MAPS, METHOD AND MEANING:
THE PROBLEMATICS OF INTERPRETATION IN *THE NAME OF THE ROSE* AND *FOUCAULT'S PENDULUM*.

MARK BADGER

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DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

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Table of Contents

Abstract
Declarations
Acknowledgments
A Note on Quotations

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Abstract

This thesis offers a reading of Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* and *Foucault's Pendulum* which focuses on the interpretive themes presented by the novels. It sets out to argue that not only do the novels raise questions about the validity of our interpretive strategies (relating to the world, as epistemology, to texts, as hermeneutics, and to signs, as semiotics), but that they can be read as developing a certain critical position regarding the possibility of valid interpretation.

In *The Name of the Rose* William's method of semiotic ratiocination is challenged by the fact that, as a detective, he fails, whereas Bernard Gui, who seems the character most removed from William because of his blatant prejudice, succeeds. I suggest that this failure undermines William's positivism by underlining the unavoidability of prejudice. However, rather than providing the definitive post-modern solution to the question of interpretive validity (by declaring that there can be none), I argue that *The Name of the Rose* simply calls into question a belief in absolutism without committing itself to freeplay.

Foucault's Pendulum takes up the question posed at the end of *The Name of the Rose*: if there is no absolute interpretive validity, can there be any criteria for interpretation at all? The novel traces the seduction of its three central characters by the hermetic philosophy of similarities and correspondences. Arguing that Belbo's adoption of hermetic interpretation stems not from a rational commitment to freeplay but from a personal crisis of belief, which drives him to "use" hermeticism as a form of escape, I suggest that *Foucault's Pendulum* can be read as opposing radical theories of freeplay.

Both *The Name of the Rose* and *Foucault's Pendulum* can thus be read as sketching an interpretive middle ground between the extremes of positivist hermeneutics and radically relativist hermeneutics.

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Declarations

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any University. To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being available for loan and photocopying.

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Mark John Badger
31 January 1995

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A Note On Quotations

Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations in Part One are from *The Name of the Rose*, whilst all those in Part Two are from *Foucault's Pendulum*. Quotations are referenced in brackets following the text, with the name of the author (unless already specified), and, in the first instance and where confusion between two publications by the same author is possible, the year of publication.

Introduction

I prepare to leave on this parchment my testimony as to the wondrous and terrible events that I happened to observe in my youth, now repeating verbatim all I saw and heard, without venturing to seek a design, as if to leave to those who will come after (if the Antichrist does not come first) signs of signs, so that the prayer of deciphering may be exercised on them. (*The Name of the Rose*, 11)

0.1.

It is customary to commence a study of Umberto Eco's novels by declaring one's helplessness in the face of such vast, erudite and ironic texts. Such gestures are hardly surprising given both Eco's reputation and his achievements in *The Name of the Rose* (1983) and *Foucault's Pendulum* (1989). When a scholar who has devoted his career to the study of aesthetics and poetics turns his hand to fiction, critics are warranted a sense of apprehension. When that scholar produces eminently readable novels densely packed with philosophical reflections about the nature of texts and their unravelling, such apprehensions are realised. The difficulty in Eco's novels lies not so much in the vast amount of information presented (although that is truly formidable) nor even in the interweaving of philosophical and narrative strands throughout the novels. Rather, what seems most disturbing in *The Name of the Rose* and *Foucault's Pendulum* is the pervasive sense of irony, an irony that causes critics to question whether or not the novels' interpretive reflexivity might not serve to undermine their own position as privileged readers.

The Name of the Rose and *Foucault's Pendulum* are, I wish to argue, intensely textual novels, both structurally, in their use of frame narratives, intense quotation and intertextual reference, and thematically. *The Name of the Rose* and *Foucault's Pendulum* are novels *about* the difficulties involved in interpretation. That both novels incorporate interpretive references and themes is an observation of little ingenuity, and most critics have taken issue with the semiotic and hermeneutic implications they present. It is tempting to deal with these interpretive elements within the novels by simply appealing to Eco's "other" body of work, his academic writings, especially those of his works that develop his semiotic theory. There are certainly rich pickings to be had

in this regard, for both *The Name of the Rose* and *Foucault's Pendulum* contain many "echoes" of ideas expounded in more academic terms in Eco's theoretical writings, from Brother William's exposition and practice of the process of "abduction" to Belbo's fascination with the unlimited chain of associations that constitutes the universe of significance.

The temptation (although it is also something more responsible than temptation) to look to Eco's other writings when explicating his fiction is one to which I have succumbed. However, in drawing on Eco's semiotics many critics have concentrated on particular technical aspects, especially the concept of "unlimited semiosis," in order to suggest how the novels serve to "narrativise" ideas that already exist as "theory." Rocco Capozzi has argued that

> this approach of tracing *The Rose* to Eco's own works, or to any other
> author, would reduce Eco's application of unlimited intertextuality to a mere
> question of identifying sources, or quotations ... A search for sources would
> also overlook Eco's intentions of demonstrating how in the act of writing an
> author undertakes what Maria Corti appropriately calls a 'literary journey' ...
> through the encyclopedia of literature. (1989, 413,414)

In this thesis I wish both to recognise the ramifications of many aspects of *The Name of the Rose* and *Foucault's Pendulum* in terms of Eco's theory, and also to suggest that they present an argument about interpretation that goes beyond Eco's theoretical writings, although both theory and fiction move in the same direction.

From his early work on the poetics of modernist art to his most recent work on the "limits of interpretation," Eco has been involved in the debate over the nature and role of interpretation. Having explored the concept of the "open" work as a way of explaining the experience of modernist art, Eco sought to map out the relationship between reader and text in semiotic terms, a project which produced such works as *A Theory of Semiotics* (1976), *The Role of the Reader* (1979), and *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* (1984). From this work in particular, Eco came to be associated with a "reader-response" approach to interpretation, an approach which centred around the concept, borrowed from Peirce, of "unlimited semiosis." Eco stressed the potentially endless nature of signification, each sign requiring interpretation in terms of another sign,

and the necessity for the reader to bring to the text the interpretive effort required to "actualise" the potential significations contained therein.

In his most recent work, as represented in *The Limits of Interpretation* (1990) and *Interpretation and Overinterpretation* (1992), Eco has engaged more specifically in the debate over interpretive validity. Eco's work has, ever since *Opera aperta* (1962)[1], had implications for the basic hermeneutic question of "how are we to understand correctly." As David Robey says of Eco's argument in *Opera aperta*, where he introduced his conception of the "open" work: "the interpretation of the modern open work is far from entirely free; a formative intention is manifest in every work, and this intention must be a determining factor in the interpretive process" (Eco 1989, xii). However, the stress on unlimited semiosis and the role of the reader seemed to imply the opposite of such interpretive restrictions: unfettered by univocal signification, the reader could bring any experience to a text, making the concept of "valid" interpretation redundant.

In *The Limits of Interpretation* Eco sought to counter such relativist implications in his semiotics, reinforcing his often overshadowed commitment to Peirce's demand that interpretation be "grounded."

> To say that interpretation (as the basic feature of semiosis) is potentially unlimited does not mean that interpretation has no object and that it 'riverruns' for the mere sake of itself. To say that a text potentially has no end does not mean that *every* act of interpretation can have a happy ending. ... If there is something to be interpreted, the interpretation must speak of something which must be found somewhere, and in some way respected. (6,7)

If interpretation must "respect" its "object," and if it is constrained also by the "intention" of the text itself, as constructed by the encyclopedic competence of a historical and political community, then some interpretations can and should be accepted as preferable to others. We may not be able to say what a text means definitively—Eco's semiotics, unlike much structuralist thought, has always respected the contingency of historical conditions—but we can still develop criteria for a kind of interpretive validity. "If it is very difficult," Eco writes, "to decide whether a given interpretation is a good

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[1] translated into English as "The Open Work" (1989).

one, it is, however, always possible to decide whether it is a bad one" (1990, 42).

Arguing that some reviews of *The Name of the Rose* had been too narrow in tying the novel's events to the ideas expressed in *A Theory of Semiotics* and *The Role of the Reader*, Rocco Capozzi asserts that such critics had not paid "sufficient attention" to the fact that Eco was already developing these ideas further in *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* (Capozzi 1989, 413). Likewise, I feel that many reviews of both *The Name of the Rose* and *Foucault's Pendulum* have suffered from not taking into account *The Limits of Interpretation*. Many critics seem to have found in Eco's novels support for precisely the interpretive free-play Eco has recently been at pains to disassociate himself from, being unable or unwilling to distinguish, as Eco does, between the "unlimited semiosis" of Peirce and the interpretive "drift" of *Foucault's Pendulum*. Reading either novel as an illustration of the values of interpretive freedom proves, to some degree at least, problematic—although it most certainly can be done, and done well. Eco himself refuses to proscribe such readings of his novels; far be it for me to suggest that they are untenable. My aim in this thesis is to argue that reading the novels as *opposing* interpretive freedom along the lines of *The Limits of Interpretation* is also a fruitful approach, even if it shares the same problematics as the argument of *The Limits of Interpretation*.

In order to develop such a reading, I wish to outline the way in which both novels present the problematics of interpretation as a theme, and to argue that these themes can be read as placing certain attitudes towards interpretation in a pejorative light. In so doing I will refer to various issues raised by Eco elsewhere, both semiotic and hermeneutic, to illustrate my argument. I do not wish, however, to present an exhaustive account of semiosis in *The Name of the Rose* and *Foucault's Pendulum*. Others are better equipped, and it is a task beyond the bounds of this thesis.

0.2.

"In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (11). So begins Adso's introduction to his narrative in *The Name of the Rose*, echoing the famous opening verse of the Gospel of John. The origin of the Word in the Godhead is, Adso contends, the one event "whose incontrovertible truth can be asserted" (11) in a world of change and decay. The Absolute Truth to which the text gives witness is, however, veiled to a fallen and depraved humanity who, in consequence, must struggle to "spell out its faithful signals even when they seem obscure to us" (11). Moving from the general to the particular, Adso is able to claim his own poor text as a symptom of this overwhelming mortal frailty, declaring his ignorance in the face of the events he lived through and has now come to narrate.

> I prepare to leave on this parchment my testimony as to the wondrous and terrible events that I happened to observe in my youth, now repeating verbatim all I saw and heard, without venturing to seek a design, as if to leave to those who will come after (if the Antichrist has not come first) signs of signs, so that the prayer of deciphering may be exercised on them. (11).

In opening with a quotation about the divinity of the Word, and arguing for the frailty of our efforts at interpretation and understanding, especially in relation to his own narrative, Adso effectively places the problematics of textuality and interpretation before the reader.

The hermeneutic doubt of Adso's introduction follows from yet another introduction, that of the frame narrator, the discoverer and translator of Adso's text, who is equally at pains to stress his doubts regarding the text he presents. The impression that builds is thus one of extended divorce from the events at the heart of the story. We, the readers, are told that what we have before us is a translation of a French translation of an eighteenth-century Latin edition of a now lost medieval manuscript, whose author opens by declaring his uncertainty about the meaning of his own narrative. And all this is unverifiable, for not only are the bibliographical details in the French edition misleading, but the only copy of that edition is itself missing. The possibility of grasping the "meaning" of Ado's narrative thus seems even more remote than the original text itself, for even if we possessed the original, it would still presumably "exercise on the reader"

the task of making meaning. Indeed, at the end of his own introduction the frame narrator declares, that the text has no meaning, no deeper truth than its own enjoyment. Adso's story is, he declares, "immeasurably remote in time ... gloriously lacking in any relevance for our day, atemporally alien to our hopes and our certainties" (5).

The structure of the narrative frames of *The Name of the Rose* thus poses a challenge regarding the nature of meaning and interpretation, placing the meaning of the text in contention. What Adso's narrative may "really" be is repeatedly denied to the reader. This strategy of rendering reading problematic is continued into the actual narrative of *The Name of the Rose* itself, continuing to deny the reader any safe ground upon which to build an interpretation. Essentially, Adso's narrative takes the form of a detective story. From Adso's description of William of Baskerville, so similar to Watson's description of Holmes, through William's initial act of ratiocination in locating Brunellus to the series of murders, William's attempts to locate the murderer and his conflict with the "evil genius," in Jorge of Burgos, Adso's narrative bears all the tell tale signs of the detective genre. However, *The Name of the Rose* holds a twist: it is a detective story where the detective loses. Brother William discovers the murderer, Jorge, but he does so by accident, following a false chain of reasoning, and he discovers Jorge too late to save the lives of the monks, and too late to save his "grail," Aristotle's lost book on comedy.

The Name of the Rose is not a "typical" detective story, where the detective is triumphant and the villain vanquished. Instead Adso closes his reminiscences with Brother William denouncing the hubris of human reason and asserting the futility of seeking an order in the universe. I wish to argue that William's defeat, and the conclusions that he draws from it, are central to a reading of *The Name of the Rose* that sees it as a self-reflexively textual novel. Far from being isolated sentiments expressed only in the disappointment of a failed quest, William's questioning of the possibility of ratiocination, and of reading texts and signs in general, is the culmination of a thread running through the entire novel. From the beginning of Adso's narrative, where William explains to Adso his method in discovering the whereabouts of the lost

Brunellus, the way we read signs and the knowledge we can draw from them features prominently in Adso's recollections. Nor is William's despair at the narrative's conclusion an about face from a previously uncontested positivism, for one of Adso's most enduring memories would seem to be of William's struggle to reconcile the positivism of Roger Bacon with the perceived relativism of William of Ockham, a struggle never fully resolved in spite of William's apparent championing of empiricism.

What can appear at the outset, then, as a "safe" detective story, in the same positivist form as the stories of Sherlock Holmes, Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple, rigidly tied to space and time within a narrative which imposes the strict order of the canonical hours, ends up turning on the reader's expectations. Instead of championing the skill of the detective, which may to some extent negate the unease of the frame narratives, it compounds that unease, refusing the reader the conventional platitudes and making problematic the usually unchallenged ability of the detective to interpret the universe correctly. This refusal of conventional expectations[2] is carried over into Eco's second novel, *Foucault's Pendulum*, providing a certain continuity of themes between the two. Both novels permit a reading that sees the transgression of convention in a narrative dealing with interpretation as making a statement about the nature of interpretation itself.

As with *The Name of the Rose*, *Foucault's Pendulum* provides both a narrative and a narrator that raise doubts about interpretive certainty. Casaubon, like Adso, narrates his tale from a position of doubt: *The Name of the Rose* centres on a narrative spun by Adso looking back on an event long past but still confused in his mind, and *Foucault's Pendulum* is Casaubon's attempt to construct a narrative to account for his experiences, a narrative constructed over a period of two days and shifting according to Casaubon's moods. The conclusion of *Foucault's Pendulum*, being Casaubon's final reflections as he awaits his death, constitutes not the completion of what has gone before (635 pages of "before," no less), but a revision, a rewriting. Having come to an

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[2] cf. Robey's account of Eco's association of ambiguity, art and convention in the introduction to *The Open Work*: xi, xxiv.

understanding by producing a narrative, Casaubon enacts the hermeneutic circle by returning to the parts with a view of the whole and providing a new interpretation of them.

The story that he weaves is itself consciously interpretive, for it is a story of a creative rewriting, a fiction that appears to trespass into the realm of reality. *Foucault's Pendulum* takes the form of a thriller rather than a detective story, revolving around a lighthearted "reconstruction" of a secret "plot," with a twist as the plot seems to become real, trapping its ostensible creators. Casaubon's narrative tells of how three editors, fascinated with the apparent meaninglessness of the world in which they live, begin to play with a philosophy that asserts the necessity of interpretive free play. The hermetic adepts the trio encounter all insist that meaning lies beyond the apparent, that it is to be sought in hidden associations, in occult correspondences. Because the Ultimate Truth, the only Reality, lies beyond, outside of the realm of comprehension, the meanings we traditionally assign to the elements of our experience are invalid, and we are free to dismember those experiences and recombine them in any way we desire, in search of connections that hint at the Truth.

Whilst our trio set out to parody what they see as the illogical nature of hermetic philosophy, they are gradually seduced by its possibilities, fascinated by the ease at which they are able to discover perverse and bizarre correspondences. History becomes a text that reveals hidden truths, malleable and compliant, accepting the wildest of interpretations without complaint. Thus, like Adso's narrative in *The Name of the Rose*, the story of the Plan in *Foucault's Pendulum* calls into question the possibility of universalising interpretations; given the right assumptions and enough skill, any interpretation is possible. But the trio begin to believe in their own narrative, which starts to occupy a twilight world of the boundary between what is accepted as fiction and what is accepted as history. Whilst they may not believe that it is true, they find themselves *wanting* to believe that it is. In this condition, their world comes falling down upon them: Diotallevi dies of a cancer he equates with their own interpretive metastasis, Belbo is blackmailed by the Diabolicals to reveal what the Diabolicals now think is a real

Plan, and Casaubon is not only drawn into Belbo's fate, but seems to lose control of his own sanity.

Casaubon's conclusion thus turns away from the philosophy that would appear to have destroyed their world. Rethinking his experiences, he concludes that meaning can be found in our lives, and the denial of meaning is, as Diotallevi had claimed, to blaspheme against the Word. We may not, he decides, be able to know truly, but that does not mean that we should give up contesting the world in which we live altogether. In concluding on this note, *Foucault's Pendulum* seems to imply the opposite of the conclusion of *The Name of the Rose*, raising the possibility that its own questioning of the stability of meaning is itself an interpretive excess, an extreme that cannot be warranted. In this way, *Foucault's Pendulum* could be seen to answer Adso's final question of William in *The Name of the Rose*: "Do you mean," Adso asks, "that there would be no possible and communicable learning any more if the very criterion of truth were lacking ...?" (*The Name of the Rose* 493). Truth may be beyond us, but as "fragile as our existence may be, however ineffectual our interrogation of the world, there is nevertheless something that has more meaning than the rest" (*Foucault's Pendulum* 623).

0.3.

Inevitably, when dealing with texts in translation, the question of interpretive adequacy acquires a new dimension. No translation, not even the most inspired, can claim to flawlessly reproduce the original into another language: there is always a degree of difference, always something "lost" in transition. This is something attested to by William Weaver's "Pendulum Diary," an anecdotal account of Weaver's translation of *Foucault's Pendulum*. "Pendulum Diary" frequently functions as an admission of the gap between Italian and English, and the inability of seamlessly closing it, especially when the language in question is so artfully and cunningly employed. From the very opening words—"Fu allora che vidi il pendolo"—Weaver explains that the task of translating the Italian novel was one of approximation and compromise; not so much a

translation of a message from one medium to another as an interpretation of a text into the terms of another language.

There seems to be little argument that translation is always a matter of interpretation in this manner and that Weaver is not alone in his dilemma. Even, then, given that Weaver's translation is a remarkably good one (and at least one critic has refused to allow this point), it seems too much too ask that it provide the English speaking reader with access to a text that is somehow essentially Eco's. The novel *Il nome della rosa*, Eco's "original" text, remains always something different from the text which is *The Name of the Rose*. This difference can pose a problem for the traditional philological enterprise, in that the aim of a study of Eco's novels should be, under such terms, to provide knowledge *about* the novels, and anything that is interposed between the essence of the novels[3] and the reader should be considered an impediment, and an attempt made to overcome it.

Given Eco's frequent assertion that in interpretation it is paramount that the text be respected, it may seem especially brash to attempt a study of his own novels in translation. However, I wish to suggest that it is this very injunction to respect the text that dispels any doubts about dealing with the novels in translation. What is present to the reader, in the terms of Eco's poetics, is always a "linear text manifestation" (Eco 1979, 13-15) which must be approached, if not on its own terms, at least in a manner which respects the cultural milieu that engendered it. What the reader of *The Name of the Rose* and *Foucault's Pendulum* is faced with is not an Italian text, requiring respect for the nuances of late twentieth-century Italian experience (although that can certainly be brought to the text), but an English text, requiring respect for late twentieth-century Anglophone experience. *The Name of the Rose* is a different text to *Il nome della rosa*, its status as a translation should not function as an impediment to a "correct" reading, but instead set it apart from its "original" as a literary event in its own right, requiring its own commentary. Certainly, for many critical purposes, the two novels (*Il nome della*

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[3] in whatever terms "essence" should be conceived; authorial intention, textual intention, historical intention, the language of the text, etc.

rosa and *The Name of the Rose*) are similar enough for there to be little point in distinguishing them (does Guglielmo/William discover the murderer in *Il nome della rosa/The Name of the Rose*?), but we should not assume that a reading sufficient to one is necessarily sufficient to the other.

It could certainly be argued that given my assertion of the differences between the "original" and the "translation," *The Name of the Rose* ceases to function as Eco's text. At best we should see it as a hybrid text, attributable to both Weaver and Eco, or perhaps we should attribute it to Weaver alone, as his commentary on *Il nome della rosa*. This thesis should then be renamed a study of *Weaver's* texts, not of Eco's, to which it does not really refer. Otherwise I may give the false impression that I am saying something about texts that are essentially Eco's. Such an objection has some force; however I would like to counter it by challenging its assumption about the role of the author. Eco himself would surely, although perhaps not as radically, assent to Barthes' dismissal of the role of the "empirical" author from the function of the text. The text is, after all, a "machine for generating interpretations" (Eco 1992 (b), 820) and not a tool for revealing the hearts and minds of writers. Given this, the appearance of the name "Umberto Eco" on the cover and title page of the novels functions as an element of the text itself, providing the opportunity for intertextual allusion, rather than serving to anchor the text to some extra-semiotic event or intent. Thus *The Name of the Rose* remains bound to Eco, no matter how distancing the translation may be from the words he scripted (as does even the movie called *The Name of the Rose*). Likewise, any translation of *Il nome della rosa*—and even *Il nome della rosa* itself—is always removed from the empirical figure who likewise bears the name that is emblazoned on its cover. Thus I will continue, in this thesis, to explore the question of interpretive validity as it is raised in Eco's two novels, *The Name of the Rose* and *Foucault's Pendulum*.

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Part One

"The Text and the Detective"

Smilzo came with the truck in the afternoon.

"The chief sent me to pick up some stuff," he said to Don Camillo, who pointed out the parcels waiting stacked up for him in the hall.

When Smilzo came to pick up the last lot of them, Don Camillo followed him as he staggered under his loads and gave him a kick so hearty that both Smilzo and half of his parcels landed in the truck.

"Make a note of this along with the list of names you gave to the Party delegate," Don Camillo explained.

"We'll settle with you come election day," said Smilzo, extricating himself from the confusion. "Your name is at the head of another list of ours."

"Anything more I can do for you?"

"No. But I still don't understand. I've had the same treatment from Peppone and Straziami already, and all because I carried out an order."

"Wrong orders shouldn't be carried out," Don Camillo warned him.

"Right. But how can one know ahead of time that they're wrong?" asked Smilzo with a sigh.

Giovanni Guareschi *Don Camillo and the Prodigal Son* (37,38).

Chapter 1

"By way of introduction (1) ..."

The Name of the Rose, says Jospeh J. Carpino, is a tapestry "woven of a woof of detective story crisscrossing a warp of philosophy (epistemological and political)" (1986, 390). As Eco says, "it is no accident" that the novel takes the form of a detective mystery, (*Reflections*, 54), for the detective genre bears a strong affinity with reflections of a philosophical nature (both epistemological and political). Eco's primary concern as an academic is with semiotics, the "science of signs" (Eco 1989(b), xx), and it takes not much more than a glance through his various books on the topic to realise that he sees semiotics as engaging in the same problematic that troubles the detective: the central question for both being how we can "know" the "guilty party" from the evidence that is before us, how it is possible for us to know the connections between the thing and the sign that "points" to it?

David Robey presents the thrust of Eco's semiotics, especially in regard to his key terms of "encyclopedia," "abduction" and "unlimited semiosis," thus;

> Eco's argument is that, just as the detective finds the author of the crime by postulating certain rules concerning the connections between human motives and actions and physical events, so in the normal processes of communication we find the meaning of a sign by postulating certain rules concerning the relationship between that sign and others. (Eco 1989(b), xxiii)

Eco's semiotics differs in this way from much structuralist semiotic theory, in that rather than seeking to schematise the "codes" that create meaning in specific situations, he engages immediately with the question of *how* codes and signs actually work. How is it that certain phenomena lead, seemingly automatically, to other (mental) phenomena? His conclusions lead away from the rigid classifications (and the belief in the "classificatoriness" of all meaningful events) that constitutes structuralist semiotics, arguing instead for a recognition of "signs" as a cognitive engagement, a process whereby we "guess" what meaning could apply, and then proceed to act. Eco's semiotics is in this way fundamentally epistemological, in that it presents signs as the space within which we entertain our environment, thus making the questions "how do we know?" and "what does it mean?" inseparable.

The links between epistemology and semiotics can be discerned within *The Name of the Rose*, as they can within any detective story; in any investigation, be it criminal, medical, or historical, the clues are always signs, and the detective must proceed from the available signs to construct a picture of the universe that satisfies the conditions of the *real* universe, so as to pull off the required *coup*, arresting the hidden culprit, concluding the matter successfully. The figure of the detective necessarily raises the question of how we can, with any confidence, move from the signs around us, to know the universe as it *is*. And this is, indeed, the problem raised by William in *The Name of the Rose*. In *The Name of the Rose*, however, there is a twist, for not only does the detective inspire wonder at his ability to "know," and not only does he, as is only fair, expound on the wonders of his method, but he also critically questions that method, asking not simply "how did I know that?" but "how can I know at all?" thus foregrounding the otherwise

implicit confrontation between applied semiotics (or "ratiocination") and epistemology.

The detective traditionally must bring the investigation, not just to any conclusion, but to a *successful* conclusion, one which ties the "real" events to the signs that refer to them, which necessitates a *correct* interpretation of the those signs. That is to say that the detective must, from the signs present to him/her, construct a mental universe that corresponds to the "real" universe, the phenomenal universe, in order that he/she may then *act* to produce the desired outcome. It is neither good enough to conceive a universe that corresponds to the "real" one and then not to act upon the deduced implications, nor to conceive a universe in such a way that fails to allow for successful action in the "real" one. The problem then becomes one of *guaranteeing* that the conjectures we make about the connections between signs and things, and, indeed, between other signs, are valid. What is required is a interpretive authority, a guarantee of correct understanding.

In the universe of Arthur Conan Doyle, such interpretive authority accompanies Sherlock Holmes by virtue of his methodology; his "semiotics" in effect constitutes his guarantee of success in that he is able to *recognise* from signs the way things really *are*. This is also initially the case for William, although he is more modest than Holmes, admitting to Adso that he has, in the past, made painful mistakes ("The others believed me wise because I won, but they didn't know the many instances in which I have been foolish because I lost" [305]). But William's admission of error is more than just modesty: it unravels the convenience of his semiotic justification, posing the question of whether the world really must conform to the rules we impose upon it. What is, in the end, at stake in *The Name of the Rose*, is how we can guarantee the validity of our understanding of the universe, given that we need to understand in order to act. Thus *The Name of the Rose* raises semiotic and epistemological concerns that effect our ability to be sure of our own understanding, by threatening the very possibility of interpretive authority.

The Name of the Rose is many things to many readers; detective story, political fable, metaphysical investigation. But in every reading this concern with epistemology, with the question of knowledge and how we come by it, makes its presence felt. Every episode within *The Name of the Rose* carries the impression of this over-riding concern, giving the impression of a Chinese Box; as each layer of the narrative is unpacked, the basic pattern remains the same. Whether it is the introduction of the "frame" narrator, Adso's narrative, the detective story, or its constituent elements—the "badly scraped parchment" of snow, the riddle of the library—or the "digressions" into the religious and political themes that occupy so much of the novel (much to the dismay of those who wish only to read a detective yarn), each serves to illustrate the same fundamental concern: the problematic of the acquisition of knowledge.

This at least is uncontroversial. Most commentators seem content to recognise the semiotic potential of the novel, differing largely only on the scope, impact, and suitability of a "semiotic reading" to the novel as a whole. Some, for instance, have found Eco's repeated philosophising objectionable—it ruins a good detective story—while others have found in the novel's ability to raise semiotic concerns the very reason for its success. That such concerns should be evident in a novel written by a Professor of Semiotics should hardly be surprising to anyone. Of more controversy is the question of what conclusions we should draw from the way the question of knowledge is raised in *The Name of the Rose*, which is the question of what the novel *means*.

The Name of the Rose quite neatly turns politics into a detective plot, and a detective plot into politics, but it is also possible to read in it (contrary to the intentions of both the frame narrator and Adso) an ethics, a position on how we should frame our thoughts and behaviour. It is here that controversy arises, for, as Adso clearly states, this is a tale that does not spell out its conclusions. *The Name of the Rose* does not wear its heart on its sleeve, as do Eco's academic works of semiotic theory, but rather, visits on the reader the task of interpretation. And it is in ascribing a meaning to the "threads of happenings so many and so confused" (12) that there is a divergence of opinion.

