

## **I. Introduction**

This research analyzes John Barth's use of metafiction to explore celebration of fragments refuting holistic and objective historical approach. On the one hand, it studies the use of metafictional features in *The Sot-Weed Factor* and on the other it focuses on the affirmation of fragments especially about historiography.

Metafiction is postmodern literary form that came in 1960s and 1970s as a reaction against modernism and realism. Metafiction assimilates all the perspectives of criticism into the fictional process itself. The writers of metafiction may emphasize structural, formal or philosophic quality because for these writers there are no eternal essences, primal archetypes and no coherent system. Political situation of the 1960s enhanced the re-emergence of historical interest. After the tranquilized 1950s the decade underwent a period of violence and crisis changing the earlier spirit of hope and optimism into disillusionment and cynicism. The crisis of established norms, the loss of old certainties made the writers since 1960 response in various ways to the collective experience. This phenomenon led many writers to a heightened awareness of both the fictitiousness of contemporary as well as historical reality and of the artificiality of its literary reconstructions.

John Barth is one prominent writer of metafiction. He uses metafiction to explore the sense of historical fragmentation and demise of representation. Barth takes history as subjective construction of the crude fragments of events. He, in *The Sot-Weed Factor*, celebrates the fragments through the use of metafiction.

### **Writers of Metafiction**

The writers of metafiction are inventors of elaborate, sometimes fantastic plots; experimentalists with form; parodists of genres and style; skeptics of history

and reality; and writers self-conscious of their writing. Barth, Barthelme, Burroughs, Rushdie and Nabokov are some famous practitioners of metafiction.

Vladimir Nabokov provokes the notion that there are no real meanings in the text, it is just construction. In *Through the Looking Glass*, when Alice finds the Red king sleeping and is informed by Twedledum and Twidedee that she is merely a sort of thing in his dream. She is, in fact, worse off since the king is in Charles Luttwidge Dadgson's dream. Alice, protesting her reality, begins to cry, provoking this exchange:

'You won't make yourself a bit realler by crying.' Twidledee remarked: there's nothing to cry about.'

'If I wasn't real,' Alice said-half laughing through her tears, it all seed so ridiculous –'I shouldn't be able to cry.' 'I hope you don't suppose those are real tears? Tweedledum interrupted in a tone of great contempt'. (4)

There is no longer the sense of the coherent, continuous, autonomous and free subject in metafictional textuality. In John Fowle's *A Maggot*, for instance, self conscious contemporary narrator introduces the eighteenth century prophet John Lee as, in his words, an "innocently, self-believing...ignorant mystic". He then adds, however:

To speak so is anachromistic. Like so many of his class at this time, he still lacks what even the least intelligent human today, far stupider even than he, would recognize an unmistakable personal identity set in a world to some degree, however small, manipulable or controllable by that identity. John Lee would not have understood *cogito, ergo sum*; and far less it's even terser modern equivalent, I am. The

contemporary I doesn't need to think, to know it exists. To be sure the intelligencia of John Lee's time had a clear, almost but quite modern, sense of self. (385)

Barthelme's work is verbally witty and formally elegant. Through odd juxtapositions and unpredictable swerves Barthelme recovers the irrational from rationalized discourse, reopening a space for invention and possibility. Barthelme demonstrated the absurdity of the official version, its lifelessness, its low-grade concrete block quality, getting out of this bind by going through it, using the most effective hegemonizing instrument of the official version, its language, against itself and evolving a new estranging poetry out of the shards of philosophic, sociological and bureaucratic discourse. "The Balloon" in *Unspeakeable Practices, Unnatural Acts*, Which covers forty-five north-south blocks of (apparently) New York City, is a paradigm of the Barthelme art object.

There were reactions, some people found the balloon 'interesting'...

There was a certain amount of initial argumentation about the meaning of the balloon; this subsided, because we have learned not to insist on meanings... It was agreed that since the meaning of the balloon could never be known absolutely, extended discussion was pointless. (286)

Rushdie directly addresses the debates about representation in both the novel and history. His paradoxically anti-totalizing totalized image for his historiographic metafictional process is the 'chutnification' of history (Shame 459). The cliché with which Saleem is clearly playing is that to understand him and his nation, we "have to swallow a world' and swallow too his literally preposterous story... however, he acknowledges inevitable distortions: raw materials are transformed, given shape and

form – that is to say, meaning" (461). This is as true of history-writing as it is of novel-writing. As Saleem himself acknowledges:

Sometimes in the pickle's version of history, Saleem appears to have known too little, at other times, too much ... yes, I should revise and revise, improve and improve, but there is neither the time nor the energy. I am obliged to offer no more than this stubborn sentence. It happened that way because that's how it happened. (560-1)

Rushdie's novel in fact, works to foreground the totalizing impulse of history writing as Saleem provoked the notion of fictionalized representation. His works often raise the issue of self-consciously fictive and resolutely historical representation. In the narrativisation of the past the events are consciously composed into a narrative whose constructed order is imposed upon them, often overtly by the narrating figure.

Berger also manipulates the official records through metafictional writings. He views elisions are likely to occur in the drive to totalize and give unified meanings to historiography which would condition the 'truth to fact' of any representation of the past. The narrator, in *G*, intervenes in the middle of description of a fictive character caught up in a real historical event:

I cannot continue this account of the eleven-year-old body in Milan on 6 May 1898. From this point on everything I write will either converge upon a final full stop or else disperse so widely that it will become incoherent... To stop here, despite all that I leave unsaid, is to admit more of the truth than will be possible if I bring the account to a conclusion. The writer's desire to finish is fatal to the truth. The end unifies. Unity must be established in another way. (77)

From the above extract it is clear that closure is a forceful manipulation which represses the brute data of historical events and their political consequences. The reference of fictive narrative of authorial 'End' and 'Unity' foregrounds the postmodern suspicion of closure of both its arbitrariness and its foreclosing interpretive power. Hence, the writing of history is seen as an ultimately futile attempt to form experience into meaning.

Thus, different writers use metafiction for different purposes against modernism and realism. Barth, uses metafiction to affirm multiple chaotic fragments of the past events.

### **Critics on Barth**

John Barth is one of the most important literary figures in 20<sup>th</sup> century American Literature. He belongs to a new school of fabulators whose inventiveness, whose unexpected fantasies and whose renewed love for old tales have dominated the fictional landscape of the past decade of America. But beyond mere inventiveness and wit, ostentatious glibness and stylistic idiosyncracies, he has a keen awareness of topicality and offers prototypical formulations of present day pathology in his novels. Thus, Barth's early fictions, *The Floating Opera* and *The End of the Road*, take off on a statement of contemporary nihilism and absurdity. It puts variations of existentialists thought concerning the possibility and impossibility of stringent self-definition to a test. His later works increasingly concentrate on the function of the imagination in the self defining process. It is in these works Barth draws upon, parodies, imitates and echoes the literature of the past. He is in fact largely preoccupied with the issue of fictiveness and the way that language continues to embody and embolden the fictions by which we live. In this context, Kathrun says:

Barth is nonetheless deeply aware of philosophical issues and clearly aspires to ask questions about the relationship between fiction and authenticity, unwitting imitation and deliberate emulation. That he poses these questions with no prospect of arriving at an orderly exposition of the crucial issues, let alone an answer, attests only to the fact that he is a novelist, not a philosopher. That he is shamelessly prolix and self-contradictory attests to his appetite for the performative and exasperating. (713)

Barth's works are often overwhelmed with his life events and history of his homeland. Showing the coincident relevance of his anti sex twin birth with his textual reference, George Perking comments:

Barth, an opposite sex twin whose novels also tend to come in pairs, almost always contradicts in the second novel of the pair whatever philosophical position he seems to have arrived at in the first. *The Floating Opera* (1956) apparently makes a case for ethical subjectivism, as Todd Andrews concludes that in the absence of absolutes, relative values are in no way inferior. *The End of the Road* (1958), on the otherhand, Barth first attributes Todd's conclusion to Joe Morgan and then has Jake Horner undo that position. Similarly, pair of "gigantic", purposely inflated, novels, apparently reject the possibility of attaining the transcendental unity represented by Eben's quest for ideal beauty and Henry's desire for coalescence. But in *Giles Goat-Boy* (1966), George does transcend categories, perceiving at once universal unity. (66)

As a postmodernist, Barth is a forerunner of self reflexive text. He exploits self reflexivity to show the text's explicit concern with its own process of narration, with writing, with composition so that it confides the reader that the text is the only reality not a mirror image but an image of itself. In this concern, John G. Parks expresses his ideas in the following manner:

Few writers have gone as far as John Barth has in self-reflexivity- a highly self conscious foregrounding of fiction-making as it is going on. In his 1967 essay "The Literature of Exhaustion" Barth ponders whether after James Joyce, Contemporary writers can really do anything new. The traditional modes of fiction are tired, but they do present opportunities to innovate authors in the form of parody, irony and self conscious reflexiveness, a fiction about fiction. Essentially anti-realist Barth has produced a large body of fiction on the enterprise of making fiction itself, showing the influence of the writers Jorge Luis, Borges and Vladimir Navokov. (106)

Barth does better with writing about writing and with mythologizing mythology. In the sixties he becomes an important leader in the post realist movement. He tries to create new forms and possibilities. His one short fiction, "Autobiography: A Self- Recorded Fiction" is designed to be played before an audience as a tape recording with Barth himself standing silently beside it. Viewing Barth's spirit of experiments, Earl Rovit places him in the forefront of his era.

