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BEYOND EXHAUSTION: JOHN BARTH'S THEMES OF INNOCENCE AND ESCAPE IN "SABBATICAL"

Even an experienced Barth reader may find "Sabbatical", 1982, something of a multi-layered surprise. Its author abandons here his former involvement in elaborate and often huge allegories which range from early colonial past ("The Sot-Weed Factor"), through modern political and technological fantasy ("Giles Goat-Boy"), to ancient mythology ("Lost in the Funhouse", "Chimera") and returns to the reality of the contemporary American scene of his first two novels, "The Floating Opera" and "The End of the Road".

Signs of change in the direction of Barth's prose were already visible in "LETTERS", 1979 in which the author resurrected most of the characters, or their descendants, from his earlier novels in today's United States, and reworked some of the themes of these novels.

This return to the contemporary American setting and the mode of realism is in contradication to Barth's earlier beliefs. In a 1965 interview the novelist officially renounced reality which was, he implied, dramatically uninteresting for modern fiction:

> Since I don't know much about Reality, it will have to be abolished. What the hell, Reality is a nice place to visit but you wouldn't want to live there, and literature never did, very long![1]

[1] J. E n c k, John Barth; An Interview, "Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature" 1965, No. 6, p. 10.

Consequently, after his first two novels Barth all but ceased to portray characters and situations against the background of any recognizable current American locale.

The role and quantity of realism required in a modern novel is cheerfully discussed by the protagonists of "Sabbatical", Fenwick and Susan Turner, who are involved in writing a book which turns out to be "Sabbatical" itself.

> The literary marvelous is what we want, with a healthy dose of realism to keep it ballasted [...] Realism is your keel and ballast of your effing ship and story, and a good plot is your mast and sails. But magic is your wind, Suse [...][2]

Equally surprising in "Sabbatical", though of greater consequence for the novel's ultimate significance, is the unexpected shift in the predominantly uniform aesthetic and dialectic environment of Barth's prose. That such a shift in Barth's novels would take place was predicted in David Morrell's "John Barth, An Introduction", published in 1976, long before "LETTERS" or "Sabbatical". Morrell's supposition was based on conversations he had had with Barth, his agents and editors, as well as on Barth's manuscripts and various unpublished materials. According to Morrell, Barth would "try something new, abstraction again but now not so much in terms of language as in structure [...] and more important (indeed quite unexpected and surprising) a different kind of theme, away from pessimism toward a full-hearted embracement of life, especially love, and a reliance on writing not as anodyne to painful living but as metaphor the truth of which is that the joy one can take in words is the same as the joy one can take in everything"[3]. Morrell's prophesy, partly fulfilled in "Chimera" and "LETTERS", finds a more complete realization in "Sabbatical".

Set in 1980, against the political events of the last year of the Carter presidency, "Sabbatical" describes the final weeks of a long sailing trip which takes Fenwick and Susan, an American couple, from the Chesapeake Bay to Yucatan and the Ca-

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[2] J. B a r t h, Sabbatical, Granada Publishing, 1982, p. 112.

[3] D. M o r r e l l, John Barth, An Introduction, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976, p. 114.

ribbean Islands and back to the shores of eastern United States.

Fenwick, or Fenn, Scott Key Turner, 50, a former employee of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, is a beginning novelist. His first novel, "Kudove", published a year before the trip, was an exposé of the Agency's Clandestine Services division, and strained relations between him and his former colleagues. Attracted to the idêa of becoming a full-time writer and possibly a university teacher, Fenwick is suspended between careers, on a kind of an unpaid sabbatical.

His wife of seven years, Susan Rachel Allan Seckler, 35, is an associate professor of American literature and creative writing. She is on an actual sabbatical from her college.

The novel's subtitle stresses that "Sabbatical" is a romance and much of it lives up to this promise. It is a genuinly moving and tender love story in which the lovers are both intensely modern and sternly traditional, appropriately obsessed with their sexuality, yet almost puritanically oblivious of any extramarital possibilities. Love triangles, so prominent and always destructive in all of Barth's earlier novels disappear here. Fenwick and Susan's union is similarly undisturbed by conflicts of race, social standing, or financial status.

