FIGURING NARRATION:
JOHN BARTH'S SABBATICAL AND THE TIDEWATER TALES

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A DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN
PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA
1989
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KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS

Books by John Barth:

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This dissertation describes the narrative and textual effects, in John Barth's *Sabbatical* and *The Tidewater Tales*, of the inscription of four figures: the circle, abortion, production, and repetition. Each of these figures represents an attempt to escape various linguistic binds invariably reintroduced in the telling and writing of the stories.

"Circling" explores the way in which a circle questions our ability to understand the text and places itself in opposition to a narrative organization of events. Any attempt to exceed the orbit of the text reinscribes the circle. The sequentiality of *Sabbatical* and *The Tidewater Tales* tends to disrupt the notion of their circling because the circling text would suggest a linguistic collapsing of time.

In "Abortion Stories" I show that abortion is connected to a decision concerning the organization of the woman's life and the orderliness of the text. Abortion is a
disposal because it is the attempt both to arrange and to get rid of that which is aborted. Getting rid of a text will leave behind the trace of an erasure. The terms by which an analysis would be made are shown always to be inappropriate, and in the synthetic moment the prior division is reestablished, so that a decision cannot be made.

"Production" develops the notion of reading as the production of the supplement. Though reading is an addition, since there is no outside-text, reading is, as Derrida says, adding and following a thread. Because the writer does not command language, the text always says something other than what the writer would mean.

"Repetition" demonstrates that we can neither go back to a time before repetition nor identify the "original" repetition. Because the questioning of truth leads one back, it forces one to use a methodology based on a sequentiability and so to create a narrative, which denies, paradoxically, the possibility of arriving at the truth.

My "P.S." describes the inevitable bearing of the sign. Implications inscribed in the system that proposes the validity of the concept of the end (in particular the distinction between the real and the textual) are assumed in turning that system against itself.
INTRODUCTION

Rethinking the Beyond

One of the things that bothers John Barth, that bothers me too, is that what we are writing today, our literature, seems to be at an intellectual standstill. What worries him is that it will (or has already) come to a narrative standstill too. In *The Tidewater Tales* a story within a story is framed by his anxiety:

> a man who once magically visited Scheherazade now wishes that she could visit him, so that if what he’s done must be essentially what he’ll do, it might be done at least as spiritedly and wholeheartedly as before. In short, that story was this story, and, like this one, it was not only unfinished, but stuck. (TT 603)

*Stuck* is essentially the situation with which we are left in *Sabbatical* and with which we take up *The Tidewater Tales*. Fenn and Susan cannot decide, within *Sabbatical*, what to do with themselves, how to end their story; Peter Sagamore has minimalized his stories nearly to the vanishing point, so cannot begin his and Katherine’s. Barth, the author of them all, tries to drive them, narratively, "to some presumable farther shore" (TT 284).

Barth’s work confronts a variety of linguistic binds (such as the development of meaning in the face of the
impossibility of communication and the imposition a
traditional understanding of narration entailing a
beginning, middle, and end in view of the indeterminateness
of the contours of the text) and, confronting these binds,
his work asks: Can we advance? Can we move beyond?

Barth’s metaphor suggests that the answer will not be a
simple one. "Shore" comes from the Middle Low German
"schore," which meant "point of division," and even now
designates the land between low and high water or the land
at the edge of a body of water. We should wonder whether in
reaching a farther shore Barth’s books would simply be
coming to another point of division, marooned, so to speak,
on a beach on which the necessity of moving beyond is
presumed.

The farther-shore metaphor may be inappropriate for
describing a system that would escape a linguistic bind.
Peter Sagamore’s reflection about what language should do
leads him to his minimalist "less is more" theory of
writing. I emphasize that it is the reflection of Peter
Sagamore that gets him stuck. More precisely, it is
language’s looking inward at itself that places out in front
a "farther shore." Language says of itself, I am
incomplete; but it does not offer us the means of completing
it and in fact tells us to look outside for the meaning or
the truth or the real.

"What is being written today?" becomes an absurd
question in the face of the "farther shore." Insofar as it
reinstates the logic of dichotomy and the logic of anticipation, "the farther shore" takes us where we have already been, disrupting the possibility of simply moving forward within *The Tidewater Tales*, and so is inappropriate in describing what is being written *today*, in distinguishing today from yesterday. We can not be sure that today's literature and criticism of literature are fundamentally different from works described by the term *modernism*. In fact, what people are calling modernism or *postmodernism* seems to have been taking place all along. Two stories with which Barth identifies, stories that contain "postmodern" situations (such as the stuckness at the end of *The Tidewater Tales*), *Ocean Story* and *The Thousand and One Nights*, are among the oldest in the history of written language.

The criticism of Barth up to now has, for the most part, simply positioned Barth philosophically or thematically. The earliest articles, which began coming out in the mid '60s, labeled him a nihilist or "postexistentialist." He has been aligned with Kurt Vonnegut and the "Black-Humorists." Now, perhaps, because he has used the term in his article about the replenishment of literature, critics are calling him a "postmodernist." It could be argued that the job of the critic is, first of all (and perhaps as an end in itself), to name what is being talked about. But because all of Barth's books illustrate the danger of identification and of the alignment with a
particular type of writing, approaching *Sabbatical* and *The Tidewater Tales* with a name in hand would be an inappropriate gesture. Barth’s work takes up the so-called postmodern themes (self-reflection, self-destruction, etc.) in order to go beyond them, but winds up showing that going beyond them is impossible in setting them aside, that going beyond them is impossible given the always prior intellectual positioning. Rather than trying to establish terms, Barth involves himself, his characters, his books, in the metaphors with which we allow our lives to be described. Writing, reading, and narrating are always subsumed by (and in) the metaphorics of creating a life. *Sabbatical* and *The Tidewater Tales* are the exploration of the appropriateness of particular metaphors for that creation. Understanding that language and living are not only involved with each other but are dependent on each other, Barth’s work is concerned that the way we use language may determine the way we live. The creating of a life may be something more, in Barth, than metaphorical.

One of the most worrisome things about writing about *Sabbatical* alone would be ending. Having read *The Tidewater Tales*, the reason for the problem is clear: *Sabbatical* is incomplete. If *The Tidewater Tales* does not complete *Sabbatical*, it at least points out the difficulty in ending. Peter Sagamore’s initials suggest the PostScriptal activity of *The Tidewater Tales*. One of the rules of Katherine and Peter in their telling of stories is that none should be
left unfinished. "The Ending" of The Tidewater Tales reads like the captions following a 1960's B movie: Mickey So-and-so becomes a movie star and falls in love with So-and-so; MaryJean So-and-so starts her own business and lives happily ever after; etc.

Speaking about the books separately, in separate sections for example, would be entirely inappropriate, if possible at all. Not only are the books alike, but they are literally intertwined. In The Tidewater Tales the plotlines of the books—characters, the names of characters, and all—are twisted together such that to tug on the structure or a metaphor, say, of The Tidewater Tales is to put Sabbatical in tow. I am required to talk about them both at the same time or to talk about one knowing that the other is riding its wake. To talk with the knowledge of and to talk about are nearly the same thing—that is, they have similar effects; either way, the talking is based on terms that affect them both.

On the other hand, inherent in the idea of the postscript is the coming afterward of the script. Sabbatical and The Tidewater Tales are written in sequence, The Tidewater Tales the sequel. It is also suggested that Peter Sagamore's last name might indicate the attempt to add to the text; Peter's father was a German immigrant: "The word is not given in our German-English dictionary: Sage mehr ('Say more'), we wonder, metamorphosed by some immigration clerk like many another new American's name" (TT
This suggestion is ironic considering that Peter has been trying to "say more" by saying less, but is consistent with the sequential nature of Barth’s last two books, the anticipated delivery by Peter of a substantial work of fiction, and, in fact, the heft of *The Tidewater Tales*, both in itself and in relation to *Sabbatical*.

Susan’s decision to abort her child in *Sabbatical* had been made, in the past tense, in *The Tidewater Tales*: Lee and Frank, the "people" on whom the characters Susan and Fenn are "based," decide to try to get pregnant in *The Tidewater Tales*, something that did not happen, could not have happened, to Susan and Fenn in *Sabbatical*. We read *The Tidewater Tales* having read *Sabbatical*, having a prior knowledge of the conflict. Though, if we read *Sabbatical* first, *The Tidewater Tales* has not yet come into play, we anticipate, because of the incompleteness of *Sabbatical*, something else.

At the end of *Sabbatical*, Fenn, in a state of euphoric discovery, explains to unconvinced Susan that the story, "this story," "Our Story," *Sabbatical*, is their child. *The Tidewater Tales* makes it clear from its conception, so to speak, that, though they are intertwined, "lives are not stories" (*TT* 142).

Leah Talbott sets Peter up for a direct response to the predicament of *Sabbatical*: "You generate your stories, and your stories generate your readers. Frank and I are your ... children." In other words, Peter has written them
into his tidewater tales. "Says Peter carefully, who is not always bad at intuiting situations, Nope:"—his colon introduces the next chapter: "A Story is Not a Child" (TT 410).

Peter has made it clear that telling a story is only like living. Fenn and Susan’s story can be their offspring but only in a sense. They have created it; they have come together and in coming together have produced. Peter and Katherine have found that, though they cannot write and tell a story that is their lives, they can create their lives in writing and telling a story. That is, writing and telling can be a part of their living.

Narration and the Use of "Non-Fiction"

Typically, a critic of Barth will read the fiction in terms that Barth establishes in his nonfiction. For example, Charles B. Harris says in Passionate Virtuosity: The Fiction of John Barth, "Significantly, from the corpus of his own work Barth cites LETTERS as an example of postmodernism, which suggests that 'The Literature of Replenishment' will prove as indispensable a guide through the intricacies of this novel as 'The Literature of Exhaustion' has for Lost in the Funhouse" (161). Harris frames his entire book with the indispensable-guide theory. In Alan Prince’s "An Interview with John Barth," Barth speaks of "passionate virtuosity" as the relation between technique and art. I’m not, here, concerned as much with
what Barth means by "passionate virtuosity" as with Harris’s use of the term: "So important is this sentiment to Barth’s esthetics that he includes it with only minor revision in Chimera (1972, p. 24), allowing the genie, his obvious surrogate in the novel, to speak the words" (3). Rather than involving himself in the fundamental question of the connection between fiction and nonfiction, the question of authorship, into which Barth’s self-quotation seems to force us, Harris assumes that Chimera is elevated by the addition of the nonfiction, that the statement made outside the work of fiction stands alone, and, of course, that the author and a particular character can be spoken of as one. In "The Essay as Aesthetic Mirror: John Barth’s 'Exhaustion' and 'Replenishment,'" Elaine B. Safer makes the reading of Barth’s fiction in terms of his essays the whole of her argument: "The essays on 'Exhaustion' and 'Replenishment' thus cast light on what Barth has done in the past and call attention to the shorter form [of fiction] that he, theoretically, would like to use in the future" (116).

The assumption that the terms of nonfiction are more stable (that they are, indeed, established) and the reading of fiction that is based on this assumption define a traditional method of critical inquiry. Because Barth’s work questions the distinction between the poles of truth and falsehood, order and chaos, and because it is a reorganization from the "beginning," to assume the rigidness
or the primacy of his nonfiction is dangerous, if not directly oppositional to the texts themselves.

When Barth speaks of moving "beyond," for example, we read the term knowing that he understands and even respects the connection of things--of texts to "reality," one text to another, etc. So we cannot think of moving beyond, in Barth, as getting outside.

In *The Floating Opera*, Barth's first novel, Todd Andrews is preoccupied with talking about his idea of order. We find early on that his interest is not simply a facet of his "character" or an incidental aesthetic orientation shared by his author, but that on his idea of order wavers his life—not only the "fictive" life of Todd Andrews, but the life of narration:

> It seems to me that any arrangement of things at all is an order. If you agree, it follows that my room was as orderly as any room can be, even though the order was an unusual one. (FO 10)

The narrator speaks, implicitly, against the idea of order as an absolute, against the possibility that there is one perfect system. His room does not illustrate absolute order, but rather "an" order based on a particular system of ideas or images. Since any group of things is an arrangement (if for no other reason than its relation to the group), and therefore everything is arranged, since, in other words, arranging always takes place, it makes no sense to speak of a system as more or less orderly--the narrator's room, therefore, "was as orderly as any room can be."
In "Some Reasons Why I Tell the Stories I Tell the Way I Tell Them Rather Than Some Other Stories Some Other Way," Barth sees himself involved in the process of narration:

At heart I'm an arranger still, whose chieffest literary pleasure is to take a received melody—an old narrative poem, a classical myth, a shopworn literary convention, a shard of my experience, a New York Times Book Review series—and, improvising like a jazzman within its constraints, reorchestrate it to present purpose. (FB 7)

We should be careful not to read this statement of Barth's as the thing that is. We should read it in terms of the system it proposes to find out how the system works. We might be tempted to think of Barth's "definition" of himself as a comment on Todd Andrew's. But if either statement describes the process of narration, using them as "definitions" that can be lifted out of one text undisturbed and applied to the other, assuming, in other words, we can pick out the Todd Andrews or the John Barth from either of them or that Todd Andrews and John Barth are identical, is contradictory. By speaking of himself, in the context of narration, as an "arranger," Barth speaks implicitly of order as an activity—rather than being a thing, it is done to things—and arranging as the process of narration.

Right- or wrongness, though, make little sense in talking about the texts of John Barth (or any texts, for that matter). With absolute order goes the possibility of correctness. Right- and wrongness are of no use in discussing process (or texts in any other terms because of their connection to narration). Right- and wrongness
nevertheless are always present as the things moved beyond. To leave absolute order behind is never to get rid of absoluteness; the narrator, rather, considers his own process and thereby involves himself in ordering.

Barth confronts a theory of activity in terms of polemical argumentation in the "Literature of Exhaustion"-- "the language of action consists of rest as well as movement. . . . Nothingness is necessarily and inextricably the background against which Being, et cetera" (FB 67, 68). His "et cetera" implies that the argument almost goes without saying. In order to say "et cetera," he must allow the premise, on which the argument is based, to tag along. Not only is a theory of opposition (the necessity of both and) upheld, it is included. But included as the orientation, which, of course, entails movement, toward a theory of narration:

I decided I'd spend my professional academic life saying all the things that go without saying: staring first principles and basic distinctions out of countenance; facing them down, for my students' benefit and my own, until they confess new information. What is literature? What is fiction? What is a story? (FB 11)

Todd Andrews never "mastered first principles" (FO 60) either, and his statement attests to the fact. "First principles" are precisely that which cannot be "mastered." He says of his suicide—"I could master the fact of my living with [my heart condition] by destroying myself" (FO 227). Since mastery is a state of being, to exist it must extend beyond the act. Todd Andrews would only be "master"
after his death and by then, by his own logic, he would not be at all.

At the showboat Jeannine "slipped into the 'Why?' routine":

"Why What?" I asked. "Why do the actors act funny or why do the people like to watch them?"
"Why do the people?"
"The people like to go to the show because it makes them laugh. They like to laugh at the actors."
"Why?"
"They like to laugh because laughing makes them happy. They like being happy, just like you." ..."Why?"
"Why do they like being happy? That's the end of the line." (FO 199)

Todd Andrew's "whole life has been directed toward the solution of a problem, or mastery of a fact" (FO 16). One could propose a particular answer, but "always something would happen to demonstrate its inadequacy" (FO 16). There is never a satisfactory answer to the question "Why?" One can't move back to one static cause of life. The questions "What is literature?" and "What is fiction?" ask the same of us—that we discover an identity or write a definition that will stick. Definition is by definition inadequate; it is a limitation rather than a universalization. The questions themselves are inadequate. "Information" is exactly what they cannot supply.

It could be argued that the necessity of inadequacy is the kind of "new information" of which Barth speaks. In "The Literature of Exhaustion" he suggests that by taking inadequacy into account a writer can do something new: 
"[Borges'] artistic victory, if you like, is that he
confronts an intellectual dead end and employs it against itself to accomplish new human work" (FB 69-70). Though this passage is often quoted, it is not, in itself, representative of Barth’s point of view. He suggests in "Tales Within Tales Within Tales" that works have always taken themselves into account: "that is . . . stories within stories, which always to some degree imply stories about stories and even stories about storytelling--that this phenomenon is ancient, ubiquitous, and persistent; almost as old and various, I suspect, as the narrative impulse itself" (FB 221). We can even wonder about his "almost": in "The Title of This Book" he comes straight out with it: "literature, like language, is seldom simply but always also about itself" (FB xii).

Barth’s inconsistency is not the issue, but it suggests that when he speaks of "new information" he is posing a theory of origination as process. One of Borges’ characters, Pierre Menard, re-creates several chapters of the Quixote. "It would have been sufficient," Barth says, "for Menard to attribute the novel to himself in order to have a new work of art, from the intellectual point of view." That is, the addition of the name "Pierre Menard" would require a different reading, one in terms of a new author and all the baggage--scholarly, philosophic, what have you--that inevitably goes along with it. "Pierre Menard" would make the Quixote something other. Barth
distinguishes, though, Borges from this "intellectual" idea of difference:

But the important thing to observe is that Borges doesn't attribute the Quixote to himself, much less recompose it like Pierre Menard; instead, he writes a remarkable and original work of literature, the implicit theme of which is the difficulty, perhaps the unnecessity, of writing original works of literature. (FB 69)

Implicit in Barth's discussion of originality is the understanding that texts are connected to other texts. An original work, therefore, is not one that is outside or that has no relation to the past. A work of literature is "created" not out of nothingness but in relation to nothingness. A text is "original" to the extent that it involves itself in origination—not simply a going back but a coming into being. Texts are made new. Borges, nevertheless, wrote the passages that Pierre Menard re-created and so involves himself in the creation of a narrative event and involves his story in its own creation.

Barth speaks of originality in one of two ways. Either (1) originality is contained in absolute paradox and so is effectively cancelled out (Borges writes an original work about the impossibility of originality); "originality" in other words carries only the meaning of its own paradoxical impossibility. Or (2) there are two senses of "original": the original before which there was nothing and evolutionary origination in which every work takes part; there is no "need" to write "original" works of literature ("original"
in the first sense) because works of literature inevitably involve themselves in origination.

I take up Barth’s first novel not (as will be assumed) to discover the cause of the works that come after it, to unearth the rudiments of Barth’s "budding genius," but because The Floating Opera rethinks beginning. I go back to The Floating Opera not as the Todd Andrews who begins his Inquiry as "an attempt to learn why [his] father hanged himself" (FO 218, emphasis mine), and not even as the Todd Andrews who understands that "it is another thing to examine this information and see in it, so clearly that to question is out of the question, the cause of a human act" (FO 218). Even the revision of the purpose of his Inquiry to this new understanding is inadequate: "In fact, it’s impossible, for as Hume pointed out, causation is never more than an inference; and any inference involves at some point the leap from what we see to what we can’t see. Very well. It’s the purpose of my Inquiry to shorten as much as possible the distance over which I must leap" (FO 218). He has decided to continue, knowing that he cannot solve the problem. His purpose, he says, "is not really to leap the gap . . . only to shorten it" (FO 219). At this point he is satisfied by simply continuing; he is satisfied by the "activity" of inertial movement—movement devoid of change.

I go back, rather, as the Todd Andrews who, out of the Inquiry, composes a novel.
Sabbatical, like The Floating Opera, is based on an intellectual pursuit. Fenn and Susan have taken the sabbatical to decide what to do with their lives--Susan whether to take a position at Swarthmore, Fenn whether to go on doing what he’s been doing, and both of them whether to have a child. And, like The Floating Opera, the narration of the story is moved out in front of the intellectual bind. At the beginning the question “Why?” is made a matter of substance (both essential to the text’s relation to the "intellect" and material to its relation to the "things" talked about):

After sundown we see against broken clouds the reflected glow of city lights from below the horizon ahead: Virginia Beach, Fenn reckons, and hopes we’re far enough offshore. The name catches Susan’s breath; brings tears to her eyes. Fenwick knows why. (S 10-11)

As we will see in Chapter II, why the name "Virginia Beach" brings tears to Susan’s eyes is caught up in the decision making (or lack of decision making) of the entire text. The extraordinarily brutal rape, in Virginia Beach, of Susan’s twin sister and the moronic child that is the product of the rape obviously affect Susan’s contradictory desires about having children. Her tears at the mentioning of "Virginia Beach" can be read as a reflection of the impetus of the conflict between her and Fenn, the reason for their sabbatical voyage, the reason, in fact, for Sabbatical.

But as I said the question is essential to the story. In this passage the narrator is concerned more with positioning than with the impossibility of deciding or the
inevitable assumption of a cause. They see "against" the clouds light that is "reflected" from "below" the horizon "ahead." From his observation of the position of the light Fenn estimates his own position and wonders whether they are "far enough offshore." The glow of city lights is out in front of Susan and Fenn just as the story of Mimi's rape is projected out in front of the present bind, the lack of knowledge about why Susan is crying. The narration proceeds by placing the story out in front.¹

Sabbatical takes place at what is to be the end of their voyage. But it is about beginning. One can infer, then, that Sabbatical is also necessarily about the relation between beginning and end. The narrator looks at narration as a putting things in order:

Okay, he decides, and consults the compass over Susan's shoulder, wondering the while what words best follow Once upon a time. 

Blam! Blooey! (§ 11)

The story has, of course, already begun by the time we get to the words "Blam! Blooey!" The words do "follow," though, the phrase "Once upon a time" and so even though "Blam! and "Blooey!" do not begin, they question the sequence of events in terms of beginning. Though "A dialogue on Diction" takes place "three days later, safely at anchor in Poe Cove, Key Island, Virginia," since it

¹ In the case of Fenn's cardiac episode and Susan's abortion "placing out in front" becomes a putting-off or displacement of the story (they decide to wait to tell each other about the particular events) and so serves as much to disrupt the progression of the story.
concerns the appropriateness of the use of "Blam! Blooey!" it comes next. The use of "Blam! Blooey!" has already been questioned implicitly by its juxtaposition to the archetypal opening line of a story--"once upon a time." The discussion of its relation to the tradition seems to follow naturally.

Susan, the scholar of the two, falls back easily to the foundations of philosophical division:

S: In the Poetics, Aristotle distinguishes between lexis and melos--"speech" and "song"--and discusses them separately, since in Attic drama there really were both spoken dialogue and choral songs. (§ 12)

When she teaches Aristotle she "combines[s] lexis and melos into the general heading of Language. Under that heading she consider[s] all questions of tone, style, diction, the effective management of dialogue, the strategic deployment of metaphor, and what have you" (§ 12). Susan wonders about the use of language in terms of the tradition and at the same time rearranges Aristotle’s categories, using "language" as the term under which lexis and melos are interrelated, speaking of both lexis and melos as aspects of "style," "diction," etc.

She also reads their beginning in terms of the history of fiction:

S: So: after a splendid four-thousand-year tradition of sea-voyage fiction, from the Egyptian papyrus of the Shipwrecked Sailor, said to be the oldest story in the world . . . to Crane and Conrad, all with their big set-pieces of tempest and shipwreck, . . . we proudly enter the narrative lists with Blam and Blooey. (§ 13)
Fenn turns her questioning of the quality of narration into a discussion of narrative technique: "I used to read books in college days. Those blokes all has a little warning, for Christ's sake; an effing foreshadow or two, you know? But us: Blam! Blooey!" (p 13). Fenn speaks of warning as foreshadow; he says, in effect, since we had no warning we should not include foreshadow, but he does so by speaking of the event written about in terms of speaking about the event, in terms of narration; he says the storm itself, described by the words "Blam! Blooey!" and the story "A Storm at Sea," was not foreshadowed. So one cannot differentiate the storm from the narration of the event that is the storm.

By deciding to "begin" their story with the storm they make narration its topic and define narration as the development of a new order. Susan and Fenn haggle over another point of diction and include it in the narrative:

F: I'll make you a deal: I'll take out every effing in the script except the ones in this passage, and those I'll soften to "effing."
S: I can live with that.
F: But blam and blooey stay.

"Effing" has always already, within the text, been edited. Fenn says "I will soften the ones in this passage to 'effing'" but, by including the promise in the narrative, underscores the pervasiveness of rearrangement. We never see the word to which "effing" refers. Fenn meshes the idea of what "really happened" with the narration of their story:

F: My finger was on the effing starter-button!
I was wondering what to say to you after Susie and Fenn. Then Blam! Blooey! (§ 14)

Story and narration coincide and thereby reduce any argument based on the reality of events outside the text to irrelevancy. What "really happened" were the words "Blam! Blooey!"

The theory of language and the story come together in the story’s narration.

What Follows

Because so few articles have been written about Sabbatical (the book itself has been out of print for several years, though it was published in 1982) and so little said about The Tidewater Tales (it came out in 1987), the water would seem to be uncharted. In fact though, because the reading of Barth’s work is disturbingly narrow and, as I have pointed out, firmly established, there is no indication that the trend will not continue. Thus, I am writing about Barth’s work under the pressure of an establishment. Most of the criticism I consult is considered in terms of these two most recent books of Barth only by extension, but even so, I find myself arguing against the possibility of the application to Sabbatical and The Tidewater Tales of the assumptions made in these widely accepted methods of criticism.

Unlike Harris’s Passionate Virtuosity, for example, this dissertation attempts more than an explanation of John
Barth or even of a particular idea in the books of John Barth. Insofar as the writing of his books make up, in part, his life and insofar as the relations between living and writing are what his books are about, yes, this is about John Barth. But it is also a discussion of ways to read, in critical terms, the relation between metaphor and narration and the effect that relation has on reading and writing in general.

This is why the theory I work with is more integral to this dissertation than the discarding of the criticism. As my bibliography will attest, the work of Jacques Derrida is essential to my understanding of the work of John Barth. I hesitate, though, to say that I apply Derrida to Sabbatical and The Tidewater Tales, because any "use" of Derrida will constitute a reading. The work of Derrida initiates a dialogue and an interpretation at least as extensive as the work of Barth. I would rather say that my study constitutes a double reading, of both the work of John Barth and some of the recent theories about language and literature. Because of Barth's tendency to grapple with the more difficult and provocative issues in language, his books call for this double reading.

This dissertation is divided into four chapters, each of which corresponds to the reading of a "figure" or a "metaphor" and a discussion of its consequences on the reading, writing, and telling of stories. I should point out beforehand that the terms figure and metaphor are part
of our subject in that the assumption they carry, the assumption that the figure or metaphor is distinct from the meaning or the idea it conveys, is shown by the figures themselves to be misleading.

"Circling The Question of Knowledge" explores the way in which the circle, as a model for the text, questions our ability to understand the text and places itself in opposition to a narrative, which is to say a sequential, organization of events. The hermeneutic circle describes the necessary presupposition of a knowledge of the thing to be understood and so questions the validity of interpretation generally. The hermeneutic circle can be thought of graphically both as a circular path, challenging the notions of beginning and end, and as an enclosure, challenging the traditional understanding of the inside and the outside of the text. Titles in The Tidewater Tales and the quotation of the "first line" in Sabbatical and The Tidewater Tales tend to act according to the circular logic of hermeneutics because neither gives us a means of establishing textual or narrative limits. Though we do not ever see the closure of the text or the story, they describe themselves as an enclosure. Those who would try to understand the enclosure, which would require exceeding it to get a view of the whole, would find themselves caught within. Getting out of the circle of hermeneutics is problematic because any attempt to exceed the orbit of the text, to read it transcendentally, reinscribes the circle.
On the other hand, the sequentiality of *Sabbatical* and *The Tidewater Tales* would tend to disrupt any notion of their circling because the circling text would suggest a linguistic collapsing of time. The circling text is shown to be a sham; to understand the text as a circle requires a breaching of logic because a sequentiality always imposes itself.

In "Abortion Stories" I show that abortion is connected to a decision concerning the organization of the woman's life and the orderliness of the text. Barth's considering the text as the body of the woman is consequential for them both. I describe the abortion of the text as a disposal because this term indicates both the attempt to arrange and the attempt to get rid of what is aborted. Susan's abortion in *Sabbatical* reflects Penn's attempt at discarding various drafts of their story and their continual discussion about the organization of the story they are a part of, "the story of their life." Getting rid of a text will leave behind the trace of an erasure, so that what is missing comes to be what the text is about. Because the Y is the structure of decision-making (of analysis and synthesis), it is the source of *Sabbatical*’s narrative abortion. Penn and Susan discover that the terms by which they divide their world, by which an analysis would be made, are inappropriate and that in the synthetic moment the prior division is reestablished, so that a decision cannot be made. Abortion is not a neat metaphor for the self-destruction of the text or the death
of fiction, rather it indicates a narrative problem whose root is in the language.

Whereas abortion describes the text and the writing of the story, "Production, Reading, Supplementarity" describes the text and the reading of the story. To think of the reader as one of the story’s parent’s, as Peter does in The Tidewater Tales, is to develop the notion of the production of the supplement. The Tidewater Tales illustrates the fact that reading is never simply an addition. Calling reading a production of supplements is not to say that reading occurs outside the text or that there is what might be called an outside-text. Though reading is an addition, it cannot add just anything; it is rather, as Derrida says, adding and following a thread. Because the writer does not command every aspect of the language used, the text always says something other than what the writer would mean.

One of the more dramatic effects of the supplement on the story is its making indeterminate the story’s "end." We cannot count on the story’s ever being finished because supplementation is also a replacement. Every supplement describes its own need for a supplemental reading, for a replacement, so marks itself as incomplete.

"Repetition, History, Narration" is a discussion of repetition as it relates to the displacement of the origin and the repetitious coming back, which is also a deferral, of the end and a discussion of the questioning of historical truth as it relates to the development of a narrative. What
is called the repetition of a text is not, as is generally presumed, containable or finite. A story will inevitably point out that it has been told before. Repetition operates according to Derrida’s description of the fort:da of Freud in that what is "repeated" is repetition itself. Every time Fenn and Susan come back to the matter about which a decision has to be made and on which the end of their story depends, the matter is deferred; thus, the story cannot be concluded within the text. The end about which they speculate is caught up in a repetitious deferral without end. Though repetition disrupts the concepts of beginning and end and would deny the difference between the past and the future, difference inevitably marks itself and puts forward the narrative of repetition; because repetition is never absolute, it entails the possibility of a sequence, of movement in time. Rather than asking about the validity of historical truth or about the possibility of coming to the origin of the text, we should ask now, What follows the questioning of truth? "Repetition, History, Narration" demonstrates that we can neither go back to a time before repetition nor identify the "original" repetition. Because the questioning of truth leads one back, it forces one to use a methodology based on a temporality and on a sequentiality and so forces one to create a narrative, which denies, paradoxically, the possibility of arriving at the truth.
"P.S.: In Place of a Conclusion" is a sort of anti-conclusion. "The Ending" of The Tidewater Tales appears to be an attempt to complete the story and to mark the end of the text. It recognizes the desire in Barth's work to get outside the dilemmas language poses and, indeed, to get outside of the text itself. Primarily, for the writer in The Tidewater Tales, it is the dichotomy between the textual and the real that needs to be overcome. "The Ending" is ironic in that it questions the possibility of ending and so the possibility of an outside. In this conclusion that is not a conclusion I ask, To what extent are the implications that are inscribed in a system that proposes the validity of the concept of the end (in particular the distinction between the real and the textual) assumed in turning that system against itself? Each time we are led to the edge of the text, pushed toward the "real," we are wrapped back into both the text and the dichotomy between the textual and the real, which compels us to move to an "outside."
CHAPTER I
CIRCLING
THE QUESTION OF KNOWLEDGE

Hermeneutic Circling

I will begin CIRCLING as if you already know about Sabbatical and The Tidewater Tales. Though their moving in circles (or in a circle) would seem to place us outside the texts, in developing an understanding of them, we will find ourselves already involved.

If, as readers, we are literally circling with the texts we interpret, the questions that seem to pose themselves (how do we begin to understand a text we are a part of, and how do we step off the circle, how do we take knowledge with us and perhaps even use it in reading, in becoming involved with, other texts?) are actually part of a presupposition about the shape of texts. The question of Knowledge is bound to the circling of Sabbatical and The Tidewater Tales, but it cannot accurately be said to be posed at the beginning or end of their reading, because the shape of the stories will have already circumvented the possibility of an absolute beginning or end. Therefore, the problem that always presents itself in the inscription of
the circle is the connection between, which is the effacement of, beginning and ending.

The question of the circle, as an issue in the theory of interpretation and in the breakdown of logic has, of course, its history. I make these statements about Sabbatical and The Tidewater Tales within the context of a theoretical and philosophical tradition—that of hermeneutics—and within the context of an issue inseparable from a general theory of interpretation: the hermeneutic circle.

Schleiermacher is thought of as the first in a line of four major theorists of hermeneutics, including Wilhelm Dilthey, Martin Heidegger, and Hans-Georg Gadamer. Schleiermacher described hermeneutics as the "art of understanding" and thereby helped to make the circle the figure of interpretation. Since understanding is referential (that is, since we understand by the comparison of things), what we understand forms itself into "systematic unities, or circles made up of parts" (Palmer 87). The circle as a whole defines the individual parts, while the parts together describe the circle. The hermeneutic circle can also be described in terms of the context of an idea or a work, what Schleiermacher called the work's "horizon." The meaning of a text is derived from its context, its relation to other texts, and yet the context is composed of

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1 See, for example, Palmer, on whom the following discussion of Schleiermacher and Dilthey is based.
the texts for which meaning is sought. The relation between
the whole and the part is, therefore, dialectical--each
gives the other meaning. Since a dialectical relation is
one that is logically circular, understanding, according to
Schleiermacher, takes the circle as its model.

Schleiermacher himself is, of course, part of a circle
of understanding about the development of the theory of
interpretation; by his own definition, his work can only be
understood in terms of its larger context. Richard Palmer
discusses, in his *Hermeneutics*, two forerunners of
Schleiermacher (Ast and Wolf) who form that context. And
Gadamer, in *Truth and Method*, shows us that the principle of
the hermeneutic circle stems from ancient rhetoric,
specifically, from the dialogic question and answer:

There is no such thing as a method of learning to
ask questions, of learning to see what needs to be
questioned. On the contrary, the example of
Socrates teaches that the important thing is the
knowledge that one does not know. . . . All
questioning and desire to know presuppose a
knowledge that one does not know. . . . (329)

This presupposition is what leads one to a particular
question; it is also the "problem" with the hermeneutic
circle because it involves a logical contradiction. As
Palmer puts it, "if we must grasp the whole before we can
understand the parts, then we shall never understand
anything" (87).

The fact that the hermeneutic circle presupposes a
knowledge of the thing to be understood brings to question
the validity of the circle as a model of understanding.
Schleiermacher contended that the concept of the hermeneutic circle is not invalid, but that logic cannot account for the operation of understanding. In fact, understanding requires an intuitive "leap" into the hermeneutic circle, and we thereby understand the whole and the parts together. Suggesting the possibility of an intuitive leap seems to beg the question of how one begins to understand, to beg the question of the circle's validity in terms of its logic. The question immediately posed by the circle is this: how can one understand anything if understanding entails the presupposition of knowledge about the thing? To say that understanding is partly intuitive is to say that we do understand, to assume the very thing that is being questioned.

Dilthey points out that, since every part presupposes the others, there is no true starting point for understanding. In other words, there can be no "presuppositionless" understanding (Palmer 120-21). Doing away with the idea of a starting point has as a consequence doing away with the need for a "leap" into the circle. Heidegger agrees with Schleiermacher that understanding "is not to be reduced to a vicious circle," but not that the circle's "problem" of logic is itself to be circumscribed by intuition. For Heidegger, the circle of understanding is itself the expression of what he calls the "fore-structure": "All interpretation," which he defines as "the working out of the possibilities projected in understanding," "operates
in the fore-structure. . . . Any interpretation, which is to contribute understanding, must already have understood what is to be interpreted" (Heidegger 189, 194).

In Aristotle the "problem" can only be described dialectically: "the word problema refers to those questions that appear as open alternatives because there is evidence for both views and we think that they cannot be decided by reasons, since the questions involved are too great." Problems, therefore, are "alternatives that can only be accepted as themselves and thus can only be treated in a dialectical way" (Gadamer 339). If the critique of the concept of the problem is organized by a logic of question and answer (which is what Gadamer says has happened, in neokantianism, for example), then the nature of the problem as dialectical has from the start been contradicted: "Reflection on the hermeneutical experience transforms problems back to questions that arise and that derive their sense from their motivation" (340). In other words, in trying to account for the hermeneutic "problem" we will find ourselves part of a circle that has not yet been taken into account.

