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That John Barth's *The Floating Opera* and *The End of the Road* have many things in common is neither accidental nor incidental but intentional and purposeful. This is clearly stated in the prefatory note to the revised edition of *The Floating Opera*: "*The Floating Opera* was written in the first three months of 1955; its companion-piece, *The End of the Road*, in the last three months of the same year."\(^1\)

Obviously, Barth, after writing and publishing his first novel, thought of new ways of developing the characters and themes he had created and used, and for this he wrote *The End of the Road*.\(^2\) That is why these two novels seem so similar and the differences between them seem so contrived.

Both *The Floating Opera* and *The End of the Road* present a tableau of three characters, two men and a woman, and explore their intellectual, emotional and sexual charades. The novels are written from the first person point of view, and they are used by their protagonists for self-analysis and to justify and explain actions and events which lead them to change their lives. The protagonists also use their narratives to justify their own behavior in relation to the other characters by subjectively depicting, selecting and interpreting the other characters' words and actions.

The purpose of this thesis is to establish the guiding
principle behind both novels, to show that the similarities and differences in plot and character serve as a means of presenting and enlarging the theme of man's conscious and unconscious fictionalization of life. In both novels fictionalization is closely related to man's search for an identity and a value system with which to cope with reality in a world perceived as absurd. This has been pointed out before in articles and books, but the relationship between the themes has never been studied in depth.

I intend to study and analyze *The Floating Opera* as it introduces and presents the themes of fictionalization, identity and value, then proceed to *The End of the Road* where fictionalization is enlarged, appearing as a pseudo-psychological therapy. This study will include Barth's protagonists as they deal with their experiences in alienation, friendship, love and sex, and the couples who are involved in friendship and love triangles with the protagonists.
The Floating Opera

The Floating Opera opens with its protagonist, Todd Andrews, stating his reasons for writing his narrative: "the explanation of a day in 1937 when I changed my mind" (p.1). In his first chapter he also says that he intends to "introduce [himself], caution [the reader] against certain possible interpretations of [his] name, explain the significance of this book's title, and do several other gracious things for [the reader]" (p.2). One of the gracious things that he will do for the reader is narrate the account of his love affair with the wife of his best friend, complete with psychological, ethical and emotional interpretations. However, this account is continually interrupted as Todd digresses to explain certain events which affect the way he thinks and acts.

From the very first chapter, Todd appears as a man who is aware of the absurdities of life. Consider the way he describes himself: "I look like what I think Gregory Peck, the movie actor, will look like when he's fifty-four ..." (The comparison to Mr. Peck isn't intended as self-praise, only as description. Were I God, creating the face of either Todd Andrews or Gregory Peck, I'd change it just a trifle here and there)" (p.3). There is also the way he explains the book's title, which he could explain until
Judgment Day and still not explain completely (p. 6). It is through his explanation of the book's title that the theme of the fictionalization of life is first introduced: the use of the word "opera" implies play-acting, and "floating" adds the suggestion of something that does not remain static, but is in continuous change. And if life is a floating opera, man is either a spectator or an actor, consciously or unconsciously, in the drama of life. Todd explains it thus: a showboat, drifting up and down a river, with a play going on continuously; the audience would be sitting along both banks, catching whatever part of the plot unfolds as the boat floats by them. To catch another snatch of the plot the audience would have to wait until the boat passes them again, and to know the rest of the plot they would depend on more observant neighbors or for word to be passed along from upriver or downriver. And this, Todd adds, is how much of life works; "our friends float past; we become involved with them; they float on, and we must rely on hearsay or lose track of them completely; they float back again and we either renew our friendship--catch up to date--or find that they and we don't comprehend each other any more" (p. 7).

In his narration, Todd is both spectator--when he sits back to watch and analyze the play others are performing--and actor--when he assumes a role and involves himself in
the action. But he is conscious of the dramatization that is going on, and, at times, by discovering the course and cause of the other characters' plot, he becomes scriptwriter and director of the action.

The idea of life being a play and man an actor in it, is not, of course, of Barthian origin. It can be found at least as far back as Shakespeare's *As You Like It*:

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts.

But while Jaques goes on to talk about the seven stages of man's life, Todd talks about his five moments of intense emotion--mirth, fear, frustration, surprise and despair--and the different masks or identities he has assumed to deal with different situations in his life:

During my life I've assumed four or five such stances, based on certain conclusions, for I tend, I'm afraid, to attribute to abstract ideas a life-or-death significance. Each stance, it seemed to me at the time, represented the answer to my dilemma, the mastery of my fact; but always something would happen to demonstrate its inadequacy, or else the stance would simply lose its persuasiveness, imperceptibly, until suddenly it didn't work--quantitative change, as Marx has it, suddenly becoming qualitative change--and then I had the job to face again of changing masks (p.15).

Here it is clearly seen how Barth relates the theme of the fictionalization of life to man's search for identity, for
these masks Todd talks about are nothing else than the identity and change of identities he has to go through to deal with the different situations that life presents. Furthermore, when Todd talks about quantitative change becoming qualitative change, values become important since it is the value he has assigned and obtained from each mask that determines its adequacy. And, finally, Todd is fictionalizing life to the extent that each mask represents his subjective interpretation of the drama in which he is performing.

But Todd Andrews is essentially an alienated man, and this alienation at times determines the identity he will assume in, and the value he will assign to his relationship or involvement with the other characters. First of all, his relationship or involvement is always initiated by the others. He watches the others play their roles and once he has fathomed their script he becomes an actor adapting the script to his specific mask. Furthermore, he never becomes completely involved, since he can always dissociate himself from the drama to watch the spectacle of his fellowmen. That is, he may play the role assigned to him in a specific situation, but he remains disengaged from the causes and consequences of playing such a role. His isolation sometimes springs from the fact that he plays roles consciously,
convincing merely that his specific mask allows him complete control of the situation, while the other characters are unconsciously playing roles, totally committed to the identity they have assumed.

Todd becomes aware of his alienation during his experience in World War II, in the Argonne (p.60), where he undergoes the second of his five moments of intense emotion--fear--and where he discovers his own animality. Fear makes him realize how alone man is in emotional situations: "death must be suffered alone" (p.63); and that in such situations man needs human companionship: "someone to keep me company while I went through with it" (p.63). From this realization comes his rationalization about the animality of man:

I could actually, for a part of the time it lasted, regard myself objectively; a shocked, drooling animal in a mudhole. It is one thing to agree intellectually to the proposition that man is a species of animal; quite another to realize, thoroughly and for good, your personal animality, to the extent that you are never able to oppose the terms man and animal, even in casual speech; never able to regard your fellow creatures except as more or less intelligent, more or less healthy, more or less dangerous, more or less adequate fauna; never able to regard their accomplishments except as the tricks of more or less well-trained beasts (p.62).

Thus he can say in all sincerity that "No matter how you approach it, everything we do is ridiculous" (p.65). And it is ironic that it is only while he experiences this extreme sense of animality that he also experiences the
closest intimacy with another human being, the German soldier who happens to be another scared animal and whom he kills (p.65).

John C. Stubbs in his article, "John Barth as a Novelist of Ideas: The Themes of Identity and Value," suggests that Todd believes he is animalistic to the extent that he is controlled by his emotions rather than his reason. Thus, Stubbs says, Todd's emotion of fear brings him to love the German soldier, and his rational reflection (after all, the German soldier is his enemy) directs him to kill the German. That being the case, a rational understanding of his animality causes Todd to repudiate emotions he shares with other human beings. Stubbs concludes by saying that Todd creates roles to escape the control of his emotions, a conclusion substantiated by the fact that it is after he realizes his basic animality that Todd assumes, consciously, a series of roles. This means that to a certain degree Todd is unable or unwilling to establish a continuity of emotional engagement with experience, and imaginatively distorts his experience into manageable shape by creating a life story.

