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# Making Truth Laugh

An Investigation of Umberto Eco's  
Comic Worlds.

By Diana June Scrimshaw.

## Abstract

This thesis discusses Umberto Eco's use of comedy in his three postmodern novels, *The Name of the Rose*, *Foucault's Pendulum*, and *The Island of the Day Before*. It argues that while Eco draws on the tradition of learned wit to create works rich in comedy, his argument is lost because of the erudition of his literary game playing. Eco uses a variety of comic techniques, especially irony, to attack the subjects which annoy him, such as librarians, academia, Roman Catholicism, and publishers. He sincerely believes that humour will enable readers to see the faults in society and, more importantly to him, to then change the world.

Unfortunately for Eco, his irony is misread. Eventually this misreading shapes Eco's own writing, as the third book shows. This in itself is deeply ironic, as Eco has strong views on reader response criticism, which the response to his work proves to be flawed.

The first chapter is a general survey of comic techniques. It draws on Eco's writing about comedy, building a picture of his comic techniques and explains the response Eco expects to his comic writing. The tradition of learned wit and postmodern writing are also discussed, and the links between them are spelled out. Given the importance of game playing in both learned wit and postmodern fiction, game theory is explored. Eco's history of playing intellectual practical jokes is discussed as intellectual game playing is part of his comic repertoire.

The remaining chapters cover each novel separately, discussing and accessing the comic devices Eco uses in each work. Attention is paid to the literary sources of Eco's comedy. The main source is Jorge Carlos Borges, who appears as a major character in *The Name of the Rose*. James Joyce and Cervantes are also important sources.

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## Introduction

Most studies of comedy originate, I am convinced, in a season of despair. A class sits mirthless and stone-faced through "the funniest story written in America since *Huckleberry Finn*." A critic ignores or even maligns humor while fitting a poem into a particular theoretical bed. Or worst of all, one laughs - and laughs alone. Then the light of wisdom shines. If they can't see what is obvious, give them what is obviously needed : a plain-spoken definition of comedy that will teach everyone when and where to laugh. So with a high heart, the scholar rides into battle; and a fearsome battle it is, for defining comedy, as Bergson has suggested, is like trying to capture the foam of the sea. As quickly as a thesis is built up, it vanishes, exploded by the intransigence of comedy itself. Above all, comedy is irregular, irreverent, and cheerfully defiant of common sense.

(Frances McNeely Leonard)

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This thesis, which investigates Umberto Eco's comic worlds, is divided into two sections. The first section contains a general survey of comic techniques. It draws on Eco's non-fiction about comedy, building a picture of his comic techniques and explains the response Eco expects to his comic writing.

Eco's writing follows on in the tradition of learned wit. Learned wit is a loose conglomeration of techniques and devices, and it is this looseness which makes it useful for examining Eco's various comic worlds. The English Augustans, such as Swift and Pope, who developed the tradition of learned wit, drew on the style and content of the original Augustans - Ovid, Virgil and Horace. While it is simplistic to assume that just because Eco is Italian he will be familiar with the great Roman writers, his education and tastes show this is, in fact, the case. More generally, Umberto Eco is deeply European in his tastes.

In the second section of the thesis each novel is analysed in the light of the comic techniques discussed in the first section. Attention is also paid to Umberto Eco's world view. Eco has strong views on a number of subjects, and he uses comedy to make his points about these views. He sincerely believes

that he has an important contribution to make in exposing the follies of the modern world, and he uses comedy to reveal these follies. Eco's aim is to make truth laugh.

Eco, too, has had his comic fiction misread. Admittedly, the success of *The Name of the Rose* stunned Eco, who thought the work would appeal to a small, highly educated group, and found himself with a best-seller on his hands. Its transformation into a book read as a popular novel is best seen in the fact that it has been translated into Swahili. Any Swahili speaker with the Western education Eco expected of his readership would be able to read the novel in the English or French translation. The expense of translating the work into Swahili shows that the publishers believed there was a market for the novel, as a medieval murder mystery.

Eco's fiction has been widely misread, his comedy ignored. Consequently, *The Name of the Rose* is read as an historical murder mystery, *Foucault's Pendulum* as a bad thriller, and *The Island of the Day Before*, as an historical novel. In fact, the first two works are scathing attacks on Catholicism, library management, publishers, academia and crank religions. By the third novel, Eco seemed to have vented his spleen, and it lacks the satirical edge of the earlier novels.

Eco has written academic articles on reader response criticism. In his *Reflections on the Name of the Rose* Eco explains how he attempted to shape the way that his first novel was read. In the end though, most readers were oblivious to the elaborate postmodern game Eco played. The resonances of Jorge Luis Borges and James Joyce go unnoticed by most readers, who seize upon the Sherlock Holmes references.

The public response to his work in turn affected Eco's writing. The third novel is noticeably less savage than its predecessors. Rather than shaping his readers, Eco in turn has himself been shaped by them.

## Chapter 1      General Survey of Comic Techniques

### **i Learned wit.**

The tradition of learned wit has a pre-Enlightenment world view. This simple statement is crucial to understanding the tradition, its demise, and, as I will argue, its reemergence in postmodern comedy.

The pre-Enlightenment world view was holistic. 'There was an all-embracing scheme of facts and meanings in which any particular matter for inquiry could always be placed. It was possible to pass from the particular event to the general cosmic pattern and *vice versa* with an easy, assured sweep of the mind such as a modern man [sic] can never enjoy. This opened up huge possibilities to a comic genius' (Jefferson, 20).

In this world a good education provided plausible explanations about human nature and the human body. Because God was still in his heaven, a Christian world view was incorporated naturally into this thinking. 'The system did not burden the imagination with too much detail, and it left a great deal to rational conjecture' (Jefferson, 20).

Comedy was a natural choice for writers who understood literally everything in the world. For the comic genius with better answers than forty-two to life, the universe, and all that, there were many areas open to satire or wit.

The Enlightenment, with its emphasis on science, insisted on detail. One started with an hypothesis (rational conjecture) and then filled it with details (facts), developing a new body of knowledge.

In the outline of learned wit which follows, it is vital to remember that contemporary writers and readers lived in a world which was quantified and understood.

Bernard Dupriez says that 'being witty involves provoking others to use their wits by exercising one's own. In order to do this, one leaves aside, or refuses, the ordinary, the true, or at least the desirable structures of reality or language. Wit is an implicit means of recognising such a refusal' (Dupriez, 472). He identifies eight different categories of wit, the witticism; nonsense; simulation and pseudo-simulation; persiflage, raillery and banter; word-play; irony; humorous emphasis on the limitation of the mind; and the burlesque.

Learned wit is a fluid term. Readers of Rabelais, Sterne, Swift and Cervantes can see that there are differing but related features in their work.

Learned wit is witty writing about the following areas:- the system of scholarship; the legal system; medicine and physiology; scientific methodology; rhetoric (to some extent); and metaphysical imagery.

Scholastic wit is a major strand of learned wit. It arises out of the scholastic approach, which favoured 'speculative freedom, [and] dialectical ingenuity' (Jefferson 18). Some writers produced a witty interpretation of the scholastic process. A classic example is Donne's 'Air and Angels', which uses Thomist metaphysics to devastating effect.

### Air and Angels

Twice or thrice had I loved thee,  
 Before I knew thy face or name,  
 So in a voice, so in a shapeless flame  
*Angels* affect us oft, and worshipp'd be;  
     Still when, to where thou wert, I came,  
 Some lovely glorious nothing I did see;  
     But since my soul, whose child love is,  
 Takes limbs of flesh, and else could nothing do,  
     More subtle than the parent is  
 Love must not be, but take a body too;  
 And therefore what thou wert, and who,  
     I bid love ask, and now  
 That it assume thy body, I allow,  
 And fix itself in thy lip, eye, and brow.

Whilst thus to ballast love I thought,  
 And to move more steadily to leave gone,  
 With wares which would sink admiration  
 I saw I had love's pinnacle overfraught;  
     Every thy hair for love to work upon  
 Is much too much, some fitter must be sought:  
     For, nor in nothing, nor in things  
 Extreme, and scattering bright, can love herein:  
     Then, as an Angel, face, and wings  
 Of air, nor pure as it, yet pure, doth wear.

So thy love may be love's sphere;  
 Just such disparity  
 As is 'twixt Air and Angels' purity,  
 'Twixt women's love, and men's, will ever be.

A love poem (however sexist) may seem an unlikely place to exhibit one's grasp of Thomist metaphysics. However, to the pre-Enlightenment thinker, such barriers did not exist. Indeed, the poem is only witty to those with a grasp of Thomist arguments.

Briefly, Donne is playing with Aquinas' interest in angels. Thomas Aquinas believed that angels 'might take more or less rarefied bodies, in order to communicate with and influence men' [sic] (Redpath, 32).

The poet mentions his soul in line seven of the poem. The soul is the central subject of Thomist philosophy of the mind. Aquinas thought of the soul 'as the single form that gives a human being its specifically human mode of existence, including potentialities and functions, from its genetic makeup on to its most creative talents' (Kretzmann, 131). He also argues that the soul has an incorporeal nature. Donne's claim that the soul is corporeal (7-10) is a clear attack on Thomist theory.

Moreover, Donne is arguably referring to Moses Maimonides' view 'that angels only *appear* to have bodies' (Redpath, 32), as Aquinas argued 'that angels cannot assume bodies of fire [as] they would burn everything they touched' (Redpath, 32).

A short love poem has become the place for Donne to display his erudition. He plays with ideas, hiding them in an unlikely context, thus rewarding an equally erudite reader. The less knowledgeable reader can enjoy other features of the poem.

Identifying the encoded meanings rewards the reader with rich layers of meaning. There may also be a sense of satisfaction at having cracked the code, leading to a feeling of identification with the writer.

The legal system was another genesis of learned wit. Comical and exasperating as the current legal system is, it pales into insignificance when compared with that of earlier centuries. 'Under the old regime the legal system . . . was a field for playful invention . . . the primitive concreteness of the law, exemplified in such ceremonies as 'livery of seisin' (the handing by the feoffer to feoffee of the symbolic clod of earth) made it also a natural source of poetic

imagery' (Jefferson, 21).

Consequently, the legal quibble is a distinguishing feature of learned wit. The writer would 'use logic to give a show of plausibility to an absurd or unreasonable argument' (Jefferson, 21-22). Seventeenth century literature is full of legal quibbles. One example, from *Tristram Shandy*, a gold mine of legal quibbles, is the discussion over Mr Shandy's relationship to his son. The quibble turns on a documented legal ruling that

the mother is not of kin to her child. . . This determination, continued Kysaricus, how contrary soever it may seem to run to the stream of vulgar ideas, yet had reason strongly on its side ; and has been put out of all manner of dispute from the famous case, known commonly by the name of the Duke of Suffolk's case :- it is cited in Brook, said Triptolemus - And taken notice of by Lord Coke, added Didius - And you may find it in Swinburn on Testaments, said Kysarcuis.

(*Tristram Shandy* IV, 29)

The Duke of Suffolk had a son by one wife, and a daughter by another. He left his goods to his son. The son later died intestate, and his mother 'took the administration of her son's goods, according to the statute of the 21st of *Harry* the Eighth, whereby it is enacted , That in case any person die intestate, the administration of his goods shall be committed to the next of kin' (*Tristram Shandy* IV,29).

The daughter claimed that she, not the Duchess, was next of kin, and that the Duchess was not kin to the deceased.

Prolonged legal and religious argument ensued and the case involved a considerable estate. It also looked to set a precedent for future cases. The daughter won, not because she was the Duke's offspring (albeit female), but because the Duchess was declared not to be related to her own son.

The questions raised in this argument are, with one exception, obsolete in modern law. Modern genetics provides concrete proof of kinship. The modern exception, surrogate motherhood, does raise a legal dilemma. It has potential as a topic for learned wit.

In an attempt to clarify the situation, the legal definition became absurd. The foolishness of declaring that a mother is not legally related to her child is obvious to all outside the law. The law really is an ass, and consequently a gift

to writers of learned wit.

In the novel, the characters carry the legal argument to its logical conclusion :- if the mother is not related to her child, then the father *cannot* possibly be.

Medicine and physiology provided material for learned wit. When all educated people could discuss medical matters knowledgeably there was potential to 'manipulate [facts] to provide an amusing explanation for any eccentricity of character' (Jefferson, 20).

Ben Jonson's humour plays continued a tradition of satirizing the medical concept of bodily humours.<sup>1</sup> In Jonson's *Every man out of His Humour* Asper says

As when some one peculiar quality  
Doth so possess a man, that it doth draw  
All his affects, his spirits, and his powers.  
In their confluxions, all to run one way,  
This may be truly said to be a Humour.  
But that a rook, in wearing a pied feather,  
The cable hat-band, or the three-ply'd ruff,  
A yard of shoetie, or the Switzer's knot  
On his French garters, should affect a Humour!  
Oh, 'tis more than most ridiculous.

Well I will scourge these apes;  
And to these courteous eyes oppose a mirror,  
As large as is the stage, whereon we act;  
Where they shall see the time's deformity  
Anatomized in every nerve, and sinew,  
With constant courage, and contempt of fear.

Abstract reasoning and reference material were all the tools required for an educated pre-Enlightenment thinker to tackle scientific questions. Mr Shandy's theory on names, culminating in a violent dislike of the name Tristram, is an example of learned wit applied to the scientific process.

<sup>1</sup> The four different humours, blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile, need to blend equally to produce good physical and mental health. See Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* for full details.

His opinion, in this matter, was, That there was a strange kind of magic bias, which good or bad names, as he called them, irresistibly impressed upon our characters and conduct' . [ He argues with scoffers, saying ]'Your BILLY, sir! - would you, for the world, have called him JUDAS? . . . That was your son called Judas, - - - the sordid and treacherous idea, so inseparable from the name, would have accompanied him thro' life like his shadow, and in the end made a miser and a rascal of him, in spight, Sir, of your example.

(*Tristram Shandy* I, 19).

Consultation of learned reference material provided a readable, finite number of works on any given subject. As a result, 'the list of authorities was the measure of a scholar's range of learning. . . [consequently in modern science and learning] [t]he list has lost its rhetorical value' (Jefferson, 24).

The importance of listing ones sources was parodied by learned wits, who frequently included quasi-scholastic lists in their writing. One example is the advice Uncle Toby receives from his brother, listing the correct diet for a wooer. 'But thou must eat little or no goat's flesh, nor red deer - not even foal's flesh by any means; and carefully abstain - that is, as much as thou canst, from peacocks, cranes, coots, didappers, and water hens -' (*Tristram Shandy* VIII, 34). Given that all these foods are supposed aphrodisiacs, their exclusion is ironic.

Rhetoric is a problematic inclusion in the area of learned wit. Jefferson argues that the parodying of rhetorical figures, such as in *Love's Labour's Lost* is outside the tradition. However, he does admit *inventio* , which is 'concerned with finding the right things to say on a given topic' (Jefferson, 26). Panurge's defence of borrowing, in Rabelais' *Gargantua and Pantagruel* is an example.

Be still indebted to somebody or other, that there may be somebody always to pray for you, that the Giver of all good things may grant you a blessed, long, and prosperous life: fearing, if fortune should deal crossly with you, that it might be his chance to come short of being paid by you, he will always speak good of you in every company, ever and anon purchase new creditors unto you: to the end that through their means you may make a shift of borrowing from Peter to pay Paul, and with other folk's earth fill up his ditch.

Metaphysical imagery has the ability to embody or heighten ideas. Samuel Johnson defined the metaphysical conceit as 'a kind of *discordia concors*; a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike . . . The most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together' (Abrams, 33). Anything is grist to the metaphysical mill. Done well, it produces innovative imagery, which illuminates the argument.

Swift frequently used metaphysical imagery. In *The Battle of the Books* the spider and the bee symbolise the ancient and modern books. The bee says that

The question comes all to this - Whether it is the nobler being of the two, that which, by a lazy contemplation of four inches round, by an overweening pride, which feeding and engendering on itself, turns all into excrement and venom, produc[es] nothing at last but flybane and a cobweb; or that which, by an universal range, with long search, much study, true judgment, and distinction of things, brings home honey and wax.

(*The Battle of the Books*, 112)

The copy of Aesop discusses this view, saying 'was ever anything so modern as the spider in his air, his turns, and his paradoxes? . . . The bee [is] an advocate retained by us the Ancients' (*The Battle of the Books*, 113).

Learned wit frequently combines these areas, producing a text rich in wit, parody and irony.

## ii Postmodern comedy

Comedy is a feature of postmodern writing. The strands of parody, irony, pastiche, paradox and self-parody are woven together in a playful manner, producing a work which abounds in exuberant comedy.

What, though, is postmodern fiction? And why are comedy and play an integral part of it?

Defining postmodernism is difficult because it is 'not a unified

movement, but a term that serves usefully as a general signifier, rather than as a sign with a stable meaning' (McCaffery, xi). This uncertainty has led many to throw their hands up in horror, condemning it as a term which 'concomitantly baffles, bedazzles and enrages' (Raschke, 94). However it is possible to unpack the term and understand it.

'Postmodernism' was coined to describe the move in a different direction in art, architecture, writing etc, which started in the 1960s.

The roots of postmodern thought and writing lie in the philosophy of Kant, Wittgenstein, Godel and existentialism; new scientific developments, such as the Uncertainty Principle, quantum physics, and the theory of relativity; aesthetic changes in major art forms; and an understanding about the role of subjectivity in systems of thought (McCaffery, xii). The incomprehensibility of Western involvement in the Vietnam war was also a catalyst for change.

Another major influence was the popular appeal of television and cinema. Both media superseded reading as a popular leisure activity. The way they handled pace, their shortcuts and omissions influenced postmodern writing (McCaffery, xviii-xix).

As a result of this background, many writers saw realistic fiction as obsolete. Realistic fiction has its origins in 'the assurances and optimism of empiricism and Western rationalism' (McCaffery, xii). In a rapidly changing world, with such nightmares as the Holocaust and Hiroshima as recent history, the notion of empire and Western rationalism had become obscene. Mimesis was out.

Writers such as Jorge Luis Borges, John Fowles, Kurt Vonnegut, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Italo Calvino, Donald Bartheleme, Robert Coover, John Barth and Vladimir Nabokov produced work which rejected the mimetic model. Their writing has 'a shared heightening of artifice, a delight in verbal play and formal manipulation of fictive elements, the widespread use of fantasy and surrealism, a tendency to present obviously fictive characters working out their destinies in landscapes of pure language, dream or fiction' (McCaffery, xiii).