That is why, for Dilthey, the task of the interpreter is not that of immersing oneself totally in the object of interpretation (which would be impossible anyway) but rather that of finding viable modes of interaction of one's own horizon with that of the text (Palmer 121) and why Heidegger says that "what is decisive is not to get out of the circle"
but to work out the fore-structures of the interpretation. "Working out" the fore-structures does not bring us to the truth about the text or even about the fore-structures. The only "objectivity" in Heidegger's system, Gadamer says, is "the confirmation of a fore-meaning in its being worked out" (237).

There are two ways of thinking about our involvement in the circle graphically, both of which pose problems for the interpretation of texts. We can think of texts, and ourselves with them, as moving along a circular path and thereby questioning the relation between beginning and end and even the validity of beginning and end as terms with which to describes texts. And we can think of the circle as an enclosure, which would lead us to position texts, and ourselves with them, with regard to the relation between inside and outside.

**Titles and Quotations and Quotations of Titles**

Where one should begin--with what metaphor, for example, or at what chronological point in the story--must be confronted, given a structure that would tend to deny a beginning and an end and to de-temporalize time. To say that I will begin CIRCLING does not consider the problem with beginning that has already presented itself: it assumes, for instance, that the title is exterior, outside the circle of the "text proper." In *The Tidewater Tales* titles are shown to be involved with the development of the
story and text, in effect, circling with the text, so that even they cannot be cited as beginnings.

There are several types of doubling or folding of the title in *The Tidewater Tales*, types which complicate the circling of the text: (1) the phrase "the tidewater tales" is reiterated in comments about the story being told; (2) the narrator quotes the title in telling the story of *The Tidewater Tales*; (3) title pages "inside" the text begin again the tidewater tales; and (4) the title pages at the so-called upper and lower limits of the text appear to frame the "text proper."

In "Title (to be specified)" Jacques Derrida uses the example of *La Folie du jour* to describe the relation between the title and the same words met elsewhere in the text. We meet various combinations of the terms of the title *The Tidewater Tales* throughout *The Tidewater Tales*, so Derrida’s discussion is directly applicable to our first complication. Though when the words are used in a statement inside the text they do not have the same function as the title, the doubling brings into question the possibility of discovering the original performance of the terms. As part of a statement, "the tidewater tales" or a phrase such as "these tales" "will not have title-value," as Derrida says, because they will not have the same nominal role; that is, the same words met elsewhere will not serve to name the text as does the title ("Title" 13). The title occurs, properly speaking, on the border of the text, and though it is "still
part of a so-called literary fiction, ... it does not play a role in the same fashion as what is found inside the same fiction." Though, in their ability to force upon us a return, the terms of the title function as a quotation, the title itself is not, in Derrida's terms, "citational": "In the duplicity of this occurrence it is impossible to say which is the original and which repeats the other" ("Title" 14).

The narrator of *The Tidewater Tales*, unlike the narrator of *La Folie du jour*, also quotes the title in telling about telling the story, "easing back into our rent-paying labors while working up our coupled viewpoint for *The Tidewater Tales: A Novel*" (*TT* 643). This quotation, or requotation, has essentially the same effect as the repetition of the same words inside the text, but the effect comes about in a slightly different manner. The quotation would seem to designate this book, *The Tidewater Tales*, the one we can hold in our hands, 656 pages long, copyright 1987. But, apparently, the one the narrator is talking about is not yet written, the viewpoint not yet "worked up." And that will always be the case with this type of reference. When the narrator quotes the title of this book, *The Tidewater Tales* will not have ended. That will always be the case, even if, as we will see, the words "*The Tidewater Tales*" are what would usually be called the last line of the text.
At the apparent end of the section "Our Story," there occurs these lines (in reference to the "Ordinary Point Delivery Story" being told and to the "forthcoming" "book"):

(with the last line still unglossed) there unfolds--

This Book: (TT 82)

On the following page a title, partly a quotation--The Tidewater Tales plus an expanded subtitle--seems to designate a book separated from what is thereby marked as introductory:

THE 
TIDEWATER TALES 
OR, 
WHITHER THE WIND LISTETH 
OR, 
OUR HOUSE'S INCREASE: 
A NOVEL

This (what can it be called?) partly "new" non-titling title has a dual function. It is both part of a statement within and about the story and a title in itself. Though it is connected by a colon to the previous line, it has its own page, in effect a title page, and there is no end punctuation to assure us of its placement in the discourse of the previous passage or of "The Ordinary Point Delivery Story."

The colon preceding the title page has the effect of negating the introductoriness of the introduction by connecting the two sections narratively. What follows a colon is, according to the organization of grammar, an example or an elaboration of that which precedes it. In
other words this book is the "glossing" of "This Book:" (TT 82). If the last line remains "unglossed," as the narrator claims, it is only because the book, as well as the "introduction," cannot be said to have come to an end, because for neither of them is there a "last line" per se.

The Tidewater Tales "concludes" with another title page:

THE
TIDEWATER
TALES:
A NOVEL. (TT 656)

This title page, after which nothing seems to follow, has the effect of leading us back. It functions as the quotation of a title, so questions the possibility of coming to an end; we would have to place "beginning" in quotation marks as well, because finding the original statement is problematic. It cannot be determined whether the title at the supposed last line of the text quotes or is the referent for another quotation, the quotation of itself. In relation to La Folie du jour Derrida has called this type of quotation of quotation the "chiasmatic invagination of the borders," each of which is the quotation of the other. This organization "does not allow us to discern in the reading the indivisible limit of a beginning from an end. It carries away the condition for every dictatorial emergence of a title, the title implying these critical effects of the border, the possibility of discerning indivisible borders" ("Title" 20).
In "Living On: Border Lines" Derrida suggests that one of the reasons that the limits of the book are indistinct is that, with books such as La Folie du jour, there are no graphic signals to indicate a distinction:

The starting edge will have been the quotation (at first not recognizable as such) of a narrative fragment that in turn will merely be quoting its quotation. For all these quotations, quotations of requotations with no original performance, there is no speech act not already the iteration of another, no circle and no quotation marks to reassure us about the identity, opposition, or distinction of speech events. (96)

The title page at the supposed end of The Tidewater Tales is the quotation of a quotation (TT 83) of a quotation (TT 5) (not including the cover of the book). There are at least four title pages, one of them, as we have seen, well within what would usually be called the text proper, none of which is distinguished by quotation marks. Though each of them has its differences, both contextual and graphic (I have not attempted to represent the spacing of lines, the level of boldness, or, least of all, the style of type), never does the difference allow us to place, with any sense of security, one title in relation to another.

Titles in The Tidewater Tales are also part of the circling of the story. This might best be illustrated by the "lower level" titles or titles of what one traditionally calls the titles of chapters. (The divisions of The Tidewater Tales tend to disrupt traditional notions about the hierarchy of parts divided and about the relation between the parts and the "whole" text. Designating the
divisions with terms such as **Part**, **Section**, or **Chapter** would give the hierarchical organization of divisions a validity. We might find that *not* suggesting the hierarchy is impossible; quotation marks can only question a term--they cannot render its meanings neutral.) Often the titles will carry as much weight in the telling of the story as the "chapters themselves." For example, these are two consecutive chapters quoted (if this is possible) in their entirety:

**DONE?**

Done.

**TIME FOR LUNCH.**

Skip lunch. *(TT 49)*

One chapter would be empty of a "text proper" but for the points of ellipsis that indicate its emptiness:

> IN ADVANCED AS IN EARLY PREGNANCY, A WOMAN’S APPETITE MAY BE CAPRICIOUS BUT WHY DID PETER SAGAMORE EAT NO LUNCH, EITHER IN THE MAIN HOUSE OR IN THE FIRST GUEST COTTAGE?

... *(TT 53)*

The following title includes its own points of ellipsis and is the "chapter itself":

**AH SO. EVEN THE B^b, THEN, AS WE HAD FEARED ...** *(TT 53)*

The most dramatic of these titles is the 463-word title of a chapter that reads simply, "Ahem" *(TT 73).* "Ahem" is the breath taken after the recitation of its long-winded title. It is ironic that the chapter is simply a comment on its title, the reverse of what is usually expected of the relation between titles and their texts. One of the
functions of the title, according to Gerard Genette, is the designation of the "'content' of the text" (711). Though the "content" of a text is undeterminable, and though the term thematic used to describe this type of title is ambiguous, "thematic titles dominate the picture widely today" (715). Being a comment on the length of the title is doubly ironic because it makes the relation between titles and their texts one of the subjects of the chapter, a subject that is not, apparently, part of the title itself. That 463-word title is, in fact, longer than half of the chapters in the first of the largest divisions. The point, here, is this: if we have to consider the title (or titles) as part of the circling text or as part of the circling story about the text, we can no longer cite a title as the location of a beginning. We are already on the circle.

Another way to approach the difficulty of beginning is to question the supposed first line of a text. Sabbathical might seem to begin with the quotation of a poem thus:

"There was a story that began,
Said Fenwick Turner: Susie and Fenn--

Oh, tell that story! Tell it again! Wept Susan Seckler . . ." (§ 9)

"'There was a story that began,'" refers to a story already told. In "The Prose and Poetry of It All, or, Dippy Verses," Barth calls these verses "a kind of standing joke between" Fenn and Susan. What makes it funny to them, and this is the case with all standing jokes, is its being "repeated" (FB 240). Hence, our double quotation marks and
Barth's indenting the verses, which serves to indicate their repetition as well as their genre. Being the archetypal introduction of a story, it would tend to lull its readers into analytical complacency; it offers itself simply as a sign (like any other sign) marking this point the "beginning." But as an introduction to Sabbatical, it is ironic and complex. It is suggested that the story will begin after the opening line, specifically with the italicized words Susie and Fenn, but, in fact, it has already begun. "'There was a story . . .' is a part of the story that is about problematic beginnings, a part of Sabbatical. Barth says that "Fenwick Turner says 'there was a story that began,' etc., but in fact he has not yet begun the story he knows is there to be told" (FB 240). We are not in contradiction, though we might seem to be. The story Fenn proposes to tell might not yet be read as the story of Sabbatical. As we read on, though, we find that Sabbatical is all there is of Fenn's story and he, in fact, claims it as his own. Fenn's story and the story of Sabbatical are being repeated but have not yet begun. To say that a story has already begun or, to be emphatic about it, always already begun is to say that the beginning cannot be localized, that there is no location by which we can cite the beginning, which is to say that the beginning has not actually occurred—it has not taken place so does not exist in such a way that it can be found or met with, which is to
say that the story has not yet begun. We circle in *Sabbatical* between the already and the not yet.

Graybeard Fenn would be happy to give it another go; we² have fiddled with our tale through this whole sabbatical voyage: down the Intracoastal in the fall in our cruising sailboat, *Pokey, Wye I.*, from Chesapeake Bay to the Gulf of Mexico and across to Yucatan; all about the Caribbean island-hopping through the mild winter of 1980; and in May through our first lazy open-ocean passage, from St. John in the U.S. Virgins direct for the Virginia Capes, Chesapeake Bay, Wye Island, the closing of the circle, sabbatical’s end. (§ 9)

Apparently, Fenn has told the story before or tried to: this is "another go," another telling or at least another attempt at beginning. Fenn and Susan’s fiddling with the tale is the inevitable difficulty of getting it going. Though the sabbatical is over, or, to be precise, nearly over, they have not yet decided how to begin *Sabbatical*. Precision, here, is important, considering the logic of the circle. ("Sabbatical" [the voyage] comes to be conflated with "Sabbatical" [the story as well as the book], so that even the first mention of the term in the opening paragraph has to be read as meaning both the voyage and the story.) If their voyage and story are circular, the end of the sabbatical will have to be the beginning of *Sabbatical*. Strictly speaking, the "closing of the circle" of the voyage is not marked by the regaining of the Chesapeake Bay or even

² This "we," which refers to Fenn and Susan, is confusing because Fenn, who makes this speech, uses both the third person (in referring to himself) and the first person (in referring to himself and Susan); the intricacy of *Sabbatical’s* point of view is discussed in the "Forking" section of Chapter II.
landfall at Wye Island, and their story does not begin with the events described in the opening passage.

What Fenn and Susan call the "end" of the sabbatical has come to be associated with the resolution of problems Fenn and Susan faced on their setting out, principally, whether to have a child. Until that decision is made, one can speak of the "closing of the circle" only figuratively. And since theirs is a sabbatical voyage, only the mainland is an appropriate symbol of its end. As long as they have sailing to do, the decision can be made later:

Fenwick considers, then sets forth his private, no doubt whimsical reason for preferring Solomons Island to a mainland harbor. Since the turn of the year, we have been on or between islands. Fenn feels, therefore, irrationally but strongly, that tying up at a mainland slip, even anchoring in a mainland cove, is tantamount to ending our sabbatical voyage. (§ 85)

Fenn’s reasons are not "whimsical," though this passage in isolation might make them seem so. If they declare that their voyage is over, they have as much as decided that they have failed: "It was our hope and intention that by the end of this same voyage we would know better our hearts and minds vis-a-vis several decisions which lie ahead; but by and large, we don’t, yet" (§ 83-84). It is their salvation as a couple that the decisions "lie ahead." "In short, let’s stay with islands, ensiled, isolated, until we know better our main landfall. Maybe we’ll know after Washington and Baltimore" (§ 84).

It turns out that Washington and Baltimore are locations that mark events that shape the story of
Sabbatical. In Washington, Fenn meets his friend, Dougal Taylor, who was a colleague of Fenn’s when Fenn was in the CIA and who is still on the payroll. Fenn sees Doog, as they call him, because he might have information about Fenn’s brother, Manfred, an upper-level CIA officer who has been missing for over a year, and Manfred’s son, Gus, a Marxist plumber who has been missing since he went to Chile to work against the CIA’s intervention there. Doog knows little, beyond the obvious possibilities, about Manfred’s disappearance. But he reveals to Fenn that Gus’s mother, Carmen, who happens also to be Susan’s mother, was in effect offered the option of ransoming Gus, who might still be alive as a political prisoner in Chile, by becoming an agent of the CIA. Fenn’s son, Orrin, might even be approached by the CIA. And Fenn is offered by Doog himself the option of doubling, if he is approached by a foreign agency, in exchange for further information about Manfred and Gus.

And, perhaps most importantly, Fenn is warned by Doog that the Agency might have come up with an untraceable inducer of cardiac arrest. Fenn is a prime target for this type of liquidation because he has had a heart attack before and because his exposé of illegal CIA activities has made him many CIA enemies. On the bus from Washington, Fenn has a minor cardiac episode.

Because Fenn had once been involved with the CIA it is impossible to disentangle his life from the movement of that agency. It does not matter that he joined the CIA to
"neutralize [Manfred], if not convert him. What happened was more the opposite" (§ 45). When Doog's pitch is followed up, Fenn tries to step off the circle:

It goes without saying, Marilyn Marsh says, that you can say no.
Fenn says No.

... Marcus Henry asks Is that the end of your interest in [Manfred and Gus]?
Fenn considers. Yes. (§ 304)

To know about Manfred and Gus, Fenn has to take the pitch, has to involve himself in the CIA. Fenn's "no" is ineffective, and his "yes" is an outright lie--an angry claim that he can dissociate himself from the CIA and rid himself of its influence.

Whereas Fenn's trip to Washington illustrates the difficulty of extricating oneself from the circle, Susan's trip to Baltimore illustrates the problem of closing the circle. What happens in Baltimore is this: Susan has an abortion. What is relevant about the abortion to this argument is that she has it without discussing it with Fenn. They get pregnant without deciding to get pregnant, and so that Fenn will not be trapped into saying "have the baby," she has the abortion without Fenn's being in on the decision. Near the apparent end of the book, when the abortion story ("Susan's Friday" [§ 287-97]) is told, Fenn and Susan's problems are unresolved. At the climax of the story, when it seems that they will split up, Fenn cannot even decide which way to steer the boat; they "circle slowly in mid-channel" (§ 347) around the red and black buoy that
marks the splitting of the river, the point at which a
decision has to be made.

At the apparent end of the book they are anchored
behind Cacaway. Cacaway is "fundamental" (§ 354) to
*Sabbatical* because that is "Where It All Started" (§ 193).
Fenn and Orrin "rescued" Susan and her sister, Miriam, who
were canoeing in wind and rough water. There, having
dropped off Orrin and Miriam, Fenn and Susan made love and
began their romance. The implication is that they have come
full circle. But they can neither close the circle nor get
off it. Though Fenn never actually accepts the pitch Doog
had offered, they are up to their necks in knowledge and
anxiety about the CIA. Susan conjectures that there may be
"Company Safe-houses on Solomons Island right over there and
on our beautiful Chesapeake River and God knows where else,
maybe even on our precious Cacaway Island." Fenn
interrupts, "Not on Cacaway, Susan. Never on Cacaway" (§
120), but his response is more wish than conviction.

In *Sabbatical* Fenn and Susan have not yet made
landfall. In *The Tidewater Tales* they are still sailing.
It is said in *The Tidewater Tales* that the Talbots (the
characters on whom, it seems, Fenn and Susan of *Sabbatical*
are "based") have "closed the circle of their cruise . . .
with so many questions unresolved" (*TT* 438). They have
"closed the circle of their cruise" in the sense that they
are back in the Chesapeake Bay. They have begun to retrace
some of the passage making of a year before and even of the
beginning of their relationship. But being "where it all started," behind Cacaway, is meaningless given the definition of closure established in *Sabbatical*; if questions are unresolved, though Fenn and Susan have regained the Chesapeake and even Cacaway, *Sabbatical* cannot be said to have closed. Behind Cacaway, their boat is anchored as if *Sabbatical* is unwilling or incapable of moving on around. In *The Tidewater Tales*, Peter and Katherine meet the characters of *Sabbatical* on the water, sailing, having not yet made their "main landfall." The supposed end of *Sabbatical* cannot be considered the end because of the impossibility of closure and the impossibility of getting off the circle, of establishing a point of reference outside the circle from which one can claim that the circle is complete.

The beginning cannot be the beginning, either. Following "A Storm At Sea" (§ 9) is "A Dialogue On Diction," which is told "Three days later" (§ 11), and following that is "The Story Of Fenwick Turner’s Boina," which occurs in "the late fall of Nineteen Sixty" (§ 27), twenty years before the "present." At the "end" of "The Cove," which is the first of the three sections and is claimed to be introductory (Fenn says about the rest of the story, "What the reader doesn’t know yet would fill a book" [§ 73]), Fenn wonders:

> Have we decided where to begin it?
> Oh, in the middle, says Susan, definitely. In medias fucking res, as my helper would say.
Before his helper edits out his casual vulgarity. Okay: we'll start with the storm at sea, like the big boys, and work in the exposition with our left hands as we go along.

Shivering Susan points out that the reader doesn't know yet for example about her seducing Fenwick on Cacaway Island in 1972, or about Penn's son Orrin's old crush on her. Our left hands are going to be busy. (§ 72)

The middle is the only possible place to start. The storm at sea has already been told. The story has already begun. We already know about Cacaway (some of it, at least); our left hands have been busy, too.

Sabbatical forces us to see ourselves within, in the midst of, a story and a text. Being on the circle, in fact, demarcates an enclosure and demands that we confront the problem of the relation between the inside and the outside (of a story, a novel, a text, etc.). These two ways of viewing the circle (as a path and as an enclosure) are inseparable. In Of Grammatology Derrida develops, from the notion of the trace, the impossibility of locating a beginning in the text: "We must begin wherever we are: in a text where we already believe ourselves to be" (162). This statement questions the possibility of beginning, but within the context of the development of a methodology of a criticism based on the axial proposition that there is nothing outside the text, and based on a consideration of the text as an enclosure. Derrida says that "In a certain way I am within the history of psychoanalysis as I am within Rousseau's text. Just as Rousseau drew upon a language that was already there—and which is found to be somewhat our
own, thus assuring us a certain minimal readability of French literature—in the same way we operate today within a certain network of significations . . ." (Of Grammatology 160). For Fenn and Susan, as well as for the reader of Fenn and Susan, there is no outside of the text. They must begin in the middle because middle is all there is; they begin on the inside.

On the other hand, being within the text does not insure the efficacy of enclosure but rather emanates from the necessity of the text’s being part of a "network of significations" that will not allow one to "sustain the coherence of one’s own discourse" (Derrida, Of Grammatology 162). We might want to reach a point that is exterior in relation to the totality of a text, what Derrida calls the "exorbitant" because it would be outside the orbit (orbis) of an enclosure, in order to see that what we are dealing with is in fact a circle and an enclosure. We might, in other words, desire a transcendent reading necessary for a view of the whole. But such an exorbitancy cannot be given methodological intraorbitaly assurances. Within the closure, the work can only be judged "in terms of the accepted oppositions" (Derrida, Of Grammatology 162), and attempting to get out of the orbit reestablishes the oppositions one is attempting to exceed, principally the opposition of inside and outside, which leads us to conceptualize the text as an enclosure in the first place.
It should be clear that circling and telling are intertwined. In order to talk about circling, one has to get on the boat, so to speak. Beginning is as much a problem for the critical encompassing of a text as for the narrative development of one. The exorbitant position might be thought of as the circular path itself, because the path cannot be thought of as being *within* the enclosure. In a sense, it is outside the enclosure, but it is also that which defines the circle as an enclosure. For Derrida the path is the point "farthest" out from which to view the text, neither within nor without, but at the contour of the text, the position that questions the validity of the enclosure as an element of textuality. The exorbitant is, therefore, a deconstruction of the hermeneutic idea of interpretation, which is based on the notion that the circle of understanding is not only not a vicious circle but a productive and stimulating paradox. The exorbitant does not at all get us out of the circle but calls into question the method with which the interpreter proceeds, saying, in effect, you cannot consider your interpretation transcendental or outside the orbit of any particular discourse or discourse "as a whole" because attempting to get out reinscribes the circle, and neither can you consider your interpretation simply *within* because enclosure is always broached.

At the contours of *Sabbatical* there is the story of Fenwick's boina. His losing it in the mouth of "The Cove"
introduces the problem of closure because Fenn expects it to come back to him and expects its coming back to close another stage of his life; his finding it marks (for Fenn at least), if nothing else, an end. It turns out that Fenn has lost the boina twice before, once in the Tajo de Ronda, a sheer gorge in Spain, famous for its use in the execution of prisoners in the Spanish Civil War, and once at the Choptank River Safe-house. Susan wants to know

Why . . . telling me this story— in the seventh year of our marriage, for Christ's sake, on our sabbatical— make[s] you believe that your boina will float back to you? No: don't touch me. (§ 45)

Susan is touchy because the "Story Of Fenwick Turner's Boina" involves telling about Fenn's first wife Marilyn Marsh and his "first" sabbatical, which they took in Spain. There, Fenn lost his boina as he tossed into the Tajo the manuscript of a novel that was, for the most part, about him and Marilyn Marsh. Susan has, effectively, answered her own question: "Not only did the Tajo return your hat; it keeps returning the story you threw into it" (§ 45). When Fenn lost his hat again, he "told [his] colleagues this story—just the boina part of it. Next day [Fenn's brother Manfred] found [the] hat on the beach, washed up by the tide right in front of the safe-house" (§ 45). The point is that the telling of the story of the hat brings the hat back:

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I will come back to this scene, this coming back of the hat, in Chapter IV in terms of Derrida's play with the fort:da of Freud, the story of the spool.
The question before us now is whether it's the Ronda story that's needed to bring it back this third time or the Choptank River Safe-house story, which I haven't told you yet. (§ 46)

"The Choptank River Safe-house Story" comes much nearer Fenn's finding the hat the third time. Getting the hat back is important to Fenn because it will signify a new beginning—both times he has lost and recovered the hat it marked the fact that "a stage of [their] life and [his] was over" (§ 44)—and because Fenn's writing had become associated with the wearing of the hat. In reference to that first attempt at fiction, Frank says (in The Tidewater Tales), "Both my hero and I developed the habit of wearing our boinas at the typewriter" (TT 408). The recovery of the hat this third time may signify his ability to write Sabbatical.

Circling Between Texts

Both Sabbatical and The Tidewater Tales are framed by storms. But the books are not simply parallel, their similarity not merely coincidence (unless we mean "coincidence" literally). The storm that appears to end Sabbatical (Fenn and Susan run for the cover of Cacaway because of the approaching weather) is the same storm that appears to begin The Tidewater Tales. The incidents that occur in the "separate" stories coexist. On the day of the storm Frank and Lee were "wrung-out." Lee had just had her
abortion and Frank had decided that he was a failure as a writer of fiction. Frank tells Peter and Katherine,

I kept wishing something amazing would happen, out of the blue. . . . But the world went on being the world: sunshine and sailboats and problems.

Remarks Peter We were there. That's just about when I said to Katherine down on Nopoint Point For pity's sake set me a task, and she said Take us sailing, and here we are. (TT 416)

Here, in The Tidewater Tales, is Sabbatical. Lee tells all of them,

We could have ducked in here, . . . but since there was time to get up to Cacaway, and since nothing was settled, we stayed with our island-to-island thing. When the storm hit, as you probably remember, it was a humdinger.

We remember, all right. But you got more of it than we did. (TT 417)

Before the storm hit, Frank put Act One of his "ovarian" TV play, called SEX EDUCATION: Play, into an empty flare canister, "and at the last minute [he] stuck this boina in there too, for the obvious reason, and [he] floated the whole thing off down the tide like baby Perseus in his sea chest or Moses in his basket. Return to sender" (TT 417).

The floating on the tide of Frank's TV play is the tidal return of a long line of messages in bottles and tidal returns both in the history of literature (Barth compares Perseus and Moses to the sex education script) and in the history of Barth's fiction. In LETTERS Ambrose Mensch makes a movie that contains a "water message sequence," which reflects his sending and receiving messages in bottles as a boy in Lost in the Funhouse. The "re" of one of Ambrose's
letters to the Author describes his receipt of "water message #2":

A new letter to me of yesternoon, "washed up" in an otherwise almost empty, Barnacled, sea-grown magnum of Mumm’s Cordon Rouge upon the beach before Mensch’s Castle during the refilming of the "Water Message sequence" of the motion picture FRAMES, duly discovered by yours truly, and found to consist this time wholly of body, without return address, date, salutation, close, or signature. To which the late "Arthur Morton King’s" reply would doubtless be the inverse, like Yours Truly’s to me of May 12, 1940. But I have commenced the second cycle of my life; I am striving through, in order to reach beyond, such games. (L 765)

The water message of May 12, 1940 (water message #1), is the one Ambrose found in Lost in the Funhouse. On the top line it read, "TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN," and, with nothing in between on the next-to-bottom line, "YOURS TRULY" (LF 53). "Reaching beyond" the games of his youth, the sending and receiving of water messages, the tendency in LETTERS (and letters) and Barth’s fiction, the fiction of "Yours Truly," to return, might be as difficult as holding back the tide. That Ambrose has only "commenced the second cycle" of his life places him rigidly within the system he wants to escape. It is only in the second phase, after one has begun to repeat, that the system can be established as cyclical. I repeat, it is in the second phase that the system is established—not only recognized, but also confirmed. The doubling back of the cycle must not be construed as establishing an origin. The so-called "beginning" of the cycle is always circumscribed. The text never comes back to the beginning as it was because the second cycle amounts to
a deformation of the first, so that, in one sense, the first phase should be considered always absent. Ambrose says he has commenced the second cycle in order to reach beyond it, apparently not realizing that it is the second cycle that contains him, not taking into account that he is part of the circling fiction.

In The Tidewater Tales Peter recalls that as a boy he sent himself out on the tide in a boat to see whether he could recover all the messages in bottles that he had sent out from the family dock but that had not returned (TT 172). The fact that "no messaged bottle cast from the family dock had ever been seen again" (TT 172) might disrupt a system of return based on tidal currents and messaged bottles and therefore disrupt a linguistic system of return generally, but Peter distinguishes between the practical experiment and a generalized metaphorical necessity: "the unpredicted wind had spoiled the experiment: There remained two hours yet to tide-turn, by when he would be at sea indeed. What was more, even the present gentle breeze would cancel out the returning tide; he would have to row the six miles home" (TT 172). Though the experiment of Peter’s youth failed because he could not control all the variables (and in fact would always fail because the variables varied with every tide), generally the trend was to return: "nothing he ever saw went down the Honga that didn’t start there, and it all came back

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4 In the following section the deformation is considered in terms of movement in time.
on the tide, no different but for a few barnacles" (TT 231).
The emphatic "nothing" and "all" seem not to take into
account the messages in bottles cast out from the family
dock, but Peter is speaking about a return of a different
order, a metaphoric circling: "It's just us Hoopers Island
water folk going out to work and coming home again,
generation after generation" (TT 231). Even the Hoopers
Island waterfolk do not necessarily come in on the tide.
With oars or sail or an engine they might even return
against the tide. But the tidal return is, in principle,
like the return of the waterfolk.

That tidal return is metaphoric does not negate its
impact on the text. The message is, in fact, made more
complex in its coming back a metaphor. The Tidewater Tales
tends to disrupt a simple reading of metaphoricity; within
the text, the traditional division between the figurative
and the literal is shown to be untenable. The figurative
and the literal have a circular relationship in that one
occupies part of the space of the other. Not only is the
message in the bottle a metaphor of linguistic return
generally, but is itself part of the linguistic return for
which it is a metaphor. What one might have called the
literal interpretation, the notion of linguistic return, is
itself at least partly metaphoric. No reading can separate
return from metaphoricity. The message in the bottle comes
back on the tide of Barth's fiction. The returning of the
message is one of the things that returns.
It almost goes without saying that at a critical point in Peter and Katherine's relationship and in Peter's working himself out of his less-is-more, self-crippling philosophy of writing, they find that flare canister, read Frank's play, and are motivated by it to continue their story. Peter and Katherine retrieve and don the writerly boina that Frank felt he could no longer wear.

And then the storm. The hat drifting from the characters of one story to the characters of the other and even (though not in as literal a manner) from one text to the other suggests the sequentiality of the events.\(^5\) The Tidewater Tales was published after Sabbatical. But the storm that makes appropriate the use of the flare canister in the sending off of the play and the hat is the same storm that carries it to Peter and Katherine—"Says Peter Alert and Locate" (§ 417)—and thereby returns the play and the hat to Frank, their sender. The storm that "ends" Sabbatical (that does not allow Sabbatical to end) is the same storm, happens at the same time, as the one that "begins" The Tidewater Tales. And it is that storm that carries Fenn and Susan (in the form of Frank and Lee), carries Sabbatical, into The Tidewater Tales.\(^6\) The texts

\(^5\) The relation between Sabbatical and The Tidewater Tales is further developed in Chapter IV wherein the "changing" of names becomes a marker for the sequencing of narratives and the disruption of the concepts of truth and origin.

\(^6\) What must be described in terms of the circle as the same might in other contexts be described as doubled or repeated; on repetition (of events, characters, texts) see Chapter IV.
seem to be part of the same conception. Still wondering how to begin toward the apparent end of *Sabbatical*, Fenn makes a statement that is as applicable to the relation between two texts as between the beginning and ending of one. Susan prompts:

> Which came first?  
> They both come first! How could either come before the other, except as one twin happens to get delivered earlier?  

Regardless of their conception, though, one is "delivered earlier," *Sabbatical* was published first. Though it is the same storm, it seems to end *Sabbatical* and begin *The Tidewater Tales*. The sequentiality of the texts would seem to disrupt any notion of their circling, but at the point of origination and apocalypse circling tends to bring about

**The Collapsing of Time.**

Susan wants to make their story in the shape of a circle for the purpose of bringing about that collapse. At the end of *Sabbatical* she says,

> ... 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.  

If the beginning of a story is literally the story’s end, "beginning" and "end" are meaningless, except as signifiers of an arbitrary point at which one notices that they are meaningless, that the point is arbitrary. Circling within a text is the denial of an origin and end, which is to say, the wish for immortality.
Peter and Katherine are told "The Long True Story of Odysseus's Short Last Voyage," which was not included in Homer's Odyssey (for reasons that will become apparent) and which illustrates the telling out of time. Odysseus and Nausicaa decided to sail to "The Place Where Time Stands Still." "The problem," Odysseus explained to Homer and Nausicaa, "was time..."

As Circe had explained it to him, and Calypso had subsequently confirmed, The Place Where Time Stands Still does not stand still; it recedes to westward at exactly the speed of the sun itself, a speed no ordinary vessel could hope to approach. (TT 208)

Just at the moment when it looked like Odysseus and Nausicaa would fail, Odysseus remembered that he had asked Homer about a Phaeacian idiomatic expression Homer had used: "That a young fellow certainly can sing up a storm. Being a prose-minded Ithacan, he asked Homer whether the tribute was literally correct and, if so, whether Homer could teach him the knack." Homer replied that "The secret was to find the right song for the singer and the occasion, and then (in Homer's own words) to let 'er rip" (TT 223). Homer had taught Odysseus the first two lines of a new song, and at the crucial point, Odysseus sang the first of these lines into the sail:

Once upon a time...

In heartfelt harmony then, Diana says, Nausicaa joined him in Line Two, which they sang together like this:

There was a story that began... Not only did the boat surge forward and the sun climb visibly a few degrees above the horizon, but when it did, instead of facing the problem of Line Three (which neither of them knew), they found
themselves back at Line One: Once upon a time. And when they followed it with Line Two—There was a story that began—there they were, back at Line One again, and the sun another few degrees higher. Eureka, exclaims laughing Peter Sagamore.7 (TT 224)

Odysseus and Nausicaa had found the right song not only for singing up a storm but for singing themselves out of time. The song is, of course, circular—it collapses beginning and end. The "Third Line" is both beginning and end at the same time. Strictly speaking, there is no Third Line, only the repetitions of lines One and Two.

The storm that "begins" The Tidewater Tales is, in fact, two storms, one at the beginning and one at the end. "The first storm—Blam!—was born to a sultry low-pressure cell that squatted over Maryland all Sunday, June 15, 1980, last weekend before the solstice... Hail and mini-twisters: trees downed, roofs unroofed, doors unhinged, windows blown... and our story begun" (TT 23). Much of the language in the description of the storms would seem to establish the movement of The Tidewater Tales as sequential: the "first" storm "begins" the story. And the fixing of the dates, both the calendar date and the solar date, would seem to suggest the structural dominance of time. But the storms, both of them, blow structure apart—"roofs unroofed, doors unhinged, windows blown." The sequentiality and temporality in this passage are debris left by the pressure

7 The repetition of these lines is very much like the reiteration of the standing joke that does not allow Sabbatical to begin: "There was a story that began... Oh, tell that story! Tell it again!" (§ 9).
of language and suggest (is this the first time?) the impossibility of a perfect circularity. One word of a text must follow another, one sentence another sentence. But if time cannot be overcome in a book, it can at least be "unhinged," its "windows blown." A story can force us back around, not to its beginning but to where we were. With "[t]he second storm---Blooev!---... our story came 'round on itself" (TT 23). "Blam!" and "Blooev!" are the terms Fenn and Susan haggle over in deciding "what words best follow Once upon a time" [§ 11]. Peter and Katherine's story not only comes around on itself, but also comes around on Sabbatical.

"Once upon a time" is, of course, a convention. By convention it establishes a beginning; that is, readers have agreed to call this place at which the statement "Once upon a time" occurs the beginning. In a sense, anything one says will always be understood as following "Once upon a time"—everything comes after the beginning. But we should argue this point rigorously. If everything is understood as following "Once upon a time," then the beginning has always already occurred and is not located anywhere. In both Sabbatical and The Tidewater Tales this conventional beginning comes even after the apparent first lines of the stories, so that even the statement "Once upon a time" is marked as coming after the story has begun. "There was a story" (the apparent first line of Sabbatical and the "Line Two" of the Odysseus story in The Tidewater Tales) functions
in the same way as "Once upon a time": they both mark a point in time that is previous to the story as the beginning of the story.

A story can be constructed in such a way that the delivery of the event that begins the story can coincide with the event that also ends the story:

Blam! cries Kath, A storm at sea. At bay.
Says Peter Blam Blooey! Two storms. At once. (TT 75)

They decide that the story will be "bracketed" by twin storms. The storms twin in the same sense that the Sabbatical and The Tidewater Tales are twin--one only happens to be delivered earlier. Because in the "Ordinary Point Delivery Story," at the apparent end of "Our Story," Peter and Katherine run through the list of events and objects to be delivered and the sequence of their delivery and because a new title page (including "The Tidewater Tales" and an expanded subtitle) follows "Our Story," it is implied that "Our Story" occurs preliminary to the "actual" story. But the introductoriness of "Our Story" is negated by the circling of titles and by the breaking down of sequentiality. The event that concludes the inventory of their story and the introduction and thereby begins their stories, which are The Tidewater Tales, is the second storm--and the first. Let's do that again: since the "Ordinary Point Delivery Story" catalogues the order of the events of the story, it "ends" with the second storm. Since the "end" of the "introduction," which is that delivery
story, is also the "beginning" of "The Tidewater Tales" (TT 83), the second storm coincides with the first:

We understand now what I meant before by two storms striking at once, two weeks apart, one up at Ordinary Point on the Twenty-ninth and one right here, right now, just as the poem’s last stanza unfolds to read Tell me their story as if it weren’t ours but like ours enough so that the powers that drive and steer good stories might fetch them beyond our present plight and--

Blam!

