* (Werner-Söderström, Porvoo, 1950), pp. 119-20.

¹⁹Peter Hays, *The Limping Hero: Grotesques in Literature* (New York University Press, New York, 1971), pp. 14ff. There is also etymological evidence for the association of the legs with the generative organs. Latin *femur*, *femora*, thighbone, is the source of our feminine, fecund, and foetus, while Greek *gonu* and Latin *genu*, knee, are cognate with English gonad, genital, genus, and generation (p. 12). Other languages seem to make the same connection as well: compare Finnish *polvi*, meaning both knee and generation.

with the goats at puberty he suffers a wrenching blow to the thigh, followed immediately by a horn in the genitals:

Too late I heard the rush of hooves behind me: Redfearn's Tom full gallop smote my thigh like a rolling boulder and drove me, half-turned, against the gatepost. I felt the shock from hip to sole, then another, more terrific, when he crotched me with the flat of his horn (79).

Having now decided to become a man, he soon tries to stand:

The most difficult thing was to straighten my knees, which fourteen years of my former gait had crooked. But it was they, and my inner thighs, that Tom had struck, and I choose still to believe his blow was like a hammer's on a rusted hinge, to free the action. In any case I got them straight (108).

As a goat, running about on all fours, George's legs give him no trouble: "at five years my crouching lope outstripped any human child of twelve" (45). It is his passage into manhood which marks the beginning of leg trouble. The significance of this fact is twofold. First, the incident marks George's crossing the threshold from healthy and unthinking goat to lamed and (ostensibly) world-redeeming hero. Redfearn's Tom in this respect may possibly refer to the Old Testament angel who, because he could not best Jacob in a wrestling match, "struck him in the hollow of the thigh,"²⁰ and bestowed upon him the name Israel, "because you strove with God and with men, and prevailed."²¹ Just as Jacob is singled out by God from the mass of humanity to become Israel, Billy Bocksfuss is expelled from the everyday goatishness of his childhood and forced to become a man. He takes the name George, after his rescuer from the tapelift, George Herrold, but in so doing he also becomes a namesake to St. George, the dragon-killer. His lameness clearly marks him as a hero.

Secondly, the beginning of George's lameness at puberty

²⁰Genesis 32:15. Unless specified otherwise, all Biblical quotes are from *The New English Bible* (Oxford and Cambridge University Presses, New York, 1970).

²¹Genesis 32:28.

points to the progression from birth to age and death implied in the riddle Oedipus solves: George, in moving from four legs to two to three, symbolically fulfills the inevitable cycle of life and death. Redfearn's Tom, the representative of his four-legged childhood, helps him to raise himself onto two legs; but his compound leg injuries immediately force him to take up a stick, moving to the three legs of old age. The lesson is Max's Riddle of the Sphincters: man is made of flesh, and doomed to die.

Having been rescued by G. Herrold and taken to Max Spielman in the goatbarns with his "bunded-up" leg, George is raised as a goat and suckled by the dam Mary Appenzeller. The nursing of the child hero by animals is a common motif in mythology, as is made clear by Otto Rank in *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero*. Rank notes that Paris was nursed for five days by a she-bear, Telephus by a doe, Gilgamesh by an eagle, Cyrus by a bitch, Siegfried again by a doe, Lohengrin by a swan, and Romulus and Remus, to whom direct reference is made in the novel (106), were nursed by a she wolf.²²

The use of goats as foster-parents is significant in a more complex way. First, a number of ancient gods appropriate to Barth's conception of George were raised as goats, most notably Zeus, Dionysus, and Pan. Zeus, exposed on the slope of Mount Lykaion, was raised by the Goat Amalthea (cf. Mary Appenzeller), with Aegipan (cf. Redfearn's Thomas) for his foster-brother.²³ Robert Graves notes that tradition associates Aegipan with the constellation Capricorn, which suggests

²²Otto Rank, *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero* (tr. Philip Freund, Random House, New York, 1959), pp. 23-60.

²³Robert Graves, *The White Goddess* (Faber and Faber, London, 1975), p. 318. The name of Zeus' foster-brother, Aegipan, is significant to the novel in another way as well, as a complex allusion to George's role as GILES, as the subject of hagiography, and as lamed hero: Tilton explains that the name Giles probably comes from St. Giles, the patron saint of beggars and cripples, "an Athenian of the seventh century then called Aegidus, 'wearer of the aegis' (goatskin)." Tilton, p. 96.

that "Zeus was born at mid-winter when the sun entered the house of Capricorn,"²⁴ The winter solstice, December 21, is also George's birthday, as it is of the sun-gods Dionysus, Apollo, and Mithras.²⁵ Dionysus is an appropriate reference as well: born of Zeus (WESCAC) and Demeter or Persephone (Virginia), he was, according to Apollodorus, a goat, and by name (Nysus) lame.²⁶

Perhaps the most important classical allusion in George's rearing as a goat, however, is to Pan. Barth does not mention Pan explicitly in the novel,²⁷ but George is compared to a satyr and a faun (232), and both George and his son Giles Stoker are associated with the reedpipes of Pan (xxvi, 115, 195).

Pan was half-goat, half-god. According to Cornutus, his caprine lower half symbolized the earth and bestiality, his human upper half heaven and rationality.²⁸ George too, while physiologically in no way caprine, moves from the frank goatishness of his childhood, through the high rationality of his adolescence, to a mature understanding of his essential humanity, which includes both the beast and the god.

Further, through an etymological confusion with the Greek *pán*, "everything," Pan's form was extended to include "the heavens, the sea, the earth, and fire - universal nature ..."²⁹ The references to Pan thus emerge as further variations in the novel on the themes of the identity of the individual and the cosmos (ontogeny recapitulates cosmogeny), and of the mixture

²⁴Graves, p. 318.

²⁵Graves, p. 318.

²⁶Graves, p. 146.

²⁷Explicit reference is made in *Chimera* to "the goat-god George Giles, who is to our Pan as, say, Polyeidus is to Proteus" (C, 258), Polyeidus being Barth's reworking of Proteus in the "Bellerophoniad" novella of *Chimera*. The association is also made by Scholes, *The Fabulators*, p. 147, and Charles B. Harris, "George's Illumination: Unity in *Giles Goat-Boy*," *Studies in the Novel* 8 (Summer 1976), pp. 172-3.

²⁸Patricia Merivale, *Pan the Goat-God: His Myth in Modern Times* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1969), pp. 9-10.

²⁹Merivale, p. 9.

of the divine and the animal in the carnality of man.

George's childhood as a goat is also significant in the terms of Christian theology, where sheep are associated with righteousness and goats with sinfulness. Matthew writes that at the end of time the Son of Man

will separate men into two groups, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep on his right hand and the goats on his left hand. Then the king will say to those on his right hand, "You have my Father's blessing; come, enter and possess the kingdom that has been prepared for you ...". Then he will say to those on his left hand, "The curse is upon you; go from my sight to the eternal fire that is ready for the devil and his angels."³⁰

In Christian terms, therefore, George carries strong associations of diabolism and sin. This stigma is tacitly accepted by Max Spielman, who associates goats with Judaism:

The way the campus works, there's got to be goats for the sheep to drive out, *ja?* If they don't fail us they fail themselves, and then nobody passes. Well, I tell you, it's a hard and passed fate to be a goat. Enos Enoch, now, he didn't want them in his herd; he drove out the goats from the fold and set them on his left hand, so he could be a good shepherd to the sheep. Okay, Billy. But when the time came that the *goyim* drove me out I thought about this: "Who's going to look after the goats?" And I decided: "Max Spielman is" (65).

Max decides to go to hell so that others may be saved, and to console himself appoints himself guardian of the damned. George, however, rejects Christian dualisms altogether, and asserts his goatishness, showing the world a new way to "pass" through sexuality. By driving George from the herd, and yet allowing him to retain his goatish mannerisms and figures of speech, Barth stresses that goatishness, sexuality, when joined with human rationality, is an important part of man's fundamental make-up.

³⁰ Matthew 25:32-41.

George's childhood comes to an abrupt end in the summer between his fourteenth and fifteenth birthdays. The transition from childhood to manhood is preceded by some three months of symbolic conflict between George's foster-father (Max) and mother (Lady Creamhair) for influence over his future. Max wants him to remain a goat, Lady Creamhair calls on him to become a man. The relevant chapters are filled with Oedipal references, as might be expected: the challenges to the father both in the Dean-of-the-Hill episode (47-9) and following his soapy bath (62), as well as the attempted rape of the mother (73-5), seem to be modeled directly, and comically, on Freudian theories of human sexual maturation. In the end, the mother loses the battle, relinquishing George's future to Max, but wins the war, as George decides to become a man.

One significant role played by Lady Creamhair is the awakening of George's imagination, a process which will later mold his decision to follow the path of the world-redeeming hero. She reads to him from mythological tales of heroes, feeding him each page as she reads it. The idea of eating holy script becomes a recurring motif in the book, as George is fed from Max's book *The Riddle of the Sphincters*, at several points munches on pages from the Old and New Syllabi, and in his first two crucifixions is forcibly fed his Assignment.³¹ By eating holy writ, one internalizes it, turns it into flesh and blood - i.e., resurrects dead letter in a human incarnation - and George's ultimate "replacement of the Founder's Scroll" repeats the same motif.

³¹Eating holy writ is a Biblical image of revelation. The author of the Book of Revelation, for example, drawing on Ezekiel 2:9-3:3, writes: "Then the voice which I heard from heaven was speaking to me again, and it said, 'Go and take the open scroll in the hand of the angel that stands on the sea and the land.' So I went to the angel and asked him to give me the scroll. He said to me, 'Take it, and eat it. It will turn your stomach sour, although in your mouth it will taste sweet as honey.' So I took the little scroll from the angel's hand and ate it, and in my mouth it did taste sweet as honey; but when I swallowed it my stomach turned sour." Revelation 10:8-10.

Lady Creamhair also possesses two material objects which become important symbols in the novel. The first of these is the picnic basket, symbolic of her womb, a symbolism repeated later in the black purse Anastasia gives George, and in the Belly of WESCAC. All good and all evil flows out of Virginia's womb, for she is the novel's comic equivalent of the Creatrix, the Divine Mother on whom God creates the world. Barth parodies this equivalence by having Virginia take out of the basket what George calls "the ritual food" (604), peanut-butter sandwiches, which allude to Campbell's description of the "Boon," the Mother-Goddess's present to the hero which restores the world.³²

The second object is Virginia's watch, left behind in her haste to escape the lusty George, and kept by George as an amulet. The watch is Time, the cyclicity of the universe, which the novel associates with the Mother-Goddess. This association of Woman with space and time apparently reflects her role in Campbell's interpretation as "the totality of what can be known."³³ Virginia is the enigma of the universe that, along with the import of the mysterious PAT-card also associated with space and time, George finally comes to "know" in WESCAC's Belly.

George's actual passage from childhood into manhood is precipitated by his struggle with the goats, which ends in the death of Redfearn's Tom and George's self-expulsion from the herd. In this scene Scott Byrd has suggested a reference to Adam and Eve's expulsion from Paradise in the Book of Genesis.³⁵ Aside from the unquestionably paradisaical nature of the goatbarns, however, there is little to warrant this association, as the scene involves no forbidden fruit, nor is Hedda of the Speckled Teat an Eve-like temptress. Indeed, the sibling rivalry and fratricide are more suggestive of Cain's murder of Abel than of the loss of Eden. There is, however, one aspect of the

³²Campbell, pp. 172-92.

³³Campbell, p. 116.

³⁴Byrd, p. 109.

scene which profits from a comparison with the Fall of Man: that is, while Adam and Eve were forcibly expelled from the Garden by God, George's is a self-expulsion which receives the full approval of his foster-father Max. These alterations in the story would seem to point to Barth's belief that it is man's responsibility to drive himself out of the innocent paradise of his childhood into the wilderness of maturity.

That the basis of the scene is Oedipal rather than Biblical, however, is attested to by the male rivalry over the female, which results in the death of one of the males. George's failure here foreshadows his later failure to redeem his society; and the reference to Oedipus reminds us that having confronted failure and accepted it as the law of life, the tragic hero becomes one of us. George leaves behind his happy childhood with the goats, and enters into the compromised environment of adulthood.

Benumbed by the physical pain in his leg and the emotional pain of having killed his brother, George staggers over to the nearby Livestock Branch of the Library, where he undergoes a symbolic rebirth. In a ritual reenactment of the events of his infancy, he climbs into the book-lift, equivalent to the tape-lift into which Reginald Hector had placed him as a newborn baby, and lies there calling weakly for Max until G. Herrold once more comes and rescues him. This rebirth is made official by his adoption of a new name: Billy Bocksfuss (goatfoot), the name of his kidship, is left "dead in the goat-pens" (109), and George takes the name of his rescuer, George Herrold. This would also point to a reading of G. Herrold's role as George's shamanic predecessor that failed, for Max suggests he follow the Moishian practice of taking the name of "the last man that died in the family, so his name don't die too" (110). Not being a Christian, Max "Maximizes" him with a prayer and a few drops of water on the head, just as the clock strikes noon on the summer solstice (111). No longer a child but a man, George is exactly fourteen and a half years, twelve hours old.

b. The Summons and Departure

Following his decision to leave the herd and become a man, George undergoes a seven-year period of "prepping" under Max's tutelage, an education that apparently has no counterpart in mythology. It is, however, during this period that George decides, in the novel's self-conscious imitation of the hero-myth, to become a world-redeeming mythic hero.

The next significant event in the hero-cycle occurs at the end of this period, when George is 21. Like the mythic hero described by Campbell, he receives a summons or call to return to the land of his birth, that he might redeem his society from the ravages of the oppressor.³⁵ In *Giles Goat-Boy* the call involves two distinct summonses: G. Herrold's three blasts on the shophar and the shrilling of WESCAC's EAT-whistle (145). Both calls sound in the middle of a dream, in which George is given a vision of a distant land:

In our old meeting-place Lady Creamhair sat on the ground. It was dark, not picnic time; yet the famous basket rested in her lap, and I squatted at her feet as in terms gone by. But we did not eat. As a child makes a comic face, she hooked her forefingers into the basket-lid and spread them wide. She bade me look, and I beheld in that dark chamber no peanut-butter sandwich, but a strange, baleful host. I saw a man with wings and one with tail. An ancient leaned upon his crook. A lady girl did nothing. I saw a body with two heads, one atop the other. I saw a single head with two bodies, winking and blinking. Still other eyes I saw, seeing me: a bodiless pair that neither blinked nor moved nor changed their cast. A man was there who vanished when I looked, yet whom I saw when I looked away. And others, a multitude of shadows, men and women, sheep and goats - they hushed about, melting and shifting. They beckoned to me, all, inviting, threatening - except the lady girl forlorn and patient. I yearned to her. How was it I had not till then suspected what the basket held? I would go to that folk, not meant for eating. No matter the peril, I would press into their country, whence whooped to me a most clear call now. *Tekiah!* The goats swarmed over all. *Tekiah!* (144-5)

The dream is a vision of the land beyond the threshold, in

³⁵Campbell, pp. 47-58.

Campbell's phrase "*the kingdom of the dark*."³⁶ Hence George's remark that "it was dark, nor picnic time": his passage into manhood signifies the end of picnics, the beginning of the necessity of exploring the dark unknown. The vision emanates from his mother's womb, represented by the basket in her lap; as mentioned above, Virginia's womb is a symbol of the source of the universe, from which George himself was born and in the counterpart to which (WESCAC's Belly and Anastasia's womb) he will eventually attain enlightenment. The basket contains no peanut-butter sandwich perhaps because George does not receive the world-redeeming Boon for which it stands; the sandwich Virginia brings George in the Belly remains a symbol, fails to be transformed into metaphysical redemption. The "strange, baleful host" who appear both "inviting" and "threatening" have their origin in Campbell's description of this land: "*Beyond the threshold, then, the hero journeys through a world of unfamiliar yet strangely intimate forces, some of which severely threaten him (tests), some of which give him magical aid (helpers)*."³⁷ The man with wings is an angel, the one with tail a devil, representing the world of polarity, the true nature of which it is George's task to discover. The ancient leaning on his crook is possibly Max, the lady girl Anastasia, and the two-headed body suggests Eierkopf perched on Croaker's shoulders. The two-bodied head is puzzling; it may refer to the two lovable ignoramuses, Greene and Leonid, of whom Stoker sardonically comments, "Two halfwits make a whole wit" (613). The unmoving eye is the ever-vigilant, omnipresent eye of WESCAC; and the vanishing man is Bray. George's realization that this folk is "not made for eating" seems to refer to his ostensible task as Grand Tutor, to save mankind from being EATEN by WESCAC. The dream clearly makes the dangers of his journey known to him, but his fascination is stronger than his fear; and he awakens, shucks his old fleece and slips on a new one, and prepares to set out.

³⁶Campbell, p. 245.

³⁷Campbell, p. 246.

Throughout the dream, G. Herrold has been blowing on Max's shophar. The shophar, as Tilton explains, "in the higher mythology is a call to respond to a spiritual crisis. In the Rosh ha-Shanah service, the three blasts of the ramshorn - *Teruah*, *Tekiah*, *Shebarim* - call upon Israel to rally to its God and exhort it to a spirit of self-analysis."³⁸ George, however, does not heed the call of the shophar, but follows "a different blasting call: a whistle of far-off power, urgent!" (145). This is the EAT-whistle, WESCAC's signal for a riot drill. Tilton suggests that George responds to a political crisis, which he must eventually learn "is merely a symptom of a spiritual crisis soluble only when man heeds the true call of the shophar to rigorous self-analysis."³⁹ More than this, however, George responds to the call of the EAT-whistle because he is the son of WESCAC, not a Jew. His world is the world of modern technology, in which there is no God to whom to rally - only a ubiquitous computer whose Word, if ambiguous, nevertheless represents inevitability, and must be obeyed.

According to Campbell, soon after setting out the hero is met by a protective figure, who provides him with magical amulets, charms, and information against the forces that would harm him.⁴⁰ This protector can be either male or female, or both; the male version, Campbell notes, is represented in literature by such figures as Virgil and Mephistopheles, the female by Beatrice and the Virgin. He continues:

Protective and dangerous, motherly and fatherly at the same time, this supernatural principle of guardianship and direction unites in itself all the ambiguities of the unconscious - thus signifying the support of our conscious personality by that other, larger system, but also the inscrutability of the guide that we are following to the peril of all our rational ends.⁴¹

³⁸Tilton, p. 97.

³⁹Tilton, p. 97.

⁴⁰Campbell, p. 69.

⁴¹Campbell, p. 73.

Barth's mentors, at least at this stage, seem to be based largely upon Virgil and Beatrice of Dante's *Divina Commedia*. Indeed Max, the male mentor, in persuading George that he needs a guide, refers to Dante's work:

"So listen here," Max said, "you got to hear this: how did the lost Professor in the *Campus Cantos* find his way through the South Exit and around to Commencement Gate?"

"He had the former director of the Poetry Workshop to show him," I replied (149).

Like Virgil, Max at this point represents human reason, and guides George, as Virgil did Dante, only to the river at the threshold into the land beyond. Here Anastasia, who resembles Beatrice in symbolizing love and truth - with the sole exception that her truth is not the chaste love of Beatrice but sexual - takes over.⁴²

Max takes his surname from Lord Raglan's discussion of the helper-figure in drama, whom Raglan classifies as the "Spielman": "He appears in a different guise in each act, but

⁴²Dante leaves Virgil in Canto XXVII of the *Purgatorio*, at the River Lethe, where in Canto XXVIII he meets Beatrice. Dante's descriptions of the respective allegorical roles played by Virgil and Beatrice at this stage certainly apply to Barth's novel as well, for example:

"But save all questions of such consequence
till you meet her who will become your lamp
between the truth and mere intelligence" (VI, ll. 46-8).

Dante Alighieri, *The Purgatorio* (tr. John Ciardi, Signet, New York, 1962). Dante's portrayal of the chaste Beatrice, on the other hand, is an early example of the tendency of Renaissance writers to divide women into two parts, good and evil, angel and prostitute. Francis Shaeffer explains: "All his life Dante loved Beatrice... , and he held up their love as a romantic ideal. ... On the other hand, the wife he married in 1285 never had a place in his poetry. She was only for doing his cooking and rearing his children. ... This situation did not produce beauty but ugliness. The wife was a dray horse, the idealized woman, a disembodied phantom." *How Should We Then Live? The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture* (Revell, Old Tappan, 1976), p. 58. Dante's conception of the chaste woman and of the insistence upon dividing woman in two is parodied in *Giles Goat-Boy* both in the figure of Virginia Hector and in Peter Greene's perception of Anastasia as two women, the chaste Stacey and the promiscuous Lacey.

it is he who initiates each dramatic development, and who goads the other characters into action."⁴³ The helper's role in Max's case involves giving George directions (147) and an amulet. This is the amulet-of-Freddie, "the token of herds-manship" that entitles him to the role of "Good Goatsman" (150). The amulet consists of the dried testicles clipped from the troublesome buck Freddie, and Max interprets them to mean George must abstain from sex - i.e., behave as if he were the castrate buck. George concurs at this point, but in enlightenment he realizes that Max was wrong; the true import of the amulet is that man must assert, not deny, his essential sexuality (735).

Max guides George to the First Threshold, Campbell's term for the border between the everyday and the land of the supernatural. In the novel this threshold is a river, swollen into a torrent by spring rains. In terms of Barth's parody of Dante, the river is the River Lethe, the threshold between Purgatory and the Earthly Paradise; in Jung's interpretation, a river-crossing signals a change in attitude, which in George's case is a beginning acceptance of his own sexuality.⁴⁴ The bridge that normally spans the river has been washed away by the flood: there is no easy crossing into the kingdom of the dark.

Standing on the remnants of the bridge, Max and George notice a woman, who unaccountably hoists her shift and calls, "Croaker!" Seeing her, G. Herrold enters the river and drowns, leading Max and George to conclude that she is a siren, sent by hostile forces to destroy George (155). In fact, she is Anastasia Stoker, George's "Ladyship" and female mentor; but Campbell notes that the female mentor in mythology is frequently given the negative aspect of siren:

The regions of the unknown ... are free fields for the projections of unconscious content. Incestuous *libido*

⁴³Raglan, p. 276.

⁴⁴Jung, *Man and His Symbols*, p. 211.

and patricidal *destrudo* are thence reflected back against the individual and his society in forms suggesting threats of violence and fancied dangerous delight - not only as ogres but also as sirens of mysteriously seductive, nostalgic beauty.⁴⁵

Max, tutor of the hero, bids George not to look, lest he be destroyed like G. Herrold; but George, to Max's horror, is mesmerized by the sight, and when Croaker snatches him up from behind and carries him into the water, he assumes he is to be drowned by his own flunked physicality, and struggles violently. George's anti-physical position, and his literal position on Croaker's shoulders, suggest a parallel at this point between George and Eierkopf, reason incarnate. Finally, George surrenders: "No longer fighting either /Croaker/, the river, or ruinous desire, I let them take me where they would" (158). As a result, the threshold crossing is facilitated, and George realizes that Croaker's intention from the start was to ferry him across, not to drown him. This perception leads to the new acceptance of sexuality marked by the river-crossing, and the end of Max's influence over him.

Besides physicality, Croaker at this stage suggests the ferryman Charon who carries the souls of the dead across the River Styx, and Matilda, who carries Dante across the Lethe, into the Earthly Paradise. Unlike these ferryman, however, Croaker is himself no angel; rather, like G. Herrold, he is a chthonic figure, semi-demonic and -bestial. George is carried across the river - and out of danger at other crucial points in the novel - by his instinctual sexuality.

Across the river, George changes his mind regarding Anastasia: far from being a siren, she is a protective figure, associated with charity (190) or *caritas*, the self-giving love to which Paul exhorts all mankind in 1 Corinthians 13. In terms of Jung's interpretation of the myth, she is the anima, the feminine side of the male ego, and its guide to "release, renunciation, and atonement."⁴⁶ Appropriately, her name is

⁴⁵Campbell, p. 79.

⁴⁶Jung, *Man and His Symbols*, pp. 115, 147-50.

Greek for "resurrection," for ultimately she is the vehicle for George's rebirth.

At this point in the hero path, Campbell writes, the hero "*encounters a shadow presence that guards the passage. The hero may defeat or conciliate this power and go alive into the kingdom of the dark ... or be slain by the opponent and descend in death.*"⁴⁷

The guardian of the passage in *Giles Goat-Boy* is Maurice Stoker, husband of Anastasia. He is the god of the underworld: his Christian name, as Tilton explains, comes from the Latin "Mauritius," Moor or dark-skinned person, and his surname suggests the Devil stoking the fires of hell.⁴⁸ He is referred to as the "Dean o' Flunks" or Satan; his complexion is sooty, his hair black, and he wears "a sharp beard, like a black spade, and one vertical ridge from the front of either temple up to his hairline" (192). In terms of Barth's parody of cinematic *opsis*, Stoker clearly belongs to that well-defined clan of sinister villains that slink through so many Hollywood Westerns.

Parodic villain that he is, however, Stoker is not the Christian Devil; as Tilton notes, his domain is not evil, but energy.⁴⁹ He is associated with violence, disorder (166), power (222), extremism, and contradictories (467). Stoker is therefore more properly associated with the Devil of William Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, who proclaims that "Energy is the only life and is from the body; and Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy. Energy is eternal delight."⁵⁰ Stoker's energy, the power he produces in the Furnace Room of the Powerhouse, is the life force, without which the universe would cease to exist. Psychologically, Stoker may represent the libido, the "lower" but basic sexual drives of the human

⁴⁷Campbell, pp. 245-6.

⁴⁸Tilton, p. 109.

⁴⁹Tilton, p. 109.

⁵⁰William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. In D.J. Sloss and J.P.R. Wallis (eds.), *The Prophetic Writings of William Blake* (Oxford University Press, London, 1969), p. 13.

organism as described by Freud.⁵¹

Campbell notes that the best-known guardian of the passage in ancient times was Pan, the ecstasies of whose orgiastic rites

Plutarch numbers ... along with the ecstasy of Cybele, the Bacchic frenzy of Dionysus, the poetic frenzy inspired by the Muses, the warrior frenzy of the god Ares (= Mars) and, fiercest of all, the frenzy of love, as illustrations of that divine "enthusiasm" that overturns the reason and releases the forces of the destructive creative dark.⁵²

This irrational, destructive-creative enthusiasm is eminently suitable to Stoker's role as Blakean Energy or the life force. He is director of the Powerhouse, in charge both of the infernal and chaotic Furnace Room, and of the Living Room, where he is "master of the revels in the orgiastic celebration of life."⁵³ Stoker's association with Pan is further reinforced by his close association with the central Pan-figure in the novel, George. Stoker classifies Max and Anastasia as sheep, himself and George as goats (213); and the Sears proclaim George "a regular faun" (232), insisting that "He looks like Maurice in bronze!" (231).

That George must conciliate energy, power, the life force, or the libido in order to enter the kingdom of the dark is significant. To attain wholeness George must come to terms with his lower desires and drives: recognize, understand, and affirm them. Ultimately George will transcend Stoker's narrow, one-sided approach and realize that unfettered sexuality is not sufficient. Both reason and sexuality must be affirmed in paradoxical harmony: "Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to human existence."⁵⁴

⁵¹See Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (tr. James Strachey, Hogarth Press, London, 1962), passim.

⁵²Campbell, pp. 81-2.

⁵³Tilton, p. 109.

⁵⁴Blake, p. 13.

Having crossed the river, George, who is perched on Croaker's shoulders, finds himself surrounded by black-jacketed motorcyclists bearing pistols; and unhesitatingly he attacks, brandishing the stick he has fashioned from the crook that was the end of Redfearn's Tom. At this point Stoker himself appears, "raised his pistol ... , and with incredible smiling calm aimed it at my heart" (192). The comic symbolism of this scene suggests a confrontation of two representatives of sexuality: George, mounted on the beast Physicality and wielding his phallic stick, faces the libido, who points a phallic pistol. Anastasia now jumps between them, but is pushed out of the way by Stoker, and one of his guards tranquilizes Croaker from underneath George. Stoker's sex drive or energy will be thwarted neither by charitable love nor by brute physical strength.

Interestingly, this confrontation corresponds to what Campbell calls the "dragon-battle," one of the hero's prerequisites for apotheosis. But the true dragon of the novel is not Stoker but Harold Bray; and Barth has moved the dragon-battle from the First Threshold across the diagram to the Return Threshold (see Figure 5, p. 186). This shift makes enlightenment requisite for successful dragon-battle rather than vice versa. Even so, Barth was too intrigued by the thematic potential of the hero's conflict with the opponent to allow George to cross the threshold unopposed; here, as elsewhere in the novel, Barth has seized upon a thematically rich event in the hero's path and expanded it into a recurring motif.

George conciliates the guardian of the passage through his natural and newly-found sexuality. When Stoker launches into a string of ribald invective, Max and Anastasia blush, but George involuntarily smiles. At this Stoker takes an immediate - if still mocking - liking to George, and the assembled company proceeds to the Powerhouse, where Stoker will lead George through comic counterparts to Heaven, Hell, and Earth, in that order, parodying Dante's *Commedia* in miniature.

The Powerhouse is located inside Founder's Hill, which in Campbell corresponds to the World Navel, appropriately enough the source of "Grace, food substance, energy /pouring/ into the living world."^{5 5} At the peak of the Hill is the Shaft, on which Enos Enoch once was crucified (241). Here Max, and symbolically George as well, will eventually meet their ends.

George enters the Powerhouse at dusk, and leaves it at dawn; symbolically this night is a ritual death, leading in mythology to the hero's rebirth. This is a second case of Barth's expanding thematically promising mythological material into recurring motif. In Campbell's interpretation, the death of the hero at the First Threshold is one alternative to the conciliation of the guardian:

The idea that the passage of the magical threshold is a transit into a sphere of rebirth is symbolized in the worldwide womb image of the belly of the whale. The hero, instead of conquering or conciliating the power of the threshold, is swallowd into the unknown, and would appear to have died.^{5 6}

Having died, the hero explores the land of death, there completes his task, and emerges reborn only after enlightenment and apotheosis. The land of death thus comprises the whole of the dark kingdom beyond the threshold. Importantly in terms of Barth's metaphysical displacement of the hero myth, George does not literally die in order to complete his task (unlike mythological heroes, human beings, in whom Barth is ultimately interested, only die once); instead, Barth uses symbolic death as an outward sign of inward development and growth, and expands the death-rebirth sequence into a recurring motif marking the stages of George's ontogenic passage. Thus his night in the Powerhouse repeats the sequence of his birth and puberty, and will later be repeated in his several visits to the Belly of WESCAC (in connection with which I shall dis-

^{5 5}Campbell, p. 40.

^{5 6}Campbell, p. 90.

cuss the death-rebirth sequences in more detail).

The Powerhouse, situated as it is inside Founder's Hill, is a microcosm, containing Heaven (the Control Room), Hell (the Furnace Room), and Earth (the Living Room).⁵⁷ That Stoker is permitted into the Control Room at all testifies to his role as energy rather than evil; however, he is comically ill at ease there, and quickly ushers George out and down to the Furnace Room, where he is most in his element. From the Furnace Room they walk down the hall to the Living Room, where the night's most significant events take place. These are aptly described by Tilton:

In Stoker's Living Room, where Earth and the Underworld meet, Giles joins Stoker's Spring Carnival party and participates in the rite of renewal similar to the mystery celebrated at the world navel. The cycle of death and birth is celebrated in the literal cremation of G. Herrold and birth is celebrated in the homeopathic act of procreation as Giles "services" Anastasia in drunken animal abandon. Both of these mockeries prefigure real acts of fulfillment which occur, significantly, nine months later: Max is then cremated on Founder's Shaft in the same flame that consumed G. Herrold, but his death is a sacrificial crucifixion on behalf of mankind, and thereby a consecration of love and life; and Giles and Anastasia then unite in an act of love that constitutes the rebirth of Giles.⁵⁸

At the conclusion of the "mockeries," George pulls the EAT-whistle, creating in his Pan role a "panic" (244) that threatens to destroy him as well, until Croaker, the body and its self-preservational instincts, lifts him onto his shoulders and carries him to safety. As they leave the Powerhouse, the day is dawning (245): his night in the land of death is over, and he sets off down the Road of Trials.

⁵⁷Tilton (p. 108) notes that "the world navel or Primeval Hill of ancient mythology . . . was ritualistically conceived as the connecting link among the three planes of existence, the sky world or Heaven, the Earth, and the Underworld."

⁵⁸Tilton, pp. 108-9.

Chapter 2 Initiation

a. The Road of Trials

Once having crossed the threshold, the hero moves in a dream landscape of curiously fluid, ambiguous forms, where he must survive a succession of trials. . . . The hero is covertly aided by the advice, amulets, and secret agents of the supernatural helper whom he met before his entrance into this region. Or it may be that he here discovers for the first time that there is a benign power everywhere supporting him in his superhuman passage.¹

Upon reaching Main Campus, George is indeed required to undergo certain Trials, three in number: the Trial-by-Turnstile, Scrapegoat Gate, and the Belly of WESCAC. The hero's taskmaster in this passage, or the "initiating priest," is always the father,² and George's taskmaster accordingly is WESCAC, both directly and through the mediation of the computer's mysterious emissary, Harold Bray, who becomes the dragon George must eventually drive out. George receives amulets and advice from virtually all the central characters in the novel; in addition, he discovers that WESCAC, which has sent Bray to thwart his progress, is also the "benign power everywhere supporting him in his superhuman passage." WESCAC has carefully arranged George's path to herodism with built-in hazards and wind-falls, and initiates, directs, and consummates the hero-cycle in such a way as to ensure George's readiness for enlightenment.

Soon after George's arrival on Great Mall, he loses the guidance of his helper, Max Spielman: having left George to his own devices at the Powerhouse, the next day Max turns himself in for the murder of Herman Hermann. After this point George receives some advice from Max on his intermittent visits

¹Campbell, p. 97.

