

The Humanist Principle:
A Philosophical Criticism of Characterization
in John Barth's Novels

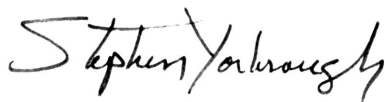
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The way John Barth's characters try to answer the question of their own identity is the thematic catalyst for the conflicts and crises in his fiction.* Some characters come to happier and more purposeful conclusions because they come to who they are and what it means to have that identity; some characters do not come to happy or purposeful conclusions. The characters' answers to the identity question have specific hierarchical values depending upon the completeness of their answers and the characters' fates. These answers and fates differ according to the philosophy the characters embody.

The vehicle Barth uses to have his characters question their identity is the concept of masks. The mask is a dramatic device used both in classical Greek and in Japanese No theater. But there is a deeper, more primitive use for the mask in religious ceremonies. Barth is able to use effectively the concept of the mask because

* All notation will follow the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers. Eds. Joseph Gibaldi and Walter S. Achtert. 2nd ed. New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1984.

it has roots deeply entrenched in man's cultural history. In The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology, Joseph Campbell discusses the importance of the mask in primitive rituals. His introduction, "The Lesson of the Mask," explains how a primitive religious participant finds a sense of identity in his god through a ritual involving a mask. This specific use of a mask shows how a not-so-primitive Barth character can employ the same process in his life story.

According to Campbell, the central focus of a primitive festival is the ceremonial mask. Everyone who participates in the ritual is aware that the mask is made of wood and that a man is wearing the mask. But during the festival rites these things do not matter. The wearer of the mask "does not merely represent the god; he is the god" (21). The animated representation comes to life. Campbell explains that this is a dynamic process moving from the "level of sentiments . . . to the conscious plane." He calls the stages of this movement the phase "of becoming" and "of being" (23). In the participant's mind the reality of the mask's being wooden and the man's being flesh and blood is subjugated to the feeling that the god is actually there.

In Barth's first novel, The Floating Opera, the protagonist, Todd Andrews, speaks about masks as "a matter of attitudes, of stances" (15). Andrews claims to have assumed four or five such masks, each of which was the

answer to a dilemma at a certain point in his life. He calls this phenomenon "the mastery of my fact" (15). But Andrews goes on to concede that quantitative changes in the fact of his existence required qualitative changes in his relationship to the world, and so, he "had the job to face of changing masks" (15). Changes in his social, emotional, or physical environment required adaptation, the inescapable law of survival.

Here in the second chapter of Barth's first novel lies the thematic foundation of all his novels. Their crises, conflicts, and resolutions revolve around the concept of identity. The characters respond to dilemmas either by adjusting their masks to fit their environment or by succumbing to their inability to choose a fitting response. In each work the concept of the mask is explicitly or implicitly addressed.¹ The characters who fail to adapt do so because they cannot deal with the psychological conflicts of their position. These characters are always in a phase of becoming and never in one of being. In other words, they cannot accept the fact that their persona is their identity.

When Jake Horner introduces himself in Barth's The End of the Road, he questions the cogency of his identity by saying, "IN A SENSE I AM JACOB HORNER" (1). The rest of the novel recounts his hopeful, yet ultimately tragic search for identity. Chronologically the plot begins with

Jake's paralysis. His life had come to a sudden halt on the evening of March 16, 1951, when he was struck immobile by "cosmopsis" (73), a disease characterized by being unable to choose from among the infinite possibilities of existence. Jake is taken in by a quack-genius doctor who helps him "mobilize" by prescribing a series of hitherto unknown psychotherapies. The therapy that frees Jake from the Remobilization Farm is mythotherapy. Mythotherapy is the most primitive mode of self assertion that a person uses to face the world. The doctor explains that the human norm is to mythologize oneself into the role of the hero in every life situation. The hero-role is a mask that will sufficiently protect the ego until a situation arises to which the mask does not apply (The End of the Road 88-90). At this point crisis ensues and results in either a mask change or mental illness.

The problem with Jake is that he is not aware that he may choose to be the hero of his situations, that he may assert his will by choosing a mask. The doctor explains Jake's problem to Jake in this analysis:

You claim to be unable to choose in many situations. . . . Well I claim that that inability is only theoretically inherent in situations when there is no chooser. Given a particular chooser, it's unthinkable. So, since the inability was displayed in your case, the

fault lies not in the situation but in the fact that there was no chooser. Choosing is existence: to the extent that you don't choose, you don't exist. (The End of the Road 83)

This quotation indicates that Jake contracts cosmopsis because he will not choose to act. "Choice and action" are the tools with which the doctor will try to make Jake "conscious of . . . [his] . . . existence" (The End of the Road 83). Since choosing is existence, Jake must be conscious that he can make choices and that there are choices to be made, if he is to be cured of cosmopsis.

