

A Semiotic Analysis of *The Name of the Rose*  
By Kees Garrigan

Submitted to the Board of Literature  
School of Humanities  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts

Purchase College  
State University of New York

May 2023

Sponsor: Gaura Narayan

Second Reader: Mariel Rodney

**Table of Contents:**

**Introduction 3**

**Prologue: What is a sign? 5**

**Part One: Using Semiotics to Solve Mysteries 11**

**Part Two: Semiotics, Philosophy, and Religion 22**

**Part Three: Semiotics and Language 28**

**Part Four: Intertextuality and Hyperreality 32**

**Conclusion 42**

## Introduction

Umberto Eco is an eminent figure in both literature and semiotics. The dense and complicated plots, themes, and allusions of his novels are only a match for his opaque and rigorous theoretical work. In this project, Umberto Eco's first novel, *The Name of the Rose*, will be analyzed using the semiotic theories featured in his 1975 book *A Theory of Semiotics*. In reading both his fiction and his theory, the latter being quite dense and difficult to parse, it can be seen that instead of his theory illuminating the understanding of his novel, instead the novel illuminates the complex messaging of his theories, in much the same way that a moral lesson needs a story to be easily understood.

Eco draws from several sources of inspiration. He bases his theory of semiotics primarily on Charles Sanders Peirce, with many references to Ferdinand de Saussure and Roland Barthes, as well as the linguists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson. Thus, in analyzing *The Name of the Rose*, these theorists, as well as the movements of post-structuralism, deconstruction, linguistics, and postmodernism must be taken into account. Aristotle's *Poetics* features in Eco's works of theory and serves as an integral element of *The Name of the Rose*, both as a thematic focus of debate and a plot element.

*The Name of the Rose* is a mystery novel set in a Benedictine monastery in the year 1327. The main protagonist, William of Baskerville, is a British Franciscan Friar who attempts to solve a series of murders in the monastery through the analysis of signs, linguistics, and logic. Therefore, the merits of rationalism and scientific inquiry are put in opposition to the dogmatism of the Catholic church. This is especially emphasized by the backdrop of the novel, in which the very foundations of Christian doctrine are debated and tested through the schism between the new Pope John XXII and the Franciscan sect. Therefore, the novel is rife with layered and

complex ideas, yet the crux of the plot is based on the use semiotics to solve mysteries and to construct perceptions of reality. Additionally, the impact of literature and scripture on the perception of reality through a hyper-realist framework is integral to understanding how the monks view the world. I will also focus on how semiotics is required for a foundational understanding of language and communication.

## **Prologue: What is a sign?**

In his seminal work, Ferdinand de Saussure explains that all language is composed of signs that can be broken down into 1) the signified, as in the object or concept, and 2) the signifier, as in the way, through sound or symbol, that the signified is communicated. These signs are arbitrary, meaning that they are not natural or definite, but socially constructed. Saussure also believes that ideas cannot be independent from language. Although signs are arbitrary, Saussure believes they are not wholly arbitrary, and thus “there is the rudiment of a natural bond between the signifier and signified” (42). This has been debated by the semioticians he influenced. Even still, interjections and onomatopoeia, words that can be seen as instinctive and thus natural, vary based on language, showing that even “natural” signifiers of signs are different between languages. Signs are arbitrary, as even at the most distilled or basic forms of language and communication, signs are ambiguous and therefore require interpretation.

Roland Barthes takes Saussure’s concept of the sign as being composed of signifier and signified and adds a third element, signification. Signification is the deeper imbedded meaning of a collection of signifiers. Thus, signification allows for the construction of myths through the use of signs. This is not limited to language but includes other forms of communication and media. Signification, the metalanguage of signs, holds great political power as it is often only understood unconsciously by the reader. The signification can be seen as a natural truth instead of a constructed myth. In fact, most of Barthes’ essays aim at unveiling the ways in which the media encodes messages with propagandistic signification in favor of a bourgeois framework for understanding the world.

An example used by Barthes, elucidating the political nature of the concept, is a photograph of a Black soldier saluting the French flag (56). The signification here is of wilful subjection to

French colonialism, a pernicious deeper meaning that may not be immediately understood consciously, but still has an unconscious effect on the interpreter through signification. Barthes' signification shows that in reality there is an implied meaning to signs that the reader may not be able to consciously interpret, yet this meaning still exists and influences them.

