

REVIEW ESSAY:

WRITING IS REWRITING

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I read this book long before it was written. (*A sentence is made up of whatever they mean. You know Eco's method.*) The author will argue that this is the case with every book. We read in Ecclesiastes: "There is no new thing under the sun." And to no surprise, we read in Eco's book "All is recapitulation. " Jorge Luis Borges, el *inmortal*, once used this motto: "Salomon saith. *There is no new thing upon the earth.*" So that as Plato had an imagination, *that all knowledge was but remembrance; so Salomon giveth his sentence, that all novelty is but oblivion.* (Francis Bacon, Essays LVIII). If we take the argument to heart, actually to mind, we will have to repeat, this time with Babbage, that everything ever said (in whisper or shout) is around. The

Parfois, J'aimerais ne pas avoir écrit le livre, a fin d'écrire un très bel essai sur le "nom de la rose"

problem is: How do we reconstitute the thought from the oscillations of the atmosphere surrounding us? The air as library of everything ever said is not a metaphor, Babbage would argue. To “read” it, we would have to decode, an operation prohibited by two basic difficulties: What is the law (code, *n'est-ce pas?*) according to which the energy of our utterances (*flatus vocis*) is translated into the movement of the atmosphere? How powerful should our computers be in order to perform the calculations involved in reconstituting thoughts from the air in which they were expressed? New problems? Not at all; maybe a new way of presenting them. Old problems? No; maybe a different interpretation of some well known ideas or what David Cody (ever heard of him?) would call the mechanicist paradigm, applying it to an intelligent presentation of the *Birth of the Detective*.

For the sake of argument, let us imagine that this library is set on fire. Some St. John, or Jorge de Burgos, or Borges, or Eco listened to the voice from heaven: “Go and take the open scroll. . .” and followed the angel’s words: “Take it and eat it. It will turn your stomach sour, although in your mouth it will taste sweet as honey.” Everything ever said will once again go through a transformation. Oh no, the story cannot go on like this because the original message is: “Once again, you must utter prophecies over peoples and nations and languages and many kings.” Obviously, Eco knows that the message is the medium. (Or is it the other way around?) Medium is Secondness, an intermediary (between Firstness and Thirdness), a representamen. As long as books are printed on paper and not delivered as cake or cheese, the swallowing of a poisoned manuscript by Aristotle on laughter is the place to start any interrogation about the novel. Are all manuscripts poisoned? Are some more so than others? Is the disappearance of the representamen the end of the semiosis? What is the difference between the interpretation of a sign and the interpretation of interpretations? Questions pile up; the detective plot supports a monastery of the holy order of intertextuality. Each time someone is killed, the universe is somehow affected. To be more precise, our perception and interpretations are affected.

The principle I apply in this text is the same as the book’s: Everything written here was written-or at least said-before (by someone the reader might recognize, by someone whose name sounds familiar, or by a rather obscure reader or writer) but now assembled in a different way. Indeed, why bother with truth or accuracy of information, before we decide if writing about a book is an issue of precision or of expressivity? My historian friends are better than semioti-

cians; but as inquisitors, we are better (“God forgive me,” cf. p. 394). I find the most joyful delight [Is Eco intentionally redundant?] in unravelling a nice, complicated knot. And it must also be because, at a time when as a philosopher I doubt the book has an order, I am consoled to discover, if not an order, at least a series of connections in small areas of the book’s affairs. And there is probably another reason: In this story, things greater and more important than the battle between Giovanni (XXII, *il Papa, sicuro*) and Ludwig (der Kaiser, *sicherlich*) may be at stake.

From Melk comes Adso’s cry: “But it is a story of theft and vengeance among monks of scant virtue;” and the answer: “*‘Intorno a un libro proibito, Adso, intorno a un libro proibito’ rispose Guglielmo,*” (which William Weaver translates as “‘Because of a forbidden book, Adso. A forbidden book!’ William replied”). A single, but strange inference: Guglielmo de Bascavilla (sic!) is one and the same as the Franciscan brother William of Baskerville. Adso (Adson, Watson), the young Benedictine novice from the Melk monastery (*già novizio beneditinno nel monastero di Melk*) complements William (*dialettica servo-padrone?*). In the Italian monastic universe, he is a German-like assistant detective, while back in the idyllic Austrian monastery, he turns into a narrator caught between the imperative to be faithful to the truth (seen from the perspective of his order) and the urge to confess to the most intense moment of his life (not the sole instance of a rehash of some Boccaccio), which occurred despite the strict rules of monastic life. “. . . *Hörst Du nicht aus meinen Liedern, daß ich ein und doppelt bin?*” which means, as Goethe might have said, that Eco (= Adso + William) has a split personality. Adso and William are Eco looking at Eco, examining each other, one part, one character discovering the other. William about Adso: “You, wretched illiterate rogue, dare say we are still where we started? . . . I believe that your sleeping soul understood more things than I have in six days, and awake.” Adso about William: “I had the impression that [he] was not interested in truth. . . . On the contrary, he amused himself by imagining how many possibilities were possible.” It is in this respect that I state that they complement one another. “*‘Autour d’un livre interdit, Adso, autour d’un livre interdit,’ répondit Guillaume,*” says a new voice (that of the French translator Jean-Noel Schifano).