It seems relatively innocuous to observe at least that William of Baskerville

functions as a privileged voice within *The Name of the Rose*. The centre of Adso's reflections, William is an English Franciscan monk who displays curious affinities with a later English literary creation, Sherlock Holmes, beginning with his physical description, and continuing through his penchant for lecturing his assistant, his keenness for semiotic distinctions, and even his habit of chewing certain narcotic plants. A former inquisitor with a taste for the practical empiricism of Bacon, and the pragmatic semiotics of the British Franciscans of the period, William is given the role of detective within *The Name of the Rose*, a role which provides him with a stage from which to present his thoughts on everything from canine hydrophobia to the ontological status of individual entities and the condition of the poor in the society of catholic Europe.

From Adso's impressions of his master's opinions, the contemporary reader in turn develops an impression of William that is, I would suggest, generally positive. Certainly William can appear both overbearing and aloof, and perhaps many readers find Adso a far more congenial figure in his innocence, naivety and simple fallibility. Nevertheless, when push comes to shove and the good guys line up against the bad guys (as they must), it is William who represents the characteristics with which the contemporary reader sympathises. The question of William's privileged position in this regard deserves a thesis of its own, investigating the way in which readers construct characters within the expectations of their own ideologies. For my purposes, however, it suffices to say that William's nascent empiricism and liberalism dovetails nicely with late twentieth-century western sentiments. William champions the objective rationality of Sherlock Holmes in a fourteenth century world where mysticism and superstition seem to hold sway. This dichotomy is brought into play right from the opening of Adso's narrative, where Adso's own musings on the mystical symmetries of the approaching Abbey are disturbed by William's triumphant deduction of the whereabouts of the abbot's lost horse, actually utilising the signs revealed to him by his careful scrutiny of his environment.

William is thus set apart by what we might call his "modernity," which earns him our respect when manifested in his detections, and endears him to us when it is displayed in his politics. Our perceptions of the medieval world to which William thus seems

opposed are neatly summed up in figures such as Abo, Jorge and in Bernard Gui. Abo, who voices his approval of the massacre of the population of Beziers in the name of religious truth, and especially Bernard, who expediently and callously condemns Adso's helpless love interest, the unfortunate peasant girl, horrify us. Jorge also inspires a certain distaste for his puritanical condemnations of laughter, the product of his blind passion for the truth, a passion which leads him even to murder. Against this backdrop, William, who explains to Adso that heresy is born not so much out of the perversity of doctrine as the perversity of a political system which demands the exclusion of the poor, and argues with his colleagues for the rights of the populace in the governing of the state, appears as a breath of fresh air, the voice of reason in a society in which hatred and intolerance seem otherwise unchecked.

This distinction between the rationality of the Enlightenment and the superstitious squalor of the middle ages is drawn most clearly in Jean-Jacques Annuad's film version of *The Name of the Rose*. Constrained by length and a visual, as opposed to textual, narrative, the film focuses on the surface narrative of *The Name of the Rose*, and provides us with a graphic portrayal of the squalor of the middle ages, the poverty of the peasants, the brutality of the inquisition and the remoteness of the abbey from the concerns of the everyday. Within this version, William appears as the only saving grace, uncovering the truth of humanistic reason in the face of prejudice, superstition and corruption.

But as a novel *The Name of the Rose* is not quite as sharp in its distinctions as is the film, nor, perhaps, the popular perceptions readers tend to bring to the text. To begin with, William is not necessarily a modern figure at all, but a quite accurate portrayal of a fourteenth-century British Franciscan. William is, after all, a character both based on and associated in the novel with Roger Bacon and William of Ockham, both progressive thinkers who influenced later developments in thought, but who were at the same time, indelibly medieval, immersed in the conflicts and concerns of their time, as, indeed, is William. Thus, rather than condemning the fourteenth-century as a society in its death throes, simply awaiting the Renaissance, as the movie (and some commentators on the novel) would suggest, *The Name of the Rose* allows us to glimpse some of the forgotten

acumen of a period far from intellectually barren. William takes his place in opposition to many of the other characters in the narrative, but it is an opposition that was itself medieval, not simply one between the enlightened present and the benighted past.

But perhaps more pointed than its validation of the fourteenth-century is the fact that *The Name of the Rose* also calls into question the validity of the enlightened humanism of the nineteenth and twentieth-centuries. As I have pointed out above, *The Name of the Rose* is a detective story in which the detective loses. In Conan Doyle's universe, Holmes always wins. Even when plunged over a cliff entangled with Moriarty, Holmes has achieved his purpose—and he survives, anyway, rendered immortal by the pressure of public sympathy. But the sympathy we have for William, sharing in his triumphant conquest of the library's labyrinth, revealing the *Comedia* of Aristotle, hidden by Jorge, and its diabolical protector, Jorge, has the effect of shielding us from his ultimate defeat. William discovers Jorge, but too late. Where the act of discovery should validate the detective's methods—as it always does for Holmes—William's discovery, like that of the parodic Holmes in Eberhardt's film *Without a Clue*, simply confirms the failure of his method.

William has indeed discovered the murderer, but he has done so by accident, proceeding according to a pattern that he discovers to have been false. His construction of the killers thoughts, which as Jorge asserts should be sufficient to locate and apprehend the culprit (465), proves to have been mistaken; a false trail suggested by Alinardo. It is in fact only William's desire to posit an order that provides an order, one read in turn by Jorge who, paradoxically, then sees himself as justified by it. William's vaunted ability to move from the sign to the thing, by recreating in his mind the order that supports the connection, comes to nothing. Even his success in penetrating the mysterious *finis Africae* is owed in the end not to his own method but to Adso's apparently meaningless interjections, which provide William with the clues his own dependence on rationality lacks.

What is the reader to make of defeat in a detective novel in which the nature of the detective's method is as important as, if not more important than, the crimes under

investigation? For as William explains to Adso, who cannot see the value of continuing to search out the conclusion to "a story of theft and vengeance among monks of scant virtue" (394), there is more at stake than the murder of five monks, and even more than the conflict between the emperor and the pope, with all its political and theological ramifications (394). What is at stake in *The Name of the Rose* is our ability to understand the world around us, our ability to know, and to be confident that we *do* know, that our knowledge is valid. And such validity must surely be called into question by William's failure to act to stop the murders.

William's privileged position within the text suggests that his philosophy should, likewise, be accorded the privileged position within the novel's epistemological quest. William's tolerance and rationality stem from his abandonment of the "medieval" reliance on "tradition." Such a pattern of uncritical thought is assumed to perpetuate mistaken understanding, and stand in the way of humankind's need to develop a more accurate picture of the universe. This negative understanding of the role of tradition is perhaps no better illustrated than in the popular perception of the trial of Galileo, as dramatised by Bertolt Brecht, where Galileo's quest for the truth about the universe is crushed by the prejudices of the received tradition.

The problem of William's failure thus becomes acute. How can William's adherence to the claims of human reason be presented as the antidote to the poison of prejudice if it fails to serve him in his quest for the murderer? Joan Del Fattore is one critic who advocates the triumph of rationality within *The Name of the Rose* and yet also recognises this problem posed by William's defeat. It is a problem she solves by arguing that William fails his method, rather than he being failed by it. In succumbing to his inability to reconcile Baconian empiricism with Ockhamite nominalism, Del Fattore argues that William is allowing the debilitating intellectualism of scholasticism to stifle the practicality of his method. He thus becomes a victim of the authoritarian outlook to which he is so effectively opposed for the majority of the novel.

In presenting William as a flawed hero, and his defeat as a kind of tragedy, Del Fattore dismissively casts Ockham as essentially "medieval," ignoring his relevance to

contemporary thought. Within the history of philosophy Ockham is certainly not alone in raising the problems that nominalism presents to causality. Indeed, whilst Ockham managed to see his way around such problems, they re-emerged to dominate the philosophy of the late eighteenth-century, becoming a key issue in the thought of Hume, Locke and Kant. Indeed, Kant's solution to Hume's radical nominalism, which underlay his entire philosophical endeavour, still exercises a profound influence on philosophical debate today[4]. Thus William's doubts should not be characterised as his inability to break free of the shackles of scholasticism in order to carry the baton of rationality. Rather, his reluctant skepticism can quite reasonably be seen as a response to the problems inherent within the positivist platform. If he did not manage, from his fourteenth-century vantage point, to reach Kant's neat solution, not all have acquiesced to that solution anyway. If this is so, then William comes to represent not an unqualified positivism, but a point of rupture within positivism, something that is recognised by many post-structuralist readings of *The Name of the Rose*.

William's failure to make his own conjectures about the universe conform to the events actually unfolding within it is reflected in the doubts he expresses to Adso at the narrative's close. "I behaved stubbornly," he laments, "pursuing a semblance of order, when I should have known well that there is no order in the universe" (492). Drawing on his perceptions of Ockham's nominalism, William reaches the disturbing conclusion that we live in a universe upon which we can never definitively impose an order. As Eco points out in *Reflections on "The Name of the Rose,"* William has made the leap from a model of the world based on a mannerist maze, to one based on a "rhizome," a maze which "has no centre, no periphery, no exit, because it is potentially infinite" (57).

Such a model, characterised as following organically interlinked paths which "can be structured but ... never structured definitively" (ibid 58), recalls one of Eco's most well known concepts, that of "unlimited semiosis," which likewise models a pattern of continually branching, universally interconnecting conjecture. Unlimited semiosis is, in

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[4] For Kant's response to Hume see, for example, Stumpf (302).

effect, Eco's answer to structuralism, or, at least, what Eco terms "ontological structuralism" (Eco 1989, xxi). Whilst such positivistic structuralism holds that all human behaviour is grounded on significative "structures," which can be delineated and thus demystified, Eco asserts that the process of semiosis—the movement from the sign to the "object" of the sign—functions in a fashion that always allows further development. As a conjectural process in itself (semiosis is, to Eco, fundamentally inferential) semiosis proceeds by guesswork, but, unlike William's Baconian ideals, it never stops when its "object" is guessed, for the "object" can always function as another sign. We are, on at least one level, committed to an eternal deferment.

The relevance of such a model to post-structuralist thinking is obvious, as is its similarity (at least superficially) to Derrida's philosophy of *difference*. And it is a similarity that finds many echoes in *The Name of the Rose*. *The Name of the Rose* is after all "a tale of books" (5), as the frame narrator asserts and as Adso discovers. Not only is it an account of the search amongst books for a lost book, it also becomes a tale of the nature of books themselves. Books, like the world, seem to fit well the rhizomatic model that threatens order and design, as Adso comes to realise:

> Until then I had thought each book spoke of the things, human or divine, that lie outside books. Now I realized that not infrequently books speak of books: it is as if they spoke among themselves. In the light of this reflection, the library seemed all the more disturbing to me. It was then the place of a long, centuries-old murmuring, an imperceptible dialogue between one parchment and another, a living thing, a receptacle of powers not to be ruled by a human mind, a treasure of secrets emanated by many minds, surviving the death of those who had produced them or had been their conveyors. (286)

"The Middle Ages," argues Christine de Lailhacar, "were *the* era of intertextuality" (1990, 158). The reliance on tradition equated to a reliance on texts, thus each new idea had to be couched in the terms of previous ideas: text mirrored text, each constructed of others. As Mikhail Bakhtin wrote: "the boundary lines between someone else's speech and one's own speech were flexible, ambiguous, often deliberately distorted and confused. Certain types of texts were constructed like mosaics out of the texts of others" (1981, 69, quoted in Cappozzi, 417). The library thus becomes the space of potentially

infinite quotation: each text speaks of another, which, in turn, speaks of another, which can speak, in its own turn, both of the original and yet others still. The only thing absent from this chain of signification is the "thing" itself.

William's positivism asserts that we cannot understand the unicorn truly until we comprehend the individual unicorn itself, no matter what the chain of its signification within the universe of books. To *truly* know, we must go beyond the universe of semiosis to apprehend the universe of actuality.

> "The unicorn of the books is like a print. If the print exists, there must have existed something whose print it is."
> "But different from the print, you say."
> "Of course. The print does not always have the same shape as the body that impressed it, and it doesn't always derive from the pressure of a body. At times it reproduces the impression a body has left in our mind: it is the print of an idea. The idea is sign of things, and the image is sign of the idea, sign of a sign. But from the image I reconstruct, if not the body, the idea that others had of it."
> "And this is enough for you?"
> "No, because true learning must not be content with ideas, which are, in fact, signs, but must discover things in their individual truth." (317)

But William's positivism is open to conclusions different from those he wishes, and Adso is quick to recognise the tension: "Then I can always and only speak of something that speaks to me of something else, and so on. But the final something, the true one—does that never exist?" (317).

Adso recognises the principle that within the universe of semiosis, the chain of signification has no end, that it becomes, in effect, an interplay of associations without a ground to restrict or control it. William's failure can be seen to lie in his inability to recognise the unlimitability of semiosis until it is too late. He fails to see that semiosis is the realm of the possible, and that the positing of the possible does not lead beyond semiosis to the actual, but simply perpetuates the rule of the sign. Such a reading of *The Name of the Rose* finds in William's failure a positive gesture, rather than a complication, for it contributes to the undermining of authoritarian Order, be it traditional or positivistic. For instance, as Eden Liddelow reads *The Name of the Rose*, "it is faithful to Eco's long-standing project—to make the reader into one who longs for faith in a system that is destined to fail him" (1991, 128).

Eco himself, however, is not happy to be counted amongst the post-structuralist movement, at least in its relativistic form. In his most recent theoretical work, *The Limits of Interpretation*, Eco has argued against those who would see in unlimited semiosis a movement from order to "free play," proposing a distinction between his own anti-structuralism and that of post-structuralism. Far from acquiescing to Adso's skeptical proposition that the "thing" must remain always absent, Eco draws on the philosophy of C.S. Peirce to assert that whilst unlimited semiosis is a useful abstraction of the semiotic process, the actual "doing" of semiosis (interpretation as an event) conforms to a pragmatic grounding based on the notion that understanding is always prompted *by* something. Interpretation becomes on this consideration "intentional," in Brentano's sense, and cannot function purely within or for itself.

Drawing on these ideas, other critics have seen *The Name of the Rose* as a narration of a "middle line" philosophy, reflecting, as JoAnn Cannon suggests, the recent trend in Italian thought towards a position known as "weak thought," characterised by the philosophy of Gianni Vattimo. In "Semiotics and Conjecture in *Il nome della rosa*," Cannon argues that a model of semiosis based on inference, as is Peirce's abductive method, can be neither absolute, as positivistic philosophies demand, nor can it allow an "anything goes" approach. It eschews absolute authority in interpretation, but replaces it not with free-play, but with a form of "pragmatic" authority. *The Name of the Rose* thus eschews both the traditional detective model, with its triumph of order, and also the post-modern detective disarray, positing "reasonableness" as a solution to the "crisis" of Reason (1986, 44,45)[5].

The way in which we read William's failure plays a crucial role in the way *The Name of the Rose* as a whole is read. Positioning William as either a positivist, a relativist, or an early adherent of *il pensiero debole* affects the way we see the novel dealing with the questions it raises about the possibility of valid interpretation. *The Name of the Rose* places William in an environment of hermeneutic contest, where his

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[5] cf Cannon's study of postmodern Italian fiction (Cannon, 1989) for reference to Eco's conception of the "crisis of Reason" (eg, 13).

understanding of his own method is contrasted to and complicated by the positions of other characters. This should not be seen in the simplistic terms of Sherlock Holmes being opposed to the pedestrian, authoritarian practices of Scotland Yard, where Holmes' success vindicates his model of rationality. Nevertheless, William's success, or lack thereof, does carry profound implications for a reading of his importance to the moral[6] of *The Name of the Rose*, affecting how we see the text directing our sympathies and considerations.

Chapter 2

"William of Baskerville: Semiotic Detective"

2.1

In *The Name of the Rose* we encounter a character troubled by the reliability of what we call our "knowledge" of the world and our place within it. William of Baskerville is concerned with our ability to understand the world successfully, and our ability to proceed from our understandings to act in a responsible manner. These fundamental epistemological and ethical concerns take on, in Adso's narrative, an essentially semiotic perspective, which accords with the medieval view of God as author of a textual creation. If the universe is a great book, as Alanus de Insulus, for instance, asserted, then it's elements must themselves be signs, all pointing to a higher truth, which must be properly deciphered. Alanus had seen in the world a network of mundane signs speaking of a higher, spiritual "object," the truths that God, as their author, had "written" into them. The necessity of the interpretation of the universe was thus traditionally a religious one. William accepts this demand for religious semiotics, but he also wishes to go further, as he says to Adso;

But the universe is even more talkative than Alanus thought, and it speaks

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6 In this sense the text's "moral" can be understood as a didactic purpose within what Eco terms the "intention of the text."

not only of the ultimate things (which it does always in an obscure fashion)
but also of closer things, and then it speaks quite clearly. (24)

Thus William follows the traditional medieval fascination with signs into the realms of natural philosophy, as well as theology, echoing the semiotics of the Classical and Hellenistic schools. Such a semiotics is, however, not as clear cut as William initially intimates, for whilst it is certainly possible to characterise the natural world in terms of signification, it is rare that it deigns to speak clearly.

"For in his book entitled *Concerning the Non-existent* ... he tries to establish successively three main points—firstly, that nothing exists; secondly that even if anything exists it is inapprehensible by man; thirdly, that even if is apprehensible, yet of a surety it is inexpressible and incommunicable to one's neighbour."[7] So, according to Sextus Empiricus (*Against the Logicians*, I, 65), runs Gorgias' rebuttal of knowledge, a rebuttal firmly based on the semiotic principle that the sign and the thing cannot be equated: for, "we communicate with words, but words are only symbols or signs and no symbol can ever be the same as the thing it symbolizes. For this reason, knowledge can never be communicated"[8] (Stumpf, 33).

Gorgias' realisation that we communicate via signs can be seen as the prelude to Western philosophy's interminable fascination with semiotics. From Plato to Peirce and beyond, the relationship between "that which points" and "that which is pointed to" has been subjected to close scrutiny, with a bewildering variety of theories postulated to take into account our apparently simple ability to know something through something else.

Gorgias' initial premise seems sound: signs are not, indeed, what they signify. If they were, then we would have to face the situation envisaged by Robert Artigiani,

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[7] Trans. R.G. Bury, see also DeCrescenzo (163), for a more relaxed translation.

[8] "And even if it should be apprehended it is incommunicable to another person. For if the existent things are objects, externally existing, of vision and of hearing and of the senses in general, and if these visible things are apprehensible by sight and the audible by hearing, and not conversely,—how, in this case, can these things be indicated to another person? For the means by which we indicate is speech [logos], and speech is not the real and existent things; therefore we do not indicate to our neighbours the existent things but speech, which is other than the existing realities. ... since the existent subsists externally, it will not become our speech; and not being speech it will not be made clear to another person" (Sextus Empiricus *Against the Logicians* Book I, 83,84. trans. R.G. Bury).

where knowledge of things would be gained by the bodily introduction of objects into the brain, which could hardly be conducive to the process of understanding (1992, 861). A footprint is not a foot, and likewise a word is not the thing it represents. Indeed, even the terminology that we use indicates a distinction; re-present implies an evocation of something that is not in itself immediately present.

Unfortunately, Gorgias' semiotic skepticism seems rather too profound for comfort. Since, then, we communicate with signs, what we communicate (or "share") is not knowledge, but something else, some other thing. And, considering that if we use the very same signs to represent things in our own thoughts (and mental processes must use signs of some description, for we cannot, as Artigiani demonstrates, think things themselves), then our own process of perception itself does not grasp what is, but again something "other." Such an undermining of the very possibility of grasping the universe is surely too severe, for, whilst its logic seems sound, it fails to accommodate the apparent fact that we *do* perceive, and we frequently do so successfully.

Thus Gorgias, and the skeptical position he represented, was challenged by various competing theories of epistemology, such as those offered by the Peripatetic, Stoic, Epicurean and Neo-Platonic schools[9]. Nevertheless, the questions posed by Gorgias remained, if muted, inherent within any intellectual paradigm that privileged a semiotic model of epistemology, as did the medieval. This should not come as a surprise, for if we are to grasp stable conditions for a knowledge based on representation, then we must tame the gap between the world that we seek to know, and the way in which it is actually presented to our intellectual capacities. Any such enquiry necessarily risks the possibility of conclusions similar to those of Gorgias.

Skepticism was muted in the early Middle Ages, but it was certainly not absent, and the fourteenth-century saw its re-emergence as a position with which to be reckoned. William of Baskerville is a character written into this period of philosophical

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[9] For a discussion on skepticism in the classical period, see especially Leo Groarke's *Greek Skepticism: Anti-Realist Trends in Ancient Thought*, but also D.W. Hamlyn's *The Pelican History of Western Philosophy* and V.V. Luce's *An Introduction to Greek Philosophy*.

flux, not only as a spectator, as Adso seems to be, but as one who engages with the changes taking place, especially with those concerning epistemology. In the background to *The Name of the Rose*, the hazy dominance of Plotinus had given way to the influence of Aristotle, in whose light even Augustine was being reinterpreted. But even as the principles of "the Philosopher" were being gradually synthesised into a system a millennia old, a synthesis epitomised by Aquinas, a new conflict was taking shape. The *via moderna*, engendered by the new spirit of enquiry in turn engendered radical new offshoots, as figures such as Duns Scotus, Roger Bacon and William of Ockham emerged, using Aristotle to achieve new ends. By the late 1420's, as William and Adso approached the Benedictine Abbey, Ockham's razor was already beginning to sever the Thomistic synthesis.

The ensuing rupture was not merely academic, a storm in the elite ivory towers of learning. The Europe of the Middle Ages was bound in a network of theology and politics that was impossible to untangle. Thus any innovation in one sphere had ramifications in the other, giving to debates over epistemological and theological matters a significance perhaps unequalled in history. The effect of Ockham's theology was thus profound, as it called into question the very grounds of medieval thought (grounds which were to be openly rejected by those who followed him). At stake were the possibility of religious certainty, in itself no small issue, and also the relationship between the Church and the gradually coalescing states of Europe.

In William himself we have a character who represents to us much of the learning of medieval Europe; theology, political philosophy, natural science, astronomy, and, of course, underpinning all else, sign theory. Adso's narrative time and again relates William's musings on signs, his theories of how the world signifies things to us, of how the mind constructs ideas (which are signs of signs), of how books (which are signs of signs of signs) speak often of other books. His beliefs as to how we understand things about the world from signs form the foundation for his reputation as a man both of learning and of ethics, for they form an integral part of the way he chooses to see the world around him, and thus underpin the choices he makes in that world.

2.2

From Bacon, William has inherited a belief that repeated observation of causal relationships provides certainty in the determining of effects from causes and *vice verse*, a belief that serves as the ground for his practical semiotics. William's reputation is built, it would seem, on a Holmes-like ability to discern the truth about a state of affairs from apparently trivial evidence. The reader of *The Name of the Rose* is introduced to this reputation through a most startling and audacious act of ratiocination that bears a strong affinity to the exploits of Holmes. As Adso and William climb the road to the abbey towering above them, Adso loses himself in a semiotic reverie, contemplating the profound spiritual significations to which the abbey's external architecture testify. William is also engaged in semiotic reflection, as is revealed when the pair are confronted by a group of abbey servants, rushing down the same road. Modestly displaying his acumen, William calmly informs the leader of the party, the cellarer Remigio, that the horse he is seeking, Brunellus, is to be found not far away, on a dead-end track overlooking a cliff.

This marvellous effort of observation and deduction would do Holmes proud, not least in the abruptness of William's revelation, inspiring stunned awe in his audience. Nevertheless, it is not Holmes, in this instance, whom Eco has invoked as a model, but a character from one of Voltaire's philosophical tales, Zadig. The choice carries some significance. The "Brunellus episode" serves to introduce William as both modern and scientific, attitudes we might commonly attribute to a detective in the Holmes tradition and oppose to Adso's blatant medieval fascination with number, divinity and mystery. In the echo of Voltaire, however, William's triumph also introduces an element of philosophical ambiguity into William's character. Not only does Voltaire provide more ambiguous tales than Conan Doyle in general, alerting the suspicious, but Zadig in particular refuses the semiotically sophisticated detective the satisfaction of success.

William's "detection" of Brunellus is essentially a practical exposition of sign theory, one closely followed by a theoretical exposition, included both for the edification of Adso and of the reader. In this regard it is firmly grounded in fourteenth-century

semiotic theory which, drawing on such influences as the Stoics and Augustine, reached a considerable degree of sophistication—if primarily as a theological tool. However, William also goes beyond these roots, anticipating more recent developments, as his explanation to Adso demonstrates.

Through the very corporeality of the world William is able to learn of things that he has not himself experienced ("We haven't seen him at all, have we, Adso?" [23]) because, as Alanus said, for those who care to read, nature is a book of signs. William reads these signs carefully: from hoof prints he reads the horse, from the distance between them, the horse's gait, from their direction, the horse's destination. From an indention in the snow on the ground—or, more precisely, from a series of such indentations—William feels himself able to propose another thing; the cause of the indentations, the horse. In so doing, he is tracing a chain of cause and effect, in true Baconian style. He wishes to make the effect, which is evident to him, speak of its cause, which is not, in order that he may know something more about his environment. It is in this process that the sign's place in epistemology becomes apparent.

How, though, to trace the chain? How to start with one thing and end with another? In that it involves moving from something which is apprehended, and therefore present, to something which must be inferred in its absence, working from signs to things can be seen as akin to, if not the same as, solving a mystery. In the context of another mystery, that of the murders in the abbey, William explains to Adso what such a procedure involves:

> Solving a mystery is not the same as deducing from first principles ... It means, rather, facing one or two or three particular data apparently with nothing in common, and trying to imagine whether they could represent so many instances of a general law you don't yet know. (304)

Thus William elaborates the process that, six centuries later, Charles Sanders Peirce was to call "abduction."

In his essay "Horns, Hooves, Insteps: Some Hypotheses on Three Types of Abduction" (Eco & Sebeok, 1983), Eco explains for us very neatly William's method of reaching a solution to his problems. At least, he analyses the problem solving techniques

employed by Zadig, Voltaire's singularly successful but ill fated prototype detective. William and Zadig, are, however, incontrovertibly linked by their predilections for discovering passing horses they have not actually sighted, and the methodologies they employ in so doing are surprisingly similar, as Eco elucidates in "Horns, Hooves, Insteps."

Eco points the reader of his essay to the third chapter of Voltaire's *Zadig*, where, having found married life unbearable, his hero has secluded himself in order to study nature, "this great book that God has placed before our eyes" (quoted in Eco & Sebeok, 208). From his vastly enhanced sensibility to the subtle variations in nature, Voltaire tells us, Zadig is able to detect the passing of both a lame spaniel recently delivered of pups, and of a fine stallion, harnessed in gold and silver. Unfortunately for him, his revelation of his ability to infer this information from the signs before him results in significant (if comical) hardship, and an attitude of resigned despair. "A man who walks in a wood where the queen's bitch or the king's horse has passed is to be pitied!" he complains. "How difficult it is to be happy in this life!" (quoted in Eco & Sebeok, 210).

Following and expanding on Peirce, Eco proposes four types of "abduction" employed by Zadig. Abduction, according to Eco, is a process for the resolution of disparate or surprising data by means of proposing a law or rule which would account for all of the data. Such a proposition is necessarily tentative, and must be altered or discarded if new data emerge that fail to conform to its pattern. This type of problem solving, involving the proposition of a possible rule (or many, which may all fit the known facts) which is then tested for its explanatory validity against emerging data, is the key to William's method, as William explains to Adso: "in the face of some inexplicable facts you must try to imagine many general laws, whose connection with your facts escapes you ... You try applying it to all similar cases, to use it for making predictions, and you discover that your intuition was right" (305).

Eco divides this process of moving from the "surprising" to the known into four types in order to account for what he sees as the different ways that rules can be applied to events. In the first and second types, following his work elsewhere, he distinguishes

between sign-functions that are "overcoded" and those that are "undercoded" (see Eco 1976,1979). According to his thesis, we possess socially determined mechanisms for accounting for certain phenomena, mechanisms which we tend to term "codes." Some of these codes seem relatively binding and obvious, whilst others are not apparent but are, nevertheless, socially binding.