What makes this happily married couple flee, or rather sail away from the life they could have had and, in fact, dream about - having children and family life, successful professional careers - is their inability to accept the world as it is, "regressing like crazy". Fenwick and Susan are worried about the proliferation of nuclear weapons, the power of the military, the cold war, toxic wastes, acid rain. They are perplexed by the growth of organizations like the C.I.A. They fear that the "shadowy world" of such organizations, "the world of information, disinformation, even super disinformed supercoded disinformation" may become synonymous with human relations, where "simple truth and falsehood, fact and fiction, loyalty and disloyalty"[4] become indistinguishable.

The Agency tries to persuade Fenwick to return, and it also attempts to recruit members of his family. His and Susan's ada-

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[4] B a r t h, Sabbatical..., p. 93.

mant refusal to return, as well as their refusal to accept some of their society's social and cultural norms, reveals their moral defiance and honesty, a sense of innocence which Ihab Hassan defines as radical refusal "to accept the immitigable rule of reality" and which he sees as a characteristic feature of a moderna American hero[5].

The dangers and cruelties of life loom large around them. Fenwick's twin brother, Manfred, a former Clandestine Services officer has been missing for more than a year. Allegedly a victim of drowning at sea, he is suspected of having gone to Chile to rescue his son, Gus, imprisoned and tortured by the junta. Both are feared to be dead. Susan's twin sister, Miriam, is a victim of a different kind of violence. Gangraped, beaten and made pregnant by a motorcycle gang, Miriam has given birth to a moronic child.

A sense of invisible danger haunts Fenwick and his wife throughout their voyage. Shots are fired at night on an island which they are surprised to find uncharted, later their own boat is shot at, and a friend dies of a heart attack that could have been induced.

Being rebels worried about the state of the world our protagonists are not overly fearful. They do not develop nihilistic or existential attitudes and they do not assume masks, something the characters of Barth's first two realistic novels could not do without. Similarly absent in "Sabbatical" is the notion that reality exerts a basically destructive or paralyzing influence on contemporary man. In "LETTERS" Barth concedes that he has abandoned his early excessive nihilism. In a letter to Jacob Horner, the nihilist narrator of "The End of the Road", Barth remarks that "the whole business of ontological instability [...] seems now (in the late 1970s) so quaint and brave an aspect of the early 1950s (and our early twenties) that it would be amusing, perhaps suggestive, to hear how it looks to you from this perspective"[6].

Cast into roles of traditional rebels Fenwick and Susan re-

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[5] I. Hassan, Radical Innocence: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel, Princeton University Press, 1961, p. 6.

[6] J. Barth, LETTERS, Putnam's Sons, New York 1979, p. 342.

sort to a well-tested vehicle of spiritual survival in America - physical withdrawal from the society, an escape that becomes a search. "Sabbatical" returns to the journey-and-quest tradition in American literature, a genre all but forgotten in the novels of the 1960s and 70s.

Fenwick finds the symbolism of his voyage increasingly appealing. Works of literature provide him with fitting analogies:

> Cervantes he decides was right: the road is better than the inn. How more satysfying when the voyage, not the port, was our destination. If life's a journey and the grave its goal, getting there is all the fun[7].

His fascination with mythic themes often leads to refreshing speculations. If life is often seen as voyage, he muses, "a voyage may be like life". The novel's concluding philosophy will grow out of such speculations.

The attractiveness of possessing a boat as a symbol of one's control over future possibilities is evident in Barth's first novel, "The Floating Opera". Its main character, Todd Andrews builds his own boats for the better part of his life. Constructing them seems to him "a deed almost holy" in itself, and using them an existential beacon.

> Never have I regarded my boyhood as anything but pleasant, and the intensity of this longing to escape must be accounted for by the attractiveness of the thing itself, not by the unattractiveness of my surroundings. In short, I was running _to_, not running _from_, or so I believe[8].