Go the twin storms exactly then, their force doubled by their combination. They slam together into the Eastern Shore of Maryland just as . . . there unfolds--

Blooeey!

This book: (TT 82)

With these words the book literally turns into itself, as described in another context,8 "exactly-at-the-moment-when-the-past-overtakes-the-present" (TT 610).

When Peter first mentions these two storms, he doesn’t know just what he means: "Katherine asks him what he means blam blooey two storms at once; she doesn’t get it. Neither does he, says Peter: He just upped and said it. The moon of inspiration, he supposes" (TT 75-76).

Circling also are meaning and inspiration. It is assumed that meaning is prior: one writes in order to convey

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8 That of the story May Jump tells about Sheherazade, who becomes stuck in the present after trying to reestablish a love affair with her "real-life" author, who had found himself able to move back and forth between her time and his; she utters the phrase "what you’ve done is what you’ll do" and is propelled through time and across the fiction/nonfiction border. Trying to get back to her life and time she recounts her story, hoping that at the moment when the past of the story overtakes the present, when she narrates her narrating presently, she would find herself in "her own" time, her past would be present. The Sheherazade story will be developed more thoroughly in Chapter III.
a meaning; the meaning exists before (and even independent of) the text used to convey it. *The Tidewater Tales*, though, seems to come before its meaning. Peter and Katherine’s stories are "chasing the moon and telling themselves" (TT 68). The stories "telling themselves" is not simply a personification; that the stories tell themselves is essential to the circling text. Meaning is not attached by someone outside the work, someone who exists prior to it. Meaning is developed, rather, by those who will find themselves already involved, by those who, with the text, are "chasing the moon," by those, in other words, who are going nowhere. The stories are told by narrators so much a part of the circling text that they can give us no assurances about what the text means; they cannot position themselves so as to give us a view of the whole. Indeed, it is rather difficult to talk about meaning at all in regard to the circling text because meaning requires an exteriority the text is incapable of sustaining.

Even if, against such obstacles as the text’s inability to support the notion of the priority of meaning, and the inevitable collapsing of time, the circle is offered by Barth as the figure of narration, there are other considerations that question a simple view of narration as the representation of a sequence of events. We will see in the following chapters that the notions of abortion, production, and repetition point out various dilemmas for the narrative organization of a text.
J. Hillis Miller's *The Linguistic Moment*, a thorough study of the relation between time and language, can help us through (or at least into) the problem of time in *Sabbatical* and *The Tidewater Tales*. Miller notices that language has de-temporalized time. He moves back in time (to Wordsworth) to dispose of the idea that de-temporalization is a modern thing: because it is a function of language, it has taken place as long as there has been language. He therefore argues against the idea of a "progress of linguistic sophistication" (181), making his case in the form of a circle, a form that stops time and denies that progress.

Miller says that works of literature are not just now, with the advent of modernism, taking themselves into account, incorporating the criticism of other texts, and thereby becoming philosophies of literature. Signs have always referred to other signs. So works of literature are not becoming more sophisticated. The circle seems the appropriate metaphor.

But the shape of *The Linguistic Moment* is problematic from the beginning:

The reading of the book, the traversal of the never quite complete circling it makes, will bring the reader back to where he or she is at the beginning. At the beginning, nevertheless, the reader is not quite able to know where he or she is, or it would not be necessary to read the book to get there with a new awareness. (xvii)

Miller's book can only describe a "noncircular circle" (423) or one that is incomplete. For a book to actually be a circle, its reader would have to know as much at the
beginning as at the end. But that is never the case. The
beginning is never the literal end: "what none of us knows,"
says Peter Sagamore, "is the ending: the thing that's going
to happen any day now and be news to both of us, sound scan
or not, and change our lives and start a different story
altogether" (TT 68).

The circling text is always a sham.

It is suggested that the events of "Our Story" and "Day 0: Nopoint Point to Dun Cove" occur before the characters
begin circling in The Tidewater Tales proper. One of the
reasons Peter and Katherine set sail, one of the reasons, in
fact, for The Tidewater Tales, is that Peter is having
trouble telling. Peter begins the "Ordinary Point Delivery
Story" describing himself:

Once upon ahem. There was this couple. More
or less like us? That, um.
K kisses the crow’s-foot at the outboard corner
of her husband’s starboard eye. On with the
story.
Hum. Well, Him. Redneck bluecollar, right?
You have a way with words.
Declares P. S., warming to his work, Brother
sister parents? Yeah. Scholarship get out write,
okay? Stay loose sterilize write! No wife lovers
travel write. He beams: Then teach-write-Less-
Pfff?
Him to a T. (TT 74)

On Day 0 Katherine demands that Peter tell her a story he
had mentioned. This is it:

THE NEW CLOTHES HAVE NO EMPEROR.

Over.
What do you mean Over? You haven’t started!
But Peter Sagamore insists he’s done. (TT 90)
These types of "stories" occur less frequently after "Day 0," and as the story progresses they disappear altogether. The implication is that the tales are told after Peter's problem is worked out and that "Our Story" and "Day 0" are told before the problem is worked out, while Peter is still stuck. It is implied that Peter and Katherine do not begin circling until "Day 1." If the story is circular, though, everything has happened before. The introduction too must have been written or told after Peter begins to write. It is impossible to write a story beforehand, to write the story before the story is written. Getting on a circular story requires that logic be suspended. The sequentiality of getting on is denied by the story itself, which, if perfectly circular, has always already done away with movement in time.

Peter had wished as a child that he lived on the Mississippi River rather than the Honga because the Mississippi could carry him out into the world as it did Huck Finn and as Huck Finn did Samuel Clemens. The Mississippi "doesn't come back, any more than Mark Twain went back to being Samuel Clemens of Hannibal," whereas everything that "went down the Honga came back on the tide, no different but for a few barnacles" (TT 231). Peter understands now though that the difference is significant. His reading of Huck Finn again is different because it is based on other readings, because he has the experience of having already read. The Chesapeake is not the same
Chesapeake Peter and Katherine sailed before. In *Sabbatical* Fenn and Susan are told that "the Wye Island you returned to was not exactly the Wye you left" (S 269). In reference to that lost and found boina, Frank says of the hat that Peter and Katherine returned to him, "This isn’t it." Katherine is disappointed because, if it were the same hat, there would have been a story in it. But its being different does not bother Frank: "This hat here is the lineal successor to that one. He frisbees it over to [Katherine]. If the boina fits, wear it" (TT 409). Frank’s point is twofold: even if this is not the same hat, it is like enough to the old one to function in the same way and to be caught up in the same metaphors and the same plot of their story--the boina does fit; and even if it is the same hat, the hat cannot be the same--it has been in the water for at least a week.

Getting off the circle is as problematic as getting on. If we are presently circling within a text, then communicating something about the text to someone outside or applying knowledge about the text to an outside work is impossible. Lois Parkinson Zamora describes Barth’s works in general as self-contained: "Barth’s novelistic games demand enclosure" and therefore his fictions "set forth rules which operate within the work and are relevant only within that work" (28). Miller says of *The Linguistic Moment*, "My enterprise . . . is a search to locate a ground beyond language for the linguistic patterns present in my poems. Who would not wish to escape the prison house of
language and stand where one could see it from the outside?" (xvii). Though it is not clear that he could get outside language in any case, it is clear that he understands the confinement of the circular text. In Chapter Two circling will still be an issue.

In the linguistic moment time is committed to space. Every poem that Miller describes is a "version of a spatial emblem of human temporality" (xv). He suggests by the consistency of his examples that there are no temporal emblems of time, that in language, in the "linguistic moment," time must be described spatially, but concludes the spatial image, in particular the circle, is never successful at seeing the "riddle of temporality" (433). Time can only be described, written, spatially and so is stopped in language, is localized, planted, grounded, in a non-temporal element.

Language itself is a "non-temporal element." One doesn’t have the choice whether to use language spatially. A "fundamental feature of literature" is the search for a ground before or after time, "something that will support time, encompass it, still its movement" (Miller xvi-xvii).

In response to Susan’s suggestion that they make Sabbatical circular so that they can go on forever, Fenn says, "we both know that not even a story is ever after." So they "conclude, that they lived":

Happily after, to the end
Of Fenwick and Susie. . . . (§ 366)
CHAPTER II
ABORTION STORIES

1. Organizing Barth’s Texts

With *Sabbatical*, Barth’s eighth novel, which, not incidentally, has slipped prematurely out of print, the image of abortion becomes directly involved in the disposal of the text, such that abortion becomes a way of talking about writing. In Barth’s previous work, as well as in *Sabbatical*, abortion is always connected to a decision concerning order. More specifically, it is the decision of the woman concerning the organization of her life and the condition of her body. The body of the woman is incorporated, though, into the text so that a corpus of works or the corpus of a work is subject, like the woman, to conception and abortion. Barth’s notion of the text as the body of the woman forces us to consider the ramifications of abortion on the orderliness of texts. By attempting to put his stories in order (to dispose of them---from the Latin *disponere*, to arrange) Barth finds that orderliness is always sucked away. The reverse of that is also true: in trying to dispose of a story by getting rid of it some of the organization makes itself felt; the removal has an
organizational impact on the remainder of the text or corpus.

Already, perhaps, what I have said about abortion illustrates the difficulty of establishing an organization. The following complications must be included. That the abortion is the decision of the woman is not to say that she is unaffected by the father or the masculine orientation of her society, but rather that it is a decision made amid the assertion of an independence. For example, though Penn's reluctance to be a father again is part of the reason for Susan's abortion in Sabbatical, Susan's decision to have the abortion is made under the auspices of a silence that reinscribes her and Penn's separateness. That the decision concerns the order of her life is not to say that it does not affect the lives of those around her, the father's life in particular, but rather that the problem of organization is always partly textual, always a question of the life-corpus, so to speak. One of the consequences of speaking of a text as abortive or as having been aborted is the association of the text with the child that might have been born. But the question of abortion is never simply whether or not to have a child because the delivery of the child is always to be considered the delivery of another part of the corpus, which cannot be reduced to the mother-child dichotomy.

From the outset we will have noticed that talking about abortion is problematic because any description is partly an
attempt at establishing an order and therefore subject to an inevitable disruption. Ordering is itself an abortion because it entails the delivery of an imperfect or premature text.

By taking up the issue of abortion, Sabbatical comes back to an image integral to Barth’s earlier works. For example, The End of the Road, Barth’s second novel, concludes with Rennie Morgan’s abortion and death. In order to understand the relation between The End of the Road and Sabbatical’s involvement with abortion, the possibility of orderliness, we need to discover what leads to the abortion in The End of the Road. The dilemma Rennie faces, whether to abort the child she carries or to commit suicide, is tied to the organization of the family and the logic of dichotomy, a logic never completely separate from the family scene.

Joe Morgan and Jacob Horner represent the classical moral split between good and evil and its philosophical counterpart, the split between reason and chaos.

Joe was The Reason, or Being (I was using Rennie’s cosmos); I was The Unreason, or not being; and the two of us were fighting without quarter for possession of Rennie, like God and Satan for the soul of Man. (ER 129)

Rennie, Joe’s wife, is caught between them. She is the betweenness always present in division, the "point" at which Joe and Jake come together. The fact that Joe and Jake do come together or, more precisely, were never actually
separate, makes the idea of an identifiable "point" of connection problematic:

I mention this because it applies so often to people's reasoning about their behavior in situations that later turn out to be regrettable: it is possible to watch the sky from morning to midnight, or move along the spectrum from infrared to ultraviolet, without ever being able to put your finger on the precise point where a qualitative change takes place; no one can say, "It is exactly here that twilight becomes night," or blue becomes violet, or innocence guilt. One can go a long way into a situation thus without finding the word or gesture upon which initial responsibility can handily be fixed--such a long way that suddenly one realizes the change has already been made, is already history, and one rides along then on the sense of an inevitability, a too-lateness, in which he does not really believe, but which for one reason or another he does not see fit to question. (ER 100-01)

In describing the split between The Reason and The Unreason, Jake uses "Rennie's cosmos" because he knows that "pretty ontological manichaeism would certainly stand no close examination" (ER 129). Rennie struggles to uphold the categories because she has a vested interest: her husband defines himself in terms of rationality and truth and she defines herself in terms of her husband; if Joe is not entirely rational, if he cannot be entirely truthful, Rennie's position is untenable, her world (her "cosmos") is meaningless. Though Rennie would keep Joe and Jake separate, it is she who precipitates the breakdown of the categories they represent, the crossing over of reason and chaos. "The trouble," Jake says, speaking about Rennie's perception of him and Joe, "... is that the more one learns about a given person, the more difficult it becomes
to assign a character to him that will allow one to deal with him effectively in an emotional situation. . . . [A]s soon as one knows a person well enough to hold contradictory opinions about him" (ER 128), the myths of consistency and finiteness are disposed of.

Jake takes it upon himself (not for entirely selfish or evil reasons—Jake cannot be entirely anything) to show Rennie that Joe cannot possibly be the person she thinks he is and thereby shake up her false sense of stability. Rennie thinks that Joe is "the same man today he was yesterday, all the way through. He’s Genuine!" Jake applies Rennie’s idea of Joe to Rennie herself because he realizes that her sense of being is dependent on who her husband is, and therefore her "genuineness" is brought dangerously into question. If she defines herself in terms of someone else, then she cannot be "true to herself," she cannot be "genuine." Because her identity is based on something exterior, it is by her own definition, false. This is a more general problem of family relations, of the relation between husband and wife. If it is assumed that they lose their separate identities in marriage, that they become one person (in Sabbatical Susan’s grandmother takes this point of view [S 260]), the relation will be shaken, because, inevitably, something is learned about the other person that reestablishes that person’s otherness, the couple’s initial separateness.
Jake wonders whether Rennie is genuine. "I don’t know. Joe’s strong enough to take care of me, I guess. I don’t care" (ER 68). He convinces Rennie to eavesdrop on Joe, but she, of course, is hesitant and defensive: "Real people aren’t any different when they’re alone. No masks. What you see of them is authentic" (ER 71). What they see, though, begins Rennie’s "disintegration" (ER 128). Standing in the middle of the room, Joe smartly executes military commands; he pirouettes, bows, leaps, and winds up masturbating in his reading chair.

Rennie closed her eyes and pressed her forehead against the window sill. I stood beside her, out of the light from the brilliant living room, and stroked and stroked her hair, speaking softly in her ear the wordless, grammarless language she’d taught me to calm horses with. (ER 71)

It turns out that only wordlessness and grammarlessness could allow them to escape their dilemma. The inevitable breakdown of categories, particularly those of dualistic division, is a linguistic phenomenon:

"You’re as bad as Joe is. I think all our trouble comes from thinking and talking too much. We talk ourselves into all kinds of messes that would disappear if everybody just shut up about them." (ER 131)

Jake agrees with Rennie about the source of the problem but denies the possibility of a solution. The apparent ambivalence of Rennie’s feelings toward Jake, he thinks, is "only a pseudo-ambivalence whose source was in the language":

it was both single and simple, like all feelings it was also completely particular and individual, and so the trouble started only when she attempted
to label it with a common name such as love or abhorrence. . . . Assigning names to things is like assigning roles to people: it is necessarily a distortion, but it is a necessary distortion if one would get on with the plot. (ER 141-42)

Jake sees their positions as essentially textual--"getting on with the plot" is tantamount to the working out of their lives--and so he sees their problem as inescapable. They are, in fact, part of a text, part of The End of the Road. If they were "real people," though, they would have no less of a problem dealing with language. "Shutting up" (Rennie's suggestion) is never a real option, we would nevertheless rationalize, interpret, and remember, activities that are based on language and that define us as humans. Joe says of Jake,

"You won't rationalize. You didn't make any conscious interpretations of anything Rennie did. And you can't remember any conversations. Have I got to agree with Rennie that you don't even exist? What else makes a man a human being except these things?" (ER 145)

Joe represents that force in the world that would inevitably reattach us to language and to the paradoxes inherent in it. He is of the opinion that Rennie has "'got to decide once and for all what she really feels about [Jake] and [him] and herself'" (ER 145).

Rennie is completely incapable of making those decisions. The categories by which her world is constructed will simply not allow her to choose. Reason and chaos, good and evil have become, for her, confused. She is the fact that the elements of the dichotomy define, and so are dependent on, each other. The tension between Joe and Jake,
the fact that Rennie doesn't know which one is the father of the child she carries, leads her to what seems like an arbitrary decision, but one that nevertheless is made inevitable by her impossible position between: "I don't know," Rennie said. 'I'm going to get an abortion or shoot myself, Joe. I've decided'" (ER 152). She chooses abortion but winds up being killed as well. (Even in the end, the second option can never actually be eliminated.) The issue of the dichotomy in The End of the Road is abortion and death.

The Issue of Abortion

I can say Sabbatical takes up "the issue of abortion" without limiting myself to a thematic reading, to speaking of abortion as a metaphor for the sucking away of orderliness. Issue is a complex term that demands attention because it can mean a number of interrelated things: it can be a means or place of going out, an exit; the final outcome or result; termination; offspring, progeny; something coming forth from a specified source (as in "issues of a disordered imagination"); a discharge (as of blood) from the body; etc. All these meanings will come into play in the following disposal of Barth's texts. Trying to come to a conclusion about how they feel and what they should do, Joe demands that Jake stick to the issue: "'I want you to forget about everything except what's to the point and what's beside the point'" (ER 153). The problem for Jake is that nothing is absolutely "beside the point." In order to analyze a
situation, aspects of it must be ignored, even though they are not completely extraneous. And even if he wanted to take into account the whole story, it would be too long to ever finish recounting. (The narrators of Sabbatical claim fatalistically, "we ourselves may never know one another's whole story" [§ 302]. Some of it will have to be ignored, and some of it inevitably will be forgotten or lost.) Whole stories are never known. Every analysis, therefore, is a distortion. With every disposal of a problem the orderliness on which the problem can be established is found to be problematic. This is dramatized by Rennie's dilemma. She divides her options into two categories: abortion and death. But abortion, in itself, is not a real option; they know of no competent doctor who will perform it, and so Rennie dies because of the abortion.

The thematics of abortion cannot simply be gotten rid of. Abortion is an issue. But we should also understand this to mean that abortion is the result—the result of a conflict between oppositions and of the textual impossibility of orderliness. (The multiplicity of the term issue is itself an example of the problematic split between thematic and textual readings. Issue means both subject and result, among other things.)

LETTERS, Barth's seventh novel, might be thought of as a point of division of Barth's career because it is one of the major attempts within the corpus to organize the corpus
It incorporates his previous novels in a dialogue, carried on through letters, between the characters of those novels and between those characters and their "Author." LETTERS is essentially the putting into order of Barth's fiction up to that point in time (it was copyrighted in 1979).

The title that appears on the title page, which looks something like a computer card, is also the subtitle of the book:

```
A  NOLD  TIMME  PISTO  LARY  NOV  E L
B  Y  S  E  V  E N  F  I
C  T  I  T  I  O  U  S
D  RO  L  L  S&  DRE  A M
E  R  S  E  A  C  H  O
F  W  H  I  C  H  I  M  A
GINE  SHIM  S  E  LFAC  T  U  A  L
```

The letters that make up the title, LETTERS, and subtitle, An Old Time Epistolary Novel by Seven Fictitious Drolls and Dreamers Each of Which Imagines Himself Actual, function as the scheme of organization of the novel. The first chapter, which is titled "L," is divided into subchapters "A," "B," "C," "D," "E," "F," "G," "I," "N" and "E," the letters that make up the L; the second chapter is titled "E," etc. The play with this puzzle is exemplary of a text that is motivated by the organization of texts. For Barth, the puzzle is at least partly a game. It lacks the seriousness forced on us by the assumption of the rigidness of systems.

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9 See, for example, Robbins 222.
of organization. The puzzle doesn’t quite work; or, rather, in order to make the puzzle work, Barth has had to dispose of a rule of grammar. In an interview by Angela Gerst, Barth is asked about the awkward "each of which" used to refer to "drolls & dreamers":

B: Unavoidable. Whom doesn’t have enough letters.
G: To total eighty-eight?
B: And to put the g of imagines in the right position in a certain pattern, an alphabetical acrostic. (FB 173)

Barth does not compromise his text by thus making the puzzle "fit," by jeopardizing the title’s grammatical system of organization. Something consequential, something serious, is thereby learned about the possibility of putting texts in order.

Jerome Bray’s computer, which would use and create cards such as this one, will never have worked out all its bugs because it cannot take into account the sucking away of orderliness, the fact that the categories with which it begins will inevitably be problematic.

Bray’s computer generates a "schema for the rise and fall of . . . dramatic action," which is based on the conventional model "sometimes called Freitag’s Triangle":

The new schema is called the "Golden-Triangular Freitag":

```
A -- C -- E
  |    |    
  B    D
```

C A B D E
This revised organization illustrates a story's turning in on itself and reflects the computer's "vexing" "tendency to self-mimicry" (L 147). Self-mimicry is "vexing" because it can reveal contradictions or flaws within the system being mimicked. We can use the "Golden-Triangular Freitag" itself as the example. Though the new schema can suggest a story's turning in on itself, its self-reflection, and possibly even a "tendency to self-mimicry," it cannot also represent its self-destruction, which is caused by the turning in, etc.

No model can represent simply the absence of order because as a model it would entail an organization, however provisional, because, in other words, the model would countermand its own representation. Whereas The End of the Road warns that abortion can be self-destructive, LETTERS argues that it is not necessarily or absolutely self-destructive.

LETTERS cannot function simply as an organization of Barth’s previous fiction. Inevitably, there occurs in the rewriting, in the self-reflection, a deconstruction—the principles of organization are tested against the text in which they reside. In the final letter, "L: The Author to the Reader, LETTERS is 'now' ended. Envoi.," the author "goes forward with Horace's 'labor of the file': rewriting,
editing, dismantling the scaffolding, testing the wiring and the plumbing . . ." (L 771). LETTERS cannot actually be the point of division of Barth's career--the end of a stage is always provisional, the "now" must always be questioned with quotation marks. One of the items in the "file"--"sloop Brillig found abandoned in Chesapeake Bay off mouth of Patuxent River, all sails out, C.I.A. documents in attache case aboard. Body of owner, former C.I.A. agent, recovered from Bay one week later, 40 pounds of scuba-diving weights attached, bullet hole in head" (L 772)--is the parent of "The Strange True Case of John Arthur Paisley" of Sabbatical and The Tidewater Tales, issues (Webster gives us) of a disordered imagination.

**Disposing of the Text**

In deciding how to organize their story, what to include, what needs to be developed, Susan and Fenn, the narrators of Sabbatical, come back around to the footnote to the initial problematic "we" and Susan's ambiguous tears:

* This we, those verses, Susan's tears, these notes at the feet of certain pages--all shall be made clear, in time. (§ 9)

At her mentioning of her sister Miriam's being gang-raped at Virginia Beach and being tortured by the Shah's thugs, Susan is weeping again, and "The reader now understands, but for one detail, her tears of some pages past" (§ 47). Fenn wonders whether Susan is okay.

I'm okay, I'm okay. That little exposition [the story of Miriam's other rapes] will have to be
fleshed out in our story or flushed out from it. (§ 47)

We should wonder whether "flushing out" that little exposition will be as easy as Susan suggests, as simple as an editorial pen stroke or the addition of a footnote. The mention of Susan's tears and one of their principle causes, the rapes of Miriam, has already been incorporated, has already been made part of the body of the text, the flesh of the story. As signs, tears and Miriam's rapes will have a variety of influences on the text: graphic, semantic, thematic, etymological. And, as part of the story, the tears and Miriam's rapes will, to some extent, control the movement of the plot--Susan has her abortion, at least partly, because of the rapes and the moronic child that issues from them.

We all try, less and less successfully as Sy grows older and larger, not to image in him the beefy sadist who got him forcibly upon skinny Mims. It was not Sy's fault! We all--no doubt even Miriam, though she has not said so--wish much she had aborted or, failing that, miscarried or even given the child up for adoption: the unlucky lad senses, even in his mother, our want of easy warmth with him. (§ 265)

Miriam's irresponsibility extends to her second child, Edgar Allan Ho. Visiting Susan on board, the three of them go a long way toward demolishing the boat. "The blood and tomato stains in the teak deck planking, like the shoe-leather scratches on the cabin and cockpit soles ... will yield to laborious refinishing next season" (§ 155), but while Susan is cleaning up after Sy and discovering Miriam's cigarette burns on the chart table and washstand, Edgar
discovers the galley knife-rack and slashes the custom made cockpit cushions.

Telling all this to Fenn later, Susan says that

Mainly Mims wanted to know why we don’t have children.

... [Fenn] put the hand-bearing compass down on the slashed cockpit cushion.

What’d you tell her?

The point is that the ordeal of Miriam and her children’s visit, specifically (in this example) the slashed cockpit cushion, is representative of the irresponsibility and mediocrity of which Susan wants no part:

I compared my feelings about parenthood to Kafka’s about marriage: that it’s the single most important thing in human life, and that my standards for it are self-defeatingly high.

... I couldn’t go much farther down my Superkid road with her because of Sy and Ho. I just told her again that being an ordinary mediocre parent doesn’t interest me. (§ 164)

The "one detail," which Fenn mentioned was also a reason for Susan’s tears, is that she is pregnant or, more to the point, that she got pregnant accidentally, without their deciding that it is the right thing to do. She and Fenn have already been irresponsible and thereby represent the ordinary and mediocre mass of parents who have their children without the slightest idea why.

I need to keep this argument under control and get back to the original point (though, in a sense, getting back there is the same problem as flushing out the extraneous from our text). Because Susan’s tears, Miriam, her rapes and her children and her general irresponsibility are already part of the text, because Sabbatical has already
been inseminated by these signs, the signs can only be flushed out after they have shown themselves to be present, which makes getting rid of them problematic and introduces a textual inevitability. The rape has already been conceived, the idea already given significance.

Susan, herself, has already begun to "show"—her "breasts have been engorged since last April," her stomach slightly protrudes, and "she has experienced more frequent nausea all spring than she believes can be attributed to seasickness and subtropical food. [S]he infers herself, therefrom, to be two months pregnant" (§ 289). After examining Susan her obstetrician announces that "Goodell's, Chadwick's, and Hegar's signs . . . are all present" (§ 230). Susan and her doctor set up her conception and pregnancy in terms of signs and significance and so give the abortion all the complications of textuality, one of which, particularly active here, is the problem of flushing out the extraneous. There are at least two things that make removing a sign from a text problematic: (1) the sign will inevitably have had an impact on the surrounding text (removing the text that has been influenced will simply leave the editor with another, perhaps greater, portion of text to be removed, ad infinitum or until there is nothing left but the text's absence), so that (2) marks of erasure or deletion will always remain; the removal itself becomes significant—absence becomes part of what the text means.

Within the context of the story of Susan's abortion,
Fenn wonders . . . whether formidable Carmen has been earning her keep in our story. The artist Claus Oldenburg once bought a pencil drawing by the artist William de Kooning, erased the drawing, and exhibited what was left under the title Erased de Kooning, by Claus Oldenburg. (§ 236)

Though Fenn’s example crosses mediums of expression, it is essentially to the point, and to some extent it is the title (the words) "Erased de Kooning" that points out what the work is about, gives it the significance of the erasure.10 Though the work becomes something else, even perhaps someone else’s, it does so only in terms of signs that have been erased, of what has been made absent, of absence itself. The name de Kooning and the work that was "his" make themselves present even in their erasure. Carmen is "formidable" not only in her personality (as a character) but because she is composed of signs and is already part of the text.

In "Dissemination" Derrida argues this point in terms of the erasure of traces: "Since the trace can only imprint itself by referring to the other, to another trace (’the trace of its reflection’), by letting itself be forgotten, its force of production stands in necessary relation to the energy of its erasure" (331). The question of erasure is, in part, the questioning of "presence"; if the trace only imprints itself by referring to another trace, one that (because of the imprinting) has been erased, then "presence"

10 In describing the author disposed of, Fenn makes the mistake of attributing the drawing to Claus Oldenburg, in effect, disposing of (committing to erasure) the name of the artist to which it should be attributed—Robert Rauschenberg.
and "absence" are no longer absolute. Derrida says elsewhere that the text is produced only in the transformation of another text: "Nothing, neither among the elements nor within the system, is anywhere ever simply present or absent. There are only, everywhere, . . . traces of traces" (Positions 26), which is to say erasures of erasures. We never have available, can never even point to, the so-called "original sign."

Abortion is not something that can happen without having an effect, both because it is a momentous event in anyone’s life and because as a sign it has an impact on the meaning of its text. After her ordeal with Miriam and her children and her realization that she would be a failure at raising the perfect child, Susan understands her life as "empty and stupid" (S 164). What is remarked as missing comes to be what this book is about.

Susan has been faking her periods since she and Fenn were in the Caribbean and even marking them down in the log:

* * * * *
Let each asterisk represent a night, beginning with that Sunday night the first of June: we embleimize the period both of Susan’s menses . . . and of Pokey’s stop at Solomons Island. . . . (S 127)

Because Susan has been faking, these asterisks embleimize (for both of them, even then--Fenn knows Susan has been faking) the menstruation she should have had but didn’t.

Susan’s period would have also functioned as a sign, signifying that for the present everything, in the conception way, is as it was. And, as is always the case,
the sign's absence is significant (perhaps even more so than its presence) because it marks a change, a difference.

The fact that those asterisks emblemize "the period both of Susan's menses . . . and of Pokey's stop at Solomons" (emphasis mine) illustrates that the movement of the voyage, the movement of Sabbatical, is keyed to the menstrual cycle and, as we will see, to the process of conception and abortion as well.

In many respects, Fenn and Susan's story is also their child, though it is, as of yet, unborn--they speak of Sabbatical as if it were still in the planning stages. As they actually conceive a child, they create this story. In a very different sense, we must think of the child as having been delivered. We hold Sabbatical before us; it is a story already told, though it has not, as of yet, been brought to maturity.

Swimming in Poe Cove, their first anchorage after their long open ocean passage and after their reentering the Chesapeake Bay, in Poe Cove, which at first they think is "perfectly empty," Fenn "stirs to the surface what looks like a light colored rag" (§ 25) and turns out to be a large paisley scarf. Fenn wears it on his head, pirate fashion, to protect him from the sun--he has recently lost his boina. He thereby associates himself with the paisleys, which they later decide remind them of sperm. This, of course, isn't the first cove that they assumed was empty but later
discovered was occupied—not only by Fenn's sperm but by the fetus Susan will abort.

Part I of Sabbatical sets up much of the metaphoric significance of terms used throughout the book. Part I is titled "The Cove" and subtitled "Key," though subtitled is not quite the right description for this play of titles. On page 7 appear only the number "I" and the words "The Cove" italicized thus:

I

The Cove

If "Key" were simply a subtitle, it would normally appear on the same page as this main title. But we find it on the following facing page as if it were the title of the first chapter of the first part:

KEY

There was a story that began,
Said Fenwick Turner: Susie and Fenn--

In fact, the title "Key" is printed in the same typeface and position as the titles of the chapters of Parts II and III, the only difference being that the chapters of Parts II and III are also numbered. For example, the title of the first chapter of Part II reads:

1

SOLOMONS

Since there are no divisions of the first part, "Key" cannot logically be the title of a chapter within Part I or a "sub-part"--besides the title "The Cove" it is all there is of Part I.
"The Cove" and "Key" are derived from the cove and the island at which Susan and Fenn make their first stop and which turn out to be the basis for the sexual metaphorics of Part I. They are also named after the authors whom Susan and Fenn like to claim as relatives and whom (whether related or not) they are, in part, named after. Indirectly, Susan and Fenn name the cove and the island after themselves (Susan Rachel Allan Seckler, the namesake of Edgar Allan Poe from which the name Poe Cove; Fenwick Scott Key Turner, the namesake of Francis Scott Key from which the name Key Island):

You're my island, sleepy Susan murmurs, kissing her husband's chest. She lays her head there briefly in the salt-and-pepper fuzz, then sits up to hear his heart beat breaks her heart. He kisses her lap. You're my cove. Puts an ear to her tidy belly as if to listen for a heartbeat there. (§ 26)

With this passage nomination becomes involved with sexuality. "Poe Cove" is a reference, made here perhaps too obvious, to Susan; the cove is vaginal--Fenn kisses Susan's "lap" and calls her his "cove"--and it is also womb-like--after identifying Susan with the cove, Fenn puts his ear to her belly "as if to listen for a heartbeat." Fenn's listening for the heartbeat foreshadows our being told that there is actually something there; upon rereading, the "as if" becomes ironic. Fenn pretends to listen for a heartbeat as if he doesn’t know that Susan is pregnant.

Though it is difficult to think of an island as phallic, and thereby able to represent, appropriately,
Fenn’s sexuality, that problem is circumscribed. In terms of Fenn, it isn’t the word island or the idea of islandness but rather the name of the island that is the key. Notice that the title and "subtitle" of the first part are not parallel: "The Cove" is the common noun that designates, generally, this type of thing; "Key" is a proper noun that designates for Fenn and Susan this particular island. (A key is also, though not primarily in this case, a type of island--one that is low-lying, such as, not incidentally, Key Island: "The island, though low-lying, is more woods than marsh . . ." [§ 25, emphasis mine].) Key, the idea, the thing, and the story, is phallic. It is no accident (unlike Susan’s conception) that "Key" is inside "The Cove," that in its function as the title of a sub-part it signifies a text within or enveloped by "The Cove"; the key (the thing, the island, and the story) is also that by which access is gained, with which an entrance is made (an entrance into the text, the metaphorics of sexuality, and, as we will see, metaphorics as a subject--a subject of metaphors). "The Cove" is the Keyhole. As the subtitle of the only "division," "Key" must be read in conjunction with the title. Though "Key" is phallic, it is not only phallic. "Key" exists only in its relation to "The Cove." Without "Key" "The Cove" would be empty of everything but those words, the title itself--it would designate little more than emptiness. And without the title "The Cove," "Key" would be drained of a phallic significance that has come about
structurally. Calling the first part simply or mostly womb-like or vaginal because "The Cove" comes first or is "the main" title would be a mistake too. "The Cove" appears first because it encloses "Key," not because it has a larger or primary significance.

The problem of representing the sexuality of *Sabbatical* is mostly a graphic and structural one. In the case of the titles of the first part, Barth relies on a general understanding of the organization of texts, specifically the logic of subdivision. In recognizing the representation of the masculine and the feminine we must have noticed that the logic of subdivision has been disrupted. By "disrupted" I do not mean simply "done away with," because, in doing away with that logic, the titles are given their sexual significance and thereby given another system of organization. An orderliness of some kind will inevitably reestablish itself.

I began this section by describing the "disposal of the text": putting a text (or texts) in order is, in Barth, always accompanied by the disruption of an orderliness. I want to make it clear that Barth's books prefer or presuppose neither order nor disorder. To say that orderliness inevitably reestablishes itself does not contradict the idea of disposal; that is, though they are the reverse of each other, they do not cancel each other out. When a text is disposed of, we are not left with a chaotic, an irrational, work, one that will not involve
itself in or acknowledge reason. In fact, reading demands orderliness, organization, reason; but it also entails their disruption. In "Reading (Proust)" Paul de Man explores the consequences of a text that narrates the impossibility of reading. He asks whether stories that offer themselves as examples of that impossibility can be read. If a story makes contradictory demands on a reader--this is in a sense a definition of abortion fiction--how are those demands taken into account? Just as one recognizes that it is "forever impossible to read Reading" one must "'understand' that this word bars access, once and forever, to a meaning that yet can never cease to call out for its understanding" (de Man 77). "Understanding" is brought into question by the inevitable difficulty of a text's being able to contain the questioning of understanding, of a reading that calls for orderliness just as it disrupts the order on which one bases that reading. How does one decide that a text cannot be read? Certainly not by referring to an unreadable text. That would beg the question of readability. The demand for understanding and for orderliness is reinscribed in their disruption.