When we encounter something we recognise as an element of a binding code, it is simple to assume that that code is in fact in operation and to use it to account for the thing encountered. This is termed by Eco overcoding. When something is recognised as pertaining to possibly one or two, or even more, socially determined codes, and we are forced to make a choice as to the most likely, Eco describes it as an instance of undercoding. Overcoded and undercoded abductions are then to Eco both situations where the surprising facts encountered can be recognised as pertaining to a socially determined structure, or code, and this code can thus be posited as the rule that may account for them. This form of abduction is thus similar to what Peirce had termed "hypothesis," "which is the isolation of an already coded rule, to which a case is correlated by inference" (Eco & Sebeok, 206).

The first two of Eco's types of abduction, over and under-coding differ from the other two in that the latter do not allow for the presence of an already coded rule, but demand that a rule be posited, or created. Having invented such a rule and applied it to the data in question, termed by Eco "creative abduction," we can then proceed with the process of "meta-abduction," which "consists in deciding as to whether the possible universe outlined by our first-level abductions is the same as the universe of our experience" (Eco & Sebeok, 207). In efforts of overcoded and undercoded abduction, where the recognition of an extant code presumes a correlation (of some sort) between the proposed solution and the reality it solves, it is not necessary to perform a validating exercise in order to demonstrate that correlation. However, when we invent our own rule, we must decide whether or not it is likely to fit the facts "out there," or whether it may be plausible, but unlikely. Thus some validatory effort is required by creative abduction, where it is optional with "coded" abductions.

All these variations on a theme provide a very thorough and enlightening analysis of Zadig's adventure with the king's horse. Encountering a series of potential semiotic phenomena (Eco makes fine distinctions between "imprints," "symptoms" and "clues"), Zadig is able to recognise obvious codes, such as hoof prints, which are experientially coded as being produced by horses, *etcetera*. A series of overcoded abductions thus leads him to a series of (still) disconnected propositions, each pertaining to one of his observations. From there our hero may move on to posit a possible rule that would unify and account for all of his overcoded propositions, and in order to do this he posits the most economic explanation for the disparate data. As Eco points out, it is conceivable that a knight with gold and silver panoply was thrown by his horse, creating the phenomena observed by Zadig, but it is more economical to propose only one cause, a single horse with a fancy harness.

This again is a principle that William explains to Adso, saying that "one should not multiply explanations and causes unless it is strictly necessary" (91). William does not attribute the notion to Peirce, of course, but to William of Ockham. In Ockham's philosophy this principle of economy, drawn from earlier scholastics, found form as the non-multiplication of causes and became known as "Ockham's Razor." Of course, should Zadig encounter further surprising facts, for instance a silver spear butt, then a single cause may be insufficient, and he would then wish to revise his proposition to include Eco's theory of the knight. He would still be constrained by Ockham's razor, however, to introduce as few elements as possible, in order to maintain the economy of his explanation.

Eco goes on to explain why Zadig, in denying (truly) that he has ever seen the king's horse, stops short of true meta-abduction, refusing to commit himself too fully to the possible world he has created from his inferential efforts. Having produced an abductive rule that would seem to have explained all the surprising facts, and having been partially verified by the encountering of further facts (the searching officials), he shies away from any apprehension of the particular in refusing to acknowledge the actuality of the horse whose existence he has predicated. Zadig remains in the world of the possible,

or, at least of the general. He remains willing to attach a degree of certainty to those overcoded abductions that provide him with general propositions (*a* horse of such and such a step and stature, *a* gold implement, etcetera), without seeking to move on towards the apprehension of the individual thing.

It is not difficult to see Adso's accounts of William's detective work in the terms of Eco's theory of abduction. The Brunellus affair closely follows Zadig's adventure, adding only the meta-abduction that Eco finds lacking in Zadig's method, and an element of undercoded textual abduction in William's guessing of the features and name of Brunellus. Moreover, many other instances in Adso's narrative see William performing similar feats, again following the same technique. The secret writing of Venantius' manuscript can be deciphered if we first guess what it means—posit a rule—and then refine our guesses as we realise more elements of it. Likewise, the Labyrinth itself can be negotiated by facing the disparate evidence available (the number of walls, the number of windows, the shape of the internal well, etcetera) and positing a relationship between them, a rule.

But of all of William's demonstrations of his great acumen, his ability to know what he cannot see, his search for the murderer plays the central role within the narrative. All his other efforts are either peripheral to, or derive from, his charge to find out, before the arrival of the Avignese legation, who is murdering the monks within the Abbey. In this grand enterprise William proceeds with the same method. "But why would he have killed himself?" Adso asks regarding Adelmo, to which William replies "But why would anyone have killed him? In either case reasons have to be found. And it seems to me beyond doubt that they existed" (91,92).

Each corpse, the phenomena surrounding each corpse, the scattered pages of a manuscript, the presence and then absence of a book, the reticence of some monks, and the anger of others: all these are, in Peirce's terms, surprising facts, for which reasons must be found. As William works through each group of surprising facts—those surrounding the secret writing, or the placing of Venantius in the jar of blood—he posits a rule, a reason, and then tests the rule as he can. In each case his abductions lead him to

a further state of affairs, which in themselves constitute new surprising facts for which he must posit a further rule.

Meta-abduction is the point where we take what we have hypothesised, the "universe" we have constructed in our mind (the one of many that we consider to be the most *likely*), and compare it with the "universe of our experience" (Eco & Sebeok, 207). If abduction is the process of tracing signification, then meta-abduction is the moment of grounding, where grounding is seen as the recognition of the congruence of intrinsic and extrinsic universes. What we have constructed within the world of our interpretations must conform to the actual world of our experience, and if it does so, we have successfully grounded our interpretative effort according to the Peircean model.

This is where the detective, having clarified his/her suspicions, calls the suspects into the drawing room and tells them how the crime was done—and by whom. At this point, the accused, if they have any decency at all, will make the appropriate gestures, indicating, if only by implication, a confession. The experience that constitutes hearing the confession is the gratifying part for the detective, because it is the confession that confirms their method, that validates the processes they performed. In the confession, the world of their conjecture is seen to conform to the world of their experience (the "outside" world)—or vice versa, depending on the arrogance of the detective. The accused, however, does not always have the decency to confess. Sometimes he/she simply will not, sometimes he/she/it cannot. What then? How then do we ground our abductions? Indeed, can we even be content to ground our abductions in the experience of the confession? What if the confessee *lied*? How can we be sure of the validity of our own experience? What if, rather than constituting an end to the process of tracing the chain of signification, the confession, the experience, constitutes only another step in that chain, demanding further interpretation?

These questions do not seem to have bothered Zadig. Eco asserts that Zadig began his conversation with the royal servants by bluffing, by presenting the universe of his hypotheses as if it *were* the universe of the servant's experience, and hoping to be found right. I am not so sure. It would seem to me that Zadig was quite convinced in

his own mind that he had made the correct assumptions about the signs in front of him. "I saw an animal's tracks on the sand and I judged without difficulty that they were the tracks of a small dog," he tells the judges, going on to say that the various signs "informed me" of one thing and "gave me the idea" of another (quoted in Eco & Sebeok, 209). Zadig was, in his mind, at least, not guessing, he was simply recognising necessary connections between the things he encountered and their causes.

The necessity of connections, however, is precisely the issue that bothers William. It is all very well to be sure in your own mind of the connections between α and β, but in order to act in the world, we must be sure that our ideas correspond to the state of affairs within that world. Zadig was sure of his connections but, as a man of contemplation, he had no desire to act in the world of the prints, or of the servants. He had no desire to find either the Queen's bitch or the King's horse, he was content merely to recognise. When, however, prevailed upon, he failed to recognise the complexities of acting, and fulfilling only what he considered necessary—the recognition of the signs— he got into trouble for failing to fulfil what the servants considered necessary—finding the animals.

William, on the other hand, demands not only recognition, but reaction, and reaction demands that the recognition be correct. William acted in the world by proffering to the monks he encountered below the Abbey a reason for their presence, a description of the horse and a direction in which to pursue it. This act offered two outcomes; success and failure. William desired success for a multitude of reasons— personal vanity, intellectual pride, political advantage—and likewise desired to avoid failure. In order to achieve his desires, however, he had to commit himself to an act, and in order to commit himself to an act, he had to be confident that the rule which he had proposed, the possible universe he had constructed, conformed to the world in which he was about to act. If it did, then he could proceed according to the dictates of his proposed world and achieve success. If it did not, then he would fail.

It is thus imperative that William reads the signs correctly and, perhaps more importantly, *knows* that he is reading them correctly. To be sure of your reading is not

simply an academic matter, as Zadig appears to have felt, for as Zadig discovered, your reading of events/situations places you in the world of actions, a world in which interpretations accrue consequences. William fears the possibility that his method of interpretation may be flawed, and that consequently his ability to be confident in his actions is undermined. What appears to be at stake for William is the possibility of representing the world truly.

2.3

Adso, who holds that the truth "is nothing but the adjustment between the thing and the intellect," fears that William, in his passion for "imagining how many possibilities were possible," (306) has abandoned the quest for truth for an academic game. Rather than declare how things are, William spends his time imagining how things may be, freely admitting, moreover, that by this method he is constantly in error. His defence when a rebellious Adso challenges him on the point of truth is simply that by conceiving many errors, he becomes a slave to none. In this way he declares himself unlike the doctors of the school of theology at Paris, who, imagining themselves to possess the truth, "are very sure of their errors" (306).

William, of course, is not uninterested in the truth, and Adso's malady of discontent seems to have been a passing one. In his introduction to his tale, written many years after the events he narrates, he attributes to William "the desire to learn and a sense of the straight way, which remains even when the path is tortuous"(15). Furthermore, Adso has presented in his manuscript a picture of a character deeply troubled by his inability to guarantee for himself a method of appropriating the truth. William yearns, as does Adso himself, for the certainty of true knowledge. Following his Baconian tendencies, he conceives of knowledge as the adequacy of the conjectured universe to the "real" universe in which we live, of the semiotic to the phenomenal. It is his unease with the possibility of this adequacy that fuels the philosophical import of Adso's narrative.

If the truth, for Adso, is the adjustment between the intellect and the thing, it is not

so different, then, for William in his empiricist moods. Nor is it so different for William's other influence, William of Ockham. In terms of Ockham's philosophy, we can declare a statement true when both the subject and the predicate refer to the same thing. "For instance, the proposition 'Socrates is white' is true if there really is one individual signified by the term 'Socrates' and also by the term 'white'"(Boehner xxxvi). Both "Socrates" and "white" can, of course, be used without any reference to an object (an individual Socrates), but despite its possible logical correctness (it involves no semantic contradictions) it cannot be known to be true (or false) unless it applies to an individual object.

This notion of the individual object (termed simply "individuals" or "particulars") is one of the keys to Ockham's philosophy, and Adso notes William's adherence to it time and again. It is, of course, to Ockham's theory of individuals that William refers when he explains his abductions in finding Brunellus. Adso, curious about his master's near magical ability to know things from signs, points out to William that, in the accepted wisdom, signs speak "to us only of essences," and not of things in themselves (27). The scholastics had faced the same problem as every other period; how to account for the fact that we appear to have both individual things and unified groups of things in the universe of our experience. Looking back through the Arab and Roman philosophers to Plato and Aristotle, they generally accepted the solution that reality consisted of essences, of "forms," of "universals," and that these forms manifested themselves in matter as individual things. Individuals, then, only served the cause of knowledge in pointing to the realities from which they drew their existence.

Opinions on the matter were not rigid across the scholastic period. Both Aquinas and Duns Scotus, for instance, held to a notion known as moderate realism, whereby universals had a real existence as mental recognitions of true relationships. Nevertheless, Ockham's assertion that only the particular was real, that is, only individual things themselves were possessed of true ontological status, cut across the vein of received thought. It is an assertion that William echoes as he tells Adso that "full knowledge" is the learning of the singular, and that the universal idea is useful only that we may come

to know the individual (28). Thus, to William, universals are the tool of the mind in ignorance, as it strives to come into knowledge, which is the direct apprehension of the singular.

If knowledge is the apprehension of the particular, then propositions such as "All men are animals" cannot strictly be said to be true, by virtue of the fact that they refer not to individuals, but to mental concepts. "Men" and "animal" can only be understood as shorthand for "each individual man" and "a series of individual attributes applying to particular things," and to declare the proposition true, we must apprehend each individual man in order to test the proposition. This kind of radical empiricism has enormous consequences for epistemology, including, as William painfully recognises, Bacon's empiricist epistemology. If we cannot declare propositions including species to be true, then the basis of all inductive reasoning, and, hence, all ability to determine cause and effect, vanishes, and we are left with no certain knowledge about anything we experience. We can no longer say if it happened once with one member of a species it will happen again with another.

William himself explains this problem to Adso, saying "if the sense of the individual is the only good, how will science succeed in recomposing the universal laws through which, and interpreting which, the good magic will become functional ... Because if only the sense of the individual is just, the proposition that identical causes have identical effects is difficult to prove..." (206). This has an impact not only on the wonderful science spoken of by Bacon but also on William's ability to decipher signs. The assumption that underlies the interpretation of signs is precisely that identical causes have identical effects. If they do not, then not only could the print in the snow have been left by anything at all, but the concept it produced in the minds of William and Adso (even at the level of simply recognising its physical shape) need not be the same.

William further develops this skeptical idea by referring to Ockham's belief in the "inherent contingency of all creation and hence the limitations upon natural certainty, in the light of the supernatural certainty of God's omnipotence" (Leff 1975, xxii). Ockham believed that God, as the primary cause of all things, could act in the world without the

agency of secondary causes—that is to say, He can perform miracles (see Boehner xix, xx, and also xxv for primary causality in cognition). Adso recalls William expressing a simplified account of this position: "the very concept that universal laws and an established order exist would imply that God is their prisoner, whereas God is something absolutely free, so that if He wanted, with a single act of His will He could make the world different" (207).

There can be, then, no certainty beyond the immediate, primary, perception. Beyond the individual thing we can know nothing because the rules that we construct to account for phenomena are simply not valid. William is trapped, between the desire to account for the operations of the world ("who was in the scriptorium last night, who took the eyeglasses, who left traces of a body dragging another body in the snow..." 207) and his belief that it is impossible to do so. If we attribute to William the method that Eco attributes to Zadig, we must accept that William feels that his abductions are necessarily groundless, unable to be declared true or false and unable to give direction to action. "Then there is an order in the world!" cries Adso triumphantly, remembering Brunellus. But William refutes him: "then there is a bit of order in this poor head of mine" (208).

At the end of Adso's narrative, William disconsolately laments his inability to know the truth, his semiotic doubt seemingly affirmed by his failure to discover the murderer and rescue Aristotle's *Comedia*. Adso attempts to cheer him; "there is one truth, however, that you discovered tonight, the one you reached by interpreting the clues you read over the past few days"(491). Even in the midst of the burning Abbey, vivid proof of William's failure to conclude events successfully, Adso can still believe that William's ability to read signs was shown to be true because he found Jorge. But William is both more acute and more confused (perhaps he is acute because he knows he is confused). "There was no plot," he says, "and I discovered it by mistake"(491). It was not the validity of his hypothesis that led William to Jorge, but a series of errors, a series of hypotheses that did not mirror the world because, according to William, it is impossible that they could do so.

"Where is all my wisdom, then?" William exclaims to Adso, "I behaved stubbornly, pursuing a semblance of order, when I should have known well that there is no order in the universe" (492). We can only know the individual things that present themselves to us ("I have never doubted the truth of signs, Adso ..." 492), we cannot know their relations, because they are neither fixed nor real. But William, in despairing of his learning, despairs of more than he would like, even in the depression of failure. Adso asks him if God is "totally polluted with the possible," is that not "tantamount to demonstrating that God does not exist"(493)? But to deny God's existence would remove the grounds for William's last bastion of belief, the truth of the sign, and so he hesitates, answering; "How could a learned man go on communicating his learning if he answered yes to your question?" (493).

Thus William's nominalist tendencies overcome his empiricist methodology, undermining the possibility of semiotic certainty. There is, for William, no possibility of a hermeneutic authority, for the method of tracing the sign to the thing is ultimately flawed, rendered inoperable by the mind's attachment to the immediate. William, as Eco suggests in *Reflections on "The Name of the Rose"* (57,58), has broached the concept that the universe is a rhizome, an organically intertwined maze with no beginning, centre, or end, contrary to the labyrinth of the library, which, as Abo (*The Name of the Rose*, 38) and Alinardo (158) assert, was the medieval model of the world. The rhizome is, rather, a post-modern model of the world, and, since Nietzsche, we have been growing used to the idea of a centreless universe. William, however, is not yet totally convinced of the value of the post-modern and his recognition of the absence of authority causes him some distress.

It is interesting to note, however, that William need not have reached the point of semiotic doubt that he does at the end of Adso's narrative. William bases his refusal to accept universal laws as possessing any validity on Ockham's nominalism, but in so doing, he goes well beyond the position of Ockham himself. Certainly Ockham placed severe limits on the ability to know a thing *via* another. He asserted, for instance, that "an image or sign is only representative of what is already known habitually" (Leff 1975,

127), that is to say, we cannot achieve "primary cognition," or immediate knowledge, of a thing through a sign.

Nevertheless, Ockham made fine distinctions between knowledge that is "evident," and knowledge that is "certain." As Boehner explains it (xliii), evident knowledge is that which is drawn from a demonstration where the premises themselves are evident; that is, where the premises are cognised directly, either intuitively or abstractly. Evident knowledge, as William recognises, is based firmly on the apprehension of individual things, and ties the intramental world of semiosis, of conjecture, to the "real" world of things and events. It is not however gained *by apprehension alone*, but by reasoning *from* apprehensions, a point William does not appear to recognise.

Certain knowledge, returning to Boehner, is obtained from premises which are not evident to us at all but which are accepted as "reasonable." Boehner uses the example Ockham gives of our parents; "we can be certain who our parents were, but the fact itself cannot evident to us" (xliii). We have no reason to doubt the claims of our parents as to our heritage, indeed, we cannot reasonably doubt the fact of our birth, even if we could doubt the exact circumstances. Not being in a position to apprehend the individual event of our birth, we cannot have evident knowledge of it, and so, according to William, we cannot know that we were born. It is just one possibility in a universe of possibles. Ockham, however, was unwilling to reject such modes of knowledge, and declared it "certain:" if not having the absolute quality of evident knowledge, at least such knowledge is still epistemologically viable.

Thus Ockham also allows for another area of knowledge that William doubts; empiricist causality. Gordon Leff states of Ockham's position on causality that

> Nothing, therefore, could be more misconceived than the older widespread belief that Ockham denied causality or relation in general. What he did was to conceive them empirically, as opposed to logically, as deriving from observation and abstraction. (Leff 1975, xxiii)

In *The Name of the Rose* William asks, invoking Ockham to counter Bacon,

> How can I discover the universal bond that orders all things if I cannot lift a finger without creating an infinity of new entities? For with such movements all the relations of position between my finger and all other objects change. The relations are the ways in which my mind perceives the connections

between single entities, but what is the guarantee that this is universal and stable? (206,207)

This skeptical tone, however, seems more appropriate to modern stereotypes of nominalism than to Ockham's position, and sounds more reminiscent of Nicholas of Autrecourt or Robert Holcot[10] than the venerable inceptor himself.

Without the ability to abstract from our individual experiences, to accept that entities behave in fixed and observable patterns, enabling the mental construction of such universals as species and genera, "the way to knowledge would be closed." Leff goes on to argue that "it is not too much to say that causality and similarity are the pivots upon which for Ockham all order and intelligibility turn" (Leff 1975, xxiii). And it is precisely these issues that William both utilises and doubts, that he uses and abuses. William thus approaches the philosophy of another later philosopher, Hume, who likewise held that the immediacy of perception argued against the possibility of laws, and hence of the validity of epistemological (semiotic, or hermeneutic) method.

Chapter 3

"'Medieval' Counterpoint: Absolute Interpretation"

3.1

William seems unique within *The Name of the Rose*, a modern figure in a medieval landscape, obsessed by post-modern doubt. His semiotic rationalism contrasts markedly with the semiotic mysticism displayed by Adso, his suitably awed assistant, whilst his political liberalism is thrown into stark relief by the passion of those around him for burning the heretical. Such an impression is, of course misleading, and Eco himself might suggest that it simply reinforces his own impression that the modern era is more medieval than we might think. For if William can be read as a modern figure, he is also indelibly medieval, his philosophy and politics drawn almost *verbatim* from fourteenth-

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[10] see Ozment (62) and Leff (1958: 291-293).

century sources. As Eco recounts in *Reflections on "the Name of the Rose"*; "every now and then a critic or a reader writes to say that some character of mine declares things that are too modern, and in every one of these instances ... I was actually quoting fourteenth-century texts" (76). William is firmly anchored in the historical period of *The Name of the Rose*, and his semiotics places him firmly within one of the most profound debates of the century, that between the claims to authority of "faith" and of "reason."

It is common to see the fundamental problem of the fourteenth century as the conflict between "realism," the position that regarded Platonic forms as having ontological validity, and "nominalism," which, following from Duns Scotus and Ockham, claimed being only for the individual thing in itself. William alludes to these doctrines on occasion, bewildering the Thomist Adso with his support for Ockham's position. However, as Gordon Leff argues in his *Medieval Thought: St. Augustine to Ockham*, to characterise the whole fourteenth century in these terms would be misleading.

Whilst the debate between the moderate realism of the Thomistic position and the "Augustinian" position, to which both Scotus and Ockham subscribed, was certainly vibrant, with far reaching implications, it was largely an extension of the classical question "of how much reason could know of faith" (Leff 1958, 260).[11] Christianity, unlike the dominant philosophical traditions of the Hellenistic world upon which it burst, held itself to be a divinely inspired faith, the holder and communicator of a testament entirely dependant on God. The Christian faith was the only true understanding of the nature of things (not only metaphysical, but also physical, for any physical speculation, such as the age of the earth, needed to conform to the metaphysics expounded by the faith), and it was an understanding that was not available to humankind.[12] As such, the speculations of the human intellect as to the true nature of the universe were, at best, mere echoes of the Christian revelation, and at worst counterproductive instances of humanity's *hubris*.

Furthermore, Christianity held its revelation to be sufficient; there was not only no

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[11] see also McGrath: 21 ff.
[12] cf Pelikan: 215.

need for a further development of the truths revealed in the incarnation and the Scriptures, but any such development would compromise the validity of the faith. Christ had claimed to be the medium of the final reconciliation between God and man, outside of which nothing more, spiritual or historical, was necessary. This concept was extended into the realm of doctrine by the preaching of the one true gospel; anything other than that which was revealed to the Apostles about the nature of Christ's mediation was not only unnecessary, but also transgressed the purity of the truth. Thus not only was the intellect excluded by the transcendent nature of a gospel which spoke of things humanity could not of itself know, but it also denied the intellect any ability to develop or modify it.

This distinction between orthodox Christianity and the philosophical traditions with which it came into conflict throughout the Mediterranean was not without its difficulties. Many early church fathers felt the need to reassert that faith was above and beyond the realm of the intellect, in the face of what they saw to be the dilution of the faith by philosophy, which could have no say in Christian metaphysics. "What has Paul to do with Aristotle, or Peter with Plato?" asked Jerome, echoing Tertullian, who had demanded; "What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem?" (quoted in Morrison, 10). Nor would the problem go away. Augustine was forced to grapple with it in his distinguished career as a divine, and decided, as had others, that reason, redeemed by the incarnation, had a valid role to play in the Christian's assessment of the gospel. He was, for his troubles, vigorously attacked by Vincent of Lerin, whose response became the catch cry of medieval hermeneutics. Authentic doctrine, he asserted, must be that which has been believed "everywhere, always, and by everyone" (quoted in Morrison, 4), a formula which left no room for the novelties of the intellect.

Essentially, the nature of the Christian faith demanded that the initial revelation, as a body of doctrine and belief, had to be preserved in its originality. The gospel needed to be handed down from one generation to the next in the same form as it had been received —deviation equalled loss and imperilled the Christian community which could as a result fall into heresy and apostasy, and lose its salvation (as it was considered the Jews had

lost theirs by allowing the corruption of the truth of the Mosaic revelation). Such a project of transmission was necessarily imperilled by critical reflection, as various heresies of the early church demonstrated. Not only were many of the intellectual positions of the age contrary to the spirit of the faith, and therefore potential contaminants, but there was also no guarantee that any rethinking of the gospel would be true. Quite simply, rational disputation lacked the hermeneutic authority necessary to take its place in revealed religion.

But the early church was not only concerned with the transmission of a body of doctrine from one generation to the next, or even from one community to another. It was also taxed by the question of how the gospel was to be *understood.* God may have made known to man the truth of salvation but, being constituted in a text—or in the early church, in a series of texts and verbal traditions—the truth came to require another truth, that of correct interpretation. Unless the gospel could be articulated in terms relevant to the audience hearing it, then it remained a text of its generation, fixed within early first century Judaism, and could have no impact on a wider geographical and historical context. It was a problem experienced even by the evangelists of the Scriptures themselves, notably Paul and Peter of Acts, and was not to be easily resolved.

The Scriptures suffered the problem that they were by and large occasional texts, written in response to a certain situation or event, rather than being doctrinal statements by design. As a consequence they were, to an audience removed from the first century, frequently incomprehensible, containing both apparent contradictions and passages that were simply impossible to understand. The necessity of interpretation thus implied the necessity of the intellectual manipulation of the gospel, causing the single most destructive dilemma of the Christian faith. If rational thought cannot guarantee its validity, how is it possible to guarantee an interpretation of Scripture? As Vincent's opposition showed, Augustine's solution of importing a neutered rhetoric into theology in the form of the *quadriga* was, despite its nearly universal adoption as the best solution, far from ideal.

The problem of interpretation was exacerbated by the apparent openness of the

Scriptures to clearly heretical interpretations. Perhaps the most obvious was the tendency of many early Christians to account for the divergent pictures of God in the "old" and "new" testaments by simply disclaiming the "old."[13] Such a view clearly contradicted the orthodox position, which saw Christianity as springing from the fulfilment of Judaism, rather than its destruction. The need was for an ability to confront these "novel" doctrines, and to demonstrate their absence from the original gospel. The apparent solution was the line Vincent had adopted against Augustine's "sophism," an appeal to a living tradition, rather than to a strict hermeneutic principle. Thus the faith, like history, came to be identified with the winners and, in a form of theological Darwinism, whatever survived was obviously true. If we all believe it, and have always (as far as we know) believed it, then God must will it so. As Bonaventure was to observe in the thirteenth century, "the universal church is not deceived, nor does she err," for it would be "most horrible and incredible" were God to allow his people to stray (quoted in Tierney, 87).

In this fashion retrospection came to predominate over ratiocination, and the nature of hermeneutics within the medieval church adopted reconstitution rather than investigation as its ostensible end. Not that the intellect vanished completely: on the contrary, it could well be argued that the medieval tradition of "super-literal" interpretation according to the *quadriga* (which was later expanded to include no less than seven interpretive strategies) was in itself a continuation of the practice of rhetoric, a way of making "interpretation" in actual fact "re-interpretation." Furthermore, classical dialectic still managed to find champions throughout the early middle ages, from Augustine through John Scotus Erigena to Anselm and Abelard. Thus the question remained unresolved by the thirteenth century when, under the influence of the Islamic interpretations of Aristotle, the role of the intellect, in the form of the Scholastic "movement," reached new heights.

But if these new heights, characterised by syntheses of Aristotelian dialectic with

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[13] cf Ozment: 63,64.

orthodox (neoplatonic) dogma (such as that of Aquinas), generated reactions from those who disputed their philosophical validity (such as Duns Scotus), they had still to fight on the traditional front. The distaste for uninspired reason was still strong, especially in the monasteries, as Eco's narrator points out, where the growth of the urban centres of learning had been, to a point, resisted (" Adso thinks and writes like a monk who has remained impervious to the revolution of the vernacular ... educated on patristic-scholastic texts; and his story could have been written, as far as the language and the learned quotations go, in the twelfth or thirteenth century" [4]). Jorge, a violent opponent of William's Ockhamite intellectualism, is able to accuse even Aquinas, to whom Ockham was opposed, of being "seduced by the Philosopher" and of "following the proud paths of natural reason" (473).

William finds himself involved in two debates within the narrative of *The Name of the Rose*: on the one hand he debates within himself the relative merits of causality and nominalism, but on the other he is still forced to defend the very validity of reason against the traditional position of "faith." The latter position finds its expression in *The Name of the Rose* through various characters and disputes, offering to a doubting William an alternative authority to the semiotic method that seems unable to bear the weight of his scrutiny. The characters who bear it, however, offer little as advertisements for their position. Intolerant, hypocritical, and obsessive, they appear as the very opposites of the characteristics we find so positive in William's method.