Barthes explains how to read and deconstruct myth, but rarely clarifies whether the encoding of the myth or sign is intentional (propagandized), accidental, or implicit to any given worldview. He also does not necessarily show how signs are both encoded and decoded by the recipient of the sign. Rather, his philosophy is one of a direct axis of encoding by the creator of the sign to decoding by the interpreter of the sign. By limiting his study of myth to bourgeois culture, Barthes fails to see that myth is a function of language and a necessity of constructing reality, not simply a political or explicitly bourgeois project. This limits the potential for signification to be understood as a driving force of communication and understanding of reality.

This is precisely what George Lakoff and Mark Johnson argue in *Metaphors We Live By*. They assert that "human thought processes are largely metaphorical" (6). Not only is our language entirely imbedded in metaphor (for example statements like "your argument holds no ground," "time has passed me by" employ metaphor to construct meaning), but our entire methods of perception and understanding of the world are based on metaphor. These metaphors structure our reality and influence how we think and what we will do (156). Therefore, humans cannot understand object truth as all truth is *experiential* in its perception and reconstruction (179).

Julia Kristeva's work on semiotics shows how the stoics replaced the concept of the "idea" with that of the "sign," which can be seen as a shift from philosophical inquiry to scientific empiricism (60). However, Kristeva also says that semiotics should not be entirely considered as

mathematic or logical, but rather that it is dependent on “social, political, and psychological domains” (Lane 60). Kristeva furthers the theories of Saussure, by writing that “the Saussurian project may be resumed as follows: there is no linguistics other than as a part of semiotics which in turn is only a part of general theory of psychological and sociological functioning” (66).

Kristeva believes that semiotics is the foundation for scientific abstraction, but that semiotics must be used on itself to question these foundations. This notion that semiotics acts on itself is integral to understanding Umberto Eco, who quotes from Charles Sanders Peirce, “‘Therefore a sign is ‘anything which determines something else (its *interpretant*) to refer to an object to which itself refers (its *object*) in the same way, the interpretant becoming in turn a sign, and so on *ad infinitum*.’ Thus, the very definition of ‘sign’ implies a process of *unlimited semiosis*” (69).

Umberto Eco has a very simple definition of signs, “A sign [is] *everything* that, on the grounds of a previously established social convention, can be taken as *something standing for something else*” (16). This simple definition will become convoluted with Eco’s further extrapolations.

Eco bases his theory of signs on the work of Charles Sanders Peirce. Specifically, Peirce posits that all signs consists of a sign, its object, and its interpretant (Eco 15). This is called tri-relative influence. The interpretant is not the person who interprets the sign, but all of the various ways in which the sign can be interpreted. Eco breaks these down into denotative and connotative markers:

- (i) A denotative marker is one of the positions within a semantic system to which the code makes a sign-vehicle correspond without any previous mediation; (ii) a connotative marker is one of the positions within a semantic system to which the code makes a sign-

vehicle correspond through the mediation of a preceding denotative marker, thus establishing a correlation between a sign-function and a new semantic unit (85).

Eco gives an example of how the sign for /dog/ (Eco employs the term sign-vehicle, not sign, and uses the iconography “/x/” to differentiate the signifier from the signified, because he needs to complicate his theories further), denotes an animal with certain physical characteristics, but also connotes certain characteristics or associations, such as “fidelity” (or as Eco writes it, “<<fidelity>>,” where the “<<x>>” indicates the combined content unit of signifier and signified). If the parenthetical is confusing, that is because Eco is confusing.

Both denotative and connotative markers are culturally defined, although connotative markers are the interpretants that relate to value-statements, where denotative markers are more classifications of properties of the object that is being signified. However, even the scientific classification of features is still cultural and subjective. This is why Eco considers all signs to be cultural content or cultural units (60). Even objects such as color, which seem rigidly and even mathematically defined, are arbitrarily classified from culture to culture (61). Therefore, if nothing can be truly known beyond their interpretants as signifiers, and these signifiers are arbitrary cultural constructs, then it will be difficult to gain any semblance of objective truth through signs. Of course, in a novel that is so tethered to religion, the Benedictine monks do not see signs in this arbitrary manner. Instead, signs always either signify God’s will and truth, or the corruptive influence of the devil. This is why the creation of iconic signs is taken very seriously by the monks, as it can represent a deviation from God’s creation of the world and its functions.

