

## **Aesthetics in Cognition: The Narrative Construction of New Discourses in *The Name of the Rose***

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### **Abstract**

Eco's fiction takes a great interest in the idea of reading as a creative negotiation between writer, reader and text that construct a story world. In *The Name of the Rose*, Eco initializes the cognitive manoeuvre of the reader through the employment of metaphors, images, analogies, time frames, digressions, suspense and medieval aesthetics. Eco's works offer a panoramical space to explore the interrelationship between various dimensions of narrative, a reader's cognitive processing of them which include mental representations of different categories, changes in readers' attitudes or beliefs, and affective reactions. As the possible world created is different from the actual world and the readers vary in background, the aesthetic orientation and emotional patterning, their constructions of/or responses to the same narrative can be different. *The Name of the Rose* being designated as a cognitive hybrid novel, the paper attempts to study the narrative methodologies employed to present the connotations including, emplotment, recurring intratextual motifs, semantic indeterminism and ambiguity. Thus tracing the employment of diverse narrative strategies, an expedition based on the readers' competence and imagination, calling for cognitive exertion to form discourses.

**KEYWORDS:** cognition, fictional world, intertextuality, symbols, medievalism

Umberto Eco's international bestseller *The Name of the Rose*, is an inciting novel, a stimulating palimpsest and a literary collage engineered in Eco's scriptorium. William of Baskerville and Adso of Melk, a Franciscan friar and a Benedictine novice - narrator, function as the alter-ego of Eco, who explains the process of gathering scraps, books and images that remained imprinted in his mind; as Adso says, his "faithful chronicle" of erudition.

Atypical to usual representations, Eco opens his novel, with frequent addressing of the readers, readily making them self-conscious of being the spectators and co-investigators along with William and Adso, providing a detailed map of the entire abbey – a layout and its architecture. It is the metafictional strategy employed by Eco to distance the reader and equipping reader in order to broaden the knowledge of the world given, leading to a fuller comprehension of the novel in proper pace. As William says, "Books are not made to be believed, but to be subjected to inquiry. When we consider a book, we mustn't ask ourselves what it says but what..."(Eco 204).

Eco's pragmatic approach to symbolism offers a refreshing account when compared to the early tiring concepts of interpreting symbols. According to Eco, "a true symbol offers a range of indeterminate meanings" (57), his pragmatic approach facilitates an identification of 'the library' as a symbol of wisdom and aggressive power in *The Name of the Rose*. As William notes, when lost in the library, the knowledge of which the library is made up "is used to conceal rather than enlighten" (Eco 187).

From a cognitive perspective, a journey to the labyrinth of the library fits into the schema of solving the mystery around which the whole plot revolves. The library stands as a symbol which embodies wisdom, truth, adventurousness, evil, unpredictability and aggressiveness. A fourteenth century abbey with a library structured like a labyrinth, where the power resides at its centre, has a forbidden book on Aristotle's comedy, safeguarded by a dogmatic old blind monk, Jorge of Burgos, who believes in "censoring texts that undermines authority." As Adso surmises the plot of the novel on 'Day 5' of the story, "It is a story of theft and vengeance among monks of scant virtue ... Because of a forbidden book" (Eco 420). William neither could save the book from fire nor could succeed in mediating Franciscans and papal delegates which was the actual mission he was sent for. To the endmost section of the *The Name of the Rose*, William confesses before Bernardo Gui, that the mystery was solved accidentally, despite the itinerary of knowledge he possesses. William laments, "Where is all my wisdom, then? I behaved, stubbornly, pursuing a semblance of order, when I should have known well that there is no order in the universe" (Eco541). Hence William is considered as a doomed anti-detective.

The library, in all ways symbolic, and with a multiplicity of signs traceable to the number and shape of its every wall, reproduces the narrative of the mystery itself. The non-existent text of Aristotle creates the novel's ultimate sign. Since the book has no existence, it can carry any symbolic baggage the reader wishes to map onto it, and so possesses no ultimate significance outside the reader at all. Thus acting as the cognitive instrument in interpretation and analogical thinking, as Eco states, "There are cases in which from one or more metaphors the interpreter is led to an allegorical reading, or to a symbolic interpretation, where the boundaries between metaphor, allegory, and symbol can be very imprecise" (Eco 124).