To recognize that choosing a direction is necessary requires first a fundamental understanding that any one thing in the world is related to other things. To foster this understanding in Jake, the doctor tells him to "study the World Almanac" (The End of the Road 85), a book which lists and orders the world into a series of relationships.

By using the World Almanac to discover that things are related one to the other, Jake starts down a long and disparaging road. Instead of taking to heart the lesson inherent in seeing relationships, that is understanding that the self is related to the things around it, Jake simply collects the objects he studies as so much data. He associates data with other data as a computer does, with no feeling. Barth reveals this most fully in LETTERS, where every letter that Jake Horner writes

includes at least one healthy paragraph listing the important events which happened throughout modern history on the day that he writes (18, 97, 278, 401, 473, 569, 579, 738).² Jake's lists are catalogues without meaning. These catalogues show that Jake takes in information, stores it, and feeds it out automatically without choosing which information is important. From his initial bout of cosmopsis to his conclusion in LETTERS, Jake fails to learn to act out of choice.

Jake has lost himself, or his "self," in the objects and data he collects. In William James' four-part structure of the self, James defines man's "instinctive impulse" to collect as the fundamental element in the material self (one of the four parts) (qtd. in Organ 22). Jake is not simply centered in the material self as opposed to the social self, spiritual self, or pure ego, the other three parts of the whole man (Organ 21ff), he comes to resemble the catalogues he amasses. His identity is simply a mirror of the information he has stored. Jake cannot apply his catalogues to the world in which he lives by forging a mask from the information he has collected. Because Jake's paralysis was caused by an absolute annihilation of masks and mask-making abilities, the doctor sends Jake out to relearn mythotherapy and to reorganize his self in the highly structured role of a prescriptive grammar teacher (The End of the Road 5).

Jake fails in his mission to reorganize his self, because he cannot reestablish a link with his sentimental level of consciousness. Jake begins well enough by wearing the mask of the well qualified job applicant and the sexually confident young man, but he quickly becomes lost when he chooses Joe Morgan as a role model. In his attempt to reestablish contact with his sentiments, Jake sees the apparently candid and serious marriage of Joe and Rennie Morgan as a paragon of emotional integrity and seeks to become as honest as they are. Instead of emulating that righteous honesty, Jake intrudes on a tenuous battle for sanity. (In Barth's novel Chimera, Deliades faces a similar situation. When Deliades assumes his hero-brother Bellerophon's identity, he assumes the mantel of the heroic cycle. Although his imposture is convincing, the god's rejection of him is an indictment of inappropriate mask-wearing.)

A conflict between Jake and Joe is inevitable because each is unprepared to compromise his own position and to mediate their differences. Jake Horner's uncompromising position is a product of his singular reliance on the material self, a position which places him on the edge of non-existence because he has no subjective or spiritual sense of identity within his self. Jake is unable to "argue and discriminate," to derive a "moral sensibility," or to be conscious of his "indomitable will" (Solomon 23).

If Jake had been aware of these parts of his whole self, he would never have been paralyzed in a train station by the relatively simple discriminatory task of choosing a destination (The End of the Road 74).

Joe Morgan, on the other hand, is entirely centered in his spiritual self, his ego. He prides himself in being able to "argue and discriminate" the terms of his "moral sensibility" and the direction of his "indomitable will." Rennie Morgan's description of her very serious introduction to Joe shows that their marriage is built on the ability to argue the terms of and to determine the discriminatory principles of "moral sensibility" in a world which is "full of tons and tons of horseshit, and without any purpose" (The End of the Road 61). Thus, Joe finds no value in the material self because it develops in a world without value. He responds by assigning value only to those things about which he wishes to care, a purely arbitrary act of egoism. Joe is therefore able to remove or ignore emotions, which would complicate his life, by arbitrarily structuring a world in which he can expend emotion only on those things prescribed for that purpose (i.e., Rennie, his children, etc.).

Rennie Morgan's tragic death in this environment is inevitable. Among the three principal characters only she has the ability to see or use the virtues of materialism and egoism, but she denies herself both of those virtues

when she struggles on the curette during the abortion of a child who may be either Jake's or Joe's, and aspirates on her own vomitus under anesthesia. Rennie was metaphorically the humanist mean, the normative function that balanced the philosophical extremes of Jake and Joe. But Rennie was unable to continue balancing Jake and Joe as each withdrew further from the mean when the adultery became known. The unborn child was a symbol of further imbalance. As the product of either Jake or Joe, the child tipped the scales. Rennie's death, which she insures by eating soon before surgery, removes the human norm from Jake's and from Joe's lives. Jake and Joe were left in a void without human identity.