There are other results from the war experience which affect the way Todd thinks and acts, the way he assumes roles, fictionalizes life and assigns values. After the war Todd keeps a distance between himself and the rest of mankind, a distance which alienates him from society and its
values. He can never forget that fear, an emotion, reduced him to the state of an animal and that reason made him kill the only "animal" with whom he was close enough to share that fear. And with this understanding comes a tolerance for what people do to cope with their loneliness and emotions, and so the experience cures him of other things: "I seldom daydream any more, even for an instant. I never expect very much from myself or my fellow animals. I almost never characterize people in a word or phrase, and rarely pass judgment on them at all. I no longer look for the esteem or approbation of my acquaintances" (p.67).

But it is not until his discharge from the army--after a heart attack and the diagnosis that every moment he lives might be his last (what he calls the fact with which he has to live)--that Todd, to deal with his heart condition (symbolically, his emotions), consciously creates and assumes roles, even though he admits that he becomes conscious of it after the fact: "I know for certain that all the major mind changes in my life have been the result not of deliberate, creative thinking on my part, but rather of pure accidents--events outside myself impinging forcibly upon my attention--which I afterwards rationalized into new masks" (p.21).

In his first fictionalization, Todd becomes what Stubbs calls a "free-wheeling student," and Richard W. Noland
After returning home from the army, Todd finds it easier to control his emotions by pleasing his father and enrolling at John Hopkins University, than by telling his father about his heart condition. His father says, "Then when September comes, son, nothing could make me happier than if you'd go to school. . . . I shan't specify John Hopkins, but I must say that that's where the bright men are coming from, lately" (p.124). And so he becomes a free-wheeling student and rake as he joins a group of students who live each day as though it were their last (p.126), drinking, womanizing, and playing the pranks that are associated with the gay, irresponsible young men of the Twenties.

Todd's first fictionalization ends when it involves him in yet another emotional situation, one which he cannot cope with as a free-wheeling student-rake. He is out for a night on the town when he encounters a specter from his past: Betty June Gunter. She is the girl with whom an adolescent Todd experienced his first moment of intense emotion, mirth, as he watched himself and Betty June copulating (pp.114-121). She is now a prostitute. Betty June, either to get even with Todd for laughing at her so many years ago or because he mentions the name of the dead boy she had been in love with at the time, attacks him by emptying a whole bottle of rubbing alcohol in the worst
possible place and hitting and cutting him with the bottle. When he regains consciousness, he goes to the hospital and discovers that he has an infected prostate (pp.130-133).

During his stay in the hospital, Todd comes to the conclusion that his role has been the wrong one, since it has not protected him from emotional entanglements, and this cancels any value he might have assigned to it. And so he decides to change his fictionalization:

I would not attempt to sort the causes from the effects in my month's thinking, but when I was finally discharged I had decided with my whole being that I was "out of it"; that the pursuit, the goals, the enthusiasms of the world were not mine. My stance had been wrong, I concluded; the fact with which I had to live was not to be escaped in whiskey and violence, not even in work. What I must do, I reasoned, is keep it squarely before me all the time; live with it soberly, looking it straight in the eye. There was more to my new attitude, but it was a matter of rearrangement of abstractions, not important here (pp.133-134).

He reasons that he needs a mask to help him fictionalize life to stay uninvolved with and unmoved by his emotions and those of other people. He becomes a "saint" (p.134). And this is his identity and attitude when he becomes involved in a friendship with Harrison Mack.

Friendship at this point presents various problems to Todd's fictionalization: How is he to value and fictionalize friendship while remaining uninvolved and unmoved? Will his saint's mask protect him from the control of his emotions?
The first he solves with the help of his characteristic irresponsibility; he arbitrarily decides that though, as a saint, he will have no more to do with his fellow man and his value, he sees nothing amiss in a saint having one friend (pp. 19, 20). The second will remain an abstract problem, for both Todd and Harrison adhere to the principle of rationalizing emotions; that is, they deal with emotions (in this case the attraction they feel for each other) by labeling them in a manner which will not affect their specific fictionalizations. Harrison tells Todd that he is first attracted by Todd's "transcendent rejection" of what life means to him; and Todd admits that what draws him to Harrison is that Harrison's enthusiasm is opposite to anything Todd could possibly have been enthusiastic about (p. 20). They become friends by assigning an identity and a value to the other, and fictionalizing friendship to cope with the conflict between their reason and their emotions.

Thus Todd and Harrison's friendship follows the fiction of the simple attraction of opposites: an enthusiastic man attracts an unenthusiastic man, an apathetic man attracts an intense man, and an extrovert attracts an introverted man. But at the same time they have some things in common which make their being opposites in outlook unimportant: They both assume and assign roles and value to their relationship according to the role they are consciously and
unconsciously playing. Also, since Harrison "involuntarily adopts, to a great extent, the mood and manner of whomever he happens to be with" (p.19), their friendship can be seen as one between two equals, two saints. This last resolves the conflict between their reason and emotion.

At their first separation, Todd's mask proves more efficient in protecting him from the control of his emotions, for Todd places no sentimental value on their friendship while Harrison does: "Our separation upset Harrison more than me, whose nirvana could hardly be ruffled by such a mundane circumstance as losing a friend" (p.21). On the other hand, Harrison places a higher value on their friendship since he is the one who pursues the acquaintance with Todd. He also upholds the ideal of the universal brotherhood of man as presented by the communist philosophy (p.21), and the brotherhood of man is meaningless without the qualities that true friendship presupposes.

During their separation, another emotional upheaval causes Todd to change his mask, his father's seemingly irrational suicide. At this time Todd experiences the third moment of intense emotion--frustration. He simply cannot conceive of a reason why his father would commit suicide since he discards the apparent reason of financial loss (p.179). Demoralized over not understanding his father's suicide, Todd rationalizes his emotions into a new mask--
he becomes a cosmic cynic (pp. 180, 22).

Meanwhile, new emotions in Harrison's life have also forced him to re-arrange his fictionalization and create a new mask: he falls in love and marries. Therefore, when he and Todd meet again, he is no longer a communist advocating equal love to all men: "And the brotherhood of man?" asks Todd; "To hell with the brotherhood of man! . . . I wouldn't want those guys for field hands, much less for brothers," is Harrison's reply; and of social justice he now says "impossible to achieve, irrelevant if achieved" (p. 22). But Harrison's cynical attitude, unlike Todd's, does not include personal relationships. He is still enthusiastic about his friendship with Todd, and he is glowing when he talks about his wife, Jane: "Janie. Ruxton and Gibson Island, you know, but sensible. You'll love each other" (p. 23).

The Macks' marriage in The Floating Opera presents one more instance of fictionalization to cope with the conflict of reason and emotion. As Noland comments, "The Macks . . . attempt to order their lives too rationally, too abstractly, as Todd does with his masks. They live by theory, not genuine feeling. They do what any good liberal couple should." The 10

So Todd becomes Jane's friend by reason of being Harrison's, and the friendship among the three of them is possible because Todd plays the role assigned to him: that of
Harrison's shy and introverted friend who admires Jane but does not touch her because he is shy and Harrison, after all, is his friend (pp.24-25).

The love triangle that evolves from this friendship is Barth's way of showing how man values and fictionalizes a love relationship according to rationalizes feelings, how man's reason is often at variance with his emotions, and how identity is modified to cope with rationalized and natural emotions. In The Floating Opera it also serves as a dramatization of orthodox and unorthodox love-sex theories, and the adjustments that must be made to solve the conflict between reason and emotion.