Postmodern writing focuses on subjectivity, fiction-making and language. 'Many of the most important postmodern works, for all their experimentalism, metafictional impulses, self-reflexiveness, playfulness, and game-playing, have much more to say about history, social issues, and politics than is generally realised' (McCaffery, xvii). It must not be forgotten that

'postmodernism is very much centred on political questions : questions about how ideologies are formed, the process whereby conventions are developed, the need for individuals to exercise their own imaginative and linguistic powers lest these powers be coopted by others' (McCaffery, xxv).

Radical changes in writing occur when writers with something to say find current methods inadequate. Given that traditional, measured, 'adult' prose had failed to change the world, it was inevitable that writers would develop new ways to get their message across.

There is nothing new under the sun, though. The only thing stopping *Tristram Shandy* from being called a postmodern novel is the date it was written. Disgruntled writers drew from a number of their literary forebears to evolve a way of writing which expressed their ideas. James Joyce remains the major influence. *Ulysses* in all its playful, erudite, vulgar complexity, and *Finnegans Wake*, which carries erudite playfulness to its literary limits, showed writers what can be done between the covers of a novel.

Other writers had experimented in the areas that postmodern writers would imitate or amplify. These include Raymond Roussel, Alfred Jarry, Andre Gide, Franz Kafka and William Faulkner (McCaffery, xv).

Eco believes 'that post-modernism is not a trend to be chronologically defined, but, rather, an ideal category - or, better still, a *Kunstwollen*, a way of operating. We could say that every period has its own post-modernism, just as every period would have its own mannerism' (*Reflections*, 16). This statement comes out of his frustration with the tendency to declare an increasing number of older works postmodern. 'Soon' he thunders, 'the post-modern category will include Homer' (*Reflections*, 16).

Irony is at the core of postmodern writing.

The post-modern reply to the modern consists of recognising that the past, since it cannot really be destroyed, because its destruction leads to silence, must be revisited : but with irony, not innocently.

I think of the post-modern attitude as that of a man who loves a very cultivated woman and knows he cannot say to her, "I love you madly," because he knows that she knows ( and that she knows that he knows) that these words have already been written by Barbara Cartland. Still, there is a solution. He can say, "As Barbara Cartland would put it, I love you madly." At this point, having said clearly that it is

no longer possible to speak innocently, he will nevertheless have said what he wanted to say to the woman : that he loves her, but he loves her in an age of lost innocence. If the woman goes along with this, she will have received a declaration of love all the same. Neither of the two speakers will feel innocent, both will have accepted the challenge of the past, of the already said, which cannot be eliminated : both will consciously and with pleasure play the game of irony . . . . But both will have succeeded, once again, in speaking of love.

Irony, metalinguist play, enunciation squared. Thus, with the modern, anyone who does not understand the game can only reject it, but with the post-modern, it is possible not to understand the game and yet to take it seriously. Which is, after all, the quality (risk) of irony. There is always someone who takes ironic discourse seriously.

(*Reflections* , 17)

Paradoxically, Eco's example of the postmodern attitude illustrates precisely why so many people dislike reading postmodern fiction. Firstly, he announces that the audience is limited to 'cultivated' people. Postmodern writing demands a great deal from its readers, who need to be widely read to appreciate the work. Eco hopes that the circle can be widened a little - as he himself did with his best seller, *The Name of the Rose*. He quotes from John Barth's 1980 essay, 'The Literature of Replenishment : Postmodernist Fiction', in support of this point.

My ideal post-modernist author neither merely repudiates nor merely imitates either his 20th-century modernist parents or his 20th-century pre-modernist grandparents. He has the first half of our century under his belt, but not on his back . . . He may not hope to reach and move the devotees of James Mitchener and Irving Wallace - not to mention the lobotomised mass-media illiterates. But he *should* hope to reach and delight, at least part of the time, beyond the circle of what Mann used to call the 'Early-Christians : professional devotees of high art'. . . The ideal post-modernist novel will somehow rise above the quarrel between realism and irrealism, formalism and 'convention', pure and committed literature, coterie fiction and junk fiction . . . My own analogy would be with good jazz or classical music : one finds much on

successive listenings or close examination of the score that one didn't catch the first time through; but the first time through should be so ravishing - and not just to specialists - that one delights in the replay.

*(Reflections , 17)*

'Lobotomised mass-media illiterates' is a pejorative term. And a strangely safe one, in that both Barth and Eco published their essays in publications not widely read by the general public.

Ironically, this elitist attitude means that most people will not have access to the answers postmodern writers offer to political questions. Is this a prudent move? Perhaps educated readers are supposed to pass on the ideas in a more palatable form, until they finally filter down to that current Western form of public debate - talkback radio.

The second problem with Eco's argument is his insistence that very cultivated people cannot set history aside and say 'I love you madly' with a serious face. While Eco may be unable to do this, many people *can* ignore Barbara Cartland, soap operas, Hollywood movies, and even their own declarations of love to previous partners, and utter the phrase from the heart.

Eco implicitly makes another point in his argument. The 'uncultivated' are ignorant of history, and are consequently unable to accept the challenge of the past. The resurgence of Maori in New Zealand makes a mockery of Eco's argument. Maoritanga is deeply rooted in myth and history. Maori, many of whom who lack Eco's narrowly defined 'cultivation' (a university education focusing on Western literature, philosophy, art, etc, culminating in an ability to enjoy postmodern fiction) accept the challenge of the past, are highly politicised and are actively involved in changing society.

In the same way, readers and writers can - and do - willingly suspend their disbelief when they read books written in a traditional way. Important issues can be addressed in such works, and readers can engage with them.

Postmodern writing should be seen in the same light as Germaine Greer views poetry:

Poetry is now a special-interest area, not as big as food, not as small as ice-dancing, maybe about the size of ballroom dancing . . . Faith in the power of poetry as the acme of human creative expression is an absolute requirement for any who choose to study it ; the person who

comes to the conclusion that poets have been given too much honour had better keep it to herself.

(Greer, xii-xiii)

Postmodern writing is *one* approach, which appeals to a small sector of the reading public. Those of us who relish it need to remember that it is simply one way to publicly express ideas.

### iii Enlightenment Thought & Postmodernism

Opinions differ on the postmodern position on the Enlightenment. Critics generally mention it, disagreeing on whether postmodernism advances its aims, or draws from pre-Enlightenment thought.

In his famous essay ' "An Answer to the Question : What is Enlightenment?" ', Immanuel Kant states that

*Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's own understanding without the guidance of another. This immaturity is self-incurred if its cause is not lack of understanding, but lack of resolution and courage to use it without the guidance of another. The motto of enlightenment is therefore : Sapere aude! [literally, dare to be wise] Have courage in your own understanding.*

(Kant, 51)

Timothy Bewes summarises the position of Sloterdijk, from whom he draws in his views on postmodernism.

Enlightenment is a discourse which has failed to deliver in its promises . . . The perceived infirmities of the present, which include a widespread mistrust of politicians and a broad loss of faith in the political institution as such, a resurgence of interest in mystical accounts of the world, a persistent suspicion towards the grounds of their 'dehumanization' and 'totalitarianism', and a nostalgic, occasionally playful investment in the notion of reinventing or recovering a 'lost' innocence, may all be subsumed under . . . 'enlightenment false consciousness.'

Christopher Norris, the writer of 'three books explicitly angled against postmodernism' (Blewes, 20), insists that it is the 'desire to make reality over into an aesthetic phenomenon - to collapse the whole range of ontological distinctions between life and art, fact and fiction, history and poetry, truth and appearance - which typifies the current postmodernist drive against the Enlightenment and all its works' (Norris, 1993, 63).

Terry Eagleton, whose views on postmodernism tend to be negative, defines it as being the opposite of Enlightenment thinking.

Postmodernity is a style of thought which is suspicious of classical notions of truth, reason, identity and objectivity, of the idea of universal progress or emancipation, of single frameworks, grand narratives or ultimate grounds of explanation. Against these Enlightenment norms, it sees the world as contingent, ungrounded, diverse, unstable, indeterminate, a set of disunified cultures or interpretations which breed a degree of scepticism about the objectivity of truth, history and norms, the givenness of natures and the coherence of identities . . .

Postmodernism is a style of culture which reflects something of [the] epochal change [in a new form of Western capitalism], in a depthless, decentred, ungrounded, self-reflexive, playful, derivative, eclectic, pluralistic art which blurs the boundaries between 'high' and 'popular' culture, as well as between art and everyday experience.

(Eagleton, vii)

Where does Eco fit into this picture? His self-proclaimed postmodernism can be identified by such features as the incorporation of popular culture into his writing. However, he also has a high regard for individual thought, and the Horatian tag *sapere aude* could well be his motto. At this point, though, the situation becomes complicated. Eco likes to teach people. His classroom teaching technique is based on a problematic premise - seduction.

[Y]ou have to make the students love you during the first three minutes of class. If then and there you don't win them over, if the students don't

sense that you have fallen in love with them, too, it's all over. You may as well go home . . . You walk into class intending to change other people's ideas; you're going to destroy their assumptions and offer them another perspective on the world. There's always an element of possession, of conquest . . . Why do I like to teach? . . . In the process of trying to get a class to understand your ideas, during that courtship, you get a lot of different reactions and you deepen your understanding of what you are saying.

(Interview, 46-47)

In his works of fiction Eco employs comedy as a seductive device. When asked how he kept

the love affair [with students] alive for an entire semester? [He replied] If you win the battle in those first three minutes, there's little to worry about. I have a similar experience with dogs; they never bite me because, somehow, they know I'm fond of them . . . If [students] realize that you despise them, that you don't want to teach, that you don't even believe in what you're teaching, they'll reject you immediately. Otherwise they'll love you.

(Interview, 46)

In a novel he has to rely on his writing alone, and is unable to draw upon the verbal skills and physical mannerisms available to him before an audience. On paper he has to rely on plot, comedy and good writing to keep the reader's attention. Of these features, comedy is the best way of attempting to change people's views because it can subtly ridicule previously held beliefs to such an extent that they become untenable.

Because Eco sincerely believes that his writing has the potential to change attitudes. As *Reflections* shows, Eco attempts to create and control his reader. Discussing *The Name of the Rose*, Elizabeth Dipple says that the reader who 'follows the author's thorough instructions, [will] be transformed into a being ready for the next steps necessary in a neo-enlightenment of contemporary man that is Umberto Eco's most aggressive and kindly act' (Dipple, 139).

This is contrary to the spirit of postmodernism. 'The essence of a

postmodern attitude lies in its displacement and not replacement of other mind-sets. I mean displacement in the sense of stringing all such mind-sets side by side rather than in a vertical, hierarchical order' (Natoli, 15). Eco may use postmodern literary devices to make his point, but he is not a postmodernist.

Eco's views on the Enlightenment are probably best read as being similar to John Ralston Saul's argument in *Voltaire's Bastards*. Saul argues that we are living in 'the dotage of the Age of Reason' (Saul, 1993, 9) and that

[t]he reality is that we have not moved beyond the basic ideas of the sixteenth century which, for want of any better description, should be called the concept of reason. {These concepts} were based upon an essential misunderstanding - that reason constituted a moral weapon, when in fact it was nothing more than a disinterested administrative weapon . . .

It is a general weakness of men [sic] delivering ideas that they are able to convince themselves their words represent a break with the past and a new beginning . . . If the philosophes of reason [Voltaire, etc] believed that nothing provokes violence as effectively as fear and that fear is the product of ignorance, it was because they had arrived on the scene after two hundred years of religious and civil wars. These had produced levels of civilian violence not achieved again until the twentieth century. The reasonable men of the eighteenth century wanted to cut the roots of this view. Their strategy was to attack . . . theology, metaphysics and other brands of concealed dogma or superstition . . . It was quite natural that this assault on darkness and on the divine aspect of the absolute monarchs who presided over it should eventually have been called the Enlightenment . . . What the philosophes do not seem to have noticed, however, was that the very methods they were about to loose upon the world in the name of reason, had been in ever-increasing practical use throughout the two preceding centuries of violence. In fact, these methods had been used by Richelieu 150 years earlier precisely to create the absolutist stage against which the Enlightenment was now rebelling . . . it was the repackaging of disparate forces already at play . . . We are constantly declaring new ages.

Eco draws on postmodernism and learned wit to produce texts which attempt to change the way people think. He combines academic thought, game playing, a variety of literary and popular resources and various comic techniques in his writing. Because he relate to such writing (as his comments in *Reflections of the Name of the Rose* show), he expects his readers to share his tastes. On the whole he fails, because most people do not understand the subtleness of the attack, as will be seen in chapters on individual books.

#### **iv Irony**

Having clarified those matters, it is time to address Eco's comments on irony. Irony is a key element in postmodern fiction. D.H. Green's definition of irony is a useful starting point. 'Irony is a statement or presentation of an action or situation in which the real or intended meaning conveyed to the uninitiated intentionally diverges from, is incongruous with, the apparent or pretended meaning presented to the uninitiated' (Green, 9).

Eco said that irony is how postmodernism acknowledges the past. The past must be remembered to keep its lessons alive. Commemorating history produces a dilemma

: overfamiliarity can lead to nonchalance. An ironic approach avoids this problem. Of course, irony will, in turn, eventually elicit indifference. For now, though, its shock factor remains an effective tool.

'Irony, several scholars contend, is the response of people who find themselves in the twilight zone of two cultures. The humor of irony is gentler than that of Hobbesian superiority and more cogent than Schlemiel's self-derogation. Indeed, it summons us to fun, truth, and dignity. In this process, hostility actually plays second fiddle' (Dorinson & Boskin, 167).

The hero of *The Name of the Rose*, William of Baskerville, is an early example of Ecoian irony. The hint of Sherlock Holmes given in Brother William's place of origin is repeatedly reinforced in the novel. He has an adoring Watson, Adso of Melk, who records his master's adventures.

Brother William's physical appearance was at that time such as to attract the attention of the most inattentive observer. His height surpassed that of a normal man and he was so thin that he seemed still

taller. His eyes were sharp and penetrating; his thin and slightly beaky nose gave his countenance the expression of a man on the lookout, save in certain moments of sluggishness. . .

His chin also denoted a firm will . . . In time I realised that what seemed a lack of confidence was only curiosity. . . He had perhaps seen fifty springs and was therefore already very old, but his tireless body moved with an agility I myself often lacked. His energy seemed inexhaustible when a burst of activity overwhelmed him. But from time to time, as if his vital spirit had something of the crayfish, he moved backward in moments of inertia, and I watched him lie for hours on my pallet in my cell, uttering barely a few monosyllables, without contracting a single muscle of his face. On these occasions I would have suspected he was in the power of some vegetal substance capable of producing visions if the obvious temperance of his life had not led me to reject this thought. I will not deny, however, that in the course of the journey, he sometimes stopped at the edge of a meadow, at the entrance to a forest, to gather some herb (always the same one, I believe): and he would then chew them with an absorbed look. . . Once, when I asked him what it was, he said laughing that a good Christian can sometimes learn also from the infidels, and when I asked him to let me taste it, he replied that herbs that are good for an old Franciscan are not good for a young Benedictine.

*(Rose, 15-16)*

Brother William is clearly a clone of Holmes. Or is he? The uninitiated reader delights in the resemblances, while the initiated reader already starts to wonder. Dr Watson recognised heroin, and partly excused Holmes' use of the drug. The elderly Adso of Melk, writing of the adventures of his youth, is far more naive.

Unlike Holmes, whose interests, beside violin playing, run to such esoteric matters as different types of pipe and cigarette ash, Brother William is at the cutting edge of intellectual thought. Among other things, he is a disciple of Roger Bacon, owns and uses a clock, astrolabe and magnet, is a herbalist, wears spectacles to read, and is able to instruct in the correct grinding of lenses.

Brother William performs a Holmes-like feat early in the book. Nearing

the abbey they are visiting, Brother William and Adso see an agitated group of monks and servants coming towards them. Remigio, the abbey cellarer pauses to greet Brother William.

"I thank you, Brother Cellarer," my master replied politely, "and I appreciate your courtesy all the more since, in order to greet me, you have interrupted your search. But don't worry. The horse came this way and took the path to the right. He will not get far, because he will have to stop when he reaches the dungheap. He is too intelligent to plunge down that precipitous slope. . . ."

"When did you see him?" the cellarer asked.

"We haven't seen him at all, have we Adso?" William said, turning toward me with an amused look. "But if you are hunting for Brunellus, the horse can only be where I have said."

The cellarer hesitated. He looked at William, then at the path, and finally asked, "Brunellus? How did you know?"

"Come, come," William said, "it is obvious you are hunting for Brunellus, the abbot's favorite horse, fifteen hands, the fastest in your stables, with a dark coat, a full tail, small round hoofs, but a very steady gait; small head, sharp ears, big eyes. He went to the right, as I said, but you should hurry, in any case.

*(Rose, 23)*

There are a couple of twists to the Holmesian technique. William does explain his reasoning, which is logical - up to a point. Adso asks how he knew what the horse looked like.

"I am not sure he has those features, but no doubt the monks firmly believe he does. . . . If the horse whose passing I inferred had not really been the finest of the stables, stableboys would have been out chasing him, but instead, the cellarer in person had undertaken the search. And a monk who considers a horse excellent, whatever his natural forms, can only see him as the auctoritates have described him, especially if" - and here he smiled slyly in my direction - "the describer is a learned Benedictine."

"All right," I said, "but why Brunellus?"

"May the Holy Ghost sharpen your mind, son!" my master exclaimed. "What other name could he possibly have? Why, even the great Buridan, who is about to become rector in Paris, when he wants to use a horse in one of his logical examples, always calls it Brunellus."

(*Rose*, 24)

### v Parody

Other comic techniques are apparent in this example. William is a parody of Sherlock Holmes, not an anachronistic fourteenth-century version. Brother William fails to solve the multiple murders at the abbey. Eco says that 'the book starts out as a mystery (and continues to deceive the ingenuous reader until the end, so the ingenuous reader may not even realise that this is a mystery in which very little is discovered and the detective is defeated)' (*Reflections*, 14).

A deeper layer of meaning lies under this example of William's deductive skill. Sebeok explains that

Eco found his immediate inspiration for this incident of the abbot's horse in Voltaire's *Zadig* (1926:9,...), where the Master of the King's Hounds asks Zadig "if he had not seen the king's horse pass by":

The horse you are looking for is the best galloper in the stable. . . . It is fifteen hands high, and has a very small hoof. It[s] tail is three and a half feet long. The studs on its bit are of twenty-three carat gold, and its shoes of eleven scruple silver." "Which road did it take? . . . Where is it? . . . "I have not seen the horse," answered Zadig, "and I never heard speak of it."

. . . But long before Voltaire, there were Arabic, medieval, and other variants of Zadig's abductive exploits . . . Among recent post-Voltaire but pre-Eco illustrations of this equine intertextuality, my parodic pick fastens upon Dorothy L. Sayers book, *Have His Carcass*.'