3.2

An apt illustration of the tension between reason and faith is provided by Ubertino de Cassale, the great Franciscan mystic with whom William converses in *The Name of the Rose*, when he implores William to "mortify your intelligence, learn to weep over the wounds of the Lord, throw away your books" (63). Ubertino despairs of William's Oxford intellectualism, which he feels has undermined the simplicity of William's faith. As a mystic, Ubertino is profoundly impressed by the claims of revelation to transcends the limitations of our earthly existence. To William, however, "accustomed to Oxford,"

even "mystical experience was of another sort" (58), mentioning the rather bizarre account of the visions of Angela of Foligno:

> first she kissed his breast and saw him lying with his eyes closed, then she kissed his mouth, and there rose from those lips an ineffable sweetness, and after a brief pause she lay her cheek of Christ and Christ put his hand to her cheek and pressed her to him and—as she said—her happiness became sublime. (58)

William seems to imply that there may be something more temporal than spiritual to such a vision. Ubertino, on the contrary, holds to a distinction between the "moment of ecstatic love, which burns the viscera with the perfume of incense, and the disorder of the senses, which reeks of sulphur" (57), a spiritual distinction that must be sought through contemplation, prayer and meditation.

Ubertino's mysticism leads him to privilege the spiritual as a guide to truth: the mind leads men astray into pride in their own vitality. When Adso admits to the "yearnings of the mind, which wants to know too many things" Ubertino admonishes him: "that is bad. The Lord knows all things, and we must only adore His knowledge" (221). Truth is passive in that it is not something we can acquire, but must have bestowed upon us by God through the mortification of our own pride. This is not, of course, a position with which William can sympathise, holding as he does to a belief in the positive value of man's reasoning powers, and he suspects Ubertino's passive spiritualism conceals a more active temporal desire.

Ubertino of Cassale is not, of course, the only character within *The Name of the Rose* to raise the issue of Truth, and the role of the intellect in the acquisition of Truth. Both Jorge of Burgos, the blind *de facto* librarian to whom William is opposed throughout the course of Adso's narrative, and the Abbot Abo debate with William the proper way to understand the Truth. One of the occasions for such dialogue is the geometry and symbolism of the abbey's library, designed in the form of a maze, and declared off limits to William, in keeping with its position of privilege within the community of the abbey.

The Library in *The Name of the Rose* is a labyrinth designed to deceive, as William and Adso discover when they attempt to penetrate its secrets. From room to room are

many connections, but, unlike the library of Borges' short story "The Library of Babel," which it evokes, it is not possible to move from one room to any (and every) other. Some paths are blocked, becoming dead ends. Others turn back on themselves, leading nowhere. As Abo says to William: "The library defends itself, immeasurable as the truth it houses, deceitful as the falsehood it preserves. A spiritual labyrinth, it is also a terrestrial labyrinth. You might enter and you might not emerge" (38). A monk, allowed random access to the books of the library would be exposed, not only to the truths of the Gospel, but also to the lies of the infidels, and the seductions of heretics. He would soon become lost amidst the concentrated thoughts of all the world, right and wrong, bringing Truth and leading into falsehood. Hence the library's form—an architectural maze—serves both to point to the dangers of its charge, and also to protect its charge, by causing the adventurous to lose their way, keeping them ignorant as to the extent of its contents.

Thus the library acts as a *speculum mundi*, a mirror of the world. To Abo, indicative of the traditional mind, the labyrinth of the library signifies the nature of the universe. God has placed us in an environment in which there is only one True path but many distractions and deviations, and it is the task of the devout to seek the correct way. Within the library, in order to reach the desired destination—whether it be the *finis Africae* or the stairwell—it is necessary to know the correct means of orientation. It is necessary to possess, in effect, a map that portrays both the correct path and the incorrect paths that can lead the seeker astray. As Abo says, we stand in need of a guide in order that we may "interpret the multiple signs that the world sets before our sinner's eyes [and] to avoid the misunderstandings into which the Devil lures us" (448).

The Map claimed by the orthodox theology of the High middle ages was the Tradition upon which it was founded. The crucial question of the age was religious: how do we find salvation? Holding to a revealed faith, the medieval church argued that this question had been answered definitively in the Incarnation and mediated by the New Testament Scriptures, themselves of divine origin. Thus God had reached into the maze of His creation and supplied the authoritative Map whereby mankind could negotiate the

true path and arrive at the Beatific Vision. However, the nature of the Map, being itself a sign constructed of signs, meant that it was itself a labyrinth, requiring interpretation in its own right, requiring it's own authoritative map.

It is a problem echoed by Abo as he discourses to Adso on the "language" of gemology. Presenting his abbatial ring for Adso to kiss, Abo becomes lost in a reverie (reminiscent of many of Adso's own) on the significations of various gemstones:

> This is amethyst ... which is the mirror of humility and reminds us of the ingenuousness and sweetness of Saint Matthew; this is chalcedony, mark of charity, symbol of the piety of Joseph and Saint James the Greater; this is jasper, which bespeaks faith and is associated with Saint Peter ... (447)

Abo sees in gemstones, as in the universe at large, a semiotic system referring the observer to deeper, spiritual matters, as William observes that Alanus de Insulis instructs. But Abo, like William, is aware that not only can any given thing signify something else, but it can also signify many other things as well. Thus the "marvelous language" of gems is opened to compromise, for whilst certain stones signify certain qualities and saints, "for other fathers stones signify still other things" (447).

Not only does the world need interpretation, so that we may see in it the signs of the truth, but the truth itself needs interpretation, so that we can apply it to our decisions. Abo expresses the conundrum well: "the language of gems is multiform; each expresses several truths, according to the sense of the selected interpretation, according to the context in which they appear. And who decides what is the level of interpretation and what is the proper context?" He then proceeds to answer his own question, saying; "You know, my boy, for they have taught you: it is authority, the most reliable commentator of all and the most invested with prestige, and therefore with sanctity (448).

Abo is asserting that as the revelation has been mediated, so it has been interpreted by those who have passed the faith on, releasing future generations of the need to ask the same questions anew. Such a reliance on tradition serves to maintain the integrity of the institution which acts as the conduit, for what is transmitted at each stage of the mediation of the "truth" is, effectively, the interpretation made by the figure of authority (the Father or the Doctor; the *auctoritas*). Thus the "truth" becomes the interpretation

admitted by the institution and the institution defines itself by its adherence to the "truth," reinforcing both. In areas of confusion, then, the faithful will return to the words of the *auctoritas* which, in interpreting the prior revelation, reveal to the perplexed the path to take.

This reliance on the already said is emphasised by Jorge in a debate with William at an earlier point in the novel. William, defending the role of human reason in theology, asserts the validity of doubt, to which Jorge replies; "I cannot see any reason. When you are in doubt, you must turn to an authority, to the words of a father or a doctor; then all reason for doubt ceases" (132). Jorge places the responsibility for doubt on "debatable doctrines, like those of the logicians of Paris," and like those of William, born of "the cold, lifeless scrutiny of reasoning not enlightened by Scripture" (132). Thus Jorge, watching over the abbey's store of wisdom, expresses the fear of the *via antiqua* that the *hubris* of the *via moderna* would result in nothing less than the cessation of the mediation of the faith.

Jorge is most often associated in *The Name of the Rose* with the theme of laughter: his dialogues routinely involve evocations to sobriety and interdictions against laughter, which turns men away from the fear of the Almighty that is the condition of holy behaviour. It is ostensibly this fear of laughter that lies behind the murders in the abbey (although not in the way William imagines). Driven by his hatred of the jocose, Jorge has hidden a text in the most secret room of the library, a text he fears will raise laughter to the level of philosophy, obliterating in the process the very Truth itself. This terrible book is no less than the lost *Comedia* of Aristotle, whose other works had, rediscovered, altered the course of medieval thought. For its pages other monks are willing to violate the sanctity of the library and Jorge, in the end, is willing to kill.

Jorge is, however, no mere killjoy. He does not simply assume the role of the joyless old man, castigating others out of his own misery. In his eyes laughter is neither a simple expression of joy nor a base expression of ridicule, rather it is a symptom of a wider and deeper illness. Laughter accommodates the desires of man to free himself from the bonds that are properly imposed upon him by God: "Laughter, for a few

moments, distracts the villein from fear. But law is imposed by fear, whose true name is fear of God" (474,75). Were such a freedom to be unleashed, it would subvert the whole nature of orthodoxy. Wisdom would be overturned and what is marginal would move to the centre, but without the ability to impose the order that is demanded of a centring principle.

Jorge sees orthodoxy (truth) as establishing a dialectic, as engendering its own opposition, by which it defines itself. Speaking to William of the fanaticisms and violence of the various heretical movements, he says "we are not afraid ... indeed, I would say their presence is precious to us, it is inscribed in the plan of God, because their sin prompts our virtue, their cursing encourages our hymn of praise ..." (476). Laughter is not only the release of the villein from his fear: it is his empowerment, and the undoing of the ability to oppose the Truth to falsity.

> "If one day someone could say (and be heard), 'I laugh at the Incarnation,' then we would have no weapons to combat that blasphemy, because it would summon the dark powers of corporal matter, those that are affirmed in the fart and the belch, and the fart and the belch would claim the right that is only of the spirit, to breathe where they list!" (477)

In the *Comedia* Jorge sees this possibility, because whereas carnival is the province of the poor, the uneducated, the unheard, Aristotle promises to raise laughter to the domain of the powerful: "what in the villein is still, fortunately, an operation of the belly would be transformed into an operation of the brain" (474).

Laughter, although the focus of his diatribes, is not the key to Jorge's thinking. Rather he fears the overthrow of the system of difference established by the maintenance of the Tradition. Aristotle, he asserts, has undermined the received wisdom and has spread his unholy influence throughout the church. "Every book by that man has destroyed a part of the learning that Christianity had accumulated over the centuries ... Before, we used to look to heaven, deigning only a frowning glance at the mire of matter; now we look at the earth, and we believe in the heavens because of earthly testimony" (473). Aristotle has encouraged the saints to turn away from what is sound and true, from contemplation of what is spiritual, provided by faith, and to indulge in the speculations of their own intellect. Even Aquinas, to whom Jorge had earlier referred

with respect, is castigated for abandoning the path of Tradition, "seduced by the Philosopher ... following the proud paths of natural reason" (473).

Laughter is merely a symptom of the final arrogance. "Every word of the Philosopher ... has overturned the image of the world. But he had not succeeded in overturning the image of God" (473). To Jorge, the sin of the moderns is their forsaking of the Truth handed down in Tradition, in favour of the "novelties" of fallible reason. This is the theme of the sermon he delivers at Compline on the fifth day, a sermon of apocalyptic tone, castigating the falling away of his generation. The Truth has been revealed, and to continue to question the universe, seeking what has already been said, is madness.

William's and Jorge's conceptions of the truth are not, in fact, far removed from each other. Each sees before them a labyrinth, and each demands of the map he uses to negotiate the labyrinth that it correspond to the reality of the maze. To Jorge, however, as the voice of medieval orthodoxy, the map has been produced, revealed, and to question its validity is both futile and dangerous, in that what is sufficient cannot accommodate revision or addition. It is a point Jorge underlines again and again through his sermon:

> But of our work ... a part—indeed, the substance—is study, and the preservation of knowledge. Preservation of, I say, not search for, because the property of knowledge, as a divine thing, is that it is complete and has been defined since the beginning, in the perfection of the Word which expresses itself to itself. Preservation, I say, and not search, because it is a property of knowledge, as a human thing, that is has been defined and completed over the course of the centuries, from the preaching of the prophets to the interpretation of the fathers of the church. There is no progress, no revolution of ages, in the history of knowledge, but at most a continuous and sublime recapitulation. (399)

Human fallibility leads Jorge to the conclusion that only God can map the true path through the maze and the Divine map must be preserved. Thus his invocation of the words that seal the Apocalypse of John: "For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book. If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book ..." (400).

William, who represents the scholastic tradition of inquiry, of searching out and making known what is not already understood, and challenging that which is, naturally incurs Jorge's animosity. William professes the need for doubt as an antidote to intellectual pride, whereas Jorge sees in doubt only a rejection of Truth. "When you are in doubt," he admonishes, "you must turn to an authority, to the words of a father or a doctor; then all reason for doubt ceases" (132). To Jorge, the questioning of what has been handed down, the belief that revelation can be transcended, is precisely the intellectual pride from which William seeks refuge.

Authority, in Jorge's understanding, inheres in the traditions passed down from the past, which, in a very real sense transmit the Faith itself. The Christian faith is not something that can grow anew with each generation. It is something that must exist, like God, in eternity, unchanging and always available, and it must exist to us, in the form of the Apostolic dispensation, in the same way. Thus there is scope for the gloss, for the sentences and for the commentary, because they serve to recapitulate the Truth, eternal and one. But inductive reasoning, to Jorge, departs from the safety of authority by seeking to create anew: "I gave you eyes to see the light of my precepts, and you used them to peer into the darkness" (405).

Thus William's scholastic rationalism does no less than overturn the map with which the faithful are furnished in order that they may negotiate the maze of life and achieve the beatific vision. He represents to Jorge the ultimate act of sacrilege; the denial of the possibility of grounding our interpretive efforts. For this is what the Tradition is, to Jorge, neither more nor less than the point of hermeneutic certainty. It is the security of the *via antiqua* that it offers the certainty of correct interpretation. Those who raise questions beyond the scope of the *auctoritas* of the past, such as William, call into doubt the security, the certainty, that sustained nearly six centuries of interpretive endeavour. It is his desire to safeguard this certainty that drives Jorge to defend the silencing of the *Comedia*, the most potent threat to the order of his universe, even to the point of murder and death.

Chapter 4

"Burning the Accused: Method and Prejudice"

4.1

The conflict between William and Jorge personifies the conflict of the period between reliance on a received tradition and reliance on the powers of reason—although it also carries resonances with other conflicts involving conservatism and change throughout history. However, despite the opposition generated by their positions as antagonist and defender (in various ways, each on both side of the distinction), and as detective and murderer, William and Jorge both share, as Adso realises, significant common ground. As they oppose each other within the confines of the *finis Africae*, each demonstrating his cunning to the other, it strikes Adso, to his disgust, that they are as much colleagues admiring each other as rivals on the verge of killing each other. This complicity is evident in Jorge's surprising expression of remorse at William's stubborn opposition to him: "'What a magnificent librarian you would have been, William,' Jorge said, with a tone at once admiring and regretful ..." (466).

William and Jorge's complicity lies in the fact that both are seeking something that is true. Both William and Jorge want to be able to understand the universe as it is: Jorge in order to guarantee the safety of his soul (and that of his society), William in order to build the society that he desires. The bitterness of the conflict between them arises out of the incompatibility of their means of guaranteeing the truth, in that the method of each precludes that of the other. Each man's desire to know opposes him to the other, but still within the frame of the same desire.

Bernard Gui, on the other hand, serves to introduce something altogether different into *The Name of the Rose*. Bernard, like Jorge and Abo, serves the traditional position; he is an inquisitor, maintaining the traditional distinction between orthodoxy and heresy. Thus he too is positioned against William, as an adherent of a system of justification that runs counter to the rationalism that William employs. However, Bernard's understanding of his position, unlike that of Abo and Jorge, calls into question the very need for

interpretive validity. Through the politically motivated farce that is Remigio's heresy trial, Bernard effectively introduces the complicating factors of prejudice and power into the question of how we are to move through the maze that is the universe, raising the possibility that hermeneutics is merely of secondary concern to politics.

4.2

Bernard's dominant scene in *The Name of the Rose* is, of course, the trial of Remigio. A trial is, like the investigation itself, a showcase of the detective's acumen. It is the point at which he/she is held accountable for the way he/she has read the available signs, and the conclusions reached. The investigation is the scene of abduction, of the guesses that connect phenomena within a unifying structure and provide the probable (or most economically possible) villain. The trial is not so much the trial of the suspect as the trial of the detective: it is the point at which the possible universe created by the detective's abductions is compared with the real universe (or at least the universe as the community within which he/she exists perceives it). The trial is therefore the place of meta-abduction, where the detective's methods are exposed to scrutiny. This should, in an ideal world, be a process where the semiotic is made sensitive to the extra-semiotic in order that it can be discarded if the fit is not "true."

The trial of Remigio violates precisely this ideal of meta-abduction. Bernard's abductions are not actually brought to account in this instance because he plays a dual role; he is both the judge, whose role is to question, and the detective, whose method is to be called into question. There is no tension between the semiotic and the extra-semiotic, as there should be if the detective's abductions are to be tested seriously, by virtue of the fact that the world against which Bernard's abductions are to be tested is, far from the noumenal world in which the events occurred, the world which he has already created himself. His act of meta-abduction is a masquerade, for it turns in on itself, necessarily providing a perfect fit.

In this sense, Bernard recalls Zadig, who performed abductions but, according to Eco, failed to bring them to the point of testing ("Horns, Hooves, Insteps" 214,215). He

is content with constructing a semiotic world, which is, by necessity, a world of the possible. Thus, when confronted with the king's servants, he is at a loss to satisfy their desire to act within the actual world, in spite of his acumen. Bernard offers an insidious development on this theme, however: far from suffering the irruption of the actual into the semiotic, as does Zadig, he is able to impose his semiotic universe on the actual.

Thus the difference between Bernard and William is not so much a difference in method as a difference of intent. Far from seeking to understand the meaning of the signs confronting him, Bernard proceeds to draw from signs only such significance as serves his own argument. It is a difference William sums up in his wry assertion to Adso that "Bernard is interested, not in discovering the guilty, but in burning the accused. ... I, on the contrary, find the most joyful delight in unraveling a nice, complicated knot" (394). William's interest in unravelling strikes the humanist mind as a positive character trait, as a willingness to test the world, to find out what really *is*, as against what we want to believe. It is, as Boehner says of the other William, William of Ockham, an attitude that seeks to learn, not to impose (xviii)[14].

The opposite of William's openness, as Boehner infers, is thus not so much an acceptance of Tradition *per se*, as evinced by Jorge and Abo, as the imposition of an answer irrespective of the evidence. Or in a single word, prejudice, the pre-judging of an issue. And this is what Bernard represents. He appears not to engage in an interpretive effort at all, in that interpretation is an attempt to come to the meaning of the sign. By imposing his desired meaning *upon* the sign, irrespective of what may really be the case, he bypasses an interpretative solution for a political one. In so doing, Bernard demonstrates a theme that runs through the novel: people's actions seem less often governed by their desire to grasp reality than by their ability to impose their own desire.

This is a theme that is also underlined by William, in his attempts to explain the nature of heresy to Adso. The key to William's political theory is the concept of exclusion, which he understands as central to the manifesto of Francis who "wanted to

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14 Boehner says of Ockham's project; "We have to find out how things are, we have no right to dictate how things must be" (xviii).

call the outcast, ready to revolt, to be part of the people of God" (202). William realises that in order to maintain its position as guarantor of "good," the Church must maintain a distinction between good and evil, forcing those who do not conform to its pattern to the margins *as* evil. But the outcasts are not determined theologically, for heresy is not so much a matter of doctrine, as of power:

> The recovery of the outcasts demanded reduction of the privileges of the powerful, so the excluded who became aware of their exclusion had to be branded as heretics, whatever their doctrine. And for their part, blinded by their exclusion, they were not really interested in any doctrine. ... Every battle against heresy wants only this: to keep the leper as he is. As for the lepers, what can you ask of them? That they distinguish in the Trinitarian dogma or in the definition of the Eucharist how much is correct and how much is wrong? Come, Adso, these games are for us men of learning. The simple have other problems. (203)

It is the decision to impose an order that supports privilege and creates heresy, because privilege entails an exclusion which must be maintained.

4.3

William's assertion that the exclusion of the poor is premised on politics and not theology threatens to undo the emphasis he places on the necessity of reading signs correctly, introducing another tension into his thought. In chapter 1.2. I suggested that William's epistemology of the singular demonstrated his belief that a hermeneutic is not merely an academic tool, but one fundamental to the way in which we move within the universe. No matter how enticing or economical the abduction, it must be tested against experience in order that we can know it brings us to the reality itself, so that we can be confident in our progress. It is this need to ground our interpretations that is illustrated in the mapping of the labyrinth, where success depends on a series of abductions that can accommodate the phenomena. But on the issue of poverty and justice, William seems to be telling Adso that rather than correct interpretation, exclusion and heresy revolve around the issue of who can best impose their own map.

Bernard's evasion of the point of meta-abduction demonstrates most clearly this imposition of the map on the territory requiring negotiation. It is as if Bernard, seeking

to discover the *finis Africae*, constructed a map of the library positioning the hidden room at the most convenient point and proceeded to search accordingly. Except that instead of becoming lost in the real library, the library shifts its walls to conform to his "map." Bernard is able to leave the abbey secure in the success of his mission; he has succeeded in frustrating the Franciscans, and he has in his custody Remigio, Salvatore and the girl, all proof of his ability to impose his own desires upon events. William, on the other hand, leaves the abbey having almost totally failed; he discovered Jorge only by accident, and in so doing realised that his abductions were based on a false premise. "There was no plot," William admits to Adso, "and I discovered it by mistake" (491).

The possibility then exists that William's epistemology is, after all, merely an academic riddle, and his reasonableness is futile. William is, I would suggest, privileged within Adso's narrative in that the reader is disposed to sympathise with him as the hero, as representing something desirable, but he is also, as I have already pointed out, defeated. Certainly it is possible to follow Joan Del Fattore and read this defeat as William's inability to live up to his method. However I think it also opens at least the possibility that we may have to resign ourselves to what Bernard represents. It may well be that *The Name of the Rose* presents interpretative validity as a nicety that can only be afforded in certain, ideal, worlds, whilst in the actual world the exercise of power is, in the end, the only justification.

Bernard can thus be seen as offering not only a contrast to William's method, one that serves to highlight William's reasonableness, but also a challenge to the implicit centrality interpretation holds within *The Name of the Rose*. It is, of course, possible to demonstrate both that William's semiotics does not exclude politics and that Bernard's politics is not without a semiotic ground, lessening the gap Bernard appears to open. William's philosophical stance is, like that of Bacon and Ockham, fundamentally political, involving a radical proposal for a form of government based on breaking down the patterns of exclusion he recognises in medieval society. On the other hand, Bernard is an investigator of no small skill in his own right, as witnessed by the fact that he discovers not only Remigio's heretical past (by his own endeavour), but also yet another text

hidden within the library's walls, the letters of Dolcino.

Nevertheless I think that such an argument would succeed only in sidestepping the issue I am trying to raise, which is that Bernard questions the necessity, central to Peirce's semiotics, of making the semiotic accountable to the extra-semiotic. Rather, he seems to bring to the fore a Nietzschean stress on "will to power," the validity only of what we can impose on a universe that cannot be definitively known. This, not his apparent disregard for inductive logic, is what opposes him to William, and what makes him so dangerous is William's susceptibility to doubt regarding his ability to know the universe.

William's despair at the conclusion of the novel stems from his belief that the concept of universal laws, and hence inductive reason, is invalid, leaving him without a ground for his semiotic method. This belief is engendered, as I argued above, by William's misunderstanding of Ockham's two central theses, the reality of individuals, and the contingency of nature in the face of the omnipotence of God. For William the latter of these carries the most weight: "It's hard to accept the idea that there cannot be an order in the universe because it would offend the free will of God and His omnipotence. So the freedom of God is our condemnation, or at least the condemnation of our pride" (492,493). William's use of God's omnipotence to counteract the absolute order required by Bacon for empirical induction serves also to reveal the role of the intellect in that process, as he realises. Bacon requires science to "re-cognise" the order of the universe, to know it by reflecting it in the mind. What William comes to realise, however, is that the mind is not passive in the process of coming to knowledge.

William's interpretive method, involving as it does a positing of an order to account for data, is fundamentally prejudiced. Whilst William takes care to allow his conclusions to be challenged by the data for which they seek to give an account, he still seeks, as he realises, to make those data conform to a pattern that makes sense to him. William's prejudice is, then, one of necessity: he seeks to understand by reducing the world to a manageable form, thus always imposing his own cognitive limits upon the data he faces. But if he is to perform any activity at all, this imposition is a necessary one, for if we do

not reduce the infinity of events with which we are confronted to a manageable form, then we would be left confused and floundering in a world beyond comprehension.

Bernard's prejudice marks the imposition of the mind on phenomena in a gross manner, earning him the disapprobation of an enlightenment audience. But William's insight that he too subjectively imposes on the universe a desire for order allows the same accusation to be levelled at him. Christine de Lailhacar recognises this point when she compares William to Borges' Lönnrot, the detective of "Death and the Compass."

> Lönnrot's and Baskerville's single flaw is their tendency to project into a situation a coherence corresponding to a code. Thus they become, unwittingly, the ones who set the rules of the game to which diabolically complacent counter players conform. (168)

William himself explains to Adso the prejudice inherent in his method, castigating his intellectual pride as the source of his detective failure:

> I arrived at Jorge pursuing the plan of a perverse and rational mind, and there was no plan, or, rather, Jorge himself was overcome by his own initial design and there began a sequence of causes, and concauses, and of causes contradicting one another, which proceeded on their own, creating relations that did not stem from any plan. Where is all my wisdom, then? I behaved stubbornly, pursuing a semblance of order, when I should have known well that there is no order in the universe. (492)

Realising that he has "overinterpreted" the signs available to him not through failing his method but by the failure of that method to grasp the world truly, William finally accepts that our drive for order is an imposition on a universe far beyond our comprehension.

That prejudice, the bringing of our cognitive horizons to the world we wish to understand, is unavoidable has been long accepted in Western philosophy. Kant's doctrine of the "a priori" takes into account the imposition the mind makes on the extra-mental, and Hans-Georg Gadamer has developed a hermeneutic theory based on the necessity of pre-judgement. To William, however, this acceptance leads to despair. The imposition of the subject on the object carries for William the familiar empiricist stigma, invalidating the possibility of arriving at the correct conclusion, which is, to the empiricist as it is to Adso, the adjustment of the intellect to the object. Any violation of the purity of the object must have the consequence of destroying the basis of semiotic authority. In always "pursuing a semblance of order" we are abandoning any hope of knowing what

"really is," and William is not sure that he is willing to take that path: "it is hard to accept the idea that there cannot be an order in the universe" (492,93).

Although Bernard threatens the usefulness of William's rationality, highlighting the prejudice which William recognises as inherent within his semiotic method, *The Name of the Rose* does not have to be read as acquiescing with William's near nihilism. If prejudice does not simply operate in the realm of politics, as the imposition of desire, but underpins all interpretive activity, then Bernard's behaviour is brought back within the same parameters as William's. Ultimately what can be seen as separating them is precisely that which characterises William throughout the novel: his willingness to accept the possibility that he is wrong. "The order that our mind imagines is like a net," William tells Adso at the conclusion of the narrative, "or like a ladder, built to attain something. But afterward you must throw the ladder away, because you discover that, even if it was useful, it was meaningless" (492). What is to William an admission of his failure to recognise the contingency of knowledge is also an expression of epistemological humility, a characteristic not to be found in Bernard Gui.

In distinguishing between William and Bernard, we can characterise the latter's prejudice as "blind." Bernard imagines an order in his mind, and uses it to achieve his end. He is willing to throw away the postulates he uses to achieve his ends; what he is not willing to throw away is the order within which he is always right, within which it is always his end that must be obtained. William, even if in bad grace, is willing to accept that his reason is limited, and that to follow to their own ends the designs of his own making, which are all he has available to him, is folly. He must continually adjust, and must continue to posit many possibilities. His despair at the realisation that none of them can ever be true must be tempered by the realisation that at least, by so doing, he can avoid the evil into which Bernard falls, which is to be sure of his errors.

Chapter 5

"By way of summation (1) ..."

The Name of the Rose presents four conflicting approaches to the question of interpretive authority, bound up within the questions it poses as to how we can know the world. Brother William introduces one of these approaches, a positivistic empiricism where the authority for any given interpretation lies in the validity of the method of conjecture. As long as the procedure of interpretation is correct, including the process of testing the conjecture against the available evidence, then correct interpretation will follow. The nature of methodological authority relies, however, on a fixed and predictable relationship between the events of the world, a relationship that William comes to doubt, thus presenting a second approach to interpretive authority, the skeptical or relativistic, which asserts that we can at best use our interpretations, and never rely on them totally. Correctness is abandoned in favour of contingency.

Both of the attitudes fostered by William run counter to the pervading ethos of the community in which he moves, although his positivism shares certain affinities with it. The traditional stance of the medieval catholic church, represented in various guises by Ubertino, Adso, Abo and Jorge, sought a solution to the problematic of communication and interpretation in the assertion of authoritative interpretations, fixed through history, and binding on the present. By such a method it was hoped that conjecture would be forestalled, allowing certainty in recognition rather than interpretation. Any conjecture that transgressed the received opinion could thus be censured as violating the purity of the original communication.