In their fictionalization, The Macks have segregated love and sex, and they want to prove that "You can have sexual attraction apart from love" (p.30). They cannot see, rationally, why a woman should not make love to somebody she likes a lot, just for the pleasure of it, without a lot of complications, and they aim to prove their reasoning by casting Todd into the role of their friend-lover. They further rationalize that their friendship with Todd and the love they feel for each other will not be affected by Jane having sex with Todd. But the sex without love script has to be changed when the Macks' rationalizations are not corroborated by their emotions. And so they change their original script.
The Macks' original fictionalization fails them on the emotional level. They have pondered upon sex and love and the view society has of them, and they have come to the conclusion that most social conventions -- marriage and the one-and-only-and-always idea -- are arbitrary: "We're not stupid enough to be affected by things like jealousy or conventions" (pp.34,30). However, as Todd points out, the Macks' intellectual concepts do not correspond to their emotions (p.32), and the fiction of having a love affair without declarations of love becomes impossible for them to act out. Thus Jane changes her script from "I don't think there's got to be any love in it. I like you a lot as a friend, but that's all, Toddy," to "The truth is, I do love you in a way, Toddy ... Not the same as I love Harrison, but it's more than just friendship; and it makes love-making more fun, doesn't it?" (pp.28-34). And Harrison changes his from "it's like playing tennis ... Just for the fun and exercise," to "a woman can love two or several men in the same way at the same time, or, ... in different ways at the same time, or in the same way at different times, or in different ways at different times. The 'one-and-only-and-always' idea is just a conventional notion" (pp.30-34).

Todd, of course, agrees and plays along with their first and second propositions of love and sex, for after all, in his fictionalization, rationalization is used to escape the
control of his emotions. Also, Todd --who states that "each of the three of us loved the other two as thoroughly as each was able, and in the case of Jane and Harrison, that was thoroughly indeed" (p.13)--is a man who does not understand what love is and who is incapable of feeling great or solemn love for anybody (pp.34,47). He tells Jane that he loves her because he believes that is what she wants to hear (p.37).

There are several reasons why Todd, the cosmic cynic, becomes involved in the Macks' fictionalization. Jane satisfies him sexually without involving his emotions, and likewise Harrison satisfies whatever need for human companionship he has (pp.32-33). Todd will play along with the Macks' fictionalization for as long as he remains emotionally uninvolved. Unfortunately for him, the Macks are too emotionally involved, and they demand that Todd take their emotions seriously. Todd then decides that he has had enough of the Macks and ends the affair by leading Harrison to believe that a poor, Negro female client is paying for his legal services by having sex with him (pp.38-39). In Todd's conversation with Harrison, Todd's casual disregard for emotions and Harrison's earnest regard for emotions can be seen. Harrison says,

'I just wish you hadn't hurt us. There wasn't any reason to. I'm not angry. I just wish you hadn't done it.'
'Nonsense,' I said. 'I didn't say anything.'
'Do you think love is ridiculous?' Harrison asked.
'Everything is ridiculous.'
'Why'd you lie about being a virgin? There wasn't any reason to.'
'You deserved that for expecting to hear it, and being pleased when you heard it,' I said.

'You don't like us,' he declared hopelessly.
'Buck up, man, this is degrading!' I said.
'That difference does anything make? Of course I was acting, but you all wanted an act. How do you think Jane would've felt if I'd told her the truth? I'm on your side' (p.40).

The only positive result from this confrontation is that the Macks' reasons and emotions are in harmony as far as their relationship with Todd is concerned.

The failure of their fictionalization does not, however, keep the Macks from continuing to rationalize their emotions. A few weeks after breaking the affair with Todd, Jane discovers that she is pregnant, but this only causes the Macks emotional problems since there is no way of knowing who is the father (p.149). And once more they rationalize and fictionalize to cope with a reality which is too much for them. "'Look at it this way,' Harrison's most frequent argument runs; 'suppose I was sterile--wouldn't we sooner or later probably adopt a kid? Or suppose you'd been married before and had a kid--wouldn't we still love it after you married me? Now, this is better than adoption, because you're going to be the real mother either way. And it's better than a previous marriage, because
there's a good chance I'm the real father. After all, I slept with you more than Andrews did" (p.150). And so they find a way to cope with reality, by rationalizing their emotions again.

After the stability that the birth of the child brings to their marriage, the Macks can rationalize and fictionalize their emotions concerning Todd once more. This is done in a manner of taking care of unfinished business. Harrison argues,

'I mean, what the hell, we put him on the spot, when you got in bed with him; he might not even have wanted to, you know--not because he didn't want you, but because he might have thought it would hurt our marriage. But if he'd refused, we'd have been insulted, wouldn't we? And, in fact, if he hadn't done it on our terms, we'd have been insulted, I think.'

'Still, he had no business telling us he was a virgin,' Jane insisted.

'But you can't deny we were pleased when he did,' Harrison replied. 'That proves we were expecting too much of him. And we certainly had no right to expect him not to make love to other women. What the hell, he's a bachelor.'

'But he was supposed to be in love with me.'

'You're in love with me, too,' Harrison smiled, 'But you made love to Todd. You understand' (p.152).

And that is how they are ready to pick up the affair with Todd once more.

The resumption of the love triangle implies that the Macks have not completely rationalized their emotions for Todd and that their rationalizations about love and sex have not been refuted to their satisfaction. This time, however, they try it along Todd's line of thinking: "nothing
remains to be told of the affair, except that after its resumption it was conducted in a manner more satisfactory to me. No schedules, no demands, no jealousy, no fictions—all was spontaneity and candor" (p.156).

The affair ends for good when Jane and Harrison, sure of their identities, values, and the harmony between their reason and emotion, no longer need to experiment with unorthodox love-sex theories to refute conventional notions about them. This is clearly seen when Jane explains to Todd why they are terminating the affair:

When Harrison and I got married we were as prudish as they come about extracurricular sex... I swore I could never look at another man, and Harrison swore he never even thought of another woman in a sexual way. Then as we got a little older we saw how dishonest that was... Well, we decided there was nothing wrong with either of us making love to somebody now and then, because we were absolutely sure of each other. I was very attracted to you as Harrison's friend, and as soon as we didn't have to be dishonest any more, I realized I'd like to make love to you... I don't want you to think that Harrison and I are retreating in any way to our old standards...

What I mean is, we were unsure of ourselves when we decided to try this extracurricular business, I guess that's why we were so demanding, come to think of it. We wanted reassurance that we hadn't made a mistake...

Then after we started up again, after Jeannine was born, everything was fine. We all understood each other, and nobody was kidding himself. Now, then, what I want to say is that it was kind of necessary before to be actually carrying on affairs, to prove to ourselves that we meant what we were talking about. But we don't feel it's necessary any more (pp.206-207).
This statement proves that the Macks have been searching for identity and value, and that they fictionalized life to cope with the conflict between their reason and their emotions. This they do by enacting and assuming the fictionalization and roles of a happily married couple and parents.

Todd's fictionalization of life as a cosmic cynic, ironically comes to an end on his last night with Jane, when his last moment of intense emotion occurs—despair. This emotion is caused by Jane's reference to Todd's clubbed fingers and his subsequent inability to make love to Jane that night (p. 220). Out of this comes introspection as he tries to master his despair; and so he concludes "that all my masks were half-conscious attempts to master the fact with which I had to live; that none had made me master of the fact; that where cynicism had failed, no future mask could succeed; that, in short, my heart was the master of all the rest of me, even my will. It was my heart that had made my masks, not my will. The conclusion that swallowed me was this: There was no way to master the fact with which I live" (p. 222). In other words, he is saying that there is no way to escape emotions, that reason is impotent when opposed to emotions, and since he cannot master them the only thing he can do is commit suicide, and with death end all emotions (pp. 10, 15, 222). Todd rationalizes and summarizes all his emotions by postulating that
"Living is action. There's no final reason for action. There's no final reason for living." (p. 223).