His most recent short story collection, *On With the Story* (1997), treats isolation and loss in scenes that are quickly drawn. The real interests of these stories are theories of time, the possibilities and limitations of fiction, and the problems of the reader's expectations. Many of the

stories address the narrative conventions of beginning, middle and end - and the delays within them... These stories, which weave Barth's wit into an interplay between realist fictional conventions and postmodern alternatives to these, are an example of the impressive range and ambition in Barth's work. There is little doubt that his literary intelligence and mastery of language place him in the forefront of his generation of writers. (60)

From Rovit's view, we can trace that Barth combines the kind of experimentation associated with post modernist writing with the mastery of the skills. He embraces the world of the postmodern in which fiction and reality, and fictitious characters and the authors that produce them become indistinguishable and in which suspension of disbelief becomes almost impossible. Therefore he has consistently been at the forefront of literary experimentation, consequently producing works occasionally uneven and occasionally too self-consciously witty breaking away the realistic and modern convention.

Thus, different critics view Barth from multiple perspectives. Highly susceptible to the sport of metaphysical games and passionately attracted to the conundrums of self-consciousness, John Barth has moved steadily away from the objective and realistic toward myth and unashamed fable. However, this study is to explore the spirit of celebration of fragments in *The Sot-Weed Factor*.



## II. Metafictional Textuality

Since metafiction is postmodern form of literary writing, this chapter tries to trace the interrelationship between postmodernism and metafiction.

### Postmodernism and Metafiction

Postmodernism refers to any of wide ranging set of development in critical theory, philosophy, architecture, art, literature, history and culture which are generally characterized as either emerging from, in reaction to, or superseding modernism.

M.H. Abrams, in his *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, defines the term postmodernism with its historical and political relevance in the following manner:

The term postmodernism is often applied to the literature and art after World War II when the effects on Western morale of the first World War were greatly exacerbated by the experience of Nazi totalitarianism and mass extermination, the threat of total destruction by the atomic bomb, the progressive devastation of the natural environment, and the ominous fact of over population. (168)

The term postmodernism derives from postmodernity, which Lyotard understood to represent the culmination of the process of modernity towards and accelerating pace of cultural change, to a point where constant change has in fact become the status quo, leaving the notion of progress obsolete. There is a great indeterminacy about the boundaries between modernism and postmodernism. We can find many critics who see postmodernism just as continuation of modernism rather than a break from modernism. Andreas Huyssen, for example, points out this indeterminacy when he writes:

Amorphous and politically volatile nature of postmodernism makes the phenomenon itself remarkably elusive, and the definition of its

boundaries exceedingly difficult, if not per se impossible. Furthermore, one critic's postmodernism is another critic's modernism (or variant thereof), while certain vigorously new forms of contemporary culture (such as the emergence into a broader public's view of distinct minority cultures and of a wide variety of feminist work in literature and the arts) have so far rarely been discussed as postmodern. (58-9)

Indeed, as a prominent postmodernist critic Ihab Hassan points out this indeterminacy can draw in other terms such as avant-garde. He writes:

Like other categorical terms – say post structuralism, or modernism, or romanticism for that matter – postmodernism suffers from a certain semantic instability. That is, no clear consensus about its meaning exists among scholars... Thus some critics mean by postmodernism what others call avant-gardism or even neo-avant-gardism, while still others would call the same phenomenon simply modernism. (121)

Thus, some critics assert postmodernism in a relation of continuity of modernism on the basis of its retention of modernism's initial oppositional impulses, both ideological and aesthetic, and its equally strong rejection of its founding notion of formalist autonomy. But there are many critics who see postmodernism in a model of rupture rather than continuity. Linda Hutcheon points out in her book *The politics of Postmodernism* a clear break in that "Postmodernism has called into question the messianic faith of modernism, the faith that technical innovation and purity of form can assure social order; even if that faith disregards the social and aesthetic values of those who must inhabit those modernist buildings" (11-2). Postmodernism is viewed as a departure from modernism whose elitism it avoids, breaking away the standardized forms also. M.H. Abrams writes:

Postmodernism involves ...attempts to break away from modernist forms which had, inheritably, become in their turn conventional, as well as to overthrow the elitism of modernist "high art" by recourse to the models of "mass culture" in film, television, newspaper cartoons, and popular music. (168)

Hence, those committed to a model of rupture rather than continuity between the modernist and the postmodernist come with the arguments based on any number of fundamental differences in socio-economic organization; in the aesthetic and moral position of the arts; in the concept of knowledge and its relation to power; in philosophical orientation; in the notion of where meaning inheres in art; in the relation of message to addressee/ addresser. M.H. Abrams further posits the semantic correlevance of postmodernism with another movement of linguistic theory:

Postmodernism in literature and the arts has parallels with the movement known as post structuralism in linguistic and literary theory; post structuralists undertake to subvert the foundations of language in order to show that its seeming meaningfulness dissipates, for a rigorous inquirer, into a play of conflicting indeterminacies, or else to show that all forms of cultural discourse are manifestations of the ideology, or of the relation and constructions of power, in contemporary society. (169)

In architecture, art, music and literature, postmodernism is a name for many stylistic reactions to, and developments from, modernism. Postmodern style is often characterized by eclecticism, digression, collage, pastiche and irony. Some artistic movements commonly called postmodern are pop art, architectural deconstructive and magical realism in literature. Postmodern theorists see postmodern art as a conflation

or reversal of well-established modernist systems, such as the roles of artist versus audience, seriousness versus play or high culture versus kitsch. Postmodern literature argues for expansion, the return of reference and the role of reference itself in literature. While drawing on the experimental tendencies of authors such as Earnest Hemingway and William Faulkner in English, and Borges in Spanish, who were taken as influences by American postmodern authors such as Thomas Pinchon, Don DeLillo, John Barth, William Gaddis, David Foster Wallace and Paul Auster, the advocates of postmodern literature argue that the present is fundamentally different from the modern period; therefore requires a new literary sensibility. Most of postmodernist writing questions the distinction between fiction and non-fiction, history and mythology or other kinds of writing. In this context, Terry Eagleton says:

There is perhaps a degree of consensus that the typical postmodernist artifact is playful, self-ironizing, and even schizoid; and that it reacts to the austere autonomy of high modernism by impudently embracing the language of commerce and the commodity. Its stance toward cultural tradition is one of irreverent pastiche, and its contrived depthlessness undermines all metaphysical solemnities, sometimes by a brutal aesthetics of squalor and shock. (113)

John Mepham in "*Narratives of Postmodernism*" says there are four kinds of postmodernist fiction. They are *historical*: a development from or away from modernism; *philosophical*: arises from a site cleared by poststructuralist, by the realization that 'meaning is undecidable' and that 'reality is constructed in and through language; *ideological* (or *pedagogic*): postmodernist fiction is defined in terms of its intended effects, which are that it should problematize reality' or lays bare 'the process of world-construction'; and finally *textual*: it uses strategies that foreground the

textuality of fiction, force constant reinterpretation by 'reframing', and generate 'a plurality of words'.

Metafiction appears to be a postmodern form of literary textuality. Most definitions of "metafiction" vary only slightly. In coining the term, William Gas explains, "There are metatheorems in mathematics and logic, ethics has its linguistic over soul, everywhere lingos to converse about lingos are being contrived, and the case is no different in the novel" (13). In metafiction, the forms of fiction serve as the material upon which further forms can be imposed. In Scholes's definition it is the writer's awareness of critical methods that provides the added perspective that joins the 'meta' to the 'fiction'. Metafiction assimilates all the perspectives of criticism into the fictional process itself. It may emphasize structural, formal, or philosophic qualities, but most writers of metafiction are aware of all these possibilities and are likely to have experimented with all of them. Tracing the close boundary between metafiction and metanarrative Jeremy Hawthorn, in *A Glossary of Literary Theory*, writes:

Metafiction is, literally, fiction about fiction. To a certain content the term overlaps with metanarrative because any work of fiction which contains a metanarrative will contain a metafictional element. It is generally used to indicate fiction which includes any self-referential element (not necessarily resulting from a metanarrative: thematic patternings can also contribute to the formation of a metafictional effect in a work.)." (208)

Although implicit in many other types of fictional works, self-reflexivity often becomes the dominant subject of metafiction. Critics of post-modern metafiction claim that it marks the death or exhaustion of the novel as a genre, while advocates

argue that it signals the novels rebirth. Devotees claim that other genres have undergone the same critical self-reflexivity and that the definition of the novel itself notoriously defies definition. Waugh comments that "contemporary metafictional writing is both a response and a contribution to an even more thorough going sense that reality or history are provisional: no longer a world of external verities but a series of constructions, artifices, impermanent structures" (7). Explicit use of metafictional Technique stems from modernist questioning of consciousness and 'reality'. Several common epithets used to describe contemporary metafiction are self-conscious, introspective, introverted, narcissistic or auto-representational. In their introduction to an extract from Linda Hutcheon's *Narcissistic Narrative: the Metafictional Paradox*, Onega and Landa suggest that "Hutcheon's narcissistic narrative is more or less equivalent to such terms as Robert Schlegel's 'fabulation', William H. Gass's 'Metafiction', Raymond Federman's 'Surfiction' and Ronald Binn's 'anti-novel', all of which were coined to account for the wide spread tendency to introversion and self-referentiality of much postmodernist fiction" (203).