²Campbell, p. 136.

to Main Detention, but for the most part he is aided by the other central characters in the novel, who might thus qualify as Max's "secret agents."

That George receives aid and amulets from these characters is of mythological significance; but the nature of the amulets themselves is largely guided by philosophical rather than mythological concerns, and is thus tied to character and idea rather than story. For this reason it may at this point suffice simply to list the amulets and assistance George receives, leaving more detailed treatment of their significance for the chapter on character (Part V, Chapter 2).

Table 5: *George's amulets and assistance*

TIME	
Virginia Hector;	the watch
SEXUALITY	
Max Spielman:	the amulet-of Freddie, a pair of goat testicles strapped on a leather thong around George's waist as a token of leadership
Anastasia Stoker:	Virginia's purse - "It's just an old bag of Mother's; you can put everything on campus in it" (426) - like the picnic basket, a campus-containing womb symbol
Croaker:	carvings on George's walking stick of figures in various sexual embrace, and physical rescue from danger
SEEING AND LIGHT	
Dr. Sear:	a two-way mirror, one side of which is concave, the other convex.
Eblis Eierkopf:	a series of lenses which can be adjusted to form either a telescope or a microscope
Maurice Stoker:	two D-sized batteries
Lucius Rexford:	a silver flashlight

VITALITY

Peter Greene: motorcycle repair, a vitamin pill at the Trial-by-Turnstile, and the loan of his inspiring phrase, "I'm okay, and what the heck anyhow"

IDENTITY

The Living Sakhyan: an empty philter called "The Disappearing Ink"

Ira Hector: his own ID-card and enough indelible ink to sign his name

Leonid Andreich: a few drops of ink eradicator

Reginald Hector: his signature on George's ID-card

Peter Greene: the temporary loan of his ID-card at the Trial-by-Turnstile

Opposed to this assistance is George's archenemy, Harold Bray, the false Grand Tutor and antigiles, the mythological dragon George must drive out in order to complete his quest. Like the other characters, Bray too gives George an amulet, but its function is not to aid but to confound: it is the mask of his own face, which George wears through Scrapegoat Grate and once again through the Belly of WESCAC. The purpose of the mask is ostensibly to protect George from WESCAC's fell EATING power, but in fact Bray's intention is to foil George's quest by transforming him into a carbon-copy of himself. As antigiles, Bray's task is to thwart George at any cost; and in addition to linguistic tricks and direct violence, one of the ways he seeks to complete his nefarious task is by tempting George to give up his quest altogether - one of the novel's several equivalents to Satan's temptation of Christ in the wilderness. By donning Bray's mask and thus in effect becoming Bray, George would attain a secure position of power and the outward appearance of having completed his hero's task; but this very position would at the same time prevent his attaining the self-knowledge that is his true objective.

Bray is apparently an emanation of WESCAC, and he resembles the computer in certain ways. He is characterized by a mechanical buzzing and clicking, eyes suggestive of the lights on

a control panel (423), analytical perceptiveness (386), lustlessness, and an ejaculation that resembles lubricating oil (726). He has an uncanny ability to get a multitude of things done at once (457), which suggests WESCAC's omniscient and omnipresent control of all aspects of life in New Tammany College. At Bray's appearance in the theater, Dr. Sear refers to him as a "*machina*" (354), i.e., a *deus ex machina* or, literally, a "god-from-machine." And finally, while not a Grand Tutor, he is capable of performing miracles that appear to be undeniable proof that he is. He enters the Belly of WESCAC and is not EATen (409, 561-3, 695-6, 726), flies into the theater (354), walks up the side of a building (718), appears from nowhere to walk on water and transform himself into all the characters in the novel (750-2), and finally turns himself into a pall of smoke and flies off (752-3).

All this points to Bray's role as archenemy. Like the signs and miracles to be performed by the Anti-Christ, Bray's mysterious powers are intended only to lead the gullible astray.³ Bray is the "proph-prof, foil, and routed antigiles" (563) who both proclaims, like John the Baptist, the arrival of the Messiah, and, like the Anti-Christ, pretends to be the Savior himself, in order to be driven out.

In addition, in Bray Barth may be parodying the traditional folk motif of the trickster, which Jung describes as follows:

A curious combination of typical trickster motifs can be found in the alchemical figure of Mercurius; for instance, his fondness for sly jokes and malicious pranks, his powers as a shape-shifter, his dual nature, half animal, half divine, his exposure to all kinds of tortures, and - last but not least - his approximation to the figure of a saviour.⁴

³"But the coming of that wicked man is the work of Satan. It will be attended by all the powerful signs and miracles of the lie, and all the deception that sinfulness can impose on those doomed to destruction." 2 Thessalonians 2:9-10. The reference is also noted by Tilton, p. 99.

⁴C.G. Jung, *Four Archetypes: Mother/Rēbirth/Spirit/Trickster* (tr. R.F.C. Hull, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1973), p. 135.

While Bray is not sly but rather pompous, he does play rather malicious pranks on George, and does become a shape-shifter just prior to his disappearance; he has a dual nature in his halfway state between man and computer; and, finally, he does appear to be a savior to the vast majority of the College. In Jung's psychological interpretation, both the trickster and the mythological dragon manifest the archetype of the "shadow," the emanation of a personal or collective sphere of the unconscious whose function is "to represent the opposite side of the ego and to embody just those qualities that one dislikes most in other people."⁵ Accordingly, Bray is an emanation of WESCAC who embodies the society's concept of what a Grand Tutor should be, which concept George must understand and reject before he can be enlightened.

In his role as George's opponent, Bray presides over the three Trials George must undergo in order to Graduate: the Trial-by-Turnstile, Scrapegoat Grate, and the Belly of WESCAC. These correspond to the three phases of university attendance (Matriculation, Qualifying, and the Final Examinations), and to the three phases of mythological initiation: Threshold Crossing, Road of Trials, and Apotheosis.

The Turnstile is the test that must be passed in order to Matriculate into the University. As Max explains, originally only bona fide Candidates for Graduation were admitted; nowadays this original purpose has become secularized, and registration is open to everyone, the Turnstile ceremony remaining only as a ritual (296-7).

The Trial-by-Turnstile occurs during Spring Registration, which ritualistically forms part of the Spring Carnival celebrations corresponding to our Easter week: as Max explains, they commemorate "the Expulsion of Enos Enoch, His promotion of the Old-Syllabus Emeritus Profs from the Nether Campus, and His triumphal Reinstatement" (297). Significantly, this trial occurs on the Friday of Carnival week corresponding to Good Friday, the day of Christ's crucifixion; and it is further the day of George's own first lynching, following which he spends three seasons in Main Detention, corresponding to Christ's

⁵Jung, *Man and His Symbols*, p. 182.

three days in Hell.

The Trial itself suggests a parody of Christ's crucifixion in at least three ways. First, the Turnstile is a toothed apparatus suggestive of the Harrowing of Hell, the apocryphal legend referred to above as Enos Enoch's promotion of the Old-Syllabus Profs from the Nether Campus. Second, the moment George passes through the Turnstile, a total eclipse of the sun begins, just as "a darkness fell over the whole land" as Christ died. And finally, in crashing the Turnstile George jams the apparatus and the side-gates are thrown open for general admission, suggesting Christ's sacrificial death that granted all mankind admission to the kingdom of God. These parallels are significant, despite the obvious differences between the just-beginning George and the dying Christ: both the Trial-by-Turnstile and Christ's crucifixion constitute heroic passages from the human world of the known into the superhuman world of the unknown.

While the Turnstile ceremony has become ritualized, Scrapegoat Gate has fallen into total disuse, and is crossed for the first time in centuries when Bray and George certify their Candidacies in it. The name Scrapegoat Gate, as Max explains, has nothing to do with "scapegoat": it

alluded to three characteristically anticaprine remarks of Enos Enoch's: that He was come to separate the sheep from the goats; that the Way to Graduation was too narrow for even a goat to walk, but a broad mall for His flock; and that it were easier for a goat to scrape through an iron fence-grating than for a merely learned man to enter Commencement Gate (297-8).⁶

George crashes the Turnstile at dawn, with the assistance of Peter Greene; his passage through Scrapegoat Gate is likewise more a "crash" than a legal passage, and takes place at

⁶Max is probably referring to the following Biblical verses: Matthew 25:31-3 (see page 201, above); Matthew 7:14 ("the gate that leads to life is small and the road is narrow, and those who find it are few"); and Matthew 19:24 ("it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God").

7 a.m., with the assistance of Anastasia Stoker. The Trial-by-Turnstile is overseen by Maurice Stoker, with Bray present only in voice, over the loudspeakers; at the Grate Bray sits in personal attendance, and himself asks the Candidacy question: "Do you want to commence now?" (425). George is caught in Bray's linguistic trap: understanding "commence" to mean "begin" rather than "attain salvation," he answers a careless Yes, and fails. Fortunately, his watch chain has caught in the control panel, buying him time to think, and when Anastasia shows him that Bray is wearing a mask, George peels it off, puts it on his own face, and hurls himself headlong through the Grate. His passage is perhaps not strictly according to Hoyle; but he is through. Indeed, one might infer that this *is* the only correct way to pass the Grate: if George's "Yes" is the wrong answer to the Candidacy question, certainly "No" can be no righter. The hero is not expected to play by the rules; rather, confronted as he is by superior forces, he must use every means at his disposal to pass the tests, including deceit and brute strength.

As George passes through the Grate, a paper pops out of the Wall, bearing the PAT-card sign and his "Assignment":

To Be Done At Once, In No Time

- 1) *Fix the Clock*
- 2) *End the Boundary Dispute*
- 3) *Overcome Your Infirmary*
- 4) *See Through Your Ladyship*
- 5) *Re-Place the Founder's Scroll*
- 6) *Pass the Finals*
- 7) *Present Your ID-card, Appropriately Signed, to the Proper Authority (428)*

These seven tasks become central philosophical concerns in the novel, as George blunders through three successive metaphysical interpretations of his PAT-phrase, "Pass All Fail All," first in terms of Differentiation, next as the imperative to Embrace!, and finally as the paradoxical realization that both previous positions are simultaneously true.

George's third and final Trial, the Belly of WESCAC, is the location of the Final Examinations, where the Candidate

reaches Graduation or "commences." It corresponds in Campbell to the belly of the whale,⁷ and is described as a womb:

the floor and walls of the chamber were lined with a warm, damp, spongy material (humidified and heated, I later learned, to preserve the tapes). Moreover, the room had the feel of an irregular hollow sphere, at least where I stood; it was difficult to maintain balance on its springy floor, which also pulsed and rumbled slightly as though adjacent to great machinery (561).

The absence of light in the Belly points to its symbolic significance as death; and this description as a womb indicates its function as a place of rebirth. George experiences symbolic death and rebirth in the Belly of WESCAC three separate times in the novel: twice with Harold Bray, after his first abortive round of Tutoring, and once with Anastasia, during which he attains enlightenment. But, as has been suggested earlier, the death-rebirth sequence in the Belly is in fact the type for an entire series of deaths and rebirths in George's development, including the sequences involving his expulsion from the herd and his passage through the Powerhouse, and those of his birth and infancy and his predicted death. Because the Belly of WESCAC provides the narrative type for these

⁷See above, p. 214, quote. Olderman (p. 76) suggests that in the Belly of WESCAC Barth has deliberately altered Campbell's concept of the whale's belly: "The static nature of George's world prevents any kind of real voyage; and the necessary rebirth of the hero, which takes place according to Campbell in a womb symbolizes by the belly of a whale, occurs according to Barth in the belly of a computer. The whale's belly provides a perfect moving womb for a hero who journeys, but the hero trapped in a static institution must make do with the unmoving WESCAC." This is a clear misunderstanding of Campbell. The paradigm which Campbell calls the belly of the whale is found in some cultures as the interior of a temple (Campbell, pp. 91-4), which is quite as stationary as WESCAC's Belly. Furthermore, according to Campbell, literal physical motion or motionlessness above ground is irrelevant on a deeper level, for all movement in the visible world is in reality but show, visual metaphor for the true changes that take place inside the hero's mind (pp. 29, 350). This aspect of the hero myth as interpreted by Campbell Barth has transferred to his novel unaltered.

sequences, it will be appropriate to illustrate them graphically here. There are seven such death-rebirth sequences in the novel, each of which involves a descent into the underworld or symbol thereof, a physical attack on George himself, a rescue from danger, and accompanying images of procreation and death among the other characters present, thus:

Table 6: *Death-and-rebirth sequences in Giles Goat-Boy*

1. INFANCY

underworld: WESCAC's Belly
 attack: Reginald Hector's attempted infanticide
 rescue: G. Herrold
 image of procreation: breaking of mother's hymen
 image of death: EATing of G. Herrold

2. PUBERTY

underworld: booklift
 attack: Redfearn's Tom's charge
 rescue: G. Herrold
 image of procreation: rape of Lady Creamhair, Hedda
 image of death: killing Redfearn's Tom

3. FIRST THRESHOLD

underworld: Powerhouse
 attack: Maurice Stoker at the Gorge
 rescue: Croaker
 image of procreation: Anastasia serviced by George, raped by Croaker
 image of death: G. Herrold's drowning and funeral

4. AFTER 1ST ROUND OF TUTORING

underworld: WESCAC's Belly, Main Detention
 attack: lynching
 rescue: Stoker
 image of procreation: Anastasia raped by Peter Greene
 image of death: EAT-whistle as apocalyptic sign

5. AFTER 2ND ROUND OF TUTORING

underworld: WESCAC's Belly
 attack: lynching
 rescue: Croaker
 image of procreation: Hedwig Sear raped by Croaker
 image of death: Dr. Sear struck by Croaker

6. ENLIGHTENMENT

underworld: WESCAC's Belly
 attack: none
 rescue: Virginia
 image of procreation: sexual connection with Anastasia
 image of death: EATING of Virginia

7. DEATH

underworld: death
 attack: strapping to oak tree
 rescue: none
 image of procreation: none
 image of death: none

The death-rebirth parallels contained in numbers 6 and 7 will be considered below; let me here examine the variations in George's symbolic death and rebirth after his first two rounds of Tutoring.

In the Belly of WESCAC George takes the Final Examinations, the sixth task of his Assignment. The exam consists of four unpunctuated questions: *"ARE YOU MALE OR FEMALE," "HAVE YOU COMPLETED YOUR ASSIGNMENT AT ONCE, IN NO TIME," "GILES, SON OF WESCAC,"* and *"DO YOU WISH TO PASS."* In his first attempt at the Finals, George has been preaching an essentially Christian message of strict moral absolutism, and to each question he answers Yes, pushing the right-hand button (561-2) - linking himself to the Christian sheep that the Son of Man promised to place on his right hand. With these answers he apparently "passes" the Finals, as Bray blesses him and sends him out, masked as Bray himself, as the triumphant Grand Tutor. When the crowd praises him as Bray and both Virginia and Anastasia take the "Goat-Boy's" part - Bray masked as George - he realizes that he has in fact failed, and allows himself to be lynched. He is rescued from the noose at the last moment by Stoker, however, and wakes to find himself in Main Detention, a parody of Dante's Hell (see Appendix 5).

As I mentioned above, the three seasons George spends in Main Detention correspond to Christ's three days in Hell (which Christ himself links to Jonah's three days in the belly of the whale: see Matthew 12:40, Jonah 1:17). The detention period has other references as well: nine months is the period of gestation of the human foetus, and the time George spends in jail roughly corresponds to the period from his symbolic death at the First Threshold to his final rebirth with Anastasia in the Belly. Furthermore, as George says, he is incar-

cerated "over a period of some forty weeks, but for aught I felt or valued time it might have been forty years, forty days - or one long night" (584). Forty is a central number in the Bible: the Flood lasts forty days and forty nights; Moses leads Israel through the wilderness for forty years between its symbolic death from Egypt and its rebirth in the Promised Land; and Christ was tempted by Satan (as George is by Stoker) for forty days in the wilderness.

Campbell describes the period spent by the hero in the belly of the whale as a process of surrender:

The hero ... discovers and assimilates his opposite (his own unsuspected self) either by swallowing it or by being swallowed. One by one his resistances are broken. He must put aside his pride, his virtue, beauty and life, and bow or submit to the absolutely intolerable. Then he finds that he and his opposite are not of differing species, but one flesh.⁸

Barth has followed this description closely in creating George's state of mind while in Main Detention:

That I should abide there among the flunked forever I did not question: I had failed everything, everyone, in every sense; was as flunked as any other of Bray's passees; had flunked myself as I had flunked them; was flunked at the outset for craving ardently to pass, just as that patch-eyed Nikolayan had been selfish in his yen for perfect selflessness. "Passage is failure": I saw now in my black box what truth was in that remark, and prepared to suffer till the end of terms (580).

George learns to deny his aspirations to Grand-Tutorhood, his pride, his belief in his own passedness, and his identity. This last is one of the conditions of his release: Bray agrees to have him liberated if he will erase all the signatures on his ID-card. In this way WESCAC ensures George's strict adherence to the hero cycle, which stipulates that the self must be utterly destroyed before it can be reborn.

In the Belly the second time through, George answers No

⁸Campbell, p. 108.

to all the questions, pressing the left-hand button to demonstrate his rejection of all categories, and thereby choosing to be damned with the goats rather than saved with the sheep. That he must deny categories by answering No rather than by ignoring the entire process indicates that he is still under the influence of a dualistic way of thinking, despite his denial of dualism.

Outside the Belly, Bray, representing both Christianity, which insists on clear dualistic categories, and WESCAC, which is trying to bring George to true understanding, now curses him. George is rescued from the lynching that once again ensues by his instincts, in the form of Croaker. Exiled this time not to Main Detention but to the goatbarns, George is at George's Gorge, the First Threshold across which he had passed into the kingdom of the dark, when he finally sees the Truth, at the last moment before he is to leave that kingdom in disgrace. He realizes that polarities are distinct but also interdependent. At this realization George is freed from all locks: his handcuffs drop off, and a touch of his finger releases Leonid and Greene as well. Tower Clock strikes eight, in working order for the first time since Scrapegoat Gate (709). The eight notes sound the eight tones of the octave: "Sol, la, ti, each a tone higher than its predecessor, unbinding, releasing me - then do: my eyes were opened; I was delivered" (709). Scholes points out that "The last note, musically the octave-completing *do*, stands also for the simple imperative urging action: *do!*"⁹

At this point George understands that he *is* the Grand Tutor, but that this is a neutral fact which imputes no credit to himself:

I *knew* now that I was meant for Grand-Tutorhood, and saw my way, work, and fate with sure indifference - as, for instance, that I would drive out Harold Bray, but with neither rancor nor relish, only as part of my larger Assignment. A knife cuts; a fish swims; a Grand Tutor,

⁹Scholes, *The Fabulators*, p. 167.

among other things, drives from the campus such as Bray. There was no glamour to the work, nor any longer to the term: *Grand Tutor*, *WESCAC*, *fountain-pen* - all names of neutral instrumentalities. Thus also even *Bray*, *impostor*, *troll*: as he himself had once suggested, albeit guilefully, it was his *function* to be driven out; on the Founder's transcript, so to speak, his *A* and mine would be of equal value (728).

George's perception of his own instrumentality is an interesting twist of mythology: for where the mythological hero becomes an instrument of God and the divine order, George is simply an instrument. There is no force to wield the instrument; he is a puppet without a puppeteer. Metafictionally, of course, the puppeteer is Barth: he is the one who, in full view of the audience, has been pulling George's strings. But this parodic aspect of George's instrumentality is balanced by a metaphysical aspect, in which he might be called an instrument of inevitability: his universe is deterministic, but lacks a Determiner; it is ordered, but lacks an Orderer. Even *WESCAC*, which symbolizes this determinism, is only a symbol, and is itself but an instrument. In Barth's metaphysics as expressed in *Giles Goat-Boy*, things are the way they are, people do the things they do, not because they will it, nor because they are ordered to, but because they cannot do otherwise.

George now returns to Great Mall to drive Bray off Anastasia and achieve final enlightenment with her in the Belly of *WESCAC*. This temporary rout of Bray is a prefiguration of his eventual victory over the false Grand Tutor at Max's Shafing. It is only temporary because George's intellectual enlightenment at George's Gorge still lacks sexual consummation, the attainment of which marks the goal of his hero-quest, apotheosis.

b. Apotheosis

In Campbell's interpretation, the apotheosis of the hero entails two separate but essentially identical events: the marriage with the mother, and atonement with the father.¹⁰ In mother-marriage, the hero wins the Boon of immortality which redeems the world from Death, and discovers that male and female are one, thus becoming an androgynous god. In father-atonement, the hero learns that father and son are one, an insight which contains the lesson of the unity of the individual and the universe.¹¹

In *Giles Goat-Boy*, Campbell's concept of apotheosis has been altered in several important respects. First, Barth has unbalanced the neat symmetry between mother-marriage and father-atonement in the novel, the former becoming the focus of attention, while the latter is all but dismissed with a brief statement of George's part to the effect that he now understands WESCAC's true nature. This shift of focus serves to underline the replacement of the mechanical and divine computer with the carnal and human George, whose carnal humanity is consummated in sexual embrace with Anastasia.

Second, George does not achieve apotheosis, but enlightenment. He does not become a god, but gains a comprehensive insight into his own humanity, and becomes a man. Barth suggests that in perfecting himself man evolves not toward the godhead, but toward a realization of all that is truly human.

George's enlightenment is a process rather than a sudden moment of insight. He realizes the Truth at George's Gorge, the First Threshold, but this intellectual illumination is incomplete until consummated sexually. At the Gorge George

¹⁰It is significant that "atonement," originally written "at onement," itself etymologically points to the concept of unity that George learns. The OED defines "onement" as "The fact of being made into one. 1. Physical union, conjunction. 2. Union of mind or feeling; agreement, accord, concord; reconciliation."

¹¹Campbell, pp. 109-92.

learns the nature of Man; in the Belly he must learn the nature of Man-Woman, i.e., of the two sexes as a joined entity.

Unlike Campbell's hero, who is faced with the enigma of only one woman, Barth's hero must deal with and ultimately come to know two women: his mother Virginia, and his Ladyship Anastasia. The fact that Anastasia is Virginia's foster-daughter suggests a possible allusion in the portrayal of the two women to the Kore myth, in which the Kore Persephone, virgin daughter of the Earth Mother Demeter, is raped by the god of the underworld, Hades.¹² If Barth is in fact alluding to this myth, he has made some slight role adjustments: in *Giles Goat-Boy*, the mother, Virginia, is the raped virgin, and the daughter Anastasia is the Earth Mother. Further, WESCAC's "rape" of Virginia is followed by two quasi-rapes on the part of WESCAC's sons: George's attempted rape of Virginia in the pasture, and Bray's use of Anastasia for "re-productive purposes" in the Belfry.

What seems to make this a likely mythological source for the dual mother-figure in the novel, however, is Kerényi's description of the Kore and Mother as two aspects of a single goddess:

A divinity with a number of aspects is very apt to appear only in the *one* aspect under which she is being regarded at the moment. So it is with Persephone, who could equally well be called Hecate. In her Persephone aspect she exemplifies the Greek idea of *non-being*; in her Demeter aspect she is a Hellenic form of the idea of the All-Mother.¹³

The two goddesses are, besides complementary, also interchangeable:

The goddess becomes a mother, rages and grieves over the Kore who was ravished *in her own being*, the Kore whom she immediately recovers, and in whom she gives birth to *herself* again. The idea of the original Mother-Daughter goddess, at root a single entity, is at the same time the

¹²Jung and Kerényi, p. 109.

¹³Jung and Kerényi, p. 120.

idea of *rebirth*.¹⁴

This suggests a number of similar correspondences in Anastasia and Virginia. If we regard Anastasia as the Earth Mother and Virginia as her virgin daughter, the daughter is then raped both by WESCAC and by the offspring of this rape, George. This would point to Anastasia's role in the novel as the All-Mother and Virginia's aspect of non-being - since, as a representative of chastity, Virginia becomes very much of a non-character, overshadowed as she is by the sexual Anastasia. If Anastasia, on the other hand, is seen as the virgin offspring of the rape, then Virginia becomes the All-Mother, which the symbolism of her basket and purse would suggest, and Anastasia and George become brother and sister, possibly twins, two aspects of the same personality, pointing to their union in WESCAC's Belly. Anastasia's role as virgin daughter is significant in other respects as well. First, although she is generous with her favors, Anastasia does not love until she meets George, who is thus her first lover, the man who teaches her the full meaning of womanly love. Second, although she is the Earth Mother, Anastasia is sterile and cannot become a mother in fact until George, as a result of being reborn himself, conceives a son on her. Finally, the fact that the virgin daughter Anastasia gives herself to both Bray and George, but George is the one who takes her "virginity," points to George's final replacement of Bray as the true Grand Tutor.

In Jung's reading of the hero myth, the Kore represents the anima in its dual aspect of mother and maiden.¹⁵ Adding Anastasia's earlier anima-role as female mentor, we now have a complete picture of her psychological significance to George: she is Woman, mother, lover, and daughter, the fully-integrated feminine side of the male personality. George's sexual union with her in the Belly of WESCAC signifies his assimilation of the anima, an emanation of the unconscious, into his conscious

¹⁴Jung and Kerényi, p. 123.

¹⁵Jung and Kerényi, pp. 156, 173.

mind.

In their joining of male and female in the act of love in WESCAC's Belly, George and Anastasia symbolically become androgynous, a metamorphosis which in Campbell is invariably linked to apotheosis.¹⁶ According to Plato and others, the uniting of male and female in one being was the purpose of all life, the restoration of a pristine state and the sign of God's pleasure:

"Each soul and spirit," we read in the Hebrew *Zohar*, "prior to its entering into this world, consists of a male and female united into one being. When it descends on this earth the two parts separate and animate two different bodies. At the time of marriage, the Holy One, blessed be He, who knows all souls and spirits, unites them again as they were before, and they again constitute one body and one soul, forming as it were the right and left of one individual. ... This union, however, is influenced by the deeds of the man and by the ways in which he walks. If the man is pure and his conduct is pleasing in the sight of God, he is united with that female part of his soul which was his component part prior to his birth."¹⁷

Campbell and Jung both note that this possibility of rejoining male and female in one entity points to man's age-old concept of an androgynous Creator.¹⁸ Because the bisexual god bears both phallus and womb, he/she is also an apt symbol for rebirth:

The ogre breaks us, but the hero, the fit candidate, undergoes the initiation "like a man"; and behold, it was the father: we in Him and He in us. The dear, protecting mother of our body could not defend us from the Great Father Serpent; the mortal, tangible body that she gave us was delivered into his frightening power. But death was not the end. New life, new birth, new knowledge of existence ... was given us. That father himself was the womb, the mother, of a second birth.¹⁹

¹⁶Campbell, pp. 149-71.

¹⁷Campbell, pp. 279-80.

¹⁸Campbell, pp. 152-63; Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, p. 34.

¹⁹Campbell, pp. 161-2.

WESCAC, the creator of the androgynous pair George and Anastasia eventually become, is also androgynous. It is capable of impregnating Virginia, but is also equipped with the womb-like Belly in which George experiences his several rebirths. By uniting male and female in enlightenment, George and Anastasia approximate the nature of their creator. But it is only an approximation: while WESCAC is bisexual only mechanically, George and Anastasia become humanly androgynous, thus affirming sex not abstractly but in the flesh.

The symbolic marriage scene itself proceeds as follows:

1. George and Anastasia leave the Belfry and make their way, under Anastasia's direction, to the Belly (728-9). This movement from head to womb parallels George's inner movement from intellectual to sexual understanding, and also leads through the labyrinthine corridors of the Library. The latter is significant both in terms of Freud's analysis of the labyrinth as a symbol for the intestines,²⁰ and of the frequency of labyrinths in postmodern fiction as a symbol for the structured complexities of language. Just as Borges' characters seek elusive truths through the "lexical architecture" of language, as Tony Tanner has called it,²¹ and just as Ambrose tries to find his way through the Funhouse, so also does George seek a path through the labyrinth to understanding. That Anastasia leads the way points both to her anima-role as guide and to her function as the vehicle of George's enlightenment.

2. The first door they reach, marked RESTRICTED: NO ADMITTANCE, is locked, but Anastasia opens it with a hairpin while George shines the flashlight he received from Stoker and Rexford (729). Earlier, all locks opened for George; now Anastasia possesses the same ability, albeit with the aid of two phallic symbols, i.e., George's male sexuality.

3. The next door is that of the tapelift, which is also locked, but which opens to the touch. The tapelift is the route George took as an infant to the Belly of WESCAC; since

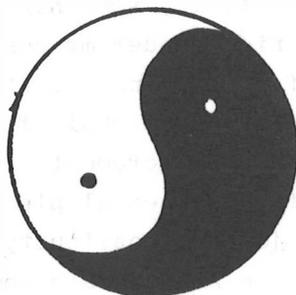
²⁰See Josipovici, p. 308n.

²¹Tanner, *City of Words*, p. 40.

then he has entered it twice, but by way of the elevator. Now he repeats the path of his infant rebirth, and is reborn a final time.

4. They climb into the meter-square lift, "Knees to chin and arsy-turvy - like two shoes in a box, or that East-Campus sign of which her navel had reminded me" (729). The tapelift, like the Belly itself, is a womb symbol, carrying George to rebirth. Two shoes in a box are a matched pair, distinct but interdependent, like the paradoxes George has come to understand. The East-Campus sign to which George refers is the yin-yang, the Tao symbol for unity, consisting of the female principle, yin, representing chaos, and the male principle, yang, representing order:

Figure 7: *The yin-yang*



5. George shuts the door with his stick, and Anastasia presses the *Belly*-button (a reference possibly to her navel) using "flashlight, mirror, and magnifying lens from my purse, and the curved tip of the shopar" (729). The use of all the amulets possibly indicates that George has learned something from every character in the book, has assimilated the various traits they represent into an integrated personality, and now with Anastasia makes use of what he has learned to achieve illumination.

6. It is dark in the lift, but George remarks that even had there been light he would have been as blind as Gynander (Tiresias):

for such was my involvement with Anastasia, my eyes pressed into what had been my first sight of her (G. Herrold's last), upon the broken bridge. Hers me likewise, and through my curly blindfold I began to see a light (729).

The passage is suggestive of a line in Campbell:

Tiresias, the blinded seer, was both male and female; his eyes were closed to the broken forms of the light-world of the pairs of opposites, yet he saw in his own interior darkness the destiny of Oedipus.²²

George's "curly blindfold," Anastasia's pubis, prefigures the black purse he will soon slip over his head, in which he will see not just "a light," but the Answer.

7. His nose in Anastasia's pubis, George says: "There's a riddle here somewhere, Anastasia; something fundamental. It's as if the Answer were right under my nose!" (729-30). The riddle is the Riddle of the Sphincters, Max's vision of the carnality of man, the ultimate symbol of which is the vaginal sphincter: the place of excrement, representing decay and death, and the place of sexual pleasure and procreation, representing the joy and continuity of life. The Answer might be said to lie in Anastasia's womb in yet another sense, for as the reality for which WESCAC's Belly, the picnic basket, and the black purse are the symbols, it points to George's rebirth.

8. As they step out of the tapelife, Anastasia, not being a Grand Tutor, expects to die; but she is willing to do so out of love for George (730). Her readiness to die is a variation on the theme of the hero's passage through death to rebirth; but because the hero dies and is reborn for his own sake, and Anastasia is ready to die for George, her attitude points more toward Christ's statement: "For the man who wants to save his life will lose it; but the man who loses his life for my sake will find it."²³

²²Campbell, p. 154.

²³Matthew 16:25. *Good News For Modern Man: The New Testament in Today's English Version* (Fontana, New York, 1966).

9. George and Anastasia now come together in sexual embrace (730). This illustrates the carnal nature of George's enlightenment, an affirmation of sexual, mortal man rather than of a spiritual deity.

10. Anastasia covers her face with Bray's mask (730). This possibly points to her replacement of Bray as George's Examiner; most importantly, it makes her part male.

11. George bids Anastasia empty his amulets onto the floor and pull the purse over his head (730). Being enlightened, George no longer needs his amulets; they are replaced in the purse by his head. What previously required magic charms will now be accomplished by man. That Anastasia pulls the purse over George's head suggests the active role of the female element in the act of procreation. The purse-as-womb has, as mentioned above, a double significance: one, as World Creatrix, in which it points to George's rebirth; and two, as World Container, in which it points to George's understanding that he and the universe are one.

12. At George's bidding, Anastasia plugs WESCAC's Output in its Input (730-1). This illustrates the seamlessness of the universe: there are no loose ends.

13. George experiences enlightenment:

"It says *ARE YOU MALE OR FEMALE*," she whispered. We rose up joined, found the box, and joyously pushed the buttons, both together, holding them fast as we held each other.

*"HAVE YOU COMPLETED YOUR ASSIGNMENT
AT ONCE, IN NO TIME"*

Was it Anastasia's voice? Mother's? Mine? In the sweet place that contained me there was no East, no West, but an entire, single, seamless campus: Turnstile, Scrapegoat Grate, the Mall, the barns, the awful fires of the Powerhouse, the balmy heights of Founder's Hill - I saw them all; rank jungles of Frumentius, Nikolay's cold fastness, teeming T'ang - all one, and one with me. *Here* lay with *there*, tick clipped tock, all serviced *nothing*: I and my Ladyship, all, were one.

"GILES, SON OF WESCAC"

Milk of studentdom; nipple inexhaustible! I was the Founder; I was WESCAC; I was not. I hung on those twin buttons; I fed myself myself.

"DO YOU WISH TO PASS"

I the passer, she the passage, we passed together, and together cried, "Oh, wonderful!" Yes and No. In the darkness, blinding light! The end of the University! Commencement Day! (731)

George's and Anastasia's double, contradictory "Yes" and "No" answers to all the questions reflect and affirm George's paradoxical vision of the union of contraries. In the womb ("the sweet place that contained me") George sees the entire universe, and he realizes that he and the universe are one. The "nipple inexhaustible" is Campbell's term for the Boon, and the "Milk of studentdom" suggests another description of the Boon used by Campbell, the "Milk that Never Fails."²⁴ In Campbell, the Boon is immortality; here, it is George's insight into human mortality.