We can incorporate, here, the idea of a discharge. Though an author or an author's book can be released from the demands of a particular type of organization, something of that organization will remain and will place other demands, perhaps in other terms, on the author and the work. Though Susan has her abortion, the problem of her relation
to Fenn remains. And, indeed, the reverberation of the "twin schlups" (§ 295) made by the abortion machine have thematic and even organizational repercussions throughout the text. Susan’s guess that she had two abortions—"Susan wails into his chest-hair It was twins! It was Drew and Lexie! I didn’t have an abortion, Fenn. I had two abortions" (§ 332)—recalls a flood of twinships, doublings, repetitions, and oppositions. There is, in fact, a good chance that she had two abortions because both she and Fenn are themselves twins. Fenn and Manfred are allowed to represent, provisionally, the division between good and evil; Susan and Miriam the difference between controlled restlessness and wild dissatisfaction. They also acknowledge the twinship of interruption and writing, doing and telling, writing and loving (§ 365), the dualism of the fork, of analysis and synthesis, left and right, Baltimore and Washington, Wye Island and Swarthmore (§ 345), substitute and compliment (§ 362), Romance and Realism (§ 362), fiction and lie (§ 126), beginning and end ("Big Bang to Black Hole" [§ 360]), dream and story, their life and their voyage (§ 200), work and play (§ 159), etc. For Fenn, this is his second sabbatical, and Susan is his second wife; it peeves Susan that there are two Mrs. Fenwick Turners (the first has retained her married name) (§ 311). Fenn and Susan also see themselves in terms of the opposition between reading and writing: Fenn is the writer, an aspiring artist, Susan the professional reader, a professor of literature (§
338). Nearest at hand, perhaps, is the duality of "The Cove" and "Key," of the male and female in general.

"Abortion Fiction" is not an acknowledgement or a restatement of what has too often been called the self-destructiveness of Barth's works. In "John Barth: The Teller Who Swallowed His Tale," for example, Sanford Pinsker says that by analyzing language Barth comes to a "dead end," and his work defeats itself:

In short, Barth is not so much the great destroyer of Modernism--exaggerating its faults through extended parody, etc.--as he is the devourer of his own Art. The principle that "fiction must acknowledge its fictitiousness and metaphoric invalidity" might be an intriguing thesis, even the subject of an academic symposium, but, baldly stated, it is a poor narrative line on which to hang one's story. (68)

In "The Anti-Novels of John Barth," Beverly Gross contends that Barth's fiction leads to "the repudiation of narrative art," that each of his books through Giles Goat-Boy is "an anti-novelistic assault on itself." In the end, though, Gross repudiates her own argument. Fiction, and specifically the novel, is a necessary and even positive endeavor for Barth: "He is not quite affirming life but he is negating lifelessness. He is not quite affirming art but he is negating silence" (Gross 109). With that conclusion Gross's title and her thesis about the repudiation of narrative art are brought into question; it places Barth somewhere between the negation and the affirmation of fiction, the novel, and narrative, but, if we can interpret her "not quite" as meaning "almost," closer to the
affirmation than to the negation. Gross struggles with the fact that Barth continues to write novels. Calling Barth's books "Anti-Novels" is only telling half of the story.

Much of the talk about the death of literature and self-destruction in terms of Barth's work has come about in response to his essay "The Literature of Exhaustion," which he has had to clarify and defend repeatedly since its publication. In a 1981 interview Barth tries to explain his position:

What was unfortunate about that essay was that I never meant to imply—as many readers, one of them Jorge Luis Borges, concluded—that I thought fiction had all been done with, that there was not much more for us latecomers to do except parody our predecessors. That wasn't, and isn't, my thought. . . . My own experiments with the oral and epistolary traditions should indicate that I consider the novel far from dead. And I never said the novel was dead in the first place.

(Barth, "An Interview" 5-6)

Abortion fiction is not a neat metaphor for the tendency toward self-reflective destruction or the anti-novel. Abortion, as a metaphor, is caught up in the difficulty of organization. In explaining "The Exhaustion of Literature," Barth comes back to the idea of disorderliness:

I believe that what I was talking about was the coming to birth of—it's hard to find a phrase—a "postmodern fiction." What I was trying to get at, I guess, was the thought that we tend to think of modern fiction in a disorganized manner, and when one combines the word "modern" with the word "fiction," he no longer has a very useful term. In a sense I can see at least three waves of "modern" fiction. . . . (Barth, "An Interview" 6-7)
It is convenient that Barth speaks in terms of the birth of "postmodern fiction." Today it is still "hard to find a phrase" for the fiction being written, because any organization of modern fiction (and this may apply to all fiction)--the term modern itself is an attempt at such an organization--will be swept under in a new wave of fiction. In its growing old one can not ignore the irony and contradiction of the term modernism. Modernism is already used to describe a thing of the past. Systems of organization are inevitably conceived and aborted.

In the introduction to the "Literature of Exhaustion" collected in The Friday Book, Barth rejects as clearly as possible what has become a routine misreading of all his books:

It has been frequently reprinted and as frequently misread as one more Death of the Novel or Swan-Song of Literature piece. It isn't. Rereading it now, . . . I hear an echo of disruption. . . . (FB 64)

Clearly, for Barth, "disruption" is not an absolute doing-away-with the text.

"Night-Sea Journey"

"Night-Sea Journey" is the title of the first chapter of Barth’s Lost in the Funhouse. It is a first person account of a sperm’s swimming upstream and his reflections on the paradoxes and even the absurdity of that journey. This image forms half of the narrative program and the structure of Sabbatical. Sailing up the Chesapeake, Fenn has a dream:
John Arthur Paisley, Doog, Count, me too—we were all swimming together, upstream, like giant sperm. With sperm! As sperm! It was late evening, or early nighttime: brillig. We were slogging along upstream in the dim light. (§ 205)

The other half of the program and structure is reflected in a parallel and feminine version of the dream, which Susan has on the same night:

Mims and I were floating! No: we were like some kind of white water canoers, but not in a canoe. More like an inflatable dinghy. It was something we were wearing, as if each of us were built into an inflatable white-water raft. And we didn’t just coast along: we were busy steering, navigating, radioing back to the . . . what? She puts her fingertips to her cheeks. We were these big, elastic, floating eggs! (§ 205)¹¹

Though an insemination takes place, the metaphors of delivery is disrupted. Though the sabbatical cruise is "nine months" long (§ 162), Susan’s pregnancy is not brought to term.

Our dreams, then, began differently but came remarkably together: shared memories of the paisley scarf. . . . Flowed together would describe it better, Susan believes, like . . . Ohio and Mississippi at Cairo, East and West Forks of Langford Creek at Cacaway Island. (§ 205)

Susan in fact felt "impregnated" by their dream (§ 208).

Fenn and Susan need a narrative medium in which to swim and float the story of abortion. The structure and plotline of Sabbatical might be thought to accommodate a metaphorsics

¹¹ These dreams are the foundation of Frank’s TV play, SEX EDUCATION: Play, in The Tidewater Tales. As we will see, Peter writes an ending for the play that reflects The Tidewater Tales’s orientation to production, an ending inappropriate to the abortion oriented structure of Sabbatical and the dilemma regarding abortion facing Fenn and Susan.
that would take into account its own disruption without also bringing about its self-destruction. "Fenwick and Susan are at a Y" (§ 236). And in "The Fork," Sabbatical's third part, their story culminates at Cacaway Island—"the crotch of the Y" (§ 350, emphasis mine)—where the East and West Forks of Langford Creek run together. The Y or the fork is, of course, roughly the configuration of the female reproductive system—the uterus and the fallopian tubes.

But because the Y is also the structure of decision making (of analysis and synthesis), it is also the source of Sabbatical's narrative abortion.

2. Forking, The Y

At the end of The Fork's second chapter, which is subtitled "The Fork," Fenn dreams what is essentially a summary of the choices that he and Susan face, choices on which they base, as we have seen, the success or failure of their sabbatical voyage. And he dreams for the summary the appropriate structure:

prompted no doubt by Susan's rowing directions, he dreams our possible futures as a literal fork in the channel, or a series of such forks, each presenting us with the options of steering astarboard, aport or astern. (§ 319)

Going "right" for Fenn implies accepting his academic appointment, "committing his main energies therefrom not to further exposure of the CIA but to improvement of his academic credentials and to fathering and parenting a child
by Susan." Going "left" means "living off lectures fees and consultations for . . . liberal 'watchdog' organizations which have approached him since KUDOVE, . . . pursuing the disappearance of Gus and Manfred. . . . There are no children down this fork; at the end of it there is no Susan either" (§ 319). Going "back" means returning to his life before Susan, working against the agency while in its employment and even reuniting with his first wife (the dream turns into an unrealistic nightmare).

And for Susan:

Going right . . . means Swarthmore, scholarship, resignation to childlessness. . . . Going left means . . . Baltimore, perhaps with Fenn; taking Miriam's cue and giving her talents to some inner-city high schools . . . perhaps conceiving a child, by Fenn or whomever; perhaps adopting one or helping poor Mims raise her guiltless bastards. (§ 320)

Going back (as with Fenn's third option) is not even a consideration; the dream becomes idyllic and absurd: Susan takes a position she previously held at Madeira School for Girls, marries some handsome "Fred Henry," has children and lives in bliss (§ 320-21).

Susan dreams an apocalyptic conclusion to their story, a cosmic abortion:

Pokey himself is now become our galaxy, now our universe, rushing headlong into one of its own Black Holes like that legendary bird that flies in ever-diminishing circles until it vanishes into its own fundament; like Pym's canoe rushing into the chasm at the foot of the cataract at the southern Pole: a black hole aspirating, with a cosmic shlup, us, U.S., all. (§ 321)
The dream is appropriate because the systems by which they plan the working out of their problems are the cause of their problems. In a sense, they are sucked in and nearly destroyed by the assumption that their problems can be solved in terms of the structure of the Y.

Fenn has already made a note that sets up the terms of the Y and introduces the initial dilemma with which that structure presents them:

Is a Y a fork or a confluence? Does the Chesapeake Channel diverge into York River Entrance Channel, or do they converge into the Chesapeake Channel? The one inbound, the other outbound; or, in tidewater, the one on floods, the other on ebbs. Analysis versus synthesis; "male" versus "female." Sperm swim up; ova float down. (§ 137)

Though fork is used here to mean "a divergence," it is often used by the narrators of Sabbatical synonymously with Y; and sometimes the meanings of the terms are interchanged so that Y means "a divergence." For instance: "Pokey's in a cove, but Fenwick and Susan are at a Y"; the narrator means that Fenn and Susan have a decision to make—they are "not sure where [they'll] be going" (§ 236). Fenn begins his dream about their possible futures as "a literal fork in the channel" but concludes the dream searching "the Y for other futures" (§ 321, emphasis mine). The meanings of these terms vary (even become interchanged) with a change in context. Part III, The Fork, should not be read as divergent, analytical, or male but rather as incorporating both divergence and convergence, analysis and synthesis, masculinity and femininity.
The question is, How does one decide between oppositions when the current that moves the narrative life of the characters flows in opposite directions? We find that despite the search for an answer that demands a choice between, Sabbatical (their voyage as well as the text and the story) involves both analysis and synthesis, male and female, in and out, up and down, divergence and convergence.

The Analytical (Inbound Upswimming Divergent) "Male"

The first act of analysis is division or categorization. In analyzing the structure of Sabbatical, for instance, Fenn discovers two aspects of the Y (both of these aspects are subdivided in terms of systems of logic, directions, and gender). In analyzing Sabbatical, we must decide first of all what aspect of the book to consider: structure, metaphor, narration, etc. And if we consider the structure, on what level is the structure to be examined: the structure of the text (sentence structure, the graphic organization of titles, the relation of letters within words), the structure of the story, etc.? Even if these divisions are not made deliberately (I think usually they are not—seldom do I say to myself at the beginning of a project, I believe I will study the organization of the plot in this particular work and thereby will divide my study from those that would consider the structure of sentences), the divisions are nevertheless made and in effect amount to the making of decisions about how to divide. One agrees if only implicitly in every step of an analysis to assume the
existence and even the appropriateness of a variety of categories, of divisions, of textual clefts.

Allow me the divergence of telling one of Fenn's stories as a way of getting us into one of those clefts (a divergence that serves mainly to move us away from what may seem a theoretical explanation of analysis toward a textual one--categories not entirely or necessarily divergent):

Fenn went to Spain with his first wife and their son so that he could become a capital-W writer; there he wrote his first novel-length story--a "story, bogged down in self concern, of a story bogged down in self concern" (§ 43). When it is apparent that the story, as well as their sabbatical, as well as their marriage, is a failure, they decide to visit Ronda, whose "chief attraction, other than picturesque streets and the oldest bullring in Spain, is a spectacular sheer gorge--called the Tajo--Spanish for 'cleft'--which in fact cleaves the town as if Paul Bunyan had split it with his ax" (§ 35). The Tajo is, of course, crucial to this story but also to a textual cleavage. There broke out a stupid husband-wife argument about whether they should leave, and Orrin got stuck in between:

Finally Marilyn Marsh ordered Orrin into the car. Very dirty pool: I had then either to countermand her order and oblige Orrin to choose between us, or spare him that by letting her have her way. I did the latter, of course: but doing it so angered me that nothing could have kept me from climbing down into that gorge. (§ 40)

Though Orrin obeyed his mother's order to get in the car, he refused to leave town with her, "arguing reasonably
that he had obeyed her earlier order not to go with me, and that if he was to be solomoned between us (not Orrin's term), he would try to divide himself equally" (§ 42). If to be solomoned is to be divided (or shared) at the complete detriment of the thing divided, Orrin, of course, is not actually solomoned. (Though he could not endure such situations without some, possibly even extensive, emotional distress, he grows up to be, as Fenn calls him, a "principled, reasonable son" [§ 42] and a reasonably happy man.) On the other hand, Solomon did not actually divide the child but rather threatened to divide it and thereby discovered the true mother, who was identified by her willingness to give up her child to save its life. Taking into account this much of the story, to be solomoned would refer to Fenn's willingness to give up Orrin to his mother in order to keep him whole, to spare him an impossible and self-defeating (perhaps even self-destructive) choice between mother and father. The stories are not as clearly analogous after the identification of the "true" parent. Solomon gives the child, who being an infant cannot speak for itself so has no say in the matter, to its parent. (In Fenn's analogy Orrin functions both as the child and as Solomon. He is both the object of a judgment and the one who speaks the judgment: he would try to divide himself equally.) Because both Fenn and Marilyn Marsh are Orrin's parents, Marilyn Marsh, unlike the lying harlot, the false mother of the Solomon story, has some legitimate claim to
him, though the claim is weakened by her using Orrin to get at Fenn, in her placing Orrin between them and risking the child’s destruction as does the false mother. In one sense Orrin does not go to the "true" parent, the one who is more deserving because true to the welfare of the child. Not only does Orrin get in the car, but he remains in the custody of Marilyn Marsh after her and Fenn’s divorce. But in another sense Fenn establishes a connection to his son that they did not previously share. Though Orrin’s division is not detrimental, it is essential—his being "solomoned" defines his relation to the story; and Fenn’s story is ruined, partly because in its subjection to the logic of Solomon, the attempt to find the true story is overturned and the story’s "true" parent cannot be determined. He "thanked [Orrin] for having rescued it [from possible abuse by Marilyn Marsh], and pitched it over the rail without a glance" (§ 43). Fenn’s climbing down into that gorge marks the division between him and Marilyn Marsh and thereby precipitates the destruction of their marriage.

**Dividing at the detriment of the thing divided.**

Fenn also takes himself, literally, into the problematics of analysis, into an analytical division of the text that leads to the text’s disposal, which is marked by his throwing the story into the gorge. "[M]y novel wouldn’t come together. It was supposed to be about the politics of political journalism . . . but it had taken an autobiographical turn and was more and more about a
frustrated writer" and a strained marriage (§ 33). Because Fenn places himself in a text he makes himself subject to the result of a textual analysis. The novel was divided between what it was "supposed to be about" (the supposed "true" parent) and what it actually was about (the supposed "false" parent)—and the division could not be reconciled. Neither parent had an exclusive right to the child. The author's intention and the outcome of the text are always at odds. The story literally contained its own examples of a failed author and was its own example of a failed story; it judged itself to be a failure because of its being irreconcilably divided. Fenn had written an autobiographical, self-abortive text—a text "rushing headlong into one of its own Black Holes . . . until it vanishes into its own fundament" (§ 321). We must be careful not to read these descriptions of Fenn's book as suggesting unequivocally an absolute self-destruction. In Allegories of Reading Paul de Man explains the double bind of arriving at the truth about a text that tries, like Fenn's first effort, to take itself into account:

Since any narrative is primarily the allegory of its own reading, it is caught in a difficult double bind. As long as it treats a theme (the discourse of a subject, the vocation of a writer, the constitution of a consciousness), it will always lead to the confrontation of incompatible meanings between which it is necessary but impossible to decide in terms of truth and error. If one of the readings is declared true, it will always be possible to undo it by means of the other; if it is decreed false, it will always be possible to demonstrate that it states the truth of its aberration. (76)
Strictly speaking, Fenn's failed story about a failed story cannot be considered a failure because it tells the "truth" about its failure. And any assertion about the story's success or truth must be just as equivocal. The truth about a failed story that is an allegory of failure undoes itself.

Sabbatical analyzes itself, too. In telling their story, Fenn and Susan are trying to decide all along the way how their story should be told. They get their story going wondering how to begin in "A Dialogue on Diction." Titles often begin "The Story of . . ." and underscore the fact that what follows is not only a story but about stories. Sabbatical includes a chapter on "Minor Characters" and one on "Name-Loss in the Myths of Wandering Heroes" (§ 236). "On Narrative Viewpoint, Selectivity, and Advancement of the Action" attempts to describe Sabbatical using those terms:

FENWICK: What are our options? I mean viewpointwise, for our story. Run them by me, would you, hon?
SUSAN: You mean narrative points of view? First person. Second person. Third person. (§ 232)

"On Narrative Viewpoint" is written, as are several other sections, in the form of notes, which are about Sabbatical. The implication is that they are not actually part of the story, and in fact they would not normally appear in the finished version, but Sabbatical is about analysis and therefore includes its notes, which are the analyses of
Sabbatical. "Poe Again:"\textsuperscript{12} comes back around to our initial observation: Fenn notices that their story is shaped like the capital letter Y. (With this extremely brief list I don’t want to simply place myself with many of Barth’s critics, such as Gross and Pinsker, who have noticed that Barth’s novels are "self-reflexive"—our topic here is the effect of analysis.)

When I ask my students to write a paper about Sabbathal, some of them make what has become a routine response: "Barth has used up all the topics—he says everything there is to say about Sabbathal." Well, that response to Barth is natural because he is a careful and critical reader of his own works and because he includes the readings in the works themselves even though, like Fenn, he claims not to be a scholar of literature or criticism. In the headnote to The Lord John Press edition of "The Literature of Exhaustion" and "The Literature of Replenishment," Barth says of himself, "The gifts of doing and explaining are notoriously not the same: An elegant artist may sound like a mumbler, a crank, a soulless pedant—may be these unadmirable things—when he sets about accounting for what he has, perhaps brilliantly, done."

Though he plays down his critical ability and though he leaves to "others more expert" the improvement of his "working perspective" (FB 193), his two short essays have

\textsuperscript{12} For titles that are punctuated according to their grammatical relation to the sentences they end or begin, the punctuation will be retained as part of the title.
been prolific in bringing about critical discussion and debate. Barth says he is "afflicted with the itch to understand and explain, to himself and others, why he tells the stories he tells the way he tells them." The "Literature of Replenishment" illustrates that this affliction is accompanied by a wide reading of theory and criticism. Nevertheless, the students' response to Sabbatical, that Barth uses up all the topics of discussion, is based on two interrelated false assumptions (the first of which I will put off dealing with until later): (1) that language, specifically the meaning of words, is finite and fixed, and (2) that through analysis one can come to the end of a text, can be done with it critically.

I said that Fenn disposes of his first novel-length text because it is not entirely gotten rid of. Though he pitches it into the gorge, and into the problematics of analytical division, it does not actually "vanish into its own fundament." The manuscript "litter[ed] up [Ronda's] chief tourist attraction" (§ 43), left its mark on the cleft into which it was thrown. And it leaves its mark on Sabbatical because the story of that first novel-length work becomes part of the story and the text of Sabbatical. In the terms of the Solomon story, the giving up of the text has allowed it to "live." "So, Susan says: Not only did the Tajo return your hat, it keeps returning the story you threw into it" (§ 45). There is always, given movement in time and the generation of new texts, a new application for the
story, a different way of looking at it or using it critically. Sabbatical marks the movement, in criticism, toward understanding literature as the development of the literary text as opposed to understanding literature according to standards presumed to be fixed, such as the originality of the work or the personality of the writer. What criticism learned from T. S. Eliot in 1917 is being rewritten into the fiction of Barth. In "Tradition and the Individual Talent," an essay that is a landmark of the development of textual analysis, Eliot says that "what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. . . . [T]he relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted . . . ." (15). For Eliot, it was essential that the artist recognize the presence of the past. The artist will not likely know what is to be done "unless he is conscious; not of what is dead, but of what is already living" (Eliot 22). Fenn wants to see whether telling the Ronda story will bring his hat back the way it did at the Choptank River safe-house or whether it needs the Choptank River safe-house story, which he has not told yet (§ 46). Telling one story forces Fenn to tell another in explanation or elucidation, forces him, as Eliot says, to readjust the relations, proportions, values of the work toward the whole. 13 A similar pressure

13 At the forefront of the study of language and literature today, M. M. Bakhtin speaks of the analysis of texts as the "problem of the second subject who is
is placed on Barth in the writing of "The Literature of Replenishment" and The Tidewater Tales. To stop writing is never to finish the story; "we might remind ourselves," Eliot says, "that criticism is as inevitable as breathing" (13). In "The Literature of Replenishment" Barth clarifies his earlier essay:

That is not what I meant at all. . . . I agree with Borges that literature can never be exhausted, if only because no single literary text can ever be exhausted--its "meaning" residing as it does in its transactions with individual readers over time, space and language. (FB 205)

Barth speaks in terms of the "literary text," but the living on of the critical text is marked as well. One of these transactions, particularly disturbing to Barth, is that between "The Literature of Exhaustion" and Jorge Luis Borges, a writer whom Barth admires but who, according to Barth, misunderstood the essay.

So far, we have pointed out two problems with analysis, which are not entirely independent of one another, but might be summarized separately thus: (1) analysis is always subject to invalidation by further analysis; (2) coming to a conclusion (an answer or an end), the presumed purpose of the analysis, is impossible because the analysis (whether

reproducing (for one purpose or another, including for research purposes) a text (another’s) and creating a framing text (one that comments, evaluates objects, and so forth)"; one of the difficulties of this reproduction is that both it and the reproduced text occur within the "textual chain" of a given sphere that is not itself isolated from other spheres ("The Problem of the Text" 104-05).
part of a story or a critical text) generates other subjects of analysis.

Near the beginning of the third part, the presumption that Fenn and Susan will be done with their analysis is affirmed. There are "large choices that must be made within this division of our story, Part III, The Fork, however many subdivisions we postpone these choices with" (§ 221). Part III is after all the last major section, according to the structure they have proposed, so if there is to be an end, a decision, it must come soon, within Part III.

Though Fenn and Susan seem to intuit the fact that the system by which they propose to resolve their dilemma tends to negate the possibility of resolution, they don't confront that contradiction until they are pressed toward separation themselves, when they involve the plight of the world in their contradictory desires about parenthood. Acid rain, the conservative and hawkish new president, Ronald Reagan, the build up of nuclear arms, government support of the right-wingers in El Salvador, and the pollution of the Chesapeake Bay, make bringing a human being into the world a difficult decision. But Fenn realizes "that none of the above considerations is sufficient reason not to reproduce oneself, though all may be invoked as consolation for not doing so" (§ 330). He realizes that logical argumentation is insufficient in making his decision. Any decision arrived at logically, by process of analysis, will always be
partly a rationalization, a logic attached only after the
decision has been made.

For Susan, neither term of the analysis is
satisfactory: "I don't want to go to Wye Island. I don't
want to go to Swarthmore. I don't want to do anything" (§
345). She both wants a child and doesn't want a child, and
she can deal with neither choice in itself. Fenn has
"search[ed] the Y for other futures" (§ 321) but has come to
only two choices (§ 333). If her only options are all there
is, then she might as well give them both up: "I can't take
it that there's nothing but you and me and soon we'll get
old and sick and die. The hell with it... [S]he wishes
she were dead" (§ 345).

As in Fenn's dream of their choices in which he and
Susan search the fork literally, in the boat (§ 370), there
is a literal forking of the channel in the structure and the
plot of their story that coincides with the decisions they
feel they have to make. The Fork is divided into three
sections, which coincide with the three possible directions
(right, left, and backwards) one could go having come upon a
fork and which coincide with the three possible decisions
they could make given the structure of their decision
making. In The Fork they encounter an actual fork in the
channel: in "Gibson to Cacaway: The Fork," Chapter 2, they
approach the splitting of the channel and the moment of
their decision; in "Cacaway: Against the Tide," Chapter 3,
you reach the buoy that marks the fork, and they reach the
point in their story and in their lives at which a decision has to be made:

By 1500 we’re in sight of the go/no-go point: a red and black mid-channel buoy at the upper approach to Kent Island Narrows. From that buoy, which may be left to either port or starboard, it’s three miles up Chester to snug anchorage in Queenstown Creek, or twelve at least down to Key Farm. (§ 345)

Susan says simply and suddenly, "we should separate" (§ 345). Statements like that will always seem sudden whether or not they are foreshadowed. In fact, though, Sabbatical sets us up for a surprise. The one thing in the story that appears to be unshakable is Fenn and Susan’s love for one another. And in fact it is not their love that is shaken. We are led to presume that because they love each other they will always be together. We cannot think of them as separate. In speaking about Sabbatical it is almost always Fenn and Susan.

Another thing that makes the possibility of their separation such a surprise is that until relatively late in the story we are not told of their dilemma about whether to have children. In Chapter 1 of Part II, the making of decisions is brought up but played down: "It was our hope and intention that by the end of this same voyage we would know better our hearts and minds vis-a-vis several decisions which lie ahead" (§ 83-84). To say one "hopes and intends" to do a certain thing is to suggest that there is a strong possibility that it will not be done. And there is little to indicate that not making these (up to that point unnamed)
decisions will have any devastating effects. Their tone throughout that conversation is cheerful. They suggest that they could sail forever:

Micronesia! Polynesia! Hawaii!
Fenn says perfectly seriously we could, you know, Suse. With a bit of refitting. People do such things. Work only as we need to. Screw the world. Sail around 'till we’re old. (§ 84)

Fenwick thinks his reason for preferring Solomons Island to a mainland harbor (so that their voyage will not yet end, to give them more time to make these decisions) may even be "whimsical" (§ 85). It isn’t until "Susan’s Friday" in the second chapter of the third part that the reader finds out for certain that Susan is even pregnant and "Susan’s Friday" is the story of that pregnancy’s abortion. Because Susan and Fenn put off talking about whether to have children (perhaps they know early on that there can be no resolution and that the effect of confronting that knowledge could be disastrous), information about the decision and its importance to their relationship is deferred.

Only gradually do their problems take on a seriousness. Susan has an outburst, says she hates her position (§ 118), and throws up to leeward (§ 120):

Fenn knows what it betokens: his wife’s dark, sometimes feeling that our years together . . . are themselves a kind of playing: not finally serious, as the lives of Susan’s childraising, house-buying contemporaries might be said to be serious. . . . (§ 159)

"We have decisions to make" (§ 159) becomes a refrain. But even when the issue of childraising is named as part of (even possibly the whole) subject of their imminent
decision-making—"we’re at a fork in our channel. We’ve got to settle the question of having children" (§ 199)—even then we are not prepared for their relationship to be made dependent on the settling of that question.

Susan’s conclusion that they should separate is not arrived at narratively so much as logically. Not only does an analysis require a division in order to proceed, but it leads to a division as well. Fenn and Susan had anticipated their problems becoming more complex:

We had allowed for the possibility, if not the likelihood, that our sabbatical cruise might increase rather than decrease certain uncertainties; that is what has come regrettably to pass. (§ 84)

Because the division between having children and not having children is unsatisfactory, Susan applies the analysis elsewhere, to her relationship with Fenn and thereby makes their dilemma more complicated. Now, if her statement about their separating is only a proposition, they have more decisions to make, more options from which to choose. Susan can stay with Fenn and have children, she can stay with Fenn and not have children, she can separate from Fenn and have children with someone else, or she can separate from Fenn and not have children. And these are only the options relating to childbearing (there are several other issues they want to settle, some of which have been cited above, though the child-bearing issue is central and would influence, possibly even determine, the outcome of the others).
Suffice it to say again that analysis does not work for Fenn and Susan as a narrative program because the terms of the division with which the analysis proceeds are inappropriate and because analysis cannot bring them to a conclusion, which their story demands.

The Synthetic (Outbound Downswimming Convergent) "Female"

Of our journey, Susan says I sure liked going down better than coming up.

The female point of view. Fenwick sets forth his notebook-notion about forks and confluences, analysis and synthesis, sperm and ova. (§ 169)

One of the problems with analysis is also (but in reverse) the problem with syntheses. Rather than calling for a division, as analysis does, synthesis begins with division. In order for a synthesis to take place, a division has to be present already. The parent of synthesis is division in two. Like the terms of an analysis, the terms of a synthesis are subject to invalidation.

Sue's appreciative [of Fenn's setting forth his notebook-notion]—but promptly observes that Fenn's note is itself synthetic, not analytical. I'm not all male, he reminds her, nor you all female. (§ 169)

One thing synthetic about Fenn's note is that it is made in the context of groups of ideas about the notebook: "Fenn notes that his notes on our story, to which the notebook is principally devoted, have nearly all to do with either such general considerations as the foregoing, or bits of narrative to be incorporated . . ., or images (e.g. Is a Y a fork or a confluence? . . .)" (§ 137). Fenn's bringing various notes together under general headings is, in
essence, a synthesis. Susan's polemical attack on the system is clear. She claims that Fenn's division is invalid, and she uses Fenn as the example. Since he is a man, given his system of categorization, his note should be analytical. Since his note is synthetic, his categorizing the "male" with the analytical is problematic. We should also notice that Susan's attack is at least partly analytical (that is, according to Fenn, at least partly "male")--she tests the terms of the division against a specific example--and, therefore, that she does not fit into Fenn's system of synthesis and analysis either.

If the terms of the proposed synthesis are Male and Female or Fenn and Susan, for the synthesis to be subject to a rigorous analysis these categories must be distinct. Fenn's response that he is only partly male and Susan only partly female would make the product of the synthesis difficult to discern. It is precisely this difficulty that eliminates any simple analysis relying on the separation of the terms, in this case, the separation of the sexes. We find, in both the male and the female, syntheses having already taken place.

The narrators try to establish the difference between Fenn and Susan throughout the book. Near the beginning Susan is identified as a teacher (§ 12); apparently she is the one who star-spangles Sabbatical with footnotes (one note begins in self-mockery, "Dr. Seckler is late with this note, drawn from her dissertation" [§ 187]); Fenn, the
writer of a CIA exposé (§ 14), aspires to be a capital-W writer of fiction—he is the unrefined adventurer. Susan reads quickly and widely; Fenn slowly and carefully. Susan is part "gypsy" and part Jewish, grows up around her mother's "bar-restaurant in the salty, boozy Fells Point neighborhood of Baltimore" (§ 54); Fenn, the son of old tidewater parents, grows up on Key Farm, Wye Island, Virginia, in the slow-paced marshland.

"Your 19th is Susan’s century, Your 18th Fenn’s," the first subdivision of Chapter 1 of Part III, is devoted to delineating the characteristics of Fenn and Susan but collapses on itself by confusing the terms of the characterization. Susan, more and more upset, takes on her role as she describes it:

> Your irrational romantic, overreaching Nineteenth is my fucking century, and Crazy Edgar is my alma pater, Jewish or not. Nervous. Unstable. Frenetic.
> Brilliant, Fenwick hastens to add.
> Energetic. Intuitive.
> Susan’s eyes are wet again. Fatherless. Childless. Self-tormented. Half hysterical. And doomed to an early, unquiet grave. (§ 215)

Fenn, trying to calm Susan down, plays his role as he describes it:

> Fenwick’s Key was your Eighteenth century man: enlightened, rational, cool, optimistic, unecstatic, self controlled. Appollonian to Sue’s Dionysiac Mister Poe, Jack of sundry trades. . . . (§ 216)

There seems to be a discrepancy between the earlier characterization and this in the third part, which foreshadows the more extensive breaking down of categories.
Susan is characterized initially as the "logical" scholar who puts things in order (§ 23), making sure that the references are clear and that the appropriate citations are made. But as their story nears its critical point, at which the coming together of Fenn and Susan is brought seriously into question, she becomes the "irrational romantic," unstable, even hysterical.

Even then, in the grip of her self-torment, she keeps enough of her cool to question Fenn's placement of himself:

Your view of the Eighteenth century is romantic, in your wife's opinion. Your view of rationalism is romantic. (§ 216)

What she means is that we don't know what Francis Scott Key was actually like: "Not impossibly he was as demon-driven as Poe, or as his namesake, F. Scott Fitz." (§ 216). Fenn is attaching his idea of the 18th century, perhaps his idea of himself, to his namesake for the sake of the category, so that he can make his point about the difference between him and his wife. He softens his position: "Well: her husband's not anti-romantic, any more than he's anti-her. Says he's got some Manfred in him; even a touch of Poe. And a little Sue Seckler, thank God" (§ 216). Though he hedges on the stability of his categories, he takes them a step further in describing their synthesis, which is the joining of him and Susan: "Well, reader: hence, the significance of our sturdy craft's name: a union of contrarieties prevailing harmoniously indeed but sometimes tense, like the physics of Pokey himself" (§ 217).
Two things: that a union of "contraries" has taken place is questionable because the terms of the union are indistinct, the "contrariness" of the terms is brought into doubt; assuming that we can call Fenn and Susan's relationship a "union," whether it will prevail is brought into doubt by Susan's suggestion that they split.

In working out the relation between Fenn and Susan, we have to deal with the chauvinistic character of the categories in Fenn's note about the difference between the synthetic and the analytical, because it begins the second phase of this argument: in the synthetic moment the prior duality reaffirms itself.

Fenn's categories tend to align the masculine and the feminine with traditional stereotypes. The male is aligned with the analytical, and therefore given the position of power: the male is the maker of decisions. His movement is positive and productive, "upward" and "forward." He moves inward and introspectively. The Feminine is aligned with the synthetic, the position of conciliation. Her movement is generally negative, downward and backward. She is outward, predisposed to excess and extravagance. Fenn bases his categories, for the most part, on the movements of the sperm and the ovum. But even the movements of the sperm and ovum, by definition the masculine and the feminine, are subject to a chauvinistic interpretation. Fenn calls them swimmers and floaters, names that reflect the traditional perception of men as active and woman as passive. In The
Tidewater Tales, it will be noted that there is medical evidence suggesting that even the ova are "aggressive." To Fenn’s credit, he never claims that the attributes he calls male and female are the exclusive domain of men or women. Though he retains the terms male and female as adjectives, he puts them in quotation marks (§ 137). The quotation marks become an indication of the categories, the prejudices, that remain when one tries to do away with them by bringing the terms of the categories together. The remainder is an essential element of the synthetic structure.

One way we can get at this idea of the remainder is through Charles Harris, one of Barth’s principal critics. Harris’s book on John Barth, Passionate Virtuosity, represents almost all of Barth’s critics in that he sees "unity as the central problem of . . . Barth’s fiction" (ix). The fact that unity could be considered a "problem" implies a system of values on which Harris builds a method of analysis that contains problems of its own. Harris means that Barth’s fiction contains in one way or another, as themes, structures, characters, etc., oppositions; and these oppositions need to be unified. The End of the Road is an "articulation of absolutes" which takes place as a "nondualistic conjunction of opposites, . . . a transcendence, a mystical view of the whole" (Harris 48). The Sot-Weed Factor is an exploration of "experience and reality." LETTERS "strives for a middle ground between
apparent oppositions, thereby achieving a postmodern synthesis" (Harris 153).

The problem is determining how this anticipated unity is to be achieved. The impulse in Barth, particularly in *Sabbatical*, Harris correctly identifies as "nondualistic." Barth wants to create a way beyond the dilemma, the double bind, faced in *The Fork*, a term that will not simply reinscribe duality. The problem is how one is to "transcend" the dualistic division of the universe and thereby achieve a "nondualistic conjunction." The problem is that as soon as we think of unity or disunity as a "problem," duality has already been reinscribed. The opposition between unity and duality stands as a testament to opposition as the principle determinant of the universe.