The forbidden book keeps the plot alive. Everything else is encyclopedic embroidery reminiscent of Nessus’ shirt. Once you put it on, you start burning. In fact, this is a performance (“*Cela revient à mettre l’accent sur des caractéristiques de son exécution*”) in *assemblage*, a particular form of semiosis in which the sign process follows an ad-

ditive principle. Once triggered, it continues according to a design reminiscent of the additive (as opposed to subtractive, dear reader) color principle (mixture of pigments) on which painting, for instance, is based. The writer must have smiled (did he?) at the thought that a "new" book could be written by reprocessing information according to this additive algorithm. The more involved in the mixture, the lower the probability of identifying the individual components ("It was a beautiful morning at the end of November" are the beginning words in Charles Schultz's Peanuts and in the third beginning of Eco's novel. For the Italian reader, the stereotype might be even more evident: "*Era una bella mattina di fine novembre.*"). The result is paradoxical: originality by way of limiting the personal contribution to the formula of the mixture. Cooking and writing are no less similar than knitting and programming (which are very similar indeed; cf. Dewar, Schoenberg, Schwartz, *Higher Level Programming*, Computer Science Department, Courant Institute of Mathematical Sciences, New York University, 1981). Recipes, like knitting instructions, are relatively unchanging. Their execution, as with cooking, knitting or writing, introduces the dynamic element. A program is just as dissimilar to its output as knitting instructions are to the sweater they produce. The same holds true for a recipe and the finished food, and for a novel's formula and the written manuscript offered to a potential reader. Neither should we confuse a program with the computer on which it runs any more than we should confuse knitting instructions with the needles used. The translation Eco completed is as real as the large notebooks from the Papeterie Joseph Gibert or the felt-tip pen he claims to have used. The diversion is charming and can only be associated with a strange cooking ritual in which real ingredients are blended with others written on paper neatly cut from books. There is no use to speculate whether Eco was challenged by the idea. In fact, many novels are the products of the same procedure, in the meanwhile legitimized under such labels as *collage*, *assemblage*, or *post-modern*. Eco does not hide what he knows; he actually enjoys showing it, pulling our legs every now and then. The novel, definitely provocative at so many levels, is not a new *Trivial Pursuit*, although in the context of the American obsession with the game, one can easily see it as one (or a source for one; too bad ideas cannot be copyrighted).

And by the way, who decides what the level of interpretation is? (The Abbott might ask Adso what the proper context is, and Adso will dream directly from Coena Cipriani.) It is authority (Is this still the Abbot or is it Patrick Suppes? Quine?), the most reliable com-

mentator of all and the most invested with prestige (and therefore with sanctity, the Abbot would continue-and so might Suppes). I write with/about Eco: A text, once written, no longer has anyone behind it. It has, on the contrary, when it survives, and for as long as it survives, thousands of interpreters ahead of it. Their reading of it generates other texts, which can be paraphrase, commentary, care-free exploitation, pastiche, or translation into other signs, words, images, even into music. However, Eco's book is in an inverse situation. It is a first text that blurs, filters, and repositions other texts (*Apocalisse di San Giovanni*, *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, *Opera Omnia*, *Tratatto di semioticagenerale*, *Das Labyrinth*, *Ill superuomo di massa*, *The Role of the Reader*, etc. etc.). The cycle of unlimited semiosis is actually a family of convergent and divergent circles; movement is from some center-which I identify as semiotics-to the periphery (Who killed who?), and from the periphery back (IF ... THEN). *The Name of the Rose* seems conceived deliberately to mock definitive readings, as all its readers come, sooner or later, to realize. Read today, and not only by a reader obsessed with the problem of communication, the novel gives the comforting impression of a message written in code. Fabri would say: written under the constraints of noise. Images abound, true, and assail the reader in a whirlwind of signs open to every reading (or at least to many). But Eco, under our pressure, the readers', referred to specific correspondences that in his day were common knowledge.