Todd's inability to concentrate and thus complete the "small things that constitute the glori whole" prevents him from completing his vessels and from using them as means of moral rebirth. Emotionally paralized, viewing reality as fragmented and elusive, he never embarks on a voyage in search of his own self.

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[7] B a r t h, Sabbatical..., p. 278.

[8] J. B a r t h, The Floating Opera, Bantam 1972, p. 57.

Barth gave his fascination with voyage as a metaphor for life an original expression in "Lost in the Funhouse", a collection of stories published in 1968. The narrator of the opening story, "Night-Sea Journey", is a sperm, or spermatozoon, on his way, his "night-sea journey", to fertilize a female egg. During his travel he reflects on all human travel, its tragic destinies, its varying religious, philosophical and artistic implications. Though his journey is horrifying he continues to travel because he is carried by "blind habit, blind instinct, blind fear of drowning". Barth elaborates the sperm imagery in "Sabbatical". The travel of the sperm, with all its tragi-comic implications, reflects, in Fenwick's view, human life and history:

> He finds something appalingly yet engagingly male about those hordes of urgent swimmers, most of them thrashing upstream - eagerly? obliviously? - as if in a water marathon, a few flailing off in the wrong direction or back toward where they came from, as if they either didn't get the general message or got it, all right, but elected to dissent from its blind imperative[9].

Admiration for those who dissent mingles here with the joy at survival. Being alive amidst the blind inscrutable forces of the biological cosmos means being the few successful spermatozoa brought to the celebration of life. Being a writer is an additional reason for satisfaction, if not delight; the night-sea journey is a metaphor of the endlessly vulnarable art of story-telling and of all fictions whose mysterious existence fills and prolongs life. The narrative voice in "Night-Sea Journey" is unmistakably that of a writer, Barth himself, and so is the voice that often speaks through and for Fenwick in "Sabbatical". Writers, Barth suggests, though driven and conditioned by outside forces possess and elusive metaphysical power to <u>be</u> the human journey.

The voyage as an extended mataphor of man's search for destiny has a longstanding and venerable tradition in the American novel. Fenwick and Susan are inevitably viewed as heirs to the ideals acted out by the protoplastic American "swimmer" - Huck Finn.

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[9] B a r t h, Sabbatical..., p. 272.

Disillusioned with society and some of its institutions, Fenwick and Susan take to the water. During their flight they delight in freedom yet discover that their ideals can be realized only in a social setting. They encounter violence and coercion, and are perplexed by the mystical, almost supernatural, aspects of life. They feel they may be pursued by those who control their society. Never apprehended, they return with a desire to withdraw again.

Despite these striking similarities "Sabbatical" cannot be seen as a rewriting or a parody of Twain's classic. The story of Fenwick and Susan's trip is more like an analog, a familiar tale, of the archetypal American experience incarnated and monumentalized by the image of Huckleberry Finn[10]. As in his other novels which are more or less openly related to well known literary sources, Barth penetrates here the patterns of existing myths with an intention of revealing their hidden significances and symbolic values.

While acting out Huck's legendary theme, the Turners are almost everything Huck was not.

Barth has always been scornful of adolescent heroes and has preferred not to deal with them. An exception is Ambrose, from the title story of "Lost in the Funhouse", a sensitive young man of thirteen searching for sexual and artistic identity, who comments critically on under-aged protagonists like himself:

> Is anything more tiresome, in fiction, than the problems of sensitive adolescents [...] scarcely past the start, with everything yet to get through, an intolerable idea[11].

Ambrose never reaches the fun sections of the funhouse he visits; he gets lost and frustrated in its maze of mirrors. He wishes he had never entered the amusement park. His last frentic resolution is, since he is alive, to become the constructor of funhouses and then their secret operator.

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[10] Huck Finn is, in fact, never mentioned by the characters in "Sabbatical" as their literary prototype. When casually referred to, he is treated slightingly, but so are other representatives of moral dissent: "Don Quixote has only his delusions [...] Huck Finn only his superstitions", B a r t h Sabbatical..., p. 112.

[11] J. B a r t h, Lost in the Funhouse, Bantam 1969, p. 88.