Metafiction typically involves a narrative in which levels of narrative reality (and the reader's perception of them) are confused or in which traditional realist conventions governing the separation of mimetic and diegetic elements are flouted and thwarted. The term is generally used with reference to relatively recent postmodern writing, but it can have wider applications to far older work in which the elements of self-observation and self-commentary can be found. Some critics trace reflexivity as far back as Miguel Cervantes' fifteenth century novel, *Don Quixote*. The 'play within play' in *Hamlet* (c. 1600) for example, inevitably introduces a metafictional element into the work, for even though there is no overt introduction of a metacommentary the audience is

encourage by Hamlet's comments on the players' performance to think about the process of dramatic illusion. Jane Austen's mention of writing the novel by her narrator in *Northanger Abbey* is also often cited as an instance in which classic work display metafictional tendency. Waugh goes so far as to claim that "by studying metafiction, one is, in effect, studying that which gives the novel its identity" (5).

Disclaiming the validity of the single objective history in metafictional writing, Linda Hutcheon says that historiographic metafiction attempts to demarginalize the literary through confrontation with the historical, and it does so both thematically and formally. "To accomplish this representation of past, historiographic metafiction plays upon the truth and lies of the historical record. Certain known historical details are deliberately falsified in order to foreground the possible mnemonic failures of recorded history and the constant potential for both deliberate and inadvertent error" (294).

Metafiction is thus an elastic term which covers a wide range of fictions. There are those novels at one end of the spectrum which take fictionality as a theme to be explored whose formal self consciousness is limited. At the center of this spectrum are those texts that manifest the symptoms of formal and ontological insecurity but allow their deconstructions to be finally recontextualized or naturalized and given a total interpretation. Finally, at the furthest extreme, in rejecting realism more thoroughly, it posits the world as a fabrication of competing semiotic systems which never correspond to material conditions.

### **Metafiction and Its features**

Metafiction lays bare conventional devices such as the omniscient narrator, plot, character etc., breaking the contract between author and reader. It makes use of tension between the reality-making language of fiction, and a laying bare of that

reality-making language two competing discourses or voice in both creative and critical form. Through self-conscious exploration of authorship as artifice and mystification, it refuses to distinguish between material reality and textual reality.

Frederic Jameson vies that some characteristics which both modern literature and modern philosophy have in common are also descriptive of metafiction. They share a renunciation of content, a tendency toward formalism, a lack of supposition about human nature and a preference of method to metaphysics. Such writing necessitates a new, non interpretive criticism. Jameson uses the late sonnets of Mallarme as examples of works that contain no tangible substances which can be substituted for the work itself: "All the apparent symbols dissolve back into sheer process, which lasts only as long as the reading lasts" (108). Jameson feels that Mallarme takes the critical reluctance to interpret and channels it back into his work as a poetic aesthetic. The non interpretive criticism Jameson calls "meta commentary" is geared to deal with metapoetry and metafiction.

What is wanted is a kind of mental procedure which suddenly shifts gears, which throws everything in an inextricable tangle one floor higher, and turns the very problem itself... into its own solution... by widening its frame in such a way that it now takes in its own mental processes as well as the object of those process. In the earlier, naïve state, we struggle with the object in question: in this heightened and self-conscious one, we observe our own strangles and patiently set about characterizing about them. (59)

The shifting of gears, the widening of frames, the expanding of consciousness, this is what metafiction does to reader and writer alike: this is where its values lie. It paints a landscape for the reader and encourages him to include himself in the painting and



stand back to view himself. It affirms Beckett's notion that at the core of the individual is only the self perceiving the self. Such self-conscious moments can be cause for both despair and exhilaration.

Metafiction's principal tool for the expanding of vistas is irony. Irony permits a speaker to separate a phenomenon from its essence – that is, to tell an untruth without betraying his subjective authenticity. An individual can profitably put on many guises as long as he avoids living completely hypothetically and subjectively. There is little to worry about retaining subjective authenticity and much hypothetical and subjunctive living. An obvious example of this is the Barthelme's story, "Kierkegaard Unfair to Schlegel" in *City Life*. The narrator lives in a rented house stuffed full of play equipment. This detail is significant because poker chips, board games, trampolines, and putting greens are items which successfully block the kind of hyper-consciousness metafiction strives for. The narrator says:

Now, suppose I had been of an ironical turn of mind and wanted to make a joke about all this, some sort of joke that would convey that I had noticed the striking degree of boredom implied by the presence of all this impedimenta ....I might have said, for instance, that the remedy is worse than the disease or quoted Nietzsche to the effect that the thought of suicide is a great consolation and had helped him through many a bad night. Either of these perfectly good jokes would do to annihilate the situation of being uncomfortable in this house. The shuffleboard sticks, the barbells, balls of all kinds- my joke has, in effect, thrown them out of the world. An amazing magical power!

This is an ironic discussion of irony, a parody of clumsy irony. Later, the more the narrator discusses Kierkegaard's unfairness to Schlegel, the more overstated his comments become, usually a hint that unsophisticated irony is at work.

The whole thing is nothing else but a damned shame and crime!

Because that is not what I think at all. We have to do here with my own irony. Because of course Kierkegaard was 'fair' to Schlegel. In making a statement to the contrary I am attempting to... I might have several purposes- simply being provocative, for example. But mostly I am trying to annihilate Kierkegaard in order to deal with his disapproval.

A: of Schlegel?

A: Of me.

It seems certain that Kierkegaard would have disapproved of the narrator and his creator, Donald Barthelme, because both are destructive. The narrator says: "What Kierkegaard worries about a lot is that irony has nothing to put in the place of what it has destroyed" (93). Kierkegaard hoped that irony could effect a reconciliation with the 'real' world rather than a victory over it, a reconciliation that is somehow connected with the God for whom existence is a system. Conversely, Barthelme and many other writers of metafiction are free floaters, widening their ironic weapon arbitrarily against whatever comes to their attention, reveling in their victories. The speaker in "Kierkegaard Unfair" is indeed the unreliable narrator but Barthelme does not use him to convey any subjective authenticity.

A quotation from Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* helps to point out the difference between metafiction's use of irony as a means to distance oneself from oneself and the traditional concept of such self-distancing: "Only as the genius in the act of creation

merges with the primal architect of the cosmos can he truly know something of the eternal essence of art. For in that condition he resembles the uncanny fairy-tale image which is able to see itself by turning its eyes. He is at once subject and object, poet, actor and audience" (68). For the writer of metafiction there are no eternal essences, primal architects, no coherent systems even at the highest level of existence. Despite this stance, metafiction abounds with archetypes, stereotypes, Freudian symbols, and so forth. Its practitioners realize, as some archetypal critics do not, that such material is good only for humor and irony. Once we become conscious of the unconscious, once we are aware of myths as myths, this material can no longer be used in an innocent, straightforward manner.

Metafiction encourages the individual to undergo self-consciousness by cutting himself off from the popular culture which surrounds him, from the folk tales and motifs which have been handed down through the centuries, from the myths and archetypes which supposedly reside in the collective unconscious. The crippling effects of popular culture are demonstrated in many of Donald Barthelme's stories, but particularly well in "Brain Damage". "Brain Damage" presents a landscape littered with Chock Full O'nuts restaurants, Chevrolets, candy bars, hamburgers, Kodak Instamatics, and Bonnie and Clyde. The narrator and a girl walk down the street singing "Me and My Winstons" to protect themselves from some nameless terrible thing, which is no doubt the fearful possibility of self-reflection. The story's ending underscores the epidemic proportions of the numbing disease: "And there is brain damage in Arizona, and brain damage in Maine, and little towns in Idaho are in the grip of it, and my blue heaven is black with it, brain damage covering everything like an unbreakable lease-skiing along on the soft surface of brain damage, never to sink, because we don't understand the danger" (146).

One of the basic characteristics of metafiction is playfulness. Humor has always followed closely on the heels of irony and satire. However, the humor of the contemporary satirist in question is softer than the bitter sort employed by Swift. They are not outraged at the breach of some common order or ideal. Scholes, in his *The Fabulators*, speaks of "the modern fabulator's tendency to be more playful and artful in construction than his predecessors...Fabulative satire is less certain ethically but more certain esthetically than traditional satire" (41). 'Fabuletor' is Scholes's term for a writer of reflexive fiction. Metafiction transforms the material of traditional satire and protest into comedy. Obviously, writers of metafiction can have no faith in satire as a reforming instrument. They tell their reader how to take life (as a joke) rather than tell them what to do about it.

The playful mood of this writing sets it apart from existentialist fiction. Scholes describes it as the difference between seeing the universe as laughably ridiculous and seeing it as dismally absurd. He cites Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus* in which the author offers "scorn" as the proper response to the human condition. The response of the metafictionist is laughter.

One best example of the preoccupation with humor and with form to the exclusion of content is clearly manifested in Vonnegut's *The Sirens of Titan*. At the end of the novel the reader learns that all of human history has been manipulated by extraterrestrial beings for the purpose of speeding a rocket ship which is on its way to the outer realm of the universe to deliver the following ridiculously inconsequential message: "Greetings!" Vonnegut carefully builds up his readers' expectations so that the effect of this deflation will be all the stronger. The process is very much like the careful construction of a joke in which the events and characters are manipulated only to lead up to and enhance the punch line. In addition to Vonnegut's, many of the

works of Borges, Nabokov, Barth and Barthelme are extended shaggy dog stories and outlandish gags—all carefully crafted jokes and all metaphors for life.