So *The Name of the Rose* is an allegory, not a metaphor; and every allegory possesses absolutely precise keys to its reading. I have to stop the quote. "Absolutely precise" does not sound right here! I don't want to correct Eco but to explain why absolutely precise keys would make *The Name of the Rose*, or any other allegory, a crossword puzzle. In fact, allegory is not the result of encoding but the attempt to share codes. Allegories are not cryptic forms. There is a transparency (something about something else) that enables the reader/interpreter of allegories to appreciate a definitory, genuine naive quality. Since Heraklitus, we know that there are three ways to speak or write about reality: *legein* (direct expression), *kruptein* (obfuscation), and *in signs* (like the Delphic oracle). Allegories fall in the last category.

But let's continue with Eco. In what spirit, then, should we face his text? In a visionary spirit, drawing from it all the promptings of which the text, reacting on us, is capable? In the spirit of malign philosophy seeking out the original images and even the iconographical ambiguities born of careless readings of previous texts? Or in the

spirit of exegesis, as if meaning and suprameanings have been established once and for all? Waiting for the millennium in 198-AD is not as out of place as some might want to accept. Beatus, the abbot of Liebania (author of an allusive commentary on the Book of Revelation), and Eco have several things in common. They both play on numerological hints to produce a kind of mathematical formula to identify things related to the coming of the Antichrist. They allude to some rigorist heresy. It is not uninteresting to read Eco's notes about Adso of Montier-en-Der and his *Libellus de Antechristo* (954). The historic perspective is indeed impressive, especially when, citing Norman Cohn, Eco talks (although taking some distance) about the pattern governing Münzer the Begards, and the Catharists, communist revolutionary ideology, and the unquestionable apocalyptic references in Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. His novel and his article "Waiting for the Millennium" explain each other in several ways, constituting one more level of intertextuality. The burning of the library is not the apocalypse, but the entire discourse goes along the line of Revelation. The main change is also suggested: The suture point between world and text is no longer the sacred text but those cultural codes that we share in our culture and which are so obvious in conflictual situations (between those who believe and those who do not, those who studied and those who did not, those who have and those who do not have, etc., etc., etc.). Desanctification is one more of those underlying themes of Eco's book that speaks for its actuality/currency.

Eco must have heard over and over again "*De te fabula narratur,*" because it is *his* story, his knowledge, *his* culture, *his* love, doubts, sense of humor, aesthetic taste, and *his* semiotic conception that the reader gets to know or comes in touch with. There is nothing in *The Name of the Rose* that can unequivocally point to events, time, or place. Indexical signs are invoked throughout, but actually they are not marks left, but marks of marks of marks . . . , a captivating sign process that starts with the first pages of the book. "11 16 agosto 1968 mi fu messo tra li mani un libro dovuto alla penna di tale abate Vallet, le *Munuscrit de Dom Adso de Melk, traduit en francais d'après l'edition de Dom J. Mabillon* (Aux Presses de l'Abbaye de la Source, Paris, 1842)". The French translation of a 14th century manuscript is then associated with Prague and the Soviet invasion. I, too, was in Prague in August, 1968, but my testimony as to the reality of the place and time and events has significance in a different system of coordinates. The indexical signs are as authentic as E. T. A. Hoffmann's claim to be the only publisher of the papers written by Brother Medardus

(*Die Elixiere des Teufels*). The monastery is in B (the writer visited Bamberg before starting the novel in 1814-18 I 5). Medardus Day is June 8, and the death of the unfortunate monk will be precisely recorded by Father Spiridion, the librarian (all those coincidences!) of the monastery, on September the 5th, 17** at 12 o'clock. *Ambrosio or the Monk* by Matthew G. Lewis (1775-1818) is an other example of the same literary strategy: Make things look real, give credibility through facts which according to a shared culture we accept as real. Everything else becomes credible by contamination. Occam and Roger Bacon are as real as persons mentioned in a news story or a story "based on real events" (as in an ad for Merrill Lynch, "the breed to watch"). To be familiar with a certain quotation (literal or hidden) allows for associations but does not make the reader understand more. The artistic procedure is one of *insolitaire, ostranenie*, a procedure that makes this form more complicated and increases the difficulty and duration of perception because the process of perception in art has a goal in itself and has to be extended/prolonged. Art is a means to transcend the *doing* of a thing. Once the doing is finished, it has no artistic relevance. The quote Schklovski gives from Tolstoy ("It's a shame") on the notion of whipping could well belong to Eco (as in the description of Dolcino's torture).