In the void between The End of the Road and LETTERS, Jake and Joe had gone their separate ways. Jake had returned to and stayed with the Remobilization Farm as the doctor's assistant. Jake still considered himself a patient even after sixteen years of therapy. Joe had raised his two sons while making an emotional comeback as a librarian for the Maryland Historical Society, and later as President of Marshyhope State University. He also came under the tutelage and manipulation of Andre Castine. Castine managed both Joe's selection and dismissal at Marshyhope. Upon his dismissal Joe developed a drug problem and consequently turns up at the Remobilization Farm demanding that Jake bring Rennie back to life. This

reintroduction of Jake and Joe shows their positions reversed.

In LETTERS, it is Jake who lives in self-delusionary life in a secure environment. He lives under a complex but highly structured system of rules for dealing with the world. The system involves three decision-making patterns: "Sinistrality, Antecedence, and Alphabetical Priority." Sinistrality says that if there are two choices side by side, "choose the one on the left." If the choices are "consecutive in time," then Antecedence dictates that Jake should "choose the first." And Alphabetical Priority says choose the choice which begins with "the earlier letter in the alphabet," if Sinistrality or Antecedence cannot be applied (The End of the Road 85).

This time it is Joe Morgan who intrudes. Joe is now the character asking for definition. The definition he demands requires that Rennie Morgan be reborn. He says, "We historians are always reinterpreting the past. . . . But if history is a trauma, maybe the thing to do is redream it" (LETTERS 107). Joe does not want to pick up where he left off with Rennie; he wants to establish a new life for himself with her in the present. The real problem is not exposed until the end of the book. Joe wants Rennie reborn so that she is untouched (sexually) by Jake. If she were reborn thus, Joe could "redream" the history that Jake set down in writing. That

history is the novel The End of the Road published by John Barth who acts as a character in LETTERS. This is the real problem, that Jake writes the script which Barth claims to have found (LETTERS 340). Since the history has been published, Joe cannot rewrite it, so he wishes to redream it (LETTERS 743). Consequently, Jake is Joe's proposed Christ-who-can-raise-Lazarus. Needless to say, Jake Horner cannot put on a Christ-mask of any kind, nor adequately atone for his sin of writing the story that became The End of the Road.

Barth's reintroduction of Jake and Joe in LETTERS repositions the two in correspondingly untenable positions. Finally both characters reach personal solutions, but neither compromises nor mediates his position. Their last conclusions are just as inevitable as their first. In their first conclusions, they lost their human identity. In their second conclusions they end their questions of identity.

Jake Horner's sixteen years of training in self-knowledge and decision-making produce an automaton. Jake tells the doctor that all his decisions are rigorously exercised according to Alphabetical Priority. This gives him a fool-proof system for making decisions (LETTERS 99). He has replaced his former highly emotional state with a total annihilation of feeling. Jake now wears a blank mask, a mask which doesn't define an

identity. Jake's attempt to remobilize in The End of the Road was complicated by an emotional attachment to Rennie Morgan. All meaning in his life was related to his manic-depressive moods. But Jake's ability to leave the Remobilization Farm at the end of LETTERS was facilitated by his ability to arbitrarily structure his world in opposition to an apparently random universe and thus remove all complicating emotions. This was exactly Joe Morgan's position in the first novel. To protect his structure, Jake marries the already pregnant, extremely cold and lifeless Marsha Mensch. This insures Jake a direction for his life, to care for Marsha as she rehabilitates from her drug abuse and to be her husband. Jake invests all his labor in Marsha as an object. This is obvious because no man could love Marsha as a person when she calls him a "creep" while preparing to have sex with Joe Morgan in return for drugs on her wedding night. Jake achieved what Joe could not, an impregnable system for dealing with the world, even in the face of Marsha's rebuff. Of course, such a system is impregnable because the intrinsic value in everything is ignored. Jake's system is a secret code with no key, and therefore, no meaning. In Giles Goat-Boy, Dr. Eierkopf fell into the same trap. No amount of scientific, political, or social structuring enabled him to achieve salvation.

Joe, however, is able to complete the act which Jake

could not. Joe takes the gun he introduced in The End of the Road and uses it to kill himself in LETTERS. Just as Jake achieves meaninglessness by arbitrarily structuring his world, Joe achieves meaning by deconstructing his. Joe tells Jake that Jake's "suspended motion" (LETTERS 105) was not suicide or death, as Jake held, but it was nothing: "Dying's different from this. Dying is something. This is nothing" (LETTERS 106). Joe's world disassembles part by part until it becomes clear to him that he has failed to understand his capacity to love. This capacity required that his love be extended to an object outside himself, Rennie. In The End of the Road, Joe failed to realize that Rennie was an essential part of himself. In LETTERS, he realizes that he cannot fill the absent part of himself with his impossible vision of Rennie resurrected. Instead of trying to fill the void in his life with other objects, Joe completes his annihilation by suicide.