Thus, using parody, irony, digression and playfulness as tools metafictional textuality moves in the direction to demystify the illusionary aspect of the representation. Linda Hutcheon in *The Politics of Postmodernism* says: "Postmodern historiographic metafiction simply does ... asking us to question how we represent—how we construct our view of reality and of our selves" (40). Although characteristics of metafiction vary as widely as the spectrum of technique used within them, a pattern of several common traits can be traced. These techniques often appear in combination, but also can appear singularly. Metafiction often employs intertextual references and allusions by examining fictional systems, incorporating aspects both theory and criticism, creating biographies of imaginary writers and even by presenting and discussing fictional work of an imaginary character. Authors of metafiction often violate narrative levels by intruding to comment on writing, by involving his or herself with fictional characters, by directly addressing the reader and by openly questioning how narrative assumptions and conventions transform and filter reality trying to ultimately prove that no singular truths or meanings exist. Lastly, it is also better to note that metafiction also uses unconventional and experimental techniques by rejecting conventional plot, refusing to attempt to become real life, subverting conventions to transform reality into a highly suspect concept, flaunting and exaggerating foundations of their instability and even by displaying reflexivity.

### **Metafiction and Celebration of Fragments**

Metafiction is a parodic, playful, excessive or deceptively naïve style of postmodern writing with implied spirit of celebration of the power of the creative imagination together with uncertainty about the validity of its representation. The

forms of 19<sup>th</sup> century realist fiction emerged from a firm belief in a commonly experienced objectively existing world of history and modernist fiction of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century responded to the initial loss of belief in such a world by representing reality through limited and selective perspectives. But postmodern metafiction responds to a more uncertain, insecure and self-questioning world in which history and reality are always provisional: "There are no more metanarratives; this is no longer a world of absolute truths but a series of constructions, artifices, impermanent structures. The materialist, positivist and empiricist worldview on which realistic fiction is premised no longer exists" (Waugh 7).

Modernism announces itself as a break with the past similar to the assault on traditional values associated with romanticism. One of the qualities which distinguishes modernist writing from realist writing is a generally more pessimistic, even tragic view of the world. The work of T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, D.H. Lawrence, Franz Kafka, Knut Hamsun are typically characterized by a pessimistic view of the modern world. The world in modernist writing is seen as fragmented and decayed, in which communication between human beings is difficult or impossible, and in which commercial and cheapening forces present an inseparable barrier to human or cultural betterment. In general, modernists are hostile towards, or at least suspicious of, developments in contemporary science and technology. This suspicion of science and technology is one distinguishing quality of modernism which is directly attributable to revulsion from the use of technology to slaughter millions in the first world war and it is also associated with a disgust at commercialism.

Both a new empirical discovery and a new philosophical belief lie behind the modernist pessimism. The empirical discovery is that full communication between human beings is difficult in the modern age and the philosophical belief is that

although the world may be single and knowable it is knowable only in small pieces at once. David Harvey has argued that "modernism took on multiple perspectivism and relativism as its epistemology for revealing what is still taken to be the true nature of a unified though complex, underlying reality" (30). For the modernists, human beings are doomed to exist in a state of social and even existential fragmentation while yearning to escape from this situation. Here, the influence of Freud is important because Freud turned the attention of many writers inward, towards subjective experience rather than the objective world. On the other hand this led to the development of refinement of important new techniques: Joyce's and Woolf's development of internal monologue and stream of consciousness, Eliot's refinement with a pessimistic belief in the unbridgeability of the gap between subjective experience and an objective world. It is like the belief that "It is impossible to say what I mean!" alienation becomes close to a cliché in modernist literature, and it is typically associated with urban landscapes. We can see T.S. Eliot's *the Waste Land* or James Joyce's *Ulysses* as the best representation of modernist sentiments.

Postmodernism is characterized by a welcoming and celebrative attitude towards the modern world. Postmodern art does not dispute that this world is one of increasing fragmentation, of the dominance of commercial pressure, in which human beings are powerless in the face of a blind technology. But whereas the major modernist reacted with horror or despair to their perception of these facts, postmodernism reacts in a far more accepting manner. Instead of trying to escape from uncertainty, fragments it affirms and attempts to celebrate every fragment. The world has changed since the early years of the twentieth century. In the developed countries the advances of the communications and electronic industries have revolutionized human society. Instead of reacting to these changes, the postmodernist

counsels celebration of the present. It is like the celebration of the loss of artistic aura that follows what Benjamin calls 'mechanical reproduction'. Thus the paintings of an Andy Warhol or a Roy Lichtenstein force us to look more carefully and less dismissively at aspects of the commercial culture of our age.

Metafiction includes the rejection of representation in favour of self-reference which is especially of a playful and non-serious, non-constructive sort; the willing, even relieved, rejection of artistic aura and of the sense of the work of art as organic whole. The self-reference in the postmodern text is the substitution of confirmation and teasing of the reader for collaboration for him or her and it is also the rejection of meaning itself as a hopeless delusion, a general belief that it is not worth trying to understand the world or to believe that there is such a thing as 'the world' to be understood. Postmodernism takes the subjective idealism of modernism to the point of solipsism but rejects the tragic and pessimistic elements in modernism. The fictions of Franz Kafka, Knut Hamsun and Laurence Sterne are some examples of this trend.

Linda Hutcheon, regarding fragmentary aspects of postmodernism, says:

Like much contemporary literary theory, the postmodernist novel puts into question that entire series of interconnected concepts that have come to be associated with what we can conveniently label as liberal humanism: autonomy, transcendence, certainty, authority, unity, totalization, system, universalization, centre, continuity, teleology, closure hierarchy, homogeneity, uniqueness, origin. (57)

The historiographic metafiction problematizes the question of objective fact of historical knowledge. Through overplotting to show mysteries in history or its multiple interpretations, metafictional writing explores that history is just fiction or



construction. In this context, Linda Hutcheon, in *The Politics of Postmodernism*, says: "In historiographic metafiction the very process of turning events into facts through the interpretation of archival evidence is shown to be a process of turning the traces of past into historical representation" (82). Some famous authors of historiographic metafiction are Salman Rushdie, John Fowles, B.S. Johnson, Raymond Federman and John Barth.

### III. Textual Analysis

#### Synopsis

*The Sot-Weed Factor* is extremely long, wholly outrageous and cleverly executed novel. The novel is set in the late 1600s England and Maryland province. The principal character is Ebenezer Cooke. He is the son of Andrew Cooke, a shrewd man, a planter and trader. In the boy's formative years, Andrew Cooke has Burlingame in his employ as a tutor to Ebenezer and his twin sister Anna. The recipient of an unusually comprehensive education from his gifted tutor, Eben can't settle on any occupation. The principal cause of his indecisiveness is his inability to make up his mind. No one thing seems to appeal to him more than any other; all things are equal in his eyes. Being an awkward fellow, he fails not only his father's utilitarian goals but also the goals of manhood in lack of sexual experience. He pursues scholarship but cannot achieve it; he tries business but is burdened by impracticality. When he is sent by his father to London and apprenticed to a merchant in order to learn the plantation trade he wastes his time and remains a mere clerk on the bottom level of the countinghouse caste.

Because of his university background and the influence of his former tutor he drifts into the coffeehouse society and becomes the hanger on of a pseudoartistic circle of toss-pot poets and low-wits. Then he is offered an opportunity to sully his virginity. The offer provides him with impetus into a vocation. On a wager, Ebenezer is faced with the prospect of having sexual experience thrust upon him but he fails to meet the test of his manhood, because he falls suddenly and completely in love with the bold young trollop, Joan Toast. After her departure, he composes a hymn to chastity and discovers his true vocation - poetry. Awed by his discovery he dedicates himself to purity and art. Being unpaid, McEvoy, the pimp, posts a condemning letter as retribution to Ebenezer's father. This letter hastens Ebenezer's

departure for Maryland. When Andrew Cooke is informed of Ebenezer's unproductive London life, he orders him to cross the ocean to the family tobacco estate at Cooke's Point, Malden, on the Choptank River, for the purpose of overseeing the family tobacco plantation. Mistress Toast, being impressed much, falls in love with Ebenezer's purity and vows to follow him. Unaware of this fact, Ebenezer embarks for Maryland after obtaining a commission from Charles Calvert, Third Lord Baltimore (actually Henry Burlingame in one of his disguises) on the condition to "compose and contract an Epical poem, setting forth the Graciousness of Maryland Inhabitants, Their Good Breeding and Excellent Dwelling-places" (393).

The novel moves forward with two great missions of both main characters Ebenezer Cooke and Henry Burlingame III. The mission of former one is to take full charge of the family tobacco plantation while the latter one's is the search of identity. The commission that Ebenezer has got from Lord Baltimore promptly involves the young man in political intrigues and he finds life in constant danger. On his mission, Ebenezer Cooke experiences capture by pirates and Indians, the loss of his father's estate to roguish imposters, love for a former estate prostitute, stealthy efforts to rob him of his virginity which he is almost determined to protect, and an extraordinary gallery of treacherous characters who continually switch identities. Burlingame intricately involves in the plotting and constantly helps and saves Ebenezer. Burlingame's search for the identity of Burlingame I and Burlingame II leads to the discovery of the amazing 'secret diary' of Captain John Smith. This outrageously comic secret journal details the true story of captain Smith and Pocahontas. Thus he establishes a clear link with his certain identity with the world when he finds out and accepts that he is the son of the Tayak Chicamec of the Ahatchwhoops Indians and the brother of Charley Mattasin and Cohunkowprets. At last he embarks for

Bloodsworth Island to join the savage Indians forever. Ebenezer on his own course composes *The Sot-Weed Factor*, a satire filled with bitter misanthrope. He marries to Joan Toast who has become opium-addicted and syphilitic. Finally, Ebenezer restores the tobacco estate at Cooke's point. After John Toast's death on childbirth and Burlingame's disappearance for good among the Indians, the twins together bring up Andrew III, Anna's child, at Cooke's point.