The world of this novel, like that of every novel: good or bad, accepted or rejected by a reader, publisher, or award-giving institution is an artifact, as real as any other artifact (be it a symphony, a palace, a statue). All that a novel does is process language pertinent to a narration. When Eco confesses that he put together a "*machine à interpreter*," he is more than paraphrasing Le Corbusier. His novel is indeed such a machine, identifiable only in the act (plurality of ways) of interpreting. Its meaning? It is hard to know whether the letter he wrote contains a hidden meaning, more than one, many, or none at all. A French writer/translator would ask about "*un certain sens cache', et si elle en contient plus d'un, beaucoup, ou point du tout*," while Burkhardt Kroeber, on behalf of a tradition culminating with Frege, will dramatically emphasize the difficulty in knowing "*ob die Lettern, die er geschrieben hat, einen Sinn erhalten, oder auch mehr als einen, viele gar, oder keinen*." Latin is the common denominator to the book, but like it or not, 90% of the American readers (not buyers!) skip the Latin-the detective plot still makes sense. Comparing translations, one will notice that there are changes, ranging from minor omissions (why, I asked myself, sensitive to a name like Milo Temesvar, is the entire reference to *Apocalittici e integvati*-a brilliant book omitted from Weaver's translation?), and a systematic effort to re-

duce the Latin text (providing translations or paraphrase). One might suspect that it is a market decision. Is it the same with the German edition, providing--hélas!--an *Übersetzung der wichtigsten lateinischen Passagen* and also *Erklärung wenig geläufiger Wörter*? Or are these various editions in fact quite different books? They are, even at a time when the world is becoming homogenous and we share more than ever before. The formative nature of signs, i.e., the way in which we are affected by the signs that we constitute (and are part of) is one of the main themes of this novel. Did Eco write a book that, by some intrinsic quality, transcends the language barrier ("un livre dont la langue se pre^{te} parfaitement à la traduction")?

Bacon was right in saying that the conquest of learning is achieved 'through knowledge of languages. Bacon was right: The scholar's first duty is to learn languages. (Sentences may be alike, we've known this since 1931!) The novel is based on a sophisticated modular construction mechanism that explains why it is so translatable, a nice concept that deserves more attention and even qualification. The language barrier is different from genre to genre and from author to author. I believe that Tolstoy can be better translated in French because once he learned French, his use of the Russian changed to a certain degree, opened to the French. Eco--no comparison intended--is an Italian writer who is open to the main Romance languages. His Italian is influenced by the languages in which he reads, teaches, lectures, and writes ... and thinks. Passages can be identified in which the thinking was that of Conan Doyle, Joyce, or Thomas Mann. Or Lyotard. If the issue of transcending language barriers has any significance, except to the extent to which language (along with so many other sign systems) participates in thinking, then the novel makes us aware of it. We learn about the role of language from the very beginning of the book and again and again through references, quotations, translations, etc.

The blueprint is a fake: "*La mia versione italiana di una oscura versione neogotica francese di una edizione latina secentesca di un'opera scritta in latino da un monaco tedesco sul finire del trecento.*" Someone else might have chosen: "*En Londres, a principio del mes de junio de 1929, el anticuario Joseph Cartaphilus, de Esmirna, ofreció a la princesa de Lucinge los seis volúmenes en cuarto menor (1715-1720) de la Iliada de Pope (. . .) El original está redactado en inglés y abunda en latinismos. La versión que ofrecemos es literal,*" a case identified as *bibliofilia apocvifa alla Barges*. Eco has immense pleasure in playing the language game, and games in general. The book is one of the most humorous I've read. But then I stop and confess that my reading is one of many possible and that

others have questioned my judgement. Laughter? Two clichés provoke laughter; 100 clichés move us (*Due cliché fanno ridere. Cento cliché commuovono*). The same holds true for kitsch and contemporary art. (Here I refer to the little Eco look-alikes sold in Milan. There is a price to celebrity). So, laughter? Wait a second. The conflict between nominalism and realism, between state and religion, between ideologies, Aldo Moro's execution and the Red Brigade's activities, church and atheism, etc.-is this humorous? Does Eco ridicule everything important, serious, grave. . .? One can answer by producing examples from the great comic tradition, remarkable books about humor, laughter, irony, but the fact remains that *The Name of the Rose* is not a collection of jokes. So why expect laughter? Not even jokes always end in laughter. (I know of some that are rather sad, or maybe I get sad thinking about what lies behind the joke.) The last phase of a historic form is its comedy. Do not ask for the volume and page number of a quote from Marx that someone planted in my memory (during my monastic life). The gods of the Elada, already mortally wounded in Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*, died again comically in Lucian's comedy. Marx wondered why things happen like this in history. So that mankind departs joyfully from its past. (End of a quote that never began.) Perhaps the mission of those who love mankind is to make people laugh at the truth, to *make them laugh* because the only truth lies in learning "to free ourselves from insane passion for the truth"; "...libraci dalla passione insunuper la verita"; ... "sich von der Krankhaften Leidenschaft für die Wahrheit zu befreien"; ... "à nous liérer de la passion insensée pour la vérité." Somebody (let's call him Jacques Barzun) once wrote: "The danger of Conan Doyle's method is caricature, which is properly a weapon of humour or satire. That is why Holmes and Watson have been endlessly parodied, have been sent up in both senses-into the Pantheon of national archetypes as well as by countless teams of professional comedians. . . . This is not to say great characters or novels cannot be based on caricature; *Gulliver's Travels*, *Don Quixote*, and so many others prove the contrary."