Harris reads *Giles Goat-Boy* as a "Synthesis Attained" (that is the subtitle of his chapter on *Giles Goat-Boy*). According to Harris, the story contains a "dialectical structure": it describes a thesis, an antithesis, and a synthesis. The synthesis "retains the elements of the prior phases, but in an altered or elevated state—aufgehoben" (Harris 88). According to Harris, the dialectic is Hegel’s.

Since it is likely that Hegel’s dialectic and his idea of synthesis will be applied to *Sabbatical* by its critics (Harris’s book stops with *LETTERS*), we should look at the nature of synthesis and Hegel’s use of it to see how Harris’s comments hold up under the pressure of an extensive study of Hegel such as Jacques Derrida’s *Glas*.
Glas’s Hegel column concerns, largely, Hegel’s idea of Sittlichkeit, the synthesis between right (Recht) and morality (Moralität). Within Sittlichkeit, another syllogism is developed (its terms: the family, civil or bourgeois society, and the state or the constitution of the state). And within the family, another syllogism: marriage, the family property, the education of the children (Derrida, Glas 4, 14). Understanding the connection of these things will give us an idea of the Hegelian synthesis.

Love is an essential predicate of the concept family, that is of an essential moment of Sittlichkeit. (Derrida, Glas 10)

Love, then, can be thought of as the connection itself, the thing that "plays in the gap" (Derrida, Glas 18), like Sittlichkeit, in the synthetic moment.

"Love means in general terms the consciousness of my unity with another, so that I am not in selfish isolation, but win my self-consciousness as the renunciation of [Aufgebung, the dispossesssion of] my being-for-self and through knowing myself (Mich-Wissen) as the unity of myself with another and of the other with me." (Derrida, Glas 17, a quotation of Hegel’s Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts)

However, love is also the "unity of [the family’s] self destruction" (Derrida, Glas 14). Love produces and resolves the familial contradiction. A member of the family wants not to be independent but counts for something in love only in terms "fixed by what the other finds" in him—"I count for something for the other" (Derrida, Glas 18). The family includes, as its synthetic moment, the education of the child, which is "the dissolution of the family" (Derrida,
In the child the parents recognize themselves as one. "They 'produce' thus 'their own death'" such that "the death of the parents forms the child's consciousness," which is the education of the child (Derrida, Glas 132). Love is thus the movement of an Aufhebung: the moment of unity is also the moment of dissolution. As in the Aufhebung of sexual desire, the moment of gratification (of the "attainment" of unity) is the moment of the loss of desire (of a declaration of independence).

To say that a synthesis has been "attained" might mislead one into thinking that the dialectic has come to an end in which a positive achievement has been established and beyond which one cannot go. But given the Aufhebung in Hegel's system, the achievement is always only partly positive. And in a speculative dialectics, such as Hegel's, the synthesis will include another system in which a synthesis is "relieved" (that is one of the not quite sufficient translations of Aufhebung) again.

Syllogism is a trinary system—"Each of the three moments of the three moments itself includes three syllogistic moments" (Derrida, Glas 20)—but the Aufhebung anchors it in the dual. Synthesis, the activity of syllogism, always represents the coming together of oppositions, of two aspects, two things, two paths. There is "[n]o marriage that is not decided by the parental instance, whatever the form of its intervention" (Derrida, Glas 194). The parental instance of Sittlichkeit is the
coming together of right and morality. Regardless of the effect of the marriage, whether we are talking about Sittlichkeit or a synthesis of another sort, the intervention remains.

Philosophy, in Hegel’s system, is the synthesis of art and religion, the syllogism within the third or synthetic moment of the most encompassing division, that between objective spirit and subjective spirit:

in absolute religion, division in two (Entzweiung) is not yet absolutely overcome by reconciliation. An opposition (Entgegensetzung) stays, determines itself as an anticipatory representation (Vorstellung). (Derrida, Glas 219)

Philosophy can only be anticipated; it always remains the not-yet of the absolute spirit. Hegel proposes a dialectic rather than a tautological relation between philosophy and religion. "Philosophy is the truth (the philosophy) of religion, and religion represents already (the name) (of) philosophy." Thus, according to Hegel, "'Philosophy is only explicating itself when it explicates religion, and when it explicates itself it is explicating religion.'" In Derrida’s terms, "Absolute religion is not yet what it is already... Absolute religion... is already what it is not yet.... The unity of the object and the subject does not yet accomplish itself presently, actually; the reconciliation between the subject and the object... is left waiting" (Derrida, Glas 218, 219-20). What remains is division in two.
The structure of Derrida's text echoes that remainder. "Before attempting an active interpretation," says Derrida, "verily a critical displacement (supposing that is rigorously possible), we must yet patiently decipher this difficult and obscure text [Elements of the Philosophy of Right]" (Derrida, Glas 5). "To know what love is . . . one needs to know what feeling is. But that will truly not be known before knowing what love is, that is, what the family is" (Derrida, Glas 14), or, we might say, what Sittlichkeit is. This pre-text becomes before we know it (that is, from the start) "an active interpretation." Another way of putting it, which is to say the same thing, though not exactly the same thing, is that all of Glas is a critical displacement, a patient deciphering, of Hegel.

Glas is organized in two columns, the left about Hegel, the right Genet. Already I have slipped backward because I have not yet gotten to their connection. We can see from the start their crossing over. The displacement of Hegel is the replacement of Genet and vice versa. Both columns anticipate the other and, together, anticipate their connection. But what remains, what is left standing, are the two columns.

In Sabbatical, the synthetic reinscription of duality is marked in the love declared by Fenn and Susan. I have said that we are led to presume that because Fenn and Susan love each other they will always be together. Sabbatical is, after all, "A Romance" (the term is part of Sabbatical's
title). Of course, we understand Romance to be used partly as a critical term. Fenn and Susan have used it to describe the temperament of 19th-century American literature, to set it against (and this is how it is usually used) the rationalism of the 18th century or the realism of the 19th and 20th centuries. Though Susan has called theirs a "love-and-adventure story"—love and adventure might be seen as elements of the Romance—Fenn wants their story to be something else: "I’m not being sentimental. . . . We don’t want some tacky roman à clef or half-assed autobiographical romance" (§ 356). In Sabbatical love becomes more than what the story is about. As a "Romance" it is also but more than a "love story," more than a story about the love between two people. In Sabbatical, love is the subject of a critical inquiry. Sabbatical is about the function of love in a relationship, about love’s betweenness; that is, about love as the synthetic moment.

As Fenn tells the story of "A Dialogue on Diction" he sprinkles it with "dirty" language as is his want, but Susan wants to establish the terms by which their "love story" will be told:

And all these effing thises and effing thats: I won’t have it, Fenn. This is our story, that I love; it’s our love-and-adventure story, that ought to speak and sing and soar and make us laugh and cry and catch our breaths et cetera, and you’re X-rating it before we even get to the sexy parts. (§ 13)

Though Hegel’s system doesn’t directly involve love as an element in story telling, it is useful in exploring the
relation between Fenn and Susan and their idea of synthesis. For Fenn (if not yet by the end of the book for Susan) the writing of their story and their loving are identical twins: "The doing and the telling, our writing and our loving— they're twins. That's our story" (§ 365). Fenn's softening to "effing" the word to which Susan finds exception is his giving over who he is, the meaning of Fennwick Turner, in the telling of the story of his love for her. As a narrator, who he is is defined by his telling the story. By taking on Susan's terms in making this their "love story," in effect declaring his love for her, he renounces (in Hegel's terms) his being-for-self. Fenn takes on meaning fixed by the other and thereby reinscribes their independence.

Much of Sabbatical involves this kind of bargaining for terms by which the love story should be told: which

14 Though in fact Hegel always opposes narration to the concept, in the reconstitution of a Hegelian process he incites us, according to Derrida, "to a kind of conceptual narration" (Glas 15). Hegel's being a speculative dialectics, the completion of the dialectical process can only occur at the end of history. It is, therefore, easier to explain Hegel in the future tense. The future tense, though, is a "grammatical ruse of reason" (Glas 5), because Hegel's dialectic is a circular system that requires us to presume the fulfillment of the synthesis it proposes, so that the appropriate tense is not the simple future but the future perfect, the future anterior, which brings into dialectical relation the future and the past. "When Hegel is explained," says Derrida, "it is always in a seminar and in telling students: the history of the concept, the concept of history. In explaining Hegel, in other words, we are lead to narrate, to consider a series of events in time, to write a history. Our explanation turns inevitably toward narration."
characters are too minor to be part of the story, what type of narration, what organization, what footnotes, etc.

Because both Fenn and Susan are twins, Fenn says, they might use "narcissism as the image of [their] love for another" (§ 332). By loving themselves in their independence, they would establish a relation to someone other, because they would love themselves as their twin. And regardless of their twinship, the reinscription of independence establishes one of the functions of love, the double movement of love as the synthetic moment.

Fenn and Susan try to join in the telling of *Sabbatical* by coupling the point of view. On the first reading of the beginning of *Sabbatical*, one can't decide who is telling the story. That confusion is due mostly to there being two usually distinct points of view that form one point of view doubled—the third person singular and the first person plural: "Fenn would be happy to give it another go; we have fiddled with our tale through this whole sabbatical voyage" (§ 9, emphasis mine). Because quotations aren't distinguished with quotation marks from the exposition of the story by the narrator, it is not easy, at first, to tell when someone is speaking, so it might seem that the narrator was the first person singular as well:

Oh, Fenn, she groans, I’ve got us lost. (§ 21)

The only time we have the first person singular is in the quotation of someone speaking. The third person is used for the narrators' reference to themselves, individually as
characters, the first person plural for the narrators' reference to themselves as a couple or as the narrator coupled.

In *Sabbatical* the coupled point of view can’t hold up. Though they have nicknamed their story "Our Story" and even devote several subdivisions to calling it that—"Our Story" (§ 71-73), "Our Story!" (§ 352-56), "To Our Story" (§ 362-64), and though Susan entertains the notion early on, calls it "our love-and-adventure story" (emphasis mine), after her abortion she has had enough, she is unwilling to let the synthesis stand without scrutiny:

> What about our story, Suse?
> What about it.
> I’m going to write it; that’s what about it.
> Joking aside, we’re going to write it.
> Susan looks away. Bully for us. Fenwick absorbs the rebuff. I’m not belittling you, Sue says seriously. You’ll write something fine, and that’ll be enough for you, because you had all the other things in your life. (§ 334)

Fenn is more right when he slips and says that he will write it. He will be the book’s principal author. Though Susan is interested in, even has a stake in, their story, it will be Fenn who writes it down, it will be the book that makes Fenn a writer of fiction. Fenn, not Susan, aspires to be the author of a novel (§ 273-74).

In fact, Susan mainly functions editorially. When Fenn names the terms and defines the story—"The doing and the telling, our writing and our loving—they’re twins. That’s our story," Susan only acquiesces: "If that’s going to be our story, then let’s begin it at the end and end at the
beginning . . ." (§ 365). "If that’s going to be our story": Susan is not satisfied with the conclusion proposed, but she will allow it to stand if she can have a hand in controlling the structure of the conclusion. But Fenn has already planned the structure she describes. Susan wonders only thirteen pages earlier, "Where does Cacaway fit in?" And Fenn gives her the conclusion before she describes it: "At the beginning and the end" (§ 352). Even Susan’s function as editor is somewhat circumscribed by Fenn’s already having worked out the story part of the way. Though Fenn says, "It’s our power and our voice, and what it’s for is our story" (§ 351), he says it in the subdivision called "She’s Listening" (§ 325-52). That irony is symptomatic of the impossibility of a "synthesis attained," indicative of the division between listener and teller, reader and writer, the duality always reinscribed in the twins and into the synthetic moment.

The Fourth Choice

It is essential that we keep in mind that we are talking about the way synthesis functions in language. To talk about the relation between Fenn and Susan is to talk about the working out of Sabbatical:

Fenn is astonished almost as much by Susan’s estimation of his abilities—and the revelation that she has examined, neither at his initiation nor against his prohibition, not only his notebooks but his sundry past literary efforts!—as by her incredible proposal that we separate. Unthinkable just now either to proceed to Wye I. or not to proceed! We can neither go forward nor go back: forward whither? Back where? (§ 347)
Where Fenn is in his career as a writer (in relation to his "sundry past literary efforts"), that is, in his making of notes for the present work **Sabbatical**, is relative to the state of Fenn and Susan's relationship.

In the section called "We Have Reached That Red and Black Buoy" in which the above statement is made, Fenn and Susan "circle in midchannel" (§ 347). Both their relationship and their story are stuck. Solution by further analytical division is unsatisfactory and by synthesis impossible to attain. In trying to get them going, to bring them to some satisfactory conclusion, Fenn cannot completely rid the story of the cause of the problem, of the predisposition to synthesis and analysis. He proposes a fourth choice within the old structure:

Fenn explains that at a place where three roads meet, there are four choices. Your Y has three legs, but four possibilities. (§ 351)

They "decide" only to **remain**. We must use the term tentatively because they "decide" only by default. Given their perspective, the restrictions and the remainder of analysis and synthesis, they have no other choice.

To the crotch of the Y, Fenn says. The hub of the wheel. The place where three roads meet. (§ 350)

Physically, literally, "staying there," when Fenn has this revelation, means staying at Cacaway. But he doesn't mean it completely literally. Susan wants the meaning of the story, the conclusion, anchored: "What does 'staying right here' mean, anyhow? Does she go to Swarthmore and he to Delaware? Does he want her to stay on at Washington College
while he writes this famous story?" (§ 358). For Fenn, though, their "working it out" has become a matter of perspective:

He doesn’t know about that, what she just asked, and the reason he doesn’t know is that it doesn’t matter in the same way anymore. That’s all clear to him now, too: We didn’t make the decisions we’d hoped to make on this sabbatical sail because the questions we were trying to decide were the wrong ones. No, excuse him: they’re the right questions, but we had the wrong handle on them. (§ 358)

Sabbatical has been about (is about) all sorts of Y’s, Wye’s, and Why’s. And they all, in some way or another, stand for each other.

Wye I. (the place Fenn is from) is epigrammatic for "Why me?" The search for a cause (the relation between cause and effect), which is implied by that question as well as by the place name itself, which marks Fenn’s "place of origin," is inappropriate. But, as Fenn suggests, that inappropriateness does not do away with the question--no more than Fenn can do away with the organization, the structure, of a story already told. The key is perspective, not what the question is, but how you look at it, what you expect it to do. If the Y is supposed to bring you to an end or an answer, then it will fail.

Fenn swears she’ll understand what he means as soon as he does. It is not a matter of answers, or even a philosophical position: just a perspective. (§ 360)

If Fenn is right that it is not a matter of answers, then understanding is not quite the right word either. If he has found a new perspective, a new way of looking at their story
that would negate the need for coming to a conclusion, he
has not yet found a way to explain it to Susan, or, if
explanation isn't the right word, to lead Susan to his point
of view:

What's more— he hopes Susan can take this the way
he means it; he knows what the past few days and
weeks have been for her— this story, our story,
it's our house and our child. ... (§ 357)

Because Fenn has made it clear that he wants to get past
their old perspective, to imagine their story as controlled
by neither analysis nor synthesis, we have to conclude that
he does not propose simply another synthesis in saying "our
story is our child." It may be that what Fenn is trying to
articulate is beyond the capacity of language in general.
It is definitely beyond the systems of discourse established
by Fenn and Susan in Sabbatical. Fenn wants to dispose of
or leave behind them a discourse that has brought them to a
standstill, to leave behind both aspects of the Y, without
bringing forward the remainder left over by the text's
disposal, without bringing forward remnants of the text that
has brought him to this new perspective.

Susan's grieving about her abortion is essentially her
dissatisfaction with the way their story ends, with the
problem of articulating a story that would place them
outside the Y.

Though Fenn wants not to see their story in terms of a
synthesis, "our story is our child" looks synthetic, and
Susan treats it that way:
Well, my friend, that's a two-edged trope you're playing with there. Stories can abort, too. (§357)

Fenn's fourth choice places Sabbatical within the Y. The terms themselves, the possibility of "understanding" the new perspective and, principally, the connection between "story" and "child," by which Fenn describes the fourth choice are the remainder of an aborted text.
Let this, then, be our departure (but neither our origin, source, nor simply our example):

The presumed subject of the sentence might always say, through using the "supplement," more, less, or something other than what [the writer] would mean. This question [of the usage of the word "supplement"] is therefore not only of [the] writing but also of our reading. . . . [T]he reading must always aim at a certain relationship, imperceived by the writer, between what he commands and what he does not command of the patterns of the language that he uses. This relationship is not a certain quantitative distribution of shadow and light, of weakness or of force, but a signifying structure that critical reading should produce.

Yet if reading must not be content with doubling the text, it cannot legitimately transgress the text toward something other than it, toward a referent (a reality that is metaphysical, historical, psychobiographical, etc.) or toward a signified outside the text whose content could take place, could have taken place outside of language, that is to say . . . of writing in general. (Derrida, Of Grammatology 157-58)

Thus, in terms of a certain writer and a certain text (we will leave them out of sight for now for reasons that will be made clear), Derrida offers a justification for his principles of reading. We must take a special precaution in reading The Tidewater Tales, as we will, by allowing Derrida to be our departure, by allowing his idea of the supplement
to supplement Barth’s text, because already a supplementary reading is at play. My quotation, which illustrates a reading, of Of Grammatology, and especially my alterations of the text, indicate the scission and the connection between writing and reading. In the first part of the quotation I have tried to generalize Derrida’s statement by removing them from the context of the specific writer in question, by leaving out references to Rousseau. The change is not entirely vitiated by pointing out that in the following paragraphs Derrida broadens the question of reading Rousseau to reading and writing "in general"; Rousseau is very much a part of Derrida’s idea of the supplement. Divorcing the subject from the context or example is always problematic, but this separation is particularly disturbing because the supplement points out the adhesion of the text to the subject and of the subject to the example. Even without the brackets, which point out in my quotation the addition as well as the omission of certain relevant information, the supplement is integrated into the text and perhaps made more dangerous, for without the appearance of signs that speak directly to us about the supplementarity of the text at hand, these sort of precautions would not be taken. Let us not mislead ourselves though: taking precautions can give us no absolute assurances about the effect of the supplement on the text that is read, because the supplement is always at play. The presumed subject will always say more, less, or other than
what the writer would mean, which is to say that reading will necessarily entail being misled if one reads for or toward a metaphysical, historical, or psychobiographical referent.

We should point out deliberately another precaution (one that is also, for other reasons, Derrida's): "To produce this signifying structure obviously cannot consist of reproducing" (Of Grammatology 158). Reading never simply doubles the text; it is not a production that is, in any absolute sense, a repetition. In reading The Tidewater Tales, the term reproduction, though it is seldom encountered, will bring itself forward because of the metaphors to which the supplement is bound in that text; because, for example, conception and delivery are marked in The Tidewater Tales as aspects of writing and narration, and therefore of reading, we have to argue the supplementarity of reading within the context of these metaphors. There is no contradiction in the inevitable appearance of this term. Reproduction (Peter and Katherine almost always break it down into more strategic units: insemination, conception, delivery, etc.) is not within The Tidewater Tales simply the doubling of the parents or the doubling of commentary on the work that is therefore produced.

It would be tempting to speak of the metaphor as a supplement of the idea of supplementarity and therefore to speak of the idea, the concept, as the "parent text," but this metaphorization may imply that the idea is somehow
outside the movement of the supplement when the supplement denies a priori that a "parent text" can be the origin and denies, as Derrida says, "the tranquil assurance that leaps over the text toward its presumed content, in the direction of the pure signified" (Of Grammatology 159). It is dangerous to try to offer an example of supplementarity because the system on which the offer is based (the dichotomy of subject/example or form/content) is disrupted by the effect of the supplement, the supposed "subject." An example cannot be made without adding to, omitting from, or saying something other than what the subject would say of itself. What the subject would say is of course always a supposition, because what it would say is never said. For this reason, we are not to think of Derrida as our origin or, in simplistic terms, our source. He is rather our departure, a leaving and a leaving off, a parting, a separation and a boundary among other separations and boundaries, within the text.

A supposition, a "metaphor," the production of a supplement:

But if stories were children, their readers wouldn’t be their children; they’d be one of their parents, and the author the other. (TT 410)

Not the "parent text" but the parent reader. To be one of the parents of the story, the reader must be made part of a system of production; reading is a production because the text comes about as the result of the tension between what the writer commands and what the writer does not command of
the language used. The reader helps to produce what is out of the writer’s hands, which is why Derrida speaks of a writing that is yet reading.

When he discovered that his sailboat leaked (not incidentally the boat is named Story), Peter did not hesitate to lay on the epoxy and the fiberglass. Peter thinks that the builders of the boat would have been offended "but it wasn’t their boat any longer. . . . P. Sagamore is not a romantic: neither about origins nor about wooden sailboats nor about fiction" (TT 111). On the other hand Peter went to great lengths not to use the engine that came with the boat (he turned it on but left it in neutral in channels that required its use), though "if there’d been a moment’s danger to anyone else or any real threat to himself or the boat, he’d have said screw this and shifted into gear . . ." (TT 111). Derrida points out that without recognizing the moment of doubling commentary which requires "all the instruments of traditional criticism . . . critical production would risk developing in any direction at all and authorize itself to say almost anything" (Of Grammatology 158). Peter authorizes himself to modernize Story (which is also to say the story), though he is not its "author"—neither the builder of the boat nor the one who signs The Tidewater Tales. At the same time, he understands the value and the necessity of recognizing and respecting Story’s history.
Peter makes his statement about the parent reader within the context of his and Katherine’s discovering who wrote the manuscript *SEX EDUCATION: Play*, which had floated into their story in two installments wrapped in plastic Baggies and set adrift in Alert-and-Locate flare canisters. To Frank, Katherine says simply, "You wrote that *SEX EDUCATION* play!" (TT 409). The response to Katherine’s assertion is not as simple. No one says directly that, yes, Frank wrote the play. Lee smiles at Frank and Peter is startled, but the supplement has not been taken into account. Katherine is not entirely correct if she means that the command of the text remains with the supposed "author."

We have pointed out elsewhere that Barth’s books read themselves, so to speak, from within. *The Tidewater Tales* makes many, arguably a continuous flow of, comments about itself—its organization, its style, etc. We should notice, though, that it also develops allegories of its being read.15 *The Tidewater Tales* talks about what it means for someone to read *The Tidewater Tales*, what effects such a reading have on the possibility of isolating an author. In other words, it talks about a critical production of the work in the reading. I emphasize that these allegories take place within *The Tidewater Tales* because they are not

15 For a seminal discussion of the relation between allegory and reading, especially as it relates to the breakdown of the dichotomy between the figurative and the literal, we should look to de Man’s *Allegories of Reading*. 
allegories of readings that occur outside the text. To understand reading as production, which is to take the supplement into consideration, is to recognize that "there is nothing outside of the text" (Derrida, Of Grammatology 158). Peter and Katherine's reading the manuscript SEX EDUCATION: Play functions as one such allegory. We are concerned here not simply with the manuscript, which is a reflection of and a commentary (essentially a "doubling commentary") on The Tidewater Tales, but also with what Peter and Katherine have to say about opening and reading the manuscript,

which by the unlikeliest of hazards swam into the Ken of dwarf-laden Story at a peculiarly volatile, suspended moment in our own tidewater tale, and in a manner of speaking catalyzed, goosed--Might as well say inseminated, says Peter--inseminated our outboard muse, though what she will deliver remains to be seen. (TT 421)

Peter and Katherine read SEX EDUCATION: Play, as do we in addition to them, a text that is in The Tidewater Tales, and thereby inseminate their "own tidewater tale," remarked over and again to be The Tidewater Tales. Reading The Tidewater Tales inseminates The Tidewater Tales. "There is no outside-text" (Derrida, Of Grammatology 158). (Reading the opinion that Katherine offers, Peter adds to and helps write it; Katherine says what she "might as well" but might not have said: inseminated. Elsewhere she has wondered whether the association of the metaphors of reproduction might be "counter-productive" [TT 45]. One of the dwarves on Peter's authorial back is the double fear for his "career and actual
sanity, should things go and stay where they've clearly been heading; and for the unthinkable burden it will place upon [their] parenthood if . . . his art turns out to have been sacrificed partly upon that altar" [TT 55-56]. Nevertheless Peter finds himself trying to write in the guest cottage, which has been turned into a nursery.)

Our reading of Peter and Katherine's reading is well marked. On opening the second flare canister they ask,

Tongue-risking reader, what do you expect we expect? You're reading The Tidewater Tales: A Novel; we're telling our stories, which are our story, which we're living and have lived from moment to moment, creek to creek. (TT 370)

Implied is that Peter and Katherine are also reading, like us, The Tidewater Tales: A Novel. They claim explicitly to read and hear the stories that make up The Tidewater Tales and to be planning a novel by that name. Their supposed reading of The Tidewater Tales is a part of their stories, which are The Tidewater Tales. They are not content to get on with what they call their "lives" before

opening that Baggie, stripping the rubber bands off that roll of loose-leaf paper, and (Katherine first this time, passing on each manuscript page to Peter as she reads it) reading

ACT II: DOWNSTREAM. (TT 371)

What follows is, presumably, a reading. But it is also a writing: "Act Two, Downstream, she says. Not even a title page. If we had found this first, we wouldn't even know what it was Act Two of (TT 371). Katherine's comments, her reading, comes under Act Two's title, without being bracketed or otherwise graphically distinguished from the
text that is read. We have only the identification of the speakers ("she says," "says Peter") that imply that what we are reading is not part of the text they are reading. But we are given no assurances; and, regardless, Peter and Katherine’s reading is part of our understanding, a part of our reading, of the text, *SEX EDUCATION: Play*.

Peter and Katherine find they cannot read without interjecting a reading, without supplementing, without writing: reading Act One, "Peter says if she doesn’t stop interrupting, we’ll have to write her lines into the script" (TT 148), and "under Act Two’s title," Act Two continues as if we are not already under Act Two’s title, "(we still can’t recall ever having seen chapter-like titles on the acts and scenes of television plays) she reads"

**Scene 1: The Swimmer**

Says Peter, What else is new? Katherine reads (TT 371-72)

Not many lines into this reading that is also a writing of Act Two, what was suggested by an ambiguity is given a formality called for by the playscript; Peter and Katherine’s reading, which could not readily be distinguished from the supposed text being read, has become a formalized part of the playscript as if it were there already:

MAY: Wasn’t that second whirlpool a bitch! (As they speak, they repair their envelopes, assisting each other in the places difficult for the wearer to reach.)

KATHERINE: Uh-oh.
PETER: Don’t start uh-ohing. Hand it over.
JUNE: "Enjoy each stage, girls." (They laugh.) You’re a terrific floater May!

Here, says Katherine, passing him page one. That Enjoy Each Stage stuff sure does sound like Florence Halsey. It’s all too spooky.

MAY: You are. That last stretch of white water.

JUNE: I majored in White Water.

KATHERINE: Yay! White Water!

JUNE: But there isn’t supposed to be any below the Confluence.

MAY: What isn’t supposed to be would fill a book.

JUNE (Grins): Maybe we’ll write one.

PETER (When he reads this far): A post-modernist self-reflexive lesbian menstrual comedy. (11 372-73)

It is important to notice that the reading is not completely lost in the text. Even after Peter and Katherine begin to speak in the dialogue among the other speakers, there are indications of their difference. Peter and Katherine’s dialogue is separated from that of May and June by spacing, as if to say beware that reading is not everything, a reading will always mark itself in the writing. The supplement does not reduce the text to a state of dissolution.

There are also two different types of passages that do the same sort of work: passages in prose dialogue wherein Peter or Katherine speak and describe their actions ("Here, says Katherine, passing him page one"); and passages in play script dialogue, which can be coupled with stage directions that describe their actions ("PETER: ... Hand
It might appear that there is no reason for this difference, but it is an indication that there is a reading going on. The difference tells us over and over: there is a writing and a reading. Reading does not supplant writing. In reading, we don’t read anything, we always also read what is written, but what is always subject to the reading, a reading that is therefore a critical production of what the writer would say.

On the other hand, neither the spacing of the dialogue nor the relation between what is said in playscript and what is said in prose gives us a way of distinguishing between a text that is "primary" and the supplement. If we claim that the dialogue between Peter and Katherine should be isolated as the supplement, we are forced to ask, why, then, the distinction between the playscript and the prose? The playscript and the prose do the same sort of work; but for the formalization into playscript, the prose is no less a part of the text that is read. This is to say that the difference between the playscript and the prose cannot be understood in terms of "levels" of supplementarity; they are both in the text. We have no way of deciding that one is a writing and the other a reading and no way of deciding that one was written or conceived of first. We read them already together. The spacing and the difference between the playscript and the prose do not allow us to decide anything, rather they mark the coupling of writing and reading and
mark what Derrida calls the relation between what a writer commands and what he does not command; in this marking the difference and the spacing do productive work.

We are not far into the script before Katherine is answering for (but not in place of) June:

JUNE: I wish we could have talked awhile before we swam off.
MAY: Talked! With a swimmer?
KATHERINE: Why not?
JUNE: Why not?

June’s answer sounds like an echo. In fact it crosses over the division between the primary and secondary text, between text and commentary. Katherine says, reads, "Why not?" before she comes to it. Is Katherine actually writing this text? Does June speak in response to Katherine reading? We come to find out, if we have not already made this part of our reading, that Frank’s play is partly about Katherine’s friend May Jump and what May has told him about her relationship with Katherine. But, more importantly, Katherine’s anticipation of what the author would say signifies the breakdown of the categories by which we understand the relation between writing and reading, the breakdown of the system of understanding that would keep reading from becoming an aspect of the production of the text.

In *The Tidewater Tales*, what the reader comes to expect of a text, the anticipation of a continuation or a divergence from a plot or a metaphor, for instance, is
connected to a system of reading as production. Having received only Act One in the first flare canister, Peter and Katherine wonder about Act Two. Moreover, Katherine wants an Act Two. Besides the question of the quality of the work (Katherine does not consider it worthy of "literary" questioning), an expectation is imposed. In the case of SEX EDUCATION: Play, Peter and Katherine are lead to expect something else because of an obvious structural absence: an Act One implies the existence of an Act Two. The establishment of systems of anticipation is seldom this simple though:

It is Peter Sagamore’s fear that there is not only an Act Two, but an Act Three as well: if not in this world, then in the heaven of dramaturgical obviosities.

The what?

Says Peter we could write the rest ourselves: All the clues are right there in Act One. (TT 161)

As Peter spins out the possibilities and probabilities, Katherine stops him, sure he will "spoil the story"—the story, keep in mind, they don’t have:

How do you know all that? Freshman Dramaturgy, in Pete’s opinion, So’s the script, doesn’t she think? Is he sure he didn’t write it? (TT 161)

Some questions follow from their anticipating Acts Two and Three. Peter denies having anything to do with such sophomoric dramaturgy, claims not to be the writer of SEX EDUCATION: Play, but to what extent should we understand him, as the reader, to be part of the same system of
anticipation that allows such a script to be written? And to what extent does a reading, any reading, require such an anticipation? On the other hand, if the reader can finish the work without the writer, why would anyone worry about the story being spoiled? When Katherine reads Act One she wears the hat that was floated off in the flare canister with the manuscript, the hat that Frank would wear while he was writing. Frank's floating the hat off with the manuscript was not simply an act of despair. Though it indicated his exasperation at his becoming an author of fiction, it also indicated the inevitable relinquishing of authority over the work, giving whoever would read the manuscript the power of authorship. We might also point out that as they tell each other the stories promised at the end of "Day 6," Peter and Katherine and Frank and Lee pass the hat to the one telling the story. Thus, in reading the manuscript, Katherine and Peter help to produce the text.

What should we, the readers of The Tidewater Tales: A Novel (as the narrators point out to us again), expect of Act Three? Of its being written? How are we to understand its being written? Having been inseminated by the reading of SEX EDUCATION: Play, Peter's muse summons him to write, but only as "a warm-up" to "the real thing" (TT 549), "ACT III: The Cove, or, Sex Education." As Peter "reads" for us what he has written, it is immediately apparent that this is not what the writer of Acts One and Two would have said.

16 See, for example, TT 406.
Peter writes Act Three (and he points this out to us within the Act [TT 619]) not as a play but in prose dialogue. "He is by nature," he has told us, "a narrator, not a dramatizer" (TT 162). Peter cannot be the writer; he cannot read from the position of the writer, which is to say that he cannot write, without also reading. Even as Peter reads what he has written, his listeners, who are essentially his readers, are careful to point out that this is Frank's play. The reader is only part, though a fully entitled part, of the production of the text. Because speakers are not identified on the left margin as in a playscript, there is another significant difference between what we would have called "Peter's text" and "Frank's text." There are no graphical distinctions between the text that was written and the supposed readerly insertions. Even if we wanted to, we could not sever, at a glance, the writing from the reading; we would be forced to make decisions (Derrida has told us that reading is a decision [Dissemination 63]) about who is speaking and whether this particular speaker is part of the text or the reading of the text. These sorts of decisions concerning the distinction between the text and its reading have become even more difficult to support.

May Jump, who wants to hear Act Three without the benefit of a reprisal of Acts One and Two because she thinks she ought to be able to construct them if the writers have done their jobs, anticipates the direction of the story:

June says That's two twenty magnetic. You said two ten.
Remarks May Jump The current, dummy. Says Peter, glancing over at her with professional respect, the Swimmer says We have to allow for the current. . . . (TT 619)

It isn’t long before the anticipation of a current is articulated as a steering of the vessel, before May marks her getting caught in the production of the story:

We can thank May’s goodness, says the Swimmer. My pleasure, Kiss, says May Jump, giving Katherine a small hug. K sighs I’ll never be black belt. Presses Peter June says Poor May! (TT 619)

May responds in a joke, as if her interruption interrupted nothing and made no addition to Peter’s Act Three. But in fact the current of her story, her relation to Katherine, is mixed with the current of "Peter’s story." May and Katherine’s parting ways and Katherine’s becoming a parent with Peter, is, they all understand, reflected in Peter’s text. There is nothing to keep a comment on that reflection out of the work, out of the reflection, away from those who would hear the story of the reflection. Peter "presses" forward with the story that is thereby remarked as "his," but must allow for, as do his characters, a current that is shifting, a current that more or less moves them all.

All of the characters who listen to Peter read Act Three supplement the text. And the writer is, of course, not outside the production of supplements: "Says Peter aside, not particularly to Frank, All these ‘smiling grimlys’ and ‘watching soberlys’ will have to come out" (TT 624). Each reader makes the story "his" or "hers" by connecting it to a part of The Tidewater Tales that has been
essential to his or her understanding of the story and of
telling stories, which is to say that the possession or
command over the text is never fixed in one writer or
reader. When Peter reads that the Swimmer and June "haul up
onto a deserted strand," the readers make their various
predictions about the identity of the place:

Ordinary Point, predicts Katherine.
Carlita's otra cuevita, predicts Lee.
Sheritt's Cove, predicts May Jump, smiling at
Katherine [Sherritt's] lap. (TT 620)

Calling it "A tell along playscript" (TT 624), Katherine
comments on the comments as well as on the "script itself,"
further obscuring these sorts of distinctions. It is
essential to remember that for Peter’s playscript and for
The Tidewater Tales telling along is not simply taking turns
telling again a story already written, but rather reading in
the story what supplements the story and becoming involved
as the text's producer.

"Interrupt, bids Peter: You’re entitled" (TT 624). The
story is also that of the reader.

We can read The Tidewater Tales as a series of stories
produced—read and written out of a given thread. In turn,
the stories of four texts, which might in other contexts be
called "historical," are taken up: Huckleberry Finn, The
Odyssey, Don Quixote, and The Thousand and One Nights. In
each case the reading of these texts becomes significant in
the production of The Tidewater Tales. It is not enough to
say, as many of Barth’s critics have, that in certain
situations Barth uses "historical" texts (texts which are
recognized as part of the history of literature) on which to construct his imaginary worlds. Stopping there might mislead one to believe that one can write without taking up a given thread, without also reading the texts already part of the history of literature. Barth understands, though, that writing is not merely placing one text on top of another, not merely an addition. Barth has said that he thinks of himself as an **arranger**, "whose chiefest literary pleasure is to take a received melody--an old narrative poem, a classical myth, a shop worn literary convention . . .--and, improvising like a jazzman within its constraints, reorchestrate it to present purpose" (FB 7). Though the stories of three of these four texts taken up in *The Tidewater Tales* are continued (we find out for instance what happens to Odysseus on his "Short Last Voyage"), their plots turn and their motivation rests on their being part of a system of production in which a reading is a necessary aspect of the text produced. "What is a book that no one reads?" Blanchot asks. "Something that has not yet been written" (Blanchot 93).18

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17 In the following chapter on repetition, history, and narration, I discuss in detail this sort of criticism and its effects on the understanding of Barth's work.