*The Sot- Weed Factor* with its 756 pages in the 1967 hardcover edition (trimmed from 806 in the 1960 edition) bulges with incidents and characters. It is a rambling, gargantuan affair studded with absurd coincidences, with London tavern and bookseller scenes, with thoughtful exchanges embedded in excremental humor that throw into an ironic shade. The book is a sprawl with comic servants and Oxford dons, with poets and pirates and prostitutes, with Maryland tobacco growers and renegade Indians, with slaves and opium peddlers. Such furiousness of invention swirls out of the intrigues of Maryland history that is already complicated enough in the *Archives of Maryland*. Here, Barth has further muddied for thematic purpose: the labyrinthine obscurity and ultimately the complete penetrability of seventeenth century plot and counter plot conveys the difficulty of knowing the moral status of anything or anyone in the great world. The many rhetorical changes of pace reinforce Ebenezer's and the reader's epistemological quandary. It is because the novel jumps from one set of piece to another such as from fluent passages of hudibrastic poetry to the Jacobean prose of John Smith's *Secret Historie*.

### ***The Sot-Weed Factor* as Metafiction.**

This chapter attempts to analyze how Barth constructs, in *The Sot-Weed Factor*, a metafictional textual game and express the fictionality of reality and history alike. It shall also demonstrate how Barth recycles genres like epic and private

journal of sea journey, re-creates the historical figures like Lord Baltimore, Ebenezer Cooke and John Coode of the colonial Maryland, and finally refutes the creditability and centrality of history writing.

Barth uses different Metafictional components in *The Sot-Weed Factor*. He denounces eternal essences and draws myths and ritual to elaborate the fictional world of the novel. In an interview, Barth stated:

Somebody told me I must have had in mind Lord Raglan's twenty-five prerequisites for ritual heroes when I created the character of Ebenezer Cooke in *The Sot-Weed Factor*. I had not read Raglan so I bought *The Hero*, and Ebenezer scored on twenty three of twenty-five, which is higher than anybody else except Oedipus... Well, subsequently I got excited over Raglan and Joseph Campbell, who may be a crank for all I know or care, and I really have not been able to get that business off my mind –the tradition of the wandering hero. The only way I could use it would be to make it comic, and there will be some of that in *Giles Goat- Boy*. (Robert Scholes 171-72)

Barth uses the mythical motifs in a simple manner without responding to their given eternal essences. Such conscious use makes the readers conscious of myths as myths which are just materials without deep rooted stereotype meaning which can be used just for the sake of writing. In *The Sot- Weed Factor*, Barth plays with myth and archetypes consciously eroding the ethical deep-seated belief. "I mean 'its Adam's story thou'rt reenacting", Henry goes on:

Ye set great store upon innocence, and by reason of't have lost your earthly paradise. Nay, I shall take the conceit e'en farther: not only hath your adventure left ye homeless, but like Adam ye've your first

bellyful of knowledge and experience; ye'll pluck easy fruit no more to line your gut with, but earn your bread with guilty sweat, as do the mass of men. Your father, if I know him, will not lose this chance to turn ye out o' the Garden!" (401)

In *The Sot-Weed Factor* Barth loosens his form, conceivably in the hope that temporal and spatial amplitude will permit his characters to burst their psychological and philosophical prisons. Throughout the novel the characters engage themselves in complex scholastic discussion on various topics such as, knowledge, the world, innocence, virginity, history and so on: "The world's indeed a flux, as Herbalists declared: the very universe is naught but change and motion" (126). The novel breaks the traditional realistic representation and teases the readers making them conscious that they are reading a constructed fiction. The descriptive chapter headings are entertaining such as "The Laureate is Exposed to two Assassinations of Character, a Piracy, a Near-Deflowering, a Near-Mutiny, a Murder and an Appalling colloquy Between Captains of the Sea, all Within the Space of a Few Pages" (237). The author violates narrative levels by engaging himself in his writing: "the author here posits in advances" (743). In the novel, he obviously goes ahead intruding to comment on his own work in the following ways: "thus much for the rival claims of fact and fancy, which the artist, like Governor Nicholson, may override with fair impunity. However when the litigants' claims are formal, rather than substantial they pose a dilemma from which few tale-tellers escape without a goring. Such is the Author's present plight, as he who reads may judge" (743). John Barth presents *The Sot-Weed Factor* as self-conscious and self-referential artifact: "The story of Ebenezer Cooke is told; Drama wants no more than his consent to Joan Toast's terms, their sundry implications being clear. All the rest is anticlimax" (743). The author seems so bold enough to violate

the narrative unity that he himself addresses the reader to listen to his work: "Hear the story: After that evening which regained Cooke's point for Ebenezer (and ended our plot) there was a general exodus from Malden" (745).

Barth's work not only shows the demise of representation, it also doubts the notion of reality. *The Sot-Weed Factor* appropriates the seventeenth century ninety-line poem "The Sot Weed Factor" by Ebenezer Cooke to address the problematic of history especially, the origin of American history. The novelist incorporates "The Sot Weed Factor" into his novel *"The Sot-Weed Factor"* and juxtaposes the poem initially entitled as "Marylandiad" with the process the writer protagonist Ebenezer Cooke creates it. Ebenezer begins his epic "Marylandiad" dedicating to the "glory" of the New World; nevertheless, his experiences of evil doings and barbarity in the colony make him change his mind and re-name the poem as "The Sot- Weed Factor". Barth's exposure of Ebenezer's writing process not only spotlights the epic and romance conventions but also highlights the discrepancy between the product (the poem) and the process (the creation of the poem) and disenchant the illusion about reality. Ebenezer's virgin poem speaks for this disillusionment. The reader may take the short lyric for the novice poet's token of his true love for a virtuous lady John Toast. She embodies the muse to his creativity. The creative background and process of writing the poem overrule this simple-minded assumption. In fact, Toast is a prostitute. The innocent Ebenezer falls infatuated with Toast the very first time he sets eyes on her when she is bargaining at a tavern with men for her profession. The drastic odds between the theme of the poem and the scene that inspires the young man to draw his pen affects a sharp irony. Toast answers Ebenezer's call to his hotel room, believing that she is to earn five more guineas. But Ebenezer's motive has nothing to do with sex. The hero proposes his priceless true love for Toast and beseeches her to leave

her whoremonger man and to forsake her profession. Feeling fooled by Ebenezer, Toast tries to coax him to make the deal. Even if the outraged Toast abuses Ebenezer with rogue and crude language, the man persistently deifies Toast as his sacred goddess and keeps persuading the woman to stop whoring herself:

And know that I love thee for my saviour and inspiration: For ne'er till you came to me this night have I been a man, but a mere dotting oaf and fop; and ne'er till I embraced thee have I been a poet, but a shallow cox comb and poetaster! With thee, Joan, What deeds could I not accomplished! What verses not write! ...Love me, and I swear to thee this: I shall be poet Laureate of England. (58)

The infatuated virgin hero, overwhelmed with poetic influence in interaction with the young whore, exaggerates the beauty and personality of the woman. He feels she has a magic touch which can make him a jack-of-all trades. Toast, in reality, is not sacred goddess rather she is a prostitute who offers herself for sex in return for money. The self appointed laureate, seemingly possessed by divine inspiration, rushes to quill down his first song:

Not Priam for the ravag'd Town of Troy  
 Andromache for her bouncing Baby Boy,  
 Ulysses for his chaste Penelope  
 Bare the Love, Dear John, I bear for Thee!  
 ...  
 Preserv'd, my innocence Preserveth me  
 From Life, from Time, from Death, from History;  
 Without it I Must breathe man's mortal Breath:  
 Commence a Life- and thus commence my Death. (59)



Ebenezer, self-styled poet and virgin, loses touch with the realities in and around him and methodically transcends the boundaries of actual experience. Consequently both reality and experience are converted to mere substrata of art. He misrepresents the image of Joan Toast. He worships her in his poem as Scare goddess who is in reality just a whore. The Toast in the novel (the process) contradicts the Toast in Ebenezer's lyric (the product) and brings to the fore, the inventiveness and functionality of the reality about Toast.

