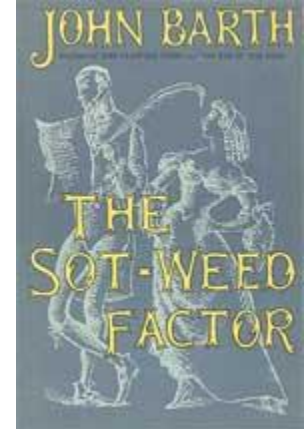


## The Sot-Weed Factor

756 pages.

Original publisher: Doubleday.

Current publisher: Anchor Press.



### Synopsis

This is truly the novel that turned Barth's career around. Those not interested in reading Barth's complete canon should start here. *The Sot-Weed Factor* is one of the landmark works of Fabulism and Postmodernism, not to mention a screamingly funny book.

An imaginative romp through early colonial Maryland with a (partially) fictitious poet named Ebenezer Cooke, *Sot-Weed Factor* (which means "tobacco salesman") introduces Barth's penchant for fancy wordplay, ontological tricks, historical parody, and existential games. There are echoes of Joseph Campbell's mythical hero track here, though Barth would later claim that this was not intentional.

Barth released a revised version of the book in 1967, shaving off some 50 pages of what he considered extraneous material.

The jacket of the original hardcover edition of *Sot-Weed* was done by none other than the late, great Edward Gorey of *New Yorker* fame. (A small picture of the jacket is at the top of the lefthand column on this page. Click for a larger version.)

### Critical Reaction

"John Barth's *The Sot-Weed Factor* is a brilliantly specialized performance, so monstrously long that reading it seemed nearly as laborious as writing it.... The book is a bare-knuckled satire of humanity at large and the grandiose costume romance, done with meticulous skill in imitation of such eighteenth-century picaresque novelists as Fielding, Smollett and Sterne. For all the vigor of these models, we have to go back to Rabelais to match its unbridled bawdiness and scatological mirth."

— Edmund Fuller, *New York Times Book Review*

"Something closer to The Great American Novel than any other book of the last decade."

— Leslie Fiedler

“Ebenezer Cooke, in this boisterous historical farce, emerges as one of the most diverting heroes to roam the world since Candide.... *The Sot-Weed Factor* is that rare literary creation — a genuinely serious comedy.”

— *Time*

“An historical novel to end all historical novels... It so completely spoofs and satirizes the typical historical novel that no self-respecting historical novelist should ever be able to take himself seriously again... A further delight is that the novel can be read on many levels. Read it deadpan, if you must, as a straight historical novel... Read it as a satire on all historical novels... Or, best, read it as a novel in the great eighteenth-century tradition.”

— *Chicago Tribune*

Reprinted from the John Barth Information Center website

<http://www.davidlouisedelman.com/barth/fiction/sot-weed-factor/>