



Giles Goat-Boy

John Barth

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In this outrageously farcical adventure, hero George Giles sets out to conquer the terrible *Wescac* computer system that threatens to destroy his community in this brilliant "fantasy of theology, sociology, and sex" (*Time*).

Giles Goat-Boy Details

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Author : John Barth

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From Reader Review Giles Goat-Boy for online ebook

Vit Babenco says

Giles – from the Late Latin name Aegidius, which is derived from Greek αἰγίδιον (aigidion) meaning ‘young goat’.

John Barth brazenly turns Holy Gospels into a picaresque fable and the Saviour becomes a revolutionary nerd of the universal standing talking in the new-fangled recondite parables:

“It occurred to me to argue, then, more out of spite than out of conviction, that even his vaunted miserliness might be passèd, and its opposite flunked. Enos Enoch, it was true, bade men give all their wealth of information to poor students and become as unlettered kindergarteners, if they would Pass; but it seemed to me that this was to pass at the expense of others, those to whom one's wealth was given, for nowhere did the Founder's Scroll say ‘Passèd are the wealthy.’ What nobler martyrdom, then, than to keep from men that which it would flunk them to possess, and hoarding it to oneself, flunk like a scapegoat in their stead?”
Never mess with messiah...

Jonathan says

So, is it quite as funny as it thinks it is? Probably not. Are there some issues with the representation of and attitude towards black people and women? Yup (even after properly distinguishing between narrator, character and "author" (yes yes, i know i know)). Do some bits drag? Yup. Does its satire and its focus seem a little dated at times? Sure. Does any of that matter in the slightest? Nope.

Virginia says

what. the. fuck.

normally i don't get pissy about books i don't completely understand. but seriously. this is too much. plus it was way way way way too long. and too much gratuitous sex/weird words used to describe gratuitous sex (which i don't normally mind either, but this was so out of control it got boring). plus, like the floating opera, it's weirdly racist: the black men are horny half-animals and the women are seductresses. i take that back. not weirdly racist. just flat out racist.

redeeming qualities? i really liked leonid. and sometimes it was funny. other than that...ugh.

Suzanne says

Finished this book 4 weeks ago, but better late than never.

I'd thought I'd read *Giles Goat-Boy* a few years ago and didn't remember much of it because I just wasn't enamored, despite my lifelong devotion to John Barth. But when I got to page 100, I knew I was in virgin territory and had never seen the subsequent pages before. Apparently I had put this aside on that other attempt. And then I began to realize why.

Because it's a 700– page comic allegory, that's why! This is something you really need to be in the mood for, and I just wasn't either time. There are some standard Barthian elements that I enjoyed, such as his playful language and its particular rhythms that just synch up with something in my neural circuitry. I do love his prose style as much as that of any writer on earth. And I cannot help but be amazed by his general brilliance that is capable of producing something as metafictionally and allegorically complex as this, even if its wackiness was over the top and then some. And there is a parody of Oedipus Rex that's a hoot! No, really. It was funny stuff.

I understand that *GGB* was the only one of John Barth's novels to ever achieve any commercial success, even though it is said to be his least favorite of his own books. I can see how college students in the mid 1960s could have gotten off on this, especially if there were earnest late night political and philosophical discussions under the influence of funny cigarettes. But the cartoonishness of it undermined any engagement I might have felt and ultimately left me pretty cold.

Some complain about the racism and sexism in this book and that would be with good reason, if any of this could be taken seriously, but again, it's all so abstract and allegorical, and the characters, well, so silly, I found it hard to be offended.

I'm making it a long-term project to read or re-read the first six Barth novels in preparation for *Letters*, which will be a new one for me and which, I understand, relies on knowledge of the first six. It's been a long time since I've read some of the early ones and *Lost in the Funhouse* will be for the first time. Even though *Giles Goat-Boy* was a bit of a disappointment, I'm moving on to a re-read of *The Sot- Weed Factor* sometime this winter or next spring, which has never disappointed. It's one of my favorite books of all time, and never fails to comfort, delight, amaze, and amuse.

Hadrian says

Ack. I feel like a cat who needs to throw up.

The author is very clever, no doubt. His wordplay, repeated denials of authorship and lampooning of the University structure are good points. Aside from this, however, there is too much dragging the book down. The book is bloated navel-gazing, and only becomes more and more tiresome as it 'progresses', boring you further and further as its once-clever puns become agony to read.

nostalgebraist says

Another odd book. I greatly enjoyed reading it, but I enjoyed the early stretches much more than the later ones, and after turning the last page, I was left completely unsure whether to declare the book good, bad, or otherwise. I don't think I would recommend it to anyone, yet at the same time I want to run around breathlessly telling people about its many virtues.

In any case, I need to read more stuff by John Barth. All I knew about him before reading *Giles Goat-Boy* was that he was one of the early "postmodernists," that he had something to do with the development of the movement called "metafiction," and that he was commonly deemed to have had less lasting appeal than other postmodernists like Pynchon and Gass. ("Barth is a relic of the '60s," I read somewhere -- a claim I still do not understand. Anyway *Giles Goat-Boy*, which makes fun of hippies -- or at least of such hippie-like

creatures as existed in 1965 -- along with pretty much everything else, feels less dated to me than most of the cultural artifacts from that era that *haven't* been forgotten.) What I didn't know is that Barth is just a really, really good writer, both on the micro-level of sentence construction and on the macro-level of plotting, characterization and thematic patterning. It's funny that Barth's reputation (or the version of it that had managed to filter through my dense skull, anyway) is mainly as an experimentalist and underminer of traditional narrative, when *Giles Goat-Boy* (ostensibly one of his less inviting books) reveals him to be a fun, charming, and consummately skilled storyteller. I had never thought Barth sounded particularly interesting, and I only checked this book out from the library because its premise sounded so weird and I was idly curious; now I want to read everything else he's written (which is a lot).

Giles Goat-Boy takes place in an allegorical alternate world in which the whole of earth is a single university, with colleges instead of countries, chancellors and deans instead of presidents and kings, and "Grand Tutors" instead of religious leaders. The western and eastern worlds are "West Campus" and "East Campus." Wars are "riots," and after weathering Campus Riots I and II, the university has found itself enmeshed in the "Quiet Riot," i.e., the Cold War. God is "the Founder," and salvation is "Commencement" or "Graduation," both supernatural notions subjected to considerable doubt on the modern campus. But there is another Godlike being in the story: WESCAC, the West Campus Automatic Computer, a supercomputer of superhuman intelligence that exerts almost totalitarian control over the people of New Tammany College (the United States) and controls its arsenal of this world's version of nuclear weapons, a type of electromagnetic pulse called the "EAT-wave" which is capable of "EATing" -- driving permanently insane -- large groups of people in a controlled and targeted fashion. (It was interesting in a way to read this right after *Anthem*, a much worse book set in a similar alternate-universe-via-rigid-replacement-scheme.)