(Sebeok, 279)

Eco is writing for the reader who knows the Zadig story. That reader is invited to join Eco in quiet laughter at those who read the novel as either a whodunit, or as a straightforward parody of Sherlock Holmes.

## vi Paradox

Paradox is another feature of postmodern wit. Abrams defines paradox as 'a statement which seems on its face to be self-contradictory or absurd yet turns out to make good sense' (Abrams, 140). *Foucault's Pendulum* has layers of paradox which add to the complexity of the plot. One example of these multiple paradoxes is Lia's deconstruction, in chapter 106, of Colonel Ardenti's mysterious document. The whole novel to this point has been based on the assumed authenticity of this document. However crazy the speculation may have been, the reader has believed that the Colonel's interpretation of the document was, in the realm of the fiction, correct. Eco demolishes this belief. Twice. First in the chapter's epigraph.

List No. 5

6 undershirts

6 shorts

6 handkerchiefs

has always puzzled scholars, principally because of the total absence of socks.

- Woody Allen, "The Metterling List," *Getting Even*, New York, Random House, 1966, p.8

(*Foucault's Pendulum*, 532)

And second, in Lia's reading of the document.

"Listen carefully, Pow, because I'm going to demonstrate to you that the simplest explanation is always the best . . . Because the message is ordinary. It's a laundry list. " . . .

"My God," I said. "I think you're right . . . but the first message really is in code." . . .

"True. The French text I polished off in an hour, but the other one kept me busy for two days . . ."

The reader has ploughed through 105 chapters on a false premise. The first chapters, written as a flashback, had promised a thriller. Belbo's frantic telephone call to Casaubon was terminated by '[a] sharp report, like a shot. It must have been the receiver slamming against the wall or onto that little shelf they have under telephones. A scuffle. Then the click of the receiver being hung up. Certainly not by Belbo' (*Foucault's Pendulum, 22*)

Until this point, the novel has worked on the assumption that Belbo's claims prior to that abrupt conclusion were true.

"The Plan. The Plan is real. I know, don't say it. They're after me."

"Who?" I still didn't understand.

"The Templars, Casaubon, for God's sake. You won't want to believe this, I know, but it's all true . . . I'm on the run, Casaubon. They'll kill me."

*(Foucault's Pendulum, 21 -22)*

Lia maintains that the tongue-in-cheek plan Casaubon, Belbo and Diotalleivi have written and rewritten is 'grotesque . . . your plan is full of secrets, full of contradictions. For that reason you could find thousands of insecure people ready to identify with it. . . It's a nasty joke' (*Foucault's Pendulum, 540 -541*).

This is a second paradox. The plan is a game played by three intellectuals as light relief from their job as publishers of lucrative works lunatics and morons write. As Belbo explains,

A lunatic is easily recognized. 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 the 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.

*(Foucault's Pendulum, 66 - 67)*

Belbo damns himself, and his two friends, as morons who produce a worthless pseudo-scholastic work. In seeking to parody the authors they despise, the men increasingly lose sight of the parodic element. Vast quantities of time and effort go into their project. Lia, even with a baby to care for, only took two days to demolish the document their complex argument was based on. The sub text is that the three men chose not to do so, because, from the start, they were deluding themselves about their motives. Paradoxically, the ideas of this sane, intellectual trio are more dangerous than many they print. They cost Belbo his life, Diotallevi thinks they caused his terminal cancer and, as the novel ends, Casaubon is waiting to be assassinated.

This is because, hearing of the work, pseudo-scholars believed it held vital clues to a (non-existent) secret about the universe. A secret which these scholars would torture and kill to discover.

Lia's prediction that insecure people would readily identify with the plan was correct. And the results were fatal.

#### **vii Eco's views on comedy**

Eco has strong views on comedy. He argues that the difference between comedy and tragedy is not the subject matter, but the focus. Tragedy repeatedly restates the rule which is being violated (eg incest, cannibalism, matricide). However, 'comic works take the rule for granted, and don't bother to restate it' ('The Comic & the Rule', 272). The subject can be identical. It is the reinforcement or not of the social rule being flouted which dictates whether the work is tragic or comic.

The violated rule need not be universal. The modern reader of *Madame Bovary*, Eco says, may not agree that adultery is sinful. However, the story will seem tragic to the reader because the novel reinforces that particular view. Adultery is sinful in the world of the novel, and *Madame Bovary's* situation is consequently tragic.

A story about a cannibal who rejects cannibalism 'will be tragic to the degree that the story convinces us of the majesty and weight of anthropophagy. A story that narrates the sufferings of a dyspeptic and vegetarian anthropophagist who doesn't like human flesh, but fails to explain to us at length and convincingly how noble and proper anthropophagy is, will be only a comic story' ('The Comic & the Rule', 272).

'Comic effect is achieved . . . if the rule is not cited but assumed as

implicit . . . to enjoy the violation, the rule of the genre must be presupposed, and considered inviolable' ('The Comic & the Rule', 274 -5).

Eco, then, believes that any subject may be treated in either a comic or a tragic manner.

Eco argues that comedy only appears to liberate and subvert. The situation is comic, Eco says, precisely because the reader has internalized the rule which is being violated. The reader believes the rule to be inviolate. Comedy appears liberating because it exists against this internalisation. Rules, as is the case with Carnival, are only flouted for a brief period in comedy. Then 'real' life resumes, the rules firmly retained.

Eco uses the Aristotelian differentiation between comedy and humour. 'The comic is the perception of the opposite ; humor is the feeling of it' ('The Comic & the Rule', 276). Again, the topic is immaterial, it is the treatment which matters. 'An example of the comic might be a decrepit old woman who makes herself up like a young girl ; humor would insist on asking also why the old woman acts like that' ('The Comic and the Rule', 276).

In humour, the reader identifies with the rule breaker. In Eco's terminology, Don Quixote is a humorous, rather than a comic, character. This is because the reader knows that Don Quixote is harking back to an outdated type of fiction.

Unlike comedy, humour states and discusses the rules it violates. As a result of this, humour functions like tragedy, with the following difference. 'In the tragic, the reiterated rule is part of the narrative universe (Bovary), or, when it is restated at the level of the structure of discourse (the [Greek] tragic chorus) it is still uttered by the characters ; in humor, on the other hand, the description of the rule should appear as an intrusion, though concealed, of the author, who reflects on the social scenarios in which the enunciated character should believe' ('The Comic and the Rule', 277).

Eco writes of humour:

Humor does not pretend . . . to lead us beyond our own limits. It gives us the feeling, or better, the structure of our own limits. It is never off limits, it undermines limits from inside. It does not fish for an impossible freedom, yet it is a true movement of freedom. Humor does not promise us liberation; on the contrary, it warns us about the impossibility of global liberation, reminding us of the presence of a law that we no

longer have reason to obey. In doing so it undermines the law. It makes us feel the uneasiness of living under a law - any law . . . [real humour is rare]. When a real piece of humor appears, entertainment becomes avantgarde; a supreme philosophical game. We smile because we feel sad for having discovered, only for a moment, the truth. But at this moment we have become too wise to believe it. We feel quiet and peaceful, a little angry, with a shade of bitterness in our minds.

('Frames of comic freedom', 8)

Lia's unravelling of the document is an example of this type of humour. This revelation is an epiphany for Casaubon. He begins to understand what is *really* matters in life - well, what Eco considers to be important in life.

### **viii Game theory**

Eco expects his readers to act as accomplices in the literary games he creates (*Reflections*, 14). In this he follows two of his literary 'heroes', James Joyce and Jorge Luis Borges. Borges once said that 'literature is a game with tacit conventions; to violate them partially or totally is one of the many joys (one of the many obligations) of the game, whose limits are unknown' (Hutchinson, viii).

Game theory is a loosely defined body of knowledge. It has two branches. The first, rooted in mathematics,<sup>2</sup> is now the domain of social scientists. As such, it relates to conflict management and decision making. The second branch is the game in literature.

The idea of game playing as a theory caught the public imagination with Eric Berne's 1964 book, *Games People Play*. Berne discusses what he calls transactional analysis, that is, the type of psychological games played by people in everyday life. He gives the games evocative - and populist - names, such as Now I've Got You, You Son Of A Bitch and Look How Hard I've Tried.

He does refer briefly to games played by characters in fiction. 'Let's

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<sup>2</sup> It deals with games of strategy. This compares with probability theory, which deals with games of chance.

YouAnd Him Fight<sup>3</sup> is the basis of much of the world's literature, both good and bad' (Berne, 124). He fails to give any examples. He does say that Maugham's *Of Human Bondage* and Dicken's *Great Expectations* are examples of Rapo<sup>4</sup>.

Peter Hutchinson claims to be the first person to apply Berne's achievement - the isolation and categorising of human moves and stratagems - to the field of literary criticism (Hutchinson, 1). While Johan Huizinga and Roger Caillois both wrote about play and games neither dealt with literary games.

Huizinga believed that human beings are fundamentally game playing creatures, calling his book *Homo Ludens* to reflect this belief. He developed the first definition of play which he quantified as

a free activity standing quite consciously outside 'ordinary' life as being 'not serious', but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. it is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means.

(Huizinga, 13)

Caillois identified the flaws in this definition, especially the fact that while play may at times promote secrecy, it is ostentatious. Caillois said that play had six attributes. It is free, separate, uncertain, unproductive, governed by rules, and consists of make-believe. (Hutchinson, 5). Like Huizinga, he idealises play.

<sup>3</sup> There are three variations to this game.

1) A romantic situation, where a woman causes two men to fight for her love. She marries the victor.

2) A tragic situation. Custom demands that two men fight for her. Traditionally she has no choice of husband. However, she can determine the outcome of the fight by playing another game, eg Let's Pull A Fast One On Joey.

3)A comic situation. Having Initiated the fight, she leaves with a third man.

<sup>4</sup> Rapo is a game where a woman flirts, in order to reject her victim. As the title indicates this may have dire consequences for the woman, but Berne seems to be reinforcing the stereotyped view that 'she brought it on herself'. Berne is a Freudian, and the book was published in the early sixties, which may explain his attitude toward women. The trivialisation of rape by using the word rapo is unthinkable in the late 1990s.

## ix Game playing

Leaving aside other games, it is obvious that literary games do not fit into these definitions. The reader is not totally free. An example of this is the revelation in chapter 106 of *Foucault's Pendulum* that the crucial document is a 'laundry' list. While the reader knew that the document was a fiction, in that Eco had invented it as part of the novel, it was held to be 'true' and 'real' in the context of the fictional world.

Literary games are about intellectual pleasures and have their own priorities (Hutchinson, 6). A literary game 'may be seen as any *playful*, self-conscious and extended means by which an author stimulates his [sic] reader to deduce or to speculate, by which he encourages him to see a relationship between different parts of the text, or between the text and something extraneous to it' (Hutchinson, 14). He says that excessive self-consciousness is the principal hazard of literary play (Hutchinson, 15).

Play, like comedy, can be subversive. Postmodern writers use play and comedy to hook in, destabilise and hold the interest of readers. Postmodern fiction is complex. It requires a great deal of effort from readers. Game playing has an important role in this expectation. Part of the postmodern writer's aim is to challenge the Realist world view. One way to achieve this is to emphasise and celebrate the *fictionality* of works of fiction. Rather than the willing suspension of disbelief, the postmodernist wants the reader to acknowledge the work as a work of fiction<sup>5</sup>. This immediately sets up a game situation, with the reader acknowledging the work is fiction.

Realism, which postmodernism challenges, is based on the following premises.

[T]here is a positively determinable world. . . this world is a complete, integrated system of phenomena governed by some coherent scheme of rules . . . whose only obscurity derives from its vast diversity and complexity, and whose truthful delineation depends ultimately on the comprehensiveness and rationality of its description . . . the essentially right procedures for referentially-motivated fiction are those of *mimesis*, . . . [that is] the material transcription of the empirically verifiable data (the

<sup>5</sup> Italo Calvino does this in the first sentence of *If on a winter's night a traveller*. 'You are about to begin reading Italo Calvino's new novel, *If on a winter's night a traveller*.'

objects) of the physical senses . . . fiction . . . should direct its attention towards an *exhaustive* disclosure of the 'facts' ('the whole truth') and the presentation, finally, of what is most *probable* according to our past experience of the actual world . . . the greatest effort must be made towards the ostensibly most '*objective*' articulation of the data possible ('nothing but the truth'), with the minimal visible intervention on the part of the 'teller'. A Realistic narrative is to be an *illusionistic* and *declarative* mode of telling. . . the orderliness of an *unambiguous causal* conception of the universe is essential.

(Nash, 8)

Postmodern writing makes Berne's type of literary analysis, where fiction is held to reflect and repeat real life (whatever that is), impossible.

Hutchinson says the following features may be treated playfully in literature :- adumbration (foreshadowing), allegory, allusion, ambiguity, games - social and sporting, montage and collage, myth, names, nonsense, paradox, parody, travesty, burlesque, pastiche, hoax, spoof, pictures, prefiguration, puns, quotation, red herrings, and symbols. Many of these features, such as allegory, can be used in a serious manner. This enables the writer to invert and possibly ridicule, the straight use of these features.

The fictionality of the *The Name of the Rose* is obvious in the first few pages. The epigraph, 'Naturally, a manuscript' (*Rose*, iv) alerts the reader. It is a curious way to start a novel. It is followed by a quasi-scholastic introduction which parodies those which preface edited editions of literary works.

Despite the French and Latin quotations and footnotes, the introduction is unquestionably spurious. In the first sentence the pseudo-scholar says 'I was handed a book written by a certain Abbe Vallet' (*Rose*, 1), but fails to say who did the handing. He never names his sources. He refers to 'a scholar, whom I prefer not to name - later assured me (and he quoted indexes from memory) the great Jesuit never mentioned Adso of Melk' (*Rose*, 3). The reader has no way of checking either the scholar, or the indexes. Primary sources are a distant memory. The pseudo-scholar acknowledges this.

On sober reflection, I find few reasons for publishing my Italian version of an obscure, neo-Gothic French version of a seventeenth century Latin edition of a work written in Latin by a German monk towards the

end of the fourteenth century

. . . In short, I am full of doubts. I really don't know why I have decided to pluck up my courage and present, as if it were authentic, the manuscript of Adso of Melk.

(*Rose*, 4&5)

Eco attacks shoddy scholarship in the introduction. This attack continues with the pseudo-scholar's coy references to his complicated love life. The book was lost when 'the person with whom I was travelling disappeared - taking Abbe Vallet's book, not out of spite, but because of the abrupt and untidy way in which our relationship ended' (*Rose*, 2). Later he says that 'by now the Vallet volume itself could not be recovered (or at least I didn't dare go and ask it back from the person who had taken it from me)' (*Rose*, 3).

Eco expects his reader to understand the process of scholarly editing. Eco's tongue is planted firmly in his cheek, and the educated reader will realise that this sets the tone for the whole book.

Eco deliberately set out to construct his reader. He refused to abbreviate the first one hundred pages, saying that they set the pace for the book. 'Therefore those first hundred pages are like a penance or an initiation, and if someone does not like them, so much the worse for him' (*Reflections*, 13). Eco wanted the reader to be 'an accomplice . . . one who would play my game . . . But at the same time, with all my might, I wanted to create a type of reader who, once the initiation was past, would become my prey - or, rather, the prey of the text - and would think he wanted nothing but what the text was offering him . . . I wanted the reader to enjoy himself.' (*Reflections*, 14 & 15).

Ironically, Eco's failure to construct this ideal reader was one of the factors which made the novel a commercial success.

Eco plays a more select game in the introduction. A breakthrough in the pseudo-scholar's hunt for sources occurred when he 'came upon the Castilian version of a little work by Milo Temesvar, *On the Use of Mirrors in the Game of Chess*' (*Rose*, 3).

Until 1988, Milo Temesvar's name had meaning for only a few people. Then, after reading an article which analysed and explained Eco's choice of this name, Eco published an account of the origins of Milo Temesvar.

In the early sixties, at the Frankfurt Book Fair, four distinguished publishers met for lunch. . . . It was a moment in publishing history when people were paying enormous sums of money to buy the rights to any book, and these publishers were preoccupied with that irresponsible trend. Thus one of them said, "I bet if we invent an author - let's say, Milo Temesvar - who has written a new novel, let's say 'Let Me Say It Now,' and that the New American Library has just paid a \$50, 000 advance for an option on the manuscript, before this night is over, everybody will rush to obtain the foreign right." Valentino Bompiani went back to our booth and told me the story. I started circulating through the fair, asking people about that mysterious Temesvar and dropping vague bits of information. The rumor did indeed spread; by 6:00 p.m. practically everyone was ready to sell his own soul in order to have Temesvar, and at 8.00 p.m. a well-known Italian publisher boasted at dinner : "Stop. I have just bought the foreign rights for the whole world."

I began to like Milo. Two years later I wrote for a magazine a fake review about the new book of Milo Temesvar, *The Patmos Sellers*. My review was a piece of academic chicanery intended to mock the positions of Adorno and Marcuse. I inserted in my review numerous signals of forgery. I said, for instance, that Milo Temesvar was an Albanian who had been charged with "leftist deviationism" and expelled from his country, that the book was published by Snoopy & Snoopy Inc. All in vain. A prominent publisher took my review seriously and sent his editors a memo instructing them to buy the book at any cost.

*(Prelude to a Palimpsest, xii-xiii)*

Eco, then, has long been interested in playing literary games. The Milo Temesvar business has disturbing undertones. Eco has a malicious side to his character. The first incarnation of Milo ( which Eco seems to have single handedly lifted out of the realm of conjecture) had the intention of making publishers look foolish. Eco and his friends disapproved of the price paid to writers for their work. This was presumably because Eco ( at the time a non-fiction editor) and his publisher friends did not like to pay those sort of figures. The issue of a writer's worth is ignored. These men focused on their own profit margins.

The fake review ended up reinforcing Eco's views not only on people's gullibility, but, more importantly, on the (apparent) lack of education of supposedly erudite individuals. In neither of these cases does Eco present any mitigating evidence on behalf of the publishers.

Milo Temesvar's name in the introduction signals that the story is a joke *at the expense of anyone who takes it seriously as a novel*. Given that twenty-odd years had lapsed since Milo had his last public outing, only a handful of people would realise the significance of the name. Some of whom would have been the victims of Eco's practical joking, and may not have appreciated the reference.