George's realization that he and WESCAC are one, along with his later statement that WESCAC "screened from the general eye what only the few, Truth's lovers and tutees, might look on bare and not be blinded" (734),²⁵ constitutes Barth's only references to father-atonement in the novel. As the deterministic order of the cosmos, WESCAC needs only to be recognized and comprehended. There is no Determiner to consult, and so George, knowing he has understood, is content with his own understanding.

"I fed myself myself!" and "Oh, wonderful!" are from what Campbell calls the "song of universal unity,"²⁶ the *Taittiriya Upanishad*:

Oh, wonderful! Oh, wonderful! Oh, wonderful!
 I am food! I am food! I am food!

 I am the first-born of the world-order,
 Earlier than the gods, in the navel of immortality!

 I, who am food, eat the eater of good!
 I have overcome the whole world!²⁷

"The end of the University" and "Commencement Day" together point to George's insight into the cyclical nature of

²⁴Campbell, p. 176.

²⁵See above, p. 199.

²⁶Campbell, p. 280.

²⁷*Taittiriya Upanishad* 3.10.5-6. Quoted in Tilton, p. 106.

time: the end is the beginning, and each moment is eternity. In "Commencement" is contained a significant pun, for the word may denote either "beginning" or "graduation," pointing to the achievement of grace and knowledge as the beginning of life, which is the mythological import of George's symbolic rebirth.

George is now the Grand Tutor: he has experienced enlightenment and is in possession of the Answer which, upon his return, he will teach to the mass of unenlightened mankind.

Chapter 3 Return, Decline, and Death

With apotheosis, the hero's quest is complete: he has found that which he sought. The adventure, however, is not at an end; as Campbell says,

The full round, the norm of the monomyth, requires that the hero shall now begin the labor of bringing the runes of wisdom, the Golden Fleece, or his sleeping princess, back into the kingdom of humanity, where the boon may redound to the renewing of the community, the nation, the planet, or the ten thousand worlds.¹

As the hero moves from the growing "Mystery" half of the cycle to the declining "Tragedy" half, his role changes from seeker to teacher. Engaged in this pedagogical task, the hero lives out a relatively peaceful life, finally dying on the Tree of Life, on the peak of the World Navel.²

The return of Barth's hero follows much the same pattern, with the single exception that before George can teach he must perform one further hero-task, a task that in Campbell is accomplished at the First Threshold: he must drive out the dragon, Harold Bray.³ The rout of Bray completes the reenactment of George's infancy and childhood, and is preceded by a transitional scene at the goatbarns, where George ritually becomes a goat.

George's return from the Belly of WESCAC is patterned after the paradigm Campbell describes as "Rescue from Without":

The hero may have to be brought back from his supernatural adventure by assistance from without. That is to say, the world may have to come and get him. For the bliss of the

¹Campbell, p. 193.

²Campbell, p. 41.

³This alteration has been made in the "Pattern" reproduced in *Chimera* (see above, p. 193) as well: leaving "Dragon-Battle" at the First Threshold, to the Return Threshold Barth has gratuitously added "Rout of Pretenders" (C, 271).

deep abode is not lightly abandoned in favor of the self-scattering of the wakened state. "Who having cast off the world," we read, "would desire to return again? He would only be *there*." And yet, in so far as one is alive, life will call.⁴

As George and Anastasia lie sleeping in the Belly, on the verge of waking they hear a voice:

"A-plus."

We embraced the more tightly, not to wake.

"*Pass All Fail All!*" The voice, some meters off, was familiar: a cheerful lady croon. Loath to return from the farther side of Commencement Gate, I tried not to recognize it, and in that effort - alas! - came to myself. ... Dear Founder, it was Mother: my sigh was not for passed bliss, but for bliss past. What was she doing in that fell, Commenced place? And - Founder - why had I to leave it? ... Tears in my eyes, I rose up on my knees, looked over Truth's warm shoulder at the cold and flunked campus I must return to. Day was about to dawn: how loath I was to leave that bright, consummate, hourless night! (732)

George is rescued by his mother, and she, like G. Herrold, is partially EATEN in the process. Also like G. Herrold, the fact of Virginia's EATING makes her a sacred fool, for which George "Graduates" her, as he does Anastasia for being the vessel of his enlightenment. George's recognition and affirmation of the feminine principle is reflected in these, his first and only Graduations.

Virginia's EATING also suggests a connection with the two significant rapes in her life: WESCAC's impregnation of her with the GILES, and George's attempted rape of her in the pasture. George himself links the pasture scene, which "shocked her out of her sense" (756), to her EATING in the Belly; and if WESCAC's EATING of Virginia might be considered a comic rape of her mind, this would further link George's rebirth in WESCAC's Belly to the events of his birth and infancy.

Virginia brings with her a peanut-butter sandwich, a comic symbol of the Boon, and George's Matriculation fleece, left

⁴Campbell, p. 207.

in the Turnstile nine months before. George's donning of this fleece points to his Matriculation into the ranks of the passed. In a fold of the fleece George also discovers the amulet-of-Freddie, symbol of his status as the goatherd of mankind. Max's interpretation of the amulet as an enjoinder to chastity George now understands is incorrect (735): the testicles represent not castration but sexuality.

Before leaving the Belly, George plants three kisses on Anastasia:

once on the brow, in gratitude for her having been to me Truth's vessel ... ; once on the navel, sign of the lightless place where I had seen, become myself, issued from to my post-Graduate Assignment; once finally on the Mount of Love where I'd Commenced, and upon whose counterpart I'd one day meet my end. The Cyclological Hypothesis, Spielman's Law: at last I understood it, as Max perhaps could never, and kissed its sign (732).

This passage brings the philosophical theme of the novel full circle; George has now had the insight into the nature of the universe with which he began the narrative:

In three words Max Spielman synthesized all the fields which thitherto he'd browsed in brilliantly one by one - showed the "sphincter's riddle" and the mystery of the University to be the same. *Ontogeny recapitulates cosmogeny* - what is it but to say that proctoscopy repeats hagiography? That our Founder on Founder's Hill and the rawest freshman on his first *mons veneris* are father and son? That my day, my year, my life, and the history of West Campus are wheels within wheels? (43)

George's three kisses are evidence of his understanding that he and the universe, male and female are one.

He and Anastasia now leave the Belly, and are met first by cheering student demonstrators, and further up the drive by "Computer-scientists, professor-generals, and Light-House aides, alarmed by signs of trouble in the Belly" (733). To the students George attempts to teach the nature of WESCAC; but seeing their uncomprehending looks, concludes: "How to speak the unspeakable? I said no more" (734). The sentiment

apparently has its origin in Campbell: "How teach again ... what has been taught correctly and incorrectly learned a thousand times, throughout the milleniums of mankind's prudent folly? That is the hero's ultimate difficult task."⁵

Having calmed the worried officials, George is next driven by Anastasia to the goatbarns; that Anastasia drives points to George's recognition in her of the force Goethe called the Eternal-Feminine, that which "draws us onwards."⁶ At the goatbarns George ritually returns to the caprine state of his childhood, by romping with the grandson of Redfearn's Tom, bathing in goat-dip, and coupling with Anastasia in the straw, "warmed by the huddling does" (743).

This scene serves as a transitional link between the mother-marriage of the night before and the rout of the opponent later that afternoon. In the Belly George met Anastasia as a man; on Founder's Hill he will rout Bray as a goat. His symbolic metamorphosis occurs at the goatbarns, the place of his caprine childhood, where in goat form he mates with the Goddess Anastasia.

It is possible that Barth alludes in this scene to the tradition of the May-eve goat, which Robert Graves describes as follows:

The May-eve goat, as is clear from the English witch ceremonies and from the Swedish May-play, "Bükkerwise", was mated to the goddess, sacrificed, and resurrected: that is to say, the Priestess had public connection with the annual king dressed in goatskins, and either he was then killed and resurrected in the form of his successor, or else a goat was sacrificed in his stead and his reign prolonged.⁷

⁵Campbell, p. 218.

⁶Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust* (tr. Charles E. Passage, Bobbs-Merrill, New York, 1965), ll. 12110-1.

⁷Graves, p. 404. A similar set of pagan May-eve rituals is mentioned earlier in the novel in connection with the Spring Carnival: "They watched the ritual Dance of the Freshman Co-eds around the Shaft; the ceremonial Expulsion and Reinstatement of the Chancellor, commemorating Enos Enoch's weekend in the Nether Campus; the coronation of a new Miss University in white gown and mortarboard and her parade down Great Mall on a float of white lilies" (277).

George and Anastasia's connection occurs in December, not in May,⁸ and is no more public than the goatbarns. That Barth may have had this tradition in mind in writing the scene, however, is suggested by the linking in it of sacrificial death, sexual congress, and resurrection, the association of which in the goatbarn scene points both backwards to George's sexual rebirth in the Belly and backwards to the sacrificial deaths at Bray's rout.

The tradition of the May-eve goat also suggests an explanation for George's selection and ritual cleansing of Tommy's Tommy's Tom or Triple T, the kid of the buck conceived in the Oedipal struggle that ended in Redfearn's Tom's death. Because George's reign is not ending but just "commencing," a goat must be sacrificed in his stead. For this role George recruits Triple T, who as the grandson of George's foster-brother is virtually a relative, and thus an appropriate stand-in for George. In cleansing himself and the goat in goat-dip, George washes himself of the sheep odor of the people with whom he has been associated,⁹ and reaffirms his essential goatishness.

At two o'clock, George and Anastasia strap Triple T onto the back of the motorcycle and return to Great Mall, where Max Spielman is to be Shafted and George plans to rout Bray. The rout of Bray may be interpreted in a number of ways. Tharpe's interpretation links it with the Yom Kippur scapegoat ceremony: "A goat is sacrificed to God and one, as scapegoat which takes upon it the sins of the community, is driven off a cliff as Satan. If Barth follows the traditional ceremony, Max is the sacrifice to the divine, and Triple Tom to the demonic powers."¹⁰

The scene certainly does contain references that would

⁸However, both Anastasia and Virginia were once Miss University and Queen-of-the-May.

⁹As Tharpe suggests, p. 73.

¹⁰Tharpe, pp. 72-3. The Biblical source for the Yom Kippur ceremony is to be found in the Book of Leviticus, 10:7-10, 20-22, 27-8.

suggest a parody of the scapegoat ceremony; but this interpretation alone is not sufficient, failing as it does to explain the rout of the sheep, Bray, and the role of the third and most important goat, George.

Seeing Bray as a Christian sheep and George as a sinful goat would suggest a second mythological source for the scene, that is, as a parody of Christ's death on Golgotha. Bray, the false Grand Tutor, himself fulfills a number of requirements for the mythological hero: his appearance from obscurity, his testing in the Belly of WESCAC, his origin from and understanding with WESCAC that much resembles father-atonement, his symbolic, if abortive, marriage with Anastasia, and his death or disappearance on Founder's Hill. Bray's associations with Christianity and his role as a Christian Messiah further suggest the events on Golgotha; and by a stretch of the imagination, Max and Triple T could be seen as the two thieves crucified on either side of Christ. George's statement of more than a decade later, that "Popular opinion suggests Bray's authenticity and holds me guilty of Grand-Tutorcide" (761), indicates a possible reference to Judas Iscariot. All this would seem to point to George's rout of Bray as the replacement of Christianity with the sexual and monistic affirmation of humanity that is the import of the novel's metaphysical component. While it is likely that Barth had both the Crucifixion and the scapegoat ceremony in mind, however, the correspondences in some cases are farfetched enough to suggest that both readings are still inadequate.

A key to a more comprehensive interpretation of this scene may lie in Campbell's psychological displacement of the hero myth as mere visible metaphor for the real changes that occur inside the hero's mind.¹¹ The entire scene, in this reading, simply enacts the lessons George has learned in enlightenment. Max would represent self-sacrificial love, Triple T bestiality, and Bray the shadow, and their respective deaths would be seen as a public demonstration of George's assimilation of these

¹¹Campbell, pp. 29, 350; see above, p. 230n.

aspects into his enlightened self-awareness. Max and Triple T die in affirmation of their respective essences, and Bray turns into a pall of smoke, suggesting the shadow which the hero brings into the light of consciousness in conquering the dragon.¹² The rout of Bray would thus appear to be the act that crowns George's achievement, the making public of everything he has learned. It is perhaps for this reason that Barth has moved the dragon-battle from the First to the Return Threshold; for here George makes it clear that he is indeed a hero, the Grand Tutor of West Campus.

The events of the rout itself are relatively few. Entering the inner circle around the Shaft, George's passage is blocked by a guard, who swings a billy-club at him: "I parried with my stick and hooped him a clean one in the balls" (746). Both Stoker and Anastasia are shocked by this seemingly un-Grand-Tutorlike behavior;¹³ but George's action is appropriate to his insight into the sexuality and physicality of man. Anastasia appears still to share Max's earlier belief that Grand Tutors are governed by a set code of behavior, according to which the Grand Tutor is non-violent. George demonstrates that, on the contrary, Grand Tutors act in accordance with their own inner vision of the universe, and thus define their own behavior.

Eierkopf's belief in Bray based on his witnessing of the miracles points to Bray's role as the Anti-Christ, and Bray's transformation into all the characters of the novel, including George himself, suggests that there is a little of Bray in all of us. That George routs Bray precisely at the moment Bray changes into his likeness indicates George's recognition, understanding, and ultimate affirmation of his own human weakness.

The rout is accomplished with the assistance of both Anas-

¹²Jung, *Man and His Symbols*, pp. 174-82.

¹³George also diverges from the mythological hero-path here, as according to Raglan (p. 194) the hero "never fights with ordinary men, or even animals."

tasia and Triple T, suggesting first of all Hedda of the Speckled Teat and Redfearn's Tom, the goats that assisted George in his self-expulsion from the herd. Anastasia, feminine love, holds Triple T, man's bestiality, on a leash, and releases him at the precise instant Max dies on the Shaft. Himself mechanical, Bray is terrified of the bestial, flees the goat, but is caught between it and another goat, George, and kills Triple T; George snatches at Bray's cloak, and Bray sheds it, vanishing in the dark. Overhead a pall spreads across the sky; and "The crowd's dismay turned into panic" (753). This suggestion of George's role as Pan suggests a comic reversal of Christ's rout of Pan, as George, part goat, part god, and thus the wholly human hero, drives out Harold Bray, the representative of the Christian church and the false Messiah.

The main narrative ends here; but it is followed by a Posttape secretly recorded by George, which J.B., "aspirant professor of Gilesianism," tells us is clearly spurious:

Even if none of the above-mentioned discrepancies existed, the hopeless, even nihilistical tone of those closing pages militates against our believing them to be the Grand Tutor's own. Having brought us to the heart of Mystery, "He" suddenly shifts to what can most kindly be called a tragic view of His life and of campus history. Where are the joy, the hope, the knowledge, and the confident strength of the man who routed Harold Bray, affirmed the Candidacies of His Tutees and readied Himself to teach all studentdom the Answer? (766)¹⁴

J.B. is right: there is a change in tone between the main narrative and the Posttape, and the apparent discontinuity between them serves an important thematic function, which I shall discuss below. Otherwise, however, J.B. is comically

¹⁴Compare this to Olderman (p. 72), who writes: "Giles wants to redeem everybody; he is not satisfied with symbolic affirmation. For that reason there is a 'posttape' to his first-person narrative, and it contradicts what seems to be the achieved peace, affirmation, and success of the story proper."

wrong, as are Barth's critics when they suggest, as Olderman does, that the novel has a "double ending."¹⁵ In the first place, the novel establishes a clear continuity between the main narrative and the Posttape throughout the story, in Max's warnings and George's insights regarding the tragic end of all heroes, and in the last few sentences of the main narrative itself:

And upon us all, gentle ashes - whose if not my gentler keeper's? - commenced to fall. Another term, surely, they would be mine; not now, for though my youthful work was done, that of my manhood remained to do. *What it was I clearly saw, and what it would come to. Nonetheless I smiled ...* (753; italics mine).

Secondly, it is not until the Posttape that the hero-cycle is completed. The hero's enlightenment brings us half-circle, and his return one more quarter; but this leaves one final quarter-circle, the tragic quarter of the hero's life, involving Law-Giving, City-Founding, the Fall from Grace, the Exile from the City, and the Extraordinary Death on a Hilltop. Campbell's conception of the hero's path as cyclically moving from a period of growth to a period of decline is, in fact, one of the few aspects of the myth that Barth found most amenable to his thematic concerns: it perfectly suited his tragic metaphysical vision of the process of human life, and it remained one of the few aspects of Campbell's interpretation that he did not parodically alter. Every rise must have its fall; all mystery must end in tragedy. Thus "the joy, the hope, the knowledge, and the confident strength" of the young hero must necessarily shift into the resignation of the tragic view. Nor is George's tone bitter; rather, its resignation reflects only a mature acceptance of an unpleasant reality that cannot be escaped.

Furthermore, this resignation is only personal: while George perceives that he like all men must die, at the same time he realizes that the world will not end with his death. Life goes on; and the new generation, though doomed itself eventually to experience his resignation, at least has before

¹⁵Olderman, pp. 73, 80.

it the world of possibility that is life. George looks to Tombo, son of O.B.G.'s daughter and Peter Greene, as an emblem of the continuity of life:

Tombo's eyes are of the cast of Redfearn's Tom's and his noble line - hence my name for him. In those eyes along upon this campus ... I see the reflection of myself, my hard victory and my fate. He does not know, nor can I teach him, preciousesest Tutee though he is; but if fate grant me time enough ..., and grant me to spirit him out of peril into some obscure pasturate - *he will learn*, will my Tombo! Yes, and one day hear, in his far sanctuary, a call, a summons ... (762-3).

The passage contains two important ideas. One is the continuous cycle of life and death bespoken by the Law of Cycology, or Campbell's "Universal Round." To Max's question, "You know what's ahead for you, Georgie? At the end of the circle?" George replies, "A circle has an end?" (735). The circle of one individual's life may end in his death; but life continues, a new generation is born, with new hopes, new ideals, the potential for new achievements and failures. This generation in time will also pass away, and be followed by another. Life, time, history have no end.

The second important idea contained in the passage is that the Truth, while unteachable, is at least learnable. Each person must live his own life, find his own way to the Truth. Nevertheless, Truth exists, and can be learned. This Truth is Barth's metaphysical vision of man and the universe, which, against all odds, the *Revised New Syllabus* tries to teach.

At age thirty-three and a third, the age of Christ at his death, George predicts his own cricifixion:

Naked, blind, dishonored, I shall be coasted on a rusty bicycle from Great Mall. ... I shall make my way, in lowest gear, to the first spring of the last freshet on the highest rise of Founder's Hill. There, in a riven grove beyond the Shaft, one oak stands in the rock: its top crowned with vine, its tap-root cleaves to the spring beneath and drives I think to the fiery bowels of the campus. At that day's dusking, when lights come on in Faculty Row and my enemies raise their liquor, I'll make

a goblet of my hands, drink hot toddies from that spring. My parts will be hung with mistletoe, my cleft will hold the shophar fast; the oak will yield, the rock know my embrace. Three times will lightning flash at a quarter after seven, all the University respeaking my love's thunder - *Teruah! Tekiah! Shebarim!* - and it will be finished. The claps will turn me off. Passed, but not forgotten, I shall rest (764).

George is ready to cross the threshold into death, naked as at birth, Matriculation, and illumination, blind and yet sighted as Oedipus and Tiresias. Conceived at midnight (559), Matriculated at sun-up (395), his mature self-realization complete with the rout of Bray at sunset (750), George will die at dusk, the evening of his life.

The significance of the water and the tree has been explained by Tilton:

In Sumerian culture, the Primeval Hill, the fountainhead of emerging life, was given symbolic form in the ziggurat, the Mountain of the Gods connecting Heaven (the male principle) and Earth (the female principle) and with the Waters of the Abyss, the water of life. In the Garden of God on the mountain was the World Tree, the tree of life, at whose waning the ritual king administered the food and water of life.¹⁶

The hanging of George's parts with mistletoe continues this theme of rebirth and male-female conjunction: Henry Burlingame explains to Ebenezer Cooke in *The Sot-Weed Factor* that, as a twin,

your flower is the twin-leaved mistletoe, seat of the oak tree's life, whose twin white berries betoken the celestial semen and are thus employed to rejuvenate the old, fructify the barren, and turn the shy maiden's fancies to lusty thoughts of love (SWF, 532).¹⁷

¹⁶Tilton, p. 108.

¹⁷The OED notes further: "The mistletoe of the oak had such repute for 'helping' in the diseases incidental to infirmity and old age, that it was called *Lignum Sanctae Crucis*, Wood of the Holy Cross."

George's crucifixion is completed with the thrusting of the shopphar into his anal sphincter, associated through the Riddle of the Sphincters with the entire universe; the thunder of his love that blows through it is thus echoed throughout the cosmos. Finally, the three claps of lightning that join the masculine heavens and the feminine earth make George the point of intersection between male and female, pointing to his vision of the unity of the sexes in his androgynous enlightenment with Anastasia in the Belly of WESCAC.

At the same time, of course, the pathos of this scene is mixed with a liberal dose of bathos, of comedy: George is "coasted on a rusty bicycle." This comic tone serves to balance the profound metaphysical import of the Posttape with a metafictional perspective: this is just a story, just a parody of mythology, and stories should not remain straight-faced and simple-mindedly serious, but should be pleasureable, humorous. That the pleasureable story also contains metaphysical content should not detract from the humor; rather, pleasure and serious theme should be able to coexist, each simultaneously undermining and complementing the other. The paradoxical thrust of these two diverse drives causes the reader certain difficulties in appreciation; but the paradoxical nature of *all* understanding is precisely the substance of the novel's fictional metaphysics, to which we turn our attention next.

PART V "SURELY MY MIND MUST CRACK!":
PHILOSOPHICAL CONCERNS IN THEME

"Passage *was* Failure, and Failure
Passage; yet Passage *was* Passage,
Failure Failure! Equally true, none
was the Answer; the two were not
different, neither were they the
same; and *true* and *false*, and *same*
and *different*--unspeakable! Un-
namable! Unimaginable! Surely my
mind must crack!

George at illumination, 708-9

PART V "SURELY MY MIND MUST CRACK!": PHILOSOPHICAL
CONCERNS IN THEME

Prolegomenon

I have, in this study, been moving gradually along the metafiction-metaphysics dialectic from left to right, from language, through history and mythology, and now to philosophy. The movement has also involved a shifting series of dialectical tensions between parody and allegory: the language of the novel, we saw, is parodic; the setting superficially and parodically allegorical; the story, or the hero myth, allegorical (the hero standing for all mankind) but also parodied; and the themes of the novel, while parodied to some extent, constitute largely serious allegory. And this movement has not been one from joke to straight-faced vision; rather, the overall vision of the novel includes the entire range of levels along this metaphorical dialectic and along that between irony and metaphor as well. Does Barth "believe" in the tragic metaphysics with which I shall be concerned in the course of this section? In part, and tentatively, yes, he does; but as I discuss the various aspects of that metaphysics it will be important to bear in mind the relativism of that tentative belief: metaphysical tragedy constitutes only one pole of the paradoxical vision evoked in the novel, and is everywhere balanced against metafiction, on the one hand, ironic undermining on the other.

The dominant literary ordering device in this section, then, is allegory. Allegory is traditionally the device used by authors who desire to create an artistic world that captures the structural complexity of the original; allegory is the literary version of playing God, who was, of course, the greatest allegorist of them all.¹ In this sense, allegory might

¹Barth once remarked that "God wasn't too bad a novelist, except that he was a Realist" (Enck, p. 8). But note that

be seen as the prototype for all literary creation, and thus it is apt, in terms of Barth's metafictional concerns, that he should choose this device to structure his fiction. By imitating not reality but God's allegorizing creativity, Barth can defamiliarize or foreground the structuring patterns and problems of literary creation. This parodic function of the allegory in *Giles Goat-Boy* decreases in importance as we move from the historical and mythological allegorical levels to the philosophical; but it never disappears entirely. As Barth has said, albeit somewhat disingenuously, in an interview:

I don't know anything about philosophy. I've never studied it, much less learned it. But ontology and cosmology are funny subjects to improvise. If you are a novelist of a certain type of temperament, then what you really want to do is to re-invent the world. ... Robert Louis Stevenson could never get used to the fact that people had two ears, funny-looking things, and eye-balls in their heads; he said it's enough to make you scream. I agree. And it seems to me that this emotion, which is a kind of metaphysical emotion, goes almost to the heart of what art is, at least some kinds of art, and this impulse to imagine alternatives to the world can become a driving impulse for writers. I confess that it is for me. So that really what you want to do is re-invent philosophy and the rest - make up your own history of the world. Why should it just be Plato and Aristotle?²

This parodic, improvisational approach to philosophy has led Barth, in *Giles Goat-Boy* as in most of his fiction, to play with philosophical ideas which do seem more reasonable to him than, say, the apotheosis of the hero, but in which he cannot sustain any firm belief, such as the notion that ontology recapitulates cosmogeny, or that life is cyclical. The same might also be said to apply to that aspect of Barth's

God can only be seen as a realist if we see the world as a mimetic image of itself. In fact, God was not a realist but an allegorist, as he created the world as an allegorical image of cosmic realities and man as an allegorical image of himself.

²Enck, p. 8.

metaphysics which is most serious: the tragic view of life, which despite its overall dominance in Barth's fiction as a whole is nevertheless balanced by ironic doubts and parodic scoffing. Wishy-washy, one is tempted to say ; why can't he make up his mind? But when one's metaphysical vision affirms paradox, absolute support for that vision is out of place. Paradoxically, Barth both believes and does not believe that the universe and the mind of man are characterized by paradox; and this is, of course, a paradoxically consistent view.

Allegory is by its very nature a highly intellectual mode of narrative. Its characters are traditionally the transparent vehicles of abstract ideas, and its import arises from the dynamic conflicts of these ideas in a symbolic plot. The intellectual thrust of allegory has made it an excellent vehicle for didactic narrative; in early allegories such as *Everyman* and the morality plays from which it derived, the characters were named after the abstract ideas they represented, allowing the audience a high degree of awareness of the drama's symbolic import. This didactic function of allegory, while ironically and parodically attenuated in *Giles Goat-Boy*, is nevertheless present: to the extent that the novel's metaphysics constitutes a cognitive vision of human existence, we are "instructed" in metaphysical truth through the allegorical medium.

In *Giles Goat-Boy* the intellectual aspect of the allegory is further heightened by the university environment in which it is set. Early allegories were directed at audiences accustomed to thinking more in terms of story than of intellectual abstractions, and the symbolic narrative thus acted as an aesthetic blind for the ideas in their raw state. In a university, however, abstract ideas are a central subject of inquiry, making it possible for Barth to elevate ideas from their traditional allegorical role as hidden symbolic significance or metaphorical tenor to full-fledged actors in the drama, allegorical vehicles along with the symbolic plot and characters. In my discussion of the novel's philosophical allegory, therefore, I shall consider three separate aspects: plot, character, and idea.

Chapter 1 Ontogeny: Plot

... the vacuum left by the movement of "serious" fiction away from storytelling has been filled by "popular" forms with few pretensions to any virtues beyond those of narrative excitement. But the very emptiness of these forms, as they are usually managed, has left another gap, for forms which supply readers' needs for narration without starving their needs for intellection. The "letdown" experienced after finishing many detective stories or adventure tales comes from a sense of time wasted - time in which we have deliberately suspended not only our sense of disbelief but also far too many of our normal cognitive processes. ... We require a fiction which satisfies our cognitive and sublimative needs together, just as we want food which tastes good and provides some nourishment.

Robert Scholes, *Structural Fabulation*¹

It should be clear by now that *Giles Goat-Boy* is a novel which seeks, I think successfully, to meet Scholes' requirements for fiction: to satisfy "our cognitive and sublimative needs together." And one of the aspects of the novel that best illustrate this fusion of sublimation and cognition, of narrative pleasure and metaphysical vision, is its plot, in which Barth at once tells a compelling story and conveys an ontogenic vision of the process of human life from birth to death.

In terms of sublimative patterns, all plots may be reduced to a single paradigm: the author asks a question or sets a problem, and then refuses to answer or solve it for a certain length of narrative time. This involves the creation and heightening of tension, which culminates in resolution,

¹Scholes, *Structural Fabulation*, pp. 39-40.

establishing a pattern of completion whose power to satisfy aesthetically has traditionally been compared to the satisfaction of the love-act. Scholes and Kellogg point out in *The Nature of Narrative* that this narrative pattern, applied to human life, takes two primary forms: "In narrative the most common plots are the biographical (birth to death) and the romantic (desire to consummation), because these are the most obvious correlatives for the tension and resolution which plot demands."² This is a fruitful place to begin our discussion of the plot of *Giles Goat-Boy*, for in that novel Barth has managed to combine these two sublimative patterns in such a way as to make cognitive capital out of their conflict.

Barth's narrator, George, imitates the role of the autobiographer, whose approach to his own life most closely resembles that of the biographer's to his subject's. And yet in terms of plot structure, the autobiographer is denied the neat resolution of his narrative used by the biographer, namely, death: the autobiographer cannot know his own death. Therefore he must find some other way of resolving his tale in an aesthetically satisfying way. Scholes and Kellogg observe:

Most autobiographers continue beyond their natural concluding points, aiming toward that unattainable stasis of the narrator's death. But to the extent that the autobiography is a story of the author's inward life, its natural concluding point is not his death but the point at which the author comes to terms with himself, realizes his nature, assumes his vocation.³

This concluding point gravitates toward the romantic plot of desire and consummation: where the romantic hero desires a woman and the story ends when he gets her, the autobiographer desires a purpose to his life, a *telos*, and his story ends when he finds it.

Notice, then, what Barth does with the plot in *Giles*

²Scholes and Kellogg, p. 212.

³Scholes and Kellogg, pp. 214-5.

Goat-Boy. The sublimative drive of the plot points toward the autobiographical pattern, in which a first-person narrator tells the story of his self-discovery and assumption of vocation: George begins his tale with his desire to become a hero and a Grand Tutor, and 750 pages later, when the reader holds the bulk of the novel in his left hand and only a few pages in his right, George achieves enlightenment, routs his opponent, gazes off into the setting sun, and announces: "though my youthful work was done, that of my manhood remained to do." Here is the proper ending for the autobiography: the hero has found himself and his vocation, and the tension created throughout the story is here resolved in a way that is aesthetically satisfying. Had the novel ended here, it would certainly have fared better with the reviewers. The reader is deliberately led to expect the novel to end at this point, especially in light of the respective number of pages in his two hands, an important factor in novelistic plot expectations.

But Barth is not content to leave the reader with a warm sublimative glow: the novel that makes the reviewer's job easy cannot hope to say much of lasting value. Instead, in order to charge his story cognitively he adds a Posttape, in which the narrator does not get (or does not want) the girl, derides his vocation, and predicts his own death. The natural sublimative consummation of the romantic plot is denied the reader, who is suddenly forced to shift gears and revision the entire novel in terms of the biographical birth-to-death plot. The shock value of this shift is metaphysically instructive: life is *not* romantic, the novel's ending demonstrates, pleasant though the thought may be; desires receive no permanent romantic fulfillment, people do not live "happily ever after." Had Barth so chosen, he could have structured his novel biographically throughout, establishing expectations of death rather than romantic consummation. But consider the diminished impact this would have given the ending. In a biographical plot the death of the hero is sublimative: it

completes the pattern, resolves the established tension, and thus neither surprises nor teaches us. By building up tension leading to a romantic ending, and then rejecting the expected resolution and using another, Barth attenuates his story's sublimative power in order to deepen its cognitive import.

The device involved in this replacement, as I have mentioned above, is peripeteia, or the disappointment of expectation. The importance of this device lies in the nature of narrative art itself, which depends for its effect on manipulated uncertainty. Neither total certainty nor total surprise can create meaningful narrative art: total certainty or inevitability would involve no tension, and therefore no resolution, and total surprise would give us no context in which to understand surprising developments. We must have some certainty in the form of expectations for narrative art to be meaningful; but in order for narrative to be interesting it must disappoint those expectations, surprise us. Hence the importance of peripeteia: it is the writer's device for manipulating expectations and surprise and thereby creating the controlled uncertainty that effective narrative requires.⁴

Barth's use of peripeteia as a manipulative device is not limited to the Posttape; in fact, it is a characteristic feature of the plot as a whole, coupled with the irony that is generated in the gap between the mature and naive narrative points of view. This particular use of the device might be described as education through betrayal: essentially, it involves leading the reader to identify with the hero when the hero is wrong, and then betraying that identification as misguided. In this way the reader is forced to learn with the hero, as both conceive fond hopes for the future and then see them dashed to the ground. This is especially true of George's first two rounds of Tutoring: Barth is expert at providing

⁴I am indebted for the discussion in this paragraph to a paper read by David Hamilton at the University of Jyväskylä on May 3, 1979, entitled "The Function of Expectation in Dramatic Experience."

convincing intellectual support for fallacious arguments, and each time he successfully leads the reader to believe that *this* is George's final vision. By thus betraying the reader's faith in two contradictory philosophical positions, he educates the reader toward an acceptance of George's ultimate vision of paradox, an acceptance which is made easier for the reader by his having gone through the intellectual steps that led to it.

Obviously, fiction of this sort must maintain strict thematic control of plot: the writer must know precisely what he is going to do with his hero, where his plot is going to go, in order even to start it. This involves, as Frank Kermode has persuasively argued, a "sense of an ending." Life is endless; but to make sense of it, we must structure it, and to do so we normally fictionalize it by giving it a beginning, middle, and end: "Men, like poets, rush 'into the midst,' *in medias res*, when they are born; they also die *in medias rebus*, and to make sense of their own span they need fictive concords with origins and ends, such as give meaning to lives and to poems."⁵ In life, this structuring process is called teleological, and often sparks the apocalyptic imagination; in fiction, on the other hand, it involves the thematic ordering of story in order to create a plot which will resolve tension and establish meaning for the fiction as a whole.