Weird enough already, right? Get this: the plot is a semi-parodic version of a Joseph Campbell-style heroic journey, starring a boy with a limp who was raised until adolescence as a goat (!) and who turns out to have been sired by WESCAC and born to a virgin, and who is (possibly) destined to become a messianic Grand Tutor and lead the students of the university to Passage and Commencement. Accompanied by his mentor and former goatherd Max Spielman -- a liberal Moishian (Jew) and sort of Albert Einstein / Carl Jung figure who designed WESCAC and developed a theory synthesizing cosmology and proctology -- he ventures out toward the building that houses WESCAC in a quest to reprogram it and end the Quiet Riot. Over the course of eight hundred pages, he meets a variety of stereotypical and broadly comic characters, has a series of increasingly bizarre and lewd adventures, witnesses a performance of "Taliped Decanus" (Barth's parody of Oedipus the King, a full play in verse placed at the center of the novel), and eventually reaches some sort of spiritual enlightenment.

I haven't even mentioned the introduction, in which four fictional editors argue over whether the novel deserves to be published. Their description of the book -- which makes it sound nihilistic, tedious, and nearly unreadable -- made me fear the worst, even keeping in mind that their opinions are of course the creations of the author himself. The book's critical reception didn't help (representative quote from an Amazon reader review: "reading Giles Goat-Boy is a bit like having one's mind EAT-en by an all-embracing cybernetic parasite"). So I was surprised to find that the book was engaging, readable, and entertaining. If I had to pick one word to describe the reading experience, at least of the first 2/3, that word would be *pleasant*.

Barth's charming, pseudo-archaic prose hits every note perfectly -- it's the kind of book where you can almost see each well-chosen word *clicking into place* (and in which this experience tends to happen almost once per sentence, at least). Since these words are put in the mouth of a naive and innocent protagonist, George the Goat-Boy (whose ignorance of human customs and mis-extrapolations from goatly life Barth milks [pun intended] continually for laughs), the effect is to endear the reader immensely to this earnest kid (okay, okay, the puns stop *now*) who knows so little of the world, yet speaks so brilliantly about it. The story is cribbed fairly rigidly from Joseph Campbell's account of the heroic monomyth, though read of course through Barth's comic and idiosyncratic spectacles. The effect, oddly but I think intentionally, is to produce a story that basically *works* as an exciting tale of adventure, full of revelations, reversals and cryptic destinies.

The goat-boy may be intended as a ridiculous figure, but he talks better than most "heroes" one finds in the works of modern authors writing in earnest, and Barth's parodic approach to the hero myth does not so much undermine it as extract it from an unnecessary atmosphere of suffocating straightforwardness -- and the specimen so extracted is in fact easier to take seriously in the absence of its treacly husk.

Plus, there's something enjoyable about the neither-here-nor-there quality of the book's conceptual edifice. Its world is not self-consistent or self-sufficient enough to be "fantasy," yet if it's "allegory," the allegorical point remains unclear. The various inventions -- the university-universe, the goat-boy, the Godlike supercomputer -- jangle weirdly against one another, neither forming a coherent system that stands for something else, nor quite standing on their own. The resulting feeling, of several different symbolic systems interlocking while also being their own entities and not quite symbol systems at all, feels to me less like fantasy or allegory than like mythology, which is pretty obviously Barth's intention.

Still, all is not right. The book is extremely long and eventually grows repetitive. The early passages I loved, with their gorgeous and quaintly amusing accounts of the goat-boy's animalistic innocence, give way to an interminably escalating sequence of ironic reversals. The characters tie themselves up in circular debates again and again until the point, if there ever was one, has long since been made. Much of the second half of the book is consumed by this material. Worse yet, the last few hundred pages are spent repeating essentially the same set of actions in three different states of mind. George, having become sure that he is the Grand Tutor, goes around dispensing advice to movers and shakers in New Tammany. His advice has disastrous results, and he eventually has a kind of spiritual awakening and subsequently goes around advising his tutees to do the exact opposite of what he had said before. That doesn't quite work either, and he then has a *second* spiritual experience, goes about professing a third creed that is some sort of synthesis of the first two, and, in the book's climactic scene, achieves a kind of transcendent mystical unity with all things, one which is supposed to blend "Western" ways of thinking ("everything is different from everything else") with "Eastern" ways of thinking ("everything is the same"). Although all the mystical stuff is kind of cool, these scenes come off as too programmatic -- it's sad to see George, so intelligent and articulate up until this point (if very innocent and single-minded), get reduced in turn to a mouthpiece for a series of caricatured philosophies. And the continuity of this chain of events with the rest of the book is never quite clear, since the first 2/3 of the book show no pre-occupation with this sort of individuation/unity stuff. Like the rest of the book, it's lovable in its enigmaticness, but it's also awkward and unsatisfying.

(And it also needs to be mentioned that the obscene and burlesque comedy is tiresome at least as often as it's funny: finding out that almost every character in the book is a pervert is a routine that gets old pretty fast, for instance. Let's not even touch the bizarre ironic [?] racism. As with some other literary "comedies," the comedic edifice here seems more useful for its overall atmosphere -- often in fact a disheartening or frustrating one -- than as an instrument for actually producing laughs. Maybe I'm missing the point, and Barth is just a puerile jokester, as some of his critics would attest. But what I've read of Barth's nonfiction writing-about-writing [admittedly not much, at this point] suggests that I have at least a pretty good handle on what he's trying to do.)

Mariano Hortal says

Publicado en <http://lecturaylocura.com/giles-el-ni...>

Giles, el niño-cabra de John Barth. Esquizofrenia lectora

He pasado por tantas fases en la lectura y posterior asimilación de esta obra de Barth que ya he perdido la cuenta.

Al principio ni siquiera iba a escribir nada de ella y ahora, sin embargo, vuelvo a ella, a esa relectura de los textos que apunté y vuelvo a cambiar de opinión.

¡ESQUIZOFRENIA! ¡O BIPOLARIDAD! (o cualquier cosa...)

El caso es que no me puedo resistir a escribir unas notas. No las necesita, pero aportaré algo de mi experiencia a la hora de afrontar esta obra excepcional.