But Todd fails to commit suicide in the manner and at the time he has chosen, when he tries to blow up Captain Jacob R. Adam's Floating Opera unsuccessfully (pp. 226-240). This failure, however, does not have the effect that the failure of his other masks had. He simply concludes that since he cannot master the fact with which he lives (that he may die any moment because of his heart condition) by rationalizing emotions, and after having tried suicide, there is no final reason for suicide, and, "faced with an infinitude of possible directions and having no ultimate reason to choose one over another," he will continue to behave as he has in the past (p. 246). He will continue to fictionalize life, assuming roles and assigning values, as it represents a way in which to escape, if not solve, the conflict between reason and emotions.
The End of the Road

The plot and the characters of John Barth's second novel, *The End of the Road*, are somewhat similar to those of *The Floating Opera*: both protagonists spend time, in and out of bed, with the wife of their best friend, both couples re-write morality and value according to their own theories, and all characters play roles either consciously or unconsciously. There are only slight differences between the characters of the first and second novel. Jacob Horner, the protagonist of *The End of the Road*, is alienated, but his alienation is more severe than Todd's. The couple in *The End of the Road* also try to live by theory, but they have developed their theories into dogmas. It is in these slight differences in characterization that the cause for the novel's tragic ending may be found, contrasting with the overall comedy of the first novel. But still, all these subtle similarities and differences are Barth's way of enlarging the theme of man's conscious and unconscious fictionalization of life as he searches for identity and value with which to cope with reality.

*The End of the Road* begins with the sentence "IN A SENSE, I AM JACOB HORNER" which immediately brings to mind identity (the name) and value (the prepositional phrase). Unlike Todd, who enjoyed digressing to explain
things like his name, the book's title, his illnesses, Jake begins his narrative directly by giving the reader facts. He becomes a teacher at the Wicomico State Teachers College in Maryland on the advice of his Doctor (p.1). In his first chapter it is also learned that he is writing the story of what happened to him while teaching there two years after the events happened (pp.1,3). Thus Jake is also narrating the events which led him to his present circumstances.

In this first chapter, Jake's malady is also made known, which is like Todd's heart problem in that it conditions Jake's behavior, identity, values and fictionalization. Jake's malady is physical paralysis caused by his inability to choose a course of action in a given situation where more than one course is desirable. He explains it by saying that "when one is faced with such a multitude of desirable choices, no one choice seems satisfactory for very long by comparison with the aggregate desirability of all the rest, though compared to any one of the others it would not be found inferior" (p.3). He can judge a diversity of choices as desirable because he has no definite identity but rather a multitude of identities, which he refers to as a "plurality of selves" (p.142), and sometimes calls moods and masks (pp. 30,66,112). Having not one but many identities, he is unable to assume one role and fictionalize life coherently.
This strange malady causes Jake's alienation, not so much from society per se as from reality. For when a man is unable to choose in any given situation and this disability causes physical paralysis, then that man becomes dissociated from reality first, and, as a natural consequence, from society. This dissociation is clearly seen when Jake explains what happened to him the first time he was paralyzed. He was given a list of places he could go to with a certain amount of money and he could not choose because there was no reason to choose one city over the others. So he stayed at the bus terminal one whole day, just sitting down and thinking nothing (pp. 73-75).

Jake's alienation and its cause are similar to Todd's in The Floating Opera because the paralysis which Jake suffers is like Todd's realization that dying is something that must be suffered alone; choosing and being must also be done alone. There is a similarity, too, in their illnesses. Todd has a heart condition which may leave him dead at any moment; and Jake has a mental condition which may leave him paralyzed (dead) at any moment. But Jake's state is more critical than Todd's, for Todd, though he rationalizes his masks after events force him to change his stance, assumes these masks wholeheartedly, thinking them the solution to his situations. Jake, on the other hand, must rationalize and decide what mask to use before
acting, and he does this by fulfilling a specific role at a specific moment. When he is unable to assume a role, Jacob Horner ceases to exist except in a meaningless metabolistic sense, for he is without a personality (p.36). That he must create a role before acting can be seen in the first episode with Peggy Rankin. Peggy Rankin is the forty-year old English teacher Jake picks up at the beach. His script has it as a casual encounter and a one-night-stand affair, and so he assigns Peggy the role of "Forty-Year-Old Pickup, a delicate enough character" (p.27), and he assumes the role of a bored, young man who picks up a mature woman with the purpose of spending a few hours with her in bed (pp.24-30).

Barth uses this incident to present certain peculiarities about fictionalization in general and about Jake's fictionalization in particular, and to comment about its nature in the novel. About fictionalization in general, he has Jake say: "Enough now to say that we are all casting directors a great deal of the time, if not always, and he is wise who realizes that his role-assigning is at best an arbitrary distortion of the actors' personalities; but he is even wiser who sees in addition that his arbitrariness is probably inevitable, and at any rate apparently necessary if one would reach the ends he desires" (p.28). About Jake's particular fictionalization, Jake says,
"Only the profundity and limited duration of my moods kept me from being a suicide; as it was, this practice of mine of going to bed when things got too awful, this deliberate termination of my day, was itself a kind of suicide, and served its purpose as efficiently. My moods were little men, and when I killed them they stayed completely dead" (p.30). This being Jake's case, identity and value are not only relative to the particular situation he is in, but also dependent on the degree of his involvement with people and the situation, though generally Jake evades involvement completely.

Jake, like Todd, is not a man who needs or desires friends (p.185) but who, nevertheless, allows himself to be drawn into a relationship of friendship with a man who seems to be his opposite. But, as in the friendship between Todd and Harrison, fictionalization is the common ground between Jake and Joe Morgan; and, like Todd, Jake is conscious of playing roles, while Joe, like Harrison, is unconscious of the fact that his identity is mere play-acting. Another difference is that Joe fictionalizes life systematically, rationally and strictly, assuming the role of a consistent, super-pragmatic rationalist, while Jake is not so concerned with values as Joe is, and fictionalizes life on the spur of the moment. Nevertheless, the success of both the fictionalizations depends on the
identity each one chooses to play, the manner in which they play it, and the value they assign and get from it.

Unlike The Floating Opera, where fictionalization appears as the idiosyncracy of Todd Andrews, in The End of the Road Barth presents the act of assuming and assigning roles as a therapy: mythotherapy. All of Barth's characters practice mythotherapy in their particular ways. In the words of Jake's Doctor, "mythotherapy is based on two assumptions: that human existence precedes human essence, if either of the two terms really signifies anything; and that a man is not only free to choose his essence but to change it at will" (p.88). In this context, essence takes the place of ego or identity, and both of them comprise value in-so-much as identity is a value. The Doctor goes on to say that all life is a fiction and that everybody is either a major or a minor character depending on who is writing or directing the script (p.88). Thus, mythotherapy is not merely the act of creating and changing identity but also the act of creating a life story, that is, a fictionalization. And, as the Doctor says, everybody practices mythotherapy "consciously or unconsciously for the purpose of aggrandizing or protecting the ego" (p.89). That the main characters do it consciously and the others unconsciously is the main difference between
Barth's protagonists and the other characters.