Ebenezer's "Marylandiad" is another instance. As the ship Poseidon sets its sail for the new world, the excited Ebenezer starts writing his "Marylandiad" comparing the beauty of Poseidon to that of grand Greek warships depicted by Homer and the food and drink to the feast and nectar at Olympus:

Ye ask, what eat our merry Band  
 En Route to lovely MARYLAND?  
 I answer: Ne'er were such delights  
 As met our Sea- sharp'd Appetites  
 E'er serv'd to jore and Junos Breed  
 By Vulcan and By Gnymede. (211)

Ebenezer's mythopoeic view becomes a lens that distorts reality by refracting it as a potential or actual work of art. Drawing references from Greek myth he composes verses ostensibly about the grand feast served to the voyagers including him who were going to Maryland. But he realizes this representation as fake when he confronts the reality. The account in the outer narrative frame *The Sot-Weed Factor* undermines Ebenezer's fancy, "The food was not what he imagined"(211):

[A] Weekly ration of seven pounds of bread or ship biscuit for master and man alike, with butter scarce enough to disguise its tastelessness;

half a pound of salt pork and dried peas per man each mess for five days out of the week, and on the other two salt beef instead of pork - except when the weather was too foul for the cook to boil the kettle, in which case every soul abroad made do for the day with a pound of English cheese and dreams of home. (212)

The most subversive example to prove reality as fictionalized lies in Ebenezer's couplets praising the beauty of Maryland even before he lands on the colony:

Nay, Try  
 As best it might, no Poets Song,  
 Be't e'er so sweet or never so long  
 Could tell the Whole of MARYLANDS charms,  
 When from the Ocean's boundless Harms  
 The Trav'ler comes unscath'd at last,  
 And from his Vessels loftiest mast  
 He first beholds her Beauty! (230)

In his epic "Marylandiad", Ebenezer represents Maryland as heavenly world. He depicts Maryland as beautiful beyond description, verdant fertile, prosperous, and cultured; peopled with brave men and virtuous women, healthy, handsome and refined. Only after his landing in Maryland and eyewitness of the evildoings and barbarity, he sheds his naiveté and decides to publicize the evils in the New world. After his new experience, Ebenezer writes: "I shall make the piece a fiction; I'll be a tradesman, say-nay a factor that comes to Maryland on business, with every good opinion of the country, and is swindled of his goods and property. All my trials I'll receive to suit the plot and alter just enough to pass the printer" (458). Ebenezer's

avowal here self-reflexively unearths the narrative structure of *The Sot-Weed Factor* as a metafictional textual game.

*The Sot-Weed Factor* dramatizes the problematic nature of historical narrative which cannot give voice to the past directly but mediates the past in language and narrative. The novel works toward an understanding of history not as an objective narrative but as story constructed of personal and ideological interests.

The postmodern historical novel, which Hutcheon terms “historiographic metafiction” characteristically foregrounds the fictionality of history. E.L. Doctorow exemplifies this position in his essay “False Documents”, where he argues that there is no difference between history and fiction, that both are narratives constructing the only world that can be known. Hence, historiography is essentially a literary that is to say fiction-making operation. Historians, like novelist, are said to be interested not in “recounting the facts but [in] recounting that they are recounting them” (Roa Bastos 32). Barth’s work resists absolute groundlessness or relativity by parodying and reconstructing the historical period of the late 1600s England and Maryland provinces.

Metafictional component grows more emphatic when *The Sot-Weed Factor* plays with the boundaries separating historical fact from fiction. Asides from textual labyrinth, Barth adopts multiple narratives to disclose the functionality and constructedness of history. In his petition to Lord Baltimore Charles Calvert for the title “the poet and Laureate of the province Maryland”, Ebenezer informs the Lord of the poetic power that shall immortalize the greatness of the Calverts and the glorious history they have made in Maryland. Ebenezer assures Lord Baltimore that his ‘Marylandiad’ will be:

An epic to out- epic epics: the story of the princely house of Charles Calvert, Lord Baltimore and Lord Proprietary of the Province of Maryland, relating the heroic founding of that province! The courage and perseverance of her settlers in battling barbarous nature and fearsome salvage to wrest a territory from; the wild and transform it to an earthly paradise! ...a Maryland, in short, splendid in her past, majestic in her present, and glorious in her future, the highest jewel in the fair crown of England, owned and ruled to the benefit of both by a family second to none in the recorded history of the universal world- the whole done into heroic couplets,... and dedicated to Your Lordship! (75-76)

After having listened to Ebenezer's lobby, Lord Baltimore turns hysterical and laughs at the young man's innocence. The Lord explains to Ebenezer that history of Maryland is not like what he has imagined. It is never a history of splendid achievements: "Maryland is mine by law and by right, yet her history is the tale of my family's struggle to preserve her, and of the plots of countless knaves to take her from us- chief among them Black Bill Claiborne and a very antichrist named John Coode, who plagues me yet" (77). Charles Calvert's confession here disputes Ebenezer's epic version of Maryland's history. Nowhere is the mechanism of beautification and fictionalization made more blunt than the aforementioned multiple narratives.

Later on, Ebenezer learns that the Lord Baltimore he has met is actually his tutor Henry Burlingame III in disguise. The credibility of Burlingame's account of Maryland is thus undermined. Moreover, Burlingame's identity is a fiction since his quest for and discovery of his lineage counts on private journals respectively by

Captain John Smith *A Secret History of Voyage up the Chessapeak*, and by sir Henry Burlingame- *Privie Journal*. Both of them relate their frontier adventures with American Indians in Maryland. But they produce completely different and contradictory recordings. Captain Smith keeps boasting about his leadership and sexuality and teases Burlingame's impotence, whereas Burlingame accuses Captain Smith of avarice for power, debauchery and arrogance. Apparently, positions, motives and perspectives condition and determine their tales. In comparison, neither of them has claim to authenticity and credibility. And doubt about reliability applies to the accounts about the historical figures Charles Calvert and John Coode, their power struggles and political intrigues. As the enlightened Ebenezer puts it: "Did the 'real' John Coode exist at all independently of his several impersonators, or was he merely a fiction created by his supposed collaborators for the purpose of shedding their responsibilities, just as businessmen incorporate limited liability companies to answer for their adventures" (751). Commenting to Ebenezer on Lord Baltimore and John Coode, Burlingame III remarks:

...albeit 'tis hard for me to think such famous weights are pure and total fictions, to this hour I've laid eyes on either Baltimore or Coode. It may be they are all that rumor swears: devils and demigods, whichever's which; or it may be they're simple clot polls like ourselves, that have been legend'd out of reasonable dimension; or it may be they are naught but the rumours and tales themselves. (705-6)

Burlingame's conclusion nullifies all the historical accounts in *The Sot-Weed Factor*. Through its play upon the known and recorded truth *The Sot-Weed Factor* questions the absolute knowability of the past specifying the ideological implications of historical representations.

Barth's *The Sot-Weed Factor* subverts the distinction between history and fiction by contrasting the two narrators who construct their own version of the episode of early American history, especially the story of Captain John Smith and Pocahontas. Because of different identities and allegiances, Captain John Smith and Sir Henry Burlingame narrate contrasting interpretations of the same historical moment. Smith in *A Secret History of Voyage up the Chesapeake* glorifies his confrontation with the savages in the New World and describes his heroic performance among those Indians which provided him easy freedom. But Burlingame's version *Private Journal* deconstructs the *Smithian* historical truth and describes the same episode as horrifying and breath-taking, out of which they luckily got a narrow escape.

Barth's novel holds Smith's and Burlingame's antithetical views in tension, showing point of view to be inherent to any historical narrative. Moreover, these conflicting stories signify history as pure fiction with no referential value whatsoever. Through the subversion of distinction between history and fiction Barth's work detotalizes the history and shows that history simply captures a fragment of truth.

Thus, *The Sot-Weed Factor* is metafiction by challenging the traditional narrative representation, by questioning the notion of reality and objective historical representation.

### **Celebration of Fragments**

History plays an important role in *The Sot-Weed Factor*. The novelists are using history in their novels from very early time but significant changes have occurred in the strategy of the historical novel so far. The writers of historical novel before nineteenth century who were interested in retaining the specifically historical had tended to opt for a far narrower canvas, taking a small slice of historical reality and endowing it with plot and significance. Works such as Capote's *In Old Blood*,

Mailer's *The Armies of the Night*, Hunter Thompson's *Hell's Angles*, or Ernest Gaine's *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* typify this documentary group. They bring to bear the techniques of fiction upon their reconstruction of history, but they take care to define and limit the particular segment of historical reality which is their concern and to shun any broader interpretation of historical change. The works of these writers are posited upon an assumption that historical reality is knowable, coherent, significant and inherently moving. They have treated the history with reverence.

On the otherhand, a host of writers of the contemporary period treat the history with skeptical point of view. The big change in attitude came with accordance with the change in politics. The political situation of the 1960s was particularly conducive to the re-emergence of historical interest. After the 'Tranquilized' 1950s, the decade became a period of crisis and revolutionary change. The earlier spirit of optimism and hope turned into bitter disillusionment and cynicism and the escalation of the Vietnam war. In the wake of this escalation, a counter culture and varied protest movements developed such as the Anti-War movement, the Civil Right and Black power movements, the American Indian movements, the Women's movement and the Gay and Lesbian Liberation movements. As a result, America in 1960s turned into a scene of social and political violence. So many American writers since 1960 have responded to the collective experience of their generation in a number of ways. Many contemporary novels focus on violence and destructive aspects of history and replace the traditional notion of history as a meaningful, teleological process with history as discontinuity, contingency, apocalypse, entropie and paranoia. The crisis of established norms, the loss of old certainties, and the experience of social disruption also contributed to general sense of disorientation and de-realization among

intellectuals and writers. So the contemporary writers are committed to a full imaginative recreation of the past and have moved in an increasingly apocalyptic direction, subordinating fact to a mythic or highly personal view of history. In their novel, history is itself ultimately absurd. In this context, Linda Hutcheon writes:

To say that the past is only known to us through textual traces is not... the same as saying that the past is only textual, as the semiotic idealism of some forms of poststructuralism seems to assert. This ontological reduction is not the point of postmodernism: past events existed empirically, but in epistemological terms we can only know them today through texts. Past events are given meaning, not existence, by their representation in history. (81-82)

Barth's uses of history are manifold and have a clear function in the context of the mythopoeic investigations he pursues. He uses a forbiddingly huge historical apparatus much of it "grounded on meager fact and solid fancy" in order to establish a semi-authentic scene as the background of the fictitious quest for the self (780). Since the distinction between alledged fact and imaginary preconceptions is all important in the novel, it is worth the trouble of penetrating to the historical core of the story before proceeding to analyze Barth's deviations and reflection on the meaning of these deviations. It is a well-known fact of literary history that there actually was a poet named Ebenezer Cooke who wrote a poem entitled "The Sot-Weed Factor". Barth himself never tried to conceal this and he readily admitted that the original poem and the figure behind it supplied one of the starting points for his work. Some of the facts and dates that are known about the Ebenezer Cooke are here compared with Barth's treatment of this figure.