Such a restrictive and introspective approach to guaranteeing interpretive validity obviously stands in conflict with the empiricism presented by William throughout most of *The Name of the Rose*. William privileges the ability of reason to grapple anew with each question as it arises, recognising the inability of received wisdom to accommodate historical change. On the other hand, both William's empiricism and the Traditionalism to which he is opposed respect some form of authority that provides certainty. Whether

it is in acquiescing to the "map" provided out of the heritage of a community or asserting the individual's ability to provide his/her own "map," both positions assert the possibility that the "labyrinth" that is the world can be successfully negotiated, and both assume a "mannerist" form for the maze through which they move.

William's belated recognition that the maze might actually be of a rhizomatic form allows his devaluation of interpretive authority and his assertion that contingency is the best for which we can hope. It is Bernard Gui, however, who presents the most potent challenge to the possibility of hermeneutic authority, providing a fourth perspective. Gui introduces the threat that authority is more a function of politics than of epistemology. His interpretations succeed not on the basis of their correct representation of the extra-semiotic universe, the "real" world, but because he is able to impose his semiotic conjectures upon the "real" world. He provides a model of prejudice—imposing an answer upon the question without even considering the nature of the question—which counters the fidelity demanded not only by William, but also by the proponents of received authority.

As I suggested in the introduction, the way the interaction between these competing positions is read determines the "message" that *The Name of the Rose* carries regarding interpretive authority. I have explicated the conditions and implications of each position and have argued that William's realisation at the end of the novel entails, in essence, the understanding that all interpretation is bound up within prejudice and history. Despite Bernard's abuse of interpretation, he entails merely a difference of degree, not of kind, and the stereotypically medieval outlook that is represented by Jorge and Abo is simply a magnification of the role that history must play in the constitution of any interpretive endeavour.

My reading of *The Name of the Rose* does not, therefore, support the conclusion that William can be accepted as fitting an enlightenment ideal set against a backdrop of medieval prejudice and superstition, promoting reason in a vacuum of irrationality. Nor, however, do I think it supports the unbridled relativism William himself seems to imply in his discussion with Adso as the Library, symbol of Order and of his own rational success,

burns. The certainty of both positivism and received wisdom has been undermined by William's failure and by Gui's success, but even in his despair, William is unable to allow for a complete nihilism regarding the possibility of interpretation. Adso, it will be recalled, takes William's doubts to their apparent conclusion, offering a universe in which God contradicts Himself, and we are left with chaos. William replies "how could a learned man go on communicating his learning if he answered yes to your question?" (493). Before Adso can fathom whether William is admitting the impotence of human reason, or its limits, the Library collapses in an apocalyptic conflagration.

William's realisation of the pervasiveness of prejudice could lead to a Nietzschean conclusion, that truth lies with power, and only with power. However, although prejudice undermines the rigour of interpretive authority based on "correctness," or "truth," and is thus a threat to both positivism and to Tradition, it is only necessarily negative from within an absolutist epistemology. That is to say, in recognising that all interpretation is indeed based on the possibility of prejudice, William's fear of relativism and chaos is a response of positivism to its own transgression. Prejudice can also be seen as a positive term, as in the philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer who sees it as the gateway to understanding; if we cannot grasp the universe on our own terms, then we remain removed from it, for we have no other way in which to accommodate it.

William's defeat, then, can be read as a liberation from the constraints of those who believe that our mission is to subdue the universe. "Perhaps the mission of those who love mankind is to make people laugh at the truth, *to make truth laugh*, because the only truth lies in learning to free ourselves from insane passion for the truth" (491). So William expresses himself to Adso, expressing his fear of the passion that drove Jorge. But the passion for truth that drove Jorge is also, surely, the passion for truth that leads Adso and William to fear its lack, to fear the possibility that we cannot *be sure* that we know. William acts and knows why he acts and is confident, but when he recognises that he doesn't know why he knows that he knows what he does (*à la* Adso, 207), he becomes disconcerted. Post-modern man, says Eco in *Reflections*, takes comfort in the rhizomatic nature of his existence, because of the possibilities it offers. William,

however, still fears its dangers, even whilst he recognises its existence.

The Name of the Rose can be read as opening the possibility of an epistemological middle path, akin to the political middle path it illustrates, one of reasonableness and responsibility, rather than one of absolutes divorced from the condition in which we really find ourselves. Interpretive authority remains a possibility, but no longer an overriding truth. Rather it becomes an outcome, a sensitivity to the text, a contingency based on reasonableness as opposed to a truth provided by positivist Reason. William can be seen, in this light, as a model of reasonableness coming to terms with his own role, only gradually becoming aware that the world of absolutes that is so harmful (a harm he sees only too clearly) is at much at work in the desire of empiricism to know as it is in the desire of the *via antiqua* for the security of an unchanging Truth.

William is not privileged in a simple manner in the reading I have proposed. It is not the position he occupies that comes to carry the "message" of the text, but the tensions he experiences between that position and the others presented within *The Name of the Rose*. William does not resolve his doubts, as Adso graphically displays at the end of his account; the fiery collapse of the dormitory engendering William's final words, "there is too much confusion here ... Non in commotione, non in commotione Dominus" (493). The tension remains even to the end, and if it can be read as producing a certain effect, *The Name of the Rose* does not forestall what might be seen as "surplus" effects.

If *The Name of the Rose* is read as calling into doubt the desirability, indeed even the possibility of certainty, and proposing a "middle way" between absolutism and absolute skepticism, it must also be allowed that such a middle path is, in turn, open to question. In a rhizomatic universe, authority is still required, even if it is a demystified and reduced authority, for action is still demanded. Interpretation still functions as the prerequisite for praxis, and we must still strive to achieve the best possible outcome. If prejudice is a necessary part of our engagement with the world, Bernard's abuse of interpretation is still not acceptable, we cannot be comfortable with the idea of inflicting order on others, even though we need it to orient ourselves. The question of how we are to determine between better and worse in a world where truth is no longer there to be

grasped remains unanswered in *The Name of the Rose*. If, indeed, there is no order in the universe, then what is to distinguish between interpretations? It is this question that haunts Eco's second novel, *Foucault's Pendulum.*

Part Two

"The Disease of Drift"

> There is a certain pathos in these "decipherments." We all interpret language and even experience in a way that is both complex and difficult to describe. It is not that Newbold and Levitov are undeniably wrong. It is at least *conceivable* that the supposed authors wrote just what they thought and encoded it just as they said.
>
> Most rational people do not ponder Newbold's and Levitov's cases long before rejecting them. To say exactly *why* we reject them is something else. Susan Sontag defined intelligence as a "taste in ideas." It is difficult to codify that taste.[15]

Chapter 6

"By way of introduction (2) ..."

"*Foucault's Pendulum* is, at one and the same time, an entertainment, a philosophical discourse, a moral tale, and a work of art." So Robert Artigiani opens his essay on *Foucault's Pendulum* (855), recalling the opinion of Joseph Carpino (and others) of *The Name of the Rose*. In many respects, the two novels are similar: both draw on a vast array of literary and philosophical allusions, and both seem inspired by a critical and reflective theme that drives the narrative. Both novels can be read as questioning assumptions about the certainty with which we understand both books and the world, presenting narratives that revolve around events which are consciously interpretive. However, *Foucault's Pendulum* can be seen as responding to a degree of safety evident in *The Name of the Rose* (Liddelow 122) . Whereas *The Name of the Rose* provided the familiarity of a detective plot (even if the detective is defeated in the end), and structures itself comfortingly according to the days of the week and the canonical hours, *Foucault's Pendulum* abandons such points of reference, presenting a disconcerting plot and replacing the rigorous frame of *The Name of the Rose* with one reflecting the mysticism of the Cabala.

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[15] William Poundstone, *Labyrinths of Reason* (200). He is referring to two aberrant interpretations purporting to decipher the mysterious Voynich manuscript.

Foucault's Pendulum thus provides a less comfortable ride for the "naive" reader (by which I mean only those unfamiliar with Eco's philosophy and the debates in which it is located), robbing him/her of the safety allowed by *The Name of the Rose*. It provides further difficulties, as many commentators affirm, through the powerful suspicion that one of its central tools is a pervasive irony, that it is, as Alicia Juarrero suggests, exhaustively self-reflexive. Indeed, in his essay "Story Problems," Dean Flower goes so far as to suggest that *Foucault's Pendulum* is nothing more than a bad joke at the expense of its own readers (313). Be this as it may, there is certainly no doubt that *Foucault's Pendulum* provides a confusing text, one where "the scatter-gun effect of his irony" diffuses any simple moral the text may have conveyed, leaving a narrative where "ambiguity reigns" (Hutcheon 1992, 12 & 14).

What is immediately apparent on reading *Foucault's Pendulum* is that it plunges the reader on a roller coaster ride of analogy, associative drift, semiotic free-play and rampant desire. The novel opens with a scene of paranoiac chaos, as Casaubon, the reader's none too naïve guide struggles to account for the simple, technical displays of the Conservatoire des Arts et Metiers in terms of universal synarchy. A *tour de force* of mystic association and paranoid logic, the opening chapters provide a disconcertingly baroque atmosphere in which the safe universe of the known is turned upside down in a montage of sophisticated madness. Thus the stage is set for a potent challenge to the ordinary reader's sense of propriety, of interpretive validity, that the remainder of the narrative seems designed to effect.

Following Casaubon from his student days, where he develops a fascination with the Templars ("the real stuff"), the narrative moves to Brazil, and Casaubon's encounter with the subterranean forces of the occult spiritualism that subverts his devoutly Marxist partner, Amparo. The Brazilian episode is disturbing for Casaubon, and raises many doubts and questions, instilling in him a fascination with analogies, as he recalls: "I began to let myself be lulled by feelings of resemblance: the notion that everything might be mysteriously related to everything else" (164). Translating "metaphysics into mechanics" (164) upon his return to Italy, Casaubon becomes an expert at academic bricollage,

establishing himself as a "cultural detective" dedicated to tracking down obscure information. This career path leads him into a partnership with Belbo and Diotallevi, and together the three begin to play with the possibilities of resemblance, gradually reconverting Casaubon's mechanics into metaphysics.

As the Trio gradually mould "the Plan," their epic parody of hermetic logic, the reader is treated to a marvellous circus of resemblance, analogy and occult connections. Whilst the actual progress of the Plan takes up relatively little of the novel—it enters into the narrative roughly two thirds of the way in—it manages to occupy the imagination of the reader out of all proportion to its place, as William Weaver notes in his "Pendulum Diary" (160). The Trio's fascination with their reinterpretation of history is, I suspect, for most readers, infectious. As they move through the history books, altering here, inventing there, they construct a narrative within the narrative, a story in which history is retold by virtue of the free play of meaning.

Early in the novel, Belbo announces a commonsense distinction between the normal and the lunatic, and to all intents and purposes his distinction describes perfectly the alteration of the Trio's outlook as the Plan exercises an increasing fascination upon them. The question that faces the reader (at least, the reader concerned with *Foucault's Pendulum* as an ethical text rather than simply an entertaining one) is "why"? What is the purpose of the text in tracing this descent into illogic—and its final rejection of this illogic? What is *meant* by the shift in perspective from the commonsense—even skeptical—position evinced early in Casaubon's narrative to the lunacy of Belbo's final behaviour, and Casaubon's rejection of the philosophy of resemblance in his final reflections? In a novel where the contentiousness of meaning seems to be one of the central points at issue, such questions take on a decidedly fraught appearance.

Whilst the "naive" reader may choose to follow the narrator, first into the fascination of resemblance and illogic, and finally into a rejection of it in favour of a kind of pure, Husserlian, experience, most critics choose to read the novel differently. Drawing their cues from Eco's semiotics and the debates which surround it, critics such as Alicia Juarrero, Eden Liddelow, Cristina Degli-Esposti and Robert Artigiani have

found in *Foucault's Pendulum* a theme which privileges the notion of interpretive free-play over the "single way" that leads to Belbo's death. Such readings, which range from Degli-Esposti's assertion that *Foucault's Pendulum* represents a variety of post-modernism she calls "alchemical," (1991, 185) to Artigiani's suggestion that it challenges the reader to "laugh at our pretensions and accept responsibility for the actions our words inspire" (1992, 875), seem to respect Eco's most prominent theory, that of unlimited semiosis, which the spectacular analogies traced in the novel apparently serve to illustrate.

However, I would like to suggest that *Foucault's Pendulum* offers another possibility as a novel with an interpretive moral. Rather than present a conflict between the freedom of interpretive possibility and the oppression of limiting meaning to a fixed and bound quantity, which would, to a degree, revisit the territory of *The Name of the Rose*, *Foucault's Pendulum* can be read as offering a distinction between responsible and irresponsible interpretation. The interpretive free-play that characterises the approach to hermeticism within the novel is premised on the self-sufficiency of the semiotic being equated to reality—thus the universe becomes as infinitely significant as the doctrine of unlimited semiosis allows. Such a model of interpretation leaves the interpretive event responsible to nothing, for there is nothing outside of the play of semiosis that is available to be responsible, or sufficient, to.

Foucault's Pendulum, I wish to argue, can be read as suggesting that interpretation is not sufficient only to itself. Certainly it allows that semiosis is unlimited (certainly it would be awkward to defend a reading in which *Foucault's Pendulum* denies unlimited semiosis, given the contextual evidence of Eco's theoretical writings), but just because semiosis is unlimited does not mean that it is totally independent of the universe that its function is to grasp. The world of the pre-semiotic, the "real" world, as opposed to the constructions of our understanding, is, whilst outside of our understanding, still the object *of* that understanding. To see semiosis as a law unto itself is I suggest castigated in *Foucault's Pendulum* as a mistake, a premise that leads to irresponsible interpretation.

Thus, whilst *The Name of the Rose* can be seen as opening the possibility that the way in which we order the universe, the way in which we interpret, cannot be seen as final or absolute, *Foucault's Pendulum* can be read as exploring the opposite possibility. If interpretation cannot close off the world, if it cannot be final, then what is to stop it from simply expanding along the multifarious paths of its own possibility? At the end of *The Name of the Rose* interpretation threatens to become an impotent tool for engaging with the world, nothing more than a game of endless possibilities. This is precisely the theme that *Foucault's Pendulum* picks up, exploring an interpretive event that is premised on the absence of any authority. What I wish to demonstrate is that, far from valorising such free interpretation, *Foucault's Pendulum* suggests that, because interpretation *is* an engagement with something beyond itself, it must strive for sufficiency, even if there can be no authority to guarantee it. Otherwise we face the possibility of being unable to make any decisions regarding our environment at all.

Chapter 7

"Hermetic Drift: A Portrait of Overinterpretation"

7.1

Towards the end of *Foucault's Pendulum* Diotallevi is discovered to have an unspecified form of cancer which leads to his subsequent death. Perhaps a little dramatically, certainly smelling of coincidence, he dies at exactly the same time as Casaubon believes Belbo to have died, midnight on St. John's Eve. *Foucault's Pendulum* is a novel about making connections, and it does not take much suspicion to detect connections in this instance. "There are always connections; you have only to want to find them" (225), and novels tend to encourage this practice by being selective in the details of the universe they present.

Belbo's death at the same time as Diotallevi's is not a coincidence: at least it wouldn't have been to Diotallevi, had he been capable of expressing an opinion. He had

already told Belbo, mere days before, that there were disturbing links between them; "We've sinned against the Word," a dying Diotallevi tells his friend, "against that which created and sustains the world. Now you are punished for it, as I am punished for it. There's no difference between you and me" (564). Diotallevi dies of cancer, his cells "proceeding on their own, creating a history, a unique, private history" (566), as they metastasise, growing beyond the bounds of the code that enables them, the body they collectively form, to live.

According to Diotallevi, Belbo is also suffering from a disease. Perhaps his cells are behaving (though considering the amount of alcohol he consumes, this is surprising), but his mind displays the same pathology Diotallevi recognises as the true source of his own cancer. Both having sinned, both must die—unless atonement can be achieved. "Your story in the outside world is still unfolding," Diotallevi tells a skeptical Belbo, "I don't know how, but you can still escape it" (566). We know, because Casaubon knows —we think that Casaubon knows—that Belbo didn't escape. Not, at least, from the story that was unfolding to trap him. But the question Casaubon poses to himself at the end of *Foucault's Pendulum* is whether or not he managed to escape the disease, an escape that would have made his failure to escape the disease's consequences almost palatable.

The disease to which I allude, to which Diotallevi gives implication, can be termed (in the jargon of semiotics, which is, after all, the "true medicine" within the universes of texts) "hermetic drift". It is a term coined by Eco himself to describe what he considers to be a form of cancer particular to our abductive tissue—the interpretative mind. "Every book," Diotallevi asserts, "is interwoven with the name of God. And we anagrammatized all the books of history, and we did it without praying" (565). Diotallevi's concern, couched in the convenient terms of Cabbala, the interpretative discipline *par excellence*, is that he and Belbo (and, presumably, Casaubon as well) have treated interpretation as a joke, as though it doesn't ever matter how you proceed to make meaning. The illness Diotallevi diagnoses takes the form of a belief that nothing matters in a universe where some things surely do.

Ignoring for the moment the positive claims of Diotallevi's assertions—that "every

book is interwoven with the name of God"—I would like to outline this disease of drift and flippancy as it manifests itself throughout Casaubon's narrative. It is, after all, the cause of the certain death of one of the protagonists, the probable death of another, and the possible death of the third. It is a disease with a high mortality rate—at least in certain communities—and, in the form of the symptoms displayed by those whom it infects, it carries both the narrative and the particular concern that I wish to discern within that narrative. So let me start with the pathology, and I will progress later to aetiology and case history.

7.2.

The disease to which Diotallevi alludes, hermetic drift, is introduced into the world of the Trio by the Diabolicals, via the Garamond Press. It all began, as they say, with Colonel Ardenti. Ardenti brings to Belbo a document which he has written and wants published, a document which purports to interpret another document, one which he had found, hidden in the library of a student of the occult. The story Ardenti tells the skeptical Belbo and Casaubon is not just the tale of adventure and intrigue that the colonel evidently thinks. It is also a tale of how someone has come to a text, mute by nature, and made it speak: it is a tale of interpretation. As such, Ardenti's tale is problematic, and whilst he presents his reading as the only conclusion possibly allowed by the text itself, supported by unassailable evidence, his interlocutors (and most readers), painfully aware of the textuality of his story, cannot help but find them suspect.

Ardenti arouses our suspicion for several reasons. Perhaps first and foremost is the way he seems to get just a little too involved in the story he is telling. Not only the arrogance with which he seems to see the Templars as somehow his spiritual brothers, but also his undignified excitement, sit uncomfortably with his audience. "His eyes were moist as he looked at us, and so were his lips and mustache" (138); to get over-enthused, especially in public, is not a thing to inspire respect. Furthermore, as his epic continues, it degenerates into a mythical tale as the colonel manages to include such fantastic locations as Monsalvat, Agarrtha and Avalon in what he wants Belbo (and us) to believe is a plan

to conquer the world. Predictably, his credibility suffers as he, quite literally, goes off with the fairies. And, not the least, he has a tendency to be loose with his evidence, most notably in the way he draws constellations at whim, and with a disturbing frequency.

All in all, the colonel's attempt to explain the mystery of the Templars offends our sense of reasonableness. He fits neatly into Belbo's characterisation of the "Lunatic":

> A lunatic is easily recognised. He is a moron who doesn't know the ropes. The moron proves his thesis; he has a logic, however twisted it may be. The lunatic, on the other hand, doesn't concern himself at all with logic; he works by short circuits. For him, everything proves everything else. The lunatic is all idée fixe, and whatever he comes across confirms his lunacy. You can tell him by the liberties he takes with common sense, by his flashes of inspiration, and by the fact that sooner or later he brings up the Templars. (66,67)

Basically, Ardenti just doesn't know how to play the game. He makes no attempt to cover his tracks once he gets going, and consequently loses his audience's sympathy.

Nevertheless, to look closely at the way Ardenti constructs his theory of the Templar master plan invites some surprises, given the neatness of his fit into the lunatic mould. As Ardenti moves from a "surprising fact" to a series of conclusions, he is following the same pattern demonstrated by William of Baskerville—whom none (but himself, perhaps) would be tempted to label "a moron who doesn't know the ropes". If William and Ardenti share a methodology, however, the question that would necessarily pose itself is how Ardenti can have come to such far-fetched conclusions on the basis of sound reasoning? I suggest that the answer may be that Ardenti's reasoning is not sound, because he violates the "common sense" advocated by William's "reasonableness," abandoning William's criteria of economy.

Ardenti begins with a problem; why was the king of France able to destroy the Templars so easily, when the Templars had such great power? That this is a *bona fide* problem has already been proposed by Casaubon, who described the Templar's trial as "full of silences, contradictions, enigmas, and acts of stupidity. The acts of stupidity were the most obvious, and, because they were inexplicable, they generally coincided with the enigmas" (95). Thus perplexed, our colonel begins as the good detective should, not so much by observation as by hypothesis. In my discussion of *The Name of the Rose* I

outlined the method employed by William, termed abduction by Peirce, Eco and Sebeok, described as the process of proposing rules that would account for events and attempting to discover if those rules are actually useful in the "world out there." Ardenti, in keeping with his great precursors, Baskerville, Zadig, and Holmes, posits a rule. In order to account for the events of the Templars destruction he suggests that there is a secret rule which accounts for the events of the Templar's destruction.

Ardenti decides that the Templars must have possessed a powerful secret, for which they were willing to sacrifice the immediate power of their order. In order to protect their knowledge, they went underground, allowing everybody to think them destroyed. Having proposed this hypothesis, Ardenti proceeds to interpret the "unconnected data" which confronts him as though it is an event of the rule. In other words, he makes sense of the evidence as though it fits his hypothesis, as Peirce asserts all investigation must, and as William demonstrated so clearly to Adso. The results of Ardenti's investigation are promising. He is lead from speculation about the underground location of the secret Templar stronghold to the discovery of a mysterious manuscript, drawn up from the caverns he postulated as being the Templars most likely hiding place, and accompanied by a host of esoteric books.

The mysterious manuscript is, however, far from simple in itself. It consists of two parts; the first an encoded text, reading like an incantation of Agrippa's to summon angels, the other an incomplete message in verse form. Both, furthermore, are presumably in the hand of a mysterious Ingolf, reputed to have explored the caverns of Provence, and to have somehow come by a reasonable fortune. Ardenti, guided by his proposed Rule, suggests that Ingolf's text may be a transcription of a manuscript which he had found in the Provence caverns, within a valuable container. The container accounted for Ingolf's comfortable financial position, whilst the message within apparently lead to a lifetime's study of the occult, evidenced by the library in the missing man's study.

The key to Ardenti's investigation lies in his interpretation of Ingolf's manuscript, an interpretation he commences assuming that it is somehow related to the mystery of the

Templars. He is subsequently able to demonstrate that the coded text can be cracked by applying to it the methods of the great Renaissance cryptologist Trithemius, revealing a reference to thirty six invisibles divided into six groups. The incomplete message can, in turn, be filled in to provide an amplification of the reference to the invisibles, offering a (rather formalised) account of the Templar's plan to reap the rewards of their secret knowledge. Thus Ardenti is able to justify his assumptions, for he has demonstrated that by working from his initial premises the evidence before him (and around him) makes sense, becomes understandable. The result guarantees the premise.

But Ardenti's method, despite its apparent similarities to the abductive process employed by William, differs in one crucial respect—in its utilisation of the possible. Ardenti is faced by a situation where sequences of disparate data require unification in order for them to make sense. But in providing a rule which would govern the events, he fails to take into account the possibility that more than one rule may possibly suffice. William irritates Adso for precisely the opposite reason; William is always entertaining the possible, and testing his hypotheses against the data presented to him, risking his abductions. This is not, however, the colonel's style. Having proposed a rule that would account for the multifarious data surrounding the Templar's disappearance, he then makes that Rule sacrosanct.

Rather than allow his hypothesis to be subjected to the rigour of the data he confronts, Ardenti treats his data with a selectivity born of his hypothesis. Challenged by Diotallevi's recognition of the flaws in his cosmological associations, the Colonel explains his method to our three friends:

> "Gentlemen, gentlemen, you know as well as I do that everything depends on how you draw the lines. You can make a wain or a bear, whatever you like, and it's hard to decide whether a given star is a part of a given constellation or not. Take another look at the Virgin, make Spica the lowermost point corresponding to the Provençal coast, use only five stars, and you'll see a striking resemblance between the two outlines."
> "You just have to decide which stars to omit," Belbo said.
> "Precisely," the Colonel agreed. (147)

Ardenti does not offend against our sense of what is reasonable simply because he entertains a hypothesis before he examines the evidence. That in itself, as I suggested in

my discussion of *The Name of the Rose*, is unavoidable: it is the way in which we engage with the world around us. Rather, Ardenti offends because he is unwilling to expose his hypothesis to evidence that may disconfirm it. Like Bernard his prejudice is born of arrogance, and refuses to entertain the possibility of error.

In asserting that the shapes we recognise in constellations depend on our decision of which stars to omit, Ardenti is undoubtably correct. There are no essential forms in the heavens, there is no absolute template within which the stars may be seen to produce the forms with which they are identified. In this sense the colonel is certainly justified in manipulating the forms of the constellations, for there is no absolute criteria which could countermand his decisions. However, whilst it might be true that there are no absolute forms in the heavens, that does not mean that the maps we construct of the constellations have no value at all. That their value is merely arbitrary, a social convention, does not give leave to re-arrange the meaning of the forms at will. In trying to use the significance of similarity, Ardenti must in fact recognise the socially established form of the constellation. To do otherwise is, paradoxically, to imply that the constellation exists in essence, and that it's form is irrelevant.

Ardenti fails, on "reasonable" estimation, when he attempts to derive significance from a connection which is perfectly acceptable within the terms of his hypothesis but which requires a certain fluidity on behalf of the data with which he is dealing. The constellation of the Virgin, as the piece of data for which Ardenti is trying to account, is not, as he might suppose, the stars of which it is composed, but the shape convention and history have imposed upon them. Thus, in establishing the connection, and drawing any subsequent significance, he must take into account the socially established criteria for the composition of the constellation, not, as he attempts to do, construct the form of the constellation on his own initiative. He is, in effect, confusing one issue of significance for another, suggesting that the decision to allocate significance to certain stars is codeterminate with his own attempt to establish the significance of his propositions.

Ardenti can be seen to follow what is a basically sound method of detection, but to follow it incorrectly. He refuses to allow the possibility that an encounter with data could

necessitate a revision of his initial hypothesis, of the Rule which he is proposing should unite all the requisite data. His answer to Casaubon, when the latter questions his reconstruction of Ingolf's manuscript, is revealing, both of his approach, and of his lack of subtlety: "But Ingolf," Casaubon objects, "may have made errors in transcription." "You don't know that he did," Ardenti responds, "whereas I know Ingolf's transcription is true, because I see no way the truth could be otherwise ..." (131). Ardenti has not proposed a Rule by means of imagining many possible situations in which the apparent data may conform and make unified sense, as is William's method; he has proposed a Rule on the basis of beliefs that he has held prior to his acquaintance with the data. Such a Rule cannot brook disagreement.

Thus we could say that Ardenti allows prejudice to dictate the way he makes sense of the events of the Templar's destruction. He brings a theory to the facts, and he forces the facts to fit that theory. His argument regarding the composition of the Virgin offends because he is playing loose with the details. Belbo's wry comment, "You just have to decide which stars to omit" suggests that the colonel is transgressing the rule that the subject cannot alter the object. But, as I have tried to demonstrate with regard to *The Name of the Rose*, prejudice, although guaranteed to offend, is a precondition of knowledge—at the very least, of that form of knowledge which is attained by the process of abduction. Ardenti, then, may offend—especially in that he flaunts his prejudice in a clumsy and arrogant fashion—but he should present no danger to the likes of Belbo and Casaubon, who instantly recognise, and abjure, his excess.

7.3.

Ardenti is a lunatic, betrayed by his clumsiness. When the Trio adopt his plan, they also adopt his methods, but they, unlike the colonel, are not clumsy. Casaubon, Belbo and Diotallevi are able to bring to the question of the Templar's secret a vastly more informed perspective and a decidedly more subtle approach. Our Trio know the ropes; according to Belbo's distinction, they are fully fledged morons. As such, the Trio are a vast improvement on the Colonel, and their narrative exceeds that of Ardenti on every

count, but they are still faithful to his methods, if under the guise, initially at least, of parody. This, of course, provides the reader with a far more lucid account of the disease of drift than is available from observing Ardenti. Not only do the Trio reveal the workings of the moronic mind but, in the name of parody, they present them clearly and concisely as deliberate strategies.