In terms of both age and intelligence Fenwick and Susan are distinctly mature people preoccupied, whenever nautical conditions allow, with sex and writing. Much of "Sabbatical" is filled with sensual sexuality and fervent debates about how to write a novelistic account of the voyage. The slangy, waggish academic idiom gives the book a playful tint.

Being middle-aged, upper middle class and rebellious, the Turners do not completely turn their backs on their affluant society. Their withdrawal from America, an act they never declare but rather instinctively carry out, is made in the best American tradition of organized ruggedness, The sailboat they own is equipped qith a diesel engine and a two-way radio. The waters they cross are well charted, and comfortable docking facilities await them when they decide to return. There is refrigerated champagne for the happier moments of the cruise. During such moments Fenwick rejoices at his lot, considers himself lucky and betrays a measure of smugness:

> To be healthy, comfortably off, in love and faithfully loved, competent in a benign, worthwhile profession, and sailing with one's darling on the gracious Chesapeake on a fine day - nine tenths of the mortal world was never so fortunate![12]

Having let Fenwick say this, the authorial voice of the novel hastily explains that it is the sea of "essential self-acceptance" rather than "self-satisfaction or self-confidence" on which Fenwick's "doubts and apprehensions, not excluding selfdoubts" float. In Barth's earlier books to retain one's self undamaged, to have feelings, to be involved and in love, to be simply human, always portended evil and brought emotional immobility and frustration. In "Sabbatical" the emergence of self-acceptance in the process of shaping the characters' emotional and aesthetic postures is coupled with an affirmation of both love and art. The Turners identify themselves with much of the reality they live in, and they also challenge it in rather traditional American ways. But these qualities are fully realized only on the water, under the healing conditions of their spiritual with-

[12] B a r t h, Sabbatical, p. 278.

drawal. Much of the life that they leave behind them is incoherend and cruel, generating emotional numbness.

This rearrangement of the basic aesthetics of the Barthian world of fiction seems like a violation of its principles, a romantic mutiny in the realm of Postmodernist detachements, ironies, and absurdities. "Sabbatical" is given an added sense of dramatic suspense, the novel's assumed romantic appeal - a new and meaningful twist. The regressing protagonists seem to be facing not only the danger of being punished for the betrayal of their former professional commitments (their work for the C.I.A.), but also the risk of being declared unacceptable among the literary conventions of the genre that employed them. They escape not only from the partial sickness of their society, but, on the level of literary aesthetics, from the paralyzing rigidity of the Postmodern novel. They feel that Postmodernist mentality is too self--contained, its means of expression suffocating and entrapping. The Turners' (is the name symbolic here?) voyage is against the currents of modern literary dogmas, in search of new territories of word and thought. In this search they reveal an innocence that acquires more traditional, idealist, and inevitably naive qualities. While discussing different modes of forming their literary existence Fenwick and Susan express a unanimous conviction - occidental fiction since "circa 1960" is ailing and stagnant:

> [...] the Beat Generation has degenerated, the Existentialists no longer exist, the French New Novelists have grown old, the Angry Young Man are middleaged and petulant, the Black Humorists are serious and tenured, the Jews are assimilated, the Latinos are lively and expatriated, the blacks and redskins pale by comparison, the homosexuals are still clearing their throats, the new feminists aren't impressive though numerous women writers are, Master Nabokov is dead, Master Beckett is silent, Master Borges has turned into Rudyard Kipling, the Nobel prize is being awarded like Swedish foreign aid to obscure authors whom even smart Susan has scarcely heard of and who evidently lose everything but their kroners in translation, there's something called Postmodernism, and, so it seems to our Fenn, lots of room at the top in the decade ahead[13].

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[13] Ibid., p. 190.

They have a similar view of modern criticism which is seen as one-third incomprehensible, one-third "bullshitful", while the third third is "mostly irrelevant".