In 1708 an "Eben Cook, Gent." published a satirical poem called *The Sot-Weed Factor* in London. In 1728 "An Elegy on the Death of the Honourable Nicholas Lowe, Esq." appeared under the name "E. Cooke. Laureat". 1730 saw the publication of *Sot-Weed Redivivus*, signed "E.C. Gent", in 1731 *The Maryland Muse* (signed "E. Cooke, Gent") and in 1731 another elegy (signed "Ebenezer Cooke, Poet Laurent") followed. Three of these books can be found in Bernard C. Steiner's edition of *Early Maryland Poetry* published in 1900. The Cook or Cooke of these works may or may not have been identical with an Ebenezer Cooke who in 1694 signed a petition against moving the capital of Maryland; or with yet another gentleman of this name who obtained permission to practice law in 1728. A similar confusion that cannot be settled conclusively arises over Eben's alleged father Andrew Cooke. Subsequent speculations have dealt with the possibility that neither the two Andrew Cookes on record nor the several Eben Cookes (or Cooks or E.C.s) of the poems were identical, as well as with the possibility that "Eben Cook, Gent" may be a mere pen-name. Barth seems to be aware of the historical confusion and avoids its intricacies by simplifying the whole situation.

Barth devises his own version of Ebenezer Cooke's story and carefully eliminates possible discrepancies with the facts on record. The problem of the two Andrew Cookes is solved by Barth's decision that the one who supposedly owned "Malden" was a suitable father for Ebenezer. The potentially different Ebenezer Cookes merge into one to whom Barth attributes several documented acts and most of the poems which had been linked with the name of the historical Cooke. In the process of compressing such scattered and disjointed facts into the life story of one man, Barth goes to the extent of inserting little details into his novel which eliminate possible contradictions to the recorded data of Lawrence Wroth's study of the life of

Ebenezer Cooke. Available clues concerning the historical Cooke have been collected and discussed by Lawnence C. Wroth in "The Maryland Muse by Ebenezer Cooke," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, in 1934. Barth tells us that Ebenezer was born in America eliminating the problem that no English birth records were ever found. He has Ebenezer attend Cambridge for a short period (in line with Wroth's conjectures); he has Burlingame sign with Eben's name the 1964 petition (which Wroth attributes to Cooke); and he has Anne Cooke, Ebenezer's mother, die after giving birth to Eben and his sister (thus eliminating the problem that nothing could be found out about Anne Cooke).

Barth then takes Ebenezer Cooke's best known poem, "The Sot-Weed Factor," and proceeds to write an 806page novel around the hardcore of this work. Many passages in the novel are either repetitions of, or more frequently, elaborations on the material presented in the original poem. Moreover, the satirical poem which Barth eventually has Ebenezer Cooke write in sharp contrast to his originally planned panegyric Marylandiad, is the original "Sot-Weed Factor" itself. Barth consistently takes the same liberties, which are characteristics of the treatment of his source, with the historical situation on the grand scale.

Apparently familiar with the *Archives of Maryland* which is a gigantic compilation of documents pertaining to the history of Maryland beginning about 1637, he develops a detailed panorama of historical personalities and events in seventeenth century Maryland and England, a panorama which embraces at once fact and fiction, historical accuracy and parodistic invention. Historical personalities such as Lord Baltimore, Governor Nicholson, William Claiborne, John Coode, Captain Smith, Pocahontas, Edmond Andros, Nicholas Lawe, or Eben Cooke himself are joined in a mad jig of events with imposters, impersonators, and a whole gallery of

fictitious characters such as Burlingame, Joan Toast, Bertrand Burton, John McEvoy, Billy Rumbly or Mary Mungummory. What finally emerges from Barth's imaginative manipulation of history is that public myth is pitted against private myth in burlesque juxtaposition. In the process, Barth not only ridicules and effectively destroys the received myth of the heroic American past, he also analyzes the function of naïve private myths in the life defining struggles of his characters.

Symptomatic for Barth's Juxtaposition of the two concurring visions is his reconstructed version of the best known episodes of early American history, the story of captain John Smith and Pocahontas. Contrary to the schoolbook version, Barth offers his own bawdy reading of the events. As so often in *The Sot-Weed Factor*, he seems to be walking the narrow line between parody and overindulgent trifling with history. Yet his parasitic distortions have an important function. Barth's treatment of the episode draws attention to the fact that alleged historical truth is not as unambiguous as we tend to think. In 1608 a Th. Watson published a book with the title *A True Relation*. The book was actually written by John Smith himself and though it related details about Powhatan and the capture of Smith, there is no mention of the Pocahontas incident. Only years later in his famous *General History of Virginia*, Smith related the Pocahontas episode as we know it today. Ever since, there has been a controversy among historians over the reasons for Smith's curious omission of the episode from the earlier book. More than once the suspicion has been voiced that Smith for some reason might have invented part of the episode or at least might have rendered it from a highly subjective point of view. Barth knows about this confusion of historical evidence and consequently plays upon the possibility of further conflicting versions. He defies the heroic version of Smith and plays upon the historical truth prepared and presented by Smith. In his history Smith tells how he was

made captive by one of Powhatan's lietenants. He swears next he was carried alone to Powhatan, the emperor of the Indians. Barth doubts this historical truth of Smith. There could have been other companies carried to Powhatan who could have been murdered by native Indians or could have been simply ignored by Smith while writing. So Barth here presents a fictitious character Henry Burlingame III who is also arrested and taken with Smith to Powhatan: "... the savages took both of us along with them to Opecanoughs town, and thence to Powhatans town, and at length into the presence of the emperor himself" (150). This we find in the journal written by Henry Burlingame III as Smith recorded his own version.

Henry Burlingame's historical writing *The Privie Journall* plays upon the historical truth of smith's *General History*. Smith claims in his history that from the very first sight Pocatuntas, the Indian king's dearest daughter, fell in love with him. So when the king ordered the savages to murder Smith placing his head on the heavy stone, Smith writes, Pochontus got his head in her arms and laid her own upon his to save him from death. Thereby the king forgave his life and Smith got a marvelous rescue on the condition that he should marry her. But Henry Burlingame disclaims this marvelous romance. He claims that case was not so wondrously heroic after all and contends that when Pocahontas interceded to save Smith's life the king reckoned for sometime and at last put forward a very hard condition. Smith had to practise the barbarous custom in order to save his life. In their custom anyone whom a maid liked or any one who desired to wed her must deflower her first fracturing her membrame, only then the suitor would be adjudged as man worthy of his betrothed and then after the marriage would follow. It was not so easy to deflower Powhotan because even great warriors had failed to wed her. Henry writes:

Powhatan, we were told, had on sundrie occasions chosen warriors of his people to wedd this Pocahontas, but in everie instance the ceremonie had to be forgone, seeing that labour as they might none had been able to deflowr her, and in sooth the most had done themselves hurt withal, in there efforts, where as, the properthing was, to injure the young lasse, and that as grievouslie as possible, the degree of injurie being reck'd a measure of the mans virilite". (154)

Burlingame opines that Powhatan showed no mercy to Smith. In case of his failure in practicing barbarous custom he would immediatly have to face severe death. In his historical journal Henry writes:

Powhatan said that whereas his daughter had seen fitt, to save my captain's life, what time it had been the Emperours pleasures to dashe out his braines, then my captain must needs regard him selfe affianced to her, and submit him selfe to that some labour (to witt, essaying the gate to venues grottoe) as her former suitors. But ... with this difference, that where, having failed, her salvage becaux had merelie been disgrac'd, and taunted as olde women, my captain, should he prove no better, his head would be lay'd againe upon the stones, and the clubbing of his braines proceed without quarter or respite. (155)

Further, Burlingame writes in his Journall what tricks smith had to carry to relieve Pcahontas of her maidenhood. According to him only after playing the game of sacred Eggplant, Smith became successful to deflower her successfully. As a result the king wished him to marry her but he requested for his release and taught him the tricky game of sacred Eggplant for successful intercourse. Ultimately the king accepted his proposal. Burlargame claims thus they were saved from death which we

find in a heroic manner in Smith's history. Burlingame asserts the historical truth was suppressed because he was under compulsion. It was because Smith had conditioned him that he would be released with him only when he would promise not to mention publicly about the manner of salvation otherwise he was threatened that he would be offered to murder. Henry says:

I was obliged to him for life, he declar'd, for that his deed had preserved the twain of us, and he offered to murder me, in some dark and dastard wise, if ever I noys'd about in Jamestowne the manner of our salvation... I was to feign I had been detained with Opecanough, and my captain alone led in unto the Emperor. Moreover, he made so bold as to show me a written account of his salvation by Pocahontas, the which he meant to include in his lying Historie. This version made no mention whatever of his scurrilous deflowering of the princesse, but merelie implyd, she was overcome by his manlie bearing & comlie face! It was this farce and travestie, then, wherein I was obliged to feign belief, and which hath mov'd me, in hopes of pacifying my anguish'd conscience, to commit this true accounting to my journall-booke. (734)

Thus, the journal is full of humours and bawdy reading of historical events. Not only is it Burlingame's *Privie Journall*, Barth also presents a personal version of Smith's *A secret Historie of the voyage up the Bay of Chesepeake from Jamestown in Virginia* in fragments. This version also is full of humorous descriptions. In this fake version of history Barth has Smith write his journey with imaginary character Henry Barlingame:

Onley two of our number show'd no sign of the maladie, namelie my self, that had not deign'd to drink of the barricoes, but had instead made my selfe to chewe upon raw fishes, and friend Burlingame, that had drunke enough for three, but that must needs have had a grand hold on his reins, for that he never did besmirch him selfe throughout those foule two daies. (370)

In this version Barth shows rivalry relationship between historical personality Smith and imaginary character Henry Burlingame III: "This they all did, but with much compleynt, most markedlie from my rival Burlingame, who looses no opening to sowe the seeds of discontent & faction" (369). Thus this fake version of *Secret Historie* doesn't only refutes the historical record but also gives the message that Smith's *General History of Virginia* also can be fake representation eroding the crude events and imposing subjective version of historical events as Barth did in this novel.