There is still another difference between the role-playing in *The Floating Opera* and that in *The End of the Road*. While in the first it is Harrison who adopts his role from Todd's, in the second it is Jake who copies Joe's. From the moment they meet, Jake plays up to Joe; that is, he adopts freely attitudes and moods from Joe. In the president's office, when Jake is being interviewed for the teaching job, he adopts Joe's seriousness and dedication when he compares a student grasping a lesson with a man making fire with flint and steel (Joe is a serious scoutmaster) (pp. 17-18). Once the need for action is over, Jake retreats into being no character at all, and this is how Joe finds him when he confronts Jake after the interview and asks Jake if he was making fun of him (p. 19). This confrontation gives Jake an inkling into the role Joe is playing: "apparently Joe Morgan was the sort who heads directly for his destination, implying by his example that paths should be laid where people walk, instead of walking where the paths happen to be laid" (p. 20). This observation implies that Joe is a man with a specific fiction and role to follow, and that he expects those who come into his sphere of action to dance to the tune he plays or at least take him seriously. Joe Morgan is definitely an extremely serious fictionalizer.
After this confrontation, the plot of the novel follows that of *The Floating Opera* to a certain extent. Joe Morgan pursues his acquaintance with Jake, and Jake allows himself to be drawn into Joe's cosmos which includes his wife Rennie. That it is Joe who goes after Jake is clearly seen when after Jake turns down Joe's dinner invitation, the Morgans "track him to his very lair" (p.31) that very same night. On this first encounter with the Morgans, Jake points out certain aspects about their marriage relationship which is a clear deviation from the marriage in the other novel. Even when Harrison Mack is the instigator, he and Jane are equal partners in everything they do. In the Morgans' marriage, Joe is preceptor, master and director, while Rennie is an apprentice and protege. Jake notices that Joe Morgan is a man who "would never make a move or utter a statement, if he could help it, that he hadn't considered deliberately and penetratingly before hand" (pp.32-33); and that Rennie borrows directly from Joe mannerisms and both the matter and manner of her thinking (p.31).

From the beginning of his acquaintanceship with the Morgans, Jake is interested in what he calls Joe's system --the way Joe practices mythotherapy--and the way Rennie fits into it: "I was interested in the story of Rennie's first encounter with the Morgan philosophy, and the
irresistible rhetoric Joe had employed to open her eyes to the truth about apologies. It demonstrated clearly that philosophizing was no game to Mr. Morgan; that he lived his conclusions down to the fine print; and Rennie became a somewhat more interesting figure to me" (p.48). Conscious of the problem he has with his own identity, Jake is curious about the identities and story of Joe and Rennie Morgan.

Identity is thus the main issue in the relationship of these three characters. But identity per se includes value, and in the novel's context is closely related to fictionalization. Of the three only Joe is confident that the identity he has assumed is the best with which to cope with life at all times, and in his confidence he disregards the peculiarities of certain people and situations. Jake's identity is that of a chameleon who acquires the identity which best serves him to protect himself in specific situations. And Rennie sways back and forth between being the Mrs. Morgan of Joe's creation and the Rennie MacMahon she was before she married him and which she never completely obliterated when she became Joe's disciple. Because of the complexities of these three characters' identities, the relationship among them is never the easy-going camaraderie that is visible in The Floating Opera.
The relationship which evolves from Jake's first visit to the Morgans' house is that of a man, Joe, who is trying or sounding off his philosophy on a person other than his disciple-wife. Besides using Jake as a sounding board, Joe casts Jake into the role of inquisitor and examiner in his relationship with Rennie. To understand this triangular relationship it is important first to delve deeply into the identity of the characters involved and the fictionalization they are enacting.

Joe Morgan's identity is, like F. Scott Fitzgerald's Gatsby's, that of a man who has sprung from a romantic conception of himself. As he explains to Jake, "In my ethics the most a man can do is be right from his point of view; there's no general reason why he should even bother to defend it, much less expect anybody else to accept it, but the only thing he can do is operate by it, because there's nothing else" (p.46). This, of course, is a very subjective stance which does away with objective values and conventional rules and norms. It means that he judges everything using his point of view as a guideline which he neither has to explain nor defend. This is clearly seen when he explains to Jake the value he assigns to his marriage to Rennie. First, he says that a value is real even though it is not intrinsic, objective and absolute, and so just because a marriage relationship
is not an absolute, this does not mean he does not value it; "in fact," he says, "I value my relationship with Rennie more than anything else in the world. All it means is that once you admit it's no absolute, you have to decide for yourself the conditions under which marriage is important to you" (pp.44-45).

It is along the lines of his ethics that Joe Morgan has created a script and character for himself, his main aim being to live coherently (p.55). He extends his fictionalization to include the figure of his wife, and later that of his friend. He has various reasons for doing this. Salient among these is that, like every human being, he needs love and human companionship, and furthermore, as a philosopher who takes himself and his philosophy seriously, he needs someone to try it on. These needs explain both the value he assigns to his marriage and the reason why he befriends Jake who obviously does not take anything seriously.

Thus Joe is a man to whom indecision is foreign, who is always sure of his grounds, acts quickly and explains his actions lucidly, but who despite his excitability lacks warmth and spontaneity (p.33). His lack of warmth and spontaneity is, however, in accordance with his ethics for he is convinced that the most a man can do is live coherently in ways he can explain if he wants to (p.47).
His fictionalization is one where everything can be explained and analyzed to the smallest detail. And he has rationalized his ethics to such a degree that he does not see how the imposition of his program is violating the identity of his wife, Rennie.12

But Joe cannot violate Rennie's identity unless she consents to it, and she does acquiesce to this violation unknowingly. It all goes back to the way she was before she knew Joe. In her own words, she was a normal shallow girl who did not think deeply nor rationalize her life, looking for reasons as to why she was the person she was: "I wasn't really interested in anything, I never thought about anything, I never even particularly wanted to do anything--I didn't even especially enjoy myself. I just dreamed along like a big blob of sleep. If I thought at all, I guess I lived on my potentialities, because I never felt dissatisfied with myself" (p.57). She thinks that this part of her life is worthless, because she is judging from Mrs. Morgan's point of view. She becomes dissatisfied with her life when she accepts Joe's assessment of it, and values it according to Joe's ethics.

From the moment in Their relationship that Joe tells Rennie that he does not expect her to change for his sake, Rennie sees herself through Joe's eyes, and realizes what a complete blank she is (p.58). And with the choice
of either remaining the way she is or of becoming something which appears to be worthier, she chooses to try Joe's way. As soon as she surrenders, Joe asserts his rules: "anything we did together we had to do it on the same level, understanding it in the same way, for the same purpose, nobody making allowances for anybody else, or he just wasn't interested. But he told me he'd like a more or less permanent relationship" (p. 60). Once she has agreed to this, Rennie places herself in a subservient position to Joe, and since she is not as articulate as Joe, "most of the more reasonable-sounding ideas would be his" (p. 61). However, as far as the action in the novel is concerned, Rennie never graduates to Joe's level of articulation; she always remains in Joe's shadow and a mere mouthpiece for his ideas. Therefore, her identity and values come from outside, assigned to her and for her by Joe.

It is in Rennie's surrender of her identity and individuality as Rennie MacMahon that the germ for the tragic ending of The End of the Road is found. The moment she marries Joe, she not only surrenders her identity, but also her ability to create scripts of her own. From then on she will recognize herself as a person only when she is playing the role Joe assigns to her and when she is acting within his fictionalization. Thus she says to
Jake:

What one of us took seriously both ought to be able to take seriously, and our relationship was first on the list, over any career or ambition or anything else. He told me that he would expect me to make the same heavy demands on myself and on him that he made on himself and would make on me, and that they always had to be the same demands.