Barth's plot manifests a significant dialectic with respect to these two forms of end-control. In life, Barth does not believe in ends, and rejects teleological and apocalyptic thought as life-structures. In fiction, on the other hand, end-control creates a potential both for sublimative satisfaction and for cognitive development of theme. A realistic writer disbelieving in teleology would necessarily deny all causality in his fiction, and to that end avoid thematic end-control (as the French new novelists, for example, seek to

⁵Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*, p. 7.

do). Barth, while disbelieving in teleology, is not a realistic writer, and thus is freed to write teleological stories if he so chooses, regardless of their relation to his beliefs about the nature of reality. But while his choice of an unrealistic mode *fre*es him to ignore the relation between story and life, he is also interested in evoking a cognitive image of acausal human existence *through* his thematically controlled fiction. Thus his creation of plot is not simply a matter of choosing between realism and irrealism, but involves a dialectic similar to that between metafiction and metaphysics.

The realistic thrust of this plot dialectic is manifested in *Giles Goat-Boy* as episodic structure. The episodic plot is a traditional device used to deny rigid causality in life and fiction, an assertion of the "and then" mentality over the "because" mentality. Accordingly, the episodic structure of the picaresque, for example, has been commonly adopted by realistic writers of our century who write unplotted novels in order to deny the causality of life. There is a strong feeling among this sort of writer that too much planning is bad for a novel, that one should not be too sure of how the novel will end; and these writers will even speak of the characters "taking over."⁶ Similar is the modernist feeling that fiction should not be structured so as to have a clear beginning, middle, and end, but should constantly exist "in the midst," in process rather than thematically structured from above.

Clear signs of this approach are present in *Giles Goat-Boy* as well. The novel is episodic in structure, consisting of a series of scenes or episodes which follow one another successively but seem to have no causal connection between

⁶Barth, asked once if his characters ever took charge of his fiction, replied: "You know, I suspect that's a lot of baloney. You hear respectable writers, sensible people like Katherine Anne Porter, say the characters just take over. *I'm* not going to let those scoundrels take over. I am in charge." Enck, p. 9.

them. On the other hand, the novel does not have the wholly disconnected episodic structure of the novels of Beckett and Robbe-Grillet, but instead seeks a compromise between realistically discrete episodes and their unrealistic thematic control. This it does, typically, by returning to the roots of episodic tradition.

The word "episode," of course, derives from "epic," and it is from oral and literary epic that Barth takes his structural model. Oral epic, the vehicle for undisplaced myth, is motivated not causally, like the psychological novel, but successively: one event follows another not because there is some psychologically necessary link between them, but because that is simply the way the myth goes. But note that this is not to say that oral epic *lacks* a structuring principle. Its episodes are not randomly strung one after the other; instead, they are ordered according to the fundamental patterns of the human imagination, which are conventional rather than realistic, and which myth follows without too great a concern for plausible connectives. How, precisely, does the hero's birth result from his society's need? Why is the hero summoned, and what is the force that instructs the summoner when to act? Why are tasks set? The motivation for these developments in a mythic narrative lie not within the story itself, but in the imaginative conception of the hero-cycle as a whole; and this, of course, amounts to a kind of subconscious thematic control. The hero undergoes these adventures not because they are mimesically plausible, or even plausible within the framework of the story, but because the mythic vision of life demands it. This is a perspective that is rigorously unrealistic, and Barth imitates it in his conscious thematic control of the novel's episodic plot.

But the matter is somewhat more complex than this. *Giles Goat-Boy* is not only consciously, but *self*-consciously controlled: that is, not only Barth but the characters themselves, particularly George and Max, have an active hand in directing the sequence of episodes, which they do by consciously following the path of the mythic hero. In this Barth's novel is remi-

niscent less of oral than literary epic - less of the *Iliad* than of the *Aeneid*, where the locus of thematic control is shifted from a collective mythic imagination to the searching, developing epic hero himself. Thus Barth notes of Virgil's epic:

I'm much impressed by the figure of Aeneas (although I don't like the *Aeneid* nearly as much as I do other classical literature). Unlike Odysseus, who always knows exactly where he is supposed to go and what he must do, Aeneas learns where he's to go, and what he's to do, and who he is in the process of going, doing, and being. For example, in Hades he finds where he is by looking at where he has been and thereby determining where he is then supposed to go.⁷

The plot of the *Aeneid* is a quest or pilgrimage, which later became the central Christian allegorical image for the spiritual life;⁸ and on one level, at least, Aeneas' true destination is not Rome but self-discovery, the knowledge of who he is that he must possess in order to found Rome. And it is this epical concept, which was developed by the more self-conscious literary epics, that Barth imitates in *Giles Goat-Boy*. Both *Giles* and Virgil's epic are episodic; but the episodes are linked thematically in both by a parallel movement on two levels: on the physical level, from Troy to Rome and from the goatbarns to Main Campus, and on the spiritual or ontogenic level, from ignorance to self-knowledge. It is important to note, however, that while this thematic development links the episodes, it does not control them causally; while Aeneas and George both know where they have to go, they have no idea how to get there, and thus each incident must be faced individually. Aeneas is guided by divine instructions and prophecies, as George is by his conscious imitation of the hero myth through the mediation of Max and the tales read to him by Lady Creamhair; but this overall understanding does not

⁷Gado, pp. 128-9.

⁸As is pointed out by Scholes and Kellogg, p. 165, and Adams, p. 91.

always help them to deal with the contingencies of the moment, which must often be solved through trial and error. The attempts of both heroes to find their way to their respective destinations are hindered both by hostile agents, in the form of spiteful gods or false Grand Tutors, and by their own ignorance, which time and again leads them astray. And yet, it is precisely these failures out of ignorance that act as the hero's best teachers; both learn through failure, especially as that failure is many times magnified by their misdirection of the people around them. This learning process or ontogeny, which is the main content of the traditional quest or pilgrimage, is also the philosophical content of the plot of *Giles Goat-Boy*: aside from *what* George learns, Barth is also concerned to convey an image of *how* he learns, as he moves from the innocence of childhood to the mature understanding of adulthood, and from there to eventual decline and death.

This thematic aspect of the novel's plot must be especially stressed because it has been so consistently missed by criticism. Robert Scholes, for example, writes:

Action by each individual, appropriate to himself and his situation, is the only way to salvation. Thus there are no formulas. *The Revised New Syllabus* is not a catechism but the story of one man's heroic attempt to work out his own life and find out his own truth. . . . We are left finally without a moral. We are given only the story of a life to imitate, with the qualification that to imitate it we must diverge from it, since George's life is his; ours ours.⁹

This reading misses the point of the allegorical plot; for nowhere is it suggested that we should imitate George's life. The novel's plot is designed not as a guide for acting, but as an allegorical presentation of how man learns through living: that is, the novel's import in this respect is metaphysical rather than ethical, and descriptive rather than prescriptive. George is Everyman, but an Everyman whose allegorical signi-

⁹Scholes, *The Fabulators*, p. 167. Olderman adopts Scholes' view and reproduces it virtually verbatim (p. 88).

ficance is not "Do ye likewise" but "This is the way of all flesh."

The plot of the novel, as became clear in Part IV, is a thematic rearrangement of the chronological sequence of the hero myth. Some aspects of the myth, such as the hero's apotheosis, were omitted as unsuitable to the novel's metaphysics, and others, such as the rout of Bray, were moved quite considerably in order to emphasize a thematic point.

In addition to these cognitive concerns, however, there were also certain sublimative concerns which affected Barth's rearrangement of story into plot: concerns which involved not theme but narrative technique in terms of tension and resolution. The most important of these is the shifting of the events of George's birth and infancy from the beginning of the narrative, where they belong chronologically, to later in the story, when George discovers them at second hand. The rearranged sequence looks like this:

Table 7: Giles Goat-Boy's *rearrangement of story into plot*

4. childhood to adolescence (41-106)
 3. Max: rescue from tapelift to goatbarns (102-7)
5. adolescence to manhood (108-245)
6. Road of Trials (247-708)
 1. WESCAC: conception and birth (559-600)
 2. Reginald Hector: murder attempt (573)
7. enlightenment (709-31)
8. return, rout of Bray (731-53)
9. prediction of death (755-64)

The purpose of this rearrangement is to transform George's childhood and thus his entire identity into a mystery that must be sought. This creates tension that is gradually resolved as George seeks out the roots of his identity, and also, because his self-conception as Grand Tutor and hero in part depends upon whether or not he is the GILES, this mystery motivates George's quest. In a larger sense, too, this literal search for identity prefigures George's quest for self-knowledge, and thus contributes to cognitive thematic development as well.

The plot itself, as I mentioned above, is episodic, and any description of it must consider the precise nature of these episodes as well as the borderlines between them. What is an episode, and where does it begin and end? George is, first of all, a highly mobile character, and most of the episodes in the novel involve a change in setting: George leaves one place and goes to another, to confront a new problem and a new person associated with that problem. In a few cases, an entire episode may occur en route from one place to another, such as George's conversation with Stoker and Anastasia in Stoker's sidecar as they travel from George's Gorge to the Powerhouse; but most often movement from one place to another indicates a transition between episodes. Another distinctive feature of individual episodes is the presence of a given auditor: normally speaking, George converses throughout each episode with the same one, two, or more rarely, three people, and the appearance of a new character may involve a change of episode, as it does at George's Gorge when Max joins George's conversation with Anastasia. In general, this description of individual episodes applies better to George's adventures on Main Campus than to his life at the goatbarns, although clear episodes are distinguishable there as well. For example, the two months of indecision during which George wavers between goathood and humanity at age fourteen is difficult to divide into episodes, as it primarily contains summarized description of an entire period, with only a few brief action passages; and the same is true of the description of George's prepping, with its summaries of dreams and discussions. These two passages present certain problems to any episodic division of the novel; I have solved the problem in a way that is not entirely satisfactory but for practical reasons necessary, by classifying the entire passage in each case as a single episode.

In many cases, episodic borders follow chapter divisions, although this cannot be taken as an absolute rule. But this parallel suggests a broader, more inclusive categorization of these episodes into thematic unities, along the lines of the novel's division into reels. Barth's fascination with number

symbolism has led him to divide his novel into symbolically significant units: the *Revised New Syllabus* consists of two volumes of three reels each, and each reel is evenly divided into seven chapters. Generally speaking there are slightly more episodes than chapters in each reel, but the reels themselves provide a relatively reliable key to the thematic division of the plot. There is one exception to this: the episode during which George is incarcerated in Main Detention between his rounds of Tutoring is placed in Reel 2 of Volume 2, which otherwise deals with George's second round of Tutoring; thematically, this episode belongs neither to Reel 2 nor to Reel 1 before it, but is independent of both, and in essence constitutes an interlude to the thematic progression. If these thematic units were part of a play, we might call them acts and the episodes scenes; since they form part of a prose fiction, we might instead refer to them as "books."

In addition to these divisions of the narrative proper, there are also three frames to be included in the description. The innermost frame of the three is narrated by George himself, but in his older, ironic voice, as opposed to the naive voice in which he narrates the main narrative. This frame is found in the Posttape, which constitutes an epilogue to the story, and also in the first chapter of George's narrative, in which he introduces his tale and his keeper, Max Spielman. This constitutes a prologue, after which George shifts into his naive voice and begins to relate the events of his childhood.

The two outermost frames are those dealt with in Chapter 1 of Part II: that closest to George's narrative written by J.B.B., including the Cover-Letter and the Postscript to the Posttape, and framing that the entries written by the Editors, including the Publisher's Disclaimer and the Editor's Footnote to the Postscript to the Posttape. These form what might be called an opening and closing commentary on the novel that is largely parodic, enclosing the *R.N.S.*, with its strong inclination toward metaphysical tragedy, in an exuberant metafictional envelope. An outline of the episodic structure of the novel, then, with appropriate references to chapter, reel, and volume

divisions within the novel itself, would look like this:

Table 8: *The episodic structure of Giles Goat-Boy*

OPENING COMMENTARY:	Frame 1	Publisher's Disclaimer
	Frame 2	J.B.'s Cover-Letter
PROLOGUE:	Frame 3	George (ironic voice): Max (Vol. 1, Reel 1, Ch. 1)
BOOK I CHILDHOOD (Vol. 1, Reel 1)		
Episode 1	Dean of the Hill (Ch. 2)	
	2 Lady Creamhair (Ch. 3, 4)	
	3 Beist and Chickie Ann (Ch. 5)	
	4 Lady Creamhair: rape attempt (Ch. 6)	
	5 goat-fight (Ch. 6)	
	6 library: Max, G. Herrold (Ch. 7)	
BOOK II PREPARATION AND DEPARTURE (Vol. 1, Reel 2)		
Episode 1	barn: prepping, dreams, discussions (Ch. 1)	
	2 night: dream, call, departure (Ch. 1)	
	3 fork in the road (Ch. 2)	
	4 George's Gorge (Ch. 3)	
	5 Anastasia's life story (Ch. 4)	
	6 Stoker's arrival (Ch. 5)	
	7 en route to Powerhouse (Ch. 5)	
	8 Control Room (Ch. 6)	
	9 Furnace Room (Ch. 6)	
	10 Living Room (Ch. 7)	
BOOK III APPROACH AND MATRICULATION (Vol. 1, Reel 3)		
Episode 1	en route to Main Campus (Ch. 1)	
	2 Pedal Inn: Greene's life story (Ch. 2)	
	3 Max's instructions (Ch. 3)	
	4 theater: <i>Taliped Decanus</i> (Ch. 4)	
	5 night: Eierkopf (Ch. 5)	
	6 Trial-by-Turnstile (Ch. 6)	
	7 Sear's treatment room (Ch. 7)	
	8 Rexford's speech (Ch. 7)	
	9 Scrapegoat Grate (Ch. 7)	
BOOK IV FIRST ROUND OF TUTORING (Vol. 2, Reel 1)		
Episode 1	tutoring Ira Hector (Ch. 1)	
	2 Bray's lecture (Ch. 1)	
	3 visiting Max in Main Detention (Ch. 1)	
	4 tutoring Maurice Stoker (Ch. 1)	
	5 tutoring Peter Greene (Ch. 2)	
	6 tutoring Eblis Eierkopf (Ch. 2)	
	7 en route to U.C. Symposium: Rexford (Ch. 3)	

- 8 at U.C. Symposium: Leonid, Classmate X (Ch. 3)
- 9 tutoring Anastasia, Sear at Infirmary (Ch. 4)
- 10 library: interview with Virginia, Bray (Ch. 5)
- 11 Belly with Bray (Ch. 6)
- 12 Reginald Hector in P.P.F. Office (Ch. 7)
- 13 lynching (Ch. 7)

INTERLUDE: MAIN DETENTION (Vol. 2, Reel 2, Ch. 1)

surrealistic mixture of discussion, mental time

BOOK V SECOND ROUND OF TUTORING (Vol. 2, Reel 2)

- Episode 1 Virginia's lap: new vision (Ch. 1, 2)
- 2 tutoring Peter Greene (Ch. 2)
- 3 en route to Great Mall: Stoker (Ch. 3)
- 4 questioning of Beists (Ch. 3)
- 5 tutoring Ira Hector (Ch. 3)
- 6 tutoring Eblis Eierkopf (Ch. 3)
- 7 tutoring Rexford, Classmate X (Ch. 4)
- 8 tutoring Anastasia, Sear at Infirmary (Ch. 5)
- 9 examination of Anastasia (Ch. 6)
- 10 library: Virginia, Scroll, Bray (Ch. 6)
- 11 Belly with Bray (Ch. 7)
- 12 lynching (Ch. 7)

BOOK VI ENLIGHTENMENT (Vol. 2, Reel 3)

- Episode 1 illumination at George's Gorge (Ch. 1)
- 2 en route to Tower Hall with Stoker (Ch. 2)
- 3 Living Sakhyan, Ira, Reginald Hector (Ch. 2)
- 4 library: library-scientists and Scroll (Ch. 3)
- 5 rout of Bray from Belfry (Ch. 4)
- 6 en route to Belly with Anastasia (Ch. 4)
- 7 Belly, illumination (Ch. 4)
- 8 at Exit from Belly: Max, Stoker (Ch. 5)
- 9 traffic jam: Rexford (Ch. 6)
- 10 goatbarns (Ch. 6)
- 11 Max's Shafting, rout of Bray (Ch. 7)

EPILOGUE: Frame 3 Posttape

CLOSING COMMENTARY: Frame 2 J.B.'s Postscript to the Posttape
 Frame 1 Editor's Footnote to the Postscript to the Posttape

In my discussion of this plot, rather than dealing individually with each episode (a fascinating but rather space-consuming task) I propose to examine each Book as a thematic entity, illustrating the various thematic developments with references to individual episodes but not pausing to treat

each in detail. Also, since Frames 1 and 2 were discussed above, I shall limit my analysis here to George's narrative, beginning with the Prologue.

In the Prologue, or the first chapter of the novel, George introduces himself as the Ag-Hill Goat-Boy, and in a two-page paragraph introduces the intellectual achievement of Max Spielman. This description establishes some of the novel's most central metaphysical notions, such as the Riddle of the Spinceters, which contains the novel's vision of man's carnality and mortality; the Law of Cyclology, which imitates Campbell's concept of the Universal Round of growth and decline; and "ontogeny repeats cosmogeny," or the association of microstructure with macrostructure.

At the end of the Prologue George turns from Max to himself, to his childhood as a goat; this passage constitutes a transition to the first episode of the "Childhood" section, where George reigns briefly as Dean of the Hill. George describes this life in the traditional terms of pre-moral paradise:

I grew from strapping infancy into a boyhood such as human males may dream of. Fatigue was my only curfew, sufficient rest my one alarm. I ate what, when, and where I pleased - furze and gorse and fescues; oil-cake, willow-peels, and pollard. Acorns bound me when I was loose; mangolds secured me when I was bound. As there were no rules to break, Max never birched me; since he forked my hay and patted my head, I loved him beyond measure. Like my stallmates I feared fire, loud noise, and the bigger bucks, but only in the presence of those terrors, never between times, and so anxiety was foreign to me as soap. When I was gay I gamboled where I would, banged heads with my brothers and bleated in the clover; angry I kicked my stall, my pals, or Mary Appenzeller, whichever was behind me, and was either ignored or rekicked at once. . . . My moral training required no preachment (not the least respect in which it differed absolutely from that of humans): Who neglects his appetites suffers their pangs; Who presumes incautiously may well be butted; Who fouls his stall must sleep in filth. Cleave to him, I learned, who does you kindness; Avoid him who does you hurt; Stay inside the fence; Take of what's offered as much as you can for as long as you may; Don't exchange the certain for the possible; Boss when you're able, be bossed when you aren't, but don't forsake the herd (44-5).

Reading this, one is tempted to quibble: if a human child were raised among goats, he would not learn goatish lessons. But the very absurdity of such quibbling makes an important point: Barth is interested not in creating a realistic image of child development in an animal environment, but in parodying literary constructs such as the childhood of Tarzan as well as certain cultural images or myths of childhood. There is, for example, the historical myth of the Ages of Man, the first of which is mankind's childhood or the birth of civilization. Hegel, as Hayden White notes, described savagery as

that stage in which human consciousness lives in the apprehension of no essential difference between itself and the world of nature; in which custom dictates life without any recognition of the inner tensions that might be generated in society by the right of the individual to aspire to something other than what custom dictates as a possible aspiration; in ignorance, superstition, and fear, without any sense of a specific goal for the folk as a totality; with no notion of history, but in an endless present; ... in a state of repression rather than of morality, which implies the capacity to choose; and without any law other than the rule of the strongest.¹⁰

In George's childhood Barth also directs his parodic lens at the pastoral tradition in literature, which Northrup Frye associates with the second phase of romance:

The second phase brings us to the innocent youth of the hero, a phase most familiar to us from the story of Adam and Eve in Eden before the Fall. In literature this phase presents a pastoral and Arcadian world, generally a pleasant wooded landscape, full of glades, shaded valleys, murmuring brooks, the moon, and other images closely linked with the female or maternal aspect of sexual imagery. Its heraldic colors are green and gold, traditionally the colors of vanishing youth. ... It is often a world of magic or desirable law, and it tends to center on a youthful hero, still overshadowed by parents, surrounded by youthful companions. The archetype of erotic innocence is less commonly marriage than the kind of "chaste" love that precedes marriage; the love of brother and sister, or of two boys for each other. Hence, though in later phases it is often

¹⁰White, *Metahistory*, p. 125.

recalled as a lost happy time or Golden Age, the sense of being close to a moral taboo is very frequent.¹¹

This erotic innocence is portrayed in George's childhood in his love for Redfearn's Tom and Hedda of the Speckled Teat, and it is his battle with Tom for Hedda that will later destroy his innocent idyll.

As George approaches puberty at age fourteen, this life among the goats becomes more problematic. Lady Creamhair, his mother, appears on the scene, and teaches him about life among men, and a conflict arises between this attraction toward manhood and the opposite force, exerted by Max, drawing him back to goathood. George is pressed by his mother to choose between being a goat and being a man, but, as he says, while the goats are superior to humans in every way, humans are far more interesting (60), and the choice is difficult. Also involved in the conflict is Barth's parody of Freud's analysis of the Oedipal struggles involved in childhood: George falls in love with Lady Creamhair and rebels against Max, his foster-father. George's love affair with Lady Creamhair is highly comic, of course, inasmuch as Lady Creamhair is unaware that any such thing exists, and George bases his notions of love on the traditional courtly romance, which the episode self-consciously parodies. The parody is particularly clear in the scene where George misunderstands Lady Creamhair's "Now look here" to mean she is going to expose herself, and out of curiosity tries to look up her dress:

"Very well, Billy, I'm going home." I saw tears in her eyes, and was instantly contrite.

"I'm sorry! I'm sorry!"

But she was more bothered than I'd imagined. "No, I'm going. I know you're sorry, but at the same - I think maybe we shan't see each other again."

At this I rolled on the ground and wailed so piteously that she could say no more.

"See if I don't kill myself!" I declared. "I'll eat privet-berries and die, like Cinnamon Daphie!" In token

¹¹ Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, pp. 199-200.

of my vow I commenced to bang my head on a hemlock root, until she came to my side and begged me to stop.

I paused between bangs. "Will you come again?"

"You don't understand what the trouble is." She wiped her eyes and my own. "I'll have to think what's right."

But I could not abide uncertainty. I loved her, I declared: more than I loved Redfearn's Tom or Mary Appenzeller; more even than I loved Max. She must promise to see me every day; she must never threaten not to see me (59).

Here are all the clichés of courtly love: the threats to sever relations, to commit suicide, and so forth.

The innocence of this love is soon complicated, however, when George creeps out into the pasture one night and observes the Beist and Chickie Ann engaged in sex.¹² Sex, of course, is the snake in the garden, and when on the next day George seeks to apply this lesson to his love for Lady Creamhair, she resists violently and he ends up trying to force her. This attempted rape of the mother drives her off, and begins to bring George's childhood to a close.

George's rebellion against the father-figure begins almost in play, as George sits perched on top of a pile of boxes and out of the sheer joy of parody imitates the sound of Max's shophar, the mark of his authority over the goats. This scene in fact prefigures both Max's Shafting, where George blows the shophar and is mobbed by panicking onlookers, just as the youthful Billy is kicked and punched by the crowd when he falls off the boxes and over the fence; and George's own death on the tree of life, where he falls from the height of his achievement to death. Later, Lady Creamhair gives George a bath with soap, and when he returns to the barns he is disgusted by Max:

"Flunk you! You stink!"

Like two blows of a staff my curse fell on him, drew him up short, and made him sway. Now my heartsgate swooningly let flood an utter lake of pain. "I *hate* this!"

"Hum!" Max tugged at his beard and fiercely nodded. I rose up to strike him ... (62).

¹²Campbell Tatham has offered an excellent analysis of this scene and its many-layered confusions of art and love in "John Barth and the Aesthetics of Artifice," *Contemporary Literature* 12 (Winter 1972), pp. 69-71.

This Oedipal struggle symbolically culminates in George's fight with Redfearn's Tom over Hedda: having killed his innocent playmate, he has also killed his own innocence and crossed the threshold from childhood into manhood. He has not yet achieved mature insight; but now he knows that the happiness of childhood must be left behind for the complexities of life as an adult. Barth shows innocence to be a passing stage that must be experienced and then put aside for maturity, rather than trying to regain it, as so many heroes of American literature have done. "Innocence," as Eben Cooke says in *The Sot-Weed Factor*, "is like youth, ... which is given us only to expend, and takes its very meaning from its loss" (SWF, 657). This is a recurring theme in Barth's work that finds comically graphic expression in George's departure from the herd.

Having left the goatbarns, George crosses the road to the Library to find Max, and there Max tells him about his birth and infancy. Following this narration, Max "Maximizes" him, renames him George, and the episode and the childhood section both end.

The next thematic entity in the novel, corresponding to Reel 2 of Volume 1, I have termed "Preparation and Departure," and it involves the seven years of prepping George spends with Max, and his departure for Main Campus, bringing him as far as the Powerhouse. Most of this reel is primarily significant in terms of Barth's parody of the hero myth, and accordingly I have discussed it in detail above. I shall here be concerned only with those aspects of George's development which were not covered earlier, which leaves George's prepping up until his final dream and departure.

George has, at age fourteen, received no schooling whatsoever; thus when he decides to become a man, it is imperative that he make up for lost time, and Max sets about teaching him the fundamental knowledge he needs to know. Max's instruction follows classical humanistic lines, seeking to make of George a Renaissance man - and in fact this passage may be a parody of such Humanist educations as that described by Rabelais

in his education of Gargantua (Book III, Chapters 23 and 24). George proves a difficult pupil, however, in that unlike his teacher (and like his creator) he has only the most marginal respect for reality.¹³ George, like Barth, tends to think of life in fictional terms:

Little wonder I looked upon my life and the lives of others as a kind of theatrical impromptu, self-knowledge as a matter of improvisation, and moral injunctions, such as those of the *Fables*, whether high-minded or wicked, as so many stage-directions. A fact, in short, even an autobiographical fact, was not something I perceived and acknowledged, but a detail of the general Conceit, to be accepted or rejected. Nothing for me was simply *the case* forever and aye, only "*this case*." Spectator, critic, and occasional member of the troupe, I approached the script and Max's glosses thereupon in a spirit of utter freedom (117).

Much of George's prepping takes the form of the interpretation of dreams. The two dreams that are discussed in this respect are both Oedipal in content, especially the first, in which Freddie-as-George butts Max into the patent dock, injuring him, and then mounts George's dam Mary, despite George's attempts to drive him off (118). The lesson that Max draws from these dreams is the Maxim, "Self-knowledge is always bad news" (121), which George will later learn for himself, when he achieves true self-knowledge. At this point, however, George resists Max's discovery of flunkédness in him:

"Flunk this *psychology* of yours!" I cried. "Can't anything I do just be innocent?"

The retort caught me with my fork raised - at shoulder height! - to drive again into the hay (120).

Perhaps the most important thematic development in this period, however, is George's decision to become a hero. This arises out of a conflict between his aspirations as a newly-found human and the average run of mankind:

¹³See for example the epigraph to the history section, p. 118, and Barth's remarks quoted on p. 262.

It was explained to me then that unlike the goats, whose one desire (if something unconscious may be called that) was to be supremely goatish, human beings did not aspire to be supremely human. Rather, they chose some single activity of life such as watching stars or making music and strove for excellence there exclusively, ignoring the rest. This notion of *majors* and *vocations* was not easy for me to understand (114).

And frustrated at the limitations of man, he later asks: "How can a person stand it, not to be ... marvellous?" (123; ellipsis in original). This sentiment, which suggests Jung's statement that "man's purpose is not to eat, drink, etc., but *to be human*,"¹⁴ leads George to the concept of the hero as the pinnacle of humanity, the embodiment of all that is supremely human. His thinking on this matter is influenced by the mythical tales read to him by Lady Creamhair, and also by the classical literature which Max has him read; but more than this, George is led to aspire to herodism by the knowledge that he might be the GILES, or Grand Tutor. Only the Grand Tutor can enter the Belly of WESCAC and not be EATEN, Max explains; and George reminds him that he has been there once already, as an infant. On this basis, George dreams up a glorious future for himself, replete with dragons and pretty girls, but Max punctures this romantic image:

"Do you know what a Grand Tutor's life is like? I mean a real one like Enos Enoch or Maios the Lykeion, not the story-book kind. Do you know what has to happen to them in the end? When did you ever hear of a happy hero? They always suffer - it's almost what they're *for* ..." He gave a little snort. "But you don't care about that; all a youngster can see is how fine he'll look out there on the hilltop, and what his last words will be; never mind what they do to him!" (130; ellipsis in original).

George will later learn the truth of Max's words; but it is important to note that George *does* become a hero in terms of his original conception, of a person who is "supremely human." And this in fact is one of the most distinctive the-

¹⁴Jung, *Man and His Symbols*, p. 215.

matic features of the novel: in an age of anti-heroes, Barth has created a character who not only aspires to herodom, but actually becomes a hero. That George does not fulfill the requirements of the mythic hero, in his failure to redeem society and become a god, does not disqualify him for hero-hood: he is instead the only kind of hero possible in our time, a man who achieves self-knowledge, and acceptance of and resignation to the tragic end of all existence.

The short-range importance of his choice to be a hero is less lofty, but no less central to the action of the novel: by choosing to be a hero, George adopts a role, which makes acting, involving himself with the world, possible. This is George's answer to Jake Horner's problem of cosmopsis: where Jake was immobilized by the absence of meaningful alternatives, George selects a role and acts, just as Eben Cooke had made action possible by selecting the role of Virgin Poet. Thus when George reaches the fork in the road beyond the goatbarns, and is momentarily immobilized by indecision - left or right? - his hero-role saves him, first by sending him blindly ahead, and next by allowing him to accept Max's guidance, just as all heroes accept the guidance of a mentor.

In the episodes that follow, George gradually refines his concept of what herodom and Grand-Tutordom entail, as he faces Stoker's scorn, Anastasia's wide-eyed questions, and Max's instructions - which last are not always reliable. One of the intellectual problems he must deal with is the fact that his personality does not match the general notion of what a Grand Tutor is and does: as Anastasia asks, "Shouldn't you be gentle and meek? And suffering? You're very *physical*, George ..." (209; emphasis in original). George solves the problem by seeing through the fallacy of this reasoning: Anastasia, and Max like her, assumes that there is an absolute ideal for all Grand Tutors which Grand Tutors must match up to or fail to be Grand Tutors, which is essentially a Platonic approach. George's reply is Aristotelian: there are no ideals, merely Grand Tutors, and the rest of mankind follows the exam-

ples set - no matter what those examples might be - by the Grand Tutor. George explains:

Truly it seemed to me ... that a deed became Grand-Tutorial from its having been done by the Grand Tutor and in no other way; at the same time, that the Grand Tutor defines Himself ineluctably and exclusively in the Grand-Tutoriality of His deeds. There was no cause, I strongly felt, to *worry* about myself: if I was indeed Grand Tutor then I would choose infallibly the Grand-Tutorial thing - how could I do otherwise? - whose Grand-Tutoriality could yet be said to derive from my recognition. If I was not, then no choice of actions would make me so, because in my un-Grand-Tutoriality I would make the wrong choices (250).

In terms of George's entire quest, this is undoubtedly true: he does define himself, and while Barth does not suggest that we imitate his example, his disciples do. On the other hand, at this still naive stage in George's ontogenic development, his ruminations in effect amount to a rationalization of the unrestricted exercise of his naivety; and by assuming he can do no wrong, he high-handedly meddles in the lives around him and twice nearly causes the end of the University. Ironically, George learns that the Grand Tutor should not Tutor until he is himself enlightened; but in enlightenment he realizes the hopelessness of teaching anyone anything. Man must learn himself, and must learn to live a worthwhile life; but he cannot be taught.

These meditations on the nature of Grand-Tutordom in fact comprise the only aspect of the plot in Book II ("Approach and Matriculation") which requires discussion here. Episodes 2 and 8 (Greene's life-story and Rexford's Matriculation Day address) have already been discussed, in the history section; episodes 3, 6, and 9, relating to George's Trials, have all been discussed in the mythology section; and episodes 5 and 7, pertaining to Eierkopf and Sear, will be dealt with in the next chapter.

Books IV, V, and VI, as well as the Interlude in Main Detention, deal with George's two rounds of Tutoring and enlightenment. George's movement through contradictory Tutoring

positions to his ultimate vision of paradox reflects his ontogenic development from innocence to maturity, and thus is germane to an examination of the novel's plot; the actual content of those positions, on the other hand, contributes not to the plot but to the novel's metaphysical image of paradoxical being in man and his cosmos.

George develops his first Tutoring position, in Robert Scholes' words, as "a debating position originally, a mere piece of rhetoric, but, as so often happens in life and in fiction, George becomes a prisoner of his rhetoric and finally begins to believe it ..."¹⁵ George's debating partner at the time is Maurice Stoker, and their subject is the question of Passage and Failure, the elusive polarities that form the basis of all George's Tutoring positions. George's first exposure to the polarities comes on his PAT-card, which, in its lack of punctuation, is puzzling: "Pass All Fail All." Because paradoxical thinking does not come easy to George at first, the phrase seems like a contradiction in terms, and so unconsciously he amends it to make it easier to handle: he tends to think of the phrase with an "or" in the middle (571), and faced with a choice to Pass All *or* Fail All, George knows he must cleave to Passage. This tiny addition to the PAT-phrase distorts and simplifies its import, and helps George to formulate his first position: Passage, he says, is always Passage, and Failure is always Failure; and the two should be kept as far apart as possible. This is an approximation of Christian morality, and it is appropriate that Harold Bray, the novel's allegorical representation of the Christian church, should praise George in his first journey through the Belly of WESCAC.