The notion of signs as revealing an ultimate truth is problematized by the fact that, according to Eco, signs can lie.



Every time there is a lie there is signification. Every time there is signification there is the possibility of using it in order to lie. If this is true (and it is methodologically necessary to maintain that it is true) then semiotics has found a new threshold: between *conditions of signification* and *conditions of truth*, in other words the threshold between an *intensional* and *extensional* semantics (59).

This also means that signs are necessary yet imperfect to use when solving crimes, which will be a main obstacle in *The Name of the Rose*. Eco's notion that there is a distinction between conditions of signification and conditions of truth doesn't necessarily posit that there is in fact a definitive truth, as he later goes on to say that material reality cannot be understood divorced from the use of sign-vehicles (61).

This also connects to his idea that semiotic functioning can be understood beyond its actual use or referent object (58). Eco calls this a *referential fallacy*, and by this he means that signs operate via codes, and these codes can operate regardless of the purpose of the sign, even if signs can only have culturally imbued meaning.

This links to a key point in Edward Said's *Orientalism*, the idea that even fictional constructions can have internally valid structures, "for fictions have their own logic" (Said 62). Therefore, scholars in their quest for knowledge, whether in the 19<sup>th</sup> century departments of Orientalism or the 14<sup>th</sup> century scriptoria of Benedictine monasteries, build off their own internal logic of interpretation. An easy way to understand this is by knowing that a syllogism can be logically valid while still being empirically incorrect.

Signs create meaning by conveying only culturally accepted truths. Therefore, it may be difficult to solve a mystery if the understanding of a sign is predicated not on an inherent truth as manifested by signs, but on signs that are created via cultural preconceptions of the person or

people interpreting the sign. Thus, it could be seen that instead of evidence impacting our understanding, understanding predicates our evidence. As is said in *Metaphors We Live By*, “Truth...is relative to the normal way we understand the world by projecting orientation and entity structure onto it” (Lakoff and Johnson 162).

Therefore, ideology is a driving factor of sign interpretation. It is not simply, according to Barthes, that signification is a political or propagandistic creation, but rather signification is an intrinsic act of sign-reception that serves as the foundation of understanding, and thus influences further attempts at understanding truth through signs.

Eco quotes Jaspers, who writes,

Ideology as unconscious code-switching is the complex of thoughts and representations appearing as an Absolute Truth to the thinking subject for the interpretation of the world...producing a self-deception, a concealment, an escape (from reality (312)

If signs are used to understand reality, and these signs are influenced by our subjectivity, then the world starts to function as an extension of our ideology instead of our ideology being informed by our perception. This will be shown later in regard to the hyper-real perception that the monks have in the novel. Eco says therefore that signs are “social forces” (65).

With a detailed understanding of Eco’s approach to semiotics, we can now dive into the novel itself, and see how his theories translate to narrative.

## Part One: Using Semiotics to Solve Mysteries

William of Baskerville's semiotics-based detective skills are first established when he and his novice (and the narrator of the story) Adso of Melk, first enter the monastery. William tells Remigio, the cellarer who greets them, that he knows that 1) Remigio is looking for a horse, 2) the direction in which the horse has gone, and 3) that the horse's name is Brunellus. William then points to where Brunellus has gone. Adso is amazed by this and asks William how he could have known what happened without being there to experience it. William explains to Adso how he was able to use signs to come to an accurate conclusion.

William tells Adso to, "recognize the evidence through which the world speaks to us like a great book" (Eco 26). This not only shows that the world is understood through signs that act as messages through coding, but also that the world can be interpreted as literature and analyzed as a text.

This theme is further established when William recites the poem,

omnis mundi creatura  
quasi liber et pictura  
nobis est in speculum (26)

This translates to "every creature in the world/is to us like a book and a picture/ and a mirror" (Tomipak 2019).

First, William says he noticed the hoofprints. He was able to tell that they were from a horse, and that they walked in a normal pattern, so they were not "crazed" (Eco 26). Then, he says that he knows that the horse was not "the finest of the stables, [otherwise the] stableboys would have been chasing him" (27). Instead it must have been a monk who was chasing after the horse, and because a monk "consider[ing] a horse excellent, whatever his natural forms, can only

see him as the auctoritates have described him, especially if...the describer is a learned Benedictine” (27).