–Argumento: cualquiera se pone a intentar resumir más de 1100 páginas de trama, calla, ¡que el propio autor lo hace en el prólogo! Está hecho. Qué mejor posibilidad que esta:

“Misterio, tragedia, comedia. El lugar donde se cruzaron estos tres caminos ante mí fue Giles, el niño-cabra: las aventuras de un joven engendrado por un ordenador gigante en una bibliotecaria desgraciada, pero dócil, y criado en los establos experimentales para cabras de una universidad universal, dividida ideológicamente en el Campus Este y el Campus Occidental. Al joven se le encarga una serie de tareas cuando se matricula y tiene que aceptar tanto su caprinidad como su humanidad (por no hablar de su maquinidad) y, en las entrañas mismas de la Universidad, trascender no sólo las categorías que representan ambos campus, sino también todas las demás; trascender incluso el lenguaje, y después regresar al campus a la luz del día, expulsar al falso Gran Maestro, que él entiende que es un aspecto de sí mismo, y hacer todo lo que esté en su mano para explicar lo inexplicable.”

Según podéis ver por la trama, muy anclada en la realidad que conocemos no parece lo que nos lleva al siguiente punto.

–Alegoría: “Figura que consiste en hacer patentes en el discurso, por medio de varias metáforas consecutivas, un sentido recto y otro figurado, ambos completos, a fin de dar a entender una cosa expresando otra diferente. “ Que nadie se engañe, todas las páginas son una sucesión de metáforas. Ello requiere un esfuerzo brutal ya que el texto no es evidente, entre otras cosas porque juega con diferentes ejes temáticos para estas metáforas que es conveniente tener en la cabeza:

1º Guerra fría: la división en ideologías (Campus Occidental-Campus Oriental) está explotada al límite y rememora la situación vivida entre las dos grandes potencias de la época (Rusia-EEUU), esta vez en el marco de la universidad. Hay un juego continuo tremendo que juega con ideologías inventadas y que no deja de ser una parodia-sátira de la importancia que tienen todos los –ismos:

“Haciendo un esfuerzo considerable (porque él ya estaba fatigado de tanto recordar, y consideraba que su punto de vista ya había sido expuesto de un modo concluyente), logré sacarle la siguiente información: Entre los extravagantes planes del Proyecto Cum Laude en el mes anterior a su abandono estaba la preparación por parte del ORDACO, bajo la supervisión de Eierkopf y en el más alto secreto, de algo llamado “el GILES”. Todo cuanto Max pudo o quiso explicarme fue que la palabra era un acrónimo de Granmaestro Ideal del Laboratorio Eugénico de Sujetos. Lo que significaba aquella frase (por lo que yo comprendía, bien podría estar formulada en el idioma de las ovejas), y si el intento de preparar dicho Giles resultó un éxito, y en tal caso cuál era su objetivo, fueron cosas de las que no me enteré hasta un tiempo más tarde. Pero comprendí, en cualquier caso, que había una relación incierta entre este misterio y mi postulación para el puesto de héroe.”

2º Novela de Campus: en efecto, el eje más evidente nos lleva a la representación, de alguna manera del ambiente universitario que Barth conocía a la perfección y que devienen en novelas de formación, el camino que sigue nuestro entrañable niño-cabra está estructurado como un Bildungsroman típico que se irá centrando específicamente en un avance de dicha formación a través del sexo.

“Mi nombre es George; mis actos se han relatado en la Sala de la Torre y la crónica de mi infancia ha aparecido en el Journal of Experimental Psychology. Soy el que en esa época fue llamado Billy Bocksfuss, un apelativo cruel y poco apropiado. Y es que si realmente tuviera una pezuña hundida ahora no iría renqueando apoyado en un palo, ni necesitaría que me llevaran a caballito a clase cuando llueve. Sí, fue precisamente por falta de una pezuña por lo que a los catorce años fui pateado en vez de pateador; por lo que caí tullido sobre la hedionda turba y tuve que ver cómo un bruto carnero de Angora cubría a mi primer amor. Que dios se apiade de aquel macho que me expulsó de un mundo a otro, cuyos cuernos retorcidos inflamaron la imaginación de mi amada, que me sacó de los pastos y me puso a cojear por el camino que todavía recorro. Él coronó esta frente desnuda, oprobio de mi descendencia, con el oprobio de los hombres; dije adiós a mi caprina infancia carente de cuernos y partí, un estudiante humano y cornudo, con rumbo a las Puertas de la Graduación.”

3º Religión: el relato del niño-cabra guarda un paralelismo evidente con la vida de Jesucristo de una manera ciertamente irreverente, equivaliendo la caprinidad a la divinidad y convirtiendo a Giles en un extrañísimo Mesías antiheroico; no hace falta mucho pensar para encontrar todas y cada una de las metáforas asociadas a la religión católica, como es el caso de este peculiar Padre Nuestro que se transforma en “Petición al Gran Maestro”:

“Fundador nuestro, que eres omnisciente,
graduado sea tu nombre.
Venga a nosotros tu facultad.
Háganse tus deberes
así en el campus como en el otro lado de la puerta.
La palabra tuya de cada curso,
dánosla este curso.
Perdona que copiemos
como nosotros perdonamos a quienes nos copian.
No dejes que se nos pasen las fechas de entrega
más líbranos de cometer errores.
Apruébanos.”

–Confusión-postmodernidad, parece mentira que después del apoteósico (y accesible) Plantador de tabaco del que hablé con profusión de detalles en este post saltara a este juego postmodernista de alto calibre, con un avance hacia delante en la estrategia narrativa que convierte la lectura en un desafío de importancia, hasta para los más avezados lectores; es fascinante hasta dónde es capaz de llegar con la parodia, la sátira y los momentos de confusión se multiplican cuando parece que ya estás en la onda:

“-Me estás diciendo que me tendiste una trampa antes para que piense que no es cierto –dijo con prudencia-. Pero te salió el tiro por la culata.

-¿Eh?

-Yo sabía desde el principio que un aprobado y un suspenso no son opuestos -¿no te dije que Aprobar es Suspender?-, pero también sabía que tú sabías que intentarías tenderte una trampa que suspendieras . Entonces te dije que eran lo mismo para que tú creyeras que yo pensaba que eran diferentes y tú llegaras solo a esa conclusión. ¿Por qué crees, si no, que fingí que seguía tus consejos?