The point of such parodistic games with historical materials is a simple one. Since some versions assumed to be historically true are themselves dubious and coloured by imaginative concepts, the novelist has every right to add his own speculations to the interpretation of events. After all, who is to say which version is ultimately true or which one is more useful to help us come to terms with the past? As Burlingame maintains throughout the book and as the author in his final chapter rubs in, "we all invent our pasts, more or less, as we go along, at the dictates of whim and interest; the happenings of former times are a clay in the present moment that will-we, nill-we, the lot of us must sculpt" (782). What is more, in the process of inventing his past, man forgets to keep track of the general structure of his inventions. Hence, everything becomes relative, contradictory, lacking the recognizable, clear-cut outlines he had originally set out to find.

Barth has admitted on various occasions that the arbitrariness of fact has always made him uncomfortable and has stimulated his attempts to pit his own creative energies against it. In an interview published in *Winsconsin Studies*, he says: "...this impulse to imagine alternatives to the world can become a driving impulse for writers. I confess that it is for me. So that really what you want to do is re-invent philosophy and the rest-make up your own whole history of the world" (8). It is from the perspective of this aggressively counter realistic attitude amplified in Barth's case to the status of an aesthetic program that we see the function of fake history and fake documents such as the *Privie Jourall* or John Smith's *A Secret Historie of the Voiage Up the Bay of Chesapeake from Jamestown in Virginia*. Both are to refute an easy differentiation between fact and fancy, both are to plant the suspicion that historical truth may be nothing but imaginary versions in disguise. Captain Smith's *A Secret History of the Voiage up the Chespeake* is a proceeding of Barth's reworking on the historical figure Captain John Smith's popular travel report *The Generall Historie*. Foregrounding Captain Smith's boasting and myth-making in the journal, Barth directs at the fictiveness of the sea journal and indirectly questions Captain John Smith as a national hero and the credit of his *Generall Historie*- a primary source on which historians draw for history writing.

Distorting the official historical documents and reconstructing fake versions of the same historical episode Barth celebrates the fragmentary aspect of historiographic metafiction. Historiographic metafiction refutes the idea that historical facts are given and contends that they carry only meaning in so far as it is attributed to them by the historian. The historian takes the chaotic fragments of the past events and generalizes them through the lens of his point of view so as to totalize the history. In this regard, David Lowenthal writes: "No historical account can recover the totality of any past



event, because their content is virtually infinite. The most detailed historical narrative incorporates only a minute fraction of even the relative past; the sheer pastness of the past precludes its total reconstruction. (214-15)"

The events of the past are full of lively chaotic fragments but historians give an appearance of order to these infinite contradictory fragments. So history is never total and objective. The two fake versions of historical document by Smith and Burlingame in *The Sot-Weed Factor* justly exemplify this matter. Two different writers take the same episode of early American history and construct two different versions with contrasting temperaments. Through reconstruction of two contrasting fake versions of historical documents, Barth refutes ordered totalized history to achieve celebration of fragments. He believes that generalized and constructed history can capture only a fragment of the past event.

Barth's toying with history aims at our assumption that there are facts which can be indisputable. He constantly undermines such assumptions, insinuating that all reading of the past may be relative to specific modes of self interpretation and to specific needs and purposes at a given time. Thus, through the use of metafiction Barth negates the holistic approach to history in *The Sot-Weed Factor*.

#### IV. Conclusion

Even a casual reader of Barth becomes aware of his recurrent concern with metafiction. John Barth uses metafictional features in his writings in relation to the postmodern concept. Therefore, he is very much conscious of metafictional sentiments against realism and modernism. In his metafictional handwritings we can trace the sense of demise of representation and the exposition of the politics of the construction of reality and history.

The negation of representation results mainly from the metafictional challenge to the orthodox view of taking language as a stable and neutral medium for the transparent representation of reality. This subversion brings up the postmodern presumption that language is implemented with ideological underpinning and power relations that, in turn, determine the position of a discourse or an utterance about reality. The relationship between language and reality therefore loses neutrality and disinterestedness. Rather than transcribing reality, man imagines and constructs reality. By extension, historiography, a human practice which inevitably addresses the issues about language and reality, can no longer hold its claim to immediateness and objectivity. *The Sot-Weed Factor* explores a new notion of history not as objective and whole rather as imaginary construction eroding the crude fragments of events of the past.

For his mega project of writing *The Sot-Weed Factor* of 756 pages Barth chooses the historical period of the late 1600s England and Maryland provinces. Since there are no reliable historical records, Barth further makes those some available records doubtful and funny. He uses the seventeenth century framework of *The Sot-Weed Factor* to put certain recent ideas to test.

*The Sot-Weed Factor* explores a new notion of reality and representation. In the process of journey from England to Maryland the innocent hero Ebenezer Cooke undergoes many such experiences which penetrate the hollowness of the constructed notion of reality. The poet creates holy verse on the chastity and his love for Joan Toast, a prostitute. Toast in the novel and her image in Ebenezer's lyric are completely contradictory which shows the spirits of fictionality of reality. Before landing on the colony Ebenezer composes couplets praising the beauty of Maryland in a holy style. But he finds the province full of horror and treachery. So his awful experience makes him decide to publicize the evils in the New World. Such segments are examples to prove reality as fictionalized. Further, Ebenezer's self-reflexivity unearths the narrative structure of *The Sot-Weed Factor* as a postmodern textual game.

Barth takes one historical personality, Ebenezer Cooke, and makes him the hero of this novel *The Sot-Weed Factor*. There are some historical records that there really existed a poet named Ebenezer Cooke who wrote a poem entitled *The Sot-Weed Factor*. Barth himself claims that the poem provided him materials for his work. Many passages we get in the novel are either repetitions of, or more frequently, elaborations on the materials presented in the original poem. He takes liberty to mould the life of the hero and devises his own version of Ebenezer Cooke's story and eliminates the discrepancies with the facts on historical records.

Barth blurs the line between fiction and history. He creates detailed panorama of historical personalities and events in seventeenth century Maryland and England, which embraces both fact and fiction. He fuses both historical accuracy and parodistic invention by joining the historical personalities such as Lord Baltimore, Governor Nicholson, William Claiborne Captain Smith, Ebenezer Cooke, etc. in the

events of fictitious characters such as Burlingame, John Toast, John McEvoy or Billy Rumbly. Barth's imaginative manipulation of history refutes the official documentary versions. In doing this Barth effectively destroys and ridicules the received heroic version of American past and presents the New world as a barbarous and pestilential place.

The problem of relating past in the form of history is further addressed when Barth himself reconstructs the version of the best known episodes of early American history, the story of captain John smith and Pocahontas. He creates the interaction of historiography and fiction by playing upon the truth and lies of the historical record; uses the historical data but rarely assimilates such data. To refute the official record he constructs fake documents such as *Privie Journal* by Burlingame and *A Secret Histories of the Village Up the Bay of Chesapeake from Jamestown in Virginia* by John Smith in the novel. Both of them relate their frontier adventures with American Indians in Maryland but both present completely different and contradictory documents. The Pocahontas incident is treated and produced in different manners refuting the official historical document.

Barth foregrounds the fictionality of history by playing with the received historical documents to nullify the notion of objective and holistic history. The fake versions of Barth's imaginative history are contrary to schoolbook version. It not only refutes the historical evidence but also questions nature of historiography. This indirectly questions Captain John smith as national hero and credit of his source of historical document. Smith's and Burlingame's manipulation of the same past events with their different points of view foregrounds fictionality of totalized history. This instance refers that history doesn't consist of immediateness of the past events rather it captures only a fragment of truth.

Barth's use of metafiction in mocking history is to explore that history has no order, logic, sense. History is organized by historians; they are the ones who make it coherent and intelligible through the use of points of view and interpretations that are always partial, provisional and as subjective as artistic constructs. In fact real history consists of a constant multiple improvisations, a lively chaos to which historians give an appearance of order. The historians reduce almost infinite contradictory fragments of the past events to arbitrary schemes and to syntheses and charts that inevitably become pale replicas and even caricatures of real history. By generalizing the multiple fragments of the past events the historians denaturalize reality and present an abstract totalization of history that is a reflection not of collective life in its temporal unfolding but of their inventiveness.

The new historicity that *The Sot-Weed Factor* inscribes is not a simple return to historical realism rather it foregrounds the fictionality of history. Thus, through the use of metafiction Barth celebrates the fragments of past events refuting holistic approach to history.

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