18 Blanchot warns us that, in speaking about reading as production, there are delicate distinctions to be made; he would revise our calling the reader a producer because, he says, reading is not a "productive activity": "The nature of reading, its singularity, illuminates the singular meaning of the verb 'to make' in the expression 'it makes the work become a work . . . reading does not make anything, does not add anything; it lets be what is . . ." (94). It is worth pointing out that Derrida *seems* to take exactly the opposite
In this chapter, I will take up only one of these stories in any detail: the tale of Scheherazade. She will become, therefore, part of my reading of the other three; that is neither regrettable nor particularly beneficial. Given the organization of this essay, that reading is inevitable. In the same way, Peter and Katherine’s thorough reading of The Thousand and One Nights makes certain that it has an impact on the writing of their tidewater tales: Peter and Katherine remember their "recent dizzy conviction that where Huckleberry Findley, Odysseus Dmitrikakis, and Captain Donald Quicksoat have crossed wakes, Scheherazade must in some guise soon sail by" (TT 526). The Scheherazade stories in The Tidewater Tales are, at least in part, stories that have been told by "Scheherazade" herself—"May Jump swears she met Scher in person last September in Annapolis" (TT 524). Scheherazade was having a difficult time getting back to her "reality," having found herself propelled into that of The Tidewater Tales by uttering the enchantment "What You’ve Done Is What You’ll Do."

position; he says that a criticism will always risk "the addition of some new thread. Adding, here, is nothing other than giving to read." Derrida explains "that it is not a question of embroidering upon a text, unless one considers that to know how to embroider still means to have the ability to follow the given thread" (Dissemination 63). In other words, we don’t add any old thing or anything that could be rigorously described as outside the text. This is where Blanchot’s and Derrida’s seemingly opposite statements come together; to call production an "activity" can suggest that it is exterior to the thing acted on, and so reading should not be described in terms of the dichotomy between activity and passivity.
The reading of Scheherazade in The Tidewater Tales begins as a question about form: Why The Thousand and One Nights? The question is addressed in "The Story of Scheherazade’s First Second Menstruation." It is explained that it is a thousand and one nights before Scheherazade has two menstruations in a row; up to that point she had gotten pregnant before her second menstruation three pregnancies running. The question about the form of The Thousand and One Nights is also a question about its production; it regards not simply why it was written but also how it comes about. If we understand something of the significance of the story’s shape, we will also understand something of the text’s production. Moreover, in our reading of the shape of the text there will be an analogous production of another. "The first repeated message of [Scheherazade’s] blood let her know that it was time for a change, ... a change, Scher said, May said, in the circumstances of her production" (TT 576).

The question about the number of nights, which is also a number of stories, leads the readers to a question about Scheherazade’s cycles of menstruation, which is an issue in the organization of her life and in, as she says, the circumstances of her production. These circumstances are summed in a quotation of Goethe: "In the morning, study; in the afternoon, work; in the evening, enjoy" [TT 576]). She sees her life so far as consisting of the first two, study
and work; now it is time to enjoy. For Scheherazade, "study" consisted primarily of reading and memorization:

Young Scher there had studied story telling like young Peter Sagamore in College Park and Portugal. Those thousand books of stories she collected; all those poets she learned by heart. She had boned-up in her library on the art of telling stories like Doctor Jack Bass in med school on the art of delivering babies. (TT 577)

In the afternoon of her life she had done her work: she had told stories and borne babies, laboring always under the possibility of death if the delivery didn’t go well. This is how Scheherazade would have the metaphor work: in the morning of life she studied (she read stories) and then that circumstance changed; in the afternoon she worked (she told stories and had babies), and that circumstance changed. As May tells it, "There comes a time when removing the ax from the narrative neck is not only the fit reward for stories told and babies borne, but the best insurance of more to come. I mean maybe she’d tell and maybe she’d swell, but she’d earned the right, Scher figured, to tell no more stories ever; to bear no more children ever" (TT 577).

The problem with Scheherazade’s metaphor is that the categories it established are not at all discrete. There is more than enough reason to question whether she can change the circumstances of her study or her work, her reading or her telling.

According to Scheherazade, the source of her storytelling was a storyteller, whom she calls a "genie," who would appear to her and read installments of Richard
Burton's 1885 edition of *The Thousand Nights and a Night*. This reading creates, of course, an inexplicable circle. What is essential to our discussion is that it is a circle on which reading and writing are indissoluble. Her continued relation with the storyteller after the night of the thousand and first story, which is when the King retracts his sentence of executing a virgin a day and proposes marriage to Scheherazade, and her coming to the storyteller's "place and time and order of reality" mark what she calls the "change" in her circumstances of production.

We are led to wonder whether her reading herself into *The Tidewater Tales* by speaking the enchantment changes those circumstances, whether her production is no longer a matter of also reading and whether she can tell without putting her life at stake. Having decided to change her circumstances, Scheherazade goes to her sister Dunyazade for advice. Rather than helping her change, Dunyazade reads her a story. And though Scheherazade says she "didn't really come . . . to read stories" but rather "to tell . . . one" (TT 583), what follows is not only the critical reading of Scheherazade's story, but of writing in general. Even as Scheherazade "tells" her story, Dunyazade makes critical judgments about what needs to be said:

> I was there, Dunyazade reminded her.
> Right. But since Kuzia Fakan wasn't there, when Dunyazade writes this story out for her latest bed-and-bathtub partner to read, she'll include the following retrospective exposition, dialogue and all: (TT 583)
Dunyazade not only considers the possibility of a future reading but makes a reading now, one that to a certain extent controls the telling of the story, saying in effect, Don’t tell me that, don’t make what I already know a part of this story, leave my understanding of what you would have said for the writing of my story, another story, which I will include here. And, further, Dunyazade’s reading of what Scheherazade would have said becomes a critical part of "Scheherazade’s story":

"If I understand you correctly [Dunyazade will say she said], you’re saying that if for example this whole situation here were fiction instead of fact, and if in this piece of fiction you found the right way, after the King deflowers you, to make him want to go on sleeping with you night after night instead of cutting your head off in the morning—that whatever magic trick you found, it would come down to particular words on the page of the story of you and the King, right?" (TT 584).

After the flashback supposedly "ends" and the story "goes on" (Scheherazade tells us to never mind that she mightn’t have told it just that way, as if to say, I’ll let that reading stand, the divergences from my view are unimportant, but also to say, I can’t help but let your reading become a part of "my" story) Dunyazade reads, critically, what Scheherazade does say:

I told him later--
Later later, smirked Dunyazade. Tell me later what you told each other later. What’d he say then? What happened next?
What happened next was. . . . (TT 586)

Dunyazade’s reading (the supplement) is, it should be clear now, part of the production of the text and an allegory for that production generally.
Scheherazade tells her story in *The Tidewater Tales*, May Jump tells us, so that in the telling she might be transported back to her place and time and order of reality, or so that her listeners (the members of The American Society for the Preservation of Storytelling), storytellers all, might come up with the appropriate ending for her unfinished tale. She tells her story, in other words, as a sort of enchantment. Though the enchantment for getting her "here" is "What You've Done Is What You'll Do," what she has done will not get her back. What she has done will not be what she will do. And the story that she retells in *The Tidewater Tales* is not simply or absolutely a repetition because its telling involves a critical reading. Therefore, Scheherazade has not escaped the circumstance of her production that ties her to reading. And neither has she gotten out from under the narrative axe; in *The Tidewater Tales*, at stake in the production of the text is her life, her living, in *The Thousand and One Nights*. Telling under the ax is always the case. What Blanchot says of the relation between language and the supposedly real also describes the relation between texts: "For me to be able to say, 'This woman,' I must somehow take her flesh and blood reality away from her, cause her to be absent, annihilate her." Blanchot is careful to point out that we know language does not kill anyone, but that it "essentially signifies the possibility of . . . destruction." This possibility is no less for the one who is speaking: "I say
my name, and it is as though I were chanting my own dirge: I separate myself from myself, I am no longer either my presence or my reality, but an objective, impersonal presence, the presence of my name, which goes beyond me and whose stone-like immobility performs exactly the same function for me as a tombstone writhing on the void" (Blanchot 42-43). No matter what Scheherazade tells of herself in this story, it will never be what she was, which is why Blanchot can also say, paradoxically, that "the book that has been exhumed . . . is born all over again" (93).

May Jump says, even before suggesting the possibility of a change, "the storytellers present have had their necks right on the line like Scher, 'cause every time we come to bat, excuse my metaphor, it’s a whole new ball game" (TT 577).

When Scheherazade is "transported" back, it isn’t by an enchantment, a chanting or a repetition, not by finding a formula in words that needs repeating. And further, no one can finish the story for her by simply repeating it, because no one sees her disappear. The unfinishedness of her story remains an aspect of the story. Though Peter suggests that May Jump should finish the story the following night, the way Scheherazade would have, May tells him not to count on it. We can not count on the story’s ever being finished because (as well as adding to) the supplement also replaces what it supplements. Every time the supplement replaces a text in order to complete it, the supplement points out its
need for a supplementation, a replacement; therefore the text is remarked as fundamentally incomplete.

The characters within the story cannot read the story's conclusion, the mark that pushes toward the outside. Though in effect (but not in fact) the characters have been reading and writing this text along the way, when "Scheherazade Tucks Us All In" (in "The Ending"), they will not have seen what takes place. If we read this vicariously as if outside the production of the supplement or if we can find the voices of Peter and Katherine in "The Ending" (which some might call a conclusion) the conclusion is thereby pushed further on. Derrida wonders that, if the laws and rules of texts run the risk of being definitely lost, "who will ever know of such disappearances?" (Dissemination 63); how will we know of the disappearance (of the conclusion, for example) if we can't see the thing that disappears, if disappearance is incorporated into the text's writing.

In "The Ending," laboring under the appearance of having changed her circumstance again, Scheherazade tells the story of her story telling in the "reality" of The Tidewater Tales, tells again without repeating the story of a critical reading. No longer does the King, now her husband, threaten to kill her in the morning, but nevertheless the narrative ax is still raised. It is up to Scheherazade not simply to finish her story but also the story of "us all," to make a reading and a supplement that will be the last, a self-defeating task. Barth has noticed
that her coming to an end is problematic if not impossible: "Indeed, there’s a wry implication," in the King’s order that Scheherazade’s stories be written down, "that her next massive narrative labor will have to be telling all those stories over again, to the scribes, plus the one about herself and Shahryer..." (FB 280). Her work is not over and neither is that of The Tidewater Tales. The story of the story being told always remains to be told. Though, according to Barth, she has earned the right not to tell any more stories ever, that right can never be exercised within the text if her task is to come to the end of the story.

Though her "first failure to conceive--a kind of biological writer’s block--could well serve to remind Scheherazade that on any morning after the night when her teeming brain shall finally have been gleaned, she might preemptorily cease to be" (FB 279), the morning after will never have come.

Like The Tidewater Tales: A Novel, finished now But for some wrap-up word, some curtain line ... . . . Comrade reader, look again. Through the keyless hole or holeless key of Form. We thought we lacked a closing rhyme for cost To end our poem with: one less bleak then lost, Remember? But we were in formal fact Not at the end at all.

In formal fact we, they, are still not at the end, not finished:

We’d launched a new stanzaic pair: a Jack Implying and preceding some new Jill . . . A whole

New ball game! Maybe a whole new tale in verse . . . or prose: Our House’s Increase, by P.S. out
And on a new page:

THE
TIDEWATER
TALES
A NOVEL.

A new page, a new story, indeed. This new title page, a supplementary repetition, tucks itself into The Tidewater Tales; it forces us to pick up a thread but demands also a new reading, which is to say a critical reading, a critical production.

I should say in the manner of Derrida, though not in the same context nor in exactly the same words, that reading is certainly a production, because I do not simply duplicate what the writer thinks of reading. If the production attempts to make the supplement an issue in the reading of The Tidewater Tales, it does not leave the text; that is, the production does not bring in from outside the text or from some outside-text the question of the supplement. As Derrida says of Rousseau, it is contained in the transformation of the language it designates, in the regulated exchanges between the writer and history (Of Grammatology 163-64).
In this chapter I will advance two theses that are not entirely distinct ideologically or even textually (though they might seem to be). They are divided so that in the sequentiaity for which they call and in their reprisal of each other they might better illustrate the questioning of repetition, of history, and of narration.

The fact that Barth is interested in repetition as a subject to be taken up in fiction, in fact as a subject demanded by fiction, has not gone undetected. His critics have approached the general issue in a variety of ways: in terms of doubling, in terms of parody and imitation, and perhaps most thoroughly in terms of self-reflection. So far, though, as we will see, the idea of a textual repetition has not been fully developed. Up to now the claims about repetition in Barth have been based on the assumption that the repetition of or in a text is containable and finite, that we can go back to a time before repetition, and that we can, therefore, identify the "original" repetition and the thing that was for the "first

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19 See, for example, Bell, Kennard, and Antush.
time" repeated. Any repetition in a text, though, is always the repetition of a repetition. One cannot move back to the "thing" (textual or otherwise—it may be that repetition defines a thing as textual, that a thing cannot be repeated without being in some way a text\textsuperscript{20}); one cannot move back to the "thing" that is not itself a repetition. Repetition, in other words, occurs only without end and constitutes, therefore, a speculative organization of texts.\textsuperscript{21}

The critics who have read Barth in terms of his relation to and position in history have encountered a problem similar to that of the speculative quality of repetition. More often than not critics want to place Barth in relation to the "historical record," which is presumed to be fixed.\textsuperscript{22} That presumption cannot be verified. What one

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{20} For a discussion of the "thing" as it relates to language, see Derrida's \textit{Signéponge / Signsponge}.
  
  \item \textsuperscript{21} In my discussion of repetition I follow Derrida’s use of the term \textit{speculation} in his essay "To Speculate--on 'Freud.'" In the first section, "Notices (Warnings)," he outlines his use of the term in three senses: (1) that of specular reflection (a principle’s recognition or lack of recognition of itself); (2) "of the production of surplus value, of calculations and bets on the Exchange"; and (3) "in the sense of that which overflows the (given) presence of the present" (\textit{The Post Card} 284). The third of these is the most important for this study, though the first also comes into play. The speculation of Freud remains unresolved (speculation may by definition suggest the lack of resolution) because with each attempt to conclude another speculation is made: "the last paragraph . . . begins with the project of a new engagement, another initiative, as if it were still necessary to institute (einzusetzen) another problematic. . . ." Repeated in both Freud and Barth is the deferral of the subject of speculation, such that deferral occupies the extent of the text and speculation comes to describe a repetition without end.
  
  \item \textsuperscript{22} See, for example, Diser, and Holder.
\end{itemize}
finds in searching for the truth or meaning of history is that the record is always defective, in part because "facts," information, texts, about the so-called historical event are always found to be missing. Rather than a history "pieced together" we have ever widening gaps, a disturbing encompassing absence of history. Our subject, therefore, is not simply the place of truth in history. We will ask, rather, what follows the questioning of truth. And what follows, we will find, organizes itself narratively, because any question about truth will lead one back and therefore will constitute and will call for the construction of a sequence and will rely on a temporality.

The Coming Back of Repetition, A Speculative Organization of Texts

With a movement essential to the telling of stories, we will return to a story that is also the deferral of a story within Sabbatical and The Tidewater Tales that both illustrates and is a part of a repetition and a speculation: the coming back of the hat.

Sabbatical is framed, so to speak, by Fenn’s losing and finding his hat. Near the beginning, just before he and Susan reach Poe Cove, Fenn leans out over the gunwale to

23 In Freud, the hat is considered a symbol of the male genital organ and also of castration. It is an extension of the head, which is considered phallic, and can be detached as in saluting, which is why the salute by taking off the hat signifies an abasement before the saluted person (Freud 14: 162-63).
make sure they have cleared some crab pot buoys, and the starboard lifeline sweeps the hat from his head (§ 23). Near the end, just after Susan suggests that they separate and both of them are immobilized and near hysteria, Fenn leaps up without knowing why, and then something catches his eye. Spearing down with the boat hook, Fenn fishes out a black beret. The losing and finding of the hat is, of course, significant but not simply as a framing device and not simply because it occurs within the context of significant action and marks the development of significant metaphors. Fenn has lost his hat twice before, previous to the present time of the novel. And in The Tidewater Tales, Peter will find and return the hat that Frank has sent off on the tide of his own accord.

For Fenn (and for Frank, who we will come to recognize as Fenn’s reprisal and sequel in The Tidewater Tales), the losing and the finding of the hat amount to a repetition, a repetition not simply or absolutely of one event but rather the repetition of the frame, the framing of the story. On the heels of telling the story of losing the hat in the Tajo de Ronda, Fenn explains that it is the telling of stories that causes the return:

I lost it a second time ten years later, on company business, late at night on the dock of a certain safe-house across the Bay from here. I told my colleagues this story--just the boina part of it. Next day Count himself found my hat on the beach, washed up by the tide right in front of the safe-house. . . . The question before us now is whether it’s the Ronda story that’s needed to bring it back this third time or the Choptank
River safe-house story, which I haven't told you yet. (§ 45-46)

Because Fenn identifies the coming back of the hat with the coming to an end of a stage of his life (§ 44), but especially because the coming back washes into the telling of stories, he is in no hurry to get the hat back and in "no hurry to find out" (§ 46) which story is needed to bring it back.

Since the coming back of the hat this third time will be the framing of their story, the framing of Sabbatical, what the narrators think of as the completion and the coming to the end of Fenn and Susan, they will defer the telling of the story indefinitely. Sabbatical will become the story that has not yet been told, not yet completed. The repetition that is its framing will be shown to occur without end. The coming back of the hat "near the end" of Sabbatical will be shown to be a speculative repetition of a speculative end.

With this general introduction, I would like to step back to the works on which this reading is based to establish if not a method of reading then a preliminary immersion in the coming back. The story of the losing and finding of the hat is very similar to the story of the fort:da of the spool in Freud's Beyond the Pleasure Principle. Very generally, this is the story of the child who makes a game of throwing a spool with a string tied to it into a cot and making a sound that represents, according to Freud, the German word "fort" ("gone") and then pulling
the spool out of the cot again by the string and hailing its reappearance with a joyful "da" ("there"). Freud concludes, "This, then, was the complete game—disappearance and return" (18: 15).

In his essay "To Speculate—on 'Freud'" (in The Post Card), Derrida takes up the story of the spool as a way of dealing with the methodology of the second chapter of Freud’s Beyond the Pleasure Principle. Derrida argues that not only is the repetitive process to be found in "the content, the examples, and the material described and analyzed by Freud, but already, or again, in Freud’s writing, in the demarché of his text, in what he says, in his 'acts,' if you will, no less than in his 'objects'" (The Post Card 295). The second chapter of Beyond the Pleasure Principle, the one that contains the story of the spool, advances arguments without itself advancing, without making any decisions about that which it questions, the absolute authority of the pleasure principle.

What repeats itself . . . in this chapter is the speculator’s indefatigable motion in order to reject, to set aside, to make disappear to distance (fort), to defer everything that appears to put the pleasure principle into question. He observes every time that something does not suffice, that something must be put off until further on, until later. Then he makes the hypothesis of the beyond come back [revenir] only to dismiss it again. (Derrida, The Post Card 295)

For example, Freud takes up the issue of children’s play, the story of the spool, by leaving behind, without concluding, the "dark and dismal subject of traumatic neurosis" (18: 14); and as he begins his interpretation, he
resigns himself again by dismissing the value of a single case study—"no certain decision can be reached from the analysis of a single case like this" (18: 16).

Derrida calls this "argument," the proceeding of Freud's writing, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*'s pas de thèse because despite several steps forward there is no advancement in the question of the pleasure principle as absolute master. Freud puts forward, "advances," "argues," a thesis that is not a thesis, by taking steps that go nowhere, pas de thèse (a non-thesis organized as if it were taking argumentative steps).

For Freud, the game was related to the child's "instinctual renunciation (that is, the renunciation of instinctual satisfaction) which he had made in allowing his mother to go away without protesting." The "repetition of this disturbing experience" as a game should be considered an illustration of the pleasure principle because the mother's "departure had to be enacted as a necessary preliminary to her joyful return" (Freud 18: 16). The game is also connected to the father's absence, which Freud says has caused the child some anxiety.

Derrida argues that Freud's description and interpretation of the story of the spool itself proceeds according to the logic of the fort:da:

Fold back: he (the grandson of his grandfather, the grandfather of his grandson) compulsively repeats repetition without it ever advancing anywhere, not one step. He repeats an operation which consists in distancing, in pretending (for a time, for time: thereby writing and doing
something that is not being talked about, and which must give good returns) to distance pleasure, the object or principle of pleasure, the object and/or the pleasure principle, here represented by the spool which is supposed to represent the mother (and/or, as we will see, supposed to represent the father . . . ), in order to bring it (him) back indefatigably. It (he) pretends to distance the pleasure principle in order to bring it (him) back ceaselessly, in order to observe that itself it (himself he) brings itself (himself) back (for it (he) has in it (him) self the principle force of its (his) own economic return to the house, his home, near it (him) self despite all the difference), and them to conclude: it (he) is still there, I am always there. Da. The pleasure principle maintains all its (his) authority, it (he) has never absented it (him) self. (The Post Card 302)

The movement of the fort:da, Derrida shows, is therefore a double movement, a double fort:da, a coming back of repetition itself in the writing. The story "conjugates into the same . . . writing the narrated and the narrating of this narrative . . . ." (Derrida, The Post Card 303).

What is essential for us is to mark, to repeat, to re-mark, the fort:da of Sabbatical.

In Sabbatical, we notice a repetition not only of the object that frames the story, not only of the hat, but also of the process of writing by which the story is told. That Fenn is in no hurry to find out which story will frame Sabbatical, how Sabbatical will end, is marked by the narrators from the first paragraph forward. Fenn would be happy to "tell the story again" as Susan demands in the opening lines,

But before he can invoke his dark-eyed muse, sole auditor, editor, partner, wife, best friend,
Fenwick is interrupted for two nights and a day by

A STORM AT SEA. (§ 9)

"A Storm at Sea" is the story of the storm that interrupts Fenwick and Susan’s passage into the Chesapeake Bay where the bulk of their story takes place. As they notice trying to bring their story to a close, "A Storm at Sea" is the interruption of their "writing" as well as their voyage. They claim in fact that the interruption "begins" their writing (§ 365). Not far into "A Storm at Sea" Fenwick is still "wondering what words must follow Once upon a time," wondering how to proceed after one has begun to write, and defers the story again (defers, this time, the story of the storm at sea) by relating "A Dialogue on Diction, three days later, safely at anchor in Poe Cove, Key Island, Virginia" (§ 11). And on the heels of that story is the one that concerned us preliminarily, "The Story of Fenwick Turner’s Boina," which is itself an interruption of the question that Susan wants Fenwick to address:

I’d been wearing it by then a dozen years already.
Those years don’t count. Where was I?
If I tell you the story of my boina, it will come back to me.
The story? Or where I was?
Mi boina.
How so?
That’s another story. First comes

THE STORY OF FENWICK TURNER’S BOINA. (§ 27)

At the conclusion of "The Cove," which is the first part of Sabbatical, the part that contains the stories just mentioned, and within the section called "Our Story" (which
is itself a deferral: "For encouragement we speak, not of our recent stories, but of 'Our Story'" ([§ 71]), Fenn and Susan decide that they will "work in the exposition" as they "go along" ([§ 72]). This apparently means that the story they want to tell will be told somewhere along the line, within the story and within Sabbatical. But telling the story does not turn out to be so simple. Susan points out, as an example of the need to work in exposition and of the fact that working it in will keep them busy, that "the reader doesn’t know yet . . . about her seducing Fenwick on Cacaway Island in 1972." They have left something else out too:

We forgot Gus and Manfred.
Good night, poor fellows. Rest you easy.
The reader doesn’t know yet about Gus and Manfred, really.
What the reader doesn’t know yet would fill a book.
Oy. Who said that?
I did. ([§ 73])

In fact, the story does fill a book, it fills Sabbatical, but it is not simply the story of Gus and Manfred or of Fenwick’s being seduced on Cacaway. Even if these stories are told, they make room for yet larger, more encompassing deferrals. What "fills the book" is the deferral, the repetitious putting off, of the story. Sabbatical comes to be the story of the deferral of the story.

Two of the most prominent deferrals are those of the story of Susan’s pregnancy and abortion, which we considered in Chapter II, and the story of Fenn’s cardiac episode. One notices, in reading Sabbatical, not the significant subject
that occupies the minds of the narrators, but rather the
significance of the subject, the subject that is not talked
about directly. One notices that something is deferred,
that a story is to be told but will not be told for a while,
not yet. The footnote to the opening lines tells us that
Susan’s tears "shall be made clear, in time" (§ 9), and,
when her weeping is taken up again, when she weeps again,
the tears are explained "but for one detail" (§ 47). That
one detail, which is left out, occupies the telling and the
deferral of the rest of the story. Mentioned off-handedly
as if insignificant and thereby put at a distance, Susan’s
pregnancy and the bind in which it places her are in part
what the story is about (but what the story is about is also
defferred).

We will recognize, in the paradoxical relation between
the presence of the subject of the story and the story’s
deferral, that the story cannot be an absolute deferral of
itself because the deferral has to be (is inevitably)
marked. The story not told is hinted at and pointed to so
that we notice its not being told. When Fenn puts his ear
to Susan’s belly "as if to listen for a heartbeat there" (§
26), we do not know yet that there is a heartbeat there to
hear. And even at the closing of the first chapter of "The
Fork," which is the third and apparently final part, we
cannot be sure why "Susan slips her left hand down inside
the front of her jeans and underpants and presses her belly,
between navel and pubic hair" (§ 243). We can be sure,
though, that what we are reading is not the story, that is, not the story remarked as deferred:

Subdued Fenwick decides not to tell her now.
Subdued Susan decides not to tell him now. (§ 243)

Susan decides, in fact, not to tell Fenn about her pregnancy at all or until after the pregnancy's termination. And the reader of the deferral does not know about or at least does not feel sure in the knowledge about, Susan's being pregnant until "Susan's Friday," which is the story of her abortion, until the pregnancy, its termination, is no longer a subject of debate. The reader is forced to speculate about that which is not talked about.

Susan's pregnancy had put her in a bind that required the story's being put off. She knew that if she had told Fenn that she was pregnant, Fenn would have agreed, sincerely, to her having the child, though he does not want children, and Susan wants children only if Fenn wants them to start with.

I hated all that faking with the Midols and the Tampax, but I couldn't accept that we got ourselves pregnant before we'd decided one way or the other, or that we'd decided not to decide, or decided no but couldn't acknowledge it. I didn't want to have that baby, much as I wanted it more than anything! I didn't want to abort it till we got home, and I didn't want to go around till then being pregnant! I didn't want to talk about it or about aborting it, to spare both of us. (§ 333)

Especially to spare Fenn because of his heart. "The truth is," says Fenn, "there's been some new justification" for fearing another heart attack. Fenn takes his turn telling:
the episode on the bus that Wednesday en route from D.C. to Solomons Island. He would have told her about it that same evening, but she was wiped out already from coping with Miriam and the boys on board, and so he put off telling her and put off telling her, just as we put off acknowledging our pregnancy and, since Black Friday, its aborting. (§ 333)

The implication in both of these speeches is that now the stories have been "told" and that we have come to a kind of end.

Freud calls the disappearance and return of the spool a "complete game" but we must add that any completion must be understood in terms of its double, the reflection in the writing about the story. Derrida notices that "if the game is called complete on one side and the other, we have to envisage an eminently symbolic completion which itself would be formed by these two completions, and which therefore would be incomplete in each of its pieces, and consequently would be completely incomplete when the two incompletions, related and joined the one to the other, start to multiply themselves, supplementing each other without completing each other" (The Post Card 320). We will recognize about Sabbatical that the telling of the stories is always only supplemental in that it adds to a story about it (the story) that is not, ever, itself complete.

Our sense of Sabbatical "having read" it is that it is an unfinished story. The abortion story or the story of Fenn's cardiac episode does not answer the question about whether Fenn and Susan will have children. That is a decision, as we have already seen, that is never, within
Sabbatical, made. Fenn’s suggestion that the story is their child (§ 357) is for Susan, which is to say for Sabbatical, unsatisfactory. Though it was their intention that by the end of the voyage they would have known their hearts and minds about "several decisions which lie ahead" (§ 84), the decisions still lie ahead:

Does that make sense?
Some.
Edgar’s dripping pickle on your blouse.
So he drips.
We’ve spent our sabbatical that way, haven’t we?
Dripping pickle?
Putting off crossing bridges till we come to them and then not coming to them.
Our eyes meet, sort of. Susan bites her meat.
What’s doing for Doog? (§ 278)

The first deferral, here, is almost unrecognizable as a deferral. It is as much a confusion of subject. Susan asks what Fenn is talking about; there are two possibilities. Her question, though, names one of the possibilities, "dripping pickle," the apparently trivial one, and thereby defers the matter at hand. Fenn wants to know about their repetitious, if not continual, putting off of decisions. The subject of deferral is itself put off: "Susan bites her meat. What’s doing for Doog?" What is more, Fenn does not try to get her back on track, back to the "meat" of the story. He answers her question without demanding one for his.

This deferral continues, remarked again by Fenn’s coming back to the subject only circumspectly:

Thinking of his conversation with Margot Scourby, Fenn declares that it’s like what
spending years writing a novel without any clear idea where it’s going, but perfectly confident that you’ll know exactly what to say when the time comes, must be like. Susan says that that doesn’t strike her as a very exact comparison. I know what you mean, says Fenn. It is, though.

This is the voice of the Enlightened Eighteenth century? Jesus, Edgar, let’s go back to work. We stroll with him toward our separate desks. (S 279)

As soon as the issue, which has become the deferral of stories and telling without telling comes back, it is put off again. Fenn and Susan go to their separate desks in order not to talk: "Susan reports I sent in all my Swarthmore forms this morning. Me too Delaware, says Fenn. We’ll decide soon" (S 279). (Swarthmore and Delaware are locations that have come to represent the two different directions they could go either together, one or the other giving up a position already offered, or separately.) We could go on pointing out deferrals almost indefinitely, and that is our point here. Not only are the decisions so often called for not made, but the deferral itself becomes intertwined in the general system of deferral. Susan and Fenn want neither to talk about the decisions not made nor about not making the decisions; they want not to remark the deferral, but as we have seen, that is impossible. They have spent their entire sabbatical that way. All of Sabbatical is the deferral and the remarking of the deferral.

Though tying up at Chief and Virgie’s dock, at Key Farm, Wye Island, completed Fenn and Susan’s return in a sense, Fenn says, "it ended neither our sabbatical nor our
cruise." At the "end" of *Sabbatical*, Fenn and Susan are still on board.

Confronting their inability to decide and Susan's "incredible proposal" that they separate, Fenn and Susan find themselves stuck, but the story is framed nevertheless: "We can neither go forward nor go back" (§ 347). Floating there in mid-channel, the hat returns: "he leaps up; doesn't even know why. . . . What is he up to? He doesn't know. . . . He has sprung to the gunwale, to the cabin, trunk. Sue sits up alarmed. Fenn's looking about him like a crazy man. Now something's caught his eye!" (§ 348). The story is framed as with an inevitability. Though on finding it, they toast "Aristotle on coincidence" (§ 350), the hat does not catch Fenn's eye by accident. It has to occur now, because this is the frame. Fenn doesn't know why he leaps up or what he is looking for; this points out not simply an intuition, but the inevitability of the return. Given the organization of the story and the hat's function as the framing device, the hat could not do otherwise but come back.

We have been making a misrepresentation if we have spoken of the return of *the* hat. What comes back is "a black beret" (§ 349, emphasis mine). This distinction is significant because it calls into question the definitiveness of the return and of the frame. Susan, in fact, is "incredulous": "That's your new one! You just dropped it in and picked it up! Fenn shakes his head; can't speak. You found your old one at Key Island the day we lost
it, and hid it away till now! Fenn shakes his head..."

When Fenn does speak he claims the validity and the completeness of the return: "Fetch up the Dom Perignon*" (§ 349). The footnote to Fenn's statement tells us that this is the same Dom Perignon Fenn and Susan were to have drunk and didn't when they returned to Wye Island. For Fenn, in other words, the finding of the hat marks a more definitive conclusion, the completion of their story and voyage.

For Susan, though, it is an "irrelevant miracle." Fenn understands that it does not matter whether this black beret is the same black beret lost at Key Island; the return can function as a frame nevertheless. But only a frame. The finding of a hat is irrelevant to a return beyond which no return can occur, irrelevant to a return that is absolute. Susan has just declared, "I can't take life. I can't take it that there's nothing but you and me, and soon we'll get old and sick and die" (§ 345). What she wants is the completion that is absolute, the answer, the frame, the return, the black beret. But, forever, Fenn and Susan can only speculate. We only know, in Sabbatical, that Fenn and Susan's relationship is in question and that whether or not they will have children is undecided. The coming back of the hat and the story about the coming back overlap each other, neither allowing the other the completion they both call for. Derrida says that this doubling is always the case: "The scene of the fort/da, whatever its exemplary content, is always in the process of describing in advance,
as a deferred overlapping, the scene of its own description. The writing of a fort/da is always a fort/da" (The Post Card 321). Derrida indicates this overlapping with a colon: "fort:da."

Implicit in what I have said thus far but not yet brought into the argument is the fact that the present action of Sabbatical is devoted to the coming back home of Fenn and Susan on their sailboat, Pokey. Sabbatical is the story of this particular "sabbatical’s end" (§ 9), Fenn and Susan’s return. They have been on a leave of absence, a vacation, and now it is time to get back to the serious business of organizing lives and making career decisions. Freud characterizes the fort:da of the spool as children’s play; it is the action of the game. The child would play the game with all his toys, would throw them "away from him into a corner, under the bed, and so on so that hunting for his toys and picking them up was often quite a business" (Freud 18: 14). Derrida notices that for Freud "the work consists of reassembling, of searching in order to bring together, or reuniting in order to give back. In return, he will call play the dispersion which sends far away (the operation of distanation), and will call playthings24 the collection of manipulated objects" (The Post Card 309).

24 In The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, 1955, Strachey translates Spielzeuge as "toys"; here Derrida prefers the variant "playthings," which in English reflects more readily the play of the child and the doubling of that play in Freud’s writing.
The opposition between play and work and its connection to dispersion and return are rendered in *Sabbatical* in terms of the sabbatical voyage and connected to the issue of childbearing. Wondering about their usefulness, Fenn and Susan reflect:

> We have been, in the main, indulging ourselves, amusing ourselves. We have been playing.

Over the third quarter of her club sandwich, Susan lays that term on the table. Fenn knows what it betokens: his wife’s dark, sometimes feeling that our years together, precious as they’ve been to both of us, are themselves a kind of playing: not finally serious, as the lives of Susan’s child-raising house-buying contemporaries might be said to be serious. . . . (§ 159)

And when Fenn summarizes his conversation with Dugald Taylor, his friend and ex-CIA colleague, omitting the part about "that rumored heart-attack drug which he had half-seriously speculated just before his excursion, and his cardiac alarm on the bus ride home," but reporting faithfully the alleged "pitch" made by the CIA to Carmen, Susan’s mother, Susan wonders how Fenn could not have told her right away: "Get me off this fucking toy!" (§ 165-66). What is serious is coming home, enjoying, engendering, and possibly protecting the family, and, as we will see, buying a house.