Further, William knows the name is Brunellus, because the famous philosopher Buridan, when wanting to use a horse for a logical example, always calls the horse Brunellus (Eco 27). It is important to note that William reveals here that all monks see the world through religious scripture and writing about Christianity, thus their perception of the world and actions are first and foremost influenced through codes and principles established by texts or literature. Thus, William is able to read their actions as if they are characters in a book. William is able to use signs to induce, deduce, and abduce from them a natural cause of events.

William is analyzing signs as clues to understand what he cannot see. In analyzing signs, there are three methods: 1) induction, 2) deduction, and 3) abduction.

First, there is deduction, which means “a rule, from which, given a case, I deduce a result” (Eco 132). William deduces that *hoofprints are going in this specific direction, animals leave hoofprints, an animal has gone this direction*. With deduction, two known premises are combined to assert another known premise. Then, there is induction, “given a case and a result, I infer a rule” (132). In this case, William knows that *horses have a certain hoof shape, therefore the animal that left this print is a horse*. The important aspect of inductive reasoning is that it is not guaranteed to be accurate. The prints could have been left by a mule or they could have been placed there by a hoof-replicating device, but what is most probable here is that a horse left these prints.

Now, abductive reasoning comes into play when probable premises are used to come to a probable conclusion. *Monks see the world through literature and scholarly texts, Brunellus is the quintessential scholarly name for a horse, a monk would name a horse Brunellus*. Eco considers

abduction, “a case of contextual interpretation when contextual selections are lacking...supposing that there existed an unexpressed but commonly shared semantic rule” (132). Abduction is a creation of multiple probable fictions to come to a probable, yet still fictitious, conclusion. Eco writes, “at first glance, abduction seems to be a free movement of the imagination, more endowed with emotion (more similar to a vague ‘intuition;’) than a normal decoding act” (132).

Abduction is the use of signs, and pre-established cultural assumptions, to create a fiction, or a hypothesis, of a given case. William is creating a fiction based on pre-established assumptions about the biases and predilections of monks. What is important about abduction is that neither the premises nor the conclusions are definitive. The culturally based assumptions that are required for abduction are influenced by signs, which must be interpreted through deduction and especially abduction. Therefore, it can be seen that the entire chain of William’s understanding is based on assumed, but not definite, premises, and that subsequently these conclusions serve as the basis for further premises. This is an extrapolation of what Eco refers to as unlimited semiosis (69). This can also serve as a serious issue, given that the premises and conclusion may very well be wrong.

Eco considers abduction to be foundational for understanding.

Peirce repeatedly asserts that even inferences are semiotic phenomena, that a rule can be the sign for its deduced result just as much as a specific case can be the sign for its deduced rule; however it would be difficult to recognize as a sign the rule in the light of which the hypothesis interprets the case, *unless the abduction once performed becomes a customary social reflex* (132).

What abduction (and induction) shows is that most understanding is based not only on construction of fiction, and therefore on past assumptions that are founded on fiction, but that the effort or purpose of abductive reasoning is to come to conclusions not simply about what is, but about what will be. Abductive reasoning can be seen as an attempt at a predictive understanding of reality based on cause and effect. However, typically, through semiotic analysis of signs, it is using effect to determine the causes. This is the basis of William's detective work, and detective work on the whole.

Interestingly, Aristotle's *Poetics* reveals that the way in which people create false inferences can be integral to conveying unrealistic elements of plot that are necessary to stories.

Homer, in particular, taught other poets the right way to tell falsehoods. This is the false inference. In cases where the existence or occurrence of *A* implies the existence or occurrence of *B*, people imagine that if *B* is the case then *A* also exists or occurs – which is fallacious. So, if *A* is false, but its existence would entail the existence or occurrence of *B*, one should add *B*; then, on the basis of its knowledge that *B* is true, our mind falsely infers the reality of *A* as well (41).

This means that because abduction is foundational to our understanding of truth, we will believe a falsehood specifically because that falsehood can be logically induced or abducted from a set of given premises or evidences. Therefore, not only is abduction a fiction used to understand reality, but this need to understand reality through fiction can be manipulated to tell fictional stories that will further influence our understanding of truth. It seems it matters less what *is* real, but rather what *feels* real. Abduction is not limited to deciphering clues but is used for understanding all of the world through signs.