-Sé por qué los seguiste –le contesté y sonreí con la esperanza de confundirlo con inversiones de inversiones durante el tiempo suficiente para poder averiguar qué era lo correcto-. Lo que tú no sabes, cuando te dijo que “Suspender es aprobar”, es si quiero que creas que eso es cierto porque es falso o que eso es falso porque es cierto.”

Resulta que el autor era totalmente consciente de todo lo que os estoy comentando, tras el prólogo, creó una introducción en la que exponía las hipotéticas recepciones de cuatro críticos a esta obra y, anda, si también resume lo que podías encontrar en ella:

“Observemos la diferencia con el N.P.R: aquí el fornicio, el adulterio, incluso la violación, de hecho hasta el propio asesinato (por no hablar del autoengaño, la traición, la blasfemia, la prostitución, la hipocresía y los actos de crueldad deliberada), no sólo se representan para nuestro deleite ¡sino que por momentos se los aprueba e incluso se los recomienda! También desde un punto de vista estético (aunque este argumento palidece ante las cuestiones morales), la obra es inaceptable: la retórica es extrema, las ideas y la acción son por completo inverosímiles, la interpretación de la historia es superficial y claramente sesgada, la narración está llena de incoherencias y tiene un ritmo muy pobre, y es en ocasiones tediosa y, con más frecuencia, excesiva; y la forma, como el estilo, es poco ortodoxa, asimétrica, inconsistente. Los personajes, sobre todo el protagonista, no son realistas. ¡Nunca ha habido un niño-cabra! ¡Nunca lo habrá!”

Excesiva, extrema, inverosímil, inconsistente, poco ortodoxa, inaceptable, tediosa.... John Barth.

Un verdadero disfrute, lo mejor, acercarse sin prejuicios y... a disfrutar. Cada vez que la leas encontrarás algo diferente. Inabarcable. Subyugadora.

Los textos provienen de la traducción de Mariano Peyrou de Giles, el niño-cabra o el Nuevo Programa revisado de John Barth publicado en Sexto Piso.

Simon Robs says

Hmm, review you say? 'I'm ok AND what the heck anyway.' The Cubs' 71-year "billy goat curse" has now been retired, maybe this book's butting obtuseness, its strutting and rutting lubriciousness, its labyrinthine 'flunkedness' of "understandabilitywise" can retire too the stayawaydom of reading this overreaching gem of a John Gray humanity is flunked no matter what against progress per se. Buddha sat quietly under a bodhi tree and so should we, maybe, if 'Failure is Passage' be.

You better lock an' load all yer suspended faculty 'cause there's total upended reverse eternal return road miss-maps ahead whilst hoofing yer way through this mess though led by an engaging set of likable riff-raff cast of characters. It's kinda fun if you've trod other thorny patches of slogged-out mind-fuck novels. I couldn't recommend this to anyone outside of the rouge scoundrels who've read and commented *here* uh hum. So, and so, there's no review once again, but, damned if I'm not engaged and enticed to go grab the other JB books yet not read and continue to marvel at this mind's elasticity, his contempt, story-telling ebullience and yes, verbosity with a [purpose] maybe?

Billy says

Dude...you think with all the raping in this book you wouldnt need a dictionary to look up every 5th word but alas it aint so. so besides learning a shit-ton of new words, this book is kind of a play off of the world slightly futuristic slightly medieval except countries are universities and Giles Goat Boy is pretty much some sorta prophet tryin to throw a rock in the system but half the time hes just followin his goat-like urges. heh. its long, and pretentious as all hell with the words...but yeah, i liked it

Daniel says

Me pasé de listo al intentar leer a la vez Giles y el Plantador, casi me ahogo con dos puertos de categoría especial. He tenido que hacer una pausa con el Plantador. El mundo de Giles es relativamente fácil de seguir y la metáfora política es divertida y reconocible, pero las aventuras del niño cabra exigen manga ancha y bastante atención. Unos años después llegarán los laberintos sin salida y las cajas dentro de cajas que nunca terminan, como la Broma de Wallace o el Arcoiris de Pynchon, pero Barth navega aquí en esos márgenes, no se llega a zambullir. Que mis peros no despisten: es una maravilla absoluta, una exigente maravilla.

Ian "Marvin" Graye says

A FEW PRELIMINARY WORDS:

[A Review...] In a Word

A-Plus!

In a Few of Leonid's Words

By George! My head spin! I'm such a dumb, I have to think about!

In a Few More of Leonid's Words...Later

Greatnesshood! Splendidacy!

In Leonid's/Father's Last Word

Gratitudinesshoodshipcy!

Glossary of Terms Used in the Novel

Glossary

Insert Huge Picture Here...

REVIEW:

Extraordinary Conception

As you'd expect, John Barth's fourth novel (from 1966) is a brilliant allegory wrapped in a mischievous metafictional frame story that inevitably questions its authorship.

Was it written by a human, a goat or a computer? Or two or more of the foregoing?

No matter! It's a story!

Not only does it adopt aspects of the structure of Sophocles' *"Oedipus Rex"* and Dante's *"The Divine Comedy"*, it's a step by step articulation of the patterns and characteristics of the mythical hero set out in Lord Raglan's *"The Hero"*, Otto Rank's *"Myth of the Birth of the Hero"* and Joseph Campbell's *"The Hero with a Thousand Faces"*.

In Which Some Author (or Other) Acts the Goat

The novel utilises two other authorial conceits:

First, it features a Pan-like protagonist, George or Giles Goat-Boy (formerly Billy Bocksfuss, who for his first 14 years believed he was half goat, half boy), which gives the author the licence to act the goat.

Second is the description of the Universe as a University. This doesn't necessarily mean that the work is a campus fiction. It just allows Barth to develop an entire glossary of terms based on the analogy, and to build a narrative that works on at least two levels.

A Staggering Variety of Exquisitries

Barth proceeds to satirise the Cold War-era world within a framework that is classically trained, philosophically knowing, religiously sceptical, Rabelaisically exuberant, sublimely comical, and sexually explicit (i.e., vulgar, and likely to be perceived as obscene and offensive by *"I don't think of myself as a feminist, but..."* prudes and dudes).

The novel is a more metafictional and metaphysical version of the textbook referred to between the covers that contains “*such a staggering variety of sexual practices, stunts and exquisites as to make ordinary genital intromission seem as tame as shaking hands.*”

Yet, somehow, for all its sexual frankness, the Goat-Boy perspective enables the reader to observe the human race without any sense of prurience, embarrassment or disgust.

I hope our next alien visitors get to read this book before they arrive.