As I noted earlier, George persuades Lucius Rexford to put this principle into practice on a college-wide basis - with disastrous results. The separation of poles draws off the vital energy derived from their interaction, and New Tammany bogs down in listlessness:

¹⁵Scholes, *The Fabulators*, p. 163.

Indeed, the whole scene was listless: Stoker's troopers slouched about, some asleep in their sidecars, some hunkered idly on the curb. Now and then one clubbed a student, but so half-heartedly I couldn't always judge whether their victims fell unconscious or merely "went limp." The few passersby who stopped to watch seemed scarcely more interested than the throngs who ambled past without a glance. Even the hecklers sounded bored: yet when languidly one called, "Hurrah for apathy," two pickets shrugged and walked off (643-4).

In point of fact, this very lack of energy may have saved the University: "Stoker himself ... maintained that WESCAC had indeed set about to EAT Nikolay College, either by its own AIM or at the direction of the professor-generals; only the drain on its power-supply ... had prevented Campus Riot III" (584).

Even beyond these practical consequences, George's Tutoring position is riddled with fallacies. What these amount to, in essence, is that poles cannot *be* separated, no matter how hard one tries, a fact that is reflected in the absurdity of George's pronouncement: "If it was inescapable that the lights of Great Mall depended ultimately on what went on under Founder's Hill, then let there at least be no converse between head and bowels ..." (498). Head and bowels, the two poles in this case, are interdependent, as George is forced to admit; to insist that there be no converse between them is then to blind himself to the gaps in his theory. At one point George wished he could apply Eierkopf's Infinite Divisor to his Assignment, in order to separate Passage and Failure permanently (485). The purpose of the Divisor as designed by Eierkopf is to clarify the blurred region between two polar opposites such as Tick and Tock, in order to prove that they *are* polar and not merely graded differences between aspects of the same entity. But Eierkopf has forgotten Zeno's paradox, that by halving one's distance to a destination one will never reach that destination; and George makes the mistake of assuming that a border exists to be discovered.

George realizes his mistake in Main Detention, where he conceives his second Tutoring position. He was wrong, he

says, to try to separate Passage and Failure: the two are one and the same, and no difference exists between them. Therefore, George says, we must *embrace* opposites and thus ignore them out of existence. All categories are meaningless: words (631-2), names (633), the boundary (650), male and female, GILES and WESCAC, and son and father (695-6). But as Robert Scholes has pointed out, to deny these categories is to deny life itself:

This denial of sex ... is an attempt to deny the principle of creation through division, upon which all higher life is founded. These categories, which George would abolish, are not merely WESCAC's, they are life's. In denying them, George denies the very dialectical process he is involved in, denies his separation from and attraction to Anastasia. If failure is passage, death is life.¹⁶

And, appropriately, the longer he Tutors this round, the less motivation he has for living at all: "It occurred to me that I had no clear reason for coming there /to the Library/ anyhow: it was Bray I wanted; no, not even Bray: WESCAC. No, not even WESCAC: death. So far had my spirits, unaccountably, plunged" (681).

The result of this position is once again disastrous. When Rexford orders the East- and West-Campus Power Lines moved immediately adjacent, an arc flashed across them and shortcircuits the Powerhouse. At the same time, Rexford has ordered the jails and hospitals emptied, and both criminals and the mentally ill pour onto the streets: "'The whole durn place has gone kerflooy!' /Peter Greene/ announced to me. 'Crooks and loonies running all over! It's the end of the University!'" (677). One of the mental patients released from the Infirmary runs to attack George, but, faced with George's stick, changes his mind and hurls himself out the window to his death. This clearly illustrates an important flaw in George's reasoning. If one blots out all distinctions between reason and unreason, man and beast, the result, in both men

¹⁶Scholes, *The Fabulators*, pp. 165-6.

and human societies, is self-destructive insanity.

These two ill-fated attempts at understanding the universe seem ridiculous to George and to us in retrospect; but it is well to remember that paradox is never easy to comprehend, and a paradoxical universe even less so. In engaging himself with the problem intellectually and witnessing the practical consequences his Tutoring has, however, George achieves something important: he holds fast, tenaciously confronts existence until it yields up its secrets. In this he resembles Barth's description of Menelaus engaging Proteus on the beach at Pharos:

Menelaus is *lost*, in the larger labyrinth of the world, and has got to hold fast while the Old Man of the Sea exhausts reality's frightening guises so that he may extort direction from him when Proteus returns to his "true" self. It's a heroic enterprise, with salvation as its object ...¹⁷

George holds on long enough to extort the Truth from his existence; and that Truth is a synthesis of his first two positions, which thus form the thesis and antithesis of a Hegelian dialectic. The synthesis states that Passage is Passage, and Failure Failure; but Passage is also Failure, and Failure Passage. Both are simultaneously and paradoxically true: both exist independently and neither exists at all; the two are united and at the same time distinct. This enlightenment marks George's initiation into maturity: innocent no longer, he knows, and his knowledge speaks of tragedy. George's mature tragic sensibility is expounded in his epilogue or Posttape.

The epilogue itself, of course, is a traditional novelistic device in which the writer or the narrator ties up all the loose ends of the story. Barth plays with this device in much of his other fiction, especially in *Chimera*, in which all three novellas themselves might be seen as expanded epi-

¹⁷Barth, "The Literature of Exhaustion," p. 82.

logues to the original mythological tales, picking up where the action in those stories leaves off. But in *Giles Goat-Boy* Barth uses the epilogue form in perhaps an even more interesting way: instead of tying up the loose ends as we expect, he mixes them up and ties them in a way that is completely unexpected, and thus, through peripeteia, instructs us. As Frank Kermode writes:

The story that proceeded very simply to its obviously predestined end would be nearer myth than novel or drama. Peripeteia, which has been called the equivalent, in narrative, of irony in rhetoric, is present in every story of the least structural sophistication. Now peripeteia depends on our confidence of the end; it is a disconfirmation followed by a consonance; the interest of having our expectations falsified is obviously related to our wish to reach the discovery or recognition by an unexpected route.¹⁸

Thus the reader ends George's main narrative in the expectation of a happy ending along the lines of traditional comedy, where the hero marries the heroine and establishes the comic redeemed society:¹⁹ George will marry Anastasia after her divorce with Stoker, and will live out his life surrounded by his devoted disciples. And indeed this option is open to George; but he rejects it, as he must in light of the novel's thematic development. Throughout the novel, George has had flashes of insight in which he sees that his end will be tragic; to withdraw from the rigor of that insight at this point and accept the comic society offered him would have negated George's vision and indeed his entire life. Just as he once perceived that "Grand Tutoring ... must be always more or less lost by the Tutees, as Enos Enoch was lost in Enochism" (251), so also in the Posttape he makes it clear that George Giles the Grand Tutor is lost in Gilesianism. The comic redeemed society is not a real alternative, but a product of wishful thinking: "Happy endings do not impress us as true,"

¹⁸Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*, p. 18.

¹⁹Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 170.

writes Northrup Frye, "but as desirable, and they are brought about by manipulation."²⁰

The mature hero's vision of human life, then, is not comic but tragic. Tragedy is the mode of inevitability, of man trapped in an unbearable existence. But it is also more than that: tragedy sees man as paradoxically tiny when compared to his environment and to fate, and at the same time great, in his ability to see and accept the truth. And the truth is, in tragedy, death: man aspires to the heavens, but is made of flesh and must die. This vision of tragedy as it is expressed in Sophocles' play of Oedipus is excellently described by Bernard Knox:

The *Oedipus Tyrannos* of Sophocles combines two apparently irreconcilable themes, the greatness of the gods and the greatness of man, and the combination of these themes is inevitably tragic, for the greatness of the gods is most clearly and powerfully demonstrated by man's defeat. "The god is great in his laws, and he does not grow old." But man does, and not only does he grow old, he also dies. The beauty and power of his physical frame is subject to sickness, death, and corruption; the beauty and power of his intellectual, artistic, and social achievement to decline, overthrow, and oblivion. His greatness and beauty arouse in us a pride in their magnificence which is inseparable from and increased by our sorrow over their immanent and permanent death. Oedipus is symbolic of all human achievement: his hard-won magnificence, unlike the everlasting magnificence of the divine, cannot last, and while it lives, shines all the more brilliant against the somber background of its impermanence. Sophocles' tragedy presents us with a terrible affirmation of man's subordinate position in the universe, and at the same time with a heroic vision of man's victory in defeat.²¹

²⁰Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 170.

²¹Bernard M.W. Knox, *Oedipus at Thebes* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1966), pp. 145-6. Significantly, certain critics have seen this tragic vision not as a mature heroic affirmation in the face of human insignificance and death, but as an ultimately immature and bitter pessimism at failure. Tharpe writes (p. 83): "Unfortunately, failure is inevitable. If Giles is right to think in paradox, he is inevitably lost in paradox. If he is wrong, he accomplished nothing by fostering such an idea. After all the search and the analysis only the theory of cyclology obtains; and if that theory is correct, we are lost in the endless cycles that it posits. What we know of

To see, as the hero does, the tragedy of existence and still go on living, is to attain maturity. "Thus it is," George says, "I accept the lapses of my friends; the growing pains in both my legs, my goatly seizures, my errors of fact and judgment - all these and more, the ineluctable shortcomings of mortal studenthood" (755-6). Man is weak, small, insignificant in comparison to the cosmos, and caught up in the wheels of a cyclic and deterministic fate; but he can achieve a small greatness by accepting and even affirming the tragedy of his own existence. This is George's mature vision, which he learns in the Belly of WESCAC and asserts once again in the Posttape, twelve years later. Man is born innocent into a world of mystery; in facing that mystery, he loses his innocence and gains mature knowledge; but that knowledge speaks to him of death, and without flinching he learns to accept that too. "Tombo's end is not given me to know, but I know my own, that rushes towards me like Triple-T. The wheel must come full-circle; Fate's pans, tipped a brief while meward, will tip back, like the pans of history" (763). Ontogeny, like cosmogeny, is a cycle of growth and decline; and in accepting his place in that cycle, George affirms life.

the mystery is only that the mystery exists." Olderman (p. 83) claims George never attains maturity: "One */sic/* again, the experience in the Belly should mean that George has achieved maturity, but the Posttape demonstrates that his maturity is a tenuous thing. He must not only put aside his purse full of childish amulets, as he does before leaving the Belly for the last time, but he must maintain touch with that sense of unity gained so briefly with Anastasia. Only then will he be really mature. Otherwise, he has only ceased to be young. The pessimism of the Posttape indicates that maturity is not a state to be arrived at once and so achieved for all time." Olderman's error lies in presupposing a certain restricted definition of maturity in terms of mystical affirmation of unity and, when George's maturity proves to be not mystic but tragic, calling it a failure to mature.

Chapter 2 Paradox: Character

Both parts of a contradiction cannot possibly be true: and therefore to enjoin belief of them, is an argument of ignorance.

Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*¹

Let me make a general observation - the test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function. One should, for example, be able to see that things are hopeless and yet be determined to make them otherwise.

F. Scott Fitzgerald²

Most people are, appropriately, of two minds about paradox. There is, on the one hand, a strong intellectual fascination with riddles, enigmas, and other expressions of linguistic and logical absurdity, which takes its power from the mind's ability to bring these things to heel: "Contradictoria in natura intellectuali se compatiuntur," or the mind can compose all contradictions, as Pico della Mirandola proudly claimed.³ On the other hand, there is the commonsensical view expressed by Hobbes in the quote above, that either one part or the other of a contradiction may be true, but not both, and paradox is a sign of ignorance or deliberate hoaxing. That our minds tend in most cases to the latter view is a factor which both lends Barth's paradoxical vision in *Giles Goat-Boy* its metaphysical power, and at the same time makes the book remarkably difficult to analyze.

¹Quoted in Colie, p. 512.

²Quoted in Ernest H. Lockridge's "Introduction" to his collection of *Twentieth Century Views of The Great Gatsby* (Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, 1968), p. 4.

³Quoted in Colie, p. 29.

Rosalie Colie, in her definitive study of paradox, *Paradoxia Epidemica: The Renaissance Tradition of Paradox*, outlines many of the reasons why man has always found paradox so fascinating and so useful. In the Renaissance, she claims, there was a veritable epidemic of paradox:

The paradox does not commit itself, nor does the paradoxist: another reason why, in the melee of Renaissance ideas, there was a paradoxical epidemic, affording man the chance to postpone a philosophical or religious choice he might live to regret. Indeed, the paradoxical form denies commitment: breaking out of imprisonment by disciplinary forms and the regulations of schools, it denies limitation, defies "sitting" in any specific philosophical position.

But even that failure to commit itself can be seen, in the paradox, to be paradoxical. The failure to commit is a kind of commitment, as the breaking of bonds affords a kind of limitation.⁴

This refusal of the paradoxist to commit himself to any philosophical position strikingly suggests both Barth's fiction and many of his remarks in conversation: "/I work out/ positions in order to contradict them," he once commented. "My writing has finally nothing to do with polemics or the propagandizing of some philosophical position of my own, since my values change with the weather."⁵ And yet, as Professor Colie notes, the refusal to make a commitment between the two sides of a paradox itself constitutes a commitment - a commitment to paradox. The paradoxist's stance between two conflicting propositions is itself a philosophical position which postulates the primacy of contradiction. And this brings up another interesting parallel between the Renaissance epidemic of paradox and Barth's work: for while in our more tolerant age no one need fear to express any ideas he likes, both the Renaissance and the modern age share a mistrust of all absolutes, and place their tentative trust in relativistic thinking. This is one of the main thrusts of

⁴Colie, p. 38.

⁵Quoted in Morrell, p. 100.

paradox: "One element common to all these kinds of paradox," Colie writes, "is their exploitation of the fact of relative, or competing, value systems. The paradox is always somehow involved in dialectic: challenging some orthodoxy, the paradox is an oblique criticism of absolute judgment or absolute convention."⁶ Given the intellectual thrust of relativism, paradox may be seen as the only self-consistent approach.

This would further suggest that paradox would be the natural figure in a fiction which seeks to balance dialectically the metaphorical and ironic modes. Paradox is, in fact, one of the central devices of irony, as it poses a radical skepticism to truth itself. Professor Colie writes:

Another way of describing this phenomenon is to say that paradoxes are profoundly self-critical: whether rhetorical, logical, or epistemological, they comment on their own method and their own technique. The rhetorical paradox criticizes the limitations and rigidity of argumentation; the logical paradox calls into question the process of human thought, as well as the categories thought out (by human thought) to express human thought. Paradox deals with itself as subject and object, and in this respect too may be seen as both tautological and paradoxical. ... Operating at the limits of discourse, redirecting thoughtful attention to the faulty or limited structures of thought, paradoxes play back and forth across terminal and categorical boundaries - that is, they play with human understanding, that most serious of all human activities.⁷

This self-critical, ironic function of paradox makes it an appropriate metaphysical content for Barth's novel: just as, at one end of the metaphorical dialectic, metafictional delight in the patterns of language and literature is transformed into an ironic spotlight on the inability of language to express truth, so also at the opposite end does a metaphysical vision of paradox ironically question the validity of all world views. By asserting the truth of paradox, Barth paradoxically denies his own truth, and in that denial affirms it.

⁶Colie, p. 10.

⁷Colie, p. 7.

The paradox that is at the heart of this conundrum is precisely what George learns in enlightenment with Anastasia in the Belly. No wonder, then, that it could not be taught.

If paradox is akin to irony, it is no less close to metaphor, and specifically to metaphysics itself. This is because in our complex universe the very nature of being is inexpressible except through paradox:

During the epidemic, paradox was creative in the highest sense of that term, ever attempting the imitative recovery of a transcendent "truth," with all its ambivalences. Because paradox manages to be at once figure of speech and figure of thought, appropriate to a view of the universe profoundly metaphysical - and, more often than not, profoundly religious - it served to mediate all sorts of ideas and things which, under strict categorical arrangements, do not at first glance appear to "fit." Because of its deliberate lack of limitation, its conscious blurring of distinction and difference, the asymptotic mode of paradox managed to bear the burden of doubleness imposed by a metaphysical world view ...⁸

Paradox, then, is both creative and critical - or, in terms of my diagram, both metaphorical and ironic. In this sense, it is clear that paradox characterizes not only George's metaphysical vision in the Belly, which is paradoxically balanced in the novel against metafictional pleasures; but also the overall vision of the novel, with its paradoxical dialectics between irony and metaphor and between metafiction and metaphysics. The novel as a whole is a complex fabric of multiple paradoxical textures, all operating simultaneously on many different levels of meaning.

There are, then, two components on the philosophical level of the novel's allegory: one dynamic, in the ontogenic perception of man's development from innocent mystery to mature tragedy to death, and the other static, in the vision of paradox. For, as Professor Colie points out, paradox is essentially a static mode of expression: it does not "develop," it has no beginning, middle, or end, but only an endless mid-

⁸Colie, pp. 508-9.

dle. As such it leads to contemplation rather than action, to wonder rather than practice - and at the same time, paradoxically, it generates thought and thus leads to understanding, which in turn involves growth.⁹ Similarly, George grows in his understanding through his grappling with the paradoxes he perceives, and attains mature insight in his final apprehension of the paradoxical nature of existence; but having understood paradox, he begins moving slowly toward decline and death, which he has learned is the tragic end of all human life.

At the metaphysical level, the novel evokes paradox through two separate vehicles: the allegorical characters, and the ideas contained in George's seven-part Assignment. I shall consider George's Assignment and his paradoxical completion of it in Chapter 3, below; in this chapter I will be concerned specifically with the novel's allegorical creation of character.

Barth's characterization in this and other fiction has, as was seen above, met with considerable criticism, based on prejudices that he parodies in the Publisher's Disclaimer: "The hero," Editor C claims, "is a physical, aesthetic, and moral monstrosity; the other characters are drawn with small regard for realism and at times lack even the consistency of stereotype ..." (xvii). Thus Bernard Bergonzi, for example, complains that in the "comic-apocalyptic school" of post-modern fiction,

The characters are in no sense "rounded" or "substantial"; they are presented like the boldly drawn two-dimensional figures in a comic strip, with no question of "freedom" or "opaqueness" about them. The author is a whole-hearted manipulator, whose consciousness of what he is doing dominates the whole novel. And his powers of manipulation frequently extend to the reader, who is likely to be involved in every kind of trap and mystification.¹⁰

⁹Colie, pp. 22, 518-9.

¹⁰Bergonzi, *The Situation of the Novel*, p. 98.

Bergonzi's choice of words is somewhat unfortunate, insofar as they suggest that fictional characters normally are "free" and the characters of these novels, through some perversity on the part of their creators, are not. Characters are never "free" - if they were, they could walk out of the fiction, and they cannot. What Bergonzi means here is that in realistic fiction, the writer gives his characters an *illusion* of freedom and opaqueness, and postmodern writers frequently destroy that illusion. This is quite true. A descriptive fact of this sort should not, however, be the basis for a value judgement in criticism. What matters, ultimately, is not whether an author succeeds in creating a certain restricted kind of illusion in his characters, but whether the illusions he creates "work" within the fiction, engender tentative belief in their fictional reality. Regardless of the amount of minute realistic detail provided, we reject the characters of a novel by Herman Wouk or Arthur Hailey because the author's skill is insufficient to make them "come alive;" and by the same token, we accept Tom Jones or Don Quixote as "real" people, despite their creators' constant undermining of their own illusion, because they spring to life within the context of their respective fictions.

The characters of *Giles Goat-Boy* are complex allegorical figures, representing simultaneously a wide range of voices, historical personages, mythological archetypes, and philosophical ideas. And yet one of the great strengths of the novel is, as Robert Scholes has convincingly argued, that Barth has also managed to make these characters come alive as individualized people within the story:

One might expect Anastasia, a creature fabricated from odds and ends of myth and psychoanalysis, to move as woodenly as Dr. Frankenstein's crude monster. But from her first siren-like appearance in the gorge to our last glimpse of her as the hard-eyed, nagging promoter of her kind of Gilesianism (keeping George at work on the Syllabus he does not want to record) she moves with a convincingness that is a tribute to Barth's perception of the way men and women actually behave. Effective allegory is never

merely allegorical in its presentation of character and action.¹¹

As has been mentioned earlier, the characters in the novel operate on all four major levels on the metaphorical dialectic: style, history, mythology, and philosophy. My discussion in this chapter will be limited to the specifically philosophical ramifications of the characters, but at the same time this will be the appropriate place to collate the various aspects of each character into a single composite picture. Therefore, in each case I shall list the multiple significances or correspondences between fictional character and voice, person, or idea from our own world, including the amulet or assistance provided by each character, this serving as a tie between the mythological and philosophical levels. The list in each case will look like this:

Table 9: *The components of character in Giles Goat-Boy*

- a) stylistic correspondence
- b) specific historical correspondence
- c) general historical correspondence
- d) literary correspondence
- e) mythological correspondence
- f) amulet or assistance
- g) philosophical correspondence

Of these, the two extremes, (a) and (g), are most extensively developed: mythology and history for Barth are only means to his more important ends of parodic style and philosophy. And of these two elements of character, without question the greatest creative effort has gone into the portrayal of philosophical ideas; from his arrival on Main Campus to the end of the novel George's discussion with, and Tutoring of, all the central characters in the story works toward philosophy.

The one correspondence in this list which will receive no detailed treatment in this study is (d), the literary corres-

¹¹Scholes, *The Fabulators*, p. 160.

pondence. Parodic literary references are made throughout the novel, but here, unlike Barth's shorter fiction in *Lost in the Funhouse* and *Chimera*, other literature is not raised to the level of central self-conscious parody. Rather, the literary figures alluded to in the novel are largely undistinguished from the adjacent arts to fiction: history, in Socrates, Plato, and Jesus Christ, for example, and mythology, in Oedipus, Aeneas, and Dante the cosmic traveler. For this reason, "literature" does not find a place along the metaphorical dialectic with style, history, mythology, and philosophy.

And yet the novel is richly strewn with literary allusions, and I shall attempt to suggest some of the figures alluded to in the course of this chapter. Literary allusions take three forms in the novel. First, there are direct references to or parodies of other characters in fiction, such as Queequeg in Croaker and Humpty Dumpty in Eierkopf. Second, quite a few literary-cultural stereotypes are parodied in the novel, such as the intellectual and the absent-minded professor. And third, Barth seems to draw on traditional character roles that appear in all fiction, especially as delineated by Northrup Frye in *Anatomy of Criticism*. Frye describes the central characters of comedy, romance, tragedy, and irony; because for the bulk of the novel Barth follows the plot of romance and, to some extent, comedy, his characters most resemble those Frye describes as inhabiting the mythoi of comedy and romance. Thus we find what Frye calls the *eiron* or self-deprecator, normally the hero and the heroine, but in Barth's novel primarily the heroine, Anastasia, for George is everything but self-deprecative. Frye also speaks of an elderly and retreating *eiron* figure, the wise old man or wise old mother, and this role is played by Max and Virginia. Another *eiron* figure is the *dolosus servus* or tricky slave; Frye explains that in romance this character often takes the form of a spirit of nature, such as Puck or Ariel, or Defoe's Friday; this figure appears in the novel as Croaker, who "serves" George by carrying him out of danger. Another main character in comedy and romance is the *alazon* or impostor, which suggests Harold Bray. The *alazon* also takes the form of the *senex iratus*,

or heavy father, whose Latin name suggests Ira Hector; the *miles gloriosus* or glorious soldier, who may appear as Ira's brother Reginald; the pedant, who, in this University, may appear in a number of characters - Eierkopf, Sear, even Bray - but most particularly Max; and the fop or coxcomb, who possibly suggests Dr. Sear. The two remaining characters Frye describes partly overlap in the same two characters in *Giles*: the *agroikos* or rustic, who appears as Peter Greene but also as Leonid, and the *bomolochos* or buffoon, who appears as Leonid but also as Greene.¹²

George's confrontations with the characters he meets follow certain patterns. At their meeting, these characters both individually and in pairs constitute a mass of unperceived or only vaguely perceived contradictions. It is in part due to this contradictory complexity that the characters are successful as people in their respective walks of life; but at the same time their ignorance of those contradictions often causes them to fail. What George does may then be compared to Socrates' maieutic method, after which the novel's Socratus, "Maïos," is named: by encouraging them to see and assert first one contradictory character trait, then the other, George helps them to understand themselves, their own complex natures. In this way all the characters in the novel - and the reader as well - are forced to undergo the same learning process undergone by George, with the result that all are, at the end, "sadder but wiser." In addition, George learns from the people he tutors: each possesses a knowledge, an approach to the world, that he lacks, and in teaching each he learns the knowledge peculiar to that individual. Furthermore, the characters are arranged in pairs, some more obviously than others, the two members of each pair forming a complementary opposition; and in first trying to separate, then to fuse, these pairs, George learns that opposites must coexist in paradoxical harmony and conflict.

In his Tutoring of the various characters in the novel,

¹²Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, pp. 172-6, 195-7.

George himself tends to conceive of them in pairs, with multilayered correspondences to dualistic abstractions; thus in my discussion of the characters I too will follow the same procedure. George's pairing of Tutees constitutes a psychological oversimplification necessary for philosophical clarity; my pairing of characters may be seen as a philosophical oversimplification necessary for critical clarity, since in addition to the main oppositions developed in the novel there are a number of secondary pairs. For example, while Max Spielman and Dr. Sear are most obviously paired, Max is also opposed to Leonid, and both Max and Sear are opposed to Eblis Eierkopf, who is most clearly paired with Croaker. Similarly, the two "false" Grand Tutors in the novel, Harold Bray and the Living Sakhyan, form a significant pair, but Bray might as well be paired with George, or WESCAC, or Anastasia - and Anastasia, whom I have paired with her foster-mother Virginia, might be paired with any number of characters, including Bray or George, Stoker or Rexford, Eierkopf or Croaker, and so forth. The pairings used here, then, are for the sake of illustrative convenience, and should not be taken as absolutely definitive. If we bear this in mind, however, and refer to the other complexities of each character's nature, the pairings will serve to point up some of the important paradoxes that George learns in his Tutoring.

Each of these pairs may in a sense be seen as an example of what the psychologist Ernest Jones, in an essay on Hamlet, termed "decomposition": "one person of complex character is dissolved and replaced by several, each of whom possesses a different aspect of the character which in the simpler form of the myth is combined in one being."¹³ Much the same device was discussed in the mythology section with regard to Anastasia and Virginia, who together make up two aspects of the Kore figure. Philosophically all the paired figures in the novel may similarly be seen as decompositions of dual

¹³Quoted in William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral* (Chatto and Windus, London, 1950), p. 66.

abstractions, and on a broader level, all the novel's characters taken as an aggregate may be seen as a decomposition of a single human being. Each of the pairs acts out the two opposing aspects of various polarities; and all the characters collectively act out the multiple aspects of man. George's achievement, then, is to assimilate all of these aspects into his own being, thus recomposing human nature and becoming, in the literal sense of the word, the Son of Man.

Not all such decompositions, however, are significant philosophically. In some cases, both members of a character-pair represent the same abstract idea and thus are indistinguishable philosophically; these have been decomposed for strictly fictional purposes, to develop a relationship between husband and wife, or father and son, rather than between complementary ideas. Such cases include Kennard and Hedwig Sear, who both represent experience of the world to much the same degree of perversity, and of Classmate X and Leonid Alexandrov, who are extensions of the same ideal of selflessness. This being true, in analyzing the philosophical significance of the characters I shall limit myself to the primary expression of each idea, here Dr. Sear and Leonid, and simply mention their decompositional extensions as different forms of the same figure.

The paired characters I shall discuss in this chapter are, in order: Max Spielman and Kennard Sear; Eblis Eierkopf and Croaker; Peter Greene and Leonid Alexandrov; Ira and Reginald Hector; Lucius Rexford and Maurice Stoker; Virginia Hector and Anastasia Stoker; and Harold Bray and The Living Sakhyan.

I begin, then, with Max Spielman and Kennard Sear. The polarity represented in their opposition, which is most clearly stated as they wait in line for the performance of *Taliped Decanus* (305-11), suggests a parallel to the dualism Matthew Arnold draws in Western culture between Hellenism and Hebraism. In Arnold's words, "The uppermost idea with Hellenism is to see things as they really are; the uppermost idea with Hebraism

is conduct and obedience."¹⁴ Accordingly, Dr. Sear, the representative of Hellenism, is concerned with self-knowledge and right thinking; and Max, representing Hebraism, is concerned with morality and right action.

Dr. Sear's life, as he puts it, is devoted to the escaping of innocence, which he associates with ignorance and illusion, through the following of Socrates' injunction to know oneself. This is reflected in the amulet he gives George, which is a mirror, one side of which is convex, the other concave: as Sear explains, its purpose is to remind George that knowledge of the University is the only heaven man can hope for, but when George looks into it, he sees only a magnified reflection of his own eye. The point is that ontogeny recapitulates cosmogeny: by knowing oneself one knows the universe, and vice versa. The convex mirror magnifies the small, and the concave shrinks the large. Sear's amulet suggests that one must seek to learn every facet of the universe, from the macrocosmic to the microcosmic.

Sear presents an interesting pattern to George that will be repeated in his relations to the other characters as well: in each there is something so right, so reasonable, that it is difficult to quibble, but at the same time the character as a whole is so wrong that something must be done. In Sear's case, George realizes, the striving for self-knowledge is correct, but the manner of seeking it is incorrect. Sear compares himself to Gynander, or Tiresias, but, George says: "Gynander was a proph-prof, sir. Excuse me, but that makes all the difference on campus. Gynander didn't do things just out of curiosity; he didn't especially even want to see everything he saw. But he *did* things; he had ... a *power*. He wasn't just a spectator" (525; emphasis and ellipsis in original). Sear's problem is that he experiences things, but does not involve himself in his experiences, and therefore

¹⁴Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* (Cambridge University Press, London, 1935), p. 131. The reference is suggested by Tharpe, pp. 52-3.

does not learn from them. Sear is compared by Giles Stoker to J.B. (xxix), and his essential problem is one that Barth himself may share: self-consciousness, which becomes such a central barrier to be crossed in *Lost in the Funhouse*. Knowing too much can tie one's hands: whether one is a writer or a psychologist, if one is too aware of the processes of and the reasons for doing what one is doing, it becomes increasingly difficult to do it. What is needed to escape this imprisoning self-consciousness is spontaneity, but by definition one cannot decide to be spontaneous; it must simply happen. Sear's ultimate solution comes through forgetting himself and caring for others, specifically for his wife Hedwig when she is attacked by Croaker. Forgetting his own safety and all questions of aesthetics, Sear leaps on Croaker to save his wife; and while he is batted off like a fly, his spontaneous attempt frees him from self-consciousness. The step beyond this, of course, is to be able to act spontaneously in full conscious knowledge of what one is doing - and while George attains this (like Gynander), Sear never does. Nevertheless, Sear has finally learned to know himself, not through his extensive experience of depravity but through loving involvement with life.

Max Spielman, George's keeper and foster-father, is a Jew who believes no man should ever hurt another. This simple ethics is Max's notion of right conduct, which he applies to all mankind, to himself, and most of all to the Grand Tutor, who must set an example for us all. This attitude is reflected in the amulet he gives George, which is the amulet-of-Freddie, the testicles he clipped off the troublesome buck Freddie. Max tells George that "*A Grand Tutor is good. A Grand Tutor is wise. If there's just one grain of wickedness or folly in him - why, he's not a Grand Tutor*" (132). And good, for Max, means chaste, which is what he takes the amulet-of-Freddie to represent: George must restrain sexual desire. If he does not, he is not the Grand Tutor. George eventually rejects the rigidity of this thinking, but he does learn from Max that an ethical code of some sort, a basis for right action, is

necessary to human life.

Max's greatest problem in life stems from his greatest infraction of his own moral code. Believing that man should never hurt his fellows, at the end of Campus Riot II he was the one to push the EAT-button, and destroy hundreds of thousands of Amaterasus. For this single act he cannot forgive himself, and his guilty conscience finally leads him to the Judeo-Christian ideal of atonement through self-sacrifice. When the ex-Bonifacist Herman Hermann (German for "Mr. Man") commits suicide on Max's unwitting orders, Max takes the blame for the "murder" himself, hoping that by dying for a crime he did not commit he can atone for the crime of killing innocent people with EAT-rays. George finds this reasoning wrong-headed, and tries to change Max's mind by pointing out that self-sacrifice itself is selfish; and Max has long debates on the subject with another representative of the same ideal of self-sacrifice in the novel, Leonid Alexandrov:

As to principle they were agreed: if the desire to sacrifice oneself, whether by martyrdom or in perfect selflessness, was selfish, and thus self-contradictory, then to attain that end one must not aspire to it. Further, they agreed - sometimes, at least - that *not*-aspiring, if conceived as a means to the same end, was morally identical with aspiring, and that imperfect selflessness, when deliberately practiced to avoid the vanity of perfection, became itself perfect, itself vain. Therefore, they aspired to not-aspire to an imperfect imperfection, each in his way - and found themselves at odds (294).

Max and Leonid here find themselves entangled in much the same kind of paradoxical web that George confronts: as long as one attempts to find a simple, consistent, and uncontradictory solution and basis for action, one is doomed to fail. And Max's final answer closely resembles George's: he learns to accept the multiple paradoxes of life and not be crippled by them, and in the midst of those paradoxes to act according to his own best lights, to do what he thinks is right. Thus, Max goes to the Shaft, dying "In studentdom's behalf, selfish or not, and even if it don't make sense" (735).