The verbal signs used - books, labyrinth and abbey, are naturally evocative in disposition, and thereby the writer prompts the reader to remain in the required ambience, for an explicit understanding of the ethos proposed. For example, the allegorical meaning a reader associates with the narration of the abbey will be of a dense closed world burrowed with pride, knowledge and secrets which precisely stands as the authorial intention. Eco has successfully woven an intricate web of relationships among the signs and metaphors used, persuading the reader to not to detach from the fictional world pronto.

Among other heuristic tools implied, parody and irony are used to keep a favourable distance from characters and story, thereby indirectly reflecting the reality to readers. Adso confronts the unnamed peasant girl in the kitchen while hiding, "I sensed that she did not understand my Latin and instinctively I addressed her in my German vernacular, and this frightened her greatly. Then I smiled, considering that the language of gestures and of the face is more universal than that of words, and she was reassured" (Eco261), illustrates Eco's wit and pun.

Eco envisaged his first fictional possible world in 1970. The social, political, literary and philosophical realities of the time contributed to the luxury of information presented in *The Name of the Rose*. Eco in his article "Small Worlds" and in the *Postscript to the Name of the Rose* emphasises the primordial rule in creating possible worlds as "cultural construct. "Writing a novel is a cosmological matter like the story told by Genesis ... What I mean is that to tell a story you must first of all construct a world furnished as much as possible, down to the slightest details" (Eco 5).

The novel opens with an informative historical account about the feuds among Kings, Popes and religious orders, happening in the fourteenth century Italy, a difficult world to be envisioned with no proper knowledge. According to David Herman, “we cannot have a notion of a felt experience without narrative and narrative affords a basis or context for having an experience in the first place” (165). The dimensions of unnaturalness employed in the novel can be measured by the degree to which they deviate from real world’s frames, a possible measure to construct them in a fictional world.

While the reader adapts to the world constructed, the cognitive status of the reader is under stipulation. Some prerequisites entrusted with Eco’s “model reader” are their ability to experience emotions, sense of chronological ordering, to infer casual relations between “reality and fiction, history and story, scholarship and pop culture.” Eco was a believer of the thought that a fictional text has “an ontology of its own which must be respected” (Eco 72), exactly why none of his other novels saw a film adaptation other than *The Name of the Rose*.

According to Eco, “the semantic domain of narrative is not a possible world” but as a universe made up of constellation of possible worlds: “A literary text is not a single possible world, but a machine for producing possible worlds” (Ryan 98) and for a world to be possible in fiction, it must have a link to the actual world by a relation of accessibility, actuating the readers capability to make discursive formations. One of the most interesting factors about Eco’s fictional narratives is that, they do not mimetically reproduce the world as the readers’ generally know it. *The Name of the Rose* confronts readers with bizarre storyworlds which have very little to do with the real world around them. Eventhough many phases of the story teem with unnatural scenarios to the contemporary reader. It is usually difficult to imagine a fourteenth century abbey with poisoned monks. Eco provides cues for the readersto construe their cognitive capabilities resulting in the fecund of interpretations and analogies. Adso remarks, “it is very difficultfor a Northerner to form any clear idea of the religious and political vicissitudes of Italy” or “Italy is a land of conspiracies: they poison popes here” (Eco 434), apparently a strange situation to decode, beyond vicinity of a modern reader.

Being a post-modernist, Eco adheres to the notion, “a text is not an isolated object but an intersection of voices from our cultural history,” where Julia Kristeva’s intertextuality and Mikhael Bakhtin’s polyphony converge.1970s witnessed an outrush of narrative innovations including Jorge Luis Borges’ metaphysical narratives to self-reflexive novels of Italo Calvino, all of those making presence in *The Name of the Rose*. Whilst focussing on some of Eco’s favourably preferred topics like the power-knowledge equation, grail quests, interpretation of signs, analogies along with intertextuality, Eco also draws from writings of Borges and Pirandello, emulates extracts from Thomas Aquinas, and fetch from Dante’s *Inferno* to explain “the medieval allegory and modern symbolism.” Eco’s narrative has a style which dictates the way he piles certain blocks together to build up a storyworld. In his view, for writing a novel, you must first create a world and then the words will practically come out.

Eco successfully builds a simulating possible world displaying an incessant myriad of erudite pun, parodies, unlimited semiosis, apocryphal manuscripts, comic relief and philosophical debates whilst conquering the readers’ mind, with a plot full

of suspense and foreshadowing. The ingenious art of educating present in Eco, entertains even a “non-model” reader, no matter he/she fails to make inferential walks through a plethora of topics offered. Thus *The Name of the Rose* remains a cult novel, legitimate to the genre.

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