Immersed in the texts of the Diabolicals following Signor Garamond's decision to enter his publishing houses into the realm of esoterica, the idea of parodying the logic that surrounds them, of playing a game with what their authors take so seriously, gradually takes shape in the minds of the Trio. The immediate catalyst is Belbo's discovery of the possibilities of permutation provided by his computer, Abulafia. He begins innocently, experimenting with language games, entering random sentences and phrases, and instructing Abu to rearrange them as a linear sequence.

The result, a sequence of lines of somewhat mysterious character, is formally reminiscent of a poem. Indeed the effect is poetic, with each line, originally random and unconnected to any context, now "grounded" in the context of the sequence. Diotallevi quickly realises the possibilities such a combinatory tool offers; with Abu you can feed in the entire Torah, and then watch as it is re-arranged at random, until the true recombination is discovered (374). A digitised Temurah. Belbo is more cautious, recalling Diotallevi's own assertion that the sheer number of elements precludes such a venture, and it is Casaubon's idea of recombining instead propositions discovered in the texts of the Diabolicals that is adopted as the game of the moment.

"What if," Casaubon asks, "you fed it a few dozen notions taken from the works of the Diabolicals ..." (375). And so contributions are selected from some available manuscripts and entered into Abu's memory, along with the necessary logical connectors; "therefore," "this proves that," *etcetera*. Diotallevi suggests that "neutral" data should be included, propositions that are not already connected with a plot imagined by the Diabolicals. Thus Belbo and Casaubon add "Minnie Mouse is Mickey's fiancée" to the rest. Diotallevi's feeling that such glibness is perhaps stretching the requirement for something neutral is countered by Belbo, who articulates one of the key characteristics of

the Diabolicals: "No, we must overdo it. If we admit that in the whole universe there is even a single fact that does not reveal a mystery, then we violate hermetic thought" (375).

The rationale behind the parody is, at this stage, fairly simple. Abu takes randomly chosen, isolated propositions, and by combining them to form a linear sequence, provides a "text," mirroring the illogical approach of the Diabolicals. The result, as Belbo points out to an unimpressed Diotallevi, still requires further interpretation in order to be "understood," but it is a text. Abu does not provide its own interpretation, its own narrative, any more than it combines random lines to make a poem. Rather it takes data and provides it, by virtue of random arrangement, with a context, or, in the case of a proposition excised from an existing context, with a new context, providing the starting point for an interpretation.

Neither the lines "I count the nights, the sistrum sounds," nor "the rubber plant is free" make any particular sense standing by themselves, with no context to which to refer them. Indeed, they could mean just about anything. But, when juxtaposed with each other, and with the other phrases Belbo has entered, they become grounded, they are provided with a context according to which we can make sense of them. Abu does not itself provide that sense—it does not provide a print-out explaining that "the rubber plant" refers to β, it merely provides connections, and like Adso, leaves to the reader the task of explaining those connections.

Thus Belbo can interpret the output as a "poem," not because Abu writes poetry, but because it allows for a reassessment of meaning in such a way as to remind Belbo of poetic effects. In the same way Abu, by randomly selecting items entered about the occult, and presenting them in a linear sequence, provides a new context for the isolated propositions, and new "meanings" are able to emerge as a result. Diotallevi is unimpressed because all he sees is a list of propositions, no different from that which was entered in. Belbo replies that he is being short sighted: "you don't see the connections" (376). To Belbo, the juxtapositions are interesting, they suggest new ways of understanding old propositions. You just have to suggest reasons for why they are

connected the way they are, and a narrative emerges.

The narrative that results from Abu's combinatory efforts is still dependant to an extent on the data entered in the beginning. Belbo's construction of a story is ingenious, but the connections are far from original.

> "Nobody would take that seriously," Diotallevi said.
> "On the contrary, it would sell a few hundred thousand copies," [Casaubon] said grimly. "The story has already been written, with slight variations ..."
> "Ye Holy Seraphim!" Diotallevi said. "Then this machine says only what we already know." And he went out, dejected. (377)

Playing largely with data drawn from texts which already display a propensity to rearrange the information they use, the Trio simply mirror the conclusions already reached by the Diabolicals. As Casaubon realises, "The challenge isn't to find occult links between Debussy and the Templars. Everybody does that. The problem is to find occult links between, for example, cabala and the spark plugs of a car" (377). The elements with which the Diabolicals routinely play are, by now, themselves overcoded within their alternative contexts. As Aglie demonstrates with his pre-emptive summation of one such text, there is little novelty to be found when the same old propositions are recombined. The trick, the secret to a good parody, is to take brand new elements, and to play the same old game with them.

Thus Belbo goes to work on a driver's manual, and demonstrates the potency of the Diabolicals strategy of drift. A driver's manual, it is reasonable to assume, has a relatively overcoded context; that of automobiles, their use and maintenance: "automobilia". Within this context, it functions as a set of instructions on, say, how to change the oil, or to replace a faulty spark plug. Unless the manual was written in a foreign language, and is therefore unintelligible, or the reader is a fool who cannot move from instruction to action (probably most of us, when it comes to car manuals ...), then there is usually no need to challenge a reading of the manual in this context: there is no need to question "automobilia" as the "governing topic" of the text.

As long as our interpretative efforts translate into successful actions—as long as our reading of the manual leads (at least potentially) to the correct performance of an oil

change—then we are comfortable with our acceptance of the governing topic. Normally, we would only suspect our choice of topic if our interpretation produces unsatisfactory results ("put the oil and the radiator in of hole and allow settling to occurrence," leading to our putting the oil in the radiator, would raise questions). But even in cases of unsatisfactory results, there are other issues that can be dealt with before we call into question the very assumption's of what the text is "about". Few of us, no matter how badly we cope with a *Gregory's* manual that appears to be about *our* car, would actually question that its governing topic is, indeed, "automobilia".

Casaubon's quip about neutral data, however, makes Belbo suspicious. What if *Gregory's*—what if the whole automobile industry—have a hidden agenda? What if the whole transport element of automobilia is just a front, a convenient surface, concealing something more profound? This is the point from which Ardenti began, a distrust of the apparent. But Ardenti's suspicion was too easy—anyone can see that the surface account of the Templars remains an enigma, demanding further effort. Belbo is starting from a point akin to paranoia, and his explication is consequently more demanding. But, applying the same criteria as before, Belbo succeeds.

> You were right. Any fact becomes important when it's connected to another. The connection changes the perspective; it leads you to think that every detail of the world, every voice, every word written or spoken has more than its literal meaning, that it tells us of a Secret. The rule is simple: Suspect, only suspect. You can read subtexts even in a traffic sign that says "No littering." (377,378)

The result is impressive. In a *tour de force* of cabala and the car, Belbo demonstrates the irrefutable similarities between the design of an automobile and the cosmology of cabala. The conclusion is obvious; the car serves as a mirror, an icon, for cabala. To the true initiate, to the one simply willing to see, the car *speaks of* the mysteries of the universe.

Belbo is clever, his analysis subtle, keen, and informed. It is also a parody, a game, a construction he knows to be fictional. But it is also intriguing. Casaubon is fascinated, and from there, via a trip to the ancient Templar stronghold of Tomar where his own suspicion is fuelled, it is a short journey to the Plan. With the driver's manual Belbo had supplied for himself the element which he had previously relied on Abu to provide, the

actual connections. Abu's shuffling of the given elements always provides or reshapes the context in which a proposition finds itself, but now Belbo discovers that if you take a series of propositions, already coherent and accountable by a context, and simply replace the governing topic—take away "automobilia," put in cosmology—everything looks different again. The sequence of propositions itself remains the same, but the associations that need to be made, the "outside" information that needs to be marshalled in order to make the text understandable, alters.

When we are examining the Gregory's, when we encounter the term "oil," under the guidance of the governing topic ("automobilia") we actualise elements of our "encyclopaedic entry" for oil that concern automobiles. We bring to mind—actualise—such associations as; dark golden, low viscosity, black-when-dirty, 20-W50, lubricant, don't-get-it-all-over-my-carpet. At the same time, associations such as cooking, pale golden, hair decoration, babies, mono-unsaturated and pimples are left untapped, or repressed, they are narcotised (Eco 1979, 23) The choice of which associations we bring to bear, of which connections we make, is therefore the result of the selection of the governing topic, and a change in that topic brings, to the same string of propositions, a totally different series of connections.

As well as simply providing new connections, altering the governing topic can also make the elements of a text no longer cohere. If a text is a sequence of propositions for which we can account by a narrative, then a series of apparently incoherent propositions —surprising data, in the terms of William's abductive method in *The Name of the Rose*— demands interpretative *effort*. That is, confronted by a curiosity, it is necessary to determine how juxtapositions create connections, and what those connections mean. This is what Belbo does with his driver's manual, he approaches the text and *makes* it curious by replacing its governing topic.

He is, in effect, creating a new text, re-writing it, re-directing the semiotic connections, actualising new associations in accordance with his novel topic. And the text does not resist. It allows Belbo's re-connections, it allows him to unplug it from the source of its meaning, and to reconnect it to a different source, apparently without

trauma. So pliant is it to his wishes that Belbo is able to deny that he is actually performing an interpretation. He asserts instead that he is merely discovering what the text itself always already said. "You don't say," Casaubon remarks at the end of Belbo's reconstruction. "I am not the one who says," Belbo replies; "it is the thing itself that says" (378).

In this way, Belbo advances, and illustrates, the attitude of suspicion maintained by the colonel. If the thing itself is able to reveal meanings other than those commonly ascribed—in preference to those commonly ascribed—then the thing itself must always be looked at suspiciously. And if you believe that there is a master narrative, a governing topic that governs much, if not everything, then that suspicion is directed at trying to see everything in terms of this master narrative. One such master narrative is the Plan, although it is an inverted one. Our Trio do not believe that there *is* a master narrative, their task is to *create* a master narrative, to show the Diabolicals that it is easy to do, and that the mania for revealing can be just as easily a passion to create. But the games that are the most fun are those in which we can most lose ourselves.

7.4.

The disease of drift manifests itself in what Casaubon describes as the losing of "that intellectual light that allows you always to tell the similar from the identical, the metaphorical from the real" (468). Its chief symptom is the creating of syllogisms on the basis of convenient connections: Raymond Chandler's initials are the same as those of the Brethren of the Rosy Cross, therefore Chandler was a Rosicrucian. But drift involves more than just bad logic, it also involves a construction of narratives in a way that is not responsible to the constraints of the world around them. To interpret a sign involves making it fit within a narrative. Drift becomes, to both Ardenti and to the Trio, a mechanism to construct a narrative, an interpretative strategy that first creates a curious text, and then provides the means to disambiguate it. "We were shaping the Plan, which, like soft clay, obeyed our thumbs, our narrative desires" (450).

Ardenti, the lunatic, fails to realise what he is doing in this regard. To him, his

methods are objective; they are "unassailable," based on "abundant evidence"(135,143). He is blind to the nature of his strategy, and so he ignores the way it influences his conclusions. The Trio *are* aware of what they are doing; as parodists they have consciously adopted the strategy of hermetic drift. Nevertheless, their consciences bother them as their game becomes an obsession, and it is only in Casaubon's narrative of reflection that their behaviour is analysed. It is Aglie, the refined and aloof doyen of the esoteric, who, distancing himself from the Diabolicals and their lunacy on the one hand, and the poverty of the Enlightenment on the other provides a justification for, and defence of, the mechanisms and motivation of Drift.

Aglie is the epitome of suspicion, seeing, as Casaubon is learning to, the ostensible as a facade, as a gesture of concealment, behind which true meaning lies. The universe is, therefore, to be probed and interrogated, rather than merely observed, if knowledge is to be gained. Thus the enlightenment, and all of its methods and attitudes, are eschewed. But the question must arise—if knowledge is hidden, if it must be read according to the "refined time of revelation" (394), rather than the linear, causal time of the Enlightenment, what form will it take, and how can we gain access to it? In suspecting the surface and rejecting everything Cartesian, Aglie is simply another Diabolical, although far keener, far more refined than most. It is his answer to the question of what form of knowledge the initiated seek that sets him apart and gives him a place of his own.

Speaking to Casaubon about the links between the Templars and the Rosicrucians, Aglie asserts; "History does not happen randomly. It is the work of the Masters of the World" (208). Just as any Diabolical, Aglie doubts the validity of accepted history. Ardenti argued that history is written by winners, and that according to the winners of the middle of our century, people like himself should not exist. Therefore, he reasoned, the existence of events ignored by others is necessarily true. Aglie is less specific; "Isn't it said that history is a bloodstained and senseless riddle? No, impossible; there must be a Design" (311). History cannot be senseless, driven by mere randomness—otherwise why go on living? Thus, history becomes a curious text, for which an answer, a Rule that would account for it, must be found.

If there is such a Rule, one which accounts for everything, then everything must bear its traces. Every event has been shaped *by* the Rule, and therefore will speak *of* it. It is for this reason that Aglie entertains the syncretism that he displays throughout his acquaintance with Casaubon, from his grasp of Afro-Brazilian spirituality to his tolerance of the bumbling occultists he nevertheless regards as brothers. All knowledge, he maintains, must contain fragments of the Truth, elements which point to the Rule beyond, perhaps even despite, their own aims.

But for Aglie there is a twist. As the Trio parody the Diabolicals' illogic, drawing up the most cosmic plot of them all, they are, as the Diabolicals are wont to do, describing a Rule. They are, as true scientists, pinning down the Rule that governs history, explaining it in order to control it. Providing such clarity is the aim of the Plan, as it was Ardenti's aim when he first brought the Provins Message to Belbo. To Aglie, however, Rules function differently. To assert that the Masters of the World direct the path of history is not, to Aglie, the same as asserting that six groups of six individuals manipulate events to their advantage. Casaubon and co., accepting the premise of the underground directorate, seek to put names to hidden faces. Aglie, on the contrary, is willing to leave unknown not only the names of the hidden superiors, but also their very natures.

"Over the centuries men far from ignorant have thought of the Masters or the King of the world not as physical beings but as a collective symbol, as the successive, temporary incarnation of a Fixed Intention" (311). The Rule is accepted by Aglie not only as unknown, as is the riddle the Trio set out to solve, but also as unknowable. History is governed, not by hidden faces, but by an intention. To grasp the face, the Masters or the King, is merely to grasp a symbol. The face is not, in itself, the intention, it is merely the trace of the Rule, which always lies beyond.

This is the fundamental principle of the "Masters of the World" in Aglie's epistemology, as he explains to Casaubon:

"Naturally, the Masters of the World protect themselves through secrecy. And that is why anyone who says he is a master, a Rosicrucian, a Templar is lying. They must be sought elsewhere."

"Then the story goes on endlessly."

"Exactly. And it demonstrates the shrewdness of the Masters."

"But what do they want people to know?"

"Only that there's a secret. Otherwise, if everything is as it appears to be, why go on living?"

"And what is the secret?"

"What the revealed religions have been unable to reveal. The secret lies beyond". (208)

Aglie privileges the "Age of the Antonines," the second and third centuries A.D., because the ethos of this period emphasised the ambivalence of such a deferral. "Knowledge," he argues, "is elusive and volatile; it escapes measurement" (185). Thus, for Aglie, the positing of the necessity for a Rule does not equate with the positing of *a* Rule, *qua* definable entity. Knowledge is realising that there is something which one cannot know.

Aglie's epistemology, therefore, leads him to a situation where everything, every event, exists not of and for itself, but as the trace of an unknowable absolute. It exists to point to the incomprehensible. This means that the universe becomes a web of events with a common meaning, and, therefore, inherent and necessary similarities. Everything *must* speak of everything else, if only it is recognised that they share the same impetus, the same sufficient cause. Aglie explains this to the Trio in a diatribe against the petty discoveries of occultists, such as the pyramidologist Piazzi Smyth. To find correspondences is, he argues, in itself no surprise. Diotallevi, salivating over the numerological correspondences Aglie has just revealed in a humble lottery kiosk, is disappointed by this admission, which suggests that Aglie is, after all, simply skeptical.

But Aglie is not just another skeptic. "On the contrary," he tells Diotallevi, " I believe firmly. I believe the universe is a great symphony of numerical correspondences, I believe that numbers and their symbolisms provide a path to special knowledge" (289). But the rigours of discovery are scorned. The occultists should realise that such correspondences are necessary and, as such, are mundane. "Why must it demonstrate that which could not be otherwise? If there is a secret, it is much more profound" (289). Once again, Aglie joins Ardenti's path, but only for long enough to emphasise the

subsequent diversion. Both see a certainty that cannot be otherwise, but whereas Ardenti sees a truth that he has contained, Aglie sees a Truth that is "more profound," beyond containment.

To Aglie, it cannot be the discovery of the correspondence that is of interest. That the lottery kiosk has similarities with the pyramids is, as a revelation, trite. (Who would care that the pyramid "speaks" of a lottery kiosk?) What is important is that the correspondences reveal a design. If everything is a symbol of everything else, then chasing the chain of similitudes is both endless and pointless, and Aglie recognises this. The inexhaustibility of correspondence provides a certain freedom; "with numbers you can do anything you like" (288). But in revealing the similarities between the pyramid and the kiosk, the similarity itself, the act of signifying another, in turn signifies the Rule. Correspondences act as traces of the unknowable absolute.

Chapter 8

"Case History: Jacopo Belbo, Editor"

8.1

The question that haunts *Foucault's Pendulum* is why Belbo should be so drawn to drift as a philosophy capable of ordering his life, and why his fascination should have the disastrous consequences it does. Initially diametrically opposed to Ardenti's passionate commitment to dubious interpretation, and nonplussed by Aglie's sophisticated esotericism, Belbo nevertheless becomes, of the Trio, the most affected by hermeticism, prompting Casaubon to attempt the reconstruction of Belbo's motives that constitutes the narrative of *Foucault's Pendulum*. In a reading which sees the Trio's exploitation of semiotic possibilities as a celebration of interpretive freedom (answering the oppressive absolutism of William's opponents in *The Name of the Rose*) the question becomes why Belbo suffers such a disturbing fate just when he seems to have grasped the freedom of drift. I wish to suggest, however, that Casaubon's account of the reasons which underlie

Belbo's fascination with hermeticism constitute a warning about the nature of drift as a hermeneutic. Far from celebrating freedom, Belbo's seduction highlights the negative role desire plays in the belief in free-play.

The reader's grasp of Belbo's character develops as the novel unfolds, as we are confronted—via Casaubon's own developing perspective on his friend—with more and more data which we are compelled to take into account in our construction of the textual device that is "Belbo." Early impressions tend to cast Belbo as a quiet, perhaps strong, perhaps resigned, but certainly skeptical character. From his vantage point at the bar in Pilade's, he surveys a world which he seems to think has gone mad.

Casaubon's descriptions of his first encounters with Belbo are striking. Belbo is a calm figure, surrounded by the unruly passions of a society in flux, casually disdaining everything.

> It wasn't just his gaze. Belbo could dismiss you with the smallest gesture, a brief interjection. Suppose you were trying hard to show that it was Kant who really completed the Copernican revolution in modern philosophy, suppose you were staking your whole future on that thesis. Belbo, sitting opposite you, with his eyes half-closed, would suddenly look down at his hands or at his knee with an Etruscan smile. Or he would sit back with his mouth open, eyes on the ceiling, and mumble, "Yes, Kant . . ." Or he would commit himself more explicitly, in an assault on the whole system of transcendental idealism: "You really think Kant meant all that stuff?" Then he would look at you with solicitude, as if you, and not he, had disturbed the spell, and he would then encourage you: "Go ahead, go ahead. I mean, there must be something to it. The man had a mind, after all." ... Belbo's remarks had a way of making you see the vanity of things, and they delighted me. (55,56)

Casaubon recalls that his initial response was that Belbo's polite cynicism masked a belief that everything anyone else did was trivial. But, no matter what the mask was there to hide, Belbo's image was typically Piedmontese, typically removed and skeptical.[16]

Nor was Belbo's ability to find a way in which to pour scorn on an idea or a person simply a superficial game of one upmanship. Belbo was quite capable of turning his skepticism on himself. As he began, bit by reluctant bit, to open up to Casaubon,

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[16] Note Belbo and Diotallevi's assertion that Casaubon can't be a true skeptic because he doesn't come from Piedmont—"No, you're only incredulous, a doubter, and that's different" (33).

revealing aspects of himself normally hidden well away from public scrutiny, Casaubon began to realise the complexities of the man with whom he seemed to be becoming involved. Many of those complexities had to do with Belbo's sense of pathos at his perceived losses, a sense of pathos Belbo was always quick to arrest, to analyse, and to dismiss as unbecoming. So much so that Casaubon wrote of him, "I never knew a man who could pity himself with such contempt" (68).

The Belbo we first encounter with Casaubon is no gullible fool, easily swayed by whoever voices an argument the loudest. On the contrary, he appears to take delight in revealing the world's fools for what they are, even if only to himself. Casaubon, reflecting on why Belbo participated in Manutius' unethical game with the SFA's, recalls

> For a long time I thought he did it because it enabled him to pursue his study of human folly from an ideal observation point. As he never tired of pointing out, he was fascinated by what he called stupidity—the impregnable paralogism, the insidious delirium hidden behind the impeccable argument. (251)

This study of human folly may indeed, as Casaubon suggests, have been a mask. But the fact remains—Belbo was nobody's fool. His was a keen mind, clearly able to discern between what was reasonable and what was not, with strong convictions about what constitutes the distinction.

The account of Casaubon's very first encounter with Belbo, an accidental meeting at Pilade's, provides an insightful commentary on Belbo's awareness of the foibles of human nature. Over a friendly drink, Belbo explains to Casaubon his division of human kind into four categories; fools, cretins, morons and lunatics. The morons, he asserts, are the most insidious, for they subvert logic subtly, and they hide it well. Moreover, they often reach the correct conclusion, but they do so by pursuing irrational means. Casaubon counters this definition; "You mean it's okay to say something that's wrong as long as the reason is right." "Of course," Belbo replies, "Why else go to the trouble of being a rational animal?" (65).

However, even as he diagnoses humanity, Belbo is careful to avoid implicating himself in any obsequience to Order. As he explains his views on human folly to Casaubon in Pilade's he says off handedly; "look, don't take me too literally. I'm not

trying to put the universe in order. I'm just saying what a lunatic is from the point of view of a publishing house. Mine is an ad-hoc definition" (64). For Belbo, the frustrated, the eternally deferred, everything is an "ad-hoc definition." There is no Absolute definition for Belbo, an absence that goes well beyond the pragmatics of publishing to inform his personality.

This lack of certainty has a profound effect on Belbo, as illustrated by his ambivalence toward writing, an ambivalence that draws together all his personal neuroses and leads him into the nightmare of the Plan. Belbo both desires to write and fears that he has nothing to write about, no "truth" to impart to others that would justify his effort. Unable to divorce himself from the process of writing entirely, Belbo contains his desire —like Casaubon in the tenda umbanda. As an editor he is able to remain true to his decision to go through life as "an intelligent spectator" (23), never preforming, never committing himself, yet remaining close to what he desires by reworking what others have created. His own drive to create he neuters, turning it into, as Casaubon relates, "a mechanical game, a solitary pondering on his own errors" (56). His game is "safe," it is not itself "creation," "for creation had to be inspired by love of someone who is not ourselves. But Belbo, without realizing it, had crossed that Rubicon; he was creating. Unfortunately" (56,57).

Abulafia, his word processor, becomes his "drug," a thing which he uses to alter his world for his own pleasure, and for his own demise. With Abulafia, he can indulge in his craft, the craft that he has chosen not through desire, but through repressed desire. He chose to be an editor because "there was no point in writing without serious motivation. Better to rewrite the books of others, which is what a good editor does" (23). With Abulafia, the possibilities of rewriting the books of others metastasise. No longer bound by the professional constraints of rendering more comprehensible, nor by the physical restraints of constantly reinscribing, he can indulge in all manner of re-combinations, weaving the works of others through his own, weaving concatenations of his own choosing.

His defence against the charge of creation is simple; he who creates must do so out

of "serious motivation," which should, by preference, entail being "inspired by love of someone who is not ourselves." Belbo's notion of creation is a Romantic one. To actually impact on society, on the universe, to be a protagonist, it is necessary to be driven by a higher cause, by an absolute. Only if there is an Intention can we can find the key to the text produced. Hence Belbo is able to hide behind his apparent lack of motivation. The creation of a text is a special event, but he merely plays with those of others, in secret. His privacy is ensured, since Abulafia is, at least potentially, secure.

The play between Belbo's desire to create—his de facto creations—and his fear of creating dominates Casaubon's reflections on the files he recovers from Abulafia. Casaubon sees in this conflict the roots of the Plan, and, of course, the point of departure, the point where the Plan lost the security of its privacy. Belbo's obsession with Abulafia, his delight in the re-combinatory possibilities of electronic memory ("This is better than real memory, because real memory, at the cost of much effort, learns to remember but not to forget" 25) lead him naturally into the combinatory nightmare of the Plan.

Belbo takes to the Plan like a duck to water—if Casaubon becomes hooked, Belbo becomes obsessed. Here is the chance to rewrite history, even if only as a joke: here is the chance to write as a game the book that he never dared to write in reality. But the Plan is more than simply the hobby of a resigned, or even a repressed writer. Thousands of people wish they could write, wish that they could express themselves publicly, convincingly: they do not all become obsessed with recombining the events of history. The Plan capitalises on the frustrations and tensions of a character who cannot reconcile himself to the lack of an Absolute which would govern his understanding of his life. Belbo's fear of creation is only a symptom of his deeper sense of lack, but it is the medium through which his frustration is able to overcome his defences.

Casaubon, hearing Belbo talk of the experiences of his youth in *** during the war, asks why he chose to be an editor, rather than the author of his own tales. "It's all been told," Belbo replies.

> If I had been twenty back then, in the fifties I'd have written a poetic
> memoir. Luckily I was born too late for that. By the time I was old enough
> to write, all I could do was read the books that were already written. On the

other hand, I could also have ended up on that hill with a bullet in my head.
(110)

Here is the point at which Belbo begins to unravel, the point where Casaubon finds the motive behind Belbo's crime. Belbo missed out, because he was too young. He could not write because during the defining moment of his life, he was too young to have anything to write *about*. And with nothing to write about, he became free to write about everything.

8.2.

Belbo's sense of alienation is reinforced by the relationships he has (or desires to have) from the inaccessible Cecilia to the ambiguous Lorenza, and it haunts his memories, finding an outlet in his recollections of his childhood in ***. Present throughout all of Belbo's reflections, it finds its most complete realisation in his fascination with the novel's central motif; Foucault's Pendulum. The pendulum in question swings from the vault of the Conservatoire des Arts et Metiers, formerly the Abbey of Saint-Martin-des-Champs (417), in Paris. Conceived by Jean Bernard Leon Foucault, in 1852, it demonstrates one of the fundamental propositions of physics and cosmology, the rotation of the earth. Central to this demonstration is the pendulum's suspension from a motionless point, a theoretically dimensionless space unaffected by either the rotation of the earth or the forces the earth exerts on the pendulum itself.

Fixed in absence of its own origin, the pendulum is free to trace a pattern in the sand beneath it, the sand that is part of the rotating, fluid, earth. Were the earth itself to be stable, the pendulum would simply trace a single line, back and forth, swing after swing, in an endless series of repetitions. Instead it produces a pattern, a series of lines, each gradually moving away from that traced by the previous swing. Moreover, the pattern varies, and the incidence of its variations vary, according to the location of the pendulum. A pendulum hung in Los Angeles differs in its movements from one hung in Paris, and only on the equator does the plethora of patterns give way to a straight line.

To Belbo, the experience of Foucault's Pendulum comes as an epiphany: "then last year, when I saw the Pendulum, I understood everything" (237). The Pendulum's

scientific purpose rests on a magic that appeals to Belbo—as it does, he claims, to his whole generation, a generation that "ate disappointment for breakfast, lunch, and dinner" (236). Relating his vision of the Pendulum to Casaubon, Belbo explains the source of his frustration, his spectatorship, in terms of generational cycles and the pressures of history.

> First there was Fascism, and even if we were kids and saw it as an adventure story, our nation's immortal destiny was a fixed point. The next fixed point was the Resistance, especially for people like me, who observed it from the outside and turned it into a rite of passage ... For some the next thing was God; for some the working class; and for many, both. Intellectuals felt good contemplating the handsome worker, healthy, strong, ready to remake the world. (236)

Each of the "fixed points" posited by Belbo's generation, the children of the war years, is shattered by the unfolding of events, as each of Belbo's opportunities is denied by the fatal hand of history. Hence the disillusion and disappointment which he endures, a disillusion and disappointment he claims is unknown to Casaubon's generation, which merely toyed with its ideals, and was never betrayed by them. Belbo's generation grew up believing in the Order of the Universe, demanding it, and the universe then shattered around them, leaving them searching the shards for salvation.