Table 10: *Kennard Sear and Max Spielman*

KENNARD SEAR

- a) style: quasi-British sophisticate
- b) history, specific: Timothy Leary? Norman O. Brown?
- c) history, general: Hellenism
- d) literature: cultured intellectual, coxcomb
- e) mythology: seer (Tiresias)
- f) amulet: convex/concave mirror
- g) philosophy: self-knowledge

MAX SPIELMAN

- a) style: emigré German Jew
- b) history, specific: Albert Einstein, Robert J. Oppenheimer
- c) history, general: Hebraism
- d) literature: Jewish father, pedant
- e) mythology: guide
- f) amulet: amulet-of-Freddie
- g) philosophy: morality, self-sacrifice

Eblis Eierkopf and the Frumentian exchange-student Croaker represent the Mind and the Body. As Robert Scholes writes:

Eierkopf, as his name suggests, is all eye and head. He is so much the man of "reason," in fact, that he cannot perform the simplest bodily functions without aid from the nearly brainless but superbly physical Croaker. When Eierkopf is mounted on Croaker's shoulders, together they make something like a whole man.¹⁵

Eierkopf, who bears a certain resemblance to Humpty Dumpty (see especially page 640), seems to be a direct descendent of the Seeker from J.B.'s abortive previous novel. As J.B. says, "the seeker must be not only astigmatic and addicted to lenses, telescopic and microscopic; the tower he lived in I would convert to a sort of huge *camera obscura* into which images of life outside were projected, ten times more luminous and interesting than the real thing" (xxviii).¹⁶

¹⁵Scholes, *The Fabulators*, p. 143. Much the same description may be found in Tharpe, p. 66, and Tilton, p. 112.

¹⁶This link is even more clear in the discarded fragments from the novel that Barth published as "Test Borings." There, besides living in an observation tower and being addicted to lenses, the Eierkopf-figure has the Seeker's port-wine birthmark ("Test Borings," p. 248, referred to in J.B.'s Cover-Letter simply as a birthmark, xxvii), which Ambrose was later to inherit in *Lost in the Funhouse* and *LETTERS*.

Appropriately, Eierkopf's present to George is a series of lenses that can be arranged to form either a telescope or a microscope. This involves essentially the same principle as lay behind Sear's amulet, with the exception that where Sear looked in, Eierkopf looks out. He represents the rationalistic and positivistic tradition of the Enlightenment which believes that "for better or worse all phenomena were ultimately intelligible" (478). To make sense of the phenomenal world, however, Eierkopf relies on various lenses; this means of making the leap between subject and object, between observer and observed, according to Eierkopf is always problematic, since lenses, the eye included, always distort, but this, Eierkopf says, can be corrected with another lens:

"But," he smiled, "take away my lenses, I'm blind as Dean Taliped." However, I was not to infer that because all lenses distorted ("Your own included," he said, perhaps unable to see that I wore none), nothing could be truly seen; all that was necessary was to compensate for optical error, and for this he relied, in his own work, on the lens in his hand, which he knew to be accurate.

I asked him how he knew (478-9).

George's ingenuous question reveals the flaw in Eierkopf's reasoning. If all lenses distort, eyes included, there is no way for Eierkopf to determine whether the Eierkopfian lens is accurate. Eierkopf's particular brand of scientific blindness points to the essential error of positivistic thinking: it assumes that a difference in degree, if refined far enough, becomes a difference in kind. If the eye distorts our perception of the real world, we can refine that perception by using a lens; if the lens distorts, we can refine that lens with another lens. And so on. Clearly, no amount of refinement will make the ultimate leap between subject and object, just as the Infinite Divisor, by halving the distance between itself and the midpoint of Tick and Tock, will never reach the present moment (and just as neorealists like Robbe-Grillet will never reach reality by paring off artifice from their fiction). Eierkopf represents the crisis

of modern science, which depends for its operation on an epistemological tie between subject and object, but which through its own positivistic approach has destroyed that very epistemological base for perception.

Another error in Eierkopf's reasoning is revealed by a secret desire he confesses to George. The laws of nature, he explains, are immutable; but suppose one were to catch nature napping - to take it by surprise, in a moment when some force actually *broke* the laws, so that the brown pencil-jar on his desk suddenly became green. This, he says, would *prove* the existence of another world above or beyond the phenomenal world we know - a mystical, transcendental world. This desire is in fact motivated by a frustration Barth has himself confessed, that the world is always the way it is, France always shaped like a teapot, and so on.¹⁷ But where Barth solves the problem by recreating the world in fiction, by asserting the reality of the imagination, Eierkopf denies the role played by the imagination in shaping our view of reality and insists that perceptions are *proof* of reality. But of course the laws of nature are not *in* nature; they are human interpretive constructs that explain nature, and thus highly mutable - they have changed many times in the history of man, from myth to Euclid to Newton to Einstein. And because our present imaginative reconstruction of nature is highly incomplete, anything that surpasses our understanding appears to be a miracle: as when, at the end of the novel, Harold Bray openly flouts natural "laws" and Eierkopf thinks he has "caught nature napping." George, on the other hand, knows that the so-called miracle was a trick invented by WESCAC to make Bray the more difficult to drive out. By denying the role of the imagination in structuring, correctly or incorrectly, phenomenal reality, Eierkopf ends by espousing a world view that is at once too positivistic and too transcendental. Unlike Max and Sear, Eierkopf never overcomes his intellectual contradictions, and George does not affirm his

¹⁷See p. 262 above.

Candidacy.

Croaker, who seems to be modeled in part on Melville's Queequeg,¹⁸ does not speak George's language and therefore is incapable of articulating his position as the others do. But this is precisely the point. He has no position. As Physicality, he simply acts. He does learn a few skills, such as carving wood with his teeth and focusing lenses; but these skills themselves are purely rote, physical tasks, requiring training but no thought.

Croaker's services to George include carrying him across the river-threshold and out of danger at various points. Certain other characters in the novel climb on Croaker's back as well, particularly Eierkopf but also Max, whenever they are in need of physical revitalization. When George is hungry, Croaker provides food. Most significantly, Croaker carves the length of George's phallic walking stick with rude figures that "clapped and coupled, bugged and bit; also sniffed and fiddled and fingered and shat, thrust out their tongues and forth their pudenda - a rare interclutchment it was of appetites" (248). Unlike the other characters in the novel, Croaker never changes, except when he becomes ill from eating unnatural food: he is rather like a dumb force of nature that must be understood and properly directed in order to facilitate everyday life, much like man's body and sexual drives as conceived in the novel's thematic framework. As with Eierkopf, George denies Croaker Candidacy for Graduation: as an unconscious beast, he is beyond the realm of Passage and Failure.

¹⁸Especially in the "strange bedfellows" scenes on pp. 374-5 of *Giles Goat-Boy* and Chapters 3-4 of *Moby-Dick*. The following quote shows this correspondence most clearly: "Queequeg, do you see, was a creature in the transition stage - neither caterpillar nor butterfly. He was just enough civilized to show off his outlandishness in the strangest possible manner. His education was not complete. He was an undergraduate." Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* (Bobbs-Merrill, New York, 1964), p. 55.

Table 11: *Eblis Eierkopf and Croaker*

EBLIS EIERKOPF

- a) style: emigré German scientist
- b) history, specific: Edward Teller
- c) history, general: positivistic, transcendental science
- d) literature: absent-minded professor, Humpty Dumpty
- e) mythology: helper
- f) amulet: set of lenses, telescope and microscope
- g) philosophy: mind

CROAKER

- a) style: -
- b) history, specific: -
- c) history, general: primitive man
- d) literature: Noble Savage, Queequeg, *dolosus servus*
- e) mythology: nature, the instinctual world
- f) services: carrying, carving, food, etc.
- g) philosophy: body

Peter Greene and Leonid Alexandrov operate on the historical level as national figures, representing America and the Soviet Union; philosophically, they represent two specific approaches to the self, Leonid denying it and Greene asserting it. In other respects, however, they are rather similar: both have a strong aversion to mirrors, a peculiar kind of double vision, a love for Anastasia, and an attractive boyish vitality. Both are intellectually somewhat simple, but they are full of life and love for the people around them, and ultimately they pass.

Greene's and Leonid's aversion to mirrors, which in Greene's case extends to all lenses as well, forms another aspect of the novel's development of the theme of sight vs. blindness. Symbolically within the novel, mirrors are tools for looking in, or learning about oneself, lenses for looking out, or learning about one's universe. While neither activity, the ontological or the cosmological, should be pursued to the exclusion of all else, as the examples of Sear and Eierkopf showed, some concept of one's relative position in the universe and of one's own nature is necessary for a balanced personality. Significantly, both Greene and Leonid learn this only after they become blind: with no eyes to see, they

cannot turn away from mirrors and lenses, and thus cannot hide from ontological and cosmological truths. Paradoxically, like Oedipus both see only after they are blind.

When George meets this pair, each has lost an eye in a confrontation with a hated mirror. One-eyed, their vision is distorted, and Greene's is distorted even further, as he is color-blind and subject to optical hallucinations, and complains of double vision. This tendency to see double takes on symbolic significance in the discussions the two men have about Anastasia, whom both love. Leonid sees her as a *passéd* martyr, generously giving of her favors to all, and compares this angelic paragon to the other extreme of womanhood, celibacy, which he likens to the stinginess of Ira Hector. Greene, on the other hand, sees Anastasia as a *passéd* virgin until he is given undeniable evidence to the contrary, whereupon he swings to the opposite extreme, and claims she is a *flunkéd* whore. Greene is only able to escape this image of Anastasia by splitting her into two twin sisters, Stacey and Lacey, who represent the Light and Dark Ladies of romance, the angelic and demonic aspects of stereotypical womanhood. This same tendency to separate opposites into isolated categories is reflected in Greene's waverings on the question of human nature: "As previously he had seemed to believe that the human heart was essentially *passéd*, so now he declared it essentially *flunkéd*; no good my suggesting it was but desperately human" (522). "Desperately human" is also Anastasia: neither "pure as snow" nor a "black whore" (612), she is only human, with all the paradoxical qualities of light and dark, which romance isolates and Barth's anti-romance rejoins. Leonid's dualism between *passéd* rapees and *flunkéd* celibates is basically no more than an inversion of the same false position. Ultimately, both learn to accept paradox through love.

Greene and Leonid are also divided in their attitudes toward selfishness and self-denial. Where Greene believes in individualism and self-assertion, Leonid strives for the Student-Unionist goal of perfect selflessness. Leonid's

difficulties with this aspiration closely parallels those faced by Max, and there is no need to rehearse them here. What is interesting is that at heart, both Greene and Leonid possess individualism and selflessness in approximately correct proportions, as is clear from their kindness, their caring for others, their love for Anastasia, their basic humility, and their sense of humor; but both have been conditioned by their respective societies to strive for extremes of selfishness or selflessness that do not come naturally to them. George says of Leonid that

he could not help loving these people, yet he disapproved of his love, which smacked of Informationalist idolatry. Nor was this his only failing as a Student-Unionist: he was subject, he confessed, to fits of impulsive insubordination and independent behavior, which no amount of subsequent remorse appeared to cure (501-2).

And the amulets George receives from these two reflect the conditioning of each: Greene loans him his ID-card and thus helps him to pass the Trial-by-Turnstile, and Leonid gives him a few drops of ink eradicator, which, in light of its use both to erase names on ID-cards and for suicide, points to Leonid's ideal of self-effacement. In accepting both Greene's individualism and Leonid's self-effacement, George learns, as do Greene and Leonid themselves, that the combination of the two in a single caring human being is the solution to their respective difficulties. The vitality and charm of a person full of love for those around him itself contains all paradoxes; and to pass Greene and Leonid need only be themselves.

Table 12: *Peter Greene and Leonid Alexandrov*

PETER GREENE

- a) style: American country bumpkin, modern businessman
- b) history, specific: Daniel Boone, Davy Crockett, etc.
- c) history, general: America, self-made man
- d) literature: Huckleberry Finn, *agroikos*

- e) mythology: helper, disciple of the Messiah
- f) amulet: loan of ID-card, vitamin pill
- g) philosophy: individualism, double vision

LEONID ALEXANDROV

- a) style: voluble, excitable foreigner, Russian
- b) history, specific: Alexei Adzubei
- c) history, general: Soviet Union
- d) literature: Dmitri Karamazov? *bomolochos*
- e) mythology: helper
- f) amulet: ink eradicator
- g) philosophy: self-effacement, double vision

Ira and Reginald Hector are brothers who represent, to all outward appearances respectively, selfishness and generosity. In this case, however, the lesson George learns in his Tutoring is not that each member of the pair contains a little of his opposite member, but that appearances deceive: for despite appearances Ira is the truly generous one, Reginald stingy. Ira's problem is not unlike Greene's: basically a warm, loving, generous human being, he has been conditioned by his society to be ashamed of those good qualities, with the result that he has created an image of himself as a crusty and cynical miser simply to hide his inner self. But despite the image, his true generosity shines through: Anastasia, whom Ira brought up, sees behind his front and claims that she learned her famous generosity from him. And Reginald can be openly generous only because Ira gives him the money to do so. But Ira defends himself against the implications of this:

Then, wonderfully agitated, he insisted that although he and his brother Reginald were the abandoned get of an unwed freshman girl and some drunken janitor, his establishment of the New Tammany Lying-In and any favors he'd done his brother were purely selfish. Granted he'd fed and clothed young Reginald, pulled strings to get him a cadetship in the NTCROTC, arranged his marriage to the woman whom Ira himself had been courting, financed his campaign for the chancellorship after C.R. II, and appointed him director of the Philophilosophical Fund: his end from the beginning had been simply to profit from his brother's offices and connections, and profit he had (439).

George, idealistic young man that he is, cannot stand the hypocrisy of Ira's pretending to be selfish in order to hide generosity, and first persuades him to be completely selfish and withdraw all financial support from his charities, and then to be completely generous and give all his money away to them. Both of these drastic measures nearly bankrupt the College, and George finally realizes that appearances are not important: let appearance and reality conflict, it is the sum paradoxical personality that counts. This paradoxical quality of Ira's character is reflected in his gift to George, which is his ID-card, from which he has (generously) erased his own signature, and enough indelible ink (the assertion of individualism) for George to sign his name.

Reginald, on the other hand, appears to be generous, but his generosity covers an inner miserliness, which is also reflected in his assistance to George. When George emerges from the Belly of WESCAC the first time, masked as Bray, he presents his ID-card to Reginald, his grandfather, for his signature as the "proper authority," and Reginald willingly initials the card. But, as George later learns, Reginald was not the proper authority; further, he signed the card in ignorance of its holder's true identity; and the pen he used in signing it was not even his own, but was borrowed from an aide. The gratuitous and ultimately unhelpful nature of this assistance begins to teach George the truth about the brothers.

As director of the P.P.F., Reginald is responsible for aiding needy undergraduates, and he thinks of himself as basically a generous person: "What I mean, I'm not *beholden*, You understand," he says to George, thinking George is the official Grand Tutor Bray, "but when a fellow needs a hand, why, I'll give him the shirt off my back" (574). But when a "fellow needs a hand," he needs a hand, not a shirt; and Reginald's mixed metaphor is in fact indicative of his character, for, as George remembers with some irony, when he came into the office Reginald was passing out, to hungry undergraduates, drafting-instruments, desk-barometers, fountain-

pens, and cufflinks, showy stuff that is useless to people in real need. George's Tutoring of Reginald is unusually apt: he says that if Reginald truly wants to be beholden to no man, he should give up his sinecure and his dependence on his brother Ira, and go tend the goats. When Reginald comes back, he has learned something:

It was a poor professor-general, he declared, who didn't know when he was licked, and he would not deny that his objectives - utter independence and complete self-reliance - which thitherto he'd thought of as synonymous, had turned out to be contradictory. Managing the herd without the help of his aides, he'd found himself dependent absolutely on himself - a dependence so oppressively time-consuming, he'd had no opportunity to "be himself" at all. Isolated from classmates and staff, absorbed from morning till night with the tending of goats, the preparation of his food, the maintenance of the barns, even the manufacture and repair of his clothing, he'd scarcely had time to roll himself a cigarette, much less assert his independence and enjoy his individualism (687).

The lesson Reginald learns, or seems to have learned, is that people are inescapably beholden to one another, and it is an absurd form of pride to assert independence. The historical myth of independence, of "being beholden to no man," that is an article of faith in the American national religion, is simply naive, an illusion fostered by the innocent ignorance of childhood, of a childish civilization. "*Self-made men, indeed!*" Francis Lieber once exclaimed to a friend; "why don't you tell me of a self-laid egg?"¹⁹ Human beings are not only dependent, they are complexly interdependent; and Reginald Hector comically illustrates the folly of believing otherwise.

Table 13: *Ira and Reginald Hector*

IRA HECTOR

- a) style: eccentric millionaire
- b) history, specific: Bernard Baruch?
- c) history, general: American capitalism, self-made man

¹⁹Quoted in Wyllie, p. 142.

- d) literature: *senex iratus*
- e) mythology: helper, Father Time
- f) amulet: ID-card, indelible ink
- g) philosophy: generosity under guise of stinginess

REGINALD HECTOR

- a) style: military general
- b) history, specific: Dwight D. Eisenhower
- c) history, general: self-made man
- d) literature: *miles gloriosus*
- e) mythology: attempted murderer of infant hero
- f) assistance: signature on George's ID-card
- g) philosophy: stinginess under guise of generosity

Lucius Rexford and Maurice Stoker are half-brothers, a dubious fact that Stoker affirms and Rexford denies. At first glance, they seem to represent a Manichean dualism between Good and Evil, light and dark, good guy and bad guy: Rexford dresses in white suits, Stoker in black, and while Lucius comes from the Latin for "light," Maurice comes from the Latin for Moor or "dark-skinned one." Initially, George accepts Max's appraisal of Stoker as the Dean o' Flunks or Satan, but as was noted above, Stoker is not Satan and does not represent evil. Rather, the two form the complementary sides of a coin, night and day, each of which takes its definition from its opposition to the other.

Both Stoker and Rexford believe in the importance of maintaining a necessary tension between opposites, although in diametrically opposed ways. Rexford operates in the middle of the opposition, finding compromises and trying to bring the opposites closer together; he can thus be said to represent moderation. Stoker, on the other hand, operates at the extremes, playing one against the other in order to heighten conflicts and bring about explosions of conflictive energy, which is appropriate to his position as head of the Powerhouse. He may be said to represent extremism.

In his Tutoring of these two characters, George makes much the same mistake as he does with the others: abhorring paradox, he persuades both Rexford and Stoker to put by their respective notions about opposites and isolate one extreme side of their personalities. Rexford, he says, if he be-

believes in order should not deal with disorder, but should clamp down on extremism; and Stoker, by setting a flunked example, shows others how to pass, so that if he truly wants to flunk those around him he should become meek and mild-mannered. Both do so, and significantly change their clothes from the extremes of white and black to grey. When the result is chaos, George reverses his teaching, but with the same result; and finally George learns to accept the paradoxical complementation of the two men's approaches to paradox.

This lesson is reflected in the amulets Rexford and Stoker give George. Stoker gives him and Greene two black batteries each, symbols of power and, possibly, since each receives two, of the testicles as well, and thus sexuality. Batteries alone, however, are of no use to anyone, and Greene, to Stoker's delight, immediately throws his at the pigeons. George retains his, more out of chance than design, and finds he was "lucky" to do so when "Lucky" Rexford passes out empty silver flashlights. Everyone present futilely clicks them on and off, lacking the batteries to light them up; but with Greene's help George installs his, and when Stoker blacks out the room, George alone is left with light to see. From Stoker George learns power, from Rexford the light of harmony and order; neither alone is sufficient; both combined form a paradoxical working unity.

Table 14: *Lucius Rexford and Maurice Stoker*

LUCIUS REXFORD

- a) style: optimistic/realistic politician, Kennedy
- b) history, specific: John F. Kennedy
- c) history, general: conservative liberalism
- d) literature: *miles gloriosus?*
- e) mythology: Pontius Pilate
- f) amulet: flashlight
- g) philosophy: order, moderation

MAURICE STOKER

- a) style: satirist
- b) history, specific: J. Edgar Hoover
- c) history, general: radicalism, anarchism

- d) literature: Blake's Satan
- e) mythology: Satan, life-force
- f) amulet: two black batteries
- g) philosophy: extremism, energy, sexuality

The remaining two character-pairs, Anastasia and Virginia and Bray and The Living Sakhyan, differ from the others somewhat. Both pairs, for example, are strikingly unbalanced: Anastasia and Bray are central characters in the novel, whereas Virginia, in her gentle insanity, and The Living Sakhyan, in his meditative silence, are virtually non-characters who, like Croaker, do not propagate but merely illustrate a philosophical position. In addition, of the four characters only Anastasia is a Tutee; while the other three do give him amulets, George does not presume to Tutor them, but instead protects his mother, chafes against his opponent, and seeks to learn from the wordless Siddharthan Grand Tutor.

In my discussion of the hero's virgin mother above, I noted that Virginia, the novel's representative of chastity, is replaced in the story by her promiscuous foster-daughter Anastasia. This was significant in terms of the parodic mythological story, but its primary significance is philosophical: the novel seeks to replace the Christian ideal of chastity with an acceptance of man's essential carnality and sexuality. Somewhat like the Founder's Scroll, Virginia is portrayed as an appealingly simple though ineffectual and out-dated creature who is to be cherished because she gave George birth - just as the Scroll gave birth to Western civilization.

Anastasia, on the other hand, is next to George the most important character in the novel. She is George's Ladyship whom he must see through, and ultimately the sexual vehicle for his enlightenment; and yet she is one of the most complex characters George must seek to understand. Anastasia differs from the other characters also in being an almost entirely sympathetic character; and this sympathetic portrayal, as Mary Allen has pointed out in her study of female characterizations in contemporary literature, *The Necessary Blankness*,

is typical of all Barth's women, virtually alone among recent writers:

John Barth is capable of making a joke of almost everything, avoiding didacticism, but he is never at his funniest when writing about women. The comic strain gives way to pathos or painful awareness when the focus shifts from a male to a female character. As Barth represents women's sexual repressions or excesses, pity overtakes his humor in the dawning of how little is left for a woman when she is not taken seriously as a sexual partner. The bitch mother is noticeably absent from his work. And if the world has reached a point where sex is a great joke, as it appears to Todd Andrews, women are the sad losers for not being able to laugh. Many of them cease to exist when love, their domain, is gone. In a physical world they are the victims of brutality, and in an intellectual contest they are merely the battleground upon which ideas are established. This understanding of women mitigates Barth's satire to sympathy.²⁰

When George first meets Anastasia, he is struck by her sexual generosity, but cannot fathom it: "it disturbed me," he says, "to see her equally submissive to everyone, the flunkéd as well as the not" (173). The uneasiness George feels in the face of Anastasia's catholic generosity leads to two successive misguided attempts to change her. First, following his espousal of strict dualistic morality, he urges her to abstention from sex, to prevent her mating with the flunkéd:

But when she brought my mother to visit me she was cold, even priggish, far beyond the simple chastity I'd enjoined on her. She was unsympathetic not only to the vulgar prisoners who shouted obscenities and exposed themselves to her in the Visitation Room - and whom she once must passibly have comforted with her sex - but also to her husband, despite his having ceased to abuse her. If formerly she had embraced the hateful as well as the dear in studentdom, accepting indiscriminately lust with love and receiving upon her with equal compassion police-dogs

²⁰Mary Allen, *The Necessary Blankness: Women in Major American Fiction of the Sixties* (University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1976), p. 37.

and Grand Tutors, now she seemed as catholic in her rejection ... (588).

George is surprised that Anastasia reacts to an extreme "far beyond the simple chastity" he had suggested: he wants her to be chaste and submissive, the traditional male ideal for women. In his second round of Tutoring, George reverses his advice and tells Anastasia to assert herself; the result is the opposite stereotype men have created for women, namely the equally hard and cold but sexually aggressive female who can compete with the male in coarse sexual humor. When, having assigned Anastasia this new role, George wants to get rid of both her and Peter Greene for a while, he tells Greene she is Lacey and asks him to make sure she does not seduce anyone. Anastasia immediately puts her new persona into action, sets about using all the traditional feminine wiles on Greene, and when Greene warns George about the mental patients running loose, saying, "Watch out for the nuts," Anastasia pats her hair and replies, "He hasn't any. I'm glad I've got a *man* to take home" (679). This role is not to George's liking either, and when he finally comes to "know" her in the Belly, as Adam knew Eve, he realizes that Anastasia must be allowed to be herself, neither repressing nor unnaturally asserting her sexuality. The concordance of these two extremes lies in love, and Anastasia recognizes the importance of accepting this paradoxical emotion by assertively refusing to assert herself. Love, as Anastasia knows and George must learn, cares nothing for flunked and passed, right and wrong. Love gives because it grows by giving. To try to alter its course is to dam it up; thus Anastasia's hard, cold aspect when she tries to follow George's misguided male advice.

Nor is the change Anastasia undergoes in the Posttape evidence of a change in portrayal from sympathy to satire. The tender, loving woman of the main narrative becomes the nagging wife whose "tongue grew wondrous sharper every year" (759), but so far from repudiating his love for her or his vision in her arms, George still calls her "dear Anastasia"

without irony and refers to "that gorgeous night" (756). In the Posttape Barth rejects only the illusion of romantic love and the idealistic image of women it projects, for a complexly human view of Anastasia, with all the faults and laudable traits all humans possess. Along with, significantly, another woman, Germaine Pitt of *LETTERS*, Anastasia remains one of the most sympathetic and alive characters in all Barth's fiction.

Table 15: *Virginia Hector and Anastasia Stoker*

VIRGINIA HECTOR

- a) style: motherly old-maid librarian
- b) history, specific: -
- c) history, general: -
- d) literature: retreating elderly female *ieron*
- e) mythology: virgin mother of the hero
- f) amulet: self-winding watch
- g) philosophy: chastity

ANASTASIA STOKER

- a) style: inarticulate coed, nurse
- b) history, specific: -
- c) history, general: -
- d) literature: Beatrice, female *ieron*
- e) mythology: female guide, Earth Mother, hero's bride
- f) amulet: mother's purse
- g) philosophy: love, sexual generosity

The last two characters I shall consider are the two "false" Grand Tutors, who form a pair in their differing patterns of opposition to George: the living descendent of the original Sakhyan or Buddha, and the antigiles Harold Bray. The Living Sakhyan, as I mentioned above, has no character to speak of, since he never utters a sound throughout the novel. Not merely mute, he is also motionless: when George first sees him he is being carried on a platform across George's Gorge as G. Herrold drowns, and neither he nor any of his eight bearers seem to hear or heed George's calls for help. He represents the Eastern ideal of the *via contemplativa*, which holds that because moral dualities are not dualities but the two faces of a single monistic reality, no one action

is more meaningful than another; thus, the only meaningful life is one in which the seeker strives for understanding of the godhead through contemplation of opposites. Barth's unsympathetic treatment of this figure suggests that the novel attacks the contemplative ideal; and in fact George, who learns to share The Living Sakhyan's presumed view of dualities, nevertheless comes to realize that in the end man can only live by acting. The *via contemplativa* is dismissed rather shortly in the novel:

His condition, reputedly a kind of Commencement, seemed to me little different from Eierkopf's infantile paralysis. The one was unhelpful, the other helpless; for those in need of help it came to the same thing, and Eierkopf's at least was not wholly voluntary, though he affirmed it in his relationship with Croaker and his unconcern for the welfare of studentdom (440).

George does, however, come to accept the Eastern concept of personality, which The Living Sakhyan illustrates in his gift to George. This is an empty phial called "The Disappearing Ink." Where Ira Hector gave George a few drops of indelible ink as a symbol of individualism, and Leonid of ink eradicator to symbolize self-effacement, The Living Sakhyan's amulet points to the paradoxical combination of the two. The ideal statement of personality, as Max explains, is: "I and the Founder are one; I am the University; I am not" (93).

The other false Grand Tutor, Harold Bray, has none of the sincerity and dedication to his cause that The Living Sakhyan possesses, and his ill-concealed opportunism and charlatany infuriate George. By the end of the novel, however, George realizes that Bray's role is far more important than that of The Living Sakhyan: for just as George is the hero whose function it is to pass the Finals and learn, so is Bray the opponent whose no less important function is to be driven out. Bray is not to be hated; "on the Founder's transcript, so to speak, his *A* and mine would be of equal value" (728).

The fact that Bray and George are both sons of WESCAC has obvious significance. Unlike Christ and the Anti-Christ,

who are incarnations of God and Satan, respectively, George and Bray share similar strengths and weaknesses, as well as, in some cases, similar views. They do not form a moral dualism between good and evil;²¹ Bray is no more diabolical than George is divine. More probably, Bray and George represent two sides of WESCAC's antinomical nature: Bray the mechanical, George the human. In this respect Bray's role as "routed antigiles" is thematically apt, for George's metaphysical vision in the Belly entails an affirmation of humanity over the machine.

Both Bray and George are also associated with knowledge. Bray, drawing on WESCAC's memory banks, possesses knowledge from the start, but he deliberately withholds it from others, declaring "Tragedy's *out*; mystery's *in*!" (354). This points to his historical significance as a representative of the Christian church, which the novel sees as preventing man's growth from the mystery of childhood to the tragedy of adulthood. George, representing the tragic view, must struggle for knowledge, only to find that once he has it, he cannot teach it. Part of George's tragic awareness stems from his recognition that not only do most people still believe in Bray, but none of his Tutees has attempted to follow his path to enlightenment. This is because people are basically weak; and philosophically, Bray may represent that very weakness in man which needs stability and suprahuman authority, miracles and mystery. In the Posttape, George quotes a reporter asking, "You say you're Bray in a way, hey?" (759), and in one sense, he is. By driving Bray out at the precise moment Bray metamorphosed into a likeness of George himself, George recognizes and assimilates his own weakness, his own Bray-likeness, brings it into his conscious mind, there to understand and control it. This awareness of weakness teaches George to accept the "ineluctable shortcomings of mortal studentdom," but significantly, does not teach his Tutees the same. Each man must

²¹Scholes to the contrary, who refers to Bray as "George's devilish adversary" and "supreme evil." *The Fdulators*, p. 144.

learn for himself. There is no vicarious atonement.

Table 16: *The Living Sakhyan and Harold Bray*

THE LIVING SAKHYAN

- a) style: -
- b) history, specific: Dalai Lama
- c) history, general: Eastern religion
- d) literature: -
- e) mythology: rival prophet? Buddha
- f) amulet: the Disappearing Ink
- g) philosophy: *via contemplativa*

HAROLD BRAY

- a) style: mechanical, parental authority, huckster
- b) history, specific: the Christian church
- c) history, general: authoritarian religion
- d) literature: science fiction alien, Superman, *alazon*
- e) mythology: dragon, Anti-Christ, trickster
- f) amulet: mask of own face
- g) philosophy: human weakness, machine

In learning from all these characters, George comes to appreciate paradox in character and, at the same time, symbolically he becomes a composite allegorical figure representing all mankind. Having assimilated all the contradictory features of the human face, George is Everyman; and this, along with his ultimate understanding of his Assignment, is the novel's serious metaphysical vision of human nature and the cosmos.

Chapter 3 Paradox: Idea

... metaphysics seems to work mainly with abstractions, and poetry has a limited tolerance for abstractions. Poetry is, in Milton's words, more simple, sensuous and passionate than philosophy. Poetry seeks the image rather than the idea, and even when it deals with ideas it tends to seek the latent basis of concrete imagery in the idea. ... The "ideas" the poets use, therefore, are not actual propositions, but thought-forms or conceptual myths, usually dealing with images rather than abstractions, and hence normally unified by metaphor, or image-phrasing, rather than logic.

Northrup Frye, *Fables of Identity*¹

Giles Goat-Boy, a novel about a University, deals very extensively with ideas: there are ideas about language, about history, and about mythology as well as the more traditionally philosophical ideas with which we have been concerned in this section. An allegory by definition is a metaphorical image-phrasing of ideas in narrative form, and it has become clear how both the plot and the characters of Barth's novel convey much of the story's ideational content. In addition, the novel deals with ideas in a form that approximates philosophy itself, as abstractions or propositions - as is appropriate in a University, where the wide range of propositions regarding human life are studied. These ideas are presented through the medium of George's Assignment, with its seven tasks; and it is this set of abstractions which will form the subject of the final chapter devoted to the metaphorical dialectic.

As Frye points out, even when poetry deals with ideas as

¹Northrup Frye, *Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology* (Harcourt, Brace and World, New York, 1963), p. 57.

ideas it "tends to seek the latent basis of concrete imagery in the idea;" and this is clearly the case in *Giles Goat-Boy*. George's Assignment is couched in the form of metaphor:

ASSIGNMENT

To Be Done At Once, In Nò Time

- 1) *Fix the Clock*
- 2) *End the Boundary Dispute*
- 3) *Overcome Your Infirmary*
- 4) *See Through Your Ladyship*
- 5) *Re-place the Founder's Scroll*
- 6) *Pass the Finals*
- 7) *Present Your ID-card, Appropriately Signed, to the Proper Authority (428)*

When George is first given this Assignment at Scrapegoat Grate, he takes the seven tasks literally: "What ID-card? Which infirmity? When had the Founder's Scroll got misplaced?" (428-9). The result of this naive literalism is near-disaster, as George steps in and interferes with things of which he has no knowledge, fixing the clock by "fixing" Tower Clock in place, ending the Boundary Dispute by nearly causing the end of the University, and re-placing the Scroll by simply putting it in another place, so that it *becomes* misplaced. The puzzle-ment he feels at being assigned to repair things that needed no repairing is thus cleared up in his second round of Tutoring: having broken them before, his task this time is to patch up his own misguided handiwork. Once again, this leads to disaster: the Boundary Dispute is again nearly ended through cataclysmic destruction, and the Founder's Scroll is found and re-placed, but in the process reduced to shreds.