Freud begins the story of the spool by declaring children’s play one of the mind’s earliest "normal activities" (Freud 18: 14). Play, on the other hand, is not entirely normal for the adult, in particular, the adult’s writing about play. Freud describes his writing as serious: an analysis, a formally organized study. For Susan, playing
with *Pokey* is essentially abnormal: "I want a normal house with kids and dogs and petunias" (§ 33). The boat is, in Derrida's terms, the manipulated object of the game; but it is not only the plaything that is sent out, it is also that which carries the players away with it, that which allows Fenn and Susan themselves to become the manipulated objects of the game. *Pokey*, whose name is decidedly childish but nevertheless has far-reaching "serious" metaphorical familial ramifications,25 can not be for Susan the house of the serious childbearing parents. (That the boat is also a toy does not bother Peter in *The Tidewater Tales*; it is the only place he can write comfortably, in fact, the place where he begins his labor, which must precede the delivery of the story with which he has been pregnant.) Fenn has already tried to convince Susan, and us, that the categories are not absolute: "We haven't been just playing; we've been also playing. We're on a well-earned sabbatical leave. . . . Things have happened in our lives. We have decisions to make. The idea of sabbaticals is to . . . take stock. . . . That's what we've tried to do" (§ 159). As we have seen, the writing of the story has been playing at the return, "also playing," though the presumption has been that it is serious work. Here is the overlapping of play and work and why Derrida calls the *fort:da* "serious play" (*The Post Card* 320). For Susan, bearing children is the one

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25 See the discussion of Poe Cove and Key Island in Chapter II.
thing that cannot be child's play. Because having children is what Susan wants, play, for her, is fundamentally abnormal. She wants not to be the child (to play normally), but rather to have the child (to not play), and, until she does, her life, as compared to the lives of her child-raising contemporaries, cannot be said to be serious.

Fenn's attempt to illustrate the seriousness of the sabbatical only partly works. Though they have tried to take stock in order to make decisions, they have essentially failed. No decisions about the things that really matter, whether Fenn and Susan will have children and whether they will be together in order to have children, have been forthcoming. Nor are they likely to be. The sabbatical is a game, but one that has to be worked at and one that has serious consequences. As Fenn puts it, "Not everybody has to be D.H. Lawrence or Dostoevsky, thank heaven. . . . You can be serious with a smile" (§ 159).

Let us go back to Derrida in order to move (forward?) into the question of history. We have noticed, in scenes that reflect each other, that the return is doubled in the story that relates the return. Speaking again of Freud's Beyond but in terms directly applicable to Sabbatical, Derrida brings into play the notion of the repetition en abyme: "The story that is related . . . seems to put into

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26 Derrida's translator, Alan Bass, notes, as we will here, that "En abyme is the heraldic term for infinite reflection, e.g., the shield in the shield in the shield . . . ." (The Post Card 304).
'abyme' the writing of the relation (let us say the history, Historie of the relation, and even the history, Geschichte, of the relator relating it). Therefore the related is related to the relating. The site of the legible, like the origin of writing, is carried away with itself" (The Post Card 304).

Fenn and Susan maintain that going back is essential to moving forward: "Once again, it is harking back that turns the key, that is the key, to harking forward" (§ 253). Their harking back, though, does not bear them out. They seem, rather, to be rushing into the abyme of reflected reflections.

Harking back to "Part I, The Cove, Key," the narrator's recall, "Sue proposed that we begin in the middle, here aboard Pokey, reentering the Chesapeake, say, on the last leg of our sabbatical cruise, and then fill in with a series of flashbacks what's fetched us here, advancing the present action one step between each flashback until the exposition's done . . ." (§ 171). We have already seen that their steps forward do not appear to be advancing anywhere. Fenn suggests that they have one big flashback that will flash them all the way back to the big bang (§ 172). Recalling much of the data, necessarily only representative, concerning the telling of the story, its historical, literary, sociological, and even biological connections to the past, the narrators do flashback as far as one can imagine or to the "big bang," the supposed beginning (§ 207-
08). But Susan points out, thinking back about the flashing back, "it didn't tell us where to go." Fenn has wondered already where they have to go in order to advance: "Key Island, to find my boina?" (§ 247). At Key Island, though, we find only another return that does not help them move forward. When Fenn loses his hat, Susan takes the helm: "Steadying the tiller then between her thighs, she sheets in the main, trims the genoa for beating and threads us back through the pots to where Fenn's hat has settled awash" (§ 24, emphasis mine). Having come back to the hat this "first" time, first in the present but not in the presence of Sabbatical, Fenn sinks it with the boat hook. Going back, to the supposed beginning, to Key Island, like going back to the "beginning," of it all, to the big bang, has not moved them forward, partly at least because we cannot go all the way back, back to beginning that is absolute. At the supposed beginning we encounter another reflection, another repetition of the thing reflected, a thing never brought to the surface, but pushed farther into the abyss. The history of the relaters, and the history of the relation, is reflected and "carried away" so that one cannot go back to the origin of the thing reflected, the "first" reflection, or the "thing" that was for the "first time" reflected.

In "The Literature of Exhaustion" Barth says of Jorge Luis Borges in regard to "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote," "he writes a remarkable and original work of literature, the implicit theme of which is the difficulty,
perhaps theunnecessity, of writing original works of literature. Its artistic victory, if you like, is that he confronts an intellectual dead end and employs it against itself to accomplish new human work" (FB 70). We should wonder what Barth claims of Borges when he applies the word original because Barth also agrees with Borges' editors who say that "For [Borges] no one has claim to originality in literature; all writers are more or less faithful amanuenses of the spirit, translators and annotators of pre-existing archetypes" (FB 73). Barth deals with the contradiction between our connectedness to the past and the inevitability of difference by recalling the idea of mystical transcendence: "If this corresponds to what mystics do—'every moment leaping into the infinite,' Kierkegaard says, 'and every moment falling surely back into the finite'—it is only one more aspect of that old analogy" (FB 70). It is ironic, of course, that Barth explains the original by citing Kierkegaard, by defining another aspect of the "old analogy."

**Recollecting Kierkegaard**

Kierkegaard's *Repetition* addresses the issue of origination by questioning the possibility of repetition and by offering the world again the Greek notion of recollection.

The narrator of *Repetition* divides Greek philosophy from what modern philosophy will become: "repetition is a decisive expression for what 'recollection' was for the
Greeks. Just as they taught that all knowledge is a recollection, so will modern philosophy teach that the whole of life is a repetition" (Kierkegaard 3). We should not want to forget that Susan "backwaters to Aristotle" ([S 232] at least twice (to distinguish *lexis* from *melos* [S 12] and in reading Nabokov [S 232]). Repetition and recollection are "the same movement" (Kierkegaard 3), but they move in opposite directions, so from them follow oppositional results. For example, "repetition makes man happy, whereas recollection makes him unhappy" (Kierkegaard 4).

Recollection begins with loss, "hence it is secure, for it has nothing to lose" (Kierkegaard 12); repetition begins with the possibility of gain and so at least the anticipation of happiness, hence it is insecure, for if repetition is not possible (the narrator never concedes its security), then recollection is all repetition has to "look forward" to. The "mistake" of the poet is that he recollects, so stands at the supposed end (Kierkegaard 13); the narrator, who seeks the possibility of repetition, thinks he stands at the beginning.

The plot of Repetition describes an "experiment" testing the possibility of repetition. The narrator actually tries to recreate events. He places himself in situations, such as traveling to a specific city on a specific train or watching a burlesque or conducting his servants, for a second time in order to have precisely the same experience he had the first time. He is repeatedly
disappointed. That is, the most he retains is a recollection of events as they were. The narrator anticipates his result in theory at the beginning of the story: "the fact that [something] has been gives to repetition the character of novelty" (Kierkegaard 34).

Where can Susan go, backwatering to Aristotle through Nabokov? Certainly not back to Aristotle. Barth shows us, thoroughly, that we cannot write as if the past has not happened but also that we cannot make it happen again: "It did happen: Freud and Einstein and ... the rest .... As the Russian writer Eugeny Zamyatin was already saying in the 1920's (in his essay On Literature, Revolution, and Entropy): 'Euclid’s world is very simple, and Einstein’s world is very difficult; nevertheless, it is now impossible to return to Euclid’s" (FB 202). As we will see later on, Alain Robbe-Grillet, in For a New Novel, argues the inevitability of novelty in modern works and in doing so denies the possibility of repetition in language. No matter the strength of the connection to an established form, he says, a work that follows must be considered new. Something has always been added and something always taken away. For an event to be a repetition, one event must be another--a contradiction in terms.

27 Nabokov’s Pale Fire illustrates as well as any modern novel that a text, whether "commentary" or "fiction," changes forever the way we read the so-called primary text, the "work of literature"; it denies, in fact, the "primariness" of any text.
Repetition and recollection have in common their propensity toward idealism and toward the portrayal of the ideal as the achievements of the past.\textsuperscript{28} Idealism, whether in terms of repetition or recollection, denies movement in time: "If she were to remain upon that ideal pinnacle, I might have to put up with it that my life, instead of progressing, remained stationary, in \textit{pausa}" (Kierkegaard 139). The pause suggested by the search for the ideal is essentially the pause of Miller's linguistic moment. In it oscillates the "both-and-neither" of repetition and recollection. "Beginning," for example, is not possible if in repeating we are moving nowhere, if we are truly repeating. But "beginning" is the only way to think about something happening again.

\textbf{Repetition} is a narrative. "Part First" is the first person account of the narrator's "experiment in psychology" and (at the same time) the story of his struggle with "philosophical" terms. "Part Second" is a series of letters to the narrator from the subject of his experiment with an introduction, a short explanatory section or renunciation of

\textsuperscript{28} In a passage of The Tidewater Tales that will become important to us in terms of the questioning of history, Peter notes, not for the first time, that his own quixotic aspiration "has been to leave behind him some image as transcendent as his favorite four: Odysseus striving homeward, Scheherazade ayarning, D.Q. astride Rocinante and discoursing with Sancho Panza, Huck Finn rafting down the big Muddy. His fortieth year near run, his narrative career half done, P. Sagamore finds himself neither famous nor unknown, unsure of his accomplishment but absolutely certain that nothing of his invention approaches that ideal. Dwarfed septuply into silence (he writes), I am a Quixote windmilled flat" (TT 472).
theory preceding the last letter, what appears to be the representation of a card or an envelope, which reads, "To / N____ N____, Esq. / this book’s real reader" and a letter addressed to "My Dear Reader" (149). In the letter to the reader, which closes Repetition, the narrator says that it might be claimed "that there is too much philosophy in the book" (150-51). On the other hand, "the ordinary reviewer will find in this book the opportunity he desires to elucidate the fact that it is not a . . . novel" (Kierkegaard 151). Robbe-Grillet would say, "Of course, how could it be either?" And Miller, "How can one renounce theory without theorizing?" I should have said, Repetition is at least a narrative, because it is a recollection, a history, a history about history and about history’s recollection.

In Sabbatical, Fenn wants to go back to Cacaway because, he says, "it’ll remind us how happy we were the first time we sailed over there to Love Point and the Chester River together. To Cacaway." Susan only offers an indication of her skepticism: "Mm" (S 372). Fenn wants to go back to the place where he and Susan began their relationship, where they sailed as lovers for the "first time," in order to regain what they had before. Cacaway, Fenn recollects thinking then, is "WHERE IT ALL STARTED" (S 193). Just as a title represents the location of a beginning in a book, Cacaway, "WHERE IT ALL STARTED," represents the location of a beginning in Fenn and Susan’s
relationship. But, also like a title, it cannot be come back to, cannot be read in the same way again for a second time, for time and because of time. It should be emphasized that Fenn anticipates recollecting, anticipates thinking about Cacaway in the past. At the time he thinks that this is the place "WHERE IT ALL STARTED," all of it had not happened yet. In fact, nearly none of it had. The effect of this anticipation is that the recollection is incorporated into the supposed first event. The "beginning," in other words, is always thought of as having happened already. The event or the thing that begins is never located in the present. At the other end, so to speak, because the beginning cannot be found, in the present, going back is found to be impossible. In the present is where we are, which is why Fenn "will remember . . . that rhyme is not repetition (the place one returns to is never exactly the place one left: the river flows, but the shore changes too, not to mention the traveler) . . . " (§ 270, emphasis mine). The place named Cacaway is reached but not regained, neither is the beginning of the story.

Repetition is narrative. The contradictoriness of that statement is addressed by the narrators of The Tidewater Tales. Musing about the enchantment that brings Scheherazade into the story teller's present--What you've done is what you'll do or WYDIWYD--Scheherazade says, "it presupposed both a past and a future, while denying their difference in the present" (TT 595). Scheherazade's
explanation would be an apt description of repetition; it finds in repetition the root of narrative, which, as we will see in the following section on history and narration, is the possibility of a sequence, of movement in time. Repetition is never absolute, which is to say that repetition never quite takes place. As Scheherazade’s story teller says, "WYDIWYD pure and simple won’t get you home" (TT 604). He explains that it is not good dramaturgy to use the same enchantment for going back. But even if it were good dramaturgy, the enchantment will never be the same. Repetition is never pure and simple. WYDIWYD cannot have the same effect in the future as it had in the past. Though repetition denies the difference between the past and the future, difference inevitably marks itself and puts forward, so to speak, the narrative of repetition.

Coming Back to Barth’s Critics

In terms of "allotropic doubling," which is thought of in chemistry, for example, as the existence of a thing in two different forms, very much like Fenn’s changing shore, John V. Antush tries to get to the bottom and the beginning of the work of literature. He suggests that by "reverting" to and confronting a double a character can discover "the awesome complexity of his real identity in the world and his link to history in exercising his humanity to its fullest
within the limits of that identity" (78). Though Antush says that "real identity" is complex (probably he means that it is at least doubled), it is in the world and links one to history. The implication of this in-the-worldness and this link to history is the anchoring of what is doubled. Though, perhaps, we cannot think of the doubled as separate from the double, they (it) are (is) fixed and real and part of a history that is, presumably, fixed and real. On the other hand, Barth, says Antush, acknowledges the limits of the "mystery of human identity" and "the limits of language to express it" (78). Apparently, the real world and the identity of humans are at the heart of literature and at the heart of the allotropic double, even though language cannot express that relationship.

Steven Bell seems to address a sort of speculative organization of texts when he says that the turning to myth in Lost in the Funhouse "marks an implicit recognition in Barth of the possibilities for infinite 'play,' infinite almost repetitions or substitutions" but claims that it occurs "within a finite system" (88). Outside the text, 29

29 In Sabbatical, Fenn and Susan claim to know the truth of Aristophanes' "wonderful fancy": "that we are each of us the fallen moiety of a once-seamless whole" (S 332). They understand themselves in terms of a past wholeness because they are both twins and can therefore more readily accept the idea of the divided self. But they claim too much of an understanding. They claim not to be like Aristophanes, doomed to seek forever and in vain for their missing half, but rather to "know that half supremely well" (S 332). Their twinship cannot give them that knowledge. Like history, which is supposed to be reflected in the historical record, the textual twin is shown always to be a vanished twin.
apparently, Bell places the real world. He suggests that at least initially Barth has hopes of "finding a role or place for literature in life" (87-88). By anchoring repetition, if only "initially," perhaps especially initially, in the real, Bell finds for repetition a beginning and points out that infinity, whether an infinity of play, of repetition, or of substitution, cannot logically be contained within a "finite system." Barth agrees with Borges who notices that all books are part of a library which is itself endless. At the same time Barth claims that an artist may paradoxically turn impossibilities into a work of literature--"paradoxically, because by doing so he transcends what had appeared to be his refutation, in the same way that the mystic who transcends finitude is said to be enabled to live, spiritually and physically, in the finite world" (FB 71). We have to remark the fact that transcendence is only said to be. The living in the finite cannot be considered part of the transcendental act, but only a contradiction of it, if what is called finite is truly finite. Barth is careful in what he says, but makes a complicated statement, and so is vulnerable to misinterpretation. What is transcended is always only "what

30 It is curious that Bell cites Christopher Norris who speaks of "the purely linguistic problem of substitution" in Lost in the Funhouse, because it seems that Bell would claim that substitution is not purely linguistic.

had appeared to be." Apparent in terms of this mystical transcendence is the finitude of the text.

Jean E. Kennard's "Imitations of Imitations" is an attempt to take into account what she describes as Barth's existentialist notion that there is no reality that can be apprehended by man. Kennard says that in order to remind us that life is as fictional as art, Barth has written "'novels which imitate the form of the Novel, by an author who imitates the role of Author'" (117). There are several "levels" on which Kennard understands Barth's idea of imitation. "On the simplest level Barth is talking of parody. . . . [S]ince any work of art is an imitation, in the sense of being an imitation of life, any work of art which parodies another is an imitation of an imitation" (Kennard 117). The imitation of "life" would seem to be excluded a priori from a theory of literature that excludes the apprehension of reality and that treats life as another fiction. Though Kennard calls parody the "simplest" form of imitation, it grounds all of her theory of repetition in the possibility of absolute origin. The most complex level of Kennard's idea of imitation is contained in the question of self-conscious art and self-reflection: "Barth says he is an author imitating the role of author. In Giles Goat-Boy there is a writer, J.B., who is presenting a novel about Giles, but there is also, of course, a novelist, John Barth,

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32 A quotation of Barth's "The Literature of Exhaustion" (FB 72).
who is writing about J.B. writing about Giles. . . .

[T]here could be another John Barth playing the role of John Barth, novelist, writing about John Barth, who is writing about Giles. . . . An endless progression of illusions is possible" (118). Barth's work does suggest the possibility of, as he says in "The Literature of Exhaustion," the "regressus in infinitum" -- the narrator who claims to be the author of the work the narrator is in is a version of that regression. But Kennard does not seem to be convinced by her own argument: "The Post Tape, which invalidates all the previous tapes, comes at the end of the novel. As J.B., Barth then points out in a Postscript the internal evidence against the Post tape's authenticity . . ." (131, emphasis mine). Though she explains that the novel "inflicts upon the reader the inability to establish anything for certain" (131), Kennard seems to have established the origin of the supposedly infinite reflection: "Barth" writes "as J.B."

No matter that an endless progression of illusions is possible, Kennard finds at the beginning or the bottom of the work, the author, not simply the name of the author, but the real-life person. The origin, though, is always born away.

The claim of authorship (all of Barth's narrators claim to be the author of the works they narrate) makes problematic the time of writing. To write "I am doing this now" or "I will write this down" claims that the act of writing is in the present or the future, but the "now" or
the "future" is contradicted by the text that is read in the present. "I will write this down" has always already been written down. We cannot place what is called the author outside this regression. The capacity of "the author" to fix an origin is born away with "the author’s" connection to the narration of the work. So an author’s speaking "as" a narrator or "coming into" a work is never, precisely speaking, the case. "It is well known," says Michel Foucault in his much cited essay "What is an Author," "that in a novel narrated in the first person, neither the first person pronoun, the present indicative tense, nor, for that matter, its signs of localization refer directly to the writer, either to the time when he wrote, or to the specific act of writing . . ." (129). Authors do not speak as narrators. The opposite, in fact, would better describe the claim of authorship and the regression it suggests: though authors do not speak as narrators, narrators can speak as authors. Fenn and Susan, speaking in Sabbatical, make this point clear.

In at least two instances Fenn and Susan suggest that they allow "the author" to speak for them, implying the author’s presence, but then they force us to conclude that the author is not present, that the narrators only speak as if they were the author. Fenn and Susan want the reader to know about John Arthur Paisley, but scholarly Susan is

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33 For a linguistic description of this phenomenon, see Ducrot and Todorov on Shifters.
afraid it would be a breach of verisimilitude for them to discuss what they already know, what goes without saying between them:

Fenn ponders, then suggests Suppose the author does it straight out, instead of putting it into the characters' mouths? ... [W]e can come in as author and give the reader a spot of briefing as needed. Right? Susan guesses so, if we do it adroitly. Otherwise it's Author intrusion. (§ 85)

Fenn suggests that having the author speak "straight out" is having someone other than the characters speaking. They will have the author say what they want us to know instead of saying it themselves. But he also makes this sort of narration ambiguous: it is the characters, who are also the narrators, that will "come in" and speak "as author." If the characters are speaking (as, as anyone), they should not be thought of as "coming in" because they are already in. It is the author who would need to come in, if he were to speak. The coming in of the author is never more than a coming back to the narrators.

When Susan says "Your ship, author," she seems to introduce a third narrator or an author who is present. And the "Thank you," which begins a new paragraph, usually indicating a new speaker, would seem to be spoken by someone other than Fenn and Susan. The suggestion is that the author takes over, gratefully, and begins to speak for Fenn and Susan. But that is not the case. As the Baltimore Sun, which is used to summarize the Paisley case, is cited, it is "we" who quote, a plural narrator, the voice of Fenn and
Susan as author. At the close of the quotation, Susan questions Fenn, not the author, about the quotation's efficiency.

At Fenn's suggestion that they recap their dreams and flash back to the big bang, "Practical Susan says I say leave it to the author" (§ 206), and following three points of ellipses centered on the line (it is the only page break of its kind in Sabbatical) the story and the point of view appear to shift:

...Done? Okay? Well! Hum! Why, that's some tall order, Susan, Fenn! Probably impossible; certainly improbable; unlikely as our having shared a dream in the first place. . . . (§ 207)

The appearance of the shift in voice is clear. It is a reply to Fenn and Susan, specifically to Susan's suggestion that the author narrate. But to whom does "our" refer? It was Fenn and Susan who shared a dream. The author, supposed or real, had no part in the plot of that particular story. After the flashing back, Susan reasserts their position as narrator:

I think the author did okay, Susan says. That was some fleshbeck. My hat is off to us. Well done, us. (§ 209)

Sabbatical illustrates that the search for an author within the text will always bring one back to the question of narration, never to an author who is the author, who is outside the text, and could therefore help us locate the origin or the beginning of a repetition.
History and the Sequeling of Narration

The question of authorship in connection to the history of a text and to a text as narrative follows (in a sense) from the difficulty of locating the origin of a repetition. In what follows I will concern myself with the narrative relation between texts, between The Tidewater Tales and Don Quixote (and between The Tidewater Tales and Sabbatical), to discover what a narrative can tell us about the history of a text relative to its author and about looking at a text "historically."

What follows here will not begin with the question of historical truth, though it will, by necessity, encompass that problem. Rather, I will ask, What follows from the questioning of truth in history and in narrative. What happens next, after one asks, "Is this book telling the truth? How much of this book is true? What of this book can be verified by the historical record?"

Barth's readers have been asking these sorts of questions about all of his books, since he wrote The Sot-Weed Factor, a story written out of, so to speak, the poem of that name, authored by Ebenezer Cooke and published in 1708, and the Archives of Maryland as well as other "historical" documents, such as William Byrd's "Secret Historie of the Dividing Line" and John Smith's "Generall Historie of Virginia." Alan Holder seems to find it

34 See Diser 52-58, and Holder 596, 599.
disturbing that "Barth has taken some liberties with the historical records" and calls Barth’s play "intellectual frivolity" (603), implying not only the priority of the real but also the certainty of the historical. Philip E. Diser comparing Barth’s book to "data" found in historical records (49) illustrates Barth’s quotation from the work of "the real Ebenezer Cooke" (52), and concludes, "Certainly, as Richard Kostalentz has said, Barth’s novel is a mockery of written history, but it is mockery within an accurate framework" (58). Diser wants us to understand Barth not as a failure because of his historical "impurity" but as brilliant and original and in touch with the truth about history. It is telling to point out that the criticism subsequent to Holder and Diser, though based on the assumption that "written history" should not be accepted "as unadulterated fact" (Ewell 33), nevertheless clings to the possibility of historical accuracy. Though Barbara Ewell says that "any scheme imposed on the past must somehow be inadequate" (43) and that an "attempt to fix the past still" will be accompanied by "the aura of mental construction and distortion," she also claims that "the imagined past in Barth impinges on the reality it supposedly elucidates and achieves a measure of reality in its own right" (46). Ewell is trying to cope with what Barth has called, in the "Literature of Exhaustion," "a real piece of imagined reality." To "imagine reality" or "invent history" is not to create something real but to make reality--the term, the
concept—problematic. Michael Hinden claims that with *Lost in the Funhouse* "Barth challenges the writers and critics of contemporary fiction to cut the coils that bind them to the recent past. But that same past, as *Lost in the Funhouse* paradoxically demonstrates, already has furnished Barth with new materials for art . . ." (116). The question that should concerns us is by what measure the past can be considered "the same" in its use in the creation of art. Arguing against Holder and the idea of a pure history, Linda S. Bergmann asserts that "play is an appropriate treatment of history if it is as ambiguous as Barth shows it to be . . ." (36). The more artificially the novelist organizes the past, Bergmann says, "the less we will be inclined to mistake the structure necessary for art for the hidden truth of history." Though she argues against the possibility of discovering truth in history, Bergmann nevertheless distinguishes history from story:

Any particular story will be the selection of a few strands of the infinite web of history, and will resist isolation as truth, unless the Author conceals its arbitrariness. Barth’s few strands of history and his cupfull of story take the form of a comedy. . . . (36)

The distinction between history and story is confusing because the only thing Bergmann leaves us by which to distinguish history from story is the capacity for telling the truth, which she has already discounted.

None of Barth’s critics has been able to completely shed the burden of truth telling in describing narrative’s connection to history. Even in describing the problem of
the idea of truth in history or historical fact, readers still cling to the hope of its possibility.

In describing what follows in narration, in a text we would call a narrative, we should be careful not to get caught up in the question of historical truth so that we will not reconfirm the possibility of truth in history and also so that we can deal thoroughly with the questioning of truth.

Peter Sagamore, in *The Tidewater Tales*, is interested in what he calls the most mysterious episode in *Don Quixote*, "the one wherein Don Quixote lowered himself by rope into the spooky Cave of Montesinos in La Mancha and is hauled up sound asleep half an hour later and awakened only with difficulty" (*TT* 388), because it brings into question, without answering the question, the truth of the story:

What is singular about the episode, in Peter Sagamore's opinion is that of all the Knight's encounters with the apparently marvelous, this is the only one unrefuted by reality. It is never accounted for, and though nothing in the plot turns upon it, Quixote clings to his belief in it to the end. (*TT* 338, emphasis mine)

In deciding how to read Peter's term "refutation by reality" it will be helpful to turn to *Don Quixote*. In Chapter XXIV, the one following the Cave of Montesinos chapter, the narrator gives us a marginal note made by the book's "first author," Cide Hamete Benengeli, which says in part,

"so if this adventure seems apocryphal, it is not I that am to blame, for I write it down without affirming its truth or falsehood. You, judicious reader, must judge for yourself, for I cannot and should not do more. One thing, however, is certain, that finally [Don Quixote] retracted it
on his death-bed and confessed that he had invented it, since it seemed to him to fit in with the adventures he had read of in his histories."

(624)

Apparently, assuming Peter has not overlooked this passage, "refutation by reality" is not the same as refutation by Cide Hamete Benengeli. Cide Hamete cannot, of course, be considered the book's "real" author. He has no life outside the text and so cannot determine the truth of a story told by a character within the text. The narrator, though, is in a similar position. The narrator offers us Hamete's marginalia, suggesting that he (the narrator) is outside the realm of the fiction narrated, but the narrator cannot be considered part of the real world either. If Don Quixote were to confess the fictionality of the Montesinos story on his deathbed (in Don Quixote there is no such confession; there is only the marginal report of a confession), it would be similarly ineffective in establishing the truth of the story. Can Don Quixote be considered more truthful or more real then Cide Hamete? The answer has to be no. The reality Peter speaks of cannot be considered the absolutely real but is rather another fiction within Don Quixote. Nevertheless, Peter seems to rest the connection to the real, which he supposes is lacking in Part Two of Don Quixote, in the narrator.

The yielding of reality in Part Two, Peter notes, sustains the fiction of Don Quixote, and it is the appearance of that yielding and that sustaining which prompts Peter to write "Part One of a Possible Three-Part
Don Quixote Story," in large part about Don Quixote's adventures in the Cave of Montesinos. Part of the problem with Peter's idea of "refutation by reality" is that it assumes, as Peter seems to elsewhere, that the author can speak in his work and separate fact from fiction:

Let Don Quixote rest in peace, Cervantes warns in his last chapter: Do not presume to resurrect or disinter him. But it is fact, not fiction, that Story overtook a few days back off the Thomas Point Light: Rocinante IV. . . . (TT 472)

Peter's story (the story of Peter) cannot, of course, be considered fact; he is in The Tidewater Tales. And "Cervantes," in Don Quixote, is also a part of the fiction narrated. The narrator is not Cervantes speaking in the book but rather a narrator speaking as Cervantes. Peter in The Tidewater Tales is very much like the narrator in Don Quixote because he is a narrator claiming authorship of the work he narrates. Peter could not actually write "Part One of a Possible Three-Part Don Quixote Story," but as a character he could write Part One of that story, which is described by "Part One of a Possible Three-Part Don Quixote Story." Following "Part Two" the narrator says outright "Peter Sagamere has not written the foregoing sentences. But shamelessly, possessedly, he has logged notes upon this unfinished possible Don Quixote story . . ." (TT 493).

One difference between The Tidewater Tales and Don Quixote is that The Tidewater Tales points out explicitly the problem of narrating writing. Peter's story marks the fictionality of Don Quixote and the difficulty of writing a
book from within. Don Quixote receives a sign from "the Enchanter himself,"

the all-seeing Moorish historian Cide Hamete Benengeli, author of *The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote of La Mancha*. The Moor has published Part One; Quixote himself, like all of Europe, has read it. He will now be in midst of setting down Part Two, whereof the Knight’s every present action is, as it were, a sentence.

Don Quixote strokes his beard. Don Quixote steadies himself with his stick. Don Quixote seats himself in the skiff’s stern and waits to see what Don Quixote will do next. (TT 474)

Cide Hamete Benengeli is spoken of by Peter and Don Quixote, and speaks of himself in *Don Quixote*, as a historian. The implication is, of course, that Don Quixote can read about his real life as it is recorded in the history written by Cide Hamete. The problem with the history is two-fold: writing in the present denies the reality of the thing written about and thus its "historical" significance, and (partly for that reason) the "historian" is not to be trusted.

Peter uses the present tense in his example of the equation of writing and narration ("Don Quixote strokes his beard . . .") to illustrate the "yielding of reality"; if every present action were a sentence, then "reality" would seem to be the thing written. But narrating in the present tense is not writing in the present, nor is it being in the present. The time of the writing is always the past. One reads what has already been written.

Not far into Peter’s illusion of Cide Hamete’s writing-in-the-present does the "present action" of Don Quixote turn
upon, as it follows and follows from, an action written in the past and described as having been:

A further happy thought occurs to him: He gave Dulcinea’s serving-maid four reales because, though she had asked for six, four was all he possessed. Now he has the other two. (TT 474-75)

My point in quoting this passage is not that a story will contain the past tense or that it will refer to a past action but rather that it will indicate that the time of writing is that of the past and that the situation of the writer as having been will mark itself somewhere in the text. When Don Quixote scans the table of contents of Part Two he finds his story "followed by others unfamiliar to him"; in other words, he finds that the text of his "life" has already been written.

In Writing Degree Zero, Roland Barthes describes narration in the context of the narrative past, the preterite. Its function, he says, is no longer that of a tense:

the preterite, which is the cornerstone of Narration, Always signifies the presence of Art; it is a part of a ritual of Letters. . . .
Allowing as it does an ambiguity between temporality and causality, it calls for a sequence of events, that is, for an intelligible Narrative. This is why it is the ideal instrument for every construction of a world; it is the unreal time of cosmogenies, myths, History and Novels. (39)

No longer functioning as a tense, the preterite points out that it is part of a constructed world: "Behind the preterite there always lurks a demiurge, a God or a reciter" (Barthes 30).
In their Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Sciences of Language, Oswald Ducrot and Tzvetan Todorov explain that, independent of grammatical tenses, there are problems of temporality that can make simplifying the narrative sequence of a discourse difficult. For our purposes, it is enough to show that the difference between "writing time" and "story time" is significant. According to Ducrot and Todorov, particular efforts have been made to describe the writing of these two times: "sometimes this temporality of writing is in turn represented--the book relates not only a story but the story of the book itself" (320). Sabbatical and The Tidewater Tales, and to some extent Don Quixote, are examples of the attempt to represent the temporality of writing. "In the simplest case," Ducrot and Todorov say, each temporal system moves "in the same direction, in a perfectly parallel course." The problem with this ideal is that "the narrative has its own requirements, which are not those of the so-called reality." The parallelism will be broken (1) by inversions wherein some events are reported earlier than others that are nonetheless chronologically anterior and (2) by embedded stories wherein the story is interrupted to begin a second and then possibly a third and so on (Ducrot and Todorov 320). Though Ducrot and Todorov do not summarize any contention that the breaking of the ideal parallelism between writing time and story time is necessary, indeed, they seem to indicate the possibility of an ideal parallelism, it is my argument that the ideal is
never achieved. What has been called "writing time" (I have
called it the time of writing) is never absolutely parallel
to "story time," to the time of the narrative or the
narration. Even when the co-presence of the time of writing
and the time of narration appears to be undisturbed, the
sequentiality of the narrative will inscribe a preteritive
effect.

In order to explain the necessity of a preteritive
effect, we should take some time to reaffirm the connection
between sequentiality and narration. In their Encyclopedia
Ducrot and Todorov have described concisely what, since
Propp and Lévi-Strauss, students of literature have taken
for granted about narrative:

The narrative is a referential text in which
temporality is represented. The unit higher than
the proposition that can be located in narrative
is the sequence, which is constituted by a group
of at least three propositions. Contemporary
narrative analyses inspired by Propp's study of
folk tales and Lévi-Strauss's study of myths agree
that in every minimal narrative it is possible to
identify two attributes--related but different--of
at least one agent and a process of transformation
or mediation, which allows passage from one
attribute to the other. (297)

If sequentiality defines a narrative and thereby demands the
representation of temporality in narration, a narrative will
always entail the effect of the preterite. Barthes says
that the operation of the preterite "occurs constantly in
the whole of Western art" (33). (Barthes excludes "a
certain Chinese tradition" which makes as the goal of art
the perfect imitation of reality, [Barthes, Writing Degree
Zero 34]. I will claim later on that the effect of the
preterite occurs in all texts that question the truth.) If the statements are organized according to a sequence, even if the statements are made in the present tense ("Don Quixote strokes his beard. Don Quixote steadies himself with his stick."), the pastness of one situation in relation to the other will establish itself and will reflect the pastness of the writing. A parallelism between the time of writing and the time of narration can never be maintained. Strictly speaking, in a narrative the time of writing is never the time of the story or the narration of the story.

When Don Quixote loses his boat and is swept under by the river at the bottom of the Cave of Montesinos, he begins to question the historicality, and thus the trustworthiness, of his enchanter; Don Quixote has a "vision of the Moor in whom he has so misplaced his trust, now calmly inscribing--in beautiful, heartless Arabic--the sentence Thus ends Part Two of The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote of La Mancha" (TT 477). The implication of Don Quixote's misplacing his trust is that his trust is better placed elsewhere. Where then? In Cervantes? We will see in the following that the author should never be considered the repository of the truth.

In Peter's Part Two, Don Quixote recants his lack of faith, because he finds himself still alive, continuing in his Part Two: "it's to my Moorish enchanter that I owe both my peril and my rescue" (TT 481). But still equivocal about his origin as he sets out again, now in search of the one to whom his greatest debt is owed, "he somehow understood that
the Cide Hamete Benengeli is no less a fiction than Don Quixote de la Mancha, the Knight of Doleful Aspect" (TT 487). Though he seems to understand that he is part of the text and that his "historian" is a narrator who is also a part of the text, Don Quixote is offended when he chances upon someone reading a translation of "Parts I & II—not by the Cide Hamete Benengeli, but by ... Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra" (TT 488). Don Quixote cannot readily abandon his belief in the reality of history and in the factual-historical nature of the text. Both the reality of history and the factual-historical nature of the text are anchored, so to speak, in the reality and the stability and the singularity of the author. To come upon a "second author" is to disrupt both the reality of the "first" and the system upon which the reality of the "second" might be based. Don Quixote's defence of his enchanter is another claim for the historical accuracy of the text written about him:

The circumstance that Benengeli is not a Christian does not license his history to be sold under false authorship or imitated and extended without his authorization. The clerk amused, replies that there have in fact been such imitations and false sequels; indeed, that it was the true author's indignation at one such that prompted Part Two of the book in hand, a full decade after the great success of Part One. But the perpetrator of that false sequel was not Hamete Benengeli, for that admirable Moor is as much a figment of great Cervantes's imagination as are Sancho Panza and Don Quixote himself. (TT 488)

Though the "true" author writes a Part Two in order to establish a sequel that is true or that in some way conveys the truth about its author, it is the following of Part Two
that marks it as false, that indicates the second part as a falsification of what was written before. Don Quixote's scanning the table of contents confirms that the second part includes episodes he thought would measure its factuality, episodes he understood as having occurred, but finds also that Part Two contains episodes unfamiliar to him, including his return to La Mancha and his death there. He questions again, but again only provisionally, his own reality:

The Knight (he scarcely now thinks of himself as one) is perplexed, the more so because, unaccountable, those unfamiliar chapter titles seem right to him, even the mention of his death. But now he hears the clerk speak of the book as the greatest novel ever written, and concludes that its second part must be a work of fiction extrapolated from the true history of Part One: an ingenious if somewhat high-handed idea. Remembering his long and painfully consequential enchantment by novels of chivalry, he pronounces it a reckless thing indeed to confuse the boundary between life and art. All the same, he buys the book in order to see how this Cervantes fellow measures up beside the errorless Moor. (TT 489)

Upon rereading Parts One and Two Don Quixote changes his notion of his own situation and comes to read his life as one would a narrative. Whereas "formerly he marveled at how accurately, in Part One, "Hamete Benengeli recorded his and Sancho's early adventures" and "how skillfully, from the Montesinos incident on, this Miguel de Cervantes spins out a convincing alternative to the truth: as if he really had been hoisted out of that cave and gone on with that story," now "so seamless is the transition from history to fiction, so persuasive the narrative, that these later adventures of 'Don Quixote,' ending in his death in La Mancha, seem to him
the real story, far more plausible than what has actually happened since Chapter XXII" (TT 491, emphasis mine). The distance between historical "accuracy" and narrative "skill" no longer seems to Don Quixote so great; "Indeed, after several rereadings, Part One also strikes him as a splendid and amusing fiction, he reads it neither more nor less spellbound than any other later-middle-aged reader--and identifies neither more nor less with its hero" (TT 491).