When "Sabbatical" begins, Fenwick and Susan are, more or less, at the end of their voyage; Barth starts where Twain leaves off. They slowly realize that to avoid the dilemma that lurks at the end of the American escape, something Huck Finn only vaguely sensed, they may have to continue their voyage in a different way: through their story. The anxiety about what they will do next blends with the excitement of looking for appropriate technical literary devices. Soon Fenwick discovers how inextricably intertwined their real and literary lives are becoming:

> In other spirits we would enjoy this weather: light rain, snug early anchorage, cozy cabin. We would read; we would write letters, chat [...] perhaps make love again, perhaps not; go to bed early; sleep well. But we're out of sorts; our story's hanging fire. We speak desultorily, as if waiting for the plot of our lives to get on with it[14].

Susan, while sharing her husband's beliefs and aspirations, finds it more difficult to deal with the conflict inherent in the dream of escape. She both desires normal family life and finds herself unable to return to it. Not to complicate their unplanned future she uses a short stopover on land to undergo an abortion. Soon she realizes how emotionally destructive her decision has been. She is afraid of becoming "some kind of invalid: mental, emotional, something". Her frustration turns into the much delayed, major psychological conflict of the novel:

> You don't want kids. I don't want kids, and I want kids more than anything. A house and friends! I want us to be normal and to the normal stuff together, both of us for the first time, and that's not possible[15].

Fenwick, who is, by and large, more composed and able to act with philosophical detachement, is moved to see Susan's desperation.

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[14] Ibid., p. 193.

[15] Ibid., p. 286.

He feels "agitated, frightened, torn". The conflict, however, never turns into a crisis. Driven by powerful inspirations, Fenwick and Susan manage to sublimate their frustration into a revitalized fascination with their novel.

One of the inspirations is derived from the American literary tradition. Fenwick claims he may be descended from Francis Scott Key, the author of the national anthem, "The Star-Spangled Banner". Susan believes her family may be related to Edgar Allan Poe, if only through Poe's adopted parents, the Allans. She feels that she has inherited Poe's spiritual qualities, "being fatherless, childless, self-tormented, half hysterical". In contrast, Fenwick's possible ancestor, Francis Scott Key, symbolizes rationality, coolness, optimism. The name of the boat Fenwick and Susan sail, "Pokey", stands for a "union of contraries prevailingly harmonious indeed but sometimes tense".

At one point, towards the end of their voyage, the Turners pay a short visit to Fort McHenry which inspired Key to write his celebrated composition. Afterwards, they call at Poe's grave in Baltimore. They thank their alledged forebears for a safe return, a return they would, in fact, like to adjourn. Later, during a moment of despair they find the Poe and Key symbolism pertinent and revealing, "sorted out, at least enough to get us started. They fit; they fit!".

Exactly what Fenwick means we never quite learn, but his fascination with Poe's novel "Arthur Gordon Pym" seems relevant. This elaborate tale about a man's journey ends with a mysterious open-ended vision in which Pym's boat is sucked into a chasm where a giant white shrouded figure appears. The point of Poe's story is, according to Fenwick, that "it is not the end of the voyage that interrupts the writing, but that the interruption of the writing ends the voyage". Susan, who does not see how this could be applied to their situation, is told: "the interruption of our voyage begins our writing".

The emergence and eventual utilization of this kind of thesis in "Sabbatical" was predictable. Barth's central, almost sacred aesthetic assumption of his earlier novels - that the telling of stories may help man to achieve a sense of self - is given a new substance here: the telling of stories is the only solution to the myth of escape. In the novel's closing lines Fenwick and

Susan come to believe that their story will extend their self--emposed withdrawal, become their "house" and their "child".

> We'll have made it, says determined Fenn, and we'll live by it. It doesn't have to be about us - children aren't about their parents. But our love will be in it, and our friendship too. This boat ride will be in it, somehow. It'll be about things coming around to where they started and then going on a little farther in a different way. It should have ancestry in it and offspring; Once upon a time to Happily ever after[16].