My basic relation with this "machine" was defined in the first line of this text. I read this book before it was written ("Sentences may be alike", comes again to my mind). The pieces assembled here are present in the interpretive mechanism once in the context in which I interpreted them some time ago (in circumstances defined by other scholars or through my own studies), and now again, in this pseudo-parody of Sherlock Holmes, supported by a mysterious forbidden manuscript in which voices like those of Joyce, Poe, Shakespeare,

Bernard de Morlay, Bunuel, Manzoni, Abelard, Villon, Tom Jones, and others can be heard. On a different level, Peirce wrote the story of a theft that he unravelled. In 1983, Eco and Sebeok, as editors, produced *The Sign of Three*, which contains no surprise more open clues to *The Name of the Rose*. In fact, and as a matter of his literary strategy, Eco does not hide any of his sources. The magic is not in the cards in his hands but in the way he uses them, in the game. For theoretical purposes, *Zadiq* (i.e., Voltaire) is an example. In Eco's novel, the episode of William's identifying Brunellus is an ironic transcription. So is the case with many other pages in which Leibniz and Wittgenstein, Roger Bacon, Alamus de Insulis (or should we say Alano delle Isole?), and Boccaccio—to name a few—more—are brought together in a *mixtum compositum* that looks like Phillip Johnson's AT&T building in New York or like Hans Hollein's Sparkasse in Vienna, architecture within architecture. The building, its history, comments, everything mixed together and identified as architectural text integrated in the bigger, more encompassing text of a street, neighborhood, city. This is called post-modern. We know how to define it. (For heaven's sake, so many books are written on the topic; even the author of this text is laboring among so many others over the issue.) When we deal with an example, we are like the good hounds (not of Baskerville) sensing the rabbit for which we were trained (an animal prepared especially for the hunt).

So what is post-modern in *The Name of the Rose*? Heterogeneity, collage, misquotes, indeterminacy, a certain ritual quality, narcissism, a double coding strategy, ahistoricism, multicentricity. Did Eco write a post-modern novel? No, he wrote a novel. Period. Texts within texts. The novel, its history, comments about the novel, everything mixed together and identified as a literary text integrated in the encompassing category of a genre, of a national literature, of contemporary fiction. Part of a culture that is simultaneously reflected in its components and influenced by it. (How high are the stakes in Eco's wager with time?). In an age when so many of our conceptions are influenced by the re-evaluation of basic cultural values, his own are molded by the spirit of our time. As an artifact, the novel is a contingent product. It does not tell us how things are but how they might be or how we might look at them. As a machine for interpretation, it allows for interaction with the reader through its interface: 1) the rigid code of writing and reading as culturally established in our civilization; 2) the new code suggested through the text; 3) various comments, including Eco's own comments, about his

book and about so many other texts. Did Eco, or someone else, Jorge maybe, write this:

Entre los comentarios que ha despertado la publicación anterior, el más curioso, ya que no el más urbano, bíblicamente se titula *A coat of many colours* (Manchester, 1948) y es obra de la tenacísima pluma del doctor Nahum Cordovero. Abarca unas cien páginas. Habla de los entones griegos, de los centones de la baja latinidad, de Ben Jonson, que definió a sus contemporáneos con retazos de Séneca, del *Virgilius evangelizans* de Alexander Ross, de los artificios de George Moore y de Eliot y, finalmente, de “la narración atribuida al anticuario Joseph Cartaphilus”. Denuncia, en el primer capítulo, breves interpolaciones de Plinio (Historia naturales, V, 8); en el segundo, de Thomas De Quincey (Writings, III, 439); en el tercero, de una epístola de Descartes al embajador Pierre Chanut; en el cuarto, de Bernard Shaw (Back to Methuselah, V). Infiriere de esas intrusiones, o hurtos, que todo el documento es apócrifo. A mi entender, la conclusión es inadmisibila.