You Beist Beauty

One of Barth’s Beatnik characters argues, “*The worst thing about that old prudery...it made everybody so afraid of their desires. Nothing in the mad University mattered except Beauty: the beauty of art, of language, and above all, of simple existence. That...was the first principle of Beism...*”

Barth definitely succeeds in his Nabokovian quest for artistic and linguistic beauty, even if the existence he describes is mythological.

Beism itself seems to be a form of Existentialism, a pre-hippy Beatnik philosophy that highlights the verb “*to be*”:

"To Be, and once more to Be! To burst into all creation; only to Be, always to Be, until no thing was: no Billy Bocksfuss, goat or Graduate, no I nor you nor University, but one placeless, timeless, nameless throb of Being!"

George initially confuses Being with Desire. He misconstrues the verb “*to be*” as meaning “*to fuck*”. Hence:

"Being...wherein every creature in the University [is] clearly pleased...a mere coupling of this to that, the business of a minute, but which lent zest to any idle pass or chance encounter; among strangers a courtesy, towards guests a welcome, between friends a bond. A meal's best dessert; a tale's best close."

Sphincteriddle Diddler

Certainly, Barth opens and closes his tale on this note, in a circular fashion that calls to mind James Joyce’s “*Finnegan’s Wake*”.

When the story, the tape, is finished, you want to “*unwind, rewind, replay*”.

The narrative is bookended by the secondary focus of the novel, George’s original goatkeeper, Herr Doktor Professor Maximilian Spielman.

His masterwork “*The Riddle of the Sphincters*” (a parody of the Riddle of the Sphinx) is the source of “*Spielman’s Law*,” which concludes that the “*sphincter’s riddle*” and the mystery of the University are one and the same (“*ontogeny recapitulates cosmogeny*” or “*proctoscopy repeats hagiography*”). [See the entry for Spielman in the glossary for the context of these Maximisms.]

In other words, if you think too much about the meaning of life or your own place in it, you might disappear up your own navel (rather than the axis mundi) or, failing that, up your own rectal passage or nether region. Eventually, George seems to be content in the knowledge that happiness can be as simple as a mother’s peanut-butter sandwich or the look in a child’s eye.

Well, maybe that’s not strictly true or enough...

"Is it now that I am nothing, that I am made to be a man?"

Indifferent Distinctions

Written between 1960 and 1965, the novel is critical of the diverse failings of capitalist America even before the Summer of Love in 1967:

"...its oppression of Frumentians [Africans], its lawless Informationalism, its staggering wastefulness, its pillage of natural resource and spoil of natural beauty, its hostility to learning and refinement, its apotheosis of the lowest percentile, its vulgarity, inflated self-esteem, self-righteousness, self-deception, sentimentality, hypocrisy, artificiality, simple-mindedness, naive optimism, concupiscence, avarice, self-contradiction, ignorance, and general fatuity..."

George initially responds on the basis of superficial, but still philosophical, distinctions (e.g., capitalism versus communism), only to realise later that they are false or inadequate:

"Studentdom it was that limped: hobbled by false distinction, crippled by categories! My infirmity was that I had thought myself first goat, then wholly human boy, when in fact I was a goat-boy, both and neither: a walking refutation of such false conceits."

We Are One, Though I Am Not

Giles Goat-Boy's fledgling worldview (assuming he's not just kidding) is analogous to Mahayana Buddhism:

"The true Graduate is the student who can say with understanding: 'I and the Founder are one; I am the University; I am not.'"

Distinctions collapse, until there is no difference. What was once twofold is now as *"inseparable as two old faggots, or ancient spouses"*. Barth describes a former nemesis in these terms:

"He was my adversary, as necessary to me as Failure is to Passage, i.e., not only contrary and interdependent, but totally undifferentiable."

Spiritedness Examined

What emerges is the primacy of personal energy:

"...a certain kind of spiritedness was absolutely good, no matter what a person's other Answers are. It doesn't have anything to do with education."

It's this energy and spiritedness that translates into the libido of the protagonists, and then onwards, inwards and upwards:

"I and My Ladyship, all, were one."

Two become one, making the way for all to become one.

Sheela-Na-Gig

The relationship isn't just one-sided, it's reciprocal. His Ladyship engages in a little sheela-na-gig, calling on George to *"examine me...look me over...[measure me with your eyes]."*

Which he does. But that's not all.

Barth has explained, "*On the tragic view, there is not any way to win; there are only more or less noble and spectacular ways to go down.*"

Here, he catalogues some of these ways to go down, some noble, some ignoble, some spectacular, some less spectacular.

But, most importantly, they're comic rather than tragic.

Many readers have expressed discomfort with the sexual content of the novel, not because it's sexual, but because it's portrayed from a male perspective and in many cases the sexual activity constitutes rape.

This might be true to some extent, but in fact it's portrayed from the perspective of a Goat-Boy, and the overwhelming message to and from the women in the novel is "*assert yourself*". Women, too, are entitled to need, to want, to desire.

Shofar, Shogood

I had known of this novel for decades, but I honestly had no idea what to expect from the little I had read about it. Most reviews just advise you to read or not read the novel. Like imperious campus mandates.

It deserves to be held in the same high regard as more familiar but comparably far-sighted works by George Orwell, Aldous Huxley, Joseph Heller and Kurt Vonnegut.

It's a long book, both satirical and satirical, but its intelligence, energy and spiritedness never flag.

It would make a great pair with Robert Coover's "The Public Burning", a novel started in 1966 (the publication of which was delayed until over a decade later), but with similar energy and playfulness.

SOUNDTRACK:

(view spoiler)

Congodog says

The Modern Bible.

Anyone that did not revel in the absurdly clear tale told in this primal romp needs to be gone from this exercise. Barth set the tone for many of us (circa 1965) as we prepared to limp through the momentarily bad joke: existence.

Scary, unadorned humans running in circles, gathering as much money and corporeal comfort as possible in the shortest amount of time on the backs of others while foreshadowing their fear of the dark with gods of the conveniently unreachable sort, make a back drop for Barth's solution. Humor.

Relax, enjoy. It will all be over soon.

Barth is simply the most prescient being to put pen to paper since BC strangely became AD. So what if he takes 7-800 pages to say: Don't Worry, Be Happy! This is miraculously intricate, interwoven word-smithing the likes of which we may never see again. The so-called Classics are the precursors to his rambling tales of improbable epic heroes. What is man if not half beast/half computer? And as boring as anything in reach of our perception.