So I scrapped every last one of my friends, because you had to make all kinds of allowances for them; you couldn't take them as seriously as all that. I had to completely change my mind not only about my parents, but also about my whole childhood. I'd thought it was a pretty ideal childhood, but now I saw it was just so much cottonwool. I threw out every opinion I owned, because I couldn't defend them. I think I completely erased myself, Jake, right down to nothing, so I could start over (p.61).

What she actually does is amputate her ability to practice mythotherapy independently and thus cope with reality as a person and not as an appendage.

There are times when she reverts to being Rennie MacMahon, as when she goes horseback riding with Jake and confides to him things she would never have dared to tell Joe (p.64). She feels guilty about this because in Joe's script it would amount to being unfaithful. To a certain degree, she confides in Jake because she sees the similarities between Joe and Jake, but still she does not know how to deal with the situation (p.64). She tries by casting Jake into the role of an examiner called in by Joe to find out how strong she is (p.68), but she cannot
fictionalize this successfully. She is very strong when Joe is around to direct the script, but when he is not around and she is confronted by a man who grants all of Joe's premises, understands them and laughs at them, she is completely lost (p.64). This is so especially when Jake uses Joe's argument to refute Rennie's reasoning, as for example when Jake comments that what she has lost by going along with Joe's program is her individuality. She argues back

'You're saying that it's better to be a real Rennie MacMahon than an imitation Joe Morgan, but that's not self-evident, Jake; not at all. It's just romantic. I'd rather be a lousy Joe Morgan than a first-rate Rennie MacMahon. To hell with pride. This unique-personality business is another thing that's no absolute' (pp.62-63).

And Jake answers her, using Joe's reasoning

'To quote the gospel to you Rennie, . . . it doesn't follow either that because a thing's not absolute it isn't valuable' (p.63).

But Rennie cannot admit the veracity of Jake's argument, because if she does, the fiction of being in heaven with God-Joe would come tumbling down, and she is not strong enough to deal with that. Also, although she knows there are cracks in the role she is playing, she still believes there are none in Joe's. Despite her lack of self-confidence, she believes that the role she is playing is the best with which to cope with life.

While Rennie is undergoing an identity crisis, which
comes into the open through her conversations with Jake. Joe seems to be unaware that there is anything wrong with Rennie. He is so confident that he has made Rennie over into Mrs. Joe Morgan, that he is blind to her playing a role for his benefit. She would lie to Joe about the nature of her conversations with Jake, while Joe would listen carefully, noncommittally, and sometimes smile (p.65). This implies that Joe only recognizes Rennie as his wife, deluding himself by believing that that is all she can ever be. Through it all, Jake remains true to himself; that is, his attitude and role change as frequently as his Laocoön's smile (p.66).

Rennie is safe so long as she can believe in the value and identity of Joe, and believe that his fictionalization corresponds to reality; she says, referring to Joe, "Real people aren't any different when they're alone. No masks. What you see of them is authentic" (p.70). But her faith is shattered one evening when Jake makes her eavesdrop on Joe. What they witness through the window is what makes it possible for Rennie to deviate from Joe's marital script by committing adultery with Jake. They see Joe executing military commands, admiring himself in the mirror, picking his nose and masturbating (p.70).

The adultery in The End of the Road is radically different from that of The Floating Opera in that, first,
the husband does not know about it beforehand; second, it is not a planned affair; and, third, it has disastrous consequences. But it also happens in a dream-like sequence as it did in *The Floating Opera*:\(^{13}\)

The point I want to make is that in the face of it there was no overt act, no word or deed that unambiguously indicated desire on the part of either of us.

... who's to say confidently that good nights were not on the tips of tongues? It happened that we embraced each other instead before we went our separate ways—but I think a slow-motion camera would not have shown who moved first—and it happened further (but I would not say consequentially) that our separate ways led to the same bed. By that time, if we had been consciously thinking of first steps—and I for one certainly wasn't—I'm sure we both would have assumed that the first steps, whoever made them, had already been made (pp. 99-100).

Neither Jake nor Rennie is conscious that their action is morally wrong and that it may have serious consequences. Furthermore, Joe has asked Jake to keep Rennie company while he is in Washington doing research, and to a certain extent it is natural for Jake to assume Joe's role (p. 99). It seems that when Jake is more caught up in playing a role he is unaware of it.\(^{14}\) And Rennie, with her faith in Joe shattered by what she saw when she and Jake eavesdropped on Joe, unconsciously accepts Jake in the guise of her husband.

Therefore, the adultery happens as though it were a natural act between man and wife. Thus, as far as Jake
is concerned, the adultery is insignificant, unimportant and inconsequential, and the fellow who committed it was not thinking ahead of his desires (p. 101). Rennie does not react until after Joe is back from Washington (p. 102). When she is back again in Joe's cosmos, she reacts by feeling extremely guilty, not only because she has been unfaithful to Joe, but also because she has violated the only role which allowed her to believe she is alive and happy. The adultery is a clear deviation from Joe's fictionalization, and she has no way of knowing how it is going to affect her relationship with Joe.

Jake remains unconcerned until the night Rennie calls him and he thinks the act is going to be repeated. Then a "sudden marvelous sensation of guilt" turns into real guilt and he truly thinks about what he has done: "Does Jacob Horner betray the only man he can think of as friend, and then double the felony by concealing the betrayal?" (p. 103). This guilt is something he cannot deal with. He does not know how to apply mythotherapy to this particular situation. Therefore, action must be taken by Rennie, who unsuccessfully tries to convince herself that it did not happen (p. 105). She has no resources to deal with the reality of what she has done and how she feels about it. There is no satisfactory role for her to assume, and no rationalization that
would erase the guilt she feels.

Jake, at this point, can only assume the role of Joe's friend who has betrayed him by committing adultery with his wife: "There was no slipping into someone else's world or otherwise escaping my own, which had me by the throat" (p.106). The way he feels means that he is operating by Joe's values, that he has accepted the role Joe cast him into, and that he must now wait to see how Joe is going to direct the script.

Jake regains his own identity when he is confronted by Joe about the adultery. He assumes a role he describes as "sincerity" (p.117) to cope with the situation and at the same time protect his ego. Joe, of course, remains the super-pragmatist he has always been, and as such wants to know everything that happened in order to understand why Rennie did it and how to deal with her. Joe's inability to modify either his identity or his fiction to cope with the adultery without endangering his ego is in part responsible for the eventual destruction of Rennie. The only thing he can conclude is that they did it because they wanted to, since in his ethics what a man wants to do, in the end is what he does (p.50).

What Joe should have realized through this confrontation with Jake, is that Joe's ethics are not applicable in all situations, that others do not operate by them. As
Herbert F. Smith puts it, "Joe's personal absolutism ought to have remained personal."^{15}

Also Joe should have come to the realization that Rennie is not the woman he thought her to be, the woman he wants so much that he forced Rennie to assume his ideal wife role. The difference is clear in the contradiction between the way he describes her when they first met and the way she describes herself. Joe says of Rennie MacMahon: "so that was my ideal of Rennie: self-sufficiency, strength, ... and privacy" (p.114). He never sees that Rennie is simply trying to play the role he has always assigned to her and that that role is not the real Rennie.