This kind of speculation contains, no doubt, an element of the banal. Man has always tried to continue his existence in art, his wordly problems and desires were to last eternally in poetry, music, etc. Arguably, not all people have had the ability or opportunity to transform their individual polemics with life into coherent, self-healing works of art. Cautioned by Susan that stories can "abort, too" and most of the "die young" Fenwick agrees yet reminds her that the coincidental nature of life reflected in the voyage of the sperm sanctions the similarly unpredictable and tenuous existence of artistic inspiration and expression.

Before his discovery, in a moment of "illumination", that his and his wife's spiritual future belong to their novel, Fenwick is inspired by one more important event. While sailing on calm waters not far from the shore the Turners come across a gigantic creature floating in the vicinity of their boat. Having steered close to it they can see the creature's "bright black and perfectly expressionless eye [...] taking us in, sizing us up". When the unrecognized "honest to Christ legendary sea-monster" swims off Fenwick thus evaluates the unexpected encounter:

> That sea-monster was important. There's a power I didn't know about, and now I think I've got it, [...] what's it's for is our story. Hoo! Everything's coming so clear![17]

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[16] Ibid., p. 294.

[17] Ibid., p. 289.

Is it the discovery of the importance of being guided by a sense of fearful fascination with life, a need to live on the edge of terror and passion, the ulterior motivation of the Romantics, that Fenwick decides to incorporate into his literary and real life? Does the monster testify to the timeless relevance of Poe's primordial fears and deathly urges, or is it rather a symbol of nature's living mysteries that fill man with obssessive urges, a symbol like Melville's Moby Dick?

The questions posed by the novel are never answered in its course. "Sabbatical" ends, or rather suddenly stops, before its optimistic final vision can be put to the test. Barth, the master of, what Tony Tanner calls, "frolicsome evasion", leaves us puzzled, lost among the tortuous significances of the story, a state he seems to delight in. In a mock editorial comment preceding "Giles Goat-Boy", an editor, the disguised voice of the author himself says what may apply also to "Sabbatical":

> I found his (Barth's) work lively but a bit naive and his last novel wild and excessive in every respect. I frankly don't know quite what to make of this one[18].

Not quite knowing what to make of "Sabbatical" is, no doubt, a part of what "Sabbatical" is about. Evolving from a rather grandiose point of departure - the American voyage toward a more complete self - the novel, while being a lively overview of the mechanics and possibilities of such a voyage, fills itself with a tangle of moral ambiguities, onotological and technical literary speculations, ironies and promises, farce and idealism. Barth suggests, as he did in his earlier books, that directly verbal answers to what life is may not exist at all, or may be too complex to make sense. What he seems to be ready to offer us instead, and does with an increasing sense of self-assurance and exuberance, is the attractiveness of arriving at the meanings of life through dealing with the latent codes of history, nature, the human mind and body, etc. He indicates that the mythopoeic signals and processes that fill reality can be arranged into useful patterns for man's spiritual existence, if not his sur-

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[18] J. B a r t h, Giles Goat-Boy, Penguin 1967, p. 11.

vival. Fenwick and Susan become instinctively aware that the very process of searching for the meanings of their culture, the human voyage, their own lives is what sustains them morally and psychologically.

Whether one opts for an idealistic or an ironic reading of the novel, one must deal with both. Both are written into the novel and derive from each other.

Rebellion or escape are both dead end streets. What may sustain and sanction them as an avenue of psychological survival is storytelling, a kind of self-applied mythotherapy. It contains the promise of the continuous harmonious coexistence of man and language, life and art. And life and art, Barth says in "LETTERS" are "symbiotic". "Lost in the Funhouse" begins with a Frame-Tale, a cut-out strip on the side of a page which, when its ends are pasted together, reads, ad infinitum, ONCE UPON A TIME THERE WAS A STORY THAT BEGAN ONCE UPON A TIME... This one-sentence opening of the book symbolizes Barth's obssession with situations which turn upon themselves, which recur constantly through words. Fenwick and Susan believe in the magic of putting themselves and their story into a circular spin, a succession of cycles:

> If that's going to be our story, then let's begin it at the end and end at the beginning, so we can go on forever. Begin with our living happily ever after[19].