The environment in which the artifact is produced can be seen (cf. Simon) as a mold. Our readings are part of the mold. Together with Eco, we read D’Alembert: “The general system of sciences and arts is a kind of labyrinth, a tortuous road which the spirit faces without knowing too much about the path to be followed. . . . Our system of knowledge is ultimately made up of different branches. . . . It is a kind of world map which must show the principal countries, their position and their reciprocal dependencies” (Introduction to *Encyclopédie*).

Of course, the architect of the Scriptorium designed it according to this text. The reading also takes place in this environment. One expects the same product from the same mold if the molded material is the same. But it is not, a reason why Eco’s reading of Eco’s book cannot be the same as my reading or anyone else’s. Should it be? An entire critical tradition is based on the affirmative reply (from which Eco takes distance) “definable as a paradigm through the image of the sign as a container.” Quite often, signs are containers: “Do not enter!” “Weight 16 oz.” “Ludwig was elected emperor in 13 14.” And when two readings of text are different? When all readings are different? That is, when the difference in interpretations will again and again confirm how different human beings are? Then the image of the sign as a container will cease to satisfy and we shall look at the sign as a kind of triggering device. *The Name of the Rose* on someone’s shelftriggers various interpretive processes. You don’t have to read it, only own it. Signing up for a class dealing with the novel is a different interpretation. What’s in a name? That which we call a

rose/By any other name would smell as sweet, we learned from Juliet, who told this to Shakespeare. ("A plain girl let it be Susan. Finally George. George is the name of George Lynes George, Georges Bracque, George Ullman, George Joinville, George Williams and will with it and George Middleton. This makes it recognizable as the name George"). Ask Eco, whose name became an object of interest once the novel triggered a plethora of interpretations, such as this article, accompanying its life as a special kind of literacy (a cultural artifact acknowledged in the marketplace). All of a sudden, semiotics moved into a better position in this marketplace. (It was already there, but quoted over-the-counter, in the penny market, while computer science and economics were stealing the show and trading megabucks). And by no accident, since this novel is about semiotics, too. *The Name of the Rose* re-presents the known and all too familiar in a disjointed, unexpected, disturbing manner, with quotation marks, not always properly placed but nevertheless part of the rhetoric involved. (William is quoted as saying "We are dwarfs [dwarves?], but dwarfs who stand on the shoulders of those giants, and small though we are, we sometimes manage to see farther on the horizon than they." I wonder if Eco purposely reassigns these words to his alter ego). One could read here a statement about architecture (Thanks, Jorge Silvetti), but once the source is ignored, we can move toward the theme of "criticism from within," which is part of post-modern discourse and so characteristic of the novel.

However, the effectiveness of such "criticism from within" does not necessarily depend on [such] ironic manipulation of literary [my selection] codes. Rather, the critical effect depends on a subversion of known (I would say here culturally acknowledged) meanings and on the production (I would say *expression*) of knowledge itself. A quote within a quote. Levi-Strauss, commenting on Duchamp's "ready-mades," eloquently expressed the complex mixture of operations and effects in these types of works.

You then accomplish a new distribution between the signifier and the signified, a distribution that was in the realm of the possible but was not openly effected (in the primitive condition of the object). You make then, in one sense, a work of learning, discovering in that object latent properties that were not perceived in the initial context; a poet does this each time he uses a word or turns a phrase in an unusual manner.

Is Eco's novel a literary replica of the "ready-mades"? Using, together with Barthes (actually Silvetti), the notion of "anamorphism" as an explanatory metaphor, we are bound to discover not only vari-

ous techniques of distortion employed by the writer, but also what kind of semiotic knowledge went into the algorithm of the novel. Of course, it is Eco's semiotics vs. so many other semiotic theories (what about the Paris School?), some ridiculed, some held in high esteem (Peirce is obviously in the latter league). Historical allusions and quotations, in spite of being marks for the self-consciousness of writing, are altered in order to bring out new ideas. The resulting effect is not a lecture on the differences among medieval semiotic theories, but a courageous deconstruction of such theories. Emphasizing, by way of example, features already known, the book—a sublime-ridiculous didactic book, written by a professor who does not hide his identity as a “teaching animal”—triggers new associations. What was called erasing of *contingencies* is maybe the most characteristic part of his narrative strategy.