The aspiration of truth as a predictive force can be seen by the example of the game of chess. “[A position in chess] conveys – as the whole of its content – a series of optional moves, a set of possible responses, a chain of foreseeable (or unforeseeable) solutions and therefore a series of new inter-relational positions of the entire set of pieces” (Eco 89-90). Eco goes further to say that the position of the piece denotes itself but connotes any future moves (90). What can be mathematically known about a chess move, while beyond human comprehension, can still be mapped in a matrix of possible outcomes. These outcomes are limited by predictions based on human subjectivity, namely that the desire to win influences the method of understanding and therefore the prediction of the optimal move, but this shows that perhaps a predictive understanding of truth and reality is possible, yet beyond current human capacity.

In the novel, William believes, “Natural science should be the great new enterprise of the learned: to coordinate, through a different knowledge of natural processes, the elementary needs that represented also the heap of expectations, disordered but in its way true and right, of the simple” (Eco 221). However, it is integral to know that even science is founded on induction via signs, and as established before, induction is an approximation of truth, even though the conclusion is always predictive. Predictive truths, especially scientific ones, can come as close to being definitive, but they can still ultimately be wrong or disproven. Mathematics can be the closest to achieving accurate, predictive truth, which is exactly what William does later in the novel to solve the library’s labyrinth: “We will use the mathematical sciences. Only in the mathematical sciences, as Averroës says, are things known to us identified with those known absolutely” (Eco 231).

Eco understands signs as being coded, but what is important, relating to abduction, is that many times Eco considers coding to be not only the innate signals and communicative properties

of signs, which are imbedded in a sign, but also that coding is an active imbedding of content into the functions of a code by the interpreter of the sign. “One can then maintain that it is not true that a code organizes signs; it is more correct to say that codes provide the rules which *generate* signs as concrete occurrences in communicative intercourse” (Eco 49). Eco says that signs are the effects of the receiver, not what they truly are, as what they truly are is so microcosmic that the true nature of objects cannot be perceived (195). Many times, interpretation of a sign is an act of imbuing a signal with meaning, not of deriving meaning from a signal.

Thus, the dichotomy of encoding and decoding may be semantically insufficient, as the act of decoding is in itself an act of encoding meaning. This relates to *Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse*, where Stuart Hall considers communication a “complex structure of dominance” (51). However, Hall criticizes the linearity of this process, claiming that the meaning of a message can only be decoded if it is understood by the receiver, and thus there is an interconnected discourse between the encoder and decoder; it is not one-way. He quotes Philip Elliot, who posits that “the audience is both the 'source' and the 'receiver' of the television message” (53). The only way an encoded message can be understood is if the receiver at least accepts the premises of the message, even if they know the premises to be false, therefore a message is imbued with meaning not because it is encoded, but because it is decoded.

Eco understands all detective work to be abduction. “As a matter of fact, clues are seldom coded, and their interpretation is frequently a matter of complex inference rather than of sign-function recognition” (224). This means that the interpreter of the sign has to not only understand the causes of the sign, but the codes that constitute the sign. The abduction of clues as being left by a participant in the crime (not necessarily the perpetrator, but perhaps the victim or a bystander), is called ostension. “Ostension occurs when a given objection or event produced by



nature or human action...is 'picked up' by someone and *shown* as the expression of the class of which it is a member. Ostension represents the most elementary act of *active* signification" (Eco 225). This concept of active signification contrasts to the aforementioned signification of Roland Barthes, where signification is created by the encoder of the message, not the decoder.

It is evident that through ostension, the detective takes a clue and abduces a fictional cause based on the content of the clue. However, this would mean that in order to do so, the detective needs to make a series of assumptions. These assumptions are tied to preconceptions about the function of these signs, and these preconceptions can be based on bias or prejudice. "Suppose that I find a pipe in the same place. What makes me sure that a man was there? A social rule establishing that gentlemen smoke pipes and ladies don't (the opposite would happen if I found a bottle of Chanel no. 5)" (Eco 224). This becomes especially significant considering the context of the novel. The Inquisition is in full effect, meaning that most detectives and inquisitors, including one antagonist of the novel, Bernard Gui, often use both their ideology and their preconception of heretics to influence their decision-making skills. Bernard Gui works backwards from an already formed conclusion. For example, he believes that Remigio is a heretic, and therefore he has committed the murders in the monastery. This is an obvious example of confirmation bias, yet even William's rational attempts at ostension, where premises or evidence is used to construct a conclusion, still require an aspect of confirmation bias. However, it is that the elements that constitute the effects are imbued with bias, instead of the elements that constitute the cause. This is how William expresses this:

Let us suppose a man has been killed by poisoning. This is a given fact. It is possible for me to imagine, in the face of certain undeniable signs, that the poisoner is a second man. On such simple chains of causes my mind can act with

a certain confidence in its power. But how can I complicate the chain, imagining that, to cause the evil deed, there was yet another intervention, not human this time, but diabolical? I do not say it is impossible: the Devil, like your horse Brunellus, also indicates his passage through clear signs. But why must I hunt for these proofs? Is it not already enough for me to know that the guilty party is that man and for me to turn him over to the secular arm? In any case his punishment will be death, God forgive him (Eco 33-34).