Although Jake apparently is facing the world with a spiritual mask, he actually is deriving his sense of identity from Marsha Mensch. At its root, this is a material world-view. And, even though Joe's dependence on his vision of Rennie is a material mask, his suicide is a strong statement of self-determination. Joe discerns the futility of his stance and commits suicide, expressing his "indomitable will." Joe's suicide is more clearly a human

act than is Jake's nihilism. The ability to say no, even to life, separates man from the animals (Brennan and Yarbrough Chapter 2, 3). Jake's reflexive automation is, therefore, not an assertion of his humanity. Materialism, it follows, is thus a beginning stage which must be surpassed. Spiritualism, or egoism, though, must be tempered with materialism to place the subjective self in a world perspective. This is a basic tenet of existentialism to which Joe unfortunately did not subscribe.

For Jean-Paul Sartre, the question of identity is fundamentally a question of the structure of consciousness. Sartre begins his existential examination of consciousness by reconsidering Husserl's famous doctrine, "All consciousness is consciousness of something" (qtd. in Solomon 312). Sartre offers two ways to interpret this statement: "Either we understand by this that consciousness is constitutive of the being of its object, or it means that consciousness in its inmost nature is a relation to a transcendent being" (qtd. in Solomon 312). That is to say, either our conscious activity produces the objects of which we are conscious, or the quality of our consciousness (our identity) is produced by the quality of the objects which we consciously perceive. Sartre sides with the later interpretation, because only man can make his own

consciousness the object of his perception. The very act of reflecting on the self, therefore, creates the self. For Sartre, the critical case in this reasoning is man's ability to be conscious of absence. Because absence is an absolute lack of "being," thoughts of absence occur only in consciousness. Being conscious of absence, for Sartre, is the ultimate explanation of what has transcendence, because thoughts of absence are a consciousness of lack and not a lack of consciousness (Solomon 312-313). So, consciousness is a being aware that it produces "itself as a revealed-revelation of a being which is not it and which gives itself as already existing when consciousness reveals it" (qtd. in Solomon 315).

The end result is Sartre's completion of Heidegger's definition of Dasein, "there-being": "Consciousness is a being such that in its being, its being implies a being other than itself" (qtd. in Solomon 315). To question consciousness is in effect to ask, "Who am I?" How I ask that question is always changing. Since what I am is a product of how I question what I am, I am always changing; and yet, since I am always questioning, I am always the same. The pattern of questioning my identity transcends all my particular questions. Thus the answers to my particular questions do not define my particular self. My questioning self is already given a priori, and is continually regiven in the present as my current point of

view.

The essential existential character in John Barth's fiction is Todd Andrews. As was previously noted, Andrews appears in Barth's first novel, The Floating Opera. He also reappears in LETTERS with Jake Horner and Joe Morgan, and like them he finds his end. Throughout his story, Todd Andrews defines his identity by the act of questioning.

Todd Andrews makes several discoveries during the two crucial periods of his life. The first period progresses from the day of his father's suicide to the day Todd decides to kill himself and then changes his mind. Todd is twenty when he begins his self-inquiry and is twenty-nine years old on his father's death date. He is thirty-seven on the day he changed his mind. The action in LETTERS takes place forty-nine years after Andrews had begun his self-inquiry, yet he is still the same questioning son of his father.

Andrews' identity is centered in his questioning. At twenty, he begins what he calls "the Letter to My Father" (The Floating Opera 216). This letter was begun as an explanation of what Andrews thought would be an early death. He expected to drop dead from a heart attack due to complications from a childhood case of subacute bacteriological endocarditis, and he wanted to clear the air about certain problems he would leave behind. By this

letter, Todd hoped to reconcile any confusion which might result from the poor communication he shared with his father, but the letter continues as a self-inquiry even after his father's suicide.

Todd's father had not been so kind as to leave an explanatory note. As a result, Todd launched into two other inquiries, one on his father's life and one on his death. The life-inquiry was a preliminary inquiry into his father's death. It studied the influences which affected the man who suddenly killed himself on Groundhog Day, 1930. The death-inquiry was to be the final chapter of the life-inquiry. According to Todd, the purpose of these inquiries was not to find the reason for his father's suicide, but "to make as short as possible the gap between fact and opinion . . ." (The Floating Opera 215). Andrews only shortens the gap because he feels it is unleapable. Like Sartre, Andrews is questioning even the concept of absence, the void of surity that lies in the gap between fact and opinion. Todd admits that the contents of that gap are unknowable, and yet he continues to question.

Todd's inability to know the reason for his father's death causes a philosophical crisis. For this reason he commits his life to his inquiries:

One needs, even in my position, something to counter-balance the immediacy of a one-day-at-a-

time existence, a life on the installment plan. Hence my Inquiry. . . . My Inquiry is timeless, in effect; that is, I proceed as though I had eternity to inquire in. And, because processes persisted in long enough tend to become ends in themselves, it is enough for me to do an hour's work, or two hour's work, on my Inquiry every night after supper, to make me feel just a little outside of time and heartbeats. (The Floating Opera 49-50)

Andrew's assertion here is self-delusionary. His Inquiry is not "timeless," it is time consuming; and he is a time consumer. Todd is simply drifting through his life without purpose. This becomes apparent when he closes his notes for his Inquiry before he goes to commit suicide, but subsequently returns with a revision - five concluding propositions about the nature of life:

- I. Nothing has intrinsic value.
- II. The reasons for which people attribute value to things are always ultimately irrational.
- III. There is, therefore, no ultimate "reason" for valuing anything.
- IV. Living is action. There's no final reason for action.
- V. There's no final reason for living.