Eco is not playing fairly with the reader. Borges reinforced the validity of this violation of the rules, and unfairness on the part of the writer is a legitimate form of literary game playing. And why should Eco keep the rules? The reader, after all, has the right to put the book down if they dislike it for any reason. The problem here is not so much that the novel has a secret sub text, but that Eco eventually publicly divulged it by ridiculing the work of the critic who had deconstructed the name Milo Temesvar. This makes subsequent critics cautious about commenting confidently about Eco's writing, given that he may cut one down to size with an equally amusing anecdote. Eco retains control of his work, then, by the clever use of disarmingly funny stories. He knows that comedy is a potent weapon, especially when wielded against the academic style of the articles to which he responds.

Even then, readers with no inkling of the academic debate over the name of Milo Temesvar, is left, duped, because they lack the information which indicates that the work is not to be taken seriously. Consequently they enjoy - or hate - the book without realising the contempt Eco holds towards them. Whether or not this matters is a different question. After all, they got a good historical detective novel, and he got fame and wealth. By his third novel, Eco seems to have stopped this game playing at the expense of his readers dignity - like the classic character in fiction, he changes.

## Chapter 2

*The Name of the Rose*

I have always imagined that paradise will be a kind of library.

(Jorge Luis Borges)

[Libraries] are paradise. . . Yes, paradise is a challenge, a privileged place in which you can stay for only a few minutes every ten centuries. Libraries fascinate me and that's why I run from them. If they ensnare me, they drive me crazy.

(Umberto Eco)

### **i Laughter and Aristotle.**

Laughter is at the core of *The Name of the Rose*. Eco inserts academic and religious argument about comedy and laughter in an historical whodunit, a step which functions as a giant red herring. It is this too effective red herring - the mystery plot- which engages most readers, rather than the discussion of the role of comedy in the world.

The plot revolves around locating a copy of Aristotle's theory of comedy. As this work has long since been lost (if, indeed it was ever written), Eco is free to reconstruct it based on his reading of Aristotle. 'Firm outlines of such a theory can, however, be derived from relevant passages in the *Poetics* and the *Rhetoric* (Golden, 239). Leon Golden summarises

Eco's reconstruction of Aristotle's theory of comedy [thus:-] . . .

1. Comedy inspires the pleasure of the ridiculous and arrives at the purification (catharsis) of that passion.
2. Comedy is worthy of serious consideration because man [sic], alone among the animals, is capable of laughter.
3. Comedy excites laughter by means of actions and speech.
4. Comic actions are those that liken the best to the worst, violate the laws of nature, or that arise from the irrelevant and inconsequential or from the debasing of character, or from disharmony, or from the choice of the least worthy things.

(Golden, 243-4)

## ii Carnival.

These points are all covered during what the novel euphemistically describes as 'a fraternal debate regarding the poverty of Jesus' (*Rose*, 335). It is, in fact, a brawl between two august delegations.

Then Alborea, running short on arguments, started to cross the space that separated him from the Minorites, indicating in a loud voice and with words I dare not repeat his firm intention to pull off the beard of the Bishop of Kaffa, whose masculinity he called into question, and whom he planned to punish, by the logic of an eye for an eye, shoving that beard in a certain place.

The other Minorites rushed to form a barrier and defend their brother; the Avignonese thought it useful to lend the Dominican a hand, and (Lord, have mercy on the best among thy sons!) a brawl ensued, which the abbot and the cardinal tried to quell. In the tumult that followed, Minorites and Dominicans said grave things to one another, as if each were a Christian fighting the Saracens. The only ones who remained in their seats were William, on one side, and Bernard Gui, on the other. William seemed sad, and Bernard happy, if you can call happiness the faint smile that curled the inquisitor's lip.

"Are there no better arguments," I asked my master, as Alborea tugged at the beard of the Bishop of Kaffa, "to prove or refute the poverty of Christ?"

"Why, you can affirm both positions, my good Adso," William said, "and you will never be able to establish on the basis of the Gospels whether, and to what extent, Christ considered as his property the tunic he wore . . . But the question is not whether Christ was poor: it is whether the church must be poor. And 'poor' does not so much mean owning a palace or not; it means, rather, keeping or renouncing the right to legislate on earthly matters."

"Then this, I said, "is why the Emperor is so interested in what the Minorites say about poverty."

"Exactly. The Minorites are playing the Emperor's game against the Pope. But Marsilius and I consider it a two-sided game, and we

would like the empire to support our view and serve our idea of human rule." . . .

As we were speaking - and truly I do not know how we managed to hear each other - the dispute reached its climax. The archers intervened, at a sign from Bernard Gui, to keep the two factions apart.

(*Rose*, 345-6)

Here Eco uses elements of the carnivalesque to ridicule the motives which led to historical decisions made by the Catholic church. This, inevitably raises questions in his readers minds about the current relationship between church and state. In true carnival fashion roles are reversed. Adso of Melk, a novice, is able to understand the political undercurrents in the religious debate. The archers, too, remain self-controlled in the face of the brawl.

Alborea's behaviour fits the fourth point above as it debases the role of Bishop. Adso's discreet language reflects his sense of shock at hearing the Dominican Bishop of Alborea's outburst, heightening the effect of the abuse. The reader knows that the sentence went along the lines of, "I'll pull off your beard, you poofter, and stuff it up your arse!" The elevated style Adso here is amusing because of his innocent shock at the language and behaviour of his elders. Men he had previously considered to be role models show themselves to have feet of clay. Adso feels that he ought to tell the truth about what transpired, but is concerned about the possible offence which may be given to the reader. Of course the euphemisms are unnecessary (especially for readers of Eco) and have a similarity to the coy references to 'the F word' and 'f...' in the media. The word is no secret - indeed, playgrounds ring with it - but the practice continues.

Using euphemisms heightens the sense of the impropriety of the language used.

The juxtaposition of discipline, lack of self-control, and political dexterity of the three groups involved increases the comedy. Their priestly training in self-control is useless.

The reader attributes the refusal of Bernard and William to get involved in the fracas to their political reading of the situation, and a personal abhorrence for such childish behaviour. Unfortunately later events prove the second premise incorrect.

Bernard's zeal as an inquisitor overtakes his apparently rational nature.

He must realise that Remigio confesses to murder to ensure a swift death, rather than the torture waiting him as a confessed heretic. 'No, not torture. I will say whatever you want. Better the stake at once: you die of suffocation before you burn' (*Rose*, 387).

William's lust for the lost manuscript causes the entire abbey, including the library, to burn. As Adso says in his old age, "I pray always that God received his soul and forgave him the many acts of pride that his intellectual vanity had made him commit" (*Rose*, 499).

The pleasure of the ridiculous created by these passages does generate catharsis, which is probably more relevant to readers with a Roman Catholic heritage who are aware of the historical abuse of Church teaching by those very teachers. Those of us who come from traditions which already share that view of Catholicism relate in a more general sense to the impossibility of ever finding agreement on ambiguous issues.

### iii Academic writing on *Poetics II*.

Golden goes on to say that while Eco's 'reconstruction is based on and understanding of relevant Aristotelian principles and has genuine merit [it fails to address]. . . the specific emotion which we experience in comedy that is directly parallel to pity and fear in tragedy; and, secondly, with the precise nature of comic catharsis which Eco interprets in a very traditional way as "purification" or "purgation" ' (*Golden*, 244).

Eco's novel was coincidentally published just before Richard Janko's *Aristotle on Comedy : Towards a reconstruction of Poetics II*. This is an academic work requiring an understanding of Greek, Aristotle and scholarly editing. It is succinctly summarised in the blurb.

Aristotle inaugurated the systematic study of comedy with the lost second book of his *Poetics*, the sequel to his profoundly original and influential work on tragedy. In 1839 the *Tractatus Coislinianus*, a summarised treatise about comedy was published from a tenth-century manuscript now in Paris. Its discoverer suggested that it derived from the lost work of Aristotle, but before long the eminent scholar Jacob Bernay condemned it as an ignorant compilation bordering on forgery, a verdict which has ever since passed unchallenged. From detailed scrutiny of the structure, language and ideas of this undeservedly

neglected treatise and related sources, professor Janko argues that it does indeed supply the cardinal points of *Poetics II*, revealing Aristotle's views on comedy and the nature of humour, as exemplified in the plays of Aristophanes, Athens' greatest comedian. Light is shed on numerous aspects of the literary criticism of Aristotle and his successors, especially on what he meant by catharsis in tragedy and comedy. A new edition of the text is accompanied by a facing translation, interpretive essays, reconstruction and commentary  
(Janko, i)

Janko acknowledges Eco's novel, which came to his attention after his 'book had attained its final form' (Janko, viii). While Janko and Golden may quibble over the details, they accept that Eco provides a valid reading of Aristotelian thought.

#### **iv Borges & libraries**

A detective novel which is really an academic discussion of laughter is an excellent example of learned wit, and in particular, scholastic wit. As discussed earlier, the introduction to *The Name of the Rose* parodies the introductions found in academic writing.

The introduction of Jorge of Burgos signals a splendid piece of scholastic wit which permeates and shapes the novel. The obvious parallels with the writer Jorge Luis Borges are there - blindness, age<sup>6</sup>, an earlier career as a librarian, mana, and a Spanish heritage<sup>7</sup> - but Eco uses Borges far more effectively than that. The insertion of Borges into the novel follows Borges' practise of using himself as a character and of, on occasion, using his friends names<sup>8</sup> in his stories as 'a form of private homage and public mystification' (Monegal, 116).

Borges' presence in the novel alerts the reader to recall his writing. As the novel progresses the links to 'The Total Library', 'The Library of Babel', 'Autobiographical Essay', 'Death and the Compass' and 'The Keeper of the Books' are obvious. It is also a carnivalesque inversion : Jorge of Burgos is violently opposed to laughter and comedy, whereas Borges uses comedy as a tool in his writing.

<sup>6</sup> Borges was alive when the novel was written. The novel was published in 1980, and Borges died in 1986.

<sup>7</sup> The Borges family came to Argentina, from Spain, as conquistadors.

<sup>8</sup> eg Bioy Casares in 'Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius.'

Eco plays with Borges' fascination with and fear of mirrors by making Jorge a distorted reflection of his namesake. The secret entrance to the library's enclosed room is hidden in the surround of a mirror. Moreover, the novel functions as a mirror for society, especially for those groups mentioned in the text, such as the Roman Catholic church.

The novel draws on the short story 'The Library of Babel.' This work satirises the function of a library, which is symbolised by the confusion of the builders of the Tower of Babel. It was written when Borges was working in the Miguel Care municipal library. While this may seem a congenial atmosphere for a writer of Borges' stature (he was thirty-eight when he began working there, and increasingly respected in literary circles) the opposite was true.

At the library, we did very little work. There were some fifty of us producing what fifteen could easily have done. My particular job, shared with fifteen or twenty colleagues, was classifying and cataloguing the library's holdings, which until that time were uncatalogued. The collection, however, was so small that we knew where to find the books without the system, so the system, though laboriously carried out, was never needed or used. The first day I worked honestly. On the next, some of my fellows took me aside to say that I couldn't do this sort of thing because it showed them up. "Besides," they argued, "as this cataloguing has been planned to give us some semblance of work, you'll put it all out of our jobs." I told them that I had classified four hundred titles instead of their one hundred. "Well, if you keep that up," they said, "the boss will be angry and won't know what to do with us." For the sake of realism, I was told that from then on I should do eighty-three books one day, ninety another, and one hundred and four the third.

(Monegal, 306)

Borges settled into a pattern of achieving his quota in the first hour, leaving the remaining five free for reading and writing in a quiet spot.

The work was trivial and boring, alongside colleagues who were either 'hoodlums or . . . people who were totally indifferent to the meaning of the function they were performing' (Monegal, 310). As Borges said, 'Ironically, at the time I was a quite well-known writer - except in the library. I remember a

fellow employee's once noting in an encyclopaedia the name of a certain Jorge Luis Borges - a fact that set him wondering at the coincidence of our identical names and birth dates' (Monegal, 308).

Borges' nine years at the library ended when the Peron government 'promoted' him to inspecting chickens and rabbits at the market. In 1955, the military government which succeeded Peron appointed Borges head of the national Library. His eyesight was failing, and the following year he stopped reading and writing on medical advice.

Eco has strong views on libraries and librarians whom he considers to be inept at best, and antagonistic at worst. 'The librarian must consider the reader an enemy, a waster of time (otherwise he or she would be at work), and a potential thief' (How to Organize a Public Library, 210).

Six months after *The Name of the Rose* was published, Eco made a blistering public attack on libraries when he was the guest speaker at the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Milan Public Library.<sup>9</sup> While couched in a humorous vein, it was a cruel attack. This possibly accounts for the silence of librarians toward the issues raised in the novel.

More likely, though, is the premise that, like most general readers, librarians, unaware of his views, were oblivious to the Borges link, and Eco's attack on them, read it as a medieval murder mystery.

'Eco has drawn liberally and with gusto on his own experiences with modern research libraries in creating the library of his novel' (Garrett, 376). As the mediaevalist Rolf Kohn has pointed out, the abbey's library resembles a modern library rather than a fourteenth century one. He concludes that Eco, 'whose credentials as a mediaevalist are impeccable' (Garrett, 376) intended an 'allegorical reading' (Garrett, 376).

Briefly then, Eco uses the novel to attack

always in a delightful tongue-in-cheek psuedo-medievaese . . . such issues as censorship; the structure of public-access catalogs; the conflicting requirements of preservation versus access; the advent and implication of new end-user technologies (William's eyeglasses!); the utility of mnemonic versus non-mneumonic (or even anti-mneumonic) signage in library stacks; the semiotics of library architecture; the education of librarians and the epistemology of librarians expertise . . .

<sup>9</sup> The text was later published as the article 'How to Organize a Public Library.'

Last but not least, the novel puts in question the capacity of librarians for self-irony, that divine gift which would allow them to perceive the ambivalence inherent in their position as mediators between books and readers.

(Garrett, 374-5)

The link with Borges is undeniable. Eco 'began his Milan address by reading aloud a long passage from Borges's "Library of Babel," referring to it as "scripture" and ending his reading with a hearty "Amen!" ' (Garrett, 379).

Both of Eco humorous attacks on libraries fail. In Milan this was because of the rudeness towards his hosts. Very few people picked up on the criticism in the novel, because it is at the crux of the plot. Readers used to the twists and turns of conventional murder mysteries read Jorge as a 'mad professor' figure who commits murders simply because they enable the plot to progress. In this novel the real crime was hiding the lost manuscript.

The ending shows how William, in his lust to read the lost copy of Aristotle, causes not only its destruction, but the annihilation of the whole library. In an awful parodic inversion of the crucifixion (it is, after all, an abbey), the entire complex and many lives are lost for the sake of one book. That book has 'risen again', in the form of Eco's reconstruction of it in the novel.

This inversion is a fitting end to an abbey which has rewritten its Rule to facilitate not only study, but also such matters as diet and silence (*Rose*, 93-4). And the ending is tragic. The abbot is walled up and left to die while the monastery burns. All its treasures are lost and the monks are left in disarray.

An alert reader does not leave the matter there. Apart from the copy of Aristotle, the works were all available elsewhere or were titles invented by Eco. Aristotle's treatise on comedy has been recreated since by academics. William himself read it to confirm his educated guess at its content. 'As he translated he smiled, as if he recognized things he was expecting to find' (*Rose*, 468). He 'reconstructed it by reading other books' (*Rose*, 472).

The plot of the novel owes much to Borges' short story 'Death and the Compass' where Lonrot, the detective, follows a trail which lures him to his own death. The first death, an accident, was 'almost a reflex action' ('Death and the Compass', 116) by one of the criminal mastermind's henchmen. Lonrot sees the words on a piece of paper inserted in the dead man's

typewriter as a vital clue to his death. In fact, they are the start of an article which the insomniac rabbi was writing when his killer, Daniel Azevedo, entered his hotel room by mistake, and killed him to prevent him from summoning aid.

Inspector Treviranus suggests, correctly, that the murderer had intended to rob the suite opposite, whose occupant had a collection of choice sapphires. "Possible, but not interesting," Lonrot answered . . . "Here we have a dead rabbi, I would prefer a purely rabbinical explanation, not the imaginary mischances of an imaginary robber"

('Death and the Compass', 107). He proceeds to weave a complex, erudite, and to the mystery fan, plausible pattern for the three murders which occur.

In fact, the two subsequent murders are a trap that Red Scharlach, the Criminal Mastermind of the piece, sets for Lonrot. Scharlach has sworn 'by the God who sees with two faces and by all the gods of fever and of the mirrors to weave a labyrinth around the man who had imprisoned [his] brother' (Death and the Compass', 115). Knowing how Lonrot's mind works, Red Scharlach uses his revenge killing of Azevedo as a clue to lure Lonrot to his death. The third murder was an illusion, with Scharlach himself disguised as a kidnap victim. The clues pointed to the final murder in the series, which Scharlach encodes in such a way to appeal to Lonrot's vanity. Only he realises that a fourth murder will occur. In true detective style he sets out alone and unarmed to catch the killer - and is himself killed, the intended victim all along. His last words are a criticism of the plot, pointing out the correct mathematical and philosophical point for the murder. He asks Scharlach to kill him there 'when in some other incarnation you hunt me' ('Death and the Compass', 117). Scharlach agrees before fatally shooting him.

The reader who is familiar with this story should realise very quickly that Eco is retelling it and ignore the suggestion, which becomes increasingly accepted by the characters, that the murders follow the pattern given in the Book of Revelation. Brother William has an epiphany which mirrors that of the reader when he realises exactly how he has been duped into misreading the situation:

"What a fool . . . Because of a remark of Alinardo's, I was convinced the series of crimes followed the sequence of the seven trumpets of the

apocalypse. Hail for Adelmo, and his death was suicide. Blood for Venantius, and there it had been a bizarre notion of Berengar's; water for Berengar himself, and it had been a random act; the third part of the sky for Severinus, and Malachi has struck him with the armillary sphere because it was the only thing he found handy. And finally Malachi . . . why did you tell him that the book had the power of a thousand scorpions?"

"Because of you. Alinardo had told me about his idea, and then I heard from someone that you, too found it persuasive . . ."

"So, then . . . I conceived a false pattern to interpret the moves of the guilty man, and the guilty man fell in with it. And it was this same false pattern that put me on your trail."

(*Rose*, 469-70)

### **v Catholicism**

Eco uses comedy to comment on the Roman Catholic requirement for celibacy in clergy. He argues that the sublimation of sexual desire is an impossible task for men. The novel shows the different alternatives men may take when faced with celibacy. Brother William and Abo, the abbot, turn to different lusts, which they pursue relentlessly. For William this is learning, for Abo, collecting and maintaining beautiful and costly religious items for the abbey. Like many of the monks, Benno, shares William's lust for learning.

Benno had said he would be prepared to sin in order to procure a rare book. He was not lying and not joking. A monk should surely love his books with humility, wishing their good and not the glory of his own curiosity; but what the temptation of adultery is for laymen and the yearning for riches is for secular ecclesiastics, the seduction of knowledge is for the monks.