The optimism in "Sabbatical", however, has recognizable undercurrents of irony. While letting Fenwick play with the schemes of his novel which is becoming his life, Barth is playing with the concept of Fenwick, "a writer of sorts", "a man neither literary nor unlettered", a person in Susan's professional opinion "who thinks about the medium (of literature) in a sensible, sometimes original way, unfettered by ideology, conventional, preconceptions or overmuch sophistication". Fenwick takes much comfort that "not everybody has to be D. H. Lawrence or Dostoevsky, thank heaven", and he, like Barth wants to be "serious with a smile"[20]. His tampering with mythic intimations and abstractions

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[19] B a r t h, Sabbatical..., p. 301.

[20] Ibid., p. 110, 130.

of culture, his grand ontological theories may be seen as an immature writer's conceit, his vulnerability to artful illusions or nis latent desire to isolate himself in art. Cervantes, while believing in the virtues of Don Quixote, Barth's favourite literary hero, mercilessly parodies the romantic adventures and pretentious theories of the lonely knight. Barth may be sympathetic with his protagonists' need for self-renewal and creative expression while parodying them, perhaps himself, too, as literary imposters who beguile themselves and others with simplistic visions of a cured self or the coexistence of life and art.

Ebenezer Cooke, the poet and virgin hero of "The Sot-Weed Factor", is also a victim of a self-made idealistic literary vision. Only at the end of his long painful journey through life does he realize that his rigidly innocent view of reality has caused innumerable complications and sufferings and turned him into a confused, spiritually immobilized cripple. Burlingame, an eptiome of philosophical relativism and moral flexibility, thus explains to Ebenzer the cause of his frustration:

> I mean 'tis Adam's story thou'rt re-enacting. Ye set great store upon your innocence, and by reason of't have lost your earthly paradise[21].

The qualities of the novel the Turners are going to write and the reader has in front of him (if their future novel is Barth's novel) seem to dispel many of these objections. "Sabbatical" is not Marylandiad, a false pastoral image of America (never completed by Cooke) that blindly effaced vulgarity, corruption and chaos. Fenwick and his wife do recognize and write about tne dark side of America. Inspired by history and nature, enlightened intellectually they are able to go beyond darkness and nihilism, towards new refreshing visions of a harmonious self. Are they creating one more illusion at the end of the road? Are their hopes as tragic as Huck's who believed that there was another territory for the self to "light out to"?

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[21] J. B a r t h, The Sot-Weed Factor, Bantam 1969, p. 434.

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POZA WYCZERPANIEM: NIEWINNOŚĆ I UCIECZKA W "SABBATICAL" JOHNA BARTHA

W "Sabbatical", powieści napisanej w 1982 r. Barth odchodzi od wielkich alegorycznych tematów charakteryzujących jego obszerne powieści, jak "The Sot-Weed Factor" czy "Giles Goat Boy". Powracając do współczesnej mu tematyki amerykańskiej, a także do realistycznej formy powieściowej, Barth nawiązuje w "Sabbatical" do tradycyjnego w literaturze amerykańskiej tematu poszukiwania własnej osobowości przez fizyczną ucieczkę od społeczeństwa, tematu najtrafniej odzwierciedlonego w literaturze amerykańskiej przez Marka Twaina w "Przygodach Hucka Finna".

"Sabbatical" nie jest parodią ani parafrazą losów Hucka Finna. Barth zastanawia się tu raczej, w jaki sposób można wyjść poza tradycyjny amerykański dylemat wynikający z pragnienia ucieczki od społeczeństwa, a jednocześnie potrzeby istnienia w nim.

Bohaterowie powieści, Fenwick i Suzan Turner, dochodzą do przekonania, że kontynuacją ucieczki fizycznej może być ucieczka w sferę słowa (Fenwick przy pomocy Suzan pisze powieść, która jest właśnie "Sabbatical"), że ich kończąca się wyprawa łodzią może trwać dalej w wyobraźni outsidera-pisarza, rozprawiającego się z obawami, ograniczeniami i pragnieniami narzucanymi jednostce przez życie we współczesnym społeczeństwie.