Unless one sees it for what it really is. A bad joke. So take a seat, sit back, be nice to one another, and work hard at not taking yourself so seriously. It all matters exactly as much as it doesn't (matter).

Carlos_Tongoy says

NO es el Plantador, ni es Gaddis, pero algo como esto no merece llevarse las cuatro estrellas que he estado a punto de darle sólo para evitar comparaciones.

Nate D says

Ack. Aghh. Though winning a fair measure of benefit-of-the-doubt on sheer absurdity, *Giles Goat-Boy* seems ultimately to have been a rather pointless shaggy-goat story: a seeming philosophic survey-course that, after oscillating between improbable extreme positions, leaves the reader right back at the start and no better for it. Or considerably worse for have staggered through 700 pages (not counting extravagant introductory material) to re-reach that position. To be fair: Barth is a clever satirist, he has composed several remarkable set-pieces here, and his words and word-play are often worthy diversion in their own right. But ultimately this novel seemed to fall well short of justifying its epic existence. Or its exceedingly trivial post-modern gestures: the disputed authorship games that bookend the story itself are as uninteresting as they are irrelevant.

And all this even saying nothing of Barth's more regrettable and eye-roll-inducing positions, which I had hoped he would amend at some point: notably, he lays out pretty blatantly that physical attractiveness is the fundamental merit available to any women, neatly eclipsing all other considerations. We can forgive a women for being unpretty as an athlete for being unathletic, but they're the same kind of failing, essentially. And then that taken further to include the great virtue of being a passive, willing sexual subject whenever called upon. To say nothing of the novel's great amount of frivolous rape, or the overwhelmingly animalistic urges of the two prominent black characters (he throws in, late, a counterexample, but it's an afterthought). ACK. Just ACK.

I am sorry to have wasted your time writing extensively about this awful frustrating book.

Prior entries follow, in chronological order:

...

I found this book in the trash outside my apartment. Will it be good?

...

And so: a satirical messianic rollercoaster through mid-century American sociology and politics. Shakespeare may have said that all the world was a stage, but he never tried to build a detailed scale model of it using only theatrical terminology; here Barth's ridiculous task seems to be constructing an elaborate mythology of the contemporary world (of the 1960s) using only collegiate concepts and language. As a vast survey of conflicting characters and ideas, it's hard to place Barth exactly, but the book is certainly dated (usually meaning that it can be theologically frustrating though Barth's heart seems to be in the right place; occasionally meaning that I have actual fundamental objections to his characterizations). Still, it is bizarre and entertaining and clever, and appeals to my basic approval for the reframing of reality as surrealist mythos (here a kind of legendary saga of a student raised by goats to disassemble the threat of nuclear holocaust, or rather threat of mind-destruction by deadly and all-powerful supercomputer. yep.)

...

Note on legendary saga sub-type: Like Zardoz, this is a story of an outsider, the force of whose-outsiderness is strong enough to remake a society. What are these called?

Note on socio-linguistic accuracy: Like *The Enigma of Kasper Hauser*, this story has little or no interest on the cultural, psychological, or neurolinguistic effects of actually having been raised by goats. I'm looking at you Jessica: be warned.

MJ Nicholls says

Like Rob, I have emerged in a post-posttape daze, staggering about not sure what to think and whether to rate this old-skool postmo razzlematazzical performance in the uppers or the lowers. The last Barth I read was *Lost in the Funhouse*, which I dismissed as dated experimental wankeroo (Barth was the keenest postmodder of the lot, and this collection reads like the marking of territory), and before then the excellent *The Sot-Weed Factor* (which bears no notable resemblance to Sorrentino's 1983 novel *Blue Pastoral*) and the hairpulling *Coming Soon!!!* where Barth proves he can still run rings around Dave Eggers and all the bepermed whippersnappers now in their mid-forties (the fact Barth outlived DFW proves for *him* the funhouse was a goshdarn hoot).

Giles Goat-Boy is the most inventive, loopy, and acronym-heavy of the four, although it didn't disprove my suspicion Barth's work is trapped in the masculine mores of sixties academe. The first part, or "tape," (the story is, implausibly, all spoken by GILES into tapes handed to Barth in the preface), is chock with ribald larks and a network of satirical plots and comic characters that keeps the story's ventricles pulsing, although it soon becomes clear—beside the obvious "quest" narrative—making sense of the other strands is a pointless exercise. The second tape finds the novel more tedious for that lack of focus, although patient reading yields page-by-page rewards.

Mainly, for a book bursting with such erudition and evident metatextual heft and subtextual smartness, *GG-B* is the silliest, daftest novel I have read since the last JM Coetzee. Barth is the only writer I have read who writes about rape with a tittering comic jauntiness, and the three rapes of the dreadful female character Anastasia, and the overall pervy, creepy aura surrounding all references to sex, seems to be a constant in his work, and threatens him with the “dated humorists” pile alongside Elkin. It is unlikely I would recommend this to anyone except hardcore postmod Trekkies (who are the only people likely to read it anyway), but there are more ideas and innovative riffs on one page of this thing than a dozen other novels, so this is not an invitation to dismissal.

Mala says

The reader must begin this book with an act of faith and end it with an act of charity.

— From the Publisher's Disclaimer

Both *The Sot-Weed Factor*, and *Giles Goat-Boy*, deal with a protagonist's life journey, both are 700+ pages sprawling books, both have been conceived & mounted on an epic scale, both are written by Barth, & there the resemblance ends.

TS-WF is one of those rare books: it's Perfect. GG-B bravely hobbles along like its lame hero— the former has 'Love Me' written all over it, the latter gives the readers a Middle-finger salute. Some might scream 'Onanistic' & so it goes!

The Microcosm as the Macrocosm

Barth sets the action in New Tammany College i.e. the United States of America where George Goat-Boy arrives to fulfill his destiny as a Grand Tutor. In an allegorical framework, there are some keywords where one thing represents another: Founder= God, University= the World, College= Country, Chancellor= President, Studentdom= Humanity, Grand Tutor= the Messiah/ Deliverer, Enochist= Christian, Student Unionists= Communists, Passed= Redeemed/ Blessed, Flunked= Failed/Damned, Commencement= Salvation & so on. If at first, you don't get these terms, worry not for Barth will keep on repeating them till you scream out of frustration— ah, flunk it all!

GG-B takes a searching look at some of the holy cows in the U.S. of A : marriage as an institution, education, business & politics. The book's subtitle, *Revised New Syllabus* shows a connection to the New Testament but theology is mainly implicit in the correspondences with Jesus' (& Moses, & Buddha's too) life events though Barth is mostly parodying them. The book is heavy on theorizing & given the subject matter perhaps it's justified, still it just goes on & on & on like Anastasia Stoker's endless acts of sexual charity! (A Mary Magdalene character.)