The alternative was to deny the need for Order, for Truth, bred into them, claiming for themselves a disinterested and cynical position outside of and beyond fallible ideals. This is the path that Belbo himself had taken. The tension between the need for an Order and the sense of betrayal is not a comfortable one, and Belbo's own history, his distrust of Casaubon, his unhappy attachment to Lorenza, his laconic cynicism, all reflect this profound discomfort with a world that is not what it should be. Given this profound sense of loss and denial, it is not surprising that Belbo should be so profoundly affected by the Pendulum, which encapsulates perfectly in its stark simplicity the confusion of an absent Absolute.

"It may be the atmosphere—" Belbo tells Casaubon, "that it's in a church—but, believe me, you feel a very strong sensation. The idea that everything else is in motion and up above is the only fixed point in the universe ..." (235,236). That the Pendulum is suspended from and revolves around a point that cannot, by definition, move, can be

treated as a strictly technical aspect of an empirical tool—as it is by the young tourist Casaubon encounters in the Conservatoire during his own homage to the Pendulum. "The earth turns, but the point doesn't. That's how it is. Just take my word for it" (6). That is far from what it means to Belbo, however. For him the concept of the unmoving point, the space free of all the temporality and corruption of motion, of time, is imbued with a mystical aura even before the occult notions of the Plan suffuse his mind, as they do Casaubon's during his first encounter.

The Pendulum provides an Absolute, a point unaffected by the oscillations of the universe around it from which the universe can be mapped, known, controlled. It is the space of the mind of God; for as William demonstrates in *The Name of the Rose*, we can map the works of man from the vantage point of the mind of man, but the works of God, containing and constraining us, are beyond our comprehension (*The Name of the Rose* 218). For Belbo, to whom history is not a riddle but a joke, who has been denied every point that could possibility orient his understanding, the Pendulum *is* the mind of God. It offers him at last something that is undeniably *fixed*, something which is beyond the possibility of contestation and revision, something in which he can allow his disappointment to dissipate. The Pendulum explains everything.

Or almost everything. If, "for those who have no faith, [the Pendulum is] a way of finding God again," it is comforting precisely because it does so "without challenging their unbelief, because it is a null pole" (236). Those betrayed by belief, but still yearning for it, can find their repose only in a faith that cannot betray them because it does not exist. As Belbo writes, heavily under the influence of the Plan, the aim becomes "to create an immense hope that can never be uprooted, because it has no root" (529). The Pendulum allows Belbo to find again his sense of propriety: there is an Order in the world, all is well. Yet at the same time, it does not challenge the careful skepticism that he has built, it does not demand anything from him. He can be comforted whilst not believing in that which offers succour.

But such ambiguity also has its negative side, as Belbo admits to Casaubon in a rare moment of candour:

"You see, Casaubon, even the Pendulum is a false prophet. You look at it, you think it's the only fixed point in the cosmos, but if you detach it from the ceiling of the Conservatoire and hang it in a brothel, it works just the same. And there are other pendulums: there's one in New York, in the UN building, there's one in the science museum in San Francisco, and God knows how many others. Wherever you put it, Foucault's Pendulum swings from a motionless point while the earth rotates beneath it. Every point in the universe is a fixed point: all you have to do is hang the Pendulum from it."

"God is everywhere?"

"In a sense, yes. That's why the Pendulum disturbs me. It promises the infinite, but where to put the infinite is left to me. So it isn't enough to worship the Pendulum; you still have to make a decision, you have to find the best point for it." (237)

The Pendulum is thus the point from which the universe is fixed, the grounds for all objectivity, and yet it is in itself subjective. It offers salvation for the human mind, offering to interpret the world, but it requires an act of interpretation by the human mind to call it into existence in the first place.

Belbo's desire for stability, for a point from which to hang his life, is thus thwarted by the Pendulum, rather than eased by it. The Pendulum, like Lorenza, speaks of a presence that can only be known in its absence, an Object of Desire that can only *be* desired, never grasped. The Pendulum's offer of certainty is, once seen for what it is, unsettling because it places itself once again in the subjectivity of the searcher, refusing that searcher anything but an illusion of transcendence. Thus Belbo's distaste of the Absolute, his imposed belief that there is nothing in which to believe is both threatened and reinforced by the dimensionless point from which the Pendulum hangs.

8.3.

In Belbo's initial encounters with the Diabolicals, they are treated unreservedly to his scorn. Falling as they do neatly into the lunatic category of his four-fold division of human kind, he has little sympathy with the mania of Ardenti or the ravings of Bramanti. Perhaps even more than others, he sees them as possessing a belief in the Order of the universe that he finds both laughable and affronting. Not only do they confront Belbo's own profound ambiguity regarding the nature of belief, but their belief is based on the most spectacular mistreatment of logic.

Belbo does, however, gradually become aware of the potential that the Diabolicals method, Drift, offers. Frustrated writer, disillusioned idealist, Belbo the Piedmontese skeptic still harbours a profound yearning for a Truth, something that would inform his life, as is witnessed by his fascination with the Pendulum. And the Pendulum's appeal to this private, disturbing desire is reiterated by Drift, which likewise holds out the offer of an Absolute, a Fixed Point.

The Truth of the Pendulum lies in its unmeasurable point of suspension, providing an Absolute that is inviolable, that cannot disappoint. The concept of the Absolute as presented by the Diabolicals, is, initially, far less profound or mystical than the Pendulum. The Diabolicals approach history with simplistic notions of plots and secret directorates which function as the real reasons for the events of history, unrecognised by the masses who fail to see the necessity of the unity the Diabolicals posit for history. From this perspective, they are unattractive to Belbo, for he sees their wild reasoning, their leaps of logic, as leading them only to bizarre conclusions.

It is only when he realises that Drift actually functions the other way around that he grasps its importance. Drift begins, not with bad logic, but the belief that the logic that provides events, signs, with ostensible contexts, is invalid. To the Diabolicals, and most profoundly to Aglie, the frustrating disjointedness of history must be undergirded by Meaning, by an Absolute that gives a most sublime Sense to what is to us, partaking in history's movement, senseless. This Absolute, however, invalidates any other meaning by virtue of its very transcendence. Truth is, in the philosophy of Drift, always, already, elsewhere, so anything that claims to be a truth, anything that claims to dispense meaning, must be suspected and disregarded, and its subject matter interrogated anew. For Aglie, the reinterpretation must not close itself with a new meaning, but must only seek out the traces of the unsayable, and be always open to reveal what cannot ever be said.

Thus, just as the Fixed Point from which the Pendulum hangs is unmeasurable, the Ultimate Secret that Drift assumes is unsayable. Absent, it guarantees interpretive freedom; posited, it provides a locus for Belief. It is a Truth that cannot be betrayed, unlike the Truths inhabiting Belbo's youth, which ordered his life for a time, but one by

one came tumbling down. As Casaubon says, the disappointed require a Meaning that cannot betray them, an Ideal that will not turn on itself. Because of this, Drift provides Belbo with what the Pendulum only suggests, the chance to believe without risk. Drift offers a Fixed Point that allows Belbo the comfort of knowing that there is an Order, a Reason, but without threatening to be yet another disappointment. Drift is belief without the need for faith.

Belbo's suppressed desire to write constitutes his weakness to Drift, as Casaubon's passion for the forms of ideas, and Diotallevi's involvement in Cabala do for his partners. Given that Belbo's retreat from authorship into the role of spectator and editor is premised on the belief that writing is an imposition of Meaning, a Meaning which he is unable to supply, Drift offers itself as a fascinating game. Belbo soon realises that what to the Diabolicals is a deadly serious way of seeing the world can be turned into a form of play, an exercise of wit somewhat akin to his and Diotallevi's School of Comparative Irrelevance, one which allows him to surreptitiously engage in the play of Meaning.

This is the motivation behind his cabalistic interpretation of the automobile manual. Beginning with the suspicion of the ostensible demanded by Drift, each signifier is freed to engage with the whole plethora of its potential associations. Any and every context within which the sign can move is legitimised in the search for analogies and connections. Belbo is invited to see the text as infinite, and to find in it the order he desires. Unconstrained by the mundane considerations of "meaning" he is able to search out the traces of Meaning.

As a game Drift is merely a matter of progressing from "pig" to "Plato" by chain of free association; it is no more harmful than a crossword puzzle. The danger lies not in the game itself but in Belbo's fascination with the chance to order events as he chooses. His reaction to the Cabalistic reading of the automobile manual is disturbing, as it goes beyond the rather childish delight he gained from his games with Diotallevi. His feverish sense of triumph should have sounded alarm bells in his colleagues, for it is one thing to play with possibilities, but another to believe, along with Ardenti, that your game constitutes a discovery of an ulterior Truth.

It is Belbo's fascination with providing connections, shared with Diotallevi and Casaubon, that gives rise to the grand narrative game that is the Plan. For Belbo, the Plan constitutes a fiction within a fiction, a narrative constructed by means he knows have no basis in reality. That his method is itself fictional is something that Belbo and the others know, as Casaubon admits;

> When we traded the results of our fantasies, it seemed to us—and rightly—that we had proceeded by unwarranted associations, by shortcuts so extraordinary that, if anyone had accused us of really believing them, we would have been ashamed. We consoled ourselves with the realization—unspoken, now, respecting the etiquette of irony—that we were parodying the logic of our Diabolicals. (467)

But for all three, the moments of forgetfulness become more and more frequent, and the Plan is able to assume a role that goes beyond mere playfulness and parody.

Belbo uses the Plan to write, without realising what he is doing. Diotallevi is skeptical of Belbo's initial purchase of Abulafia, on the grounds that it involves a compromise of Belbo's insistence on his role as a spectator. "You swore," he reminds Belbo, "that you'd never write anything of your own." Belbo acquiesces, recalling his vows, but asserts; "If an intelligent spectator hums the second movement on his way home from the concert, that doesn't mean he wants to conduct it in Carnegie Hall." To which Diotallevi responds "So you'll try humming literature to make sure you don't write any" (32). Diotallevi's skepticism is warranted. Belbo believes that by taking the work of others and recombining it on Abu, mixing in his own ideas in the process, he remains an editor, merely playing around the edges of what others have already made. "You alone created," he muses in the file called "Seven Seas Jim," "I merely made a few changes" (71).

In spite of his denials, Belbo's humming on Abu gives vent to his wish to compose, it constitutes a picking up of the clay, "electronic or otherwise" (57), and shaping it according to desire. Initially, Abu provided Belbo with the fascination of creating poems out of random lines, simply rearranging them until they fell into a pleasing shape. Merely "a mechanical game" (56), a toying with possibilities. Gradually, however, Abu became a refuge, a replacement for the closet in his uncle's farmhouse where he stored his

childhood scribblings. Casaubon's interrogation of Abu reveals files that provide kaleidoscopic detail of Belbo's memories, his understanding of the events in his life interwoven more and more with his fantasies, with his desire to create. There are files about his relationships, simple reflections on events and his responses to them, such as "Vendetta," and even "Dream," and files that mix reflection with various embellishments, such as in "Doktor Wagner," where he gives himself a shadow persona; "the viscount started, as if bitten by an asp" (232).

Other files, however, are pure fiction, giving vent to the persistent question of "what if?" "Seven Seas Jim" takes Belbo on a tour of the literature of alienation, casting him as a shipwrecked mariner from the Titanic, plying the Indies as Kurtz. As the Plan takes shape, and Belbo's "humming" assumes its form, these fictional files are replaced by files that build on the Trio's narrative. Belbo takes the strands out of which the Trio are building the Plan, the clinical (if illogical) rewriting of history, and, blending it with his own history, weaves vivid tapestries that make the Plan his own private world. Thus he is able to create as a fiction totally under his control, a new and alternative history in which he inhabits a world totally outside his control.

Belbo is, in effect, creating an alternative universe for himself in the Plan. Progressing from Seven Seas Jim to the Comte de Saint-Germain, Belbo creates a fiction where the elements of his own personal history, like that of the collective history of the world, are stripped of their grounds in mundane, sub-lunar reality, and interrogated for the traces of the Plan. In such a world, he comes face to face with the Absolute, with the Order that maps the universe, that maps his life. As Belbo writes the fiction that is the Plan, he is able to take the place of the author, the giver of meaning.

So the Plan is a game in which Belbo can be what he cannot be in life. It doesn't matter that the Order he provides is madness, it is the ability to bestow, the power of creation, that matters, not the object created. Belbo revels in the chance to be a demiurge, to mould the clay into the design of his own desire. He does so privately, convinced he is only playing, using Abu as his perfect accomplice, committing his files to electronic lock and key, able to be destroyed at a keystroke should exposure threaten.

But although Belbo is able to play his "mechanical game," recombining the events of history (his-story), without inflicting his creation on the public at large, thus preserving his vow of spectatorship, he cannot avoid the temptation his game provides.

"The desire for narrative and the urge to plot is fuelled by our fear of meaninglessness, of death." So says Olav Severijnen, in an essay comparing *Foucault's Pendulum* and *Gravity's Rainbow* (1991, 337). Belbo's resignation to meaninglessness was always tenuous, his decision to be an editor always an issue of regret. Analysing Belbo's frustration, Casaubon asserts that he had not deliberately abandoned theology, the search for Truth: "I had deliberately thrown that address away; [Belbo] had mislaid it and never resigned himself to the loss" (56). Now, in the form of the Plan, Belbo finds the opportunity to again partake in theology. In the world of the Plan, the universe is, like Italy during the war, a conflict between good and evil, a battlefield of black and white, where a bullet is a bullet, and the order of things is known. Within the Plan, Belbo is able to place the Pendulum, and to achieve an Absolute point. The Plan is Belbo's fictional hanging of the universe.

Casaubon says of the Diabolicals need to assume a plot, a secret, that it meets their need to abstain from responsibility, a need that Belbo recognises in himself.

> We offered a map to people who were trying to overcome a deep, private frustration. What frustration? Belbo's last file suggested it to me: There can be no failure if there really is a Plan. Defeated you may be, but never through any fault of your own. To bow to a cosmic will is no shame. You are not a coward; you are a martyr. (619)

Within the confines of his fictional world Belbo can at last find some sort of peace. If the Plan that he creates is real then he, like everything else, must be subject to it. He becomes a puppet pulled by strings of the Unknown Superiors, no longer responsible for his own failure.

The interpretive freedom of hermeticism thus becomes a therapy, a drug, that offers Belbo relief from the remorse and frustration from which he suffers. Tormented, he can withdraw into his creation, and no longer feel the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. "If belief," he confides to Abu, "is absolutely necessary, let it be in a religion that doesn't make you feel guilty. A religion out of joint, fuming, subterranean, without

an end. Like a novel, not like a theology" (528). And, to Belbo, the Plan takes the shape of that religion, providing solace and refuge, protecting him from the neurotic guilt of the missed moment. Belbo becomes addicted to a Plan that is no longer a game, but a saviour, seduced by the possibility of no longer being defeated.

8.4.

Despite Belbo's increasing dependence on the Plan, Casaubon makes it clear in his narrative that it is not inevitable that it should come to control his life as it eventually does. Diotallevi, who sees in the cancer from which he suffers his own destruction by Drift, argues that he can, if only he recognises his problem, escape. "You can't understand," Diotallevi says, trying to convince Belbo that the Plan has become dangerous, "You're the prisoner of what you created. But your story in the outside world is still unfolding. I don't know how, but you can still escape it" (566). Diotallevi's fascination with their narrative game has, he asserts, merged with reality in the form of his own body; his cells have followed the lead of his thoughts, and believed that any truth is acceptable, any pattern is as valid as any other. The transformation of Belbo's fiction is more subtle, being entwined in his emotional health rather than his physical self, but, in the end, the pull is just as irresistible.

Casaubon locates the trigger for Belbo's final descent into the grip of Drift in his relationship with Lorenza. Always a matter of frustration—indeed, born of Belbo's frustration—his desire for Lorenza remains an anchor to the world of his experience, an element of his life he cannot subdue through the Plan. He can explain away his failure— the man with the scar has a more powerful talisman (528)—but he cannot explain away his desire. However, the strength of his desire leads to a correspondingly greater sense of frustration at Lorenza's elusiveness, especially once he begins to see Aglie as his central rival, as Aglie begins to pull Lorenza within the bounds of his own myth.

"How can a man," Casaubon asks, "rush to his own destruction simply because he runs over a dog?" (549). Belbo's fraught trip to the Riviera with Lorenza proves to be the final straw in his relationship with her, the straw that plunges him over his emotional

edge. Frustrated at every turn, his golden chance to be with Lorenza turning rapidly to a farce, and thence to a nightmare, the trip throws his impotence, his failure to ever grasp the Object of Desire, squarely in his face. Unable to bear defeat any longer, he takes the only course of action he sees available; he turns to the Plan.

However, whereas in the past he had found in the Plan a retreat, a place to turn from the pressures of reality, now, angry and humiliated, he turns to the Plan to supplant reality. Casaubon, reflecting on the mania Belbo displayed in the files dealing with the Riviera trip, writes:

> Humiliated by his incapacity to create (and all his life he had dined out on his frustrated desires and his unwritten pages, the former a metaphor of the latter and vice versa, all full of his alleged, impalpable cowardice), he came to realize that by inventing the Plan he had actually created. He fell in love with his golem, found it a source of consolation. Life—his life, mankind's—as art, and art as falsehood. Le monde est fait pour aboutir à un livre (faux). But now he wanted to believe in this false book, because, as he had also written, if there was a Plan, then he would no longer be defeated, diffident, a coward.
>
> And this is what finally happened: he used the Plan, which he knew was unreal, to defeat a rival he believed real. (530)

By writing Aglie into the Plan, Belbo felt that he would be able to exorcise the influence of the Count, as he had rid himself of his anxiety over the Colonel by constructing the Plan out of his story. Within the Plan, he, Belbo was the master, the creator. Placed within the narrative Aglie would, thus, be under his control, deflated, malleable, and Belbo would need fear him no more.

Forgetting, definitively, that the Plan is a fiction, that it *must* be a fiction, or else he would not be able simultaneously to create it and be subject to it, Belbo chooses to believe in the Order he has created. In seeking to draw Aglie into its boundaries, he is, in effect, using Drift as an interpretive strategy, allowing it to determine his behaviour. Within the fiction that is his belief in Drift, he is able to assert the equality of all possible contextual constraints. No meaning can be privileged over another, for all must bow before the Plan, the Absolute. Now, blinded by humiliation, Belbo brings this assumption into the world in which he acts. Having until now held Drift safely in his imagination, removed from his behaviour in the real world, he now unleashes it on the universe, to

force reality to yield to his desire as it has in his fiction.

However, Belbo soon discovers that some interpretations can, and do, possess more utility than others. Tantalising Aglie with the prospect of a solution to the riddle of the Templar plot, Belbo hopes to send his rival on a wild goose chase, hunting for the map to which Belbo alludes. Aglie takes the bait, and soon becomes convinced that Belbo knows a secret so profound and powerful that it would re-direct human history were it to be revealed. Unfortunately for Belbo, however, Aglie fails to disappear as planned. Instead he initiates a complicated but supremely successful trap of his own, into which Belbo unwittingly walks.

Framed for a terrorist bomb attack after having agreed to leave a suitcase on a train for Aglie, and stripped of all outside support, Belbo finds himself, startlingly quickly, at Aglie's mercy. Far from drawing Aglie within his control by "writing him into" the Plan, he has, in fact, become a victim of his own narrative. In trying to use the Plan to interpret the real world, he has abandoned the safety of his imagination and offered the Plan as a narrative for the participation of others, as Casaubon realises;

> We invented a nonexistent Plan, and They not only believed it was real but convinced themselves that They had been part of it for ages, or, rather, They identified the fragments of their muddled mythology as moments of our Plan, moments joined in a logical, irrefutable web of analogy, semblance, suspicion.
> But if you invent a Plan and others carry it out, it's as if the Plan exists. At that point it does exist. (619)

But, in bringing the Plan into objective existence, by sharing it with others, Belbo has not made it true. There is still no map, the Plan is still an empty secret, but only Belbo knows that it is false. And in submitting it to the desires of others, he has lost control of it.

No longer is he in the position of creator. Having chosen to treat the Plan as if it were a valid strategy for engaging with the world, he is now forced to realise that it could never bear such weight. Diotallevi had argued to him that they had blasphemed by re-combining the elements of the Torah without regard, without prayer. "I'm dying," Diotallevi insisted, "because I convinced myself that there was no order, that you could do whatever you liked with any text. I spent my life convincing myself of this, I, with my

own brain. ... I'm dying because we were imaginative beyond bounds" (567). Diotallevi framed his understanding in the terms of the Cabala; to him, the Trio had failed to realise the connections between the Torah and the world. Having played games with the Torah, they had altered the world without knowing what they were doing, and the world was now taking on forms beyond their ability to either understand or control.

Belbo goes to Paris because he has lost control of events. He can no longer provide explanations that allow his actions to succeed. But in going to Paris, Casaubon suggests, he is at least deciding to face his fate openly and honestly, no longer running away. And thus he comes to the Conservetoire, refusing to continue inventing, refusing to bow to the Diabolicals demands for the Truth; a Truth he does not possess, and which he is no longer willing to invent. Casaubon, hidden in the shadows of the Conservetoire, recounts the macabre drama that unfolds as Belbo refuses to bow to his increasingly fanatical captors, and finally ends the show garrotted by the cord of the Pendulum, which slowly rotates beneath him. Whether or not Casaubon's narration is "accurate"—and he himself doubts it; the evidence is missing the next morning, and Wagner pronounces him mad—Belbo's actions, his baiting of Aglie, has lead to a phantasmagoria of uncertainty and disorientation, and Casaubon is left fearing for his own life.

But, despite the drama of the narrative, despite the macabre horror of the sacrifice of Lorenza, the bizarre symbolism of Belbo's hanging, and despite the nauseous disorientation of Casaubon's narration, it is not the corporeal consequences that matter the most. If Belbo's sin was to believe in a fiction, and to allow the lines between good interpretation and bad interpretation to become blurred so that he no longer cared about the difference, then his punishment was to be hoist with his own petard, hung from his beloved pendulum, and Casaubon's narrative becomes just a fantasy, a gothic horror tale of madness and death. But, just as Belbo is no simple lunatic, but a man driven by frustration and desire, so his death is not simply a punishment for his crimes, but something far more confused.

Were Belbo's death to be his punishment, as Diotallevi's sees his own, then the "moral" of Casaubon's narrative would be compromised by its own unreliability at the

vital point. Just when it emerges from the conjectures of trying to reconstruct Belbo's persona from the files he left on Abu, when we might expect some final "objective" eye-witness narration, Casaubon himself begins to slip under the spell of the Pendulum, of the night, and of heaven knows what else that nearly chokes him as he observes the ceremony of Belbo's trial. But such a disorienting loss of interpretive control on Casaubon's part is, perhaps, more relevant to Belbo's demise than an accurate account of an execution would be.

Belbo's crime was not to interpret the world poorly; it was that he attempted to control the world through a narrative that he knew was false, a narrative that he believed only because it offered him release from guilt. As he retreated into the Plan, to punish Aglie, to be the one who chose who, when and how, he was trying to make sense of the world according to his own desires, he was trying to become the Absolute Point. But, far from providing the control he desired, far from being a narrative that enabled him to engage successfully with the world around him, the Plan betrayed him, and, as he ventured further and further into it to escape, it allowed him to be trapped in another's desires. This entrapment is Belbo's death.

Chapter 9

"Back to the Text: Lia to the Rescue"

9.1.

Lia's role in deciding the moral of *Foucault's Pendulum* is an issue of some contention. On the one hand, critics such as Theresa Coletti see her silence as symbolic of the position of women in the novel as a whole. She is given the role of "body," primal and unsophisticated in contrast to the rationality of the male characters. Furthermore, because the tale is spun by Casaubon about Belbo (and Diotallevi), with Amparo, Lia and, especially Lorenza appearing merely as illustrations, highlighting the mania of the males, Coletti sees *Foucault's Pendulum* as reinforcing the notion that women function

only as adjuncts, never as actors. Lia is thus denied a role in reaching the moral conclusion: that is the role of Casaubon, Lia remains silent, a body, a model even, but never a voice (Coletti, 886-889).

Coletti admits that, when it is heard, Lia's voice seems privileged by the text, and mirrors Eco's own arguments about hermetic drift. It is her contention that in spite of this, Lia cannot appear as a positive character within *Foucault's Pendulum*. For other commentators, however, the only concern is Lia's presentation of an alternative to the diseased rationality of the male protagonists. Thus critics such as Victoria Vernon and JoAnn Cannon invoke Lia, especially her "counter-interpretation" of the Ingolf document, as a voice of reason in a story that is hovering on the brink of madness. To Cannon Lia is a presentation of the "good" suspicion that prevents the excesses of drift. "Suspect," says Belbo, "only suspect" (378), but his is a suspicion that has no goal but the total, the absolute. Lia's suspicion, on the other hand, is that of Copernicus and Newton, it has an immediate goal, verifiable and apparent. If it is refuted, it is satisfied; if it succeeds, its success is obvious to all—and always open to challenge.

In these terms Lia actually moves away from the position of "bodily immanence and nature" that Coletti argues for her (889), and appropriates the contrasting space of Reason, of Science as the epitome of man's rational undertaking. Her careful and methodological approach to the keystone of the Plan, the document Ardenti discovered in Ingolf's study, provides a contrast to Ardenti's own method of interpretation that highlights the inconsistencies of drift. It is not that Lia's approach, her "good" suspicion is radically different from that of Ardenti, any more than Ardenti's interpretive technique is radically different from that of William of Baskerville; rather Lia demonstrates the subtle shift that differentiates the reasonable from the lunatic.

The basis of Lia's interpretation of the Ingolf document is the principle of economy. From the signs immediately available to both herself and Casaubon, almost any interpretation is possible, the question is which hypothesis is probable. Recalling William's injunctions to Adso in *The Name of the Rose*, we can and should entertain many possible hypotheses, even the most bizarre, but we should also concentrate our

efforts to build hypotheses that answer to the apparent data with minimal excess requirements: the principle of Ockham's razor. Thus, as Eco points out in "Horns, Hooves, Insteps," the clues provided by Voltaire for Zadig *could* be accounted for by a hypothesis involving a mounted knight in a wondrous panoply having an embarrassing fall. However, a hypothesis revolving only around a horse (if one shod with gold), involving less components and accounting just as well for the available data, is economically preferable (Eco & Sebeok, 213).

The assumptions with which Lia approaches the Ingolf document are what we would tend to see as "commonsense." Fascinated by the intrigue of the colonel's story, seduced by the adventure of the subterranean discovery, the Trio bring to the fragmented text assumptions of mystique, which translate easily into hypotheses of conspiracies and plots. Lia, however, removed from the mania of the colonel, and disturbed by the passage of the Plan, is not so tempted. Seeing the document for the first time, she approaches it with a sense of the mundane. Ingolf's document is simply a scrap of paper found in a basement; the question is what is such a paper most likely to communicate?

Lia's approach is methodical, and begins with a desire to provide a possible place for the text. The fragment has both a geographical and historical locus, and, true to interpretation that respects the text, Lia seeks to familiarise herself with the possible horizons of those who generated it. Thus she finds that the locale in which it was discovered was once a merchant district, leading to the hypothesis that the text may be effectively read as having a commercial context. Faced with a piece of data, the text's ostensible origin, she seeks to explore the possible associations that data carries. Ardenti, on the other hand, and the Trio after him, were content to actualise only one association, that which sprang most readily to their minds when confronted with an underground room, heedless of the semiotic potentials they were ignoring.

With the document itself accounted for, Lia then turns to the encoded portion of the text. Ardenti made the assumption that both the fragmented text and the coded text had the same origins, as they both appeared on the same sheet of paper in Ingolf's study. As he points out to Belbo and Casaubon, when the original is lacking, then the most

ancient copy becomes the original, and to him Ingolf's document is the most ancient copy. The obvious difficulty to such a hypothesis is that the encoded text approximates the cryptograms of Trithemius, a seventeenth-century pioneer of the use of ciphers. Thus, it would appear that if the first part of the Ingolf document is considered medieval, then the second part must be of a later date, an interpolation.

Ardenti sidesteps this problem by reasoning *post hoc ergo ante hoc*; if a document encoded in the same fashion as Trithemius appears in association with a medieval text, then Trithemius must have learnt his techniques from a medieval source. Of itself, such reasoning is valid—it is always possible that any given tradition can be backdated by the uncovering of more ancient evidence. To dismiss an early date for something on the grounds that it echoes something else which received opinion suggests is of a later date smacks of an intellectual arrogance that cannot brook correction. Nevertheless, Ardenti's is neither the only approach, nor necessarily the primary one. In the case of the Ingolf document, Lia is able to suggest that to assume the second portion of the message is evidence of an older tradition of ciphering is neither immediately obvious nor economical, given that it also assumes an antecedent for a Rosicrucian tradition. Too much, she says, and sets out instead to test the more immediate hypothesis that the coded section is actually an interpolation.