Peter Sagamere and Don Quixote, like Barth's critics, have questioned, though hesitantly, the possibility of truth telling in history and thereby the distinction between history and narration.35 It is essential to understand that their position within the narrative keeps the characters and the narrators from determining the accuracy of what has been called the historical record. The record, according to its function as the repository of truth, must remain somewhere outside the narrative and this is why it is never there, never here, in the present. Peter names his stories after (in the name of and following) Don Quixote's horse

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35 Theorists, such as Roland Barthes and more recently Paul Ricoeur, have shown us the dangers of casually distinguishing between history and the narrative. Barthes says, in Writing Degree Zero, that narration is a form common to both the novel and to history. The question of truth in the use of the preterite, which is essential to narration, is indeterminate: "[the preterite] delineates an area of plausibility which reveals the possible in the very act of unmasking it as false" (Barthes 32). According to Ricoeur, "the inserting of history into action," which is the operation of narration, "brings into play the question of truth in history. This question is inseparable from what I call the interweaving reference between history's claim to truth and that of fiction" (92).
Rocinante. He is reminded of the Cave of Montesinos episode, in *Don Quixote*, its centrality to *Don Quixote*, on seeing a boat named **Rocinante IV** hailing from Montesinos. Peter's three possible stories correspond to the three Rocinante's he imagines Don Quixote sailing in (and out of) the Cave of Montesinos: "Rocinante II," the story of and the broken down fishing skiff Don Quixote sails on the Guadiana and the Ebro rivers between the Cave of Montesinos and the Island of Barataria; "Rocinante III," the story of and the "pleasure craft" provisioned and named by the duke and duchess of Barataria and sailed single-handedly by Don Quixote out of the Ebro to Lisbon; and "Rocinante IV," the title never given to the story, which is only partly told, about the boat with which Don Quixote sails to America and into *The Tidewater Tales*.

Part One's being named "Rocinante II" is indicative of the following of the story, which is the sequeling of narration, and the absence of history. "Rocinante II" is named after Rocinante, but Rocinante is neither historical (in the sense being grounded factually) nor is it the original. Rocinante is (this almost goes without saying now) part of a narrative that cannot anchor itself historically. Furthermore, which is to say the same thing in another way, Rocinante is not a story but within a story: there is no "Rocinante I." In a sense, Part One of Peter's possible three part story is not the first part but the recognition of the absence of the origin, the absence of the
historical record, the absence not simply of the past, but of what we have come to call history. 36

What follows? What comes after the conclusion that what comes before is not history but the absence of history? In Peter's Part Two Don Quixote stares out to sea and rereads Don Quixote. "[H]e finds himself telling his whole story" to a young American writer he meets, "just as Peter Sagamore will one day write it down" (TT 49). It is implied that this American is a Huckleberry Finn, who, like Don Quixote, "has strayed . . . out of a great novel, as it were. . . . Having . . . rafted chapter after chapter down certain North American waterways, at a certain pass he lit out for the Territory, so to speak, rather than return to his starting place at the voyage's end" (TT 492-93). It is also suggested that the American is Peter Sagamore, who will write the story down, who has floated in The Tidewater Tales, not out of it, toward the telling of his three-part story. Huck Finn could not explain to Don Quixote that single-handing it across the Atlantic is now made possible by the advancement of technology: "he is resolved now to equip himself to do what until meeting the American he would scarcely have deemed possible: aboard some fourth Rocinante, in quest of nothing but the having done it, to sail alone from the old world to the new" (TT 493). To be in quest of

36 Holder speaks of a "relative lack of history" (601) describing a character's lack of information about his past. I am claiming an absence that is fundamental to one's situation in a narrative.
"nothing but the having done it" is doubly consequential for the making of a narrative. First of all it is an indication of the lack of goal centeredness of narration. Don Quixote has just explained to "the American" that "you need only the most general notion of your destination" (TT 492). **What follows will be a narrative.** It is also the quest to place a thing in the past, in other words to make it possible for a narration to occur, to give the story a time on which to base a sequence and a sequel. As Don Quixote and the American prepare to depart, "Their handshake turns into a proper abrazo, and then--first apparently from the American’s far-off birth waters, then as it seems from right inside his narrative head--comes an insistent beeping that the young man realizes he’s been hearing for some time: Beep-beep-beep, beep beep beep, beep-beep-beep" (TT 493). The story the narrator of *The Tidewater Tales* says will be written has already been written and thereby calls for something to follow, a narrative. Following that beeping, in *The Tidewater Tales*, another story under another title, which again brings to the fore the temporal nature of telling:

**IT’S YOUR FUTURE CALLING.** *(TT 493)*

Peter is roused, like Don Quixote after his being hauled up from the Cave of Montesinos, not to a view of the world as it was or is, the so-called real world, but to the time of narration, to the recognition that what follows will
be a narrative—because it establishes a sequence and establishes the narrative as a sequel.

Part Three of Peter’s possible three part story is never named "Rocinante IV." That name is only suggested by the sequentiality of the other two. Being without the title that comes next follows from our being told only "Part of Part Three of that Possible Three-Part Don Quixote Story" (TT 520, emphasis mine). The story is not yet, within The Tidewater Tales, finished being told. That is why Peter’s story is only a "possibility." If the time of writing is the already, the time of narration is the following and the not yet. The text is always already written but not yet told.

Captn Don ("Donald Quicksoat" is what they call Don Quixote in America in the 1980’s) narrates "Part of Part Three," bringing himself into relation with Cervantes and with the author:

Now I figured I’d singlehand it to the end of the story, like Cervantes himself... Now, if our friends here37 were telling this part, they’d have me set out in search of Cervantes himself this time, to square my biggest debt of all... But... I reckoned that Cervantes owed me as much as I owed him. Anyhow, we characters sometimes get loose of our authors... I understood that I was my own gosh darn Cervantes. The passenger who is also the skipper, he says directly to Peter Sagamore—who nods and at once replies, also in italics: The Skipper who is also the passenger. (TT 520-21)

We have seen that the questioning of truth in a narrative as well as the impossibility of answering questions about truth

37 A reference to Peter and Katherine.
in narratives follows from the illusion of a narrator’s also being the author (and vise versa). Captn Don seems to understand that the narrator of *Don Quixote* is not Cervantes, but rather another Cervantes so to speak. Though Captn Don claims to be the skipper as well as the passenger, the author as well as the character, he does not claim to be Cervantes, but rather his "own Cervantes." This claim, like Peter’s, is an equivocal one—Captn Don claims authorship without claiming to be the author. But the equivocation is less a lack of precision than a necessity of the illusion.

Reading *The Tidewater Tales* after *Sabbatical* we will have noticed, as we have in reading the relation between *The Tidewater Tales* and *Don Quixote*, that the sequeling of narration follows from the questioning of truth, of the origin of the work, and therefore from the claim of authorship. When we read, in *The Tidewater Tales*, about some of the characters (or, perhaps, the sequels of some of the characters) of *Sabbatical*, their connection to the story that came before *The Tidewater Tales* seems to turn on the questioning of historical fact. There is no doubt that in *The Tidewater Tales* the characters and their situations bear a strong resemblance to those in *Sabbatical*:

This was the hopeful scene (we have learned) that Frank and Lee Talbott found upon the successful completion, just last week, of this blue-water passage from the Virgin Islands to the Virginia capes and Chesapeake Bay. What was more, Carla’s formidable intuitions told her that Professor Leah Allan Silver Talbott, now thirty-five, was pregnant at last, for the first time, by her strapping fifty-year-old husband! But there’d been a cloud upon their childlessness, so C.B.S.
divined a cloud upon this belated early pregnancy, which she sensed had in fact not yet even been acknowledged between the parents. (TT 352)

One cannot help wondering, and in fact we are led to wonder, why, if these are the same characters, if Frank and Lee and Carla are Fenn and Susan and Carmen, and if their story is the story of Sabbatical, why the names are different in The Tidewater Tales. Though in our critical sophistication we have come to regard names as significant matter for interpretation, as significant as the "facts," some of the details that have been "changed" do indeed seem insignificant. Why, for instance, would Fenn’s son become Frank’s daughter (TT 405). Nothing consequential in the plot of The Tidewater Tales seems to turn upon that detail—except perhaps the turning of details, which points out the sequentiality of the narrative.

When Peter and Katherine remeet Frank and Lee, they confront the changing of names as they tell each other their stories and the stories about their stories, which they are working on now, and thereby give us a way of dealing with sequencing stories: "I warned you I’d get personal," Lee says, after attempting an explanation about her and Frank’s relationship and their childlessness. "Invites Peter Don’t worry: I’ll change all the names. Frank Talbott says nevermind the names; he wishes he could change some of the facts" (TT 411). Because they occur within the story, the factuality of the "facts" is already in question. But Peter complicates the matter. If Peter changes the names in his
story as Frank changed the names in his, Frank and Lee can be considered no more factual than Fenn and Susan and just as subject to question as Peter and Katherine. The names, the details, have always already been "changed," which is why "changed" is not quite the right word. Explaining to Peter and Katherine about his shortcomings as a writer of fiction, Frank tells them about the novel he tried but failed to write on the sabbatical voyage.

I turned Rick Talbott into "Manfred Turner," because Doug Townshend called him the Prince of Darkness after Byron's Count Manfred. Lee and I were "Fenwick Turner" and "Susan Seckler." He smiles at her. Black eyed Susan, right? My idea of the art of fiction was to make her and "Mimi" twin sisters and Fenn and Manfred twin brothers. (TT 413-14)

Is this attempted novel Sabbatical? Yes and no. Yes, it is a reference to that story. As Fenn does in Sabbatical, Frank speaks as if he were the author of that work. And no, it is not Sabbatical but a book not yet written (its "working title," Frank says, "was Reprise" [TT 414]). This contradiction is contained within Sabbatical too. As we have seen, Fenn and Susan claim all along the way that the book they are, in the present, writing and telling has not been written. This writing without having written is the illusion that must be maintained in any text in which a character or narrator claims to be the author.

The problem with the claim of authorship, and according to Frank, the problem with his story, is that it turns upon the question of truth and the factuality of the story's origin.
What I had in mind, Frank Talbott goes on, was forks and confluences in people's lives. . . . Lee and I first bumped into each other at the literal fork of the Wye River, right down the road there, but that's another story.

At least I wanted it to be another story. (TT 412-13)

In other words, he wanted the story to be fiction, but it turned out to be nonfiction, like his *Kubark* exposé. Peter confirms this division ("The art of the nonfiction exposé is not the art of the novel"), but does not maintain the purity of the categories. Frank says about his story, "what it was was long faced confessional melodrama. For example, would you put a spiel like this one into a novel? Of course you wouldn't. . . . Peter shrugs his eyebrows" (TT 113, 114). Frank's spiel has, of course, made it into a book, of which Peter claims, though provisionally, to be the author.

Similarly, the story of "Reprise" has made it into *Sabbatical*. Neither the books nor the claims of authorship are in danger of being "confused with reality" because they continually disrupt the division between the "fictive" world of narration and the "factual" world of the exposé or the historical record on which questions about a text's factuality are based.

The story at hand is always another story, a story that comes after, a story that follows. If we were not led to wonder about what looks like the changing of names and of "facts," *The Tidewater Tales* would not point out as clearly the sequel ing of narration and the disruption of notions based on the reality of the origin of the text.
We are led to believe that Sabbatical, or more precisely, the story of Sabbatical, is taking place within The Tidewater Tales. Lee has her abortion in the present tense of The Tidewater Tales. But the illusion of the co-presence of the texts does not take into consideration the writing of either book, the writing that has already occurred. Peter asserts "that if he were setting about to write the new novel that Franklin Key Talbott has just been discussing . . . with him, inspired by Reprise’s Caribbean cruise, he would turn both the Silver sisters and the Talbott brothers into twins: twin twins. And he’d shorten the voyage from a year down to nine months. . . . But he’d begin the story in the last two weeks of the ninth month, when the couple reenter the Chesapeake Bay. And he’d frame it with the loss and recovery of the magic boina. Shut me up, Kath! It’s not my novel" (TT 557). One thing a passage such as this one does, coming after the writing of the story talked about as not yet written, is to point out that no one within the novel has a claim to its ownership by virtue of having created it because it is already written. In reply to Peter’s statement, we are led to declare that it is not Frank’s novel either.

We might come to view the illusion of the "presence" of the story of Sabbatical as a reprise within a reprise. Peter and Katherine’s remeeting of Frank and Lee in The

38 Peter appears to have forgotten that Frank claims to have already made this adjustment.
Tidewater Tales is a reprise and follows the questioning of reprise:

Plumply paddling some yards astern of Reprise, Wye I., she calls up cordially from the creek Are you Repreeze or Repriize? . . .

Lee and Frank Talbott! We met you at Doug Townshend’s once, a hundred years ago! Says the fellow, surprised, so you are the Sagamores. We wondered. His wife says to Katherine Your memory’s amazing. (TT 393-94)

The name of Frank and Lee’s sailboat, like their remeeting and the name of Frank’s "work in progress," is both a reprise and the questioning of a reprise. Repriese is not Pokey (Fenn and Susan’s sailboat in Sabbatical) not because Pokey is fictional and Repriese real, but because a reprise is not a repetition and because what follows is always a retelling. Following their meeting again Peter and Katherine and Frank and Lee tell each other a series of stories that describe what has brought them to this reprise, stories that are also reprises themselves. The stories are described briefly in "Ready for Another?" (TT 402-03). The following passage relates two of them:

Says Franklin Talbott directly but not severely to Leah Talbott If you’ll tell me why your having an abortion at age thirty-five means we’re never going to have any children ever, I’ll tell you why you didn’t tell me you were pregnant until after you’d had that abortion, even though I knew it anyhow, just as I knew you’d had a look at my novel-manuscript that I’d rather you hadn’t looked at till I’d proved to myself that I could write it. (TT 403)

It will be apparent that these are stories already told, in Sabbatical, and here they constitute other stories in themselves, other stories partly because they are within The
Tidewater Tales (Peter and Katherine haven't heard them before), and when they are retold and expanded they will have become part of the reprising that constitutes The Tidewater Tales. We cannot think of Sabbatical as being written into The Tidewater Tales. The story is told again, is reprised. The story of Sabbatical is made different not simply because some of the details are "changed" but also because the story comes after one already set down.

Calmed, the story tellers "tied Story [Peter and Katherine's sailboat] behind Reprise (There's a switch, said Peter Sagamore)" (TT 449). In a sense it is turning things around for the story to follow the reprising of the story, but that is essentially what the narrators of Sabbatical and The Tidewater Tales suggest is going on in their claiming authorship. They claim to be telling about the writing, to be offering a reprising of the story and its writing, before the story is written. In another sense stories do follow reprises, because stories are always in themselves the reprising of stories. The Tidewater Tales is the reprising of and is sequel to Sabbatical, a story that is itself a reprise, a repetition not quite a repetition.

After speculating about the possibility of going back to the origin of what is commonly called a repetition and coming again to the conclusion that the origin is, in Derrida's terms, borne away, I was led to question the position of the author and the time of writing. In The
Tidewater Tales the position of the author is brought into question as the repository of truth, in particular, the truth about the history of the text.

Rather than allow myself to be overwhelmed by the problem of discovering historical truth in a narrative or evidence of the factuality of a historical record, I asked what follows and follows from the questioning of truth in a narrative, arriving at this conclusion: what follows is a narrative. This conclusion might seem a tautology. Since the narrative is dependent on the sequence, on one thing following another, the text that follows, that allows a following to occur within it, is by definition a narrative. But we can not settle for tautology because tautology is, in a sense, the opposite of a narrative: since a tautological "truth" is a truth by definition, it does not allow for seqentiality.

A narrative will follow the questioning of truth. Because the questioning of truth leads one back—to the supposed origin, the historical record, the author--it forces one to use a methodology based on a temporality, on the efficacy of a past, and on sequentaility, on what follows the past. Questioning the truth forces one to create a narrative, which denies all along the way the possibility of arriving at the truth.
Setting the Task

All along, we have been playing at the "end"—at what has been called the "end" or marked in some way as representing the place of a conclusion: Circling and the question of knowledge are concerned with how what might have been called the "end" is turned back on the book towards what might have been called the "beginning," making indeterminate those absolute limits. The issue of abortion questions, as part of its effect on the text, the possibility of the text’s disposal, of getting rid of the text in order to get past or outside of it. The repetition of a text marks itself in a deferral of the end, of putting the end off until later but never coming to it in the text. Considering the text’s production in terms of the supplement also has serious consequences for the concept of the end, because, if the production of the text involves its reading, the "end" is always replaced in a supplementation that does not allow an end per se.

The narrators of The Tidewater Tales have been playing all along too, but they seem compelled to end, to conclude, to "complete," the story as if there were a price to pay in
a story's incompletion. Even as the task of storytelling is set, the story marks the need for, as it moves toward, its "ending." (Because the task is set in verse, it seems all that is needed is a closing rhyme: "in short, yet another rhyme, as it were, for cost to end this poem with, even if we have to abandon verse for prose or prose for verse to reach it: a rhyme less discouraging, more pregnant so to speak with hope, than lost" [TT 22].) What sort of hope would be lost if the end were lost? For what do the narrators hope? To be fetched by the story beyond:

Tell me their story as if it weren't ours
But like ours enough so that the Powers
That drive and steer good stories might
Fetch them beyond our present plight
and navigate the tale itself to an ending more
rich and strange than everyday realism ordinarily
permits. . . . (TT 22)

Though the narrators say together that "on our boat an
open-ended story is no story at all" (TT 237), closing the
"end" is a task generally taken on by Peter. He is the
writer and so the one who finds himself in need of moving
beyond.

For Peter we ask this question: Will "The Ending" move
us beyond?

If the end is the thing that will move us beyond, the
question of the beyond will entail playing at the limits of
the text and accounting for, if not agreeing with, the idea
that the limits can be set and therefore also for the
relation between the textual and the real, (according to
traditional usage) the signifier and the signified, which is
why in setting the task, part of which is the moving beyond, the narrators become enmeshed in their relation to the "real": "Tell me their story as if it weren't ours, / But like ours..." This statement is made as if the speaker were outside the text, perhaps in the "real" world, as if the story had not yet begun and with them in it. We know that cannot be the case. So already the question of the beyond has not only brought to the fore the dichotomy between the textual and the real but has also brought that dichotomy into question by marking as false the situation in which it is presented. Their plight, in other words, is caused by the compulsion to move beyond. Let us mark this as ironic and perhaps viciously circular.

Moving beyond, for Peter, is, in part, moving beyond the text, but there is a more particular aspect of his compulsion. The plight mentioned in Katherine's task-setting poem is, in particular, Peter's inability to write and the tension that inability has placed on Peter and Katherine's relationship. His work has become shorter and shorter over the years because of his desire to render truthfully "lived experience": contextual circumstances are as crucial to the flavor of recreated experience as the fact that Katherine has never borne a child before, though she's had one induced and one spontaneous abortion. Peter Sagamore used to wish that he could know and render them all, despite his understanding, that if he did, no story would get told. Leaving them incompletely said still feels to him like describing a fine champagne as merely alcohol, water, and carbonic acid in solution. Better sip in silence than thus falsify! (TT 99)
Better not to speak than to falsify; that is, for Peter, the minimalist creed. It is because of his desire to tell the truth about the real world that his writing the "final version of 'B'," the story in progress at the setting of the task, consists of "deleting all that remained of it: its abbreviated title" (TT 291). The "writing" of this "final version" is supposed also to be the "completion" of a stage in the career of its writer: "That ultimate kenosis, so long in the works of his works, was thus completed as Katherine's filling was all but fulfilled. The latter vessel stood ready to be emptied, the former to be replenished, when Peter said Set me a task!" (TT 291). Apparently, Peter and Katherine think that in order to write under the pressure of the minimalist creed, one must bring oneself to the end not only of the text but also of writing. In order to write, to move "beyond the vanishing point," Peter must be emptied; he must get beyond the compulsion to tell the truth, which means beyond the need to be beyond the text. The difficulty for Peter and Katherine lies in the paradox that "working through to some other side" (TT 269) reestablishes the same sort of dichotomy that requires a moving beyond.

Peter and Katherine seem to understand themselves in textual terms, if not as part of this text, The Tidewater Tales: Katherine speaks of a beyond as "an ending more rich and strange than everyday realism ordinarily permits." That the beyond of their "present plight" is tied to "everyday realism" is not to suggest simply that they are real, but
rather that they are part of a textuality dominated by the realistic. We will see that Katherine's description of their situation in the text, like Peter's understanding that a writer cannot say it all, that the text is an inevitable falsification, is contradicted by their repeated and insistent division of the fictive from the real.

The Next Thing: The Postscript

"The Ending": I accept its double meaning, the insistence of the concept of the end even under the pressure of the quotation marks which are a questioning of the concept as well as the citing of a title; let us point out that the fact that it is also a title obscures the questioning of the concept. The coming of "The Ending": Foretold in the writer's insistence on closure and completion, "The Ending" is always on the horizon.

Peter takes up the story of Don Quixote in the Cave of Montesinos because, he claims, it is the only story in Don Quixote that is "unrefuted by reality." We have considered Peter's claim in Chapter IV in detail. It will suffice us here to point out that Peter seeks a completion and a closure and that he understands the completion and closure of Don Quixote only in terms of the story's connection to and difference from the "real." Peter writes (or, perhaps, more precisely is writing) a "Possible Three-Part Don Quixote Story," Part Three of which is not yet complete--as yet it is only "Part of Part Three . . ." (TT 520). Even in
"The Ending" when the story teller "Tucks Us All In," trying to tie up all the loose ends of the story, the hypothetical listener "nods off before he can exasperate our narrator by asking So where is that Captain Whatsisname?" (TT 653). We are never told the end of the story about Don Quixote in the cave of Montesinos, about how Don Quixote comes out of the cave into the world of Peter Sagamore and becomes Captn Don (Donald Quicksoat, "Captain Whatsisname"). The end of this story has no place in "The Ending."

"The Ending" is told in response to a general dissatisfaction with the unfinishedness of May's Scheherazade stories, and in particular of "Prisoners of Dramaturgy, or, Scheherazade's Unfinished Story Unfinished." Presumably what would finish the stories would be Scheherazade's being sent back to her place and time and order of reality by the speaking of an enchantment yet to be discovered. Her seemingly random disappearance, and especially the fact that no one sees her disappear, prompts all May's listeners to protest the story's lack of conclusion. And though Peter asks, "When did Scheherazade ever finish a story the same night she began?" suggesting the coming of "The Ending" and of the end of Scheherazade's story, Lee says that "We don't know for sure she's back where she came from" and Carla B Silver that "Maybe she only appeared to disappear" (TT 613). Peter assumes that the story is unfinished because a dramaturgically appropriate enchantment has not been spoken, but Lee and Carla B Silver
add that neither do we know that Scheherazade's situation has changed. We have no way of determining whether she has been sent outside the orbit of this particular place and time and order of reality, whether where she is constitutes an outside-text.

The title "The Ending" might be considered generic because it seems to name a thing that which it is. But all generic titles have the potential for being ironic. "The Ending" can be asking us this question: Should we consider this part of the book "the ending"? Being a title, "The Ending" forces us to put it in quotation marks, and because it is generic, we may consider putting it in double quotation marks to make the irony clear: "'The Ending.'" I don't cite this title as one that names that which it is, but as one that questions that which it is considered to be. We should also consider that "ending" describes the action of the verb and not, strictly speaking, a state of being. We would not be wrong to say Peter Sagamore has been ending throughout The Tidewater Tales, if by that we meant he has been trying to end or trying to bring the story to an end. In other words, and on the other hand, "The Ending" may in fact describe itself by describing, again, the attempt to end.

It is not difficult to see that the attempt is a failed one. In order to describe the end one would have to be outside the text, which is where "The Ending"'s narrator appears to be. "Scheherazade" says to her husband, "I'll
tell you the whole story--starting tonight" (TT 641), as if she could tell it all. Her view of the story is described as "omniscopic" (TT 641), and because it has been nine months since she "rematerialized," her view is given the appearance of an objective temporal distance as well. She appears to be outside and after the story. She makes statements about events that no one within the story would seem to be able to make (about, for instance, Fred’s and Jon’s deaths).

Despite what seems to be, despite the fact that Scheherazade seems to be telling from another place and time and order of reality, "The Ending" can only be told from within. Every reference to the "outside" is made from within the text. Though Scheherazade says she will tell the "whole story," by "starting tonight" she suggests a beginning, which the concept of whole story has already denied, and suggests the ability to bring the story to an end; she will never be able to account for the whole story because it includes the story of the telling of the story, which is always under way. In addition, the fact that it has been nine months since her rematerialization places "The Ending" firmly within the metaphorical construct of the story, contradicting the appearance of a temporal objectivity. Further, though Scheherazade seems to be "speaking for herself," we are reminded that May is speaking for her as she has throughout the telling of the Scheherazade stories: "What say, May? Tell on,
Scheherazade" (TT 644). The voice is that of a "projected narrator" (TT 654), one who if thrown forward is in no way objectified or externalized. The narrator has to be viewed as an extension of what projects it.

This "projected narrator" claims that the only thing left to do is to end the poem in which Katherine set the task of coming to an end. That has been the task all along—to end the poem, to come to an end. All that is left to do is precisely what was left at the setting of the task; we have come no closer to the end in coming to "The Ending." The poem can do no more than point out its own unfinishedness.

We thought we lacked a closing rhyme for cost
To end our poem with: one less bleak than lost,
Remember? But we were in formal fact
Not at the end at all. (TT 654)

And here in the text is no end either: "We'd launched a new stanzaic pair: a Jack / Implying and preceding some new Jill" (TT 654). The implication of a "new Jill" is our reading "The Tidewater Tales: A Novel" (on page 656), which follows the poem, not as an end or as a repetition of the beginning but as a "new" text, "a whole new tale" (TT 655). The end is not the word lost after all; but the end is lost if by that we mean it was never found. The search for a closing rhyme is abandoned as the text moves into prose.

This "new" text cannot be considered an outside-text, nor can it be considered a direct reference to the "real"; "The Tidewater Tales: A Novel" does not refer directly to the book we hold in our hands when we read those words.
"The Tidewater Tales: A Novel" (TT 652) wraps itself back into the text from which it springs; it necessarily refers to the inside of the book—there are three other title pages that include the words The Tidewater Tales: A Novel and many references in dialogue to a book called The Tidewater Tales: A Novel, not to mention the arguably continual talk about "this book." It is marked throughout that those words refer to a book not yet written. "At the writing," The Tidewater Tales will not have been completed; "at the reading," all reference to the book wraps back into the book disclaiming itself as the book’s conclusion. The "wrap-up" inventory that constitutes "The Ending" does not tie up the loose ends, but "tucks" these loose ends into the text.

Without coming to the end of the text, we cannot go beyond it. "The Ending" is neither a completion nor a conclusion of the story, nor does it bring us any closer to the "outside" of the text, to a world that is real or a text that is independent of the text in hand.

What we come to in "The Ending" is always only The Next Thing, a postscript. Peter explains the narrative nature of the "ending" in describing a story of his, called "Apocalypse," that "ends" in mid-sentence: "When, in a story, nothing happens next, that is the thing that happens next: The nothing becomes a thing" (TT 142). The apocalypse, foreshadowed by the story, never comes.39 What

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39 Derrida points out that the apocalyptic tone is signified not by the description of an end but by the declaration that the end is beginning or that the end is
"ends" a story is never simply nothing, which is to say there is never an absolute end in the text.40 "The Ending" is simply a writing that follows, another P.S. It is not outside the text, but it is placed at the limit of text and written as if it were outside.

Bearing the Sign

In response to a question about a notation attempting to escape metaphysics, Derrida illustrates the inevitable reflection of a system in the system’s rejection. Though Saussurean semiology has marked "that the signified is inseparable from the signifier, that the signified and signifier are the two sides of one and the same production, . . . turning against the metaphysical tradition the concept of the sign that he borrowed from it, . . . Saussure could not not confirm this tradition in the extent to which he continued to use the concept of the sign" (Derrida, Positions 18-19).

There are two aspects of The Tidewater Tales’s questioning the possibility of the end, both of which tend to confirm traditional notions about the boundaries of texts soon ("Of an Apocalyptic Tone" 24).

40 That The Next Thing cannot be the end is implied in Peter’s description of one of the narrative dwarves on his back, "the petering out of literary modernism and the not-quite-petering-in of the Best Next Thing"; if we understand The Next Thing as something other, then there will be the sense of its not-quite-petering-in. Barth echoes Peter’s description in "The Literature of Replenishment" (FB 206).
in using the concept of the end: (1) if the text cannot be brought to an end, then any assertion based on the relation between the inside and the outside of a text is rendered absurd; (2) if there is no outside-text, then the real-world/textual-world dichotomy is likewise disposed of a priori.

We can see how these aspects have become attached to each other. If one has moved beyond the text to some outside, where would one be but in the real world? (Saussure argued against the absolute distinction between concept and language, but a more fundamental, more traditional distinction between the real world and the textual world tries to impose itself on the systemization of language according to the limits of the text or the sign).

Our question is this: To what extent are the implications that are inscribed in a system that proposes the validity of the concept of the end (in particular the distinction between the real and the textual) assumed in turning that system against itself?

Throughout The Tidewater Tales, the division between art and life is held to be essential: "But what husband and wife are living, and trying rather desperately just now without success to read ahead in, is not their story. It’s their life" (TT 140). We are warned: "Mess not with the distinction between life and art; things are tough enough already" (TT 150). Including an event in a story because it seems to have happened in real life is said to be "an
apprentice error" (TT 260). We are said to be able to
tolerate more complexity in a novel than we can in life; Lee
Talbott says directly, "but of course, art isn't life" (TT 407). These statements (and the divisions they make) will
seem clear cut until we introduce the questioning of the end.

In describing his "Apocalypse," Peter adds that,
whereas the story goes on with the addition of the next thing,

nothing is no thing, and our story does not at all necessarily go on, for the reason that our lives
are not stories. (TT 142)

This statement may well be indecipherable, but figuring out
how it is indecipherable will tell us something about the
reinstitution of the dichotomy between the real and the
textual. In a story what follows is the next thing, even if
the next thing is "nothing"; in other words, stories go on.
What would seem to oppose this logic would be a statement to
this effect: In life what follows might be nothing; life
does not necessarily go on. But that is not the opposition
offered by The Tidewater Tales. What will not necessarily
go on is our story. The story goes on; our story does not
necessarily go on because "lives are not stories." This
sort of messing with the distinction between art and life,
which is foretold in Peter and Katherine's wanting to "read"
ahead in their "lives" and which is nearly pervasive in
Barth's books (so much so that an illustration would be
merely redundant), is **predicated** by the questioning of the end.

"The Tragic View," according to *The Tidewater Tales*, is the inevitable self-infection of one who would undermine that which is corrupt (*TT* 261). In order to offset the evil done by his brother in the CIA or even to convert him, Frank **joins** the CIA, and, in order to establish his cover, he participates in the wrong he is trying to undo. The tragic view of language would delineate a corresponding corruption and debasing of language or the writer. Though Peter does not write about spies, because he has immersed himself as a listener in stories about spies, his work becomes fiction **not about** spies. The **not-about** becomes what the stories are about so that his work becomes a decision about how not to write spy stories (*TT* 262). In undermining the dichotomy between "subjects" and stories that define subjects, between "things" and their representations, one will participate in the tradition that allows that dichotomization to occur.

When Katherine says, "Tell me their story as if it weren't ours," she marks a connection between stories. **Ours** is elliptical for "our story," not, though it might seem to be, for "our life." But already her poetic injunction has implied the connection and difference between art and life: "Tell me a story of women and men / Like us" (*TT* 21, emphasis mine). It is therefore a double injunction, or rather an injunction that is doubled. Prefaced by a word that marks it as a quotation, the reiteration puts itself
forward as a repetition ("Well: / Tell me their story ...") to say that it is a repetition, though, does not sufficiently take into account their difference: one implies a distinction (though not without equivocation) between art and life, the other a distinction (though not without equivocation) between stories. Though the injunction is not simply repeated, the difference between its iterations is not established; they might be said to constitute two sides of the same injunction.

A reference to women and men would seem to establish the division between the textual and the real—this is to be a story about women and men. But these are not women and men in the world; rather they are women and men "like us." We are given no assurances about the referent of this "us," but even at the limits of the text the pronoun must at least refer to the characters being formed by the narrative voice. Each time we are led to the edge of the text, pushed, in fact, toward the "real," we are wrapped back into it.

Wrapped into what? Into the text which is pushing us toward the "real," both into the text and into the dichotomy between the textual and the real, which compels us to move to an "outside."

**Narrating Living**

It might be said that I have been using various figures (conception, abortion, delivery) merely to talk about language; and I might have provoked this objection by not
saying here and there along the way that I am looking through these figures, using them as a substitute for a more abstract or more "theoretical" view of reading, writing, narrating, etc. This objection and its easy remedy bear the seed of a misconception. They assume a prior division between the concept and the sign that represents the concept and between the sign or the text and the world in which a conception is thought to occur. I do not intend to remake Saussure's arguments about the connection between the signified and the signifier, though they are arguments that could bear review, but rather to say again, even here where I am at risk of laboring a metaphor, that in this particular case the figures are inseparable from a view of how language works and, in particular, how stories are told.

In The Tidewater Tales we can see "things" only textually, that is, as figures, and never outside their textual ramifications. Further, we can read the story, which is about storytelling, only in terms of the figures, so that any use of a "metaphor" will be read as constituting a statement about narration. It is not surprising, then, that Peter's delivery of his and Katherine's story, the one they call The Tidewater Tales: A Novel, is to coincide with Katherine's delivery of her and Peter's children. A coincidence, though, will not bear a methodology of reading. Sabbatical has shown us, and it is reiterated in The Tidewater Tales, that the work is not an adequate substitute for the child. When Fenn offers the story as a substitute,
it is Susan's feeling that something is missing from their story. The figure and the description of the story, the theory of narration, are no more interchangeable in *The Tidewater Tales*. The movements toward delivery are not merely coincidental and are not substitutive.

As soon as we think in traditional terms about the use of a metaphor, about the figure as a substitute for the theory of narration, a double insemination will have already taken place. The figure will have given the story its "life" and the story will have given the figure its, so that the only way they can function is in terms of the other, a contraction without equivalence.

When Peter begins the labor of his writing, we know, with the certainty and according to the rhythm of a contraction, that Katherine has begun hers. We know this not simply because we have anticipated the rigorous organization of the story (the fact is that we have been forewarned about it), but because the delivery organizes itself narratively, according to a narrative view: in terms of a sequence of events and a looking forward. A delivery defines itself as that which is looked forward to; a delivery will follow a labor. But delivery has never occurred, that is, has never taken place within the story; we cannot think of delivery as establishing itself, occupying a place or a time. The future is its only tense; the delivery will be made. This is why we will never read the book that Peter and Katherine say they are writing, the
book called The Tidewater Tales: A Novel. The Tidewater Tales does not put the narrative view in the place of the conclusion (the conclusion has no place), but in place of the possibility of coming to an end. If a narrative looks beyond itself, it looks without ever seeing what is beyond.


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Creed C. Greer, III received his BA in English from the University of Florida in 1982 and his MA in English from the University of Florida in 1985. His master’s thesis, "Boundary and Beyond: Kurt Vonnegut and the Character of Words," explores the author’s relation to the text in terms of schizophrenia, pseudonymity, and the signature.
I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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December 1989
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