(The Floating Opera 218, 223)

Andrew's reason for committing suicide is that nothing has any value in and of itself, including life. Therefore, his decision to commit suicide has no intrinsic value. But he none the less pursues his course passionately. So passionately, in fact, that he tries to take with him his mistress, her husband (his best friend), a girl who might be his daughter, and half of his hometown by blowing up "Adam's Original and Unparalleled Floating Opera" during a performance. Fortunately for the town, he fails. Todd Andrews then returns home and stoically revises his fifth proposition: "V. There's no final reason for living (or for suicide)" (The Floating Opera 245). This parenthetical amendment reopens the notes of his Inquiry and his life as a time consumer.

The second crucial period in Todd Andrews' life occurs in LETTERS. He is sixty-nine years old, has been making Inquiry notes for forty-nine years, and refers to himself as a "Stock Bourgeois-Liberal Tragic-Viewing Humanist" (LETTERS 89). His view of life changed dramatically two years earlier when he suddenly realized the grammatical error in saying "Nothing has intrinsic value." The error was emphatic. He redefines his understanding by saying, "that Nothing has intrinsic value . . . which is as much as to say: Everything has intrinsic value!" (LETTERS 96).

This realization, though, does not lead Andrews down a primrose path of positive reinforcement. After reevaluating his life through this new mask, he sees that he has been crippled by his former values. He finds that his relationship with Jane Mack, his mistress from The Floating Opera, was empty, and their short and unsatisfying resumption of the affair proved it. He also finds that he had loved and lost Polly Lake, his secretary, who he should have married. But in the face of these discoveries, Todd Andrews makes a new and more terrifying discovery. He realizes that he may commit suicide without surrendering. The reader never knows if Todd Andrews actually dies, but we might as well assume he does because his suicide would be an ironic triumph. Andrew's suicide differs from Joe Morgan's by the fact that it was both rational and passionate. Morgan's was simply passionate, an unpremeditated emotional response to utter failure. Todd Andrew's decision was a narrowing of the gap between reason and passion, an active drifting much like Jake Horner's "suspended motion."

But by his existential viewpoint, which was capitalized by his discovery of Nothing's value, Todd Andrews makes even his suicide valuable. Andrews' identity was on the edge of fulfillment. He only lacked something which he mistakenly claimed to have had, a Humanist world-view. If he had had this viewpoint, he

could have mediated his loves and bitteresses. His passion for death would have been a passion for life. In the end, Todd Andrews mistook the merely typical negative occurrences in his life for the truly representative positive outcomes of his responses to crises. That is to say, he feels that his loss of Jane Mack and Polly Lake weighs more heavily on his mind than the love he felt and still feels for them. Pain in life is a merely typical occurrence common to all creatures human or non-human, but love is an emotion which defines an identity as specifically human and, therefore, truly representative of the human condition. A realization like love gives identity a positive sense.

Not all of John Barth's characters fail to realize a positive sense of identity. Those that do (e.g., Giles of Giles Goat-Boy and Fenwick Turner of Sabbatical), take three important steps. These three steps lead to a humanistic philosophy, a philosophy which is primarily concerned with the maintenance of a mediatory principle through the forbearance of the will (Brennan and Yarbrough, Chapter 2, 1). The first step towards a humanistic philosophy is the development of a human identity. The second step is to recognize that an individual's human identity is structured as a part of the greater unity that is the world. This recognition is achieved by critical inspection of the relationships

between the self and its environment. The third and final step introduces a positive affirmation of purpose. Failure to take any of these steps creates a gap in an individual's sense of self. In that gap crises can occur which may cripple the individual or call into question the cogency of his identity. The cogency of identity is questioned because the individual standards stabilize a character's sense of identity by working for a purpose. Such a purpose may simply be happiness, but happiness cannot be maintained if the world pulls a character's emotions to extremes; therefore, a character must actively mediate the factors which cause emotional extremes, or he will lose his happiness. Jake Horner, Joe Morgan, and Todd Andrews demonstrate that crises can and probably will occur when identity and/or the purposefulness of identity are called into question.

Barth's character Giles the Goat-Boy demonstrates Horner's, Morgan's, and Andrews' failure by his success. Giles passes through all three of these steps and comes finally to have a definitive sense of identity. His sense of identity follows directly from his "ability to distinguish the truly representative from the merely typical," a gift which Irving Babbitt calls "grace" (Brennan and Yarbrough, Chapter 2, 6).