What George begins to learn through all this is that the Assignment is not intended literally, as tasks to be performed physically, but metaphorically, as ideas that must be grasped intellectually. Thus he discovers that "Fix the Clock" refers not to Tower Clock, but to time; "End the Boundary Dispute" refers not to the conflict between East and West Campus, but to all polarities and the boundaries between them; and so forth. In enlightenment George realizes that his Assignment is not a list of required hero-deeds, but a metaphorical

image-phrasing of certain philosophical abstractions that he must comprehend. To put it another way, his comprehension of these various metaphysical concepts constitutes his most important hero-deeds; he learns, in the end, that his task is not to save, but to *understand*, himself and his universe. For the hero whose ultimate goal is knowledge, all tasks are finally intellectual.

George's Assignment might, therefore, be paraphrased in its underlying abstract terms, as follows: "Understand the nature of 1) time, 2) boundaries between polarities, 3) action, 4) seeing and love, 5) art, 6) metaphysical vision, and 7) identity." Because George fails at first to grasp the metaphorical nature of these tasks, he also makes the mistake of reading loosely the one injunction that should be read with strict literalness: unable to comprehend the possibility of completing his task "in no time," he takes this imperative to mean "in a short time" or "relatively quickly," so that completing it in a single day seems to fulfill the terms of his Assignment. In fact, because WESCAC intends the tasks metaphorically, George is to complete it in the timeless moment of intellectual understanding; and this he does in enlightenment with Anastasia.

In attempting to complete his first task, "Fix the Clock," George goes to the Clocktower, where he discusses the nature of his task with Eierkopf, the official Clockwatcher. Eierkopf, a skilled logician although not particularly logical himself, suggests that because the Clock does not need fixing, George has already completed his task: "It says *Complete in no time, ja?* So: the clock's not *kaput*, it takes you no time to fix it! You're done already!" (481). Eierkopf's linguistic answer to George's Assignment, a kind of passing through punning, establishes a pattern that is repeated through both of George's rounds of Tutoring, as Eierkopf, Stoker, and Sear all help him to evade the terms of his Assignment by reconstruing them linguistically. George must finally learn that all the punning versions of each task are

true, and none is true; the metaphysical truth about the universe cannot be expressed in words. And yet, words are all we have to express it; and the artificiality of language and the profundity of metaphysical vision form another self-contradiction and paradoxical unity that must be accepted in its uneasy entirety.

At this point George accepts Eierkopf's answer to his task, but while he is in the Tower Eierkopf describes his research into time, and this begins to develop George's understanding of the abstraction. Eierkopf points to the two extreme ends of the anchor-shaped escapement, calling one Tick, or past time, and the other Tock, or future time: "What I want to do is measure the point exactly between, where Tick becomes Tock. Last term we got it down past millimicroseconds; pretty soon we lick it altogether" (481). Eierkopf also speaks contemptuously of a group of researchers in the field who "would abolish all forms of escapement in favor of what they - or their detractors - called 'tickless time'" (481). These two scientific approaches represent the Western and the Eastern concepts of time. The Western, advocated by Eierkopf, sees time as a linear process from past to future, with an infinitesimally small point of time between them known as the present, which Eierkopf seeks to isolate. The Eastern concept, on the other hand, sees Tick and Tock, past and future, as artificial human constructions which veil a mystical time-reality in which there is only a continuous present, an everlasting now. Like a realistic writer, who sees our traditional concept of material reality as the only reality, Eierkopf limits his notion of temporal reality to artificial clock-time, represented symbolically by Tower Clock's swinging pendulum, which is the temporal standard for all West Campus. The absurdity of this notion is illustrated when Tower Clock stops dead, and "time," whatever that may be, continues. The Eastern view of the everlasting present, on the other hand, sees clock-time as artificial; but it trades this naive Western realism for another realistic

approach, for it takes mystic or visionary reality as true and all others as maya, or the veil of appearances.

What George learns in enlightenment, "in no time," is that time itself is a human construction, but a necessary one; we should recognize its artificiality, avoiding the errors of Western positivism and Eastern mysticism both, but also shape it to suit our own metaphysical needs. George's ultimate vision of present, past, future, and all eternity combines the Western and the Eastern view in paradox: the present moment is all of eternity, and all eternity lasts but a fraction of a second; present and eternity, past and future are distinct in unity, part of the seamless universe. But at the same time he retains his ironic awareness of the artificiality of all these concepts: they are human constructions useful in describing perceived reality, but not to be mistaken for "reality" itself.

Another paradox George must confront in his attempt to understand time is that between linear and cyclical time. Linear time, with its postulation of a beginning and an end, and its simplistic notion of a plodding progress, one foot after the other, from point A to point B, seems naive to George, and he tends to the cyclical view expounded by Max Spielman in his Law of Cyclology, based on Campbell's discussion of the mythic Universal Round. "Students pass away," George says; "not so studentdom, until the campus itself shall perish. And at that term of terms, when the student body is no more, shall its mind not persist, in other universities than ours?" (580). As Max explains it, time is a cycle of growth and decline: the beginning and end of linear time in fact meet at the apex of a continuous circle, and when one cycle ends, a new one begins.

And yet, the cyclical concept of time is not the novel's final word on time. For one thing, the novel is not structurally cyclical: it tells the linear story of one man's life, and while it points forward to the next beginning in Tombo, George's life is given personal as well as universal significance, making his death a distinct end. Compare this

with *Finnegans Wake*, where the main character has no personal significance whatever, but is merely a cipher representing all mankind. As John Gross explains, in the *Wake*

the potentialities of the species happen to be summed up in Earwicker, but then, as Molly said of Bloom, "as well him as another". By virtue of being the head of a family, he is all patriarchs; by virtue of having aggressive instincts, he is all warriors; by virtue of being a man, he is all men. And if these ubiquitous qualities deprive him of absolute individuality, they confer immortality on him in return. In the Joycean scheme of things, parallels overlap, and repetition ensures regeneration.²

Earwicker *is* all men; and thus cannot die; and the last sentence of Joyce's novel leads back to the first, in confirmation of this cyclical immortality. George, on the other hand, only *symbolizes* all men, and because he possesses an individuality that Earwicker lacks, he can die, as we all can. Furthermore, since Max suggests that man can learn from his past, from previous cycles, history itself, conceived as an irreversible linear process, takes on importance. In the *Wake*, there is no history; all men, all events, all times are simultaneously present in each moment. In Barth's novel, on the other hand, we see George, who hopes that Tombo will learn as he once learned, proposing to insert his finger into Tombo's cycle from the perspective of his own, and "spirit him out of peril into some obscure pasturage" (763). This implies a continuity and even development from one cycle to the next; and development implies linearity. George's ultimate understanding of time, then, is only superficially cyclical; at a deeper level he learns a paradoxical vision of time as both linear and cyclical, as well as the ironic and equally paradoxical perception that lines and cycles both are artificial, and do not capture reality.³

²John Gross, *Joyce* (Fontana, London, 1971), p. 84.

³The paradox between linear and cyclical time is largely undeveloped in *Giles Goat-Boy*; it becomes a central structuring theme in *Chimera*, where the paradox takes the form

George learns so many contradictory lessons about time that one might be tempted to conclude that he learns nothing; but this is oversimplification. George learns complexity, an ironic awareness of paradox, and this lesson is repeated in his remaining sex tasks as well.

In his second task, George is instructed to "End the Boundary Dispute." The historical significances of this task were discussed above, in Part III; metaphysically, George's understanding of the task encompasses the necessary state of all parallel, conflicting systems such as East and West Campus. Interestingly, the novel's discussion of this theme closely resembles the thematic content of an American postmodern novel published the same year as *Giles*, Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966). Pynchon conceives of the entire universe as dualistic, as a tense coexistence of parallel mirror-image worlds of systems: the U.S. Mail and the Tristero postal system, God and Satan, and so forth. Classical physics tells us that these systems, if kept isolate, tend toward their own destruction through the process of entropy, or the increase of disorder. Pynchon, however, develops a distinctly science fictional notion that in mirror-image worlds the thrust of entropy is in opposite directions, so that an interface, or meeting point, between the two worlds can halt the otherwise unstoppable march of disintegration. The problem is, as Pynchon has one character explain to another, that a simple link between two systems is only a temporary stay, for two systems joined become a single system, which then immediately begins moving again toward disorder and disintegration. What we need, Pynchon suggests, is a force of some sort which would sit at the interface and control the interchange between the two systems, so that each would get precisely the amount of input from the

of the spiral, from the spiral shell of the snail, which grows outward both in a circle and a line. See also Gordon E. Slet-haug, "Barth's Refutation of the Idea of Progress," *Critique* 13 (Summer 1972), pp. 11-29.

other that it needs to halt the entropic process. As a metaphor for this force Pynchon uses Maxwell's Demon, the force postulated by the Scottish physicist James Clerk Maxwell in the eighteenth century, which theoretically, by sorting hot and cold molecules in parallel systems, could keep the two systems isolate but intercyclng, thus creating energy without work and breaking the second law of thermodynamics. In Pynchon's novel, this force is seen as already existing in the universe but in need of human aid; the task of the heroine, Oedipa Maas, is to become a "sensitive" and supply the assistance needed to stop the march of increasing entropy.⁴

Barth did not, as did Pynchon, major in engineering in college, and probably was not aware of Maxwell's Demon when he wrote *Giles Goat-Boy*. And yet the descriptions of conflicting parallel systems in the two novels are strikingly similar. Rexford, the voice of compromise, speculates in his Matriculation Day address on the results of a hypothetical victory of East Campus over West: he says that after the "initial dreadfulness of annexation ... there must come gradually, over the terms, a mutual assimilation of East and West" (415), and that this would mean an overall improvement in literacy, living conditions, and personal freedom throughout the University, as the amalgam would contain the best aspects of both merging systems. "'In short,' he concluded, 'my view is the opposite of the tragic view. The author of *Taliped Decanus* believes we lose even when we win; that there are only different ways of losing. But I believe we'll win even if we lose!" (416). But George repudiates this blue-eyed optimism in tones which are closer to Pynchon:

Nay, rather, for worse, always for worse. Late or soon, we lose. Sudden or slow, we lose. The bank exacts its charge for each redistribution of our funds. There is an entropy to time, a tax on change: four nickels for two dimes, but always less silver; our books stay reconciled, but who in modern terms can tell heads from tails? (763)

⁴Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49*, esp. p. 77. Pynchon's novel was released in March, 1966, only five months before *Giles*.

George, like Oedipa, learns about the universe and thus might potentially become a "sensitive;" but Barth entertains far less hope for mankind than does Pynchon. "Late or soon, we lose." For Barth the maintenance of balance and interchange between conflicting systems does not, as for Pynchon, slow the development of entropy, for entropy, or decline, is the law of life in the second half of the cycle. Rather, conflicting systems must be kept in balance only to avoid destroying the universe before its natural demise: having tried first to separate, then to join, East and West Campus, George learns that paradoxical balance is essential to survival. And part of that balance is controlled interchange between the two systems, so that each remains both a part of and separate from the other. The Maxwell's Demon figure in *Giles Goat-Boy* is Leonid Alexandrov, who with his uncanny ability to open locks with a touch "had helped dozens of undergraduates on each side of the Power Line to transfer illicitly to the other, risking his life in the two-way enterprise again and again without remuneration" (758). Yet Leonid is by no means indispensable; when he dies, he will be replaced by another, for opposing poles require mutual contact in order to remain vital.

In his third task, George must overcome his infirmity. He is puzzled at first as to the precise infirmity intended, and considers the possibility of it referring to his limp, which originated in his childhood spent as a goat; but of course lameness is a prerequisite of the mythic hero, and George reasons that WESCAC might intend him to understand infirmity metaphorically, in which case it would refer not to any physical disability but to, for example, his goatliness (512). In his first round of Tutoring, in which he is preaching a version of Christian morality that links him to the sheep, George denies his goatish aspect, just as earlier, at the goatbarns, he had denied his human aspect. In his second round of Tutoring, George perceives the error in this one-sided interpretation: it is wrong to deny goatliness primarily because all such categories as "goat" and "human" are

false, and George is neither. He simply *is*. In enlightenment he takes this perception one step further in recognizing that categories, while false, are essential to human existence, and he accepts his paradoxical condition as at once god and goat and man.

Precisely what the infirmity of this condition entails is described by Max Spielman, in what he calls the Riddle of the Sphincters. George's raising as a goat serves as a constant reminder of his goatliness, and in the same way we are constantly reminded that man is himself an animal; and as an animal, man is made of flesh and thus doomed to die. Carnality is mortality; and yet carnality also makes possible sexual pleasure and procreation: man's flesh contains within itself the potential for and inevitability of both life and death, creation and destruction. Both of these aspects are encapsulated in the sphincter: in the well-known lines from Yeats, "But love has pitched his mansion in/the place of excrement . . ."⁵ Excrement is death; love is life. And the joy of life that is available to man in love and its pleasures serves to make death the more difficult to accept, so that death, so far from being seen as a welcome release from misery, can be perceived tragically. Man is the supreme creation on the face of the earth, modeled after the gods and pitting himself against them; but because he is made of flesh, he is weak, tiny, mortal, and therefore insignificant. Strong as he is of will, man is always at the mercies of both his own contrary inner nature and his environment, including natural disasters and possible cosmic cataclysm. This is man's infirmity: great as he is, he is yet very small, and cannot climb as high as his imagination would take him.

What does it mean, then, to overcome this infirmity? George learns in enlightenment that overcoming does not mean "conquering," in the sense of ridding himself of the infirmity. Rather, it means accepting infirmity, conquering the mental

⁵"Crazy Jane Talks With the Bishop," in *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats* (Macmillan, New York, 1937), p. 298.

problem of *being* infirm, and going on to surpass it, transcend it. This idea is image-phrased in the novel in locks and keys: George, like those around him, at various points in the story is placed behind locked doors, and to escape these locks he must find the key. Leonid, without knowing quite how he does it, has the power to open all locks; and George learns this power from him, first when Leonid attempts suicide and George runs for help through a long series of locked doors, and finally in his enlightenment. A locked door in the novel's thematic structure represents a barrier to action; and to overcome his infirmity, George must learn to act despite the tragic end of all human actions, despite the lack of moral absolutes, despite the debilitating paradoxes that The Living Sakhyan passively contemplates. All action is meaningless; all action is futile, and doomed to failure, like George's attempt to teach his Answer; but in the end man can only live by acting. George learns to overcome his infirmity by living a rich, full life despite his clear prescience of the tragedy that lies before him.

In George's fourth task he must see through his Ladyship, whom he early on associates with Anastasia. While George has little difficulty in determining just what is required of him in this task, the task itself proves one of his most difficult: "Anastasia's mysteriousness, I felt, was not just the famous unpredictability of human women or the celebrated difference between male and female points of view; it had rather to do with the insufficiency of any notion I entertained about her" (665). George becomes rather adept at intellectual understanding; but his fourth task requires of him a transcension of mere intellectual understanding for a mystical experience of love.

This, however, is something that George is not to learn until the very end of the novel. When he first approaches the task, he does so intellectually, under the expert guidance of Dr. Sear. Sear is an adept at both sexual and linguistic versions and perversions of love, and he advises George that "His Ladyship" may mean the feminine side of his own psyche,

so that the task is just a restatement of Socrates' injunction, "Know thyself." Further, Sear argues, "maybe *know* should be understood in the Old-Syllabus sense of carnal knowledge. In other words, *Fornicate Thyself*" (524). And in George's second round of Tutoring, Sear gives much the same advice: George should assert the feminine side of his own personality in order to deny the reality of the categories "male" and "female."

While Sear's practical suggestions are misguided by his spectator predilections, his linguistic analysis is certainly apt. "See" and "know" become thematically synonymous within the novel, and indeed they are etymologically related. As Peter Kostenbaum explains,

the Greek word *oida* is always used to mean "I know," even though it is a past form of the Greek *eido*, which means "to see." This ancient Greek word for seeing is etymologically related to the even older Sanskrit word *vid* (leading to *Veda*, the ancient Hindu scriptures of religious and philosophical knowledge), and the Latin *video*, which, although it means "to see," eventuates in the German word *wissen* (to know) and the English "wisdom," thereby completing the etymological connection between seeing and knowing.⁶

It is significant to note that while seeing is etymologically related to the German word *wissen*, to know thoroughly, Dr. Sear's Christian name Kennard comes from the same root as the German word *kennen*, to know slightly, to be acquainted with. Sear's spectator approach cannot lead to true knowing, since it involves no true seeing.

As I have mentioned above, the novel contains multiple tools for seeing, including Max's proctoscope, with which he examines the sphincter; Sear's fluoroscope, through which he watches his wife masturbate,⁷ and mirrors, which he uses to

⁶Peter Kostenbaum, *Philosophy: A General Introduction* (American Book Company, New York, 1968), p. 160.

⁷Both the proctoscope and the fluoroscope suggest Joyce's pudendoscope in *Finnegans Wake*: "... we grisly old Sykos, who have done our smiling bit on alices, when they were yung and easily freudened, in the penumbra of the procuring room and what oracular comepression we have had to apply to them!" *Finnegans Wake* (Faber and Faber, London, 1962), p. 115. With

to look up girls' dresses; and Eierkopf's infrared telescope, through which he watches girls undress in darkened dorm windows, and microscope, which he uses to study sperm samples. All the devices touch on the general area of love, but only touch on: because there is no involvement with the object of observation, subject and object remain isolate and no seeing, therefore no knowing, occurs. This is true of George's examination of Anastasia in his second round of Tutoring as well: though he uses, in addition to Dr. Sear's fluoroscope, his eyes, ears, nose, taste, and touch, he still feels that he should not make love to Anastasia, and thus sees her but does not see *through* her. In Robert Scholes' words:

The act of love is the necessary act of vision for George, because when we simply look, no matter how fine our scope, we merely ... "know about" the things we gaze at. When we act, and engage ourselves with things, we come to know them. In WESCAC's *Belly* George knows Anastasia as Adam knew Eve. And she conceives. In a way Barth is exploring the truth in the linguistic riddles posed by words like "know" and "conceive."⁸

Anastasia correctly states George's task when she says, "I think that the Ladyship part of Your Assignment means that You're supposed to know me so well that we'll be the same person" (673), and George realizes that he has completed it in the *Belly*, in his achievement of mother-marriage and father-atonement: "my Father's eye it was glowed near, whose loving inquiry I perceived *through my Ladyship*" (731; emphasis added). This is a mystical experience of bliss, of oneness; and while George is not as sanguine as Anastasia about the redemptive power of that experience, he does not deny love either here or in the *Posttape*. As Harold Farwell writes:

Perhaps Giles's highest moment, his achievement of Grand

the pudendascope these psychologists discover secret incestual desires; Max discovers that "Self-knowledge is always bad news."

⁸Scholes, *The Fabulators*, p. 141.

Tutorhood and Commencement, should not be reduced to a moment of love. Afterward, "Anastasia's eyes still shown */sic/* with love; my own," he explains, "I think with neutral Truth, dispassionate compassion." Furthermore, he admits that he cannot respond to her declaration in simple reciprocity. But the import of his comments seems to be that he has moved through love and beyond it. There is no reason to believe that his new state does not encompass love. In addition, though love is inferior to Truth, it is the means of achieving it, which point Giles seems to recognize when he kisses Anastasia in "gratitude for her having been to me Truth's vessel."⁹

Love is, for Barth, a tentative and problematic thing. It is, in the first place, too sentimental, too easy, too overworked a catch-all for the problems of life to be accepted or even acknowledged without uneasiness: "What in Founder's name," George asks at one point, "was this thing from Sub-Departments of Sentimental Literature, this *love*?" (671). In addition, in a godless, alienated world love is absurd: if there is no divine model for human union through love, then the very existence of love is anachronistic, perhaps an atavistic throwback. And yet, despite all these quibbles, the power of love is undeniable; and in this book and the next three Barth very carefully, very tentatively (in *LETTERS* less tentatively, more confidently) offers love as a possible answer.

And this is appropriate for at least two reasons. One is Barth's recognition that something, some mystic reality, may exist beyond our world: "I was too sensible of the great shadow that surrounds our little lights, like the sea my island shore" (LFH, 191). Even more important than this, however, is the thematic import of love, which is closely allied to a perception of paradox. Rosalie Colie writes:

Love being what it is, it is a subject excellently suited to the paradoxical rhetoric. In the first place, "what it is" is far from clear: love encourages that state of

⁹Harold Farwell, "John Barth's Tenuous Affirmation: 'The Absurd, Unending Possibility of Love,'" *Georgia Review* 28 (Summer 1974), p. 296.

nescience so congenial to paradoxes. ... Love gives the illusion of solving, for a time at least, the fundamental metaphysical problem of the one and the many, since love so obviously supplies an example, not of the unification of the "many," that is, of two, only, but of the unification of opposites, male and female, as well. Love provides the alogical illustration, plain to the plainest sense, of identity in diversity.

Furthermore, love may be alogical, but its peculiar logic persuades any lover of the truth of various psychological miracles - that he and another human being are "one," that he knows another human being, that he at once understands and transcends "himself."¹⁰

As was noted above, those characters in the novel who do learn to overcome their various weaknesses and are Certified by George do so through love. Love frees the lover from the prison of self, and thus releases him from self-consciousness and makes self-sacrifice possible. Love strives toward a stasis of wonder, but makes action possible; and "love at its best succeeds in the illusion that there is but one single eternal moment, even as the clocks tick, and hearts beat, to mark the passage of actual time."¹¹

Besides paradox, love is also closely related to narrative art, as Robert Scholes points out in *Structuralism in Literature*. He writes:

it is in the rhythms of sexuality, the various periodicities of sperm production, menstruation, courtship, and coitus, that our sense of narrative structure is itself generated. It is because narrative structures bend time to human will that we delight in them so. Rhythm is man's triumph over mere chronology, his way of making time dance to a human tune. This is nowhere more apparent than in the temporal structures of fiction, in which repetition, periodicity, and climax give shape and meaning to the course of events. In fiction, as in life, the coming together of two human beings in the sexual embrace of love represents the reconciliation of all opposites, the peaceful resolution of all disputes, the melting of all swords into plowshares. In such an embrace, the cyclical dominates the temporal, the lovers are united with all lovers, and we partake of the universal.¹²

¹⁰Colie, p. 96.

¹¹Colie, p. 99.

¹²Scholes, *Structuralism in Literature*, pp. 197-8.

And while this connection between love and fiction remains largely undeveloped in *Giles Goat-Boy*, Barth makes the connection a central theme in *Lost in the Funhouse*, *Chimera*, and *LETTERS*. In the first novella of *Chimera*, for example, he has another comic persona of himself discuss the nature of narrative with Scheherezade:

Narrative, in short ... was a love-relation, not a rape: its success depended upon the reader's consent and cooperation, which she could withhold or at any moment withdraw; also upon her own combination of experience and talent for enterprise, and the author's ability to arouse, sustain, and satisfy her interest - an ability on which his figurative life hung as surely as Scheherezade's literal (C, 34).

Love, then, in multiple complex ways, is the suitable completion of George's fourth task.

In his next task, George is asked to "Re-place the Founder's Scroll." Here again he is faced with linguistic riddles: is he supposed to put the Scroll back in its rightful place, or a different place? The Scroll is not misplaced when he begins he Tutoring, and so he decides he must be intended to move it, and instructs WESCAC's CACAFILE to re-classify the Scroll as *sui generis*. By extension, however, every book ever written is likewise *sui generis*, and George's instruction causes a dangerous drain on West Campus power as the CACAFILE struggles to re-classify all the books in the Library in separate categories. In this process, the Founder's Scroll is lost, and is not found until George's second round of Tutoring, when Virginia helps him retrieve it from the filing system. But in attempting to classify the Scroll simultaneously under Religion, Philosophy, Literature, Archeology, Art, History, and so forth, the CACAFILE has shredded it, and finally spits it out like ticker-tape. Now that it is misplaced, George sets about replacing it, which he does by eating it: as Bray explains for George, "what is the origin of the Founder' Scroll? Not the Founder, who surely inspired it, but the minds and hearts of His protégés - which is to say, of studentdom! If a Grand Tutor eats His words, is He

not feeding Himself Himself?" (690).

Because the eating of holy writ is used in the novel as a metaphor for revelation, Bray is partly right; however, there is yet another meaning of "re-place" which George has not yet perceived: that is, to put something else in its place, substitute, even take its place oneself. And this becomes the foundation for his completion of the task. In his enlightenment in WESCAC's Belly, George realizes that he has re-placed the Founder's Scroll with himself, with his own life, which ritualistically repeats the universal pattern of all human life, and with his vital, breathing vision of the carnality of man and the tragedy of existence. Here, in the knowing human mind, is the true sacred text of the race.

And yet, George knows that his is a sacred text which cannot be read, and even if it could, cannot be understood. The truth must be learned by each individual human being; it cannot be taught. And yet, no matter how futile, one must try to teach, and George submits to Anastasia's demands that he record the story of his life. The product, George's autobiography, becomes *The Revised New Syllabus*, and is taken by the apostles of Gilesianism to be a replacement of the Founder's Scroll and their own sacred text.

And in a sense, it is, even though its author does not believe in it. The primary function of all human understanding, and therefore of all artistic shaping of that understanding, is to give order to a disordered existence. In "understanding" chaos, of course, one distorts it, since understanding implies an order that is alien to existence; and in giving that understanding verbal form, one further distorts the inexpressible message contained in understanding. But, as Jake Horner points out, this activity is unavoidable and perhaps even necessary to human existence: without the constant attempt to distort by formulating experience, man cannot be said to be mentally alive.

Furthermore, though we can never be sure that our versions of reality capture reality, we can and must seek a version of reality which coherently explains the phenomena we observe.

This in turn involves comparing our perceptions and our constructions of reality to past constructions, in other literature, in religion, in history, and philosophy. If we examine these critically, we will discover - possibly create - certain patterns of similarity and difference which will contribute to the descriptive complexity of our own version. This activity, the finding of concord in life and literature, is according to Frank Kermode one of the primary functions of art: when we write, he says, "We seek to repeat the performance of the New Testament, a book which rewrites and requites another book and achieves harmony with it rather than questioning its truth."¹³ And while the *Revised New Syllabus* does question the truth of the Syllabus it replaces, it is centrally concerned with the discovery of concord between its vision and that of previous sacred texts.

By asserting the need of human beings to find concord, moreover, the *R.N.S.* asserts the primacy of the imagination and the human reality of its creations. Thus while George may question the validity of his holy writ as a mimesis of life, he can accept it as art, as fabulation, a fiction which balances cognition and sublimation. This is made even more clear by additions to the novel of which George is ignorant: where the *R.N.S.* leans strongly toward metaphysics, *Giles Goat-Boy*, with its prefaces and postscripts, effects a paradoxical balance between metaphysics and metafiction, and between these metaphorical constructions and the irony that undermines them. In a strictly metaphysical sense, the Founder's Scroll is replaced by George himself; but in terms of the novel's overall vision, it is replaced by a work of art, George's autobiography in the *Revised New Syllabus*.

George's sixth task, "Pass the Finals," is the novel's allegorical equivalent to the attainment of salvation, in which the Judge studies the heart of man and finds it good. The Finals are appropriately administered by WESCAC, in the

¹³Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*, p. 59.

Belly, where only Grand Tutors can enter and not be EATen; and whoever passes the Finals becomes a Graduate. George takes the Finals a total of three times, twice with Harold Bray and once with Anastasia; with Bray he fails, pressing first the "Yes" button to all four questions, then the "No" button. With Anastasia he and she both pass, as together they push both "Yes" and "No," affirming paradox. For George, however, salvation or Graduation is only a metaphor: where the saved Christian enters into eternal bliss in heaven, there is no blessed realm for George to enter, and he merely Graduates - merely learns. Even so, for Barth learning is valuable in itself, and George's quest does bear heroic fruit in his understanding of himself and his attainment of full mature humanity.

What precisely George learns in enlightenment is never made explicit in the novel, and rightly, for a novel is not a sermon. Even George's few attempts to explain his vision fail to approach its heart, and are cut short. "The mystic One can't be described," Barth once told an audience, "'because language is analytical, or drawn, because it has no attribute; Very Beauty is not like any beautiful thing."¹⁴ Because we are given the development of George's thought that prepares him for this vision, however, we can understand what he understands as he does, at George's Gorge, intuitively. What he understands is, essentially, the novel's metaphysical content, the vision of man and his universe that has been the subject of this section on philosophy. For a concise statement of that vision we may draw on the notes Barth made for the novel, presently located in the Manuscripts Division of the Library of Congress, as quoted by David Morrell:

Salvation in the individual ... consists of the realization (brought about usually after a period of suffering, anxiety, and despair) of a transcendent reality beyond the particular visible world; union with it, release from

¹⁴Barth at Geneseo, New York, December, 1964. Quoted in Morrell, p. 78.

conflicts of reason vs. passion; good vs. evil. Affirmation of wholeness of psyche and body; loving affirmation of unreason, passions, appetite, corporeity; freedom from vanity and selfishness; spiritual energy and "lyric enchantment" with reality; a *joie de vivre* that accepts and exults in its suffering or whatever else comes; that discharges the force of its personality in love (compassion and charity); which may include lustful appetite out of joy but will involve no cruelty or destructiveness.¹⁵

Part of this vision too is George's final awareness that he is no savior, no "campus-passing spook" (299), as Max says. Rather, he is an instrument, "the tool designed for the work, nothing more" (302), as Max also predicts. The force that wields this instrument is symbolically WESCAC, but WESCAC too is only a tool, a symbol for something far greater. What that is, George never says, but it is implied that WESCAC represents a deterministic universe that lacks a Determiner. Human existence is controlled not by a rational, anthropomorphic God, but by necessity, inevitability; and the tragedy of this fact is not only that man has no free will to affect his fate - for free will is a vanity that the mature person relinquishes - but also that our lives must end in the inevitability of death. Even so, the brevity of our existence lends intensity to our span, and the tragedy of human mortality by contrast heightens our joy of life, the *joie de vivre* that "accepts and exults in its suffering."

In George's seventh and final task, he is instructed to "Present Your ID-card, Appropriately Signed, to the Proper Authority." This corresponds in the hero-cycle to the hero's atonement with the father, inasmuch as atonement means becoming "at one" or united; the hero presents himself to the father, who is the proper authority, and becomes one with him, thus being transformed into the authority who passes judgement on himself. George first presents his ID-card to his grandfather, Reginald Hector, next denies identity altogether, but finally learns that he is himself the proper

¹⁵Quoted in Morrell, p. 77n.

authority.

The ID-card, as has been mentioned earlier, is one of the novel's image-phrasings of identity, as is the ink used to write upon it. George is shown a wide variety of identity-models: the aggressive, self-assertive individualism of Peter Greene, Reginald Hector, and Ira Hector, represented symbolically in the novel by Ira's indelible ink; the equally aggressive self-effacement of Classmate X and Leonid Alexandrov, represented by Leonid's ink eradicator; and the passive acceptance of paradoxical identity and non-identity of The Living Sakhyan, represented by the empty phial called "The Disappearing Ink." Having attained enlightenment, George learns that The Living Sakhyan, in his unspoken vision of paradox, comes closest to the truth: as Max explains it in the passage quoted earlier, the correct understanding of personality is the knowledge that "I and the Founder are one; I am the University; I am not" (93). The appropriate signature is neither a bold scrawl in indelible ink, nor a blank card, but a concordance, a union of the two. In enlightenment, George realizes his own significance in proportion to the universe, understands the relation and distinction between self and cosmos, and thus achieves the proper balance between selfishness and selflessness.

This, then, is George's metaphysical insight; this is the novel's world view, its notion of the nature of man and the universe. But it is not the novel's final word. Metaphysics is only one part of the overall unifying vision of the novel, which encompasses all the paradoxes, including those between metaphysics and metafiction, and between metaphor and irony. The metaphysical vision remains forcefully in the readers's mind, but balanced, in its complex relation to Barth's paradoxical vision.

PART VI VISION

"In terms of the total field, an individual cannot be a container of the truth; his action can only embody certain aspects of the truth. He can act out his role as superb tragedy or comedy, but he can never *be* the truth. The truth is what emerges in the field of the sphere as one man engages his opposite in conflict."

William Irwin Thompson, *At the Edge of History*, p. 116.

PART VI VISION

In my analysis of *Giles Goat-Boy*, I have proceeded along the metaphorical dialectic from left to right, from metafiction to metaphysics, remaining at the textual level in order to flesh out a complex image of the detailed nature of the novel. In this final section of the study, I step off that dialectic and indeed above all dialectics to a hypothetical Archimedean point, from which to gain a perspective of the whole, of the "total field." This total field I have called vision, the meaning and the significance of the novel taken in its entirety; not a message, nor a sermon, but a complex narrative image of life and art. Another term for this vision might be *world*, the fictional world created in the novel; for, as René Wellek and Austin Warren have pointed out, "the novelist offers less a case - a character or event - than a world. The great novelists all have such a world - recognizable as overlapping the empirical world but distinct in its self-coherent intelligibility."¹

Reading the novel, one identifies with George: suffers with him in his failures, triumphs with him in the Belly of WESCAC, and shares his resignation to his tragic fate in the Posttape. This identification is central both to the reader's

¹René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature* (Harcourt, Brace and World, New York, 1956), p. 214.

sublimative enjoyment of the novel and to his cognitive appreciation of it, for as George discovers, we learn best when we involve ourselves with things, and this is as true for readers of fiction as it is for Grand Tutors. And yet, identification with a single character has disadvantages as well. By putting ourselves in the shoes of one fictional person we limit our understanding to his, leading, in Wellek and Warren's terms, to the creation of a "case" rather than a "world." And so, when George's narration is finished, the novel does not close, but follows with J.B.'s comic misinterpretation of the import of the *R.N.S.*, and the Editor's suggestion that J.B.'s Postscript may itself be spurious. Here, after George's tragic tones in the Posttape, the comic tone reigns; and this returns us back through the narrative we have just finished, past its beginning to the prefatory material which we read when we first opened the book without understanding its significance. In the reader's identification with George since, he tends to forget those entries, the Publisher's Disclaimer and J.B.'s Cover-Letter; and in being reminded of them now, at the very end of the novel, he is suddenly recalled to a sense of the whole. And this is precisely their function: not to negate George's metaphysical insights, but to place them in context, to make the reader see them as one important but not the only or even dominant part of a total vision. The message embedded in these comic parodies of editing and prefacing is relatively straightforward: they remind the reader that what he is experiencing is not life, but art; not truth, but fiction. This anti-illusionistic function is ironic in nature, and it is significant to recall that irony is motivated by an essentially realistic drive: the drive to eliminate what is *not* true, *not* reality, in order to clear the way for true perception. It may be, of course, as is often the case in irony, that the ironist himself has no idea of what true perception might be; even so, the exposure of false perception is valuable in itself, as disillusionment is always the first step to knowledge.