Basically, the problem for Joe is that, according to his version of Rennie and according to her version of herself, what happened could not have happened and yet it did (p.114). The adultery also violates the marital fidelity principle, which, according to Joe, is important to them both because it is important to Rennie (p.114). And since to Joe, the value he has assigned to his relationship with Rennie is that of the orientation post that gives every other part of their lives value, he has to solve the problem satisfactorily for it to remain valuable (p.115). Thus Joe demands from Jake reasons that would allow him to keep on thinking that his
program for living coherently works. But Jake for once is playing a role consistently. He is being sincere, and the only answer he can give Joe is that he was not thinking, that he had no conscious motives and was unaware of unconscious ones, and that he cannot rationalize as to why he made love to Rennie (p.116).

Because this is impossible in The Morgan Cosmos, Joe keeps insisting, to which Jake reasonably answers,

I don't think you'd have as much of a problem if you had more respect for the answer 'I don't know.' It can be an awfully honest answer, Joe. When somebody close to you injures you unaccountably, and you say 'Why in the world did you do that?' and they say 'I don't know,' it seems to me that that answer can be worthy of respect. And if it's somebody you love or trust who says it, and they say it contritely, I think it could even be acceptable (p.118).

But Joe cannot accept this because, according to his ethics, everything can be explained if one wants to, and everything is done with a conscious purpose. Jake's sincere answer leaves Joe not knowing how to deal with either Rennie or Jake, nor into what role to cast them, nor what value to assign to their actions.

What Joe wants is to turn experience into speech since speech is easier to cope with than reality and emotions. But, as Jake points out, to do this "is always a betrayal of experience, a falsification of it; but only so betrayed can it be dealt with at all" (p.119).
In other words, articulation is also a fictionalization, though at times a necessary one in order to deal with an extremely painful situation.

Since Jake's lack of articulation does not help Joe to understand and analyze the event, Joe, "nearly mad from the injury to his self-love, becomes fanatically committed to resolving this action in some acceptable way." He sends Rennie to Jake's apartment "to re-enact the crime in a more analyzable way" (p.121). Rennie has gone back to the Morgan cosmos and must abide by its rules: "we [have] to throw ourselves as hard as possible against the facts, and, as often as possible, no matter how much it hurts," and, "the only possible chance to save anything is never to leave it for a minute" (p.122).

Joe cannot accept that for a moment Rennie was weak enough to betray him, and he does not believe in the honesty of her feelings for Jake. He must consider them false so as not to have to face the facts (p.124).

In a way, Rennie's adultery is an act of deception of the same magnitude as Joe's act when she and Jake eavesdrop on him. In both instances their identities have been altered and both seem to be playing at make-believe. They should have simply revised the version they have of each other, correcting their errors in judgment. Rennie is incapable of judging by herself, and she cannot see
how Joe's position about the adultery is illogical, as were his actions on the night she eavesdropped on him. Joe's position about the adultery because, as Jake points out, "Rennie's single adultery, of course, did not at all necessarily imply that she believed extramarital sex was generally 'all right' with either other men in general or me in particular: at most it implied that she'd been willing to do it once" (pp.124-125). Rennie only knows that she loves Joe regardless, and that in order to remain with him she must be what he thinks she is, she must play whatever role he demands of her.

Joe demands that Rennie act consistently in what he considers her new role--that of an unfaithful wife. Rennie is thus faced with alternatives that are repugnant to her--going to bed with Jake or lying about it to Joe. She is unable to act as demanded, or to save herself by refusing to go along with Joe's policy decisions and thus assert her own opinion (p.125). She is like a paralyzed Jake who cannot move when faced with a multitude of desirable choices, except that her choices are all undesirable. Therefore, Rennie places the burden of action on Jake, who finally takes Rennie to bed after he dramatizes the encounter as a romantic contest between symbols: "Joe was The Reason, or Being (I was using Rennie's cosmos); I was The Unreason, or Not-Being; and
the two of us were fighting without quarter for possession of Rennie, like God and Satan for the soul of Man" (p. 129).

At this point in the novel, Jake exposes what is wrong with mythotherapy. When before he said that a man in applying mythotherapy is prepared to ignore man's charming complexities, "must ignore them, in fact, if you are to get on with the plot, or get things done according to schedule" (p. 28), he now recognizes that the more one learns about a given person, "the more difficult it becomes to assign a character to him that will allow one to deal with him effectively in an emotional situation.

Mythotherapy, in short, becomes increasingly harder to apply, because one is compelled to recognize the inadequacy of any role one assigns" (p. 128). Then he says he can only practice mythotherapy successfully when he is no more than half-awake (p. 128). And this is the way he is whenever he is with Rennie, half-conscious of the role he is playing and of what it is doing to Rennie.

For example, he realizes that in the whole business Joe behaves consistently with his position, and that "Rennie no longer has a position to act consistently with, not even the position of acting inconsistently, and yet, unlike his own, her personality is such that it seems to require a position in order to preserve itself" (p. 129); and yet he is unconscious that by behaving the way he
he does, he is aiding and abetting Joe in destroying Rennie.

The destruction of Rennie has to do with the fact that she cannot act the role of Mrs. Joe Morgan in Joe's new fictionalization of their marriage nor can she fictionalize life on her own. This is quite visible in her two visits to Jake's apartment. The first time she tries to cope with the situation by creating a script in which the adultery is completely insignificant, not to be taken seriously (p.130). In this script, she assigns to Joe the role of a man who thinks too much and talks too much, and by doing that gives the whole business more importance than it really has. To Jake she assigns the role of a bored man who began the whole thing because he had nothing else to do (p.131). But Jake tears up her script in a mood of "happy human perversity" by proving that she cannot maintain such a role in front of Joe: "Then skip home with that quart of muscatel in you, tweak his nose for him, and tell him you can't think seriously any more about anything as silly as your sex life, . . . Tell him the whole trouble is that he thinks too much. . . He'd fracture your jaw for you. Tell him he's acting like a high-school boy! He'll lay you cold and you know it" (pp.132-133). Thus it is that Jake aids and abets Joe in the murder of Rennie, by not allowing her a fictional-
ization which would enable her to cope with her situation.

The second time, Rennie seems to admit defeat in the face of her inability to cope with the new script Joe has created for their relationship since her original adultery. She does not recognize herself any more (p.137). In the face of Joe's super-rationalism, she cannot define her feelings nor take a course of action consistent with what she thinks and feels. She tells Jake,

I still love him more than he or anybody else suspects, but what we had before is just out. This makes it impossible. Even if it's actually not true that I love you, the possibility that I might--the fact that I'm not sure I don't--kills everything. It doesn't solve any problems; it is the problem. Can you imagine how it makes me feel when he says he's accepted my relationship with you, and tries to act as if nothing had happened? The whole damned thing's a lie from now on--has been ever since I first admitted to myself that I might love you (p.140).

And so she is unable to play a role which contradicts her mind and her emotions. The only thing Rennie can think of doing to preserve herself is postponing as much as she can for as long as she possibly can (p.140).

On the other hand, Jake can and does fictionalize Rennie's situation. He sees her problem as resulting from the vagueness of certain terms in the language (p.141). He feels that words are arbitrary symbols used to denominate things and feelings. They are not exact. Therefore, "assigning names to things is like assigning
roles to people: it is necessarily a distortion, but it is a necessary distortion if one would get on with the plot" (p.142). But even when Rennie assigns names to her feelings, she cannot get on with the plot, because she cannot play her new role wholeheartedly and because she is unable to read and follow Joe's script.