(*Rose*, 183)

Illicit sex, both homosexual and heterosexual, including with prostitutes, is another possible release for frustrated monks.

Adso's unexpected, and remarkably innocent sexual encounter with the unnamed young peasant woman was, as William advises him 'one of those situations in which even a father in the desert would have damned himself' (*Rose*, 252). He goes on to say that Adso

must not do it again, of course, but it is not so monstrous that you were tempted to do it. And so far as that goes, for a monk to have, at least once in his life, experience of the carnal passion, so that he can one day be indulgent and understanding with the sinners he will counsel and console [is beneficial].

(Rose, 252)

This is surely a twentieth century attitude toward sin.

William realises that the girl was prostituting herself with the cellarer to provide her family with food. When she is later caught and wrongly condemned to the stake as a witch, Adso is heartbroken.

I burst shamefully into sobs and fled to my cell, where all through the night I chewed my pallet and moaned helplessly for I was not even allowed - as they did in the romances of chivalry I had read with my companions at Melk - to lament and call out the beloved's name.

This was the only earthly love of my life, and I could not, then or ever after, call that love by name.

(Rose, 407)

This final sentence is a pun on that euphemism for homosexuality - the love that dares not speak its name. For the celibate, both acts are illicit. Homosexual sex was more available to the monks, living as they did in a male world. Adso is aware of the

passion whose evils divine wrath had castigated in Sodom and Gomorrah. So Benno expressed himself, perhaps out of regard for my tender years. But anyone who has spent his adolescence in a monastery, even if he has kept himself chaste, often hears talk of such passions, and at times he has to protect himself from the snares of those enslaved by them. Little novice that I was, had I not already received from an aged monk, at Melk, scrolls with verses that as a rule a

layman devotes to a woman? The monkish vows keep us far from that sink of vice that is the female body, but often they bring us close to other errors. Can I finally hide from myself the fact that even today my old age is still stirred by the noonday demon when my eyes, in choir, happen to linger on the beardless face of a novice, fresh and pure as a maiden's?

(*Rose*, 137)

The novel confirms Adso's heterosexuality, as his reaction to Ubertino's description of the sexual act proves.

"If carnal stimulus was felt, they did not consider it a sin if, to satisfy it, man and woman lay together, and the one touched and kissed the other in every part, and the naked belly was joined to naked belly!"

I confess that the way Ubertino stigmatized the vice of others did not inspire virtuous thoughts in me. My master must have realised I was agitated, and he interrupted the holy man

(*Rose*, 57).

Eco's gentle humour at this incident shows the foolishness of the clergy in emphasising the very details which will encourage the behaviour they seek to extinguish. As Adso himself confesses, a lifetime of repressing his innate sexual preferences has caused him to lust after young men, the only available outlet (albeit unconsummated) for his sexual nature.

It is an open secret that some of the monks in the Abbey practise homosexuality. Moreover, Berengar 'apparently pursued his vice in a yet more ignoble fashion, using the weapon of extortion to obtain from others what virtue and decorum should have advised them against giving' (*Rose*, 137).

Malachi, too abused his position as librarian to gain sexual favours. ' "You hid [Remigio's] letters and he showed you the novices' asses in the kitchen!" ' (*Rose*, 387).

It was Adelmo of Otranto's suicide, in a fit of self-loathing after sex with Berengar, which started the whole murder mystery cycle.

## vi James Joyce.

Eco's interest in James Joyce is important in a reading of the novel

which looks at comedy. He shares Joyce's attitude towards the church, as well as his great zest for having fun with a text. There are a number of parallels with Joyce's writing. 'To even the casual reader of James Joyce it must become apparent that the rose is a recurrent symbol in both *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses*' (Seward, 53).

Joyce draws on the rich imagery of the rose in his writing. Eco, on the other hand, chose the title of his novel in a spirit of irony, precisely 'because the rose is a symbolic figure so rich in meanings that by now it hardly has any meaning left . . . The title rightly disorientated the reader, who was unable to choose just one interpretation . . . a title must muddle the reader's ideas, not regiment them' (*Reflections*, 7). The last lines show this: 'stat rosa pristina nomine, nomina nuda tenemus' (*Rose*, 502) translate as 'the rose of former times stands only as a name, we hold mere names.'

Joyce has exhausted the symbolism of roses - and Eco respects this. He instead pays homage to Eco by acknowledging the rose is finished as a symbol.

The librarian's name, Malachi, recalls Malachi (Buck) Mulligan, who appears on the first page of *Ulysses*, parodying the celebration of the mass as he shaves. 'Stately, plump Buck Mulligan came down from the stairhead, bearing a bowl of lather on which a mirror and razor lay crossed' (*Ulysses*, 3). Looking for the connections between the two Malachis strengthens the portrait of the librarian, a second rate academic, who functions as Jorge's puppet. Both Malachis have loose sexual morals.

Buck Mulligan is an irreverent, ribald medical student who sponges off Stephen and his own elderly aunt, whose literary talent runs only to writing an obscene play while remaining, nevertheless part of the elite literary group invited to George Moore's party. Like Malachi he is at home asserting his views in a library setting.

Mulligan's aunt has warned him against associating with Stephen because of his behaviour towards his dying mother. Bloom, however, warns Stephen to be cautious of Mulligan's friendship, 'advising him to sever his connection with a certain budding practitioner, who, he noticed, was prone to disparage, and even, to a slight extent, with some hilarious pretext, when not present, deprecate him, or whatever you like to call it, which, in Bloom's humble opinion, threw a nasty sidelight on that side of a person's character' (*Ulysses*, 618).

Adso can be read as a gentle parody of Stephen in *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.<sup>10</sup> Unlike the intense Stephen, Adso's ability to laugh at himself is the basis of his charm. 'Most of the humour in the book comes from the indirection of Adso's narration' (Kellner, 7). Both are deeply Catholic as young men, whose faith alters as they age. The penultimate paragraph of *The Name of the Rose* captures the elderly Adso's reflection on death and the hereafter. 'I no longer believe that it is the God of glory of whom the abbots of my order spoke to me, or of joy, as the Minorites believed in those days, perhaps not even of piety . . . I shall be in the simple foundation, in the silent desert where divinity is never seen, in the privacy where no one finds himself in his proper place' (*Rose*, 501).

Both young men quake with fear on hearing a terrifying sermon. Adso, unlike Stephen, has William to transform his fear into mirth.

"These are the features that will mark [the Antichrist] : his head will be of burning fire, his right eye will be bloodshot, his left eye a feline green with two pupils, and his eyebrows will be white, his lower lip swollen, his ankle weak, his thumb crushed and elongated!"

"It seems his own portrait," William whispered, chuckling. It was a very wicked remark, but I was grateful to him for it, because my hair was beginning to stand on end. I could barely stifle a laugh, my cheeks swelling as my clenched lips let out a puff.

(*Rose*, 403)

Stephen, lacking William's stabilising sense of humour, suffers an appalling nightmare as a result of his talk. 'He sprang from the bed, the reeking odour pouring from his throat, clogging his entrails. Air! The air of heaven! He stumbled towards the window, groaning and almost fainting with sickness. At the washstand a convulsion seized him within : and, clasping his cold forehead wildly, he vomited profusely in agony' (*Portrait*, 125).

Both characters first sexual encounter is with a prostitute. Stephen later attends the nightmare inducing talk, which reinforces his Irish Catholic sense of guilt at his sin.

Adso lacks Stephen's intensity precisely because Eco has provided him with a sense of humour and a mentor. This enables him to overcome Catholic

<sup>10</sup> 'My dream was to call the book *Adso of Melk* - a totally neutral title, because Adso, after all, was the narrating voice. But in my country, publishers dislike proper names' (*Reflections*, 7).

doctrine and superstition as well as the scientific ignorance of his day. After visiting the Abbey's collection of relics, which included a unicorn's horn<sup>11</sup> and a piece of the manna that fed the Hebrews in the desert<sup>12</sup>, William tenders a piece of advice.

"And don't succumb too much to the spell of these cases. I have seen many other fragments of the cross, in other churches. If all were genuine, our Lord's torment could not have been on a couple of planks nailed together, but on an entire forest."

"Master!" I said, shocked.

"So it is, Adso. And there are even richer treasuries. Some time ago, in the cathedral of Cologne, I saw the skull of John the Baptist at the age of twelve."

"Really?" I exclaimed, amazed. Then, seized by doubt, I added, "But the Baptist was executed at a more advanced age!"

"The other skull must be in another treasury," William said, with a grave face.

(Rose, 425)<sup>13</sup>

Adso's ingenuous side is eroded as he uses logic to make sense of the excesses of medieval Catholicism. Comparison with Stephen Dedalus adds the richness of learned wit to a reading of Adso's character. The congeniality of Adso's nature is appreciated all the more when the reader realises that there, but for a sense of humour, goes Stephen Dedalus.

### **vii Jorge on laughter**

Jorge's motives for not just hiding the treatise, but for poisoning its pages are spelt out in the novel.

"But now tell me," William was saying, "why? Why did you want to

<sup>11</sup> The novel has made it clear that the origin of the unicorn myth lay in sightings of the rhinoceros.

<sup>12</sup> Scripture states that while manna was provided to the Hebrews, it did not last overnight, except on the sabbath. (Ex16:19-20). A small amount which did not decay was provided so that future generations of Jews could see what it was like. (Ex:16:32-24). So, as William knows, and Adso ought to, manna is unlikely to be found in the abbey's museum.

<sup>13</sup> Eco is not exaggerating. 'In one surviving manuscript written by a medieval pilgrim to the Middle East, the author recounts how he managed to acquire the thigh bones of Saint Peter - all three of them' (Rimmer, 163).

shield this book more than so many others? Why did you hide - though not at the price of crime - treatises on necromancy, pages that may have blasphemed against God, while for these pages you damned your brothers and have damned yourself? There are many other books that speak of comedy, many others that praise laughter. Why did this one fill you with such fear?

"Because it was by the Philosopher. Every book by that man has destroyed a part of the learning that Christianity had accumulated over the centuries. The fathers had said everything that needed to be known about the power of the Word, but then Boethius had only to gloss the Philosopher and the divine mystery of the Word was transformed into a human parody of categories and syllogism. . . Before, we used to look to heaven, deigning only a frowning glance at the mire of matter; now we look at earth, and we believe in the heavens because of earthly testimony. Every word of the Philosopher, by whom now even the saints and prophets swear, has overturned the image of the world. But he has not succeeded in overturning the image of god. If this book were to become . . . had become an object for open interpretation, we would have crossed the last boundary."

"But what frightens you in this discussion of laughter? You cannot eliminate laughter by eliminating the book."

"No, to be sure. But laughter is weakness, corruption, the foolishness of our flesh. . . But here, here, . . . here the function of laughter is reversed, it is elevated to art, the doors of the world of the learned are opened to it, it becomes the object of philosophy, and of perfidious theology . . . Laughter frees the villein from fear of the Devil, because in the feast of fools the Devil also appears poor and foolish, and therefore controllable. But this book could teach that freeing oneself of the fear of the Devil is wisdom. . . From this book many corrupt minds like yours would draw the extreme syllogism, whereby laughter is man's [sic] end! Laughter, for a few moments, distracts the villein from fear. But law is imposed by fear, whose true name is fear of God. This book could strike the Luciferine spark that would set a new fire to the whole world, and laughter would be defined as a new art, unknown even to Prometheus, for cancelling fear. . . And this book - considering comedy a wondrous medicine, with its satire and mime,

which would produce the purification of the passions through the enactment of defect, fault, weakness - would induce false scholars to try to redeem the lofty with a diabolical reversal ; through the acceptance of the base This book could prompt the idea that man can wish to have on earth . . . the abundance of the land of Cockaigne . . . A Greek philosopher . . . said that the seriousness of opponents must be dispelled with laughter, and laughter opposed with seriousness . . . But is one day somebody, brandishing the words of the Philosopher and therefore speaking as a philosopher, were to raise the weapon of laughter to the condition of subtle weapon, if the rhetoric of conviction were replaced by the rhetoric of mockery, if the topics of the patient construction of the images of redemption were to be replaced by the topics of the impatient dismantling and upsetting of every holy and venerable image - oh, that day even you William, and all your knowledge, would be swept away! . . . You yourself would be caught in the Devil's plot . . . if one day . . . the art of mockery were to be made acceptable, and even to seem noble and liberal and no longer mechanical ; if one day someone could say (and be heard), 'I laugh at the Incarnation,' then we would have no weapons to combat that blasphemy. . ."

"You are the Devil," William said then.

(*Rose*, 473 - 477)

Eco writes this from the heart and with a measure of heartache. While the Church no longer holds all Westerners in thrall, comedy has not played the incisive role in the world Aristotle had hoped. As anyone who has ever battled with bureaucracy can attest, the capacity for self-irony which Eco believes librarians lack, is generally absent. Bureaucrats who keep up with the latest jokes from the internet, frequently fail to use real comedy in their work. Because comedy is a dangerous business as the cartoonist David Low, discovered when his political cartoons earned him a place on Hitler's death list.

## Chapter 3

## *Foucault's Pendulum*

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 it's literal meaning, that it tells us of a Secret. The rule is simple : Suspect, only suspect.

(*Foucault's Pendulum*)

The mystery appeared almost crystalline to him now; he was mortified to have dedicated a hundred days to it.

(Jorge Luis Borges)

The conspiracy theory of society . . . comes from abandoning God and then asking: "Who is in his place?"

(Karl Popper)

Cela est bien dit, répondit Candide, mais il faut cultiver notre jardin.

(Voltaire)

### **i Irony**

*Foucault's Pendulum* is a deeply ironic work. Under the guise of a concerted attack on students of the occult and secret societies, Eco exposes the triviality of much academic study and debate. The novel questions whether there is any difference between the debate over the identities of Shakespeare's Dark Lady, or Joyce's McIntosh and, say, the search for the Holy Grail.

Moreover, the novel states that the important things in life are simple, everyday occurrences. The joy of a loving relationship and parenthood supersede the esoteric pleasures of world domination, sought by the Diabolicals in the novel.

In the last moments of the book, awaiting capture and death at the hands of the pursuing assassins, Casaubon finally understands the satisfaction that enjoyment of simple things brings:

In the midst of the rows [of vines] - but you have to walk barefoot, with your heels callused, from childhood - there are peach trees. Yellow peaches that grow only between rows of vines. You can split a peach with the pressure of your thumb ; the pit comes out almost whole, as clean as if it had been chemically treated, except for an occasional bit of pulp, white, tiny clinging there like a worm. When you eat the peach, the velvet of the skin makes shudders run from your tongue to your groin. Dinosaurs once grazed here. Then another surface covered theirs. And yet, like Belbo when he played the trumpet, when I bit into the peach I understood the Kingdom and was one with it. The rest is only cleverness. Invent, invent the Plan, Casaubon. That's what everyone has done, to explain the dinosaurs and the peaches.

I have understood. And the certainty that there is nothing to understand should be my peace, my triumph. But I am here, and They are looking for me, thinking I possess the revelation They sordidly desire . . . They still want the Map. And when I tell them that there is no Map, They will want it all the more.

(*Foucault's Pendulum*, 640 -641)

Eco is saying nothing new. What he is does is repeat these ideas, hoping to reach a new generation. To this end, Eco, counting on the popularity of his first novel, with its spin on the historical whodunit genre, turned to the the thriller. And indeed the book would make an action packed film. Unfortunately for Eco the novel failed to capture the public imagination.

Herein lies another irony. Eco flaunts his engagement with popular culture, but he is unable to write a truly popular novel which changes attitudes. He cannot emulate Marilyn French's success with *The Women's Room*, which was not only a good read, but became a catalyst for numerous women to leave their husbands. Later editions had *this book changes lives* printed across the cover, and it was no hollow claim.

Eco has never managed to hit on that combination of popular fiction and life changing writing. And, to be fair, French only did it the once - her subsequent work has not had the same dramatic impact on her readership. There is an element of serendipity in writing a book which captures the feelings of a people group, and provides a solution which is acted on.

Perhaps that x-factor has been more easily achieved in non-fiction in recent decades, especially in self-help books.<sup>14</sup>

Admittedly the popularity of *The Name of the Rose* took Eco by surprise. *Foucault's Pendulum* though, seems to be an attempt to lift the cultural level of the average thriller reader. He forgets that thrillers are escapist fiction. The degree of challenge found in *Foucault's Pendulum* is anything but light reading.

Eco draws on the tradition of learned wit, and, more specifically, scholastic wit, in his writing. He draws on works he expects the reader to be familiar with.

## ii Borges

The Borges short story 'Tlon, Uqbar, Ortis Tertius' lies at the heart of *Foucault's Pendulum*.. Bioy Casares, the narrator's friend, quotes from an article on the land of Uqbar, which he says is in *The Anglo-American Cyclopaedia*. The narrator happens to have the work, so they check the entry - but it is not included in the work. After trying various spellings of the name, the narrator assumes that Uqbar 'had been deliberately invented by Bioy out of modesty, to substantiate a phrase' (Borges, 112). However, the following day Bioy rings, confirming that his copy of Volume XLVI of the encyclopaedia contains the article. He subsequently brings it around for his friend's verification. The article is also omitted from a third copy which they locate.

Two years later, through a quirk of fate, the narrator comes across *A First Encyclopaedia of Tlon Volume . Hlaer to Jangr*. It is a handsome, 1001 page work.

Now I had in my hands a substantial fragment of the complete history of an unknown planet, with its architecture and its playing cards, its mythological terrors and the sound of its dialects, its emperors and its oceans, its minerals, its birds, and its fishes, its algebra and its firs, its theological and metaphysical arguments, all clearly stated, coherent, without any apparent intention or parodic undertone.

('Tlon', 114)

There is much academic debate about the existence of other volumes,

<sup>14</sup> For example those written by Dr Spock, Germaine Greer, Scott M. Peck & John Gray.

which the first article refers to as having further articles on Tlon. After fruitless searching in Europe and the Americas, the academic

Alfons Reyes, bored with the tedium of this minor detective work, proposes that we all take on the task of reconstructing the missing volumes, many and vast as they were : *ex ungue leonum*. He calculated, half seriously, that one generation of Tlonists would be enough. This bold estimate brings us back to the basic problem : who were the people who had invented Tlon? . . . We conjecture that this "brave new world" was the work of a secret society of astronomers, biologists, engineers, metaphysicians, poets, chemists, mathematicians, moralists, painters, and geometricians, all under the supervision of an unknown genius.