Thus, William is emphasizing a need to use material reality to investigate material occurrences, regardless of the fact that he believes that they are ultimately (or initially) caused God or the Devil. He does believe in God, but this does not bring himself closer to a rational, semiotics-based conclusion.

This focus on a preconceived notion of why somebody acts the way they do is what Barthes calls the “tyranny of likelihood,” where the need to understand the psychological origins of a crime means that the assumed motives reflect not the criminal but the prosecutors:

It constructs a circular truth which carefully leaves out the reality of the accused or of the problem...to be guilty...was to coincide with the ‘psychology’ which the chief prosecutor carried within himself... the likelihood never being anything but the accused’s disposition to resemble his judges (173).

In another essay regarding another trial, Barthes writes that “To be able to name [the murderer’s] action, we had to find an origin for it; hence the entire trial was committed to the search for a cause” (113). Within the context of the novel, Remigio confesses to murders he did not commit, because the inquisitor Bernard Gui uses his past as a Heretic, being a violent and controversial Dolcinian, as justification for the crimes. Where William uses effects to reveal the presumed

causes, Bernard Gui is using the presumed causes as a justification for the effects. It is important to note that the true mastermind who influences all of the deaths in the novel is Jorge, who does so specifically to combat the very heresy that Bernard Gui so adamantly opposes through his inquisition.

In the novel, Eco uses the imprints of a horse to establish semiotics as the basis of detective work, which is fitting as he writes extensively on imprints in *A Theory of Semiotics*. However, Eco makes it clear that imprints are *not* signs. He references Friday's footprint in *Robinson Crusoe*:

In fact very seldom can imprints and clues be interpreted as the traces of an individual agent (indeed maybe never) ... [with Friday's footprint] the primary denotation of the expression would have been <<human being>> and the rest would have been a matter of inference. It is very difficult to imagine an imprint that mentions a referent without the mediation of a content (224).

While it can be agreed that the connection of imprint to creator does require abduction, that does not mean that these imprints do not function as signs. Eco claims they do not because the imprint does not stand for something, "it is not a sign but an act of mention" (303). However, this entirely contradicts everything Eco has written about signs, as signs are meant to be everything that stands for something else. The distinction Eco is attempting to make is between a sign that is made up of codes, and an imprint in which the codes are abducted by the receiver. Therefore, simply because an imprint requires abduction, and the imprint can only refer to vague notions such as "man" or "horse," instead of to "Friday" or "Brunellus," the footprint is still representing the presence (at least in the past) of an entity that can be further induced through interpretation of the prints left behind, especially if iconic signs are meant to use constitutive parts to represent an

entire signified entity (Eco 241). Thus, a hoof or foot denotes a horse or human, in the same way that rays of light signify “sun” or rotor blades signify “helicopter” in the creation of iconic signs. These, in fact, are two examples that Eco uses in *A Theory of Semiotics* to refer to iconic signs, which must possess “optic...or conventionalized properties of the object” it is referring to (207). Even though the mentions of imprints are vague notions instead of direct referents, they still function in representing *something*, which is by Eco’s definition a sign.

The first true mystery that William must solve is the murder of Adelmo, an illuminator at the monastery. William uses the context from the conversation with the abbot of the monastery about Adelmo’s death to abduce that the death was not a suicide but a murder. The abbot is astounded and asks William to reveal who told him this. William says that the abbot did, explaining how, “Suicide would have been the only conceivable explanation. In which case you would not have allowed him to be buried in consecrated ground. But since you gave him Christian burial, the windows must have been closed” (Eco 36). William abduced this without knowing whether or not the window of the aedificium was opened, which is the location where Adelmo’s corpse was found, and where he could have jumped from.