Rage Against the Machine

GG-B imagines a world where humanity is ruled by a super artificial intelligence called WESCAC in the Western Campus and its counterforce EASCAC in the Eastern Bloc. They have practically replaced God as they've the answer to all of humanity's ills (or do they!).

Humanity needs to take charge of its own destiny. Cue: enter our Grand Tutor! In a modern version of the Immaculate Conception (view spoiler)

Even though the Cold War scenario dominates much of the campus politics, its narrative importance is mainly restricted to Max Spielman's flashback of the events leading up to Giles' birth. In the latter's journey, WESCAC almost appears like a benevolent presence! In fact, much of the narrative tension derives from Giles' rivalry with the enigmatic Harold Bray, another contender for the Grand Tutor honorific, rather than

the Cold War allegory.

Sex, Lies, and Magnetic Tapes!

When all this passed, flunked, & "Quiet Riot" i.e., the Cold War business gets too much to bear; comic relief presents itself in the form of rapes, orgies, bestiality, & so on. And before the feminists bay for my blood for trivialising the issues, let me state that the book borrows the mythic structure & myths are filled with such instances. One of the most offensive sexual encounters (view spoiler)

The title itself should be indicative: goats are randy creatures & our hero is raised as a goat-boy. The amorality of the animal world is juxtaposed with the immorality of the human world. But things are not that simple here: what could easily be construed as racist content, Barth presents a Frumentian (African) called Croaker: an exchange student, he is a giant, a star footballer, a gibbering idiot with a permanent hard-on. Via him Barth shows the pitfall of our romantic notion of a Noble Savage. Croaker's frank sexuality comes closest to that of the animals but it will not be accepted in our hypocritical 'civilized' world. But If I say why make the Troll figure a black man, why not a white man? You could accuse me of counter racism! Black, white, brown, yellow, red— no matter which skin colour a writer chooses for his characters, he would still end up offending someone or the other.

Barth is full of mischief but there is no malice in his humour that is why even the most outrageous things here would bring an indulgent smile. Given that the characters here are totally f***ed up, their follies & foibles are due for chastening.

But I really don't need to defend the writer here 'cause Barth already anticipated each & every objection to this work & spoofed it grandly in his hilarious text before text mock disclaimer where four 'editors' opine on the feasibility of printing such a book on moral & financial grounds.

In his essay 'Muse, Spare Me', Barth has famously stated his creed thusly: "Muse, spare me (at the desk, I mean) from social-historical responsibility, and in the last analysis from every other kind as well, except artistic. Your teller of stories will likely be responsive to his time; he needn't be responsible to it."

The Hero's Journey

"studentdom inevitably did judge its Tutors, and being less than Tutors, inevitably judged wrong." (657)

Giles Goat-Boy's biggest achievement is placing the hero's journey in a modern context. Gone are the gods & monsters, squabbling kingdoms, & assorted fairy tales characters— the challenges of a modern world are different: the threat of a nuclear catastrophe, the pressure of maintaining mutual deterrence, etc, yet the values we strive for remain the same: love, truth, honour, integrity, brotherhood of mankind, forgiveness, & embracing differences. Apart from the lives of religious figures, the journey also uses elements from the classical texts like The Odyssey, The Aeneid, & Oedipus Rex.

In his essay 'Mystery and Tragedy' Barth has analysed in detail the heroic framework for Giles Goat-Boy & his debt to Campbell's book, The Hero with a Thousand Faces Eastern Mysticism & the Western Tragic View. Barth faithfully follows all the steps of a hero's journey while simultaneously parodying it, which produces a somewhat curious effect. (view spoiler) In fact, the repetitive nature of the narrative is forced by adherence to The Road of Trials which occur in a set of threes (See the chart. Thanks, NR)— thus Giles' two failed attempts at preaching: thesis & anti-thesis which finally find transcendence in synthesis.

Here's Barth on Giles Goat-Boy : (view spoiler)

This was a hard to review book because my impressions kept see-sawing wildly: I loved the crazy ribaldry— Hedwig Sears was a hoot, I took a long time warming up to Anastasia, the faithful impoverished student followers of Giles were a dear, but all that distinguishing/ not distinguishing casuistry had me in a bind till I started fearing I was being EATen...

Giles Goat-Boy is a book where the parts are greater than the whole, e.g., Goat-Boy's disastrous attempts at "Being" with Lady Creamhair, the Dippy Verse satire of Oedipus Rex, G-B's trial by the turnstile, Harold Bray's masterful orientation lecture to the new students (Barth was writing about hypertext in 1966!), the Dantesque different levels of the Main Detention, Giles' final visit to the Belly with Anastasia, etc, are dazzling instances where Barth is in full control of his material but overall it's an unwieldy narrative where the reader vacillates between a three to five stars rating. Still, like Vollmann, Barth is good even when he is bad. That should suffice.

Greg says

An exercise in literary onanism.

Just like this site.

Marc says

This is kind of difficult, because I really love Barth, but this one didn't work for me at all. Sure, he really can write - the Goat-Boy is no exception - and it's fun to meet some of his usual themes in early form, but for everything I enjoyed in the book (the series of meta-textual framings, a truly fun parody on Oedipus, the rather insane set-up with the whole world consisting of universities, the giant all controlling computer and early musings on AI) there were lots and lots of things I *really* did not enjoy: The rapey sex comedy stuff, which it defaults to all the time, is almost unbearable, and the weirdly aggressively offensive stereotyping hard going- even by the standards of the late 60s.

Now, it's not because I can't handle the standards of another era - I love Lovecraft, even though he is an old racist asshole - nor I do not get easily offended or anything, hell, both Mano's "Take Five" and Gray's "1982, Janine" would go on my desert island list. Furthermore, Barth is clearly out to write something crude, witness the series of fictional letters from the editors listing the reasons the book should not be published he opens with. This just doesn't change the fact, that to me the book were mostly just *no fun at all*. Boring, longwinded, occasionally offensive, but mostly just *no fun*.

But then again, the book is also so goddamn weird and unique. The central world-as-universities-conceit so amazingly random. The seemingly intended crudeness of the story and offensiveness of the characters such strange choices. The stiffness of the plot parodically following the schemata of the hero's progress so awkward. Which is why I end on 4 stars, which is really 3 stars for a mostly unpleasant reading experience, and 5 stars for the occasional Barthian brilliance, however misguided this time around.