(‘Tlon’, 114-115)

The story, which purports to be an academic article complete with footnotes, goes on to describe Tlonist culture. The postscript tells of the narrator’s subsequent discovery of the history of the invention of Tlon. He traces its genesis in an idea tossed around by members of a benevolent European secret society in the seventeenth century. A couple of hundred years later, the now persecuted society reemerged in America, where a millionaire, on hearing the plan from a member, laughed at its modesty. He sponsored a plan to invent a whole planet, insisting only that Christianity be absent from the work. The prize being substantial, a forty volume encyclopaedia was produced.

In 1944 a reporter discovered the whole forty volumes of the *First Encyclopaedia of Tlon*. ‘Even now it is uncertain whether this discovery was accidental, or whether the directors of the still nebulous *Orbis Tertius* condoned it’ (‘Tlon’, 121). This speculation was fuelled by the mysterious appearance from 1942 onwards of metal objects peculiar to Tlon.

The upshot was a worldwide emphasis on Tlonist studies at all levels. ‘Now, in all memories, a fictitious past occupies the place of any other’ (‘Tlon’, 122).

The narrator, resigned to this imaginary history swamping real history, spends his days translating Sir Thomas Browne’s *Urn Burial* into Spanish. This is as fruitless a task as fighting Tlon - he has no intention of publishing the

work.

Tellingly the tenor for the story is set in the first paragraph, where the narrator and Bioy 'talked at length about a great scheme for writing a novel in the first person, using a narrator who omitted or corrupted what happened and who ran into various contradictions so that only a handful of readers, a very small handful, would be able to decipher the horrible or banal reality beneath the novel' ('Tlon', 112).

This statement is a blueprint for *Foucault's Pendulum*.

Other links with the story are the (apparently) academic discussion, which draws the reader in because each topic is fascinating. The punch line is that the argument is false, and the reader has wasted time engaging intellectually with the argument. The twist in both cases is that the reader knew it was a work of fiction, but was seduced into a level of belief in the arguments put forward. Both stories seem plausible on the surface, but the supposedly academic arguments have missing links, as shown in the above outline.

For both of these first person narrators there is a strong element of serendipity in their study. Casaubon shapes the outcome by insisting, simply because he was an authority on them, that the Templars were fundamental to the Plan. Each narrator is interesting, full of insights into humankind, and by the end resigned to the situation. Neither is prepared to rage against the dying of the light. Both are simultaneously cocooned and paralysed by their intellectual natures.

Both Eco and Borges have written stories which contain a warning for humankind. Borges has a credible explanation for the worldwide popularity of the Tlonist myth, which has resonances in *Foucault's Pendulum*.

Ten years ago, any symmetrical system whatsoever which gave the appearance of order - dialectical materialism, anti-Semitism, Nazism - was enough to fascinate men [sic]. Why not fall under the spell of Tlon and submit to the minute and vast evidence of an ordered planet? Useless to reply that reality, too, is ordered. It may be so, but in accordance with the divine laws - I translate : inhuman laws - which we will never completely perceive. Tlon may be a labyrinth, but it is a labyrinth plotted by men, a labyrinth destined to be deciphered by men  
( 'Tlon', 121-122)

There are also strong resonances of the occult element in the Borges stories 'Death and the Compass' and 'The Aleph'. Indeed, after an initial reading of the novel, one is left with the feeling that it would have been more successful as a short story. Rereading dispels this feeling, nevertheless one must be aware that most readers generally have neither the time nor the inclination for rereading an initially unsatisfactory novel.

The novel is rich (or dense, depending on one's standpoint) in the fruit of Eco's academic pursuits. The biographical details on the novel's cover state the 'Umberto Eco is professor of semiotics at the University of Bologna, a philosopher, historian, literary critic, and aesthetician.' He is also a Joycean. All of these elements are present in the novel, and seen through the guise of humour.

Undercutting the argument of the novel is Casaubon's epiphany in the orchard. Even here, Eco is playing games with the reader. Casaubon's bite of the peach echoes Borges' (the character who narrates the story) epiphanous experience of the Aleph, in the short story of that name. That moment is 'the ineffable core of [the] story' ('The Aleph', 160). Borges saw, in 'a small iridescent sphere of almost unbearable brilliance . . . the unimaginable universe' ('The Aleph' 161). This is all well and good, however a moment or two of reflection on the peach/Aleph link explodes the conclusion of the novel.

Borges initially suspects that he has been drugged. Once he sees the Aleph this idea is quietly dropped. Nevertheless, it has been raised in the reader's mind. His experience resembles accounts of the effect of hallucinogenic drugs. Leaving aside the question of a drug induced experience, the story makes three final points which reflect, damningly, on the novel's conclusion.

First, Borges' reaction to the experience. 'Out on the street, going down the stairways inside Constitution station, riding the subway, every one of the faces seemed familiar to me. I was afraid that not a single thing on earth would ever again surprise me; I was afraid I would never again be free of all I had seen. Happily, after a few sleepless nights, I was visited once more by oblivion . . . Our minds are porous and forgetfulness seeps in' ('The Aleph', 162 -3). The moment of epiphany did *not* bring a permanent change to the narrator's life. This is an accurate comment on human nature.

Second, Borges was wrong in his assessment of Carlos Argentino

Daneri's epic poem. It went on to win second place in the National Prize for Literature, while his 'own book . . . did not get a single vote' ('The Aleph', 162). He proves a poor judge of the value of his own work.

And finally, after researching the Aleph, Borges concludes it was a false Aleph.

How do these points relate to *Foucault's Pendulum*? The concept of the Aleph is analogous with the mystical elements in the novel. Of more relevance to the novel's conclusion is the reader's questioning of the importance of Casaubon's revelation. The novel ends with Casaubon waiting passively for the arrival of the Diabolicals. He expects to be tortured and killed by them. He has conceded defeat.

Casaubon actually has a variety of options open to him, but the novel's progress has shaped the reader's expectations so strongly that she accepts the inevitability of the ending. The options open to Casaubon? They range from ringing Lia for advice, to suicide (surely preferable to Belbo's fate), to selling his story to a tabloid newspaper, insisting on full protection. Instead, in contrast to the decisive ending of thrillers, the story ends with a whimper. Casaubon stands in the orchard, thinking profound thoughts and eating peaches, while his world falls apart.

Eco uses comedy to make his point. While Casaubon's statement makes clear that although he firmly believes that They are closing in for the kill, this is conjecture on his part.

But I am here, and They are looking for me, thinking I possess the revelation They sordidly desire. It isn't enough to have understood, if others refuse and continue to interrogate. They are looking for me, They must have picked up my trail in Paris. They know I am here now, They still want the Map. And when I tell Them that there is no Map, They will want it all the more. Belbo was right. Fuck you, fool! You want to kill me? Kill me, then, but I won't tell you there's no Map. If you can't figure it out for yourself, tough shit.

(*Foucault's Pendulum*, 641)

In this paragraph, Casaubon dreams up another Plan, *even though* he now claims to realise the stupidity and danger of such plotting. Eco expects his readers to see the deep irony of Casaubon jumping from his epiphany in

one paragraph, to his latest plan in the following one. He has learned nothing.

The epigraphs to the novel say it all :-

Only for you, children of doctrine and learning, have we written this work. Examine this book, ponder the meaning we have dispersed in various places and gathered again; what we have concealed in one place we have disclosed in another, that it may be understood by your wisdom.

- Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim, *De occulta philosophia*, 3,65

Superstition brings bad luck.

-Raymond Smullyan, *5000 B.C.*, 1.3.8

(*Foucault's Pendulum*, vii)

Each can be read in two ways. The first appears to be addressed to initiates, but Eco intends his work to act a warning. He wants people to observe the foolishness that is concocted by scholars and pseudo-scholars alike, and see that, in the end, it is the same. A waste of time and effort, and potentially destructive.

The second quote is simultaneously wise and funny, a telling comment on the self-fulfilling nature of superstition.

### iii Academia

The Marxist critic Alex Callinicos argues that the central question of postmodernism is 'was the Enlightenment a Good Thing?' (Elias, 534). Throughout the postmodern *Foucault's Pendulum* Eco satirises the results of living in a post-Enlightenment world.

Enlightenment thinking emphasised and privileged science. The body of scientific knowledge was built up through rational experimentation, which proved or disproved the initial hypothesis. Unfortunately this is not as straight forward as it sounds. Answers change as knowledge changes. This may be in simple but important matters, such as the treatment of a burn, or in basic scientific principles which are now queried by new revelations. The shortest distance between two points is no longer a straight line - a truly postmodern revelation.

Casaubon's attitude toward scholarship is a satirical look at the consequences of the privileging of information fostered by Enlightenment thinking. Information has become a commodity, its acquisition a commercial transaction.

After returning to Italy Casaubon says

I decided to invent a job for myself. I knew a lot of things, unconnected things, but I would be able to connect them after a few hours in a library. I once thought it was necessary to have a theory, and that my problem was that I didn't. But nowadays all you needed was information; everybody was greedy for information, especially if it was out of date . . . A sudden illumination : I had a trade after all. I would set up a cultural investigation agency, be a kind of private eye of learning . . . In the beginning I had to turn a deaf ear to my conscience and write theses for desperate students. It wasn't hard : I just went and copied some from the previous decade. Still, I was accumulating experience and information and I never threw anything away . . . I had a strict rule, which I think secret services follow too : No piece of information is superior to any other. Power lies in having them all on file and them finding the connections. There are always connections ; you have only to want to find them.

(*Foucault's Pendulum*, 223-5)

This multilayered passage shows Eco at his incisive best. It fulfils his criteria of the role of humour. '[E]ntertainment becomes avantgarde ; a supreme philosophical game. We smile because we feel sad for having discovered, only for a moment, the truth. But at this moment we have become too wise to believe it. We feel quiet and peaceful, a little angry, with a shade of bitterness in our minds' ('Frames of comic freedom', 8).

All information is equal, but some is more equal than others. This Orwellian sentiment<sup>15</sup> permeates the novel. At this stage of the book Casaubon believes in the equality of information, by the end, he realises his error.

The purpose of acquiring information has altered radically form the

<sup>15</sup> And Eco know his Orwell. See 'Orwell, or Concerning visionary Power' in Umberto Eco's *Apocalypse Postponed* (1994). London : Flamingo, 1995. 81-88. Also see Orwell reference on page 102 of *Foucault's Pendulum*.

original Enlightenment concept of uncovering truths. Academia, according to Eco, is full of people generating information to gain a qualification or to maintain their job. The information is irrelevant, as Casaubon realises when he recycles old these for students who lack the intelligence to write their own, and the cunning to plagiarise. Academic staff do not query how inept students suddenly manage to produce a finished thesis, albeit with a bibliography a decade out of date. They also fail to recognise earlier work, which they may have supervised. The system, Eco implies, if not corrupt, is lax.

Elsewhere, Eco has argued that education has become a political ploy to keep young people out of the job market for increased periods of time (Lopez, 47-48).

The charitable reading of this passage is a pragmatic realisation that information is merely a means to an end.

It is easy to romanticise historical attitudes towards learning, and sweeping statements about earlier scholars needed to be addressed with caution. What is true is that increasing numbers of people are attending universities. Eco argues that modern universities fulfil an economic role.

As long as you're a student, you don't compete in the job market. It is in this sense that universities are parking lots, where young people are led to believe that they're being educated whereas in reality they're kept there for convenience. Only a small percentage of the student population becomes erudite or scholarly. It seems clear to me that mass university education is a political solution that saves certain social costs . . . [it] benefits power . . . universities discipline our Oedipus complex. It's not only that the fifty-year old man does not need thirty-year olds, the problem is that he needs only a few . . . In any case, mass university education is tied to population growth. It's a demographic problem. In medieval universities people studied all their lives, but only a small elite did so then.

(Lopez, 47-48)

Using this argument as a basis, the novel shows that inevitably those trapped in such a system will cheat. As some of these cheats progress in academia, they will be unable to produce or identify original material.

The incident in the novel exaggerates the problem. However anyone

with an English degree knows how frequently high grades are achieved by students who choose not to read the set text, and write excellent essays relying instead on the critics. When they do read, they work out the minimum number of works required to pass the course and ignore the rest. They understand what the system requires and produce work which satisfies those requirements. Education is not their primary focus - gaining a qualification is. 'The student is corrupt, but the teacher is more so. In spite of everything, though, in the middle of these crowds you always find good students'(Lopez, 48).

Casaubon is a good example of the 'corrupt' student, who works the system winning a measure of respect for his scholarship.

"By the way," he said to me then, "since you're a philosopher -"

"Thanks, but unfortunately I'm not."

"Come on, in your day you knew everything."

*(Foucault's Pendulum, 224)*

This self-deprecating view of himself is honest enough to dissuade the reader from probing beneath the surface. Lia sums him up neatly.

"You live on the surface," Lia told me years later. "You sometimes seem profound, but it's only because you piece a lot of surfaces together to create the impression of depth, solidity. That solidity would collapse if you tried to stand up."

"Are you saying I'm superficial?"

"No," she answered, "What others call profundity is only a tesseract, a four-dimensional cube. You walk in one side and come out another, and you're in their universe, which can't coexist with yours."

*(Foucault's Pendulum, 50)*

Casaubon is open about his character. His student days show his penchant for delving deeply into the surface of things. As a student in the turbulent early seventies, he says he was a

nonbeliever, I felt guilty in the midst of all those believers . . . it was honorable, for example to take part in rallies and marches. I chanted

"Fascist scum, your time has come!" with everybody else . . . In the meetings I remained untouched by the disagreements that divided the various groups : I always had the feeling that if you substituted the right phrase for another phrase, you could move from group to group. I amused myself by finding the right phrases. I modulated.

At the demonstrations I would fall in behind one banner or another, drawn by a girl who had aroused my interest, so I came to the conclusion that for most of my companions political activism was a sexual thing . . .

I was the type who looked at discussions of What Is Truth only with a view toward correcting the manuscript. If you were to quote "I am that I am," for example, I thought that the fundamental problem was where to put the comma, inside the quotation marks or outside.

That's why I wisely chose philology.

*(Foucault's Pendulum, 50-51)*

Of course, philology has its own problems.

'MAID: Of all things, not philology, Monsieur, philology is the worst of all . . .

You little murderer! Revolting little swine . . . Put the knife back where you found it! Come along now! And I gave you proper warning, too, only a little while ago! Arithmetic leads to philology, and philology leads to Crime. . .'

*(Ionesco, 198 & 216)*

This comment from Ionesco's play, 'La Leçon' sums up the danger inherent in choosing to study philology. It is a work with which Eco would expect his audience to be familiar.

Casaubon attended the University of Milan, which, unlike other Italian universities managed a compromise between the Revolution and traditional Culture, which suited Casaubon, and helped to shape his future direction.

In these two parallel universes I lived comfortably and felt no contradiction . . . Perhaps because I was always surrounded by [Revolutionary] enthusiasm in the morning, in the afternoon I came to

equate learning with distrust. I wanted to study something that confined itself to what could be documented, as opposed to what was merely a matter of opinion.

For no particular reason I signed up for a seminar on medieval history, and chose for my thesis subject, the trial of the Templars. It was a story which fascinated me from the moment I first glanced at the documents . . . I drew up a bibliography of more than a hundred books, but in the end read only about thirty of them.

(*Foucault's Pendulum*, 52-53)

Eco's picture of Casaubon is cleverly drawn. The tone is that of a man looking back with amusement on his younger self. Normally, though, such a picture is one of youthful enthusiasm, passion and exuberance. Casaubon reveals himself to have been born middle-aged. Even at his moderate university he faced problems with the politicised students. 'I was nearly clubbed. A tall guy with a Tartar mustache said I was a fascist. I'll never forget him. He later shaved his head and now belongs to a commune where they weave baskets' (*Foucault's Pendulum*, 51).

Casaubon's secret is humour. He laughs at his youthful self. In the midst of a sea of angry young men, he was an inert young man. The continuing extreme behaviour of the tall guy with the Tartar mustache makes Casaubon's moderation attractive. In fact, his position embodies the folly described in the prayer which goes 'may I stand for something, lest I fall for anything.' And fall he does. Hard.

#### **iv Game playing**

Eco uses humour deliberately to shape the Model Reader. 'I was conscious from the beginning [of *Foucault's Pendulum*] that I was playing a *meta-game*. I am eager to admit that I thought of my novel as the story of how it is possible to invent that story, and to invent it so that it contradicted itself. Here the main problem was always, at every step of my job, how to produce a reader able to respond to my challenge' (Eco, 'Reading My Readers', 826).

For Eco a

text is a device conceived in order to produce its Model Reader . . . such a reader is not the one who makes the "only right" conjecture. A text

can foresee a Model Reader entitled to try infinite conjectures. The empirical reader is only an actor who makes conjectures about the kind of Model Reader postulated by the text. Since the intention of the text is basically to produce a Model Reader able to make conjectures about it, the initiative of the Model Reader consists of figuring out a Model author who is not the empirical one and who, at the end, coincides with the intention of the text.

How to prove a conjecture about the intention of the text? The only way is to check it against the text as a coherent whole.

(Eco, 'Reading My Readers. 821)

Eco indulges in game playing with the reader about Casaubon's character. The reader is led to accept Casaubon's wry assessment of himself - but to accept it with the grain of salt Lia offers. That is, he does look only at the surface, but that profundity is an illusion anyway. What Lia has, and Casaubon certainly does not, is common sense. Eco leaves it to the reader to decide whether or not Lia's reading of Casaubon is moderated by her love for him.

#### **v Satire**

At the end of the novel the reader is left wondering about the role of scholarship at the end of the twentieth century. The public prefer to buy aberrant scholarship, which is why Garamond sets up a second publishing house, Manutius, specialising in books on such topics as 'Hermeticism, astrology, tarot, UFOlogy' (*Foucault's Pendulum*, 264). To aid marketing, he orders 'a dictionary of all the secret societies in the world today. It exists' (*Foucault's Pendulum*, 265).

This dictionary seems to be a contender for the game Belbo and Diotallevi played in earlier days, 'planning a reform in higher education. A School of Comparative Irrelevance, where useless or impossible courses are given. The school's aim is to turn out scholars capable of endlessly increasing the number of unnecessary subjects' (*Foucault's Pendulum*, 74). Courses the two men dreamt up included Urban Planning for Gypsies, Morse Syntax, and Spartan Sybaritics.

Eco's introduction of a real dictionary is deliberate. Malcolm Muggeridge's remarks about satire, written after his stint as the editor of *Punch*

are pertinent.