At this moment I have to correct one of the statements upon which I build my argument. If all that authors of novels do is process language pertinent to a narration, Eco (and this is the case with the post-modern in general) processes literature, i.e., language already used, in order to produce literary constructs culturally identified as fiction. It is a higher level of language processing since its object is not language (ideal, but nonexistent raw material) but previously processed language. Accordingly, precision is diminished while expressiveness is enhanced. *The Name of the Rose* is not a treatise on semiotics; but accordingly compiled, it will prove in many respects similar to such works as *A Semiotic Theory*, *The Role of the Reader*, not to mention that wonderful exercise in applied semiotics called *Diario minimo*. To work consciously with literature as language (and with semiotics as literature) means to accept a difficult challenge: to simultaneously deal with the immediate and the mediated (through sign processes) object (of the sign). For it is not history in its most profound sense that is the [desired] object of explanation, exposition, and unravelling, but rather the immediate, uncritical, almost urgent rapport between the novel [architecture] and the reader [beholder]. Criticism from within is indeed a short-lived phenomenon in the synechism of knowledge implicit in Eco's semiotics. Its impact, obviously more evident to those colleagues familiar with the subject (and more claim to be than actually are!), can only diminish the time of exegesis and semiotic archaeology started for Eco when the original vigor of his conception took a downturn. It is quite paradoxical that Eco, not being in the situation to exercise the power of “truth” or academic authority through “criticism from within” (without making the novel ridiculous), institutes the virtue of aes-

thetic quality instead. Under the protective sign of irony. Accordingly, the precision of the theoretical statement and the ambiguity of the fictional/pseudo-fictional material, while reciprocally exclusive, are recruited in a cultural wedding reminiscent of the essay but going well beyond it. The author is aware that his readers will not learn semiotics from the book but hopes that they will become aware of its strange nature as discourse about signs using signs. The central word of the novel is sign.

Against the background of a Sherlock Holmes type of detective story (literature for consumption), “qualified” semiotic theories emerge. The aesthetic dimension, which such theories sometimes also have, helps us to deny the theory the chance to emerge as such. What we get is rather an ironic commentary, quite often reaching the point of sarcasm. The “subtle diversion” from the realm of the semiotic philosophic discourse to that of narration is intended as a device to stimulate/arouse the reader’s complicity. Those who do not know Wittgenstein might take the quote as coming from an imaginary mystic (un mistico *delle tue terre*) writing in a German in which “Er muoz Gelichesame die Leiter [why not capital L in the English translation?] *abwerfen*. . . .” is the same as “He must so to speak throw away the ladder after he has climbed upon it (6.54, of course, *Logisch-philosophische Abhandlung*). Those who do know the source will not learn more about Wittgenstein but might notice how a certain accent (represented by the archaic German spelling and the explanation Adso receives) changes the interpretation of the relation between usefulness and meaning. The critical process is aesthetically disguised. The literary experiments in *The Name of the Rose* are essentially different from those of a Gertrude Stein, but the discourse is frequently contaminated by hers: “A sentence is when they express that they wish that they were made of it as well which is whatever they do. This is a sentence. How do you do is a sentence. How do you do. This is a sentence. How do you do. It is a sentence. A sentence is why they will like a lake.”

There is a subtle mannerism that feeds into this kind of writing, continuously shadowed by its own criticism. The level of symbolism is so many times attacked and reconstituted that it becomes part of the intrigue. On the one hand, everything has a symbolic underlying element (naturalization/reification of culturally acknowledged codes). On the other, everything tends to resist the final integration in the unique symbolism of one and a unique order. Dubito is the key word of the book, disguised in various ways and brought to its most powerful expression through laughter. In a sacred universe, laugh-

ter is profane, subversive. And Eco's novel is about the use of the sign as a subversive instrument. The descriptive adequacy and the procedural adequacy go hand in hand. And from within the novel, Adso and William *TOGETHER*, constitute the replica of an Eco constantly seduced by both the work and its life within a given community of readers. He could afford to incorporate in the body of fiction those contradictions inherent in his semiotics (and in semiotics in general). The notion of transformation (of a theory, of literature, of a quote, of a character, of a sign, i.e., of our transformation as constitutive parts of the sign we interpret) is central to this approach. And the conclusion seems childishly simple: It is possible to mediate between the world of a theory and the world of fiction. Montague furnished some bizarre proof to this, but behind Montague is a Leibniz who anticipated the thought. Eco undoubtedly pays homage to him.