To sum up: If you are looking for your first Barth, don't go for this one. Read the mindblowingly brilliant "Chimera" or the truly moving "Sabbatical" instead. Or do as me and go straight for "Letters", which remains an all out masterpiece. This one isn't, though, and for completists only.

Jeff says

4.5/5

I waver in giving less than 5 stars to this monstrous comedy slash mirrored prophet's tale slash cold war comedy. Barth is funny, but not in the sense that he makes you laugh. His comedy is of the thought kind, in that I have read a hero's tale of a boy raised by goats who believes himself to be the last great prophet of his own religion.

The book is incredibly well written and indeed very thought inducing. There shall be more Barth books read by me.

PASS ALL FAIL ALL

Updated 8/7/15 to 5 stars

Nathan "N.R." Gaddis says

MJ Nicholls inquires:

"I have been tempted to read this for some time, but Nate's review put me off. What do you make of his thoughts?:

<http://www.goodreads.com/review/show/...>"

The first part.

I am not an impartial commentator on John Barth's work. I owe my entire seven year postmodern reading binge to him, all of which began with *The Sot-Weed Factor*. By way of his essays Barth introduced me to his generation of postmodern fictionists: Gass, Gaddis, both Barthlemes, Coover, et al, all of that generation with which David Foster Wallace was so exercised, what with all of the metafictional games and the profusion of irony and erasure of trust in an author. DFW's "Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way" was written in the margins of Barth's story "Lost in the Funhouse." (Barth: "For whom is the funhouse fun?" DFW: "For whom is the funhouse a *house*!?!") DFW's anxiety of influence never succeeded in overcoming his literary forbears even if he did exhaust the anxiety of trusting in an author once again.

Barth's books are arranged as accidental twins. His first two books belong to a pre-Barthian, existentialist phase while his third and fourth, *Sot-Weed* and *Goat-Boy* present Barth in his golden phase. The following two volumes, *Lost in the Funhouse* and *Chimera*, begin his long silver period of metafictional hijinks, climaxing with *LETTERS*. Barth is my leisurely reading, the break to take when one wants to return to novels infused with narrative and narrative and more narrative, but not compromising 'passionate virtuosity.' Barth's muse? Let me introduce you to Scheherazade.

So, to the *Goat-Boy*. Upon publication of *The Sot-Weed Factor* reviewers persistently noted that it was structured according to the classical analysis of world mythology known as the Hero's Journey. Barth found this odd because he had never heard of the Hero's Journey. It goes something like this and some similar diagram Barth pinned up on his office wall as he began to intentionally write a parody of the Hero's Journey with *Giles Goat-Boy*. A shorter version of the Barthian parody of the Journey can be found in *Chimera*.

So, that's the synopsis of *Goat-Boy*. And it's masterfully written. My impression is that Barthians are divided in their preferences as to the classic, golden Barthian novel, some preferring the right-handed twin, others the left-handed. Mine is for the *Factor*, but I will not dissuade those who say that *Giles* is more fun.

The second part.

To MJ's question. If you enjoyed *The Sot-Weed Factor*, excepting the 17th century English, you will enjoy Giles. Nihilism and character torture are present. Quest is present. Cleverness is present. There is some of the later-Barthian suspicion of authorship, but it's mostly contained in that entertaining opening section. There is a universe qua University campus divided between East and West and some kind of cataclysm hanging over the University involving a computer and for which we will require some kind of Messiah/Hero who will need to come and save us all from. And lots of degradation. And in the most important part of the book, page center almost (but not at all now that I check the pagination), is a nicely done parody of our Greek and Oedipal tragedy.

But more importantly, Nate Dorr's review. My intention is not at all to disparage Nate's review or his reading preferences about which I know only very little. If he is a talented reader [edit :: he *is*.] we will heed his views. ~~If he is an untalented reader we won't be paying attention to him.~~ But I do disagree with him re: Giles *Our Goat-Boy*, not recognizing my reading experience in his review. Nate says, "I am sorry to have wasted your time writing extensively about this awful book." Well, no, I don't believe this is an awful book. But I've got nothing with which to refute Nate. He's wrong, but not wrong in the way that I could say anything useful to dissuade him. You might feel as Nate does. Or not.

But to frame the context within which Barth was undertaking Giles. This is a novel of exhaustion. The modernists such as Joyce, Faulkner, and Beckett had in some way exhausted the potential of the novel. Barth tried his hand at this modernist type of novel with his first two publications but somehow those boring, dead-ended modernists had to be over-come, stepped out of from beyond. His answer was to rewrite what had already been written, exactly that which had been exhausted. In *Sot-Weed* he did that by way of reworking an old poem, *The Sot-Weed Factor*; Or, a Voyage to Maryland, writing a picaresque, and recreating a 17th century English much as Pynchon did in *Mason & Dixon* and Vollmann does in *Argall*. With Giles, Barth returned to the most ancient form of story-telling and retells the story, saying 'what goes without saying,' re-saying what has already been said exhaustively. DFW found himself in the same relation vis-a-vis Barth as Barth did vis-a-vis Faulkner (his first failed attempts at novel-writing were terrible Faulknerisms).

The third thing.

From the comments section of Nate's review:

William: "tsk..tsk..tsk..the 'metafiction' super epics, all written by men. You think there might have been an issue with LENGTH motivating all that?"

MJ:"I watched a DFW interview today where he slays the "big books, big dicks" fallacy (pun intended)."

If I recall DFW's remark it was in response to a question about whether his having laid this 1100 page monster upon the world was his way of asserting his phallus upon the world. To which he responded something along the lines of, (embarrassedly) If that's what's going on it's coming from some part of me with which I really don't want to find out anything about.

Our age of the Twit seems to be threatening the continued existence of the mega-novel, the encyclopedic novel. Some may say that these works of mastery--Ulysses, *The Recognitions*, *Gravity's Rainbow*, *Women and Men*, *Infinite Jest*, et al--are nothing but manifestations of patriarchal oppression. Blah, blah. We'll have to have the conversation about patriarchy and phalli some other time. Indeed, most of these books are written by Men. But, can we include Miss MacIntosh, *My Darling* in this series of mega-novels? Who wouldn't love to see Ms Zadie Smith publish a 1200 page masterwork? However we account for the demographic of authorship, some of us regard these Lengthy novels as cultural milestones and fear the disappearance of this kind of possible world in which to dwell for weeks on end.

Is Giles *Goat-Boy* worth reading? Yes.