Clearly, I decided, the business of a humorous or satirical magazine must be to ridicule the age in which we live, and particularly those set in authority over us. . . here a difficulty at once arose. Our age (as I dare say every age has seemed at the time) is so overflowing with absurdity that it defies mockery . . . The melancholia to which . . . all who are in any way concerned in the humour industry, are notoriously susceptible, is due, I am confident, to being constantly confronted with this tragic dilemma of how to ridicule a world whose reality so often outdoes their wildest and most daring inventions . . . No one who has not tried can form any conception of how truly appallingly difficult it is to find anything in the world serious enough to be ridiculed . . . Before the visit of Mr. Khrushchev and Marshal Bulganin to England we drew up what we fondly hoped would be a humorous itinerary for them. Imagine our consternation when, at the last moment, we had to delete a good proportion of it because it coincided with their actual itinerary.

(Muggeridge, 15 & 16-17)

Eco understands this. This is why his novel ridicules the two areas in which he has worked - publishing and academia. He knows that the world falls short of his utopian ideals, and that in the end, the last laugh is on him. He has written a book which shows that he has devoted considerable study to the bizarre subjects the novel satirises. Perhaps the ultimate irony is that most readers will simply fail to notice this, and that only the handful who do will have understood his satire.

## Chapter 4

*The Island of the Day Before*

"What's the good of Mercator's North Poles and Equators,  
Tropics, Zones, and Meridian Lines?"  
So the Bellman would cry : and the crew would reply  
"They are merely conventional signs!"

(Lewis Carroll)

Other authors can pass upon the public, by stuffing their books from Aristotle, Plato, and the whole company of ancient philosophers; thus amusing their readers into a great opinion of their prodigious reading.

(Cervantes)

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**i Comedy in *The Island of the Day Before***

*The Island of the Day Before* lacks the savage comic focus of the earlier novels. Eco appears to have vented his spleen on those issues which enrage him, leaving him without a focus for his comedy. True, the novel continues his general ridicule of the Catholic church, but fails to have a new target. Attacking the church is a widespread activity, whereas Eco's previous targets - libraries and academia - tend not to be ridiculed publicly. The choice of unusual topics gives his comedy a freshness which is lacking in the third novel, which lacks the edge of the earlier works.

*The Island of the Day Before* is considerably shorter than the other two works, which seems to be an admission of defeat on Eco's part. Too few people understood the complex allusions to make it worth the effort of constructing another such elaborate structure. Academia noted this absence and consequently very few articles have been written about the work.

Why, then, did Eco write the book? Firstly, he enjoys writing fiction, and he is good at it. Secondly - well, there is always the money . . . and why not? Why not give the public what they want, avoiding the complex game playing which most readers failed to appreciate. Eco is not averse to making money easily, as he proved when, in the height of his fame, he published his doctoral thesis. In the introduction he said that he had deliberately refrained from any rewriting. Critics felt that it would have benefited from Eco's mature reflection,

making it into a useful work. Instead, Eco cashed in on his fame, content to have the pompous style of his youthful work on bookshelves, making him money.

The games in this novel are on the surface. □There are descriptions of flora and fauna, some of which are easily identifiable - kangaroos, for example - and others which the reader can look up. Even the name and location of the island are given in the postscript, along with an historical justification for the novel.

The strong Borges influence is missing, or rather it is hinted at in a sly Ecoian joke. There is an oblique allusion to the Borges' short story 'Pierre Menard, author of *Don Quixote*.' As will be seen, the novel draws on *Don Quixote*, albeit with a twist. The astute reader, looking for Borgesian resonances, expects a connection.

A little reflection shows that it is a particularly difficult story to parody. The story is about the creative process of writing and reading a text. Pierre Menard's 'work, possibly the most significant of our time, consists of the ninth and thirty-eighth chapters of Part One of *Don Quixote* and a fragment of the twenty-second chapter. I realise that such an affirmation seems absurd ; but the justification of this 'absurdity' is the primary object of this note' ('Pierre Menard, author of *Don Quixote*, 45).

Menard's aim is breathtakingly audacious. 'He did not want to compose another *Don Quixote* - which would be easy - but *the Don Quixote*'. . . His admirable ambition was to produce pages which would coincide - word for word and line for line - with those of Miguel de Cervantes' ('Pierre Menard, author of *Don Quixote*', 45). This requires a special type of reading and writing. 'Menard (perhaps without wishing to) has enriched, by means of a new technique, the hesitant and rudimentary art of reading : the technique is one of deliberate anachronism and erroneous attributions' ('Pierre Menard, author of *Don Quixote*', 51). Of course, this is simply academic game playing. Borges is satirizing the intensity - and stupidity - of those who claim to produce and interpret works of literature or art when really they are doing nothing of the sort.

As will become apparent later, Eco does not rewrite *Don Quixote*. He is declaring himself to be above such pretentious writing, and it's readers. Moreover, he seems to have learned something else from the story. 'There is no intellectual exercise which is not ultimately useless . . . In literature, this

ultimate decay is even more notorious' (Pierre Menard, author of *Don Quixote*, 50). Why bother with the rich sub text when only a small percentage of readers understand it? Pragmatism overrules his earlier enthusiasm.

## ii Longitude

Despite all this, *The Island of the Day Before* is a wonderful composition<sup>16</sup> which draws together, among other things, the comic writing of Cervantes and the history of the search for an accurate way to measure longitude at sea.

Indeed, the most bizarre incident in the book, the use of a wounded dog as a navigational aid, is plucked from history. It is certainly a story which would appeal to the writer of *Foucault's Pendulum*.

Surely the most colorful of the offbeat approaches was the wounded dog theory, put forth in 1687. It was predicated on a quack cure called powder of sympathy. This miraculous powder, discovered in southern France by the dashing Sir Kenelm Digby, could purportedly heal at a distance. All one had to do to unleash its magic was to apply it to an article from the ailing person: a bit of bandage from a wound, for example, when sprinkled with powder of sympathy, would hasten the closing of the wound. Unfortunately, the cure was not painless, and Sir Kenelm was rumored to have made his patients jump by powdering - for medicinal purposes - the knives that had cut them, or by dipping their dressings into a solution of the powder.

The daft idea to apply Digby's powder to the longitude problem follows naturally enough to the prepared mind: Send aboard a wounded dog as a ship sets sail. Leave ashore a trusted individual to dip the dog's bandage into the sympathetic solution every day at noon. The dog would perform a yelp in reaction, and thereby provide the captain a time cue. The dog's cry would mean "the Sun is upon the Meridian in London." The captain could then compare that hour to the local time on ship and figure the longitude accordingly. One had to hope, of course, that the powder really held the power to be felt many thousand leagues over the sea, yet - and this is very important - fail to heal the telltale wound over the course of several months. . .

Whether this longitude solution was intended as science or satire, the

<sup>16</sup> The term is appropriate as 'Luciano Berio claims that Eco's third novel is one of the most musical narratives he has ever read' (Capozzi, 438, note 36).

author points out that submitting "a Dog to the misery of having always a Wound about him" is no more macabre or mercenary than expecting a seaman to put out his own eye for the purposes of navigation<sup>17</sup>.

(Sorbel, 41-3)

The pamphlet alluded to smacks of Swift's 'A Modest Proposal', with the passage of time causing the confusion over its seriousness. Given the harebrained scheme proposed in 1713 by mathematicians William Whiston and Humphrey Ditton, to anchor ships across the ocean and fire cannons at set intervals to provide an aural means for ships in the vicinity to calculate longitude, it is possible that the wounded dog theory may have been serious. This ambivalence is meat and drink to Eco.

In the novel the theory is tested by Byrd, with apparent success.

"Careful . . . he seems to be stirring . . . Good dog, Hakluyt . . . Yes, he's upset!" the dog was emitting unnatural yelps. "They have exposed the weapon to the fire. Are you recording the time, Withrington?"

"It is almost half eleven."

"Look at the clocks. About ten minutes should go." . . .

Roberto put his mind to work. That morning, seeing the dog, he had noticed that the animal, when stroked, grew calmer but, touched more roughly, he yelped with pain. It took very little, on a ship tossed by the sea, to provoke various sensations in a sick body. Perhaps those villains believed they were receiving a message from far away, while on the the contrary the dog suffered or experienced relief as the waves alternately jarred or lulled him . . . Was the destiny of the world thus affected by the way these madmen interpreted the language of a dog? Could a grumbling in the poor animal's belly make the villains decide they were approaching or moving away from a place desired by Spanish, French, Dutch, and Portuguese, all equally villainous? And was not he, Roberto, involved in this adventure in order one day to tell Mazarin and young Colbert how to populate the ships of France with tortured dogs?

<sup>17</sup> Before the 1595 introduction of the backstaff, sailors had to stare at the sun, with one eye unprotected, to take longitudinal sightings.

(*Island*, 225-6)

The novel makes it clear that Roberto does not have a scientific bent, but even he was able to work out why the dog yelped. Byrd is exhibiting the sloppy approach to scholarship which Eco railed against in *Foucault's Pendulum*.

Roberto tellingly refers to the purpose for discovering longitude - colonisation and economics.

[T]he global ignorance of longitude wreaked economic havoc on the grandest scale. It confined oceangoing vessels to a few narrow shipping lanes that promised safe passage. Forced to navigate by latitude alone, whaling ships, merchant ships, warships, and pirate ships all clustered along well-trafficked routes, where they fell prey to one another . . . By the end of the seventeenth century, nearly three hundred ships a year sailed between the British Isles and the West Indies to ply the Jamaica trade. Since the sacrifice of a single one of these cargo vessels [to pirates] caused terrible losses, merchants yearned to avoid the inevitable. They wished to discover secret routes - and that meant discovering a means to determine longitude.

(Sorbel, 15-16)

Eco pays little attention to historical dates in this book, which is set in 1643. Given his record, this is not due to inattention to detail, but more a sense that humankind rarely learns from the lessons of history. Consequently, real figures in the history of the quest for longitude - Sir Kenelm Digby (d'Igby in the novel), John Bird (Byrd) and Jean Colbert are fictionalised, regardless of their personal dates. Various hypotheses for measuring longitude are likewise introduced into the novel, despite being from different periods of history.

Eco uses comedy to put across his view - he makes truth laugh. Interestingly, his novel was published in the same year as Dava Sobel's highly regarded non-fiction work, *Longitude*. Eco cannot have expected the general reader to be conversant with the history of longitude. Once again, he wrote for a double audience. Only a small percentage could have been expected to pick up the satire on scientific experimentation.

### iii Father Caspar Wanderdrossel

Father Caspar Wanderdrossel, the Jesuit priest who tests various methods for discovering longitude is a cruel (albeit entertaining) parody of an eccentric academic and priest.

Roberto did not understand what Father Caspar Wanderdrossel was. A sage? That, certainly, or at least a scholar, a man curious about both natural and divine science. An eccentric? To be sure. At one moment he let fall that this ship had not been fitted out at the expense of the Society but with his private funds, or, rather, the money of his brother, a rich merchant as mad as he was; on another occasion he confided, complaining, that some of his fellow Jesuits had "stolen many fecondissime ideas" after pretending to reject them as mere scribbling. which suggested that back in Rome, those reverend fathers had not grieved at the departure of this sophistic character. Considering he was travelling at his own expense and there was a good chance he might be lost along those perilous routes, they may have encouraged him in order to be rid of him.

*(Island, 271-272)*

Father Caspar represents both the church and science. While enthusiastic in his pursuit of both areas, he fails abysmally because he inevitably follows foolish trains of thought. He refuses to be guided by his fellow Jesuits, who reject his ideas as worthless.

The narrator's conjecture about their motives for sanctioning Father Caspar's voyage show an understandably human side to the Jesuits. Unfortunately this side loses its charm when the reader realises that Father Caspar was the only crew member to escape being killed and eaten by Fijians. The good brothers ignored their probable loss, in their eagerness to be rid of the annoying Father Caspar.

One example of Father Caspar's failure to think through his ideas occurs when he tests the Galilean telescope he built. Galileo invented and built the prototype about twenty-five years earlier. It was attached to a helmet and was to be used to observe the regular eclipses of Jupiter's moons, which Galileo had charted. Sailors could, Galileo reasoned, use his telescope, and then consult his chart to calculate their longitude. After conducting

experiments at sea, 'Galileo himself conceded that, even on land, the pounding of one's heart could cause the whole of Jupiter to jump out of the telescope's field of view' (Sorbel, 26).

Father Caspar attempts to get around the problem of motion by a piece of faulty logic. He plans to sit in a bowl, which is floating in a larger bowl containing oil, which he expects to provide a calm surface however rough the sea might be. The project, while simple to dream up, is difficult to execute. Nothing, however, daunts Father Caspar for long. The equipment was 'easily transportable, except for the metal basin, which the two men hoisted up on the deck with curses and ruinous failures, for it would not pass through the hatches. But Father Caspar, wiry as he was, now that he saw the imminent realisation of his plan, revealed a physical energy equal to his will' (*Island*, 291). When Roberto complains about the stench of the oil 'Father Caspar reminded him, seraphic as a Capuchin, that they were not using the oil to fry onions' (*Island*, 291).

Father Caspar has tested the idea with a small model while in Rome. However problems arise when he attempts to get into the inner vessel wearing the Galilean helmet and the attached telescope.

It was not that the metal frame supporting the larger tub could not support an occupant, but it denied him reasonable footholds. And if Father Caspar tried, as he did many times, to set only one foot on the rim, immediately placing the other inside the minor circle, this latter, in the disturbance of the embarkation, tended to glide over the oil towards the opposite side of the basin, making the priest's legs part like a compass as he emitted cries of alarm until Roberto seized him by the waist and drew him closer, that is to say onto the relative terra firma of the *Daphne* - cursing meanwhile the memory of Galileo and extolling his persecutors and killers.<sup>18</sup> At that point Father Caspar sank into the arms of his savior, assuring him with a groan that those persecutors were not killers but most worthy men of the Church, bent only on the preservation of the truth, and that with Galilei they had been paternal and merciful . . . [after recovering] he reminded Roberto that Galilei at least with this invention had not erred, and it was just a matter of trying and trying again.

<sup>18</sup> Galileo died the a year before the date of the novel.

Through these several unhappy operations the oil did not remain as smooth as oil, and after a while both experimenters found themselves oleate and, what is worse, oleabund.

(*Island*, 293-294)

As Father Caspar starts to lose hope, Roberto suggests draining the oil, and then refilling the container while the priest is sitting in the inner bowl. 'So it was done, amid praise from the master lavished on his acute pupil, as midnight was approaching. Not that the apparatus gave a great impression of stability, but if Father Caspar took care not to move unduly, they could hope' (*Island*, 294). Success! Unfortunately, Father Caspar's cry of glee 'caused him to move his nose, and the glass, rather heavy, began to slip out of the circle : he moved his arm to arrest it, the movement of the arm jerked his shoulder, and the pan was on the point of capsizing' (*Island*, 294). Roberto steadies him, and Father Caspar continues more sedately, requiring Roberto to record the details and check the time on the clock. Disaster, inevitably, strikes.

Roberto turned towards the clock and, in moving, he struck the inkwell with his pen. Not thinking, he set the well upright, to save some of the liquid, but he knocked over the clock. "Did you take the hour? Go! The perpendiculum!" Caspar was shouting, and Roberto replied, "I cannot, I cannot!"

"How can you not, dumbhead?" . . .

"I have lost, no, not lost, I have broken everything," Roberto said.

Father Caspar moved the spyglass away from the vizer, peered sideways, saw the pendulum in pieces, the clock overturned, Roberto's hands stained with ink. beside himself, he exploded with a "Himmelpotzblitzherrgottsakramet!" that shook his whole body. In that unfortunate movement he caused the pan to tilt too far, and he slid into the oil of the basin, the spyglass slipping from his hand and his hauberk ; then, as the ship pitched, the glass rolled across the quarterdeck, bounced down the ladder, or struck the main deck before it was flung against the breech of a cannon.

Roberto did not know whether to succor first the man or the instrument. The man, flailing in that rancidity, shouted magnanimously to save the

eyeglass . . . both lenses were broken.

When Roberto finally removed Father Caspar from the oil, the Jesuit looked like a piglet ready for the oven.

*(Island, 295-296)*

This messy experiment is redundant because Galileo himself admitted that the method was unworkable at sea. Eco is highlighting the misplaced zeal of many would be scholars, who flog dead horses. He emphasises the redundancy of their subject matter by having Father Caspar make stupid errors, such as assuming that a pan of oil will be calm, while expending a vast amount of effort on a flawed plan. Father Caspar's double standard over swearing (he frequently admonishes Roberto for his language) reinforces Eco's scepticism about the ability of the priesthood to live up to the high standards they demand of their flock.

Father Caspar's basic mistake is summed up in a comment he made earlier to Roberto. He explained that 'while all [the proposed methods for calculating longitude] were erroneous when taken one by one, if taken together the various results could achieve a balance and this est mathematical' (*Island, 281*). The problem with this view is that it has a grain of truth in it. And a grain is all it takes for those of Father Caspar's ilk. Common sense teaches that this approach works sometimes, but fails abysmally at others. Everyday examples, such as adapting recipes, soon teach one that it should be treated with caution! To claim it as a scientific principle is dangerous.

His theology also leaves a great deal to be desired. He proves to Roberto that German - his first language - was the language spoken by Adam, and all people before God invented different languages in response to the Tower of Babel incident. (*Island, 269-270*).

Father Caspar is designed to show that religion and science do not mix.

As it happens, the reasons Father Caspar had set sail bore no resemblance to the larcenous designs of the various navigators of other countries. Everything stemmed from the monumental work that he was writing, a treatise destined to remain more perennial than bronze, on the Great Flood.

A true man of the Church, he intended to prove that the bible had not

lied; but, also a man of science, he wanted to make the Sacred Text agree with the results of the research of his own time. [After making careful calculations he explains that the dinosaurs became extinct because there was not room for them on the Arc]. . .

Finally, Noah did not have the problem of fish, the only creatures that had nothing to fear from the Flood.

[However, he] had come up against a physics-hydrodynamics problem, apparently insoluble . . .

"But have you tried ever the rain to collect? It rains all one day, and you cover the little bottom of a barrel . . . In forty days ist das unmoglich, not possible, to fill all the earth above the highest mountains!"

"You mean to say the Bible lied?"

"Nein!"

(*Island*, 261-262)

He devises a preposterous solution involving the Prime Meridian, that 'zero-degree longitude line' (Sorbel, 3). God, he argues, can stockpile water on the 'yesterday' side of the international date line. 'God then took from the abysso the water of yesterday (that you see there) and emptied it on the world of today, and the next day the same, and so on! Sine miraculo, naturaliter!' (*Island*, 266). When Roberto queries his logic, Father Caspar explains that Roberto thinks 'with the humana conceptione of time. For us humines exists yesterday no more, and tomorrow not yet. Tempus Dei, quod dicitur aevum, is very different' (*Island*, 267). He goes on to say that God used underwater volcanic eruptions to move yesterday's water into today, thus flooding the earth.