While Rennie is being destroyed by Joe's new fictionalization, and Jake is articulating his contradictory points of view in accordance with his plurality of selves, Joe is happily applying his subjective system of ethics to the situation, justifying what he is doing to Rennie with the line "I'm just trying to understand her" (p.144). In their relationship, Joe assigns his own feelings to Rennie: he tells Jake how they have been feeling, "we certainly haven't been carefree, but you can be pretty happy without being carefree. The point is we've been dealing with each other pretty intensely and objectively--exploring each other as deep as we can. That part of it's been fine. And we've been outdoors a lot, because we didn't want to ruin our health over it. We've probably felt a lot closer to each other than ever, whether we've solved anything or not" (p.145). Joe is actually so happy to be able to act consistently with his position that he even considers that he might be to blame for the whole thing (p.145). But this is a possibility he does not
consider seriously. This is clearly seen when he justifies his sending Rennie to Jake's apartment as a matter of testing her: "She's got to decide once and for all what she really feels about you and me and herself, and you know as well as I do that if it weren't for those trips to your place she'd repress that first business as fast as she could" (p.145). With this statement Joe shows that he is willing to ignore Rennie's feelings; first, because she does not want to see Jake again, and, second, because she wants to repress that first business. Jake shows more feelings for Rennie when he tells Joe that the important thing about wounds is healing them no matter how (p.146); that is, if one's purpose is surviving.

Joe's fictionalization suffers an unexpected complication when Rennie becomes pregnant. Joe says that he has allowed for the possibility that she might get pregnant, but he does not like the possibility that she might be pregnant by Jake (p.150), and proceeds to behave as though that possibility is a fact. To Rennie the possibility is repugnant (p.169), so repugnant that she ignores the possibility that it might be Joe's. Throughout the confrontation which follows Rennie's discovery of her pregnancy, Joe sticks to his super-pragmatic role which lacks understanding and sympathy, Jake asserts his plurality of selves (one of which might be responsible
while the others are not), and Rennie is a lost soul caught in the wrong script. None of the three have an effective way to deal with the situation. By this time all actors seem to have lost control over the script.

The farcical point in this confrontation is that the one who should assume most of the responsibility and who should make the decision, is the one who does not because in his ethics there is no subjective rule to apply. This is Joe Morgan. He is the most responsible because after all he has been responsible for the script which forces Rennie to have sex with Jake, and because he exacted from Jake the promise to do what Joe asks (p.127). He now demands that Jake and Rennie take a position and stick to it (p.151), but aside from saying he does not like the idea that Rennie might be pregnant by Jake, he does not take a position on what is to be done. Jake, consistent with his basic irresponsibility, is at least willing to help the Morgans in whatever they decide to do. Rennie assumes the position that she would like the decision to be Joe's as it has always been in their relationship. But Joe seems to want to evade that responsibility by throwing the whole thing at Rennie (pp.150-151).

Action to save the situation from disastrous consequences ought to be taken by the three of them. They are all responsible to some extent. But obviously, none knows
what to do. Rennie can only think of two ways out of her situation: have an abortion or commit suicide (p.152). Joe is willing to help her with the latter alternative—he supplies the means, a Colt .45; but he says of the first, "You're setting up alternatives that aren't actually open to you" (p.152). The whole responsibility falls on Jake's hands when he stops Rennie from committing suicide (pp.152-153). Thus Jake is the only one who acts responsibly. Stubbs summarizes the situation as follows: "Joe, by forcing his values on her, and Jake, by revealing the inadequacy of those values, confuse and break her. Barth's point is that both Jake and Joe must take responsibility for the crime of violating the uniqueness of her identity. Although Joe refuses to take any responsibility, Jake assumes his responsibility to another human being and he acts on this feeling when he tries to prevent Rennie from shooting herself." The only thing Stubbs leaves out is Rennie's responsibility to herself. Neither Joe nor Jake can violate her identity without her acquiescence, be it consciously or unconsciously given.

From then on, the only actor with an active role is Jake. Joe remains noncommittal to the end, and Rennie will not co-operate to the extent of lying or playing a part to have the much desired abortion (p.169). Jake's Doctor finally decides to help Jake out of the hole he is
in, and thus the stage is set for the last scene (p. 182).

With the responsible one of his selves, Jake wants the experience to teach him something about the nature of his essence in relation to his involvement in other people's fictionalizations. He wants to learn that given the fact that he cannot be one person nor play one role consistently, he should stay out of other people's lives, since he can only cause damage to himself as well as to others. He also wants to learn that since he does not need friends, the only way he can have them is by remaining uninvolved (p. 185). He wants to learn all this, but he recognizes that only one of his selves is the one that feels this need. His identity remains pluralistic and so do his feelings: "My feelings were mixed: relief, ridiculousness, embarrassment, anger, injured pride, maudlin affection for the Morgans, disgust with them and myself, and a host of other things, including indifference to the whole business" (pp. 185-186).

However, as he takes Rennie to the Doctor for the fatal abortion, Jake realizes "the fundamental, last-analysis loneliness of all human beings in critical situations" (pp. 186-187), a loneliness that cannot be escaped through any fictionalization: "into no cause, resolve, or philosophy can we cram so much of ourselves that there is no part left over to wonder and be lonely" (p. 187). And this is
one of the main reasons why man fictionalizes life, to protect the ego from feeling too deeply the fundamental loneliness of being human. Obviously it is not always successful. In the end, there is death for Rennie, a death which is a lesson for both Joe and Jake, since it means that mythotherapy should not be practiced too rationally nor amorally. But her death serves no purpose, because neither Joe nor Jake is affected very deeply even though they are drowning in grief (p.197).

And that is how a clever fictionalization ends. Joe no longer has the responsibility of creating a role for Rennie, but he will continue to apply mythotherapy as he always has because Rennie's death neither proves nor refutes the validity of his ethics. After all, it was Rennie who failed by not living up to them. Jake's ego is hardly affected. He still does not know what to do nor what to feel (p.196). The only thing Rennie's death clearly shows is that the identity assumed must be assumed wholeheartedly if it is to effectively protect one's ego, and that one should be convinced that the fictionalization one is enacting is the best with which to cope with reality. Thus Rennie dies in the last analysis because she has no identity of her own with which to fictionalize life and value it in order to cope with reality.
John Barth's novels, *The Floating Opera* and *The End of the Road*, subscribe to T.S. Eliot's statement that "Human kind cannot bear very much reality." That is why all his characters practice mythotherapy, consciously or unconsciously. Through his presentation of the theme of identity, Barth states that identity is not a fixed entity, but that man creates and changes his identity at will as a means to cope with the reality of the innate loneliness of being human, and to deal effectively with the conflict of reason and emotion. He also denies the existence of absolute values, asserting that values are relative and subjective, varying according to identity and the particular situation one is involved in. Barth also states that man fictionalizes life, assuming and assigning roles, for the purpose of aggrandizing or protecting his ego which is not a totally rational entity, but also emotional. However, he exposes the danger of practicing mythotherapy amorally or too strictly in *The End of the Road*. But mythotherapy is successfully practiced by Todd Andrews and the Macks in *The Floating Opera*, demonstrating that it is an effective way to deal with reality when practiced wholeheartedly, with a minimum of involvement and a maximum of adaptability. In other
words, fictionalization works, it enables man to cope with reality, if man allows for the inherent incoherence of life, and that identity and value must change given diverse situations.
FOOTNOTES


2 Richard W. Noland, "John Barth and the Novel of Comic Nihilism," *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature*, 7 (Autumn 1968), p. 264. Noland quotes a letter in which Barth says "I deliberately had him [Todd] end up with that brave ethical subjectivism, in order that Jacob Horner might undo that position in #2 and carry all non-mystical value-thinking to the end of the road."


6 Stubbs, p. 104.


8 Stubbs, p. 104.

9 Noland, p. 241.

10 Noland, p. 242.


12 Stubbs, p. 105.


14 Majdiak, p. 58.


16 Majdiak, p. 59.

17 Stubbs, pp. 107-108.

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