And so, while finishing an article about a book I read long before it was written, I wonder if there is a relation between the scriptorium and my library. Let me ask for Walter Benjamin's help. I am unpacking my library. Yes, I am. The books are not yet on the shelves, not yet touched by the mild boredom of order. I cannot march up and down their ranks to pass in review before a friendly audience. You need not fear that. Instead, I must ask you to join me in the disorder of crates that have been wrenched open, the air saturated with the dust of wood, the floor covered with torn paper; to join me among piles of volumes that are seeing daylight again after two years of darkness, so that you may be ready to share with me a bit of the mood. It is certainly not an elegiac mood but one of the anticipation that books arouse in a genuine collector. For such a man is speaking to you, and on close scrutiny, he proves to be speaking only about himself. The only missing book is Aristotle's on laughter. Did I really have this book in my library or am I missing something that must have been written because I remember it?

Postscript: Preface to an Article about Umberto Eco's *Name of the Rose Writing is Rewriting*:

In the semiosis of a text, each interpretation becomes part of the sign that the text represents. Some interpretations are directly reflected in the final printed version (suggestions of colleagues and readers, editorial decisions,

misprints, etc.), others, indirectly. Umberto Eco's novel allows, and indeed incites, an approach which might contradict some of our accepted editorial conventions. This explains (explanation is weaker than validation) this post-script offered as preface-the attempt to share with the reader the code of the main text. It is a compromise. The editors of the AJS wrote to me:

(i) As it is written, your essay assumes complete knowledge of *The Name of the Rose* on the part of our readers. This is not a serious flaw as we suspect that most of our readers are, in fact, familiar enough with the book to follow your argument. But you might consider introducing a minimal amount of description of the general plan of the book and some of the key events which you interpret (e.g., the burning of the library: William's identification of Brunellus; etc.)." (MacCannell, Flower MacCannell, 1986)

Descriptions are as good as they can be. Choosing one from many does not qualify it as the best. (It might be the first in a file or the author's name might attract attention to it).

The action is set in a major Benedictine abbey in Northern Italy, in the turbulent year 1327. All over Europe the Church is persecuting the so-called Fraticelli, followers of a lapsed Franciscan, fra' Dolcino who was burnt at the stake twenty years earlier, and whose advocacy of total poverty may, it is feared, cause anarchy, and undermine the secular power of the Church. For this very reason the Emperor is encouraging the movement. A Franciscan brother, an Englishman with the Holmesian sounding name of Guglielmo da Baskerville (his Watson, called Adso, tells the story; these, and the novel's Shakespearean title, are by no means Eco's only homage to English culture) arrives at the abbey to act as mediator between the forces of tolerance and the Pope's inquisitor, the chief persecutor of the Dolcinians, who is due to stop there on his way to the South. The newcomers find the abbey in turmoil after the sudden and violent death of a monk, and Baskerville is asked to revive his once famous gift for investigation, and throw light on the crime before the notables arrive. He does solve the murder, though not before several more monks have been similarly dispatched, seemingly in keeping with a crazy pattern based on the Book of Revelations. At the end of the story the abbey itself is reduced to ashes.

The murders are all connected with the exclusive, well defended nerve-centre of the abbey, the library: a magnificent treasury of scholarship without equal in the whole of Christendom. Its custodian, second only to the Abbot in the hierarchy, and by tradition his successor, conceals its secrets in accordance with his own idea of what is good for others. It is soon apparent that the victims have all come into contact with a certain dangerous codex, whose content are disclosed only at the end. (Massimo d'Amico, 1983) Williams bears some re-

semblance to his compatriot and friend, William of Ockham, as he whets his razor on the redundant frenzies of his contemporaries. (. . .) On arrival at the monastery his first act is to tell the monks where to find a lost horse, which he identifies by name and appearance. Since he has never seen or heard of the animal before, they have reason to be impressed. Their abbot thereupon asks William's help in ferreting out the secret of a recent unfortunate occurrence. A monk has fallen dead by the monastery wall. Was it murder or suicide? (Richard Ellman, 1983)

The editors (MacCannell, 1986) continue:

(2) In its current form, as you are aware, your essay puts maximum pressure on our style guide, suggesting possible fictitious references, calling authors by their first names only, omitting full references, etc. We realize that this is an important part of the point(s) you are making, but all the same, it will be difficult for us to publish the piece without either conforming it to our style, or commenting on its lack of conformity. Do you have any suggestions?

(3) Can The Name of the *Rose* be mentioned in, above, or near the title?

A closing confession: After years of publishing experience, I am aware that this essay will raise some editorial eyebrows. Perhaps without considering the semiotic implications, we agree to respect certain conventions because they make our professional life easier and our work more efficient (but not necessarily better). Dean MacCannell and Juliet Flower MacCannell deserve my gratitude for helping me-unwittingly perhaps- by allowing for a style consistent with the approach I took. The *approach* is part of my point. And this Postscript is another way of saying: Writing is re-writing.

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