Roberto is more interested in being able to reach yesterday, which he will achieve if he can reach the Fijian island near where the *Daphne* is anchored . Although Father Caspar visited the island before being marooned on the ship, he does not explain the prosaic nature of crossing the date line to Roberto. Unknown to him, Roberto daydreams at length about the wonder of setting foot on the island of the day before. He suspects that one will exist in yesterday and today simultaneously. Eco, who embraces popular culture, draws here on the ideas of such popular entertainment as the 'Back to the Future' films and H.G. Wells.

Father Caspar puts an incredible amount of effort into proving his

theories. 'I leave the light of reason to the old theologia. Today scientia wants proof through experimentia. And the experientia is that I am here. Then before I arrived here I took many soundings, and I know how deep the sea down here is.' (*Island*, 268).

Like the monks in *The Name of the Rose*, Father Caspar uses his religion to justify his behaviour.

Eco uses Father Caspar's flawed thinking to show that religion and science do not mix. Indeed, his novels argue that *nothing* mixes with religion. To heighten the priest's comical nature, Eco resorts to the old trick of portraying him as a mad scientist with a thick German accent and a tenuous grasp on the language used in the work. The text makes clear that Father Caspar speaks German, Latin and Italian<sup>19</sup>, nevertheless, this emphasis on his bad Italian gives the reader a sense of superiority over the priest. Eco is drawing on that feeling of xenophobia which delights television and cinema audiences when they see a German scientist, speaking fractured English, presenting preposterous and illogical ideas as fact. The reason this comedy delights us so much is that every bumbling German mad scientist since the Second World War has helped to erase the picture of the cold logical approach Nazi scientists had to the inhumane human experiments they carried out.

To drive home his point, Eco has Father Caspar die in a bizarre experiment of his own devising. Marooned on the ship and unable to reach the island where a boat, scientific equipment, and fresh food await them, Father Caspar decides to use his Aquatic Bell. He had constructed this earlier, but it remains untested. It is a cartoon-like, homemade, one person submarine, propelled by walking along the seabed. On hearing his explanation Roberto cannot keep quiet. ' "What happens is that the passenger drowns," Roberto concluded, as anyone would have. And Father Caspar accused him of knowing very little about the "equilibrium of liquors" ' (*Island*, 328). He manages to convince Roberto that it will succeed, and is a better option than Roberto's unsatisfactory progress in learning to swim. Finally, the priest explains, to ensure the Bell sinks down to the seabed, he will be wearing a pair of metal buskins . . .

He declines Roberto's offer to go in his stead, as he is desperate be the first man to see, through the little window in the Bell, the wonders of the ocean

<sup>19</sup> The novel was written in Italian, and Roberto's first language.

floor. This causes him some concern, as he wonders if success will generate the sin of pride. His final act of rationalisation is that rather than feeling pride, he will be deeply humbled. '[T]his is also a proof of mortification : if Our Lord on the water walked, I will walk under, suitable path for sinners' (*Island*, 331). And with that pretty piece of self delusion, Father Caspar drowns.

#### iv Don Quixote

*The Island of the Day Before* is a rewriting of Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. Of course, Eco being Eco, it is a multi-layered rewriting, with allusions to the Borges short story 'Pierre Menard Author of *Don Quixote*.'

Taking on *Don Quixote* is a formidable task. It is, after all, a work of satire. Further, it is an acknowledged part of the postmodern lineage, and while not precisely sacred, it is a demanding work to play games with. Given this, Eco's approach is to play it straight. *The Island of the Day Before* is to *Don Quixote* as William Golding's *The Lord of the Flies* is to R.M. Ballantyne's *The Coral Island*. Eco, a more cynical individual than Cervantes, shows what he thinks would really happen to a man living a life rooted in dreams of knight-errantry.

Both characters imagine that an unsuspecting woman loves them, weaving stories around this belief. The genesis of Don Quixote's fantasy is explained in the first chapter. '[H]e was sensible that a knight-errant without a mistress was a tree without either fruit or leaves . . . Near the place where he lived dwelt a good likely country lass, for whom he had formerly had a sort of an inclination, though it is believed she never heard of it, nor regarded it in the least' (Cervantes, 12-13). He renames her (as he has renamed himself), choosing a name 'that might have some affinity with her old one, and yet at the same time sounding somewhat like that of a princess, or a lady of quality' (Cervantes, 13).

Eco, however, allows the reader to think that Roberto's love is requited. His story is reconstructed from the letters he wrote to her while he was alone on the *Daphne*. Eco does give an early clue that this may not be the case, but it is an ambiguous clue. 'he is convinced that this will be his life for a long time, perhaps until his death ; he refashions his lady on paper so as not to lose her, and he knows he has not lost much more than the little he had before' (*Island*, 7).

Roberto's infatuation arises from the atmosphere of the salon he frequents in Paris.

He saw her for the first time one evening when she appeared in dark garb, veiled like a modest moon hiding behind clouds of satin. *Le bruit*, that unique mode which in Parisian society took the place of truth, told him contradictory things about her ; that she had suffered a cruel widowhood, at the loss not of a husband but of a lover, and she glorified that loss to reaffirm her dominion over it. Some whispered that she concealed her face because she was a splendid Egyptian, come from Morea.

Whatever the truth might have been, at the mere movement of her dress, at the light progress of her footsteps, at the mystery of her hidden face Roberto's heart was hers . . .

But suddenly . . . her veil dropped for an instant from her brow, and he was able to glimpse under that sickle moon the luminous abyss of her eyes. Two loving hearts looking at each other say more things than all the tongues of this universe could express in a day - Roberto flattered himself, sure that she had looked at him and, in looking, had seen him. And, on returning to his house, he wrote her . . . He found the letter so splendidly informed by the dictates of the Aristotelian machine of Padre Emanuel, so apt to reveal to the Lady the nature of the one person capable of such tenderness, that he did not consider it necessary to affix his signature. He did not yet know that the precieuses collected love letters as they did geegaws and bangles, more interested in their conceits than in their author . . .

One evening he caught her name, hearing someone call her Lilia . . . he knew well that such names are given in jest . . . And still he felt that Lilia and no other name could be given to his lady, lily-like in her scented whiteness.

(*Island*, 157-159)

The inflated language of this passage parodies Roberto's romantic reading of the situation. It puts him firmly in the camp of the courtly lover. The clues are the emphasis on the power of the eyes as agents of slavery in love and the excessive language, which uses extravagant metaphors to make its point. The term *precieux* (-se) was sometimes used in the sixteenth century to

describe the language of courtly love. This term is used of the women in the salon who played the game of courtly love. And game it was.

Eco finds this deeply disturbing. Stalking disturbs him - it infringes on the rights of an individual. Lilia is playing a game which she believes has well defined rules. Roberto, unbeknown to her, is playing another game, and his game seems to be Rapo.<sup>20</sup> Lilia should count herself lucky that Roberto's next step leads to his arrest and the order to spy for the French government.

Roberto who 'understood that a precious is won only with words' (*Island*,

161) appropriates d'Igby's ideas about the powder of sympathy as his own. 'And it was the meeting with Monsieur d'Igby that inspired the speech that was to lead to his ruin' (*Island*, 161).

Eco reveals the dark side of that game through Roberto's behaviour. The romantic act of following a lady love, watching her every move, are revealed as stalking. The tradition of courtly love, which privileges such behaviour, continues to affect the world today. 'What is clear is that its views of the intensity and the ennobling power of love as "the grand passion," and of the special sensibility and spiritual status of women, and of the complex decorum governing relations between the sexes have profoundly affected not only the literature of love but also the actual experience of "being in love" in the Western world, through the nineteenth century and (though to a diminished extent) even into our own day' (Abrams, 39).

And Lilia, at the end of the speech, smiled again at Roberto. It was a smile of congratulation, or at most admiration, but nothing is more natural than to believe that one is loved. Roberto interpreted the smile as an acknowledgement of all the letters he had sent . . . From then on, to be sure, he dared speak to Lilia, but the replies he received were always contradictory. Sometimes she would murmur, "just as we said a few days ago." Sometimes, on the contrary, she murmured, "And yet you said something quite different." Other times, leaving, she would promise, "But we will talk of it later. Keep your word."

What befell him drove him to compose those few episodes into a far more disturbing story.

<sup>20</sup> See page 18 for the definition of this game.

Roberto could not decide if she was absently attributing to him the worlds and deed of another, or if she was coyly provoking him.

(*Island*, 176)

Roberto's ruin - false arrest to ensure he will spy on Byrd's experiments on longitude, the subsequent shipwreck and being washed up on the *Daphne* - provide fuel for the story he invents to explain his plight. Father Caspar's presence curtails the process, but his death signals a renewed fantasy life.

As the text makes clear, Roberto has been making up stories from his childhood invention of an older brother. Many children have imaginary playmates ; Roberto's, though, was a disturbing creation.

Gradually he had also come to give this lost brother a name, Ferrante, and had begun attributing to him the little crimes of which he himself was wrongfully accused, like the theft of a cake or the improper liberation of a dog from his chain. Ferrante, privileged by his banishment, acted behind Roberto's back, and Roberto in turn hid behind Ferrante. Indeed, little by little the habit of blaming the nonexistent brother for what he, Roberto, could not have done, became transformed into the habit of inculpating him with what Roberto had done, and of which he repented . . .

We will find traces of this puerile game in the behaviour of the adult Roberto - or at least of Roberto at the moment we find him on the *Daphne* , in a plight that, to tell the truth, would have ensnared anyone.

(*Island*, 23 -25)

Alone on the *Daphne*, Roberto weaves an increasingly fantastic story involving Ferrante and Lilia, which credits Ferrante with causing his current situation. In the end, unable to differentiate between truth and fiction, he is convinced that Lilia lies on the island, shipwrecked and dying. He plans to swim to her rescue.

If I had arrived on the Island by now, he said to himself, I could save her. It is only my indolence that has kept me here . . . And yet all is not lost. I see her dying at this moment, but if at this same moment I were to reach the Island, I would be there a day before she arrives, waiting for her,

ready to rescue her.

It is of little matter that I drew her from the sea when she is on the point of breathing her last. It is a known fact that when the body reaches that stage, a strong emotion can restore it to new vigor . . .

Is it possible - as anyone would ask himself - that Roberto had not reflected on the fact that this rescue could be granted him only if he were to reach the island within the day, or at most by the early hours of the following morning : an exploit that his most recent [swimming] experiments hardly made probable? Is it possible that he did not realise that he was planning to land in reality on an Island to rescue a woman who was arriving only through his narrative?

But Roberto, as we have seen, having begun with the idea that the land of Romances was completely separate from his own world, had finally come into the other, and he had mingled their laws. He thought that he could arrive at the island because he was imagining his arrival, and that he could imagine hers at the moment when he was already there, because that was what he wished. On the other hand, he was transferring to his own world that freedom to will events and to see them achieved which makes Romances unpredictable. Finally, he would reach the Island for the simple reason that if he did not reach it, he would no longer know what story to tell.

[The only possible route to the island presents two problems. First, he is exhausted after swimming a quarter of the distance, and secondly, he will be swimming against the current] . . .

After sternly calculating these possibilities (admitting that life was short, art long, opportunity instantaneous and experiment uncertain, he told himself that it was unworthy of a gentleman to be daunted by such petty calculations, like a bourgeois computing the odds he had in staking at dice his greedily hoarded wealth.

To be sure, he then said, a calculation must be made, but it must be sublime, if the stakes are sublime. What was he gambling in this wager? His life. But his life, if he never succeeded in leaving the ship, was worth little, especially now, if his solitude was accompanied by the knowledge that he had lost her forever. . .

Finally he was seized by another idea, which immeasurably reduced for him the risk of this bet, indeed, saw him victor in either eventuality.

Assume, then, that the current did carry him in the wrong direction . . . the current would bear him along the meridian . . . .

[he plans to float on the meridian, which he believes will leave him hovering in limbo, between yesterday and today. ] Stopping time for himself, he would arrest it also on the island, indefinitely delay her death, because by now everything that happened to Lilia depended on his narrative decision.

(*Island*, 496-500)

This, Eco argues, rather than Don Quixote's change of heart, is the real result of immersing oneself in Romance. Eco allows Roberto the luxury of choosing his own ending. He swims off, '[a]nd what happened later to Roberto I do not know or think it will ever be known' (*Island*, 505). While the text has argued the impossibility of his success, the reader also knows that Roberto has been the sole survivor of both a battle and a shipwreck. In addition to these feats of survival, which both occurred by luck, fictional elements have become true in the course of the story. The powder of sympathy does heal people more than once in the course of the novel.

More mysterious, though, is the appearance of Ferrante in the text. During the siege a captured boy who 'saw Roberto and started shouting that he was the notorious Gambero' (*Island*, 74) who had double crossed the French and Italian troops. 'Toiras immediately pointed out that Roberto had been all night at his side and that, although he was a fine looking youth, nobody could mistake him for a captain. In the meantime others had ascertained that a Captain Gambero really did exist . . . Gambero protested his innocence, and in fact the boy prisoner did not recognise him . . . [There was a report that] a man had fled from the San Giorgio bastion . . . he was young, dressed in the Spanish style with a net over his hair. Roberto thought at once of Ferrante' (*Island*, 74). Earlier, Roberto had seen this man, mistaking him at first for his own reflection in a mirror. 'But as he approached, he realised that this self had, certainly, his face, but wore gaudy Spanish-style clothing, and his hair was gathered in a net. . . So he had seen not himself but someone very like him, whose trail he had now lost. Naturally he thought at once of Ferrante' (*Island*, 61-61).

Eco uses the postmodern symbol of the mirror (albeit mistakenly - Roberto is looking through a window) to add to the mystery of Ferrante. While

he may not exist, Roberto clearly does have a doppelganger, whose presence in the novel is unexplained.

Given these features of the narrative, the reader would be wise to allow for the possibility that Roberto somehow made it to the island, on the back, say, of a convenient turtle, or clinging to a fortuitous piece of driftwood, and found a woman there. With his imagination, Roberto is capable of seeing Lilia in a Fijian woman. Eco uses the postmodern trick of allowing the characters to appear at times as autonomous beings whom he cannot control, as a joke on readers who fall into the trap of treating fictional characters as real people.

Umberto Eco has written three misunderstood novels. After writing *The Name of the Rose* he realised that his ironic viewpoint was being taken seriously. By the time he came to write his third novel, Eco had conceded defeat. The upshot of this was the dumbing down of *The Island of the Day Before*. What Eco had not realised was that he would lose not only the academic recognition which attended his earlier works, but also many of his other readers. Although the novel sold well, it had nothing like the success of *The Name of the Rose*.

Eco has lost the sense of righteous indignation which propelled his earlier writing. He still feels strongly about the issues he discusses, but he has finally accepted that however persuasively he writes, people will not change. In the reader response criticism stakes, the readers have won, hands down.

*This is the way the world ends  
This is the way hte world ends  
This is the way the world ends  
Not with a bang but a whimper.*

(TS Eliot, 90)

## Conclusion

Comedy remains one of the last weapons we have. Above all, the writer has to resist the seductive call of respectability which dresses itself in myriad forms from professorship to prizes, honorific titles, medals and the siren call of art for its own sake, which leads us to take ourselves seriously.

If writers and readers feel they must act in a respectable manner, then comedy is dead. And what is true for the writer is true for the citizenry. There is no reason why all of us - except perhaps the head of government and those in charge of financial policies - should worry about sounding responsible every time we open our mouths. Gravity is a lot less useful than irresponsible inquiry.

(Saul 1995, 67 -8)

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Umberto Eco honed his comedic skills in lectures and short articles before turning to fiction. These are both short forms of communication which enabled Eco to use humour to make his points memorable. When Eco turns to longer fiction, the fish hooks in this apprenticeship become apparent. Eco's technique of using comedy to shape the audience response by making the alternatives to his point of view ridiculous is difficult to sustain in a longer work. While this technique is appealing on one level - the reader identifies with

Eco's sense of frustration - a little thought shows that Eco is making sweeping generalisations. For example, he writes off all librarians as incompetent at best, and devious and obstructive at worst. In his short article this is funny because the reader feels (rightly or wrongly) that Eco is exaggerating to make his point. In the novel he makes the argument central to his plot. This leads the reader to assume that one librarian is unfit for the job, rather than that Eco collectively condemns librarians.

As Eco became increasingly famous and wealthy, he drifted towards seriousness in his fiction. John Ralston Saul's statement that taking oneself seriously kills comedy sums up Eco's position. Umberto Eco has always had a tendency to take himself seriously, as his position as the first professor of semiotics in the world indicates. He has to practise and teach semiotics, while simultaneously defending it as a new and valid area of study. This shows that he can and does take the study of semiotics seriously. There is nothing wrong with this in itself. It does show, though, that he fits Saul's criteria for taking oneself seriously.

Eco intends his comedy to change the world. He fails of course. The world interprets fiction to suit itself. Where change occurs as a result of fiction it does so because the writer captures and expresses the mood of society, or because of a collective misreading.

Umberto Eco *understands* the individual strands which make up comedy. He knows about satire and irony and all the rest of it. Being a highly educated man with an inquiring mind he turns naturally to the tradition of learned wit as a way to express himself, as it allows him the chance to mix erudition and comedy.

Unfortunately for Eco, most of his readers lack his specialised knowledge, and so fail to understand his literary allusions. Despite this, his readable style, great plotting and memorable characters meant that *The Name of the Rose* was a surprise and long-lived success.

*Foucault's Pendulum* seems to be a drastic attempt to keep his target audience (who did read *The Name of the Rose*) while dropping the masses who read that book. He tried to drown them in a sea of potential boredom. Given that new editions of the 1988 novel are currently being sold in paperback his success is questionable. Eco fails to allow for the possibility of bored readers skipping ahead to see what happens!

By the time he wrote *The Island of the Day Before*, Eco had begun to

move away from the tradition of learned wit. If the people wanted historical novels, that is what he would provide. He saved himself the considerable effort of developing the complex structure of the earlier works. This is not to dismiss *The Island of the Day Before* as a lightweight work. It seems to be Eco's ironic salute to himself. In choosing to parody Cervantes' parody of courtly love, Eco concedes defeat. If Ovid was so misread as to institutionalise the very object of his satire, then what hope is there for Umberto Eco's comedy? The work uses new puzzles, such as natural history and music, to achieve its aim.<sup>21</sup> And while playing spot the kiwi is an entertaining pastime for the reader, it is not comedy.

Eco's focus has changed. Having broken his own rule, and engaged in dialogue with his readers, Eco has produced what he thinks they want him to write. *The Island of the Day Before* is a clever, accessible historical novel - it is, in fact, *The Name of the Rose* without its comedic edge.

Umberto Eco, satirist, rest in peace.

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<sup>21</sup> There are resonances of James Joyce in this new trend.

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