Giles was not born with this gift. The circumstances of his birth, in fact, are as mysterious as the method by

which he later receives grace. The reader must finally accept that Giles was begotten by a woman and a computer. His mother's father then tried to put him to death. Like Oedipus, he was saved by kindness, injured his foot in the process, and grew up with a goat-herd. Barth creates a novel twist to the Oedipus myth through Giles. The twist is that Giles thinks he is a goat.

During this early period of his life Giles is called Billy Bocksfuss. This identity was unencumbered by the discrepancies between the fact of Giles' human physique and his goatish thoughts and life, just as the religious participants in Joseph Campbell's "The Lesson of the Mask" were unencumbered by the discrepancy between the facticity of the mask and its human wearer, and accepted that the mask became the god it represented. These beliefs both depend on the human mind's power to establish a unity by reaching out and seizing "likenesses and analogies"; this power to create is called imagination by Babbitt. Babbitt claims that this power must be subjected to analysis by a critical intellect "from the point of view of reality" unless the imagination is to be allowed to comment only upon appearances and not upon reality (Brennan and Yarbrough, Chapter 2, 8). Imagination should not be allowed to continue in this manner; for if it does, it will lead man away from the goal of happiness, a humanist given.

Giles', Billy Bocksfuss', imagination receives a sore blow as the young man becomes aware that he has a sexual identity. This awakening is associated specifically with his standing erect as opposed to his usual goatish four-point stance. He stands up first for his mother, the Lady Creamhair as he calls her, even though he does not know her relation to him. Here, Barth uses the Freudian interpretation of the Oedipus myth. He creates a rather disturbing scene in which the all too innocent Giles tries to copulate with his mother (Giles Goat-Boy 74ff). Giles' sexual awareness and his human awareness emerge through produced with the word "erection." He stands erect both physically as a bi-ped should and sexually as an animal should. But he is shown that a human must do both by his rutting battle with Redfern's Tom, a buck on the farm.

This battle occurs after Giles returns from his attempt to mate with Lady Creamhair excited by his trial and unsatisfied with her rejection and flight. His hormonal strengths awakened, he plays a rough game of tag with Redfern's Tom. The game escalates into a battle for mating rights as the ewes and dams come to watch; it is mating season. Giles throws Tom and apparently wins, but when he stands erect to use his purely human initiative to open the gate and break the breeding schedule with Hedda of the Speakled Teats, Tom knocks Giles' legs from under him and has his own way with Hedda. Giles kills Tom with

a shepard's crook (Giles Goat-Boy 77-80). Giles then takes his injured legs and heart to Max, his keeper. Giles crosses the road to the branch library, leaving the farm for the first time.

In the library, Giles learns of his birth. From this revelation he makes the cognitive leap to a human identity. The reality that his mother was human and that WESCAC, the super-computer, used human sperm in his creation allows him to realize that he is a man. He releases his goat name by saying, "Not Billy any more! Billy Bocksfuss is dead in the goat-pens" (Giles Goat-Boy 109). This transition from goat to human parallels Adam and Eve's fall from innocence. The transition is from an innocent view that is simply a case of survival, a quantitative existence, to the human idea that life has levels of quality. Thus, the innocent goat in Giles is dead, and the human in him sets out to learn the criteria for quality. For a while after his realization, Giles takes the name of his brain-damaged savior, George Herrold. Giles shortens the name to George by which name he is baptized a "human student" (Giles Goat-Boy 110-111).

Giles' new position shows how the development of a human identity is synonymous with the development of a will, an internal ability to measure ideas against reality and to act on the resultant answer. Giles acts by recognizing he is not a goat and moving forward to become

a human. In fact, he uses the next seven years to catch up to his contemporaries (Giles Goat-Boy 113).

Giles' actions contrast Jake Horner's. Jake never asserts a will to change the course of events in which he is involved. When Peggy Rankin, the "Forty-Year-Old Pickup," spoils the pickup game by expecting sympathy and courtly manners, Jake finishes the game despite its unattractiveness (The End of the Road 27-28). And when he and Rennie Morgan commit their first adultery, he claims not to have thought about the genesis or the consequences of the act; nor does he think that anyone would in that situation. He allows things to happen to him, saying, ". . . one rides along then on the sense of an inevitability, a too-lateness, in which he does not really believe, but which for one reason or another he does not see fit to question" (The End of the Road 100-101).

Giles, in his youth and innocence, does not subscribe to the tenets of too-lateness; he moves forward from his mistakes by correcting them, thus asserting his will. Jake succumbs to embarrassment and fear: "The act of will required to make the tiny motion of lifting the telephone was beyond me" (The End of the Road 106). Jake, therefore, cannot assert his human will, nor does he change. His actions continue to be only reflexive and not assertive, withdrawing into his masks without reference to what is behind them.