Thus, William abduces the cause of death from presumed premises. However, as mentioned previously, signs can lie. It is revealed later in the novel that Adelmo actually did commit suicide. However, William is able to abduce this through yet more semiotic detective work. This may point to the theory of predictive truth, where given a matrix of enough data of functions and imbedded codes, signs really can predict outcomes, if not causes. Therefore, everything can be known, as in predicted, if all possible variables can be deduced and known, but the sense-data required as inputs for this formula is too fast and sporadic and chaotic, with too many possibilities, for this to be humanly possible. William’s initial incorrect conclusion

about Adelmo's fate either points to the insufficiency of the entire methodology of using signs as a vehicle for coming to truthful conclusions, or it points to the insufficiency of the human capacity to interpret the data required to adequately deduce a correct conclusion, as the ostension required to do so is far too relative to a person's prejudices and insufficiencies of perception.

## **Part Two: Semiotics, Philosophy, and Religion**

As mentioned previously, the monks in the novel consider signs to be a reflection of God's truth. This is why the creation of art is taken very seriously by the Benedictines. One such example is that their monastery's church features a beautifully constructed door with figures on it representing the holiness of God and the corruption of sin and the Devil. Jorge reveals this notion that signs reflect the truth of God in the debate held toward the end of the novel,

There is no progress, no revolution of ages, in the history of knowledge, but at most a continuous and sublime recapitulation...I am the way, the truth, and the life, said our Lord. There you have it: knowledge is nothing but the awed comment on these two truths (Eco 426).

This notion that the quest for knowledge is simply a reaffirming of truths that are already known is in direct opposition to the notion that signs are imbedded with meaning by the recipient of the sign, and that meaning therefore evolves given the interplay between humans and signs. This understanding of knowledge also shows a fear of scientific inquiry and philosophical discovery, as many of the leaders in the monastery see knowledge as a confirmation of a known truth, rather than knowledge and inquiry leading to an expanding alteration of truth. The library in the aedificium is so safely guarded because any deviations or discoveries that contradict these assumptions is seen as an affront to the objective truth of God.

Illuminators, such as Adelmo, work tirelessly to create images that are a reflection of God. However, Adelmo's work is criticized by the monks for this very reason. Adelmo represents many refutations of what the monks would consider a clear devotion to God. He was known to be far too inquisitive (especially of works that may have been heretical) and eager to create works that expanded and challenged his conceptions of knowledge. Additionally, central

to his struggles and reason for committing suicide was his homosexuality. In fact, he commits suicide specifically because he used his sexual relationship with a fellow monk, Berengar, in order to gain access to restricted knowledge in the library. The shame of this led him to commit suicide, which is considered another sin.

This rebellion against God is shown in the work that Adelmo leaves behind.

This was a psalter in whose margins was delineated a world reversed with respect to the one to which our senses have accustomed us. As if at the border of a discourse that is by definition the discourse of truth, there proceeded, closely linked to it, through wondrous allusions in aenigmaté, a discourse of falsehood on a topsy-turvy universe, in which dogs flee before the hare, and deer hunt the lion (Eco 83).

This can be seen as exceptionally heretical considering that it is a psalter, which contains the book of psalms. Thus, Adelmo was creating heretical images in a book of scripture. His imagery was directly contradicting, if not laughing at, the will and truth of God, as he was disrespecting the physical principles that the monks believe God is the creator of. This creation of art in itself can be seen as playing God. Adso writes that he was, “torn between silent admiration and laughter” (Eco 84) when regarding the images.

Laughter is integral to the novel, as William consistently defends laughter as a necessity, while Jorge, the ultimate puppeteer of the deaths in the novel, considers laughter to be corrupting, “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” (Eco 508). This reveals the desire for control through dogma. The purpose of the inquisition that serves as a backdrop to the novel is to control the ways in which those devout to God can express their devotion. For

example, there is a friction between the Benedictines who believe that work and the accumulation of capital is necessary to show devotion to God, and the Franciscans who believe eschewing wealth and living a life of poverty is God's way.