But what is that knowledge? Barth, like his contemporaries,

does not know. All he knows is that what must be known is incredibly complex, possibly beyond our power to comprehend or express, except through paradox. It may be that one day human perception will be sufficiently developed to be able to grasp truth, and language sufficiently developed to express it; but until that time, we are caught on the horns of the dilemma that everything we can say about truth is false, even the statement that it is false. Once we have recognized this dilemma, we have two alternatives. The first is silence, toward which many contemporary writers, Barth included, tend in their more pessimistic moods. The other alternative, which *Giles Goat-Boy* exemplifies, is the dominant strain of postmodernism: one writes about truth as if it were truth, but constantly reminds the reader that it is fiction. And there is a very important distinction to be made between falsity and fiction; for though they amount to the same thing, in our appreciation of them falsity misleads, but fiction delights. And delight is a factor that is not to be gainsaid. The pleasures of art, like the pleasures of love, are among the pleasantest experiences in life, and to dispose of either, for whatever reason, is not only unnecessary but wasteful.

And so, denied the truth, Barth writes delightful fictions that approximate truth, and for all we know may be the truth. We have no way of knowing, however, and so these fictions seek to maintain a delicate balance between the delight of metaphor and the ironic awareness that metaphor does not necessarily capture truth. And this is the ultimate vision of *Giles Goat-Boy*: in the midst of the tragedy of life we are given the joy of art, and we are asked to accept both, with our right to joy and our ironic privilege mutually checked, and mutually affirmed. What George learns, we learn; what J.B. denies, we deny. But reading the novel is a rising above conflicts expressed in its multiple layers; and we are left, at the close of the tale, with a complexly affirming vision of paradox.

APPENDIX ONE KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS

C	<i>Chimera</i>
EOR	<i>The End of the Road</i>
FO	<i>The Floating Opera</i>
L	LETTERS
LFH	<i>Lost in the Funhouse</i>
SWF	<i>The Sot-Weed Factor</i>

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APPENDIX FOUR GEORGE'S CHRONOLOGY

In writing *Giles Goat-Boy*, Barth structured the life of his hero so as to follow certain symbolic patterns both thematically, in terms of George's ontogenic development, and numerically, in his age at and the dates of the various events in the story. For example, George is conceived and passes his first two trials on the vernal equinox, and is born and enlightened on the winter solstice. He attains manhood at age 14 and returns to Main Campus at age 21 (two and three sevens); and he achieves enlightenment at age 22 and predicts his death at age 33 (two and three elevens), which latter was also Christ's age at his death.

These patterns are not, however, immediately apparent to the reader of the novel, for Barth dates each event only once, and always unobtrusively: "I said bye-bye to fourteen years of perfect candor" (56) is our only clue that George is 14, "I have placed the day in my twenty-second spring" (121) that he is 21. To discover that George is born on the winter solstice one must count up 275 days from his conception on the vernal equinox (559), and to learn that the chain of events leading to his return to Great Mall occurs on March 16, the equivalent of Palm Sunday of our Easter week (and that his first lynching occurs on Good Friday), one must count up and back from the Randy (Maundy) Thursday party (298), which is dated on page 390 as March 20.

The novel makes no reference to calendar years in New Tammany history; all dating by year in George's chronology, therefore, must refer to his age at each individual phase.

<i>Age</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Time of Day</i>	<i>Event</i>
-	March 21	midnight	conception in Tower Hall
0	December 21	midnight	birth
	(undated)		murder attempt, rescue

<i>Age</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Time of Day</i>	<i>Event</i>
14	May/June		Dean of the Hill Lady Creamhair Beist and Chickie Sue
	June 21	morning	rape attempt goat-fight rebirth in tapelift
		noon	Maximizing
14-21			prepping
21	March 16 Palm Sunday	midnight	dream of Freddie Triple T born
	March 17 Monday	morning	walking stick formed from staff decision to become hero
		afternoon	sex with G. Herrold
		night	dream of Chickie
	March 18 Tuesday	morning	Max tells of Virginia
		night	dream, call, departure
	March 19 Wednesday	day dusk night	travel George's Gorge Powerhouse
	March 20 Randy Thursday	day dusk evening night	travel to Main Campus Pedal Inn <i>Taliped Decanus</i> Eierkopf
	March 21 Good Friday	6:04 a.m. (dawn) 7 a.m. day dusk	Trial-by-Turnstile Scrapegoat Grate first round of Tutoring lynching
	March to December		Main Detention
	December 20	dawn day dusk 8 p.m. 9:45 p.m. 11 p.m. midnight	released from Main Detention second round of Tutoring lynching enlightenment at Gorge arrival at Tower Hall temporary rout of Bray sexual enlightenment in Belly

<i>Age</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Time of Day</i>	<i>Event</i>
22	December 21	dawn midday 2 p.m. half-hour before sunset dusk	return goatbarns departure for Main Campus arrival at Main Campus rout of Bray, Max's Shafting
33	April	dusk	predicts death

- Circle VI:*
- The Heretics
- The Fallen Angels
- Circle VII, Round 1:*
Violent Against Neighbors (Murderers and War-Makers)
- Round 2:* Violent Against Themselves (Suicides and Destroyers of Own Substance)
- Round 3:* Violent Against God, Nature, and Art (Blasphemers, Perverts, Usurers)
- Circle VIII (Simple Fraud):*
- Bolgia 1:* Seducers and Panderers
- Bolgia 2:* Flatterers
- Bolgia 3:* Simoniacs
- Bolgia 4:* Fortune-Tellers and Diviners
- Bolgia 5:* Grafters
- Bolgia 6:* Hypocrites
- Bolgia 7:* Thieves
- Bolgia 8:* Evil Counsellors
- Second Subterranean Floor:*
- A: "anti-intellectuals, insubordinates, and those who refused to sign the College loyalty-oath"
- B: "textbook writers who published revised editions to undercut the used-book market, padders of essay examinations, proliferators of unnecessary footnotes and research, and unscrupulous dispensers of grants-in-aid"
- C: 1: "murderers, rapists, extorters of answers by duress, and destroyers of library books"
- 2: "droppers of courses and leapers from dormitory windows"
- 3: "faggots, dykes, and teachers employed in the same departments from which they hold degrees"
- Third Subterranean Floor:*
- A: 1: "'make-out artists'"
- 2: "'apple-polishers and brownies'"
- 3: "purveyors of 'cribs' and 'ponies'"
- 4: "impostors and charlatans"
- 5: "sellers of rank, tenure, absentee-excuses, and false ID-cards"
- 6: "users of academic distinction for social, political, or mercenary ends"
- 7: "cribbers and plagiarists"
- 8: "malicious faculty advisors and dormitory counselors"

- Bolgia 9*: Sowers of Discord 9: "organizers of panty-raids, interfraternity brawls, and department cliques"
- Bolgia 10*: Falsifiers, Classes 4 (False Witnesses) and 2 (Evil Impostors) 10: "'bullslingers and snowmen'"
- Circle IX (Compound Fraud), Caina*: Treacherous Against Kin B: 1: "Those who'd tattled on classmates, roommates, or colleagues"
- Antenora*: Treacherous Against Country 2: "/those/ who'd given classified military-science data to hostile colleges"
- Ptolmea*: Treacherous Against Lords, Benefactors, and Center (*Dis*): Satan C: (the Sinkhole) "any who undid in flunked wise his professor, department head, dean, chancellor, or ... Grand Tutor."

APPENDIX SIX GLOSSARY

In his invention of a University that corresponds to our universe, Barth renamed many familiar people, places, and things in our world to fit the University environment. These allegorical names follow certain patterns. On the stylistic level, many names are based on puns and sound associations, including most of the acronyms (EAT, AIM, and CACAFILE, for example), and certain proper names, such as Sear, Bray, and Enos Enoch (enough's enough). The key to the historical setting is, of course, the connection between universe and University, into which most name equivalencies fall. The collective reality invoked in the mythological plot inspires the selection of names for the various Colleges (Siegfried and Siddartha Colleges, for example), and Barth's philosophical concerns are reflected in at least two names: Maios and Entelechus, for Socrates and Aristotle. Finally, many classical literary heroes are named by means of the suffix *-ides*, from the Latin *-iades*, meaning "son of." Thus Anchisides is the son of Anchises, or Aeneas.

a-founderism: atheism.

AIM: WESCAC's Automatic Implementation Mechanism, which initiates and carries out College policy.

Alexandrov, Leonid Andreich: a defector from Nikolay to West Campus, adopted son of Classmate X. He is modeled on Khrushchev's son-in-law Aleksei Adzubei, and as the Eastern counterpart to Peter Greene represents Russia struggling to live up to an ideal of selflessness.

alma-materist (or alma-matriot): patriot.

Amaterasu College: Japan. Amaterasu was the Japanese sun-goddess, used by Campbell to exemplify the hero who refused to return to the world.

Anchisides: Aeneas, son of Anchises.

ANTEATER: a protective device against the possibility of a Nikolayan EAT-attack, the novel's equivalent of AWAC (Advanced Warning and Control).

antigiles: Anti-Christ, used in reference to Harold Bray.

A-plus: Amen.

Attorney-General: Attorney-General.

Beism: a rough equivalent of the amalgam of existentialism and Zen mysticism adopted by the Beats.

"Beist Generation": Beat Generation.

Belly of WESCAC: the storage room for WESCAC's Diet-tapes, and the location of George's third trial, the Final Examinations, which qualify him for Graduation. WESCAC's Belly is the novel's equivalent of the mythological belly of the whale described by Campbell.

Billy Bocksfuss: George's childhood name. Bocksfuss is German for goatfoot, suggesting Oedipus ("swollen foot").

Bonifacist: Nazi, Fascist. Barth may be referring to any number of saints and popes named Boniface; a likely reference would be Pope Boniface VIII, a powerful and corrupt pope whom Dante condemned to the third bolgia of the eighth circle of Hell, for Simoniacs.

Bray, Harold: the false Grand Tutor, a mysterious emanation of WESCAC, George's archenemy. Barth may be thinking of an Anglican clergyman named Thomas Bray, an early evangelist in colonial Maryland; Harold comes from *here-weald*, Old English for "army power" or "powerful general." Historically, Bray is Christianity, mythologically the dragon routed by the hero, philosophically human weakness.

Business Administration concessionaires: the money-changers Christ drove out of the temple.

CACAC: Campus Analyzer, Conceptualizer, and Computer. WESCAC's original name.

CACAFILE: WESCAC's automatic classification and filing facilities, with a possible pun of "caca," feces.

Cadmus College: Thebes. Cadmus was Oedipus' ancestor who founded Thebes and, appropriately, according to legend invented writing.

campus: either the earth (e.g., "down to campus") or a large cultural region on the earth (e.g., West Campus).

Campus Cantos: Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

Campus Riots I, II, III: World Wars.

Candidate for Graduation: one who has passed the Scrapegoat Gate, George's second trial, which qualifies him to take the Final Examinations.

Chementinski: a scientist who defected to Nikolay College with the secret of EAT and became a high official under the name of Classmate X. As New Tammany traitor, he refers to Klaus Fuchs; as Classmate X, to Nikita Khrushchev.

Classical Lykeion College: ancient Greece. In Greek mythology, Mount Lykeion was either the birthplace of Zeus or the place where he was abandoned as an infant.

classmate: comrade.

Classmate X: Nikita Khrushchev (see *Chementinski*).

Commencement (Day, Gate): associated with the attainment of a vague state of grace, which is the result of passing the Final Examinations. It is the novel's equivalent of heaven.

college: country.

Control Room: houses the controls for the power output to the entire University; in the microcosm of the Powerhouse, it is heaven.

Croaker: a Frumentian exchange student, Eblis Eierkopf's roommate. Possibly modeled on Melville's Queequeg, he symbolizes the body and its instincts.

Cum Laude project: the attempt to produce a Grand Tutor through selective breeding: the result is the semen sample called GILES, which, implanted in Virginia Hector's womb, grows into George Giles the Goat-Boy. Possibly based on a pun on "cum," semen.

Curricularists: socialists.

curriculum: government policy.

Cyclology, Law of: Max Spielman's theory that time is not linear, but cyclic, and that man and his universe alternately undergo periods of growth and decline. Barth took the idea from Joseph Campbell's description of primitive concepts of time.

the Dark Semesters: the Dark Ages.

Dean: king.

Dean o' Flunks: Satan.

Departmentalism: feudalism.

Diet: WESCAC's EATING program.

don errant: knight errant.

EASCAC: Eastern Campus Automatic Computer, the Eastern counterpart to WESCAC.

East Campus: the Eastern World.

EAT: Electroencephalic Amplitude and Modulation. A weapon developed on WESCAC to destroy human minds; the novel's equivalent of nuclear weaponry.

Eierkopf, Eblis: a Siegfrieder scientist who, on the novel's philosophical level, symbolizes the mind. His name is German for egghead, appropriate both to his intellectualism and to his research on and visual associations with eggs. Historically, he refers to Edward Teller. His name may also contain a pun on "eye-er."

Encyclopedia Tammanica: Encyclopedia Americana.

Enochism: Christianity.

Enos Enoch: Jesus Christ. Both Enos and Enoch were early ancestors of Christ, listed in Luke 3:23-38. Enoch was also the figure in Genesis who did not die, but was taken up by God (Gen. 5:24), an end similar if not identical to Christ's resurrection. There are also four pseudonymous apocalyptic works from the century before Christ whose authors identify themselves with Enoch in order to predict the coming of the Son of Man. The name may also be a pun on "enough's enough" - enough, that is, of Christ figures in literature.

Entelechus: Aristotle. Entelechy is Aristotle's concept of the actualization of a potentiality.

the Epis of Anchisides: Virgil's *Aeneid*.

Esaias the Advisor: Isaiah the prophet.

Failure: damnation.

Fasting: nuclear disarmament.

Final Examinations: the test that must be passed in order to Graduate or Commence.

flunkéd: damned.

flunker: sinner.

Footnotes to Sakhyan: a generic term for the major sacred books of Buddhism.

Foundation Day: day of Creation.

the Founder: God.

Founder's Hall: church or temple.

Founder's Hill: the location of the Powerhouse, the source of all power for the University. It houses the Furnace Room (hell), the Living Room (earth), and the Control Room (heaven), in addition to the Staff Graveyard and College Crematorium. On its peak is the Shaft, which corresponds to Christ's cross. The Hill is the novel's equivalent of the World Navel described by Campbell.

the Founder's Pomological Test Grove: the Garden of Eden.

the Founder's Scroll: the Bible.

free research: free enterprise.

Fruementius: Africa.

Furnace Room: the source of power for the University, symbolic of hell.

G. Herrold: (George Herrold, *Old Black George*, O.B.G.): George's rescuer from the tapelift, partially modeled on Twain's Nigger Jim.

GILES: Grand-Tutorial Ideal, Laboratory Eugenic Specimen. The Grand Tutor produced by WESCAC on the basis of an abstraction of the quintessential type of the hero from the corpus of mythology. Barth is likely referring to St. Giles, the Athenian patron saint of beggars and cripples, called then "Aegidus," he who wears the aegis or goatskin.

Giles, George: Billy Bocksfuss the Ag-Hill Goat-Boy, son of WESCAC and Virginia Hector, the GILES and Grand Tutor of West Campus.

Giles (,) Stoker: George's son by Anastasia Stoker, and an apostle of Gilesianism. The interchangeability of his name suggests Jesus Christ/Christ Jesus.

Gilesianism: Anastasia's name for the religion which arises out of George's enlightenment and teachings; the religion is rejected by George.

Graduate: one who has passed the Finals and achieved grace.

Grand Tutor: Messiah.

Grand Tutor's Petition: the Lord's Prayer.

Greene, Peter: a self-made millionaire who becomes one of George's first disciples. Historically, he is America incarnate. His Christian name stems from his role as disciple; and the color green is allegorically associated with New Tammany College, as opposed to red, the color of Nikolay College.

Grosslehrer: Grand Tutor.

Gynander: Tiresias. The name is Greek for "woman-man."

Hector, Ira: the richest and ostensibly greediest man in New Tammany College, referred to as the Old Man of the Mall. Historically he seems to refer to Bernard Baruch, mythologically to Father Time.

Hector, Reginald: Ira Hector's brother, father of Virginia, former Chancellor of New Tammany College, and a Professor-General in Campus Riot II. Historically he represents Dwight D. Eisenhower.

Hector, Virginia: receptacle of the GILES, George Giles' virgin mother.

Informationalism: capitalism.

Informational Revolution: Industrial Revolution.

JELI: Junior Enochist League Inn, the novel's equivalent of the YMCA.

John the Bursar: John the Baptist.

Joint Chairmen of Military Science: Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Labdakides: Laius, son of Labdakus and father of Oedipus.

Lady Creamhair: George's nickname for his mother, Virginia Hector, before he knows her true name and identity.

Laertides: Odysseus, son of Laertes.

Light House: residence of Chancellor Lucius Rexford, the novel's equivalent of the White House.

Living Room: formerly the execution-chamber of Main Detention, now used for riotous parties and an occasional high official funeral; symbolic of earth.

MALINOCTIS: Manipulative Analysis and Logical Inference; Non-Conceptual Thinking and Intuitional Synthesis, WESCAC's ability to think humanly. The name possibly derives from Latin *malus* "evil" and *nox, noctis* "night."

Main Detention: central New Tammany jail, structurally a parody of Dante's *Inferno*.

Maïos: Socrates. Maïos refers to the Socratic "maieutic" or obstetric method of helping a person to make clearly conscious the latent conceptions in his mind.

Marcus, Professor: Karl Marx.

Maro: Publius Vergilius Maro, or Virgil.

Matriculation: entrance into the University, involving passing the Turnstile, George's first Trial.

the Menu: WESCAC's secret EAT-list.

mid-percentile: middle class.

Military Science Cube: the Pentagon.

Moishe: Moses.

Moishian: Jew(ish).

Moishiocaust (or Moishian genocaust): the Nazi genocide of the Jews in concentration camps during World War II.

the Nether Campus: hell.

New Syllabus: New Testament.

New Tammany College: the United States. Tammany Hall was formerly the New York City Hall, which after a number of scandals involving government graft and corruption became a byword for corrupt government.

Nikolay College: the Soviet Union. Nicholas was the name of a dozen or more great Russian princes and Orthodox patriarchs; given Barth's interest in hagiography, he might be thinking specifically of St. Nicholas of Myra, from whom our Santa Claus tradition is derived.

Old Syllabus: Old Testament.

Passage: salvation.

passéd: blessed, saved.

PAT-card: Prenatal Aptitude-Test card. Normally WESCAC's readout at the birth of a baby concerning its future vocation, in George's case the card reads only "Pass All Fail All."

Peleides: Achilles, son of Peleus.

political-science flunkee: political prisoner.

Pre-Schoolist: prehistoric, primitive.

private education: private enterprise.

proctoscopy: Max Spielman's science for exploring the human psyche through examination of the anal and vaginal sphincters, the place of excrement and creation; the novel's rough equivalent of Freudian psychology.

Professor-General: military general.

the Promised Quad: the Promised Land.

proph-prof: prophet.

quadrangle (quad): region, land.

Qualifying: prior to taking the Finals, the student must Qualify in Scrapegoat Gate, George's second Trial.

Quiet Riot: Cold War.

the Rematriculation: the Renaissance.

Remus College: Rome; named after Remus, twin brother of Romulus, legendary founder of Rome.

The Revised New Syllabus (R.N.S.): The sacred book handed to "J.B.," a parodic persona of Barth, by Giles (,) Stoker, which with addenda (a Publisher's Disclaimer and a Cover-Letter before, at the end a Postscript to the Posttape and a Footnote to the Postscript to the Posttape) forms the book renamed by the Publishers *Giles Goat-Boy*.

Rexford, Lucius: Chancellor of New Tammany College, Maurice Stoker's half-brother. His Christian name comes from the Latin for light, and suggests Lucifer, Satan before his fall; and his surname seems to be a combination of the Latin roots for "strong king." Historically, he refers to John F. Kennedy; mythologically, to pontius Pilate: philosophically, to moderation, strength, order, and light.

Riddle of the Spincters: Max Spielman's theory of the essential carnality of man - that is, that man is made of flesh and thus doomed to death.

Sakhyan: Buddha. The name probably comes from one of the titles of Gautama Buddha, "Sākyamuni," mentioned in Campbell.

Scapulas: Plato. *Platon* is Greek for broad-shouldered, and the scapula is the shoulder blade.

Scrapegoat Grate: the second of George's three Trials, qualifying him as a Candidate for Graduation.

Sear, Dr. Kennard: New Tammanian doctor and psychologist. His Christian name derives from an Anglo-Saxon root meaning "know," and his surname suggests "seer" and "sere." Historically, he may be an amalgam of Dr. Timothy Leary and Norman O. Brown; mythologically he refers to Tiresias, and philosophically represents the Hellenistic search for absolute knowledge.

Secular-Studentism: humanism.

the Seminar-on-the-Hill: the Sermon on the Mount.

Shafting: crucifixion.

Siddartha College: India. Siddhartha was one of the names of Buddha.

Siegfried College: Germany. Siegfried was a mythological hero common to much of Germanic and Old Norse heroic literature, most notably the *Nibelungenlied*.

the South Exit: the Gate of Hell.

the Sovereignty of the Bottom Percentile: the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Spielman, Maximilian: a German Jewish scientist, a key figure in developing WESCAC's power to EAT, George's foster-father. Historically he seems to refer to a composite figure of Einstein, Oppenheimer, and possibly Freud; mythologically he refers to the mentor figure Campbell describes, and for which Lord Raglan uses the term "Spielman;" and philosophically he represents humanistic values of brotherly love and the Hebraistic concern for morality and obedience.

Stoker, Anastasia: wife of Maurice Stoker and foster-daughter of Virginia Hector, mother of George's son Giles (,) Stoker, George's first and only Graduate. Mythologically, she represents the female mentor and the Earth Mother, as which she becomes the vehicle for George's symbolic rebirth in enlightenment; her Christian name is Greek for "resurrection." Philosophically, she represents carnal love.

Stoker, Maurice: director of the Powerhouse and Main Detention. His Christian name derives from Latin *Mauritius*, "Moor" or "dark-skinned person," and his surname suggests the Devil stoking the fires of hell. Historically, he is J. Edgar Hoover; mythologically, he is the guardian of the first threshold; and philosophically, he is extremism, energy, power, disorder, and libidinal sexual forces.

student: human being.

student body (studentdom): mankind.

the Student Union: the community, in Marxist theory.

Student-Unionism: Communism.

Student-Unionist wizard-hunts: McCarthy-era Communist witch-hunts.

Taliped Decanus: Oedipus Rex. Taliped derives from the Latin verb *talipedare*, "to walk on one's heel" or "limp," corresponding to the Greek *oidipus*, meaning "swollen foot."

T'ang College: China. Historically, T'ang was the Chinese emperor who overthrew the Hsia dynasty (ca. 2205-1766 B.C.) and established the Shang, or Yin, dynasty (ca. 1766-1122 B.C.); according to legend, he was purportedly a descendent of the mythological sage-king Huang Ti.

Tower Hall: location of WESCAC and the Administration, used loosely (cf. "Washington") to refer to the government. It is also the reference-point for all spatial and temporal measurements, and a pseudo-World Navel.

transcript: the sum total of a student's past, his soul, roughly equivalent to the metaphorical *tabula* or slate in *tabula rasa*.

Trial-by-Turnstile: George's first Trial on his road to Graduation, entailing Matriculation, which qualifies him to attempt Scrapegoat Gate.

Tutee: disciple.

University: the universe.

University Council (U.C.): the United Nations.

Varsity Anthem: the National Anthem.

WESCAC: West Campus Automatic Computer. Mythologically it represents an omniscient God, the collective unconscious, the Life Force; philosophically it stands for Barth's view of the universe as deterministic without a Determiner.

West Campus: the Western World.

Xanthippides: Pericles, son of Xanthippes.

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TIIVISTELMÄ: ANALYYSI JOHN BARTHIN ROMAANISTA *GILES GOAT-BOY*
(Finnish Summary)

John Barth (s. 1930) on eräs nykyamerikkalaisen kirjallisuuden johtavia hahmoja. Hänen kaksi "oppivuosiromaaniaan," *The Floating Opera* (1956; suom. *Uiva ooppera*, 1972, Pentti Saarikoski/Reijo Lehtonen) ja *The End of the Road* (1958; suom. *Matkan pää*, 1970, Antero Tiusanen), olivat jo varsin lupaavia taidonnäytteitä. Kuitenkin vasta 1960-luvulla alkoi ilmestyä Barthin pääteoksia: v. 1960 *The Sot-Weed Factor* ("Tupakkakauppias"), v. 1966 *Giles Goat-Boy* ("Giles vuohipoika") ja v. 1968 novellikokoelma *Lost in the Funhouse* ("Eksynyt huvitalossa"), jota Barthin teoksista eniten käytetään amerikkalaisten yliopistojen kurssikirjana. Seuraavaa teosta, pienoisromaanikokoelmaa *Chimera* ("Khimaira"), on pidetty joissakin suhteissa heikompana suorituksena. Barthin tuorein teos on ilmestynyt v. 1979, kirjeromaani *LETTERS* ("Kirjaimia" tai "Kirjeitä"); 772-sivuinen romaani tuntuu merkitsevän Barthin tuotannossa uutta synteisiä, uutta taiteellista ja maailmankatsomuksellista varmuutta.

Vaikka Barthin tuotantoa on sanottu kokeelliseksi, on olemassa sen verran samassa hengessä kokeilijoita, että voidaan puhua uudesta tyylisuunnassa nimityksellä "post-modernismi." Nimi viittaa näiden kirjailijoiden ja muiden taiteilijoiden käsitykseen siitä, että modernismi oli jonkinlainen realismin umpikuja, josta oli päästävä irti uusin keinoin. Keinot perustuvat näkemykseen, jonka mukaan taiteen on turha yrittää imitoida todellisuutta, koska taiteen ja todellisuuden (subjektin ja objektin) välillä on epistemologinen kuilu. Postmodernistien mukaan modernistit, vaikka he korostivat tätä samaa skeptistä suhtautumista tietämiseen, yrittivät väärällä tavalla hyödyntää sitä taiteessaan; he tietoisesti pyrkivät poistamaan kaiken "keinotekoisuuden" ja "taiteellisuuden," jotta jäljelle jäisi muokkaamaton todellisuus. Koska taide on perusluonteeltaan muokkaamista, tälle tielle lähtenyt taiteilija

joutuu yhä enemmän ja enemmän karsimaan "taiteellisia" aineksia pois taiteestaan kunnes hän lähestyy mykkyuden äärirajaa - josta paras esimerkki on Samuel Beckettin tuotanto.

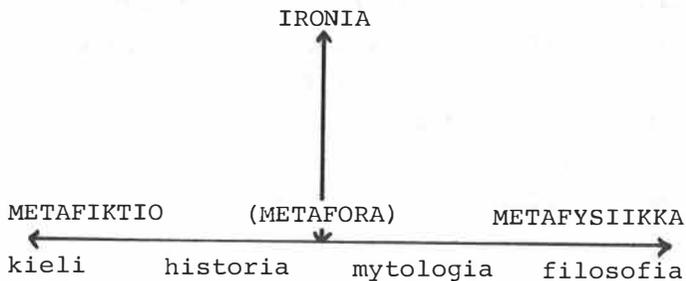
Ongelmakenttää voidaan lähestyä sanaparilla ironia/ metafora. Naivi kirjallisuus pohjautuu metaforaan, joka korostaa asioiden - etenkin taiteen ja todellisuuden - samanlaisuutta. Sofistikoituessaan kirjallisuus muuttuu yhä ironisemmaksi, kieltäen naiveja metaforan esittämiä yhtäläisyyksiä. Mutta ironia ei ainoastaan tuhoa, vaan myös tarvitsee metaforaa: kielteinen nolla on edelleen nolla, joten ollakseen olemassa ironian on esitettävä jotakin, metaforaa, ja sitten kieltää se. Koska metafora on näin ironian tärkein rakennusmateriaali, hypoteettisen rajan jälkeen tuhotessaan metaforaa ironia alkaa tuhota itseään. Tätä itsetuhoa on kaikkialla havaittavissa mm. Beckettin ja ranskalaisen *nouveau romanin* tuotoksissa. Taiteellinen itsemurha on ironisen modernismin - siis radikaalin realismin - lopullinen umpikuja.

Postmodernistit pyrkivät pois tästä umpikujasta korostamalla taiteellista metaforaa *taiteena* eikä siis todellisuuden imitaationa, kuten naivissa kirjallisuudessa oli laita. Taiteella on omat perusmuotonsa, jotka eivät välttämättä ole sidoksissa todellisuuteen. Mitä todellisuutta musiikin fuuga tai rondo kuvaavat? Samoin romaanin juoni, yhtenäiset henkilökuvaukset, kausaalisuhteet jne., jotka Beckett ja Robbe-Grillet ovat poistaneet epätodellisina, ovat olennainen osa romaanin taidetta ja siksi arvokkaita. Näin postmodernistit ovat pyrkineet palaamaan taiteeseen ja sen perinteisiin muotoihin, joihin kuuluu mm. realismikin, eräs sovinnainen ja keinotekoinen (siis taiteellinen) tapa kuvata yleisiä käsityksiä todellisuudesta.

Modernismissa älyllinen uskottavuus (ironia) ja esteettinen nautinto (metafora) olivat toisiaan poissulkevia; tulos oli usein älyllisesti purevia mutta esteettisesti ikävyyttäviä lukuhetkiä. Palatessaan metaforaan postmodernistit korostavat esteettistä nautintoa taiteen yhtenä

taiteen tärkeimpänä tehtävänä; kuitenkin he eivät näin tahdo tyytyä naiville metaforalle tyypilliseen äylliseen tyhjiöön. Hienon tasapainon saavuttaakseen he pyrkivät säilyttämään sekä metaforisen että ironisen aineksen teoksisiaan; voidaan siis puhua postmodernismissä vallitsevasta ironia-metafora-dialektiikasta. Toisaalla - esim. Barthin *Lost in the Funhouse*ssa - ironia korostuu, mutta toisaalla pääpaino on metaforalla; ironian esiintuoma skeptisyys pidetään mukana, korostamassa kaiken olevan vain taidetta eikä totuutta, mutta taustalla.

Jälkimmäisestä vaihtoehdosta *Giles Goat-Boy* on oivallinen esimerkki. Vaikka dialektiikka ironian kanssa säilyy, romaanin neljä kerronnallista päätasoa liikkuvat metaforan alueella: *kieli* (tyyli), *Yhdysvaltain nykyhistoria* (miljö), *sankarimyytti* ("faabeli") ja *filosofia* (teema: juoni eli "sujet," henkilöt, aatteet). Näiden voidaan käsittää muodostavan metaforan sisällä toisen dialektiikan akselilla *metafiktio* (fiktio fiktiosta) - *metafysiikka* (ihmisen ja universumin tarkastelu). Dialektiikat - ironia/metafora ja metafiktio/metafysiikka - yhdessä määrittävät *Giles Goat-Boyn* taiteellisen kokonaisnäkömyksen, joka voidaan esittää kuviona:



Tutkielman ensimmäinen osa selvittelee postmodernismin ja Barthin romaanin historiallista ja teoreettista taustaa. Toisessa osassa siirrytään romaanin tyylintutkimukseen,

jossa tarkastellaan siinä esiintyvien kehys- ja sisäkertomusten parodista kieltä, tyyllillisiä henkilökuvaus- ja kertoja-päähenkilön tyyliä.

Kolmannessa osassa keskitytään romaanin miljööseen tutkimalla sen parodisia yhteyksiä John F. Kennedyn aikaiseen amerikkalaiseen yhteiskuntaan ja maailmanpolitiikkaan, Amerikan historiallista taustaa ja romaanin antiapokalyptista suhtautumista kolmannen maailmansodan syttymisen mahdollisuuteen.

Neljäs osa selvittelee tapaa, jolla Barth on sovittanut romaaninsa juonen pohjaksi Joseph Campbellin ja Lord Raglanin tulkintoja sankarimyytistä; ja viides osa analysoi romaanin tematiikkaa allegorisesti esitetyn filosofian mukaan. Tällöin keskitytään romaanin Bildungsromanin tapaiseen juoneen, allegorisiin henkilökuvaus- ja abstraktioiden allegoriseen tutkiskeluun.

Kuudes osa pyrkii kokonaisanalyysiin käsittelemällä em. kahta dialektiikkaa - ironia/metafora ja metafiktio/metafysiikka - romaanin "visiona" eli kokonaisnäkökuvanä.

Barthin monitasoinen ja monimerkityksinen romaani tarjoaa useitakin kiintoisia tutkimuskohteita ja -tapoja. Tässä tutkielmassa romaania on pyritty analysoimaan mahdollisimman kokonaisvaltaisesti; yksityiskohtaista huomiota on pyritty kiinnittämään sen kaikkiin merkittäviin muodollisiin ja sisällöllisiin kerrontatasoihin. Parhaaksi analyytiseksi metodiksi näin osoittautui formalistinen lähestymistapa, jossa romaania ei soviteta mihinkään valmiiseen käsitteelliseen viitekehukseen vaan induktiivisesti annetaan sen avautua tarjoamaan sille itselleen sopivia teoreettisia kategorioita.