Giles does not stumble onto the concept of mask until later in his narrative. But all the knowledge he acquires between the revelation of his human identity and the lesson he learns from the concept of masks adds together the factors for a new revelation: that identity is not simply self-willed, but is the will's expression set in the context of the will's environment. This lesson is hard taught and comes only after Giles is almost lynched for his mistakes.

After his seven years of tutoring, Giles makes the intuitive leap that he might be the Grand-Tutor, that is, a messiah. Max talks him down, calling his position vain and crazy, but the thought never really leaves him. After a dream, Giles sets off for New Tammany College to realize his Grand Tutorhood. This time it is Max who comes around and believes in Giles, and with George Herrold they all set off for New Tammany.

As one might expect from the political allusion, New Tammany is a hot bed of political intrigue. Giles enters the college by passing a test that no one had ever passed before. He gains entrance by confronting a diabolical machine guarded by a symbolic "Dean O'Flunks" (played by the character Maurice Stoker). Giles' blinding self-determination tells him to dare this course instead of finding another way to register, yet he succeeds in conquering the great joke of New Tammany, the Commencement

Gate. All other matriculees enter quite easily without the gate; they simply go around and present their identification cards. Giles has no card, but, like Joe Morgan, he substitutes his determination and physical fact for certification of identity.

Once in the college, Giles is allowed to test his Grand Tutorhood by descending into the restricted section of his father, WESCAC, the computer. By all rights, unless he is the Grand Tutor, he should be killed by WESCAC. He survives by wearing Harold Bray's, his archetypal archenemy's, mask (Giles Goat-Boy 427-428).

The fact that Giles survived what he should not have is proof that the computer could not kill him, or that the mask protected him, or that the computer knew that Giles was his son and would not kill him. The reader will probably choose the second reason because Harold Bray is later able to exit the computer's restricted section using his own mask. But the mask has another purpose; it throws Giles into a quandry about who is the Grand Tutor and why does Bray's mask enable him to succeed. The interior question is "Who am I and what doe sit mean to be me?"

Just as Joe Morgan does after Rennie Morgan's death, Giles loses himself in hard work. The result of his hard work is the conclusion that he has solved the "University" (world) crisis by causing the East Campus and West Campus to separate their "power lines" (the very real power

supplies to their super-computers EASCAC and WESCAC). This he thinks will cause room to be made between the materialistic West Campus, and the collectively ego-centered (communist) East Campus. He sees a no man's land between the two power lines which will absorb both the electrical and the ideological tensions (Giles Goat-Boy 510). The reality is, of course, that his meddling caused the belligerents to remove themselves to isolated extremes where they fester in their own ideologies like untreated injuries. Their tensions increase, and the increased energies of their hate fill the gap as full as it was before, only now the parties are more volatile.

For his pains, Giles is taken off to be lynched. Actually, Harold Bray is taken off to be lynched wearing a Giles mask. The mistake is not discovered until Giles takes off his Harold Bray mask (he was wearing the mask because he had been to the computer's restricted section a second time). With Giles now in Bray's place, the lynching resumes. Giles awakens in jail thinking he is in hell and realizes his mistakes, "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" (Giles Goat-Boy 581). By this he means that salvation, passage, is damnation, failure. His failure through his willfulness, pride, and self-determination makes Giles see that he

disregarded the political realities and the personal reality that the salvation he sought was a kind of damnation. At least he survived the ordeal, by luck or fate; Joe Morgan did not.

In LETTERS, Joe Morgan's attempt to resurrect Rennie Morgan by forcing Jake Horner to make it happen ends in obvious failure. Joe responds by shooting himself. Joe commits suicide because his will proved insufficient to control reality. The reality in his life is that Rennie is dead, and that neither he nor Jake can change that fact. Joe chooses not to live with that fact. The real problem is that Joe's solipsistic self-determination did not allow for contradictory absolutes: his ego-centeredness denied the possibility of anything having intrinsic value; only things which he gave value could have value (The End of the Road 61).

When Giles is saved from the noose, he is given a chance to overcome this very position. He goes from believing "A Grand Tutor does what I do. . . . It's not what I do, it's because I do it" (Giles Goat-Boy 234) to saying that all absolutes are equated to their converse simply because an opposition exists, that truth and falsehood are the same (Giles Goat-Boy 250-251). Thus, he moves from Joe Morgan's point of view in The End of the Road that things have value only because he, Joe, gave them value, to Todd Andrew's viewpoint in The Floating

Opera that nothing has intrinsic value.