Whilst the form of the text approximates one of Trithemius' ciphered messages, it is not exactly the same. From its similarity, Lia first proposes that it conforms to Trithemius' principles. In order to account for its differences she suggests that the encoder (and she suspects Ingolf himself) actually went beyond Trithemius by applying methods Trithemius himself proposed but did not (apparently) utilise. Thus Lia takes the letter circles Trithemius outlines and performs a series of operations with the first, third and sixth letters of each word. And to her satisfaction, and Casaubon's dismay, she is able to produce three successful messages where Ardenti had discovered only one. That the third and most telling message is a reflexive musing in nineteenth-century French provides a piece of data that fits neatly into Lia's hypothesis whilst complicating Ardenti's, suggesting for Lia a *coup de grace*.

For all its apparent "commonsense" validity, Lia's interpretation is not absolute. Even though Casaubon admits that she is probably right, her reading of the Ingolf document remains an interpretation of an ambiguous text, one which strikes this reader as, if not forced, at least ingenious. But that Lia's interpretation cannot be shown to be what the text *really* is, is not important. What is important is that Lia is able to offer an alternative to the manic conjecturing and connecting that is the Plan.

Lia's interpretations are based on the immediate, what is graspable and testable, and are comforting in their very corporeality. Where Coletti finds Lia's championing of the values of the body disturbing, when played against the consequences of Drift, a philosophy totally unaffected by mundane experience, Lia's corporeality becomes a positive point of refuge. Confronted by Casaubon's seduction by the apparent universality of signification, Lia is able to offer an interpretation of such correspondences based on the body rather than on any mystical archetype. Numbers are sacred not because they point to a mystery beyond, but because they reflect the experiences of the here and now. According to Lia's account it is our engagement with our environment that provokes our desire to make meaning, hence people, having basically the same bodies and living in similar surroundings, will always find similar significances in things.

Interpretation should, then, be grounded in our engagement with the world, and not in the abstractions we develop as tools, such as language. Seeking some kind of Truth, we discover only deferral, potential and absence because, to Lia, there is no Truth, there is only a desire to make the world coherent. However to replace Truth, of which we now despair but for which we still, like Belbo, yearn, with the freedom to trace the myriad of semiotic possibilities as an end in itself, is, to Lia, to ignore the conditions within which we exist. The absence of Truth does not mean the absence of the experiential, nor the end of our responsibility to our own experience. If Lia's interpretation of the Ingolf document is not the Truth, it is at least responsible, which is preferable to completely giving up on our engagement with reality for the sedation of free play.

9.2.

Casaubon's acceptance of Lia's doctrine of commonsense is central to the way critics see the moral of *Foucault's Pendulum*. The narrative commences with Casaubon awaiting Belbo's fate in the Conservetoire, trying to place the events that have lead to his bizarre mission to Paris into some kind of order. He is both confused and more than a little excited, swept up in the drama of Belbo's unfinished phone call, the intrigue of Belbo's tale, and, perhaps most telling of all, he is immersed in the spell of Belbo's files, where the Plan has taken its most potent form. As he admits, he has himself been consumed by the Plan, nurturing it, enjoying the rhythm and melody of its amazing connections, for months on end, even to the point of neglecting Lia and Guilio. Given Belbo's sudden disappearance, and the sudden, alarming possibility that there may indeed *be* a plot, Casaubon's feverish paranoia as he stumbles around the Conservetoire is hardly surprising.

As the narrative unfolds, the frantic tone gradually winds down from the manic peak it reaches during the "ceremony" beneath the Pendulum. As Casaubon's moves from the Conservetoire via Dr. Wagner back to Milan and, finally, to Belbo's estate near ***, his narrative gradually returns to its normal pace, until, by the end, it assumes a gentle and almost lyrical quality. Upon reaching the house at ***, Casaubon has had time to reflect, to consider Wagner's verdict on his sanity, and he finds a new, more relaxed, context in which to place the question of Belbo's identity—and also his own. Recalling his conversations with Lia, he finally decides that her warnings about the Plan were valid —the Trio had played with the desires of others, they had spun a story out of the anxiety of a generation, and not only had Belbo been seduced, but they had moved, through his actions, into a world where they had no control. Lia and Diotallevi had been right. Casaubon's final reading of the Plan, of Belbo, is an admission that in allowing the Plan to take control of their lives they had indeed sinned.

What Casaubon realises, as he sits on the patio, overlooking the Bricco, is that the Plan was a game of irresponsible interpretation—it did not bring on its terrifying consequences because it was *wrong*, but because it payed no heed to being *right*. Belbo,

eternally frustrated by his inability to find a Meaning that would govern his life, assumed that there could, therefore, be no meaning at all. Met at every turn by traces of Meaning, finding it only in its absence, every step merely deferring again the consummation, Belbo came to believe that life is a meaningless enigma, a cosmic joke. As a result, he became free to play with history, with the experiences that constitute both himself and his culture, as if they were so many blocks of Lego, able to take any shape he desires.

But in the end, Belbo refused the game. A prisoner of the Diabolicals, standing on his own gallows with the cord of the Pendulum wrapped around his neck, Belbo made the decision to refuse to continue playing, to abandon the Plan, and all that it meant to him. Having watched the Plan attain a certain "reality" through its adoption by the very person he sought to use it to subdue, Belbo still possesses a means of escape; he can tell Aglie that there is a map. All he has to do is to invent one, any one, because, as Casaubon reflects, "with the Pendulum hung as it was, incorrectly, that bunch of lunatics would never have found the X marking the Umbilicus Mundi, and even if they did, it would have been several more decades before they realised this wasn't the one" (623).

Yet Belbo chooses not to continue inventing, denying Aglie the power he in turn seeks over his followers through the Plan. As Casaubon watches in disbelief, the circus over which Aglie presides sweeps out of control, setting the Pendulum free in its confusion. As the Pendulum swings free, Belbo is dragged to his spectacular death, suspended from the wire holding the Pendulum, which soon begins to oscillate around Belbo's still corpse, making him, at last, at one with the Absolute. Belbo loses his life because he refuses, as Casaubon says, to bow any longer to the charade going on around him. But it wasn't, Casaubon is careful to explain, "that he refused to bow to the lust for power," Aglie's arrogant quest for the knowledge that would consolidate his hold over his fanatical and volatile followers. Rather "he refused to bow to nonmeaning" (623). Belbo finally realised, Casaubon asserts, "that, fragile as our existence may be, however ineffectual our interrogation of the world, there is nevertheless something that has more meaning than the rest" (623).

The password to Abu, set by Belbo after four days of going over his own files,

seeking, desperately, a clue to his predicament, seeking an explanation (567), was, simply, "No". "Do you have the password?" Abu innocently asks. Having failed to find any true solace in his creation, realising that the Plan cannot save him, told by Diotallevi that it is, on the contrary, killing him, Belbo finally accepts that, no, he does not have the password, he does not hold any key, he does not understand. So he goes to Paris, "to say to them there was no secret, that the real secret was to let the cells proceed according to their own instinctive wisdom, that seeking mysteries beneath the surface reduced the world to a foul cancer ..." (567,68).

It is Belbo's saying "no" that stuns Casaubon out of his paranoia. Watching Belbo refuse Aglie, refuse his own invention, Casaubon too realises that there must be more than the madness of the Plan. In the Plan, the Trio had come to appreciate the fascination of the empty secret: whilst life is a search for a Meaning that is always elsewhere, there is safety, security, there is always a Reason to take comfort in, and it can never disappoint. Learning from Lia, however, Casaubon asks;

> But if existence is so empty and fragile that it can be endured only by the illusion of a search for its secret, then—as Amparo said that evening in the tenda, after her defeat—there's no redemption; we are all slaves, give us a master, that's what we deserve . . .
> No. Lia taught me there is more, and I have the proof: his name is Guilio, and at this moment he is playing in a valley, pulling a goat's tail. No, because Belbo twice said no. (622)

The Absolute can only be found outside the realm of the living—this, surely, is the symbolism of Belbo's death, his initiation as the Fixed Point. But life cannot be constructed from meaninglessness, even if it is a meaninglessness based on the realisation that our knowledge can never come to an End. Casaubon decides that there must be a ground, there must be something on which we can base our interrogation of the universe that can make life meaningful, even if it is not Meaning itself.

Searching for this "something" that is more important, he returns to the farmhouse at *** to see whether amongst Belbo's juvenilia there may not be, after all, some "key" text that explains why Belbo at last found the means to say "no." He finds what he seeks in a document, spanning years in its composition, which relates Belbo's last momentous

experience in ***, his playing of the trumpet at the partisan funeral. In this episode, in the way Belbo attempted to describe it in writing, in his continual returning to it throughout his other narratives, Casaubon sees a moment in which Belbo was fulfilled, in which he grasped, and was one with, his place in life. Playing the trumpet, pointing it at the sun, praying that the moment would never end: "in that moment," Casaubon says, "he was possessing Cecilia" (632).

Here, at the end of his narrative, Casaubon seems finally to have discovered the antidote to the disease of Drift. To assume that because Meaning is beyond us, because we cannot ever grasp it, that we are free to do as we choose, unfettered by any responsibility at all, is lunatic. Life, Casaubon preaches, is more, must be more, than a facile game of analogies, which are as empty as the promise of the infinite. Casaubon finds that "more" in Lia's belief in immediate experience. As Belbo played the trumpet at the funeral, and only then, did he allow his frustration to abate, forgotten in the pleasure of the actual moment itself. He allowed himself simply to experience what was happening, to grasp no more than the event itself, and he was fulfilled.

Likewise, as Casaubon awaits his expected fate, he realises that it was in the experience of the simple moments of his own life; running among the vines, eating a peach and letting the shivers run from his tongue to his groin, relaxing with Lia and Guilio, in these moments, he, too, was fulfilled. Having organised his narrative according to the Sefirot, he finds his answer in Malkhut, "the kingdom of this earth, in its dazzling simplicity" (541). In Malkhut, what is, is, and the need to understand, to explain, glorified in Tiferet, is transcended. Even in reaching this conclusion, understanding at last the need to ground existence in experience rather than in interpretation, Casaubon is not satisfied. He is finally able to find peace only as he forgets his interpretation, abandons his ruminations, and simply accepts the beauty of the scene around him.

Chapter 10

"By way of summation (2) ..."

Most commentator's seem to read Casaubon's concluding thoughts with suspicion. The common thread of argument suggests that Casaubon's voice cannot be privileged, because he pulls away from a recognition of the multivalent, and retreats towards some kind of unitary Meaning. Robert Artigiani, for instance, states that Belbo dies *because* he refuses to bow to nonmeaning, and Casaubon's final interpretative gesture participates in the same desire to believe "in one thing at a time" (49), thus repudiating the novel's demonstration of "the need to seek and abandon ideas and behaviors as circumstances change" (Artigiani, 874).

Victoria Vernon likewise sees Casaubon's final conclusions as acceptable only to the "naive" reader. Having followed the Trio down the heady path of Drift in the construction of the Plan, Vernon argues, the unwary (model?) reader has been "reproved" by Lia's commonsense, and is thus wary of the narrator's reasoning. Casaubon may settle on an interpretation, may discover his own "moment," but "has the reader discovered what the narrator has?" (1992, 852). The answer, to Vernon, depends on the sophistication of the reader. The "hypercritical" reader "dismisses the narrator's conclusion along with his linear narrative strategies, as mere consolatory or compensatory reading—giving a 'moral' victory to those who have been defeated by their own game or by the phantom plans that are history" (852). Readers who are simply "critical" may "react to the defeat of irony ... as a challenge," whereas "cooperative" readers "may emerge as post-textual entities inspired by the text to put it to a reflective and personal use" (852), presumably taking the narrator's prescriptions to heart.

JoAnn Cannon, on the other hand, finds Casaubon's conclusions not quite so much suspicious as curious. Drawing on Casaubon's reaction to the events of Belbo's presumed death, Cannon asserts that "The central theme of *Foucault's Pendulum*, indeed the moral of the story, seems to be that this endless travelling along the Moebius strip is fruitless and empty" (1992, 904). In reaching this conclusion, Cannon is at odds with

most other commentators, and it is a conclusion which she herself finds puzzling. The image Casaubon selects as a metaphor for the process of Drift that he is, in the end, disparaging, is that of an "infinite onion, which has its centre everywhere and its circumference nowhere" (*Foucault's Pendulum*, 621), which is, as Cannon points out, disturbingly close to the image of the rhizome, an image which, in Eco's theoretical works, as well as *The Name of the Rose*, occupies as decidedly positive position.

The issue for Cannon is why would *Foucault's Pendulum* disparage the practice of Drift in such a way that it also precludes the concept of unlimited semiosis, one of Eco's most prominent contributions to semiotic theory? As she writes;

> That Eco would choose the image of the onion/rhizome as the projection of all that is wrong with the world seems highly problematic. All of the tidy distinctions between unlimited semiosis and hermetic drift, good suspicion and bad suspicion, respect for the text and deconstructive deferral and drift are swept away with this choice. (1992, 905)

It is almost as if, as Linda Hutcheon suggests in "Eco's Echoes: Ironizing the (Post)modern," the irony that pervades the novel has become too powerful, and, in satirising both interpretive extremes (and everything between), has blurred anything the text may have tried to convey (12).

The problem, for Cannon, is compounded by Casaubon's final reflections, the revelation of Malkhut in the final chapter. Casaubon's espousal of the "moment of glory," of the presence of the "thing that is more important than everything else" is, for anyone familiar with both Eco's work and the current state of the interpretive debate, puzzling. "The glorification," Cannon writes, "of the non-semiotic from the pen of a semiotician, a masterful decipherer of symbols, signs, symptoms, and allusions is, to say the least, striking" (1992, 906).

Eco's semiotics is concerned with respecting both the potentially unlimited play of signification whilst at the same time striving for responsible interpretation, based on the realisation that whilst semiosis, as an abstraction, is unlimited, in the actual process of interpretation it is bound within contextual constraints. All cognitive engagement is semiotic, it is just a matter of whether semiosis exists in isolation or whether it stands in some kind of relationship with what it seeks to describe. As a result, Cannon argues, "if

Eco's theory were faithfully mirrored in his novel, this glorification of the non-semiotic would not be the logical conclusion" (906). What might expect some kind of showdown between Ardenti and Lia, between the responsible and the irresponsible, akin to the contrast between the arrogant certainty of Jorge and the modest, but useful, uncertainty of William. However, Cannon writes, the final choice is "not between good and bad suspicion, creative abduction and hermetic drift, but only between bad suspicion ... on the one hand, and on the other a presemiotic or non-semiotic moment of glory whose 'presence' cannot be evoked by any sign" (906).

In the end, Cannon sees the novel as providing a degree of ambiguity that sets it apart from Eco's polemic theory: "While Eco is on the one hand satirizing the notion of loss or absence implicit in the Derridean notion of sign, he also seems to share Belbo's desire of presence" (906). It is this ambiguity, this play of irony, that sets the novel as a fictive enterprise, and not just a semiotics primer. To Cannon, *The Name of the Rose* allegorizes the story of conjecture as told in such studies as *Semiotics and Philosophy of Language* [sic] and *The Sign of Three*" (902), whilst *Foucault's Pendulum* works to problematise it, to demonstrate that the "questions raised in Eco's theoretical works cannot be tidily resolved" (906).

Given Cannon's difficulties, it is not hard to see why other critics have chosen to discount Casaubon's realisations in some form or another, so as to maintain the novel's commitment to unlimited semiosis. Eco's prominent theoretical stance simply needs to be respected when reading his novels. Nevertheless, I would suggest that it is still possible to maintain that *Foucault's Pendulum* can be read as offering a critique of drift without treating Casaubon with suspicion. The distinction Eco maintains between drift and unlimited semiosis seems to me to be based not so much on the concept of "economy," although that is an important factor in recognising "responsible" interpretation, but on the question of the *aims* of interpretation. Responsible interpretation is a means of attempting to grasp a reality that is not itself a function of interpretation. Unlike the postmodern trend towards seeing textuality as effacing any notion of a pre-semiotic "reality," Eco argues that interpretation must be a response to

something beyond and outside of semiosis.

In *The Role of the Reader* Eco asserts that semiosis is itself intensional, that it relates only within itself and does not "extend" to referential objects. It must, he argues, be radically so if it is to maintain the flexibility that intelligence seems to demand. However it is by virtue of its intensionality that semiosis is able to "refer," to acquire an extensional use: "Semiosis explains itself by itself: this continual circularity is the normal condition of signification and even allows communicational processes to use signs in order to mention things and states of the world" (198). Building on Peirce's "pragmaticism," Eco cannot allow that we should mistake the model we construct to account for reality for reality itself. Our models are contingent and fallible, even if we think them useful for a given purpose, and to replace reality with what we understand it to be is, in effect, to return to the positivistic belief that reason and reality are co-determinate. Thus to treat the universe as though it were semiotic, as describing an infinite path denying signs any ultimate ground, is to establish an interpretive freedom that fails to perform the very task that characterises interpretation; engagement with the world.

What Casaubon comes to realise is that we must recognise the fact that interpretation is interpretation of *something*, that we cannot assume that reality mimics the way we mimic reality. The Moment outside semiosis that Casaubon chooses to privilege is not an escape from interpretation. It is not an alternative to a contingent mapping of the world which is still, as Casaubon's continued attempt to interpret Belbo through the agency of his files testifies, necessary. It is merely an assertion that interpretation needs to be responsible to the experience that informs us, that our attempts to understand cannot function in isolation of that which we strive *to* understand. *Foucault's Pendulum* suggests, then, that William was right at the end of *The Name of the Rose*. Our ability to understand is tenuous, in grasping the connections between events we ignore others and create still more. But we cannot, in denying stability, abandon ourselves to unbridled relativism, because that can only lead to the privileging of desire, and the loss of our ability to make even a tenuous way in our world.

Conclusion

"People spoke too long of a praxis founded on reason (*Vernunft*) as if there were only one "reason." Then they discovered that there was not one "reason" ... In any case, there *is* a crisis of reason if we are referring to the reason of Descartes, Hegel, and Marx. But if we accept the premise that our behaviour in the world ought to be not *rational* but *reasonable*, then I will say (and with a certain satisfaction), that if there is a crisis of Reason, there is no crisis of Reasonability." (Eco in Rosso 1983, 4)

Perhaps it is not useless to reiterate that while these problems remain unanswered, the older certainties remain unavailable. Once every reading is strategic, none can claim innocence and none can rely on intrinsic privilege. One might then ask, in frustration, if there is finally no way to read a text, no way to even judge a reading? If "anything" goes, why do texts not simply reduce to black marks on a page? (Robert D'Amico, "Text and Context," 181)

William's defeat in *The Name of the Rose* serves to demonstrate that the certainties of reason are as tenuous as the certainties of the form of traditional "authority" that William opposes. He can no longer assume that the structures of the universe are available for our investigation, for as quantum physics was to assert six centuries later, the order that the universe displays is a reflection of our own desire for certainty, not a quality existing to be recognised. This realisation is a disturbing one for William, for he fears that if we were to discard our reason then desire remains as the only justification for action, and there will be nothing to counteract the designs of the powerful (such as Bernard Gui). William fears a Nietzschean future in which the simple remain outcast and desolate, and there is no greater truth than that which can impose itself on all others by force.

In *Foucault's Pendulum* William's fears of epistemological anarchy seem to be realised. What appears initially as a harmless pursuit, an interpretive freedom that seems laughable and can be turned into a clever game, is gradually revealed as a tool by which

desire strives to overcome any possible restraint. The philosophy of Drift establishes a textual universe where contingency becomes absolute, allowing interpretation to impose reality, rather than react to it. And it is into this textual "reality" that Belbo retreats in order that he may no longer suffer the frustrations of his past. But whilst William comes to realise that our hold on reality is tenuous at best, Casaubon's realisation is that to use our inadequacy as an excuse to abandon the world beyond our minds altogether is a mistake. Even though we cannot contain the world by our reason, that world still remains to be negotiated, and to replace it with a universe of our own conjecture is to risk running aground.

Such a reading of *The Name of the Rose* and *Foucault's Pendulum* is consistent with the direction of Eco's other projects, both academic and journalistic, where he has aligned himself with the thought of one of the fathers of modern pragmatism, C.S. Peirce, as well as with Gianni Vattimo, a contemporary proponent of *il pensiero debole*, or what Eco terms "soft" thought (Rosso 1983, 4). In "Semiotics and Conjecture in *Il nome della rosa*" JoAnn Cannon argues that *The Name of the Rose* can be best understood as a narrative expression of the philosophy of *il pensiero debole*, arguing that the model of fallible conjecture it presents offers "reasonableness" as an alternative to the crises in Tradition and Reason. Cannon argues that this bears strong similarities to Vattimo's philosophy of truth as qualified, but both useful and still needed.

Nevertheless, as I have related above, Cannon finds some difficulties in locating the same philosophical impetus within *Foucault's Pendulum*, arguing in "The Imaginary Universe of Umberto Eco: A Reading of *Foucault's Pendulum*" that Casaubon's retreat into the non-semiotic constitutes a surprising fact that complicates the neat hypothesis that, like *The Name of the Rose*, *Foucault's Pendulum* can be read as expressing the theme of *il pensiero debole*. In chapter 10 I argued that Cannon's confusion is not necessarily warranted, given that in order to refute the notion that unlimited semiosis equates to interpretive freedom, Eco has argued that whilst semiosis is circular and intensional, it is also intentional (in Brentano's sense). If semiosis is sufficient to itself, as some postmodernist theories assert (Eco 1990, chapters 1-3) then interpretation cannot

be fixed, or even restrained. It is only if interpretation has an aim beyond itself that we can set limits upon it, even if those limits are themselves contingent. In this light I suggest that Casaubon's final understanding is in keeping with the nature of *il pensiero debole*, in that it asserts the necessity of relating interpretation to the world in which we live, salvaging interpretation from the crisis of Reason.

Both *The Name of the Rose* and *Foucault's Pendulum* castigate the hubris of positivism (rational and dogmatic) as well as the skeptical response to the "crisis of reason." Both suggest instead a form of pragmatism that refuses certainty whilst demanding that our ability to reason remains the only tool we have with which to negotiate our environment. Thus William's assertion that "The only truths that are useful are instruments to be thrown away" (*The Name of the Rose*, 492) can be read neither as a despairing abandonment of "true" knowledge, nor a celebration of interpretive freedom, but as an affirmation of the need to use what we have available to us to contest, rather than contain.

In *The Limits of Interpretation*, Eco writes that "I have the impression that, in the course of the last few decades, the rights of the interpreters have been overstressed" (6). He goes on to assert that "the interpreted text imposes some constraints upon its interpreters. The limits of interpretation coincide with the rights of the text (which does not mean with the rights of its author)" (6,7). Eco illustrates this point with a tale by John Wilkins, where an Indian slave is initiated as to the power of the text when the note accompanying the basket of figs he is transporting informs the recipient that less figs arrive than were sent. No matter how far we take this message out of its context, Eco argues, even to the extent of having it wash up on Crusoe's island in a bottle, it still has the potential to refer to figs. Indeed, as long as its reader is familiar with the language in which it was written, its primary significance will have to do with figs. Certainly, in the hands of some "sophisticated student in linguistics, hermeneutics or semiotics" the message can come to mean almost anything, for the possible semiotic chains established by "figs" is infinite (even including such private chains as ciphers). Nevertheless, Eco

asserts that "even in this case the addressee should rely on certain preestablished conventional interpretations of *fig* which are not those forseen by, say, *apple* or *cat*" (5).

What Eco is, I think, driving at in this example is that texts do not exist in isolation. As soon as they are read, they exist within the bounds of the hypotheses it is possible to make about them, and those hypotheses are, in turn, governed by the reader's competence within a given cultural / linguistic tradition. It is not possible to approach texts arbitrarily, and assign certain units of meaning to certain expressions at random. We are bound by the possibilities already inscribed (although always evolving) in our tradition. In choosing to represent these possibilities by an encyclopaedic model, rather than the more strictly hierarchised semantic models more frequently invoked in semantics, Eco maintains a strong degree of linguistic flexibility: we are able to make sense of many diverse utterances and texts by virtue of the fact that we are able to draw on a network of connotational associations, all of which lie as potential within a text, and can be actualised on the basis of topical hypotheses.

It nevertheless remains that this vast, rhizomatic network of associations is hierarchised within a particular linguistic tradition, and if these hierarchies are not as strict as logical investigations of language would wish (a lack which also undermines the dogmatic interpretations of "traditionalists" such as Abo and Jorge in *The Name of the Rose*) they must still be recognised, or all hope of interpretation breaks down. "Thus every act of reading is a difficult transaction between the competence of the reader (the reader's knowledge of the world) and of the kind of competence a given text postulates in order to be read in an economical way" (Eco 1992(b), 822). It is precisely this recognition of the constraints imposed by the text itself that Eco sees postmodern reading practices as ignoring, in much the same way that the hermetic adepts in *Foucault's Pendulum* assume the possibility of any reading on the premise that no chain of semiotic associations can claim hierarchy over any other possible chain.

Nevertheless, I suggest that Eco's appeal to "reasonableness" as an alternative to both Reason and skepticism remains open to criticism, and whilst denying certainty, does not necessarily close off the possibility of relativism. In arguing that interpretation is

grounded in its need to negotiate the world, Eco is, I suggest, effectively asserting that practical success in the criteria for successful interpretation: if we are able to proceed successfully on the basis of our interpretation of events, then that interpretation can claim to be reasonable. Obviously this is not to say that it is a "true" interpretation, or that it does not allow further interpretive effort. The history of empirical science is littered with interpretations that allowed successful action, and yet were subsequently either revised or dispensed with (phlogiston and Newtonian physics spring to mind).

Foucault's Pendulum suggests that the danger in hermetic drift lies in distancing its practitioner from the pragmatics of human existence, drawing him/her instead into a purely intra-mental world where desire has free reign. Thus, having succumbed to the lure of an interpretive practice that allows him to create his own, convenient, world, Belbo becomes unable to deal successfully with the world that still surrounds him. Likewise Casaubon, intoxicated by the influence of the Plan, loses his ability to distinguish between illusion and reality, falling into a twilight world he is totally unable to deal with. Casaubon is only able to reclaim his ability to act when he breaks away from the mechanics of the Plan and strives to accommodate the "reasonableness" of Lia, finally realising that all interpretation must be tied to our need for pragmatic success. The problem remains, however, that given that practical success does not guarantee the "validity" (in Hirsch's sense) of interpretation, and many interpretations can all claim practical success (Ardenti's interpretations, after all, lead him to practical discoveries), we are still left with no means of distinguishing between interpretive alternatives for ethical purposes.

It becomes apparent in *The Name of the Rose* that the interpretive debates between the various positions represented have profound implications for the "simple," those who suffer the way the powerful interpret the world. Interpretation cannot be divorced from ethics, for the "reasonableness" of William's hermeneutic entails also a political reasonableness that stands in stark contrast to the willingness of all the other players to impose their interpretations at the cost of others, preferably the already disempowered. As *Foucault's Pendulum* implies, a relativistic response to dogmatism fails to negotiate

this ethical dilemma, for it refuses to proscribe the interpretations of the powerful (a point that Jurgen Habermas has made forcefully against Gadamer's hermeneutics[17]). However, if, as I have argued, *Foucault's Pendulum* also implies that the distinction between the relativist and the reasonable lies in pragmatic success, then the boundary remains problematic.

The pragmatic success of Bernard, as opposed to the failure of William, would tend to suggest that, contrary to the "intention of the text," it is Bernard who should emerge as "reasonable": he has brought about a conclusion that enables him to proceed successfully. It would appear that there are times when lack of success does not invalidate "reasonableness." How are we to choose then between the interpretation that suits our political ends (one that in William's ideal promotes the rights of the "simple" and protects them from institutionalised marginalisation), and one which contradicts our own ideals? Eco's demand that we respect the "rights of the text" seems in this light inadequate, for the very distinction between reasonableness and relativism has been established in order to demonstrate where such rights may lie. All we have, in the end, is our own cultural and linguistic competence and our own sense of what is reasonable; anything else is beyond us. For as Belbo says to Casaubon in *Foucault's Pendulum*, "The whole history of logic consists of attempts to define an acceptable notion of moronism. A task too immense. Every great thinker is someone else's moron" (66).

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[17] On the Gadamer-Habermas debate see, for example, Ormiston & Schrift (21,22), or Bleicher (153-158), as well as Habermas' "A Review of Gadamer's *Truth and Method*," and Gadamer's "Reply to my Critics," both in Ormiston & Schrift.

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