Like Andrews, though, Giles is in the process of self-evaluation. The lesson he learned from Bray's mask at his lynching taught him to measure his deeds by their effect on those around him, on his environment. His self-evaluation leads him to believe that "Chicken and egg . . . [are] . . . false distinctions" (Giles Goat-Boy 641). The effect of Giles' notion that opposites are equated to each other by their mutual definition leads him to think that there is no value at all, that there are questions but no answers (Giles Goat-Boy 641). With this philosophy, which he happily tells everyone, Giles influences the East and West Campuses to close the gap between the power lines just as Todd Andrews narrowed the gap between reason and passion. The results are adequately disastrous to send Giles back to the lynch mob. After he sees the mob and is taken, Giles despairs of life, just as Todd Andrews did. Giles realizes that he has made mistakes but does not know the reason for them. To atone for his mistakes he even helps his captors by putting his head in the noose for them (Giles Goat-Boy 698). And yet again he is saved from death.

Giles has taken the first two steps towards a humanist philosophy. He has developed a human identity, and he has recognized that that identity is part of the larger unity of the world. But he has made the same

fundamental error that Todd Andrews made, to think that the world's unity is distinctionless. Finally, Giles comes to the conclusion that Todd Andrews could not, that the world's unity is derived from the bond of opposites, which, in turn, creates distinctions. Giles, through an act of grace, comes to understand there is a mean or norm between opposites that defines the meaning of being distinct. This means that he must actively mediate oppositions lest they separate and become problems which would destroy his sense of identity by tearing him between absolutes; or lest those oppositions unite and negate the sense of purpose which gives meaning to his identity.

All this comes to Giles through a sudden revelation, a grace, or outside force causing him to put the pieces in the proper places. To Maurice Stoker's question whether Leonid Andreich and Peter Greene have passed or failed, been saved or damned, Giles responds in thought:

Stoker's question had been mine since early on in his narrative, and had absorbed me entirely well before he asked it, fetching me from apathy into the intensest concentration of my life. Indeed, my spirit was seized: it was not I concentrating, but something concentrating upon me, taking me over, like spasms of defecation or labor-pains. Leonid Andreich and Peter Greene--their estates were rather the occasion

than the object of this concentration, whose real substance was the fundamental contradictions of failure and passage. (Giles Goat-Boy 708)

Here, Barth describes the moment of grace. The events of Giles' life have added up to create this moment when suddenly he is given understanding:

All things converged: I understood what I had done . . . that circular device on my Assignment-sheet - beginningless, endless, infinite, equivalence



--constricted my reason like a torture-tool from the Age of Faith. 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! Unnamable! Unimaginable! (Giles Goat-Boy 708-709)

Giles is thus given grace and its meaning, but he must accept it. He hangs in limbo for a moment and then lets understanding flow shudderingly through him. The campus bells strike the hour; Giles hears, "So, la, ti, each a tone higher than its predecessor, unbinding, releasing me - then do: my eyes were opened; I was delivered" (Giles Goat-Boy 709).

The terms and effects of Giles' deliverance are revealed in the few remaining pages of his story. From this point he is able to understand when all others do not. Instead of denouncing his past mistakes by erasure or replacement, he uses their incorrectness to prove the correctness of his new plans. He himself stops trying to save humanity and begins to tutor individuals on how to achieve humaneness. In the end we see Giles tired from his work, but without despair. He prepares finally to die at the hands of his enemies, and professes a sincere and deep love for them. Ultimately, Giles realizes that salvation and passage are personal; he may show the way, but cannot create the way to passage. His final words are, "Passed, but not forgotten, I shall rest" (Giles Goat-Boy 764).

Giles receives grace and understands it finally by knowing who he is. He is so assured of himself that the masks he wears always reflect the essential Giles, the man who actually loves humanity, and he is able to create

masks to deal with any situation because he has this essential unity. Thus, by cogent mask making, Giles is also in harmony with the world's unity. This all follows from his revelation of grace which allowed him to be able to distinguish the "truly representative" events in his life from the "merely typical." Jake Horner fails to do this because he cannot assert a will, the assertive part of mediation. Joe Morgan fails to recognize that he must adapt his interior sense of self, his will, to the world. Todd Andrews ultimately fails because he is unable to distinguish the important positive character of the events which happen to him; he can only see his loss and injury. By the completeness of Giles' sense of self, his calmness in the face of death, his assuredness of his salvation, proves the inadequacy of materialism, egoism, and existentialism for dealing with life. Thus humanism emerges as the highest stage in Barth's philosophical influences; for, by humanism, the identity question is answered.

Notes

¹ John Barth, The Floating Opera 15, The End of the Road 90, The Sot-Weed Factor 140, Lost in the Funhouse 168-169, Giles Goat-Boy 578, Chimera 314, 318, LETTERS 713, Sabbatical 356.

² For instance, in his first epistle in LETTERS, a letter to himself, Jake writes: "Cyrano de Bergerac, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Ring Lardner, Michelangelo: happy birthday. The Alamo has fallen to Santa Anna; its garrison massacred. F.D.R. has closed the banks. Franco's cruiser Baleares has been sunk off Cartagena. Napoleon's back from Elba: we approach Day One of the Hundred Days." From here, Jake begins to tell of his life as of March 6, 1969, without further reference to the information above (LETTERS 18ff).

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