Laughter which nullifies fear that is used to control and the creation of signs that represent a distortion of God's supposed will and truth are methods of humans creating their own truth and their own perception of reality. If signs are culturally constructed and serve as the basis for understanding truth and reality, this means that humans can learn not only through sense-data that is natural to the world, but through signs and texts that are constructed as artistic representations of the world. If these signs are encoded with meaning, this means that structures of perception can be created that do not follow God's will. This is why Jorge is so adamant in his belief that knowledge needs to be guarded. Of course, this is ironic considering that even Jorge and the other Benedictine leaders are simply using their own subjective interpretations of signs and positing them as objective, universal truths by claiming them to be God's will and truth. Yet, William refutes this in one debate with Jorge,

Our reason was created by God, and whatever pleases our reason can but please divine reason, of which, for that matter, we know only what we infer from the processes of our own reason by analogy and often by negation. Thus, you see, to undermine the false authority of an absurd proposition that offends reason, laughter can sometimes also be a suitable instrument. And laughter serves to confound the wicked and to make their foolishness evident (Eco 143).

This means that William's notion of reality is that natural signs and the process of sign interpretation is never a corruption of God but always proof of God's truth. However, this means that in opposition to Jorge's belief, the duty one has is not to conceal oneself from knowledge



and the rational search for truth, but rather that this pursuit is in fact in service to the truth of God. It would not be the conclusions from this reason and inquiry that would be an affront to God, but rather the use of insufficient methodologies, or the restriction of the quest for truth, that would be an affront to God.

William's inclusion of analogy in this process shows that in order to understand a concept or truth, one must do so in comparison to what it is similar to. This ties into Lakoff and Johnson's notion of the metaphorical foundations for understanding truth. It also connects directly to the fact that the main vehicle for understanding, signs can only function in representing associations, denotations, and connotations, and therefore that a belief in God as being the true originator of signs does not negate the need to continue to use signs to gain understanding. To know God's will, according to William, is a dangerous and faulty basis for being a pious monk. Instead, God imbues humans with the capacities to uncover His truth, but it is their responsibility as Christians to discover this truth. This is why William of Occam and Roger Bacon are foundational to William's inquiries. They are religious scholars whose emphasis is on exploring truths through scientific rationalism and invention.

However, it seems that William's scientific and metaphysical curiosities are limited by the basis of his metaphorical understanding of the world, specifically his religious devotion to God. When he talks to Adso, he says,

The science Bacon spoke of rests unquestionably on these propositions. You understand, Adso, I must believe that my proposition works, because I learned it by experience; but to believe it I must assume there are universal laws. Yet I cannot speak of them, because the very concept that universal laws and an established order exist would imply that God is their prisoner, whereas God is

something absolutely free, so that if He wanted, with a single act of His will He could make the world different (Eco 222).

Here William almost proves that God does not exist, as his argument is evocative of Epicurus' trilemma: *if God is all powerful, he cannot be all good, and if God is all good, he cannot be all powerful, therefore if God is both, why does evil exist?* The ultimate inevitability of the scientific rationalism that William strives for would be a refutation of God's existence. Yet, William's metaphorical preconceptions never allow him to even consider this as a natural conclusion to his reasoning.

Further, William's emphasis on empiricism in understanding truth is directly Aristotelian. This is especially contentious considering that for centuries, Aristotle was influential primarily to Muslim scholars and not Christians. Muslims and any other non-Christians in the novel are consistently called infidels, and any theories, texts, or accomplishments by "infidel" scholars is often dismissed by the monks, if not outright restricted. William, of course, sees the value of "infidel" thought, "He said laughing that a good Christian can sometimes learn also from the infidels" (Eco 16). This shows the repeated contention between William's devotion to God and desire to understand the world through scientific rationalism.

Aristotle and the *Poetics* are integral to the plot of the novel. Central to the murders is the monks' desire to read a much-coveted book. The book William is searching for turns out to be Aristotle's lost work on comedy, a sequel to his *Poetics*. Jorge, the blind monk who has been masterminding the events of the novel, has poisoned the secret book of Aristotle, as he believes that laughter is a corrupting influence, and that knowledge needs to be preserved and safeguarded, as the power of knowledge can corrupt Christian minds. This shows the perceived

danger of non-Christian texts. This of course is ironic, as Jorge is creating danger worse than the one that he seeks to stop.

### Part Three: Semiotics and Language

One character in the novel, a monk named Salvatore, reveals the semiotic foundations of all language systems. Salvatore is a monk who constantly changes language mid-sentence, going from English, to Latin, to various Romance languages. For example:

Penitenziagite! What out for the draco who cometh in futurum to gnaw your anima! Death is super nos! Pray thee Santo Pater come to liberar nos a malo and all our sin! Ha ha, you like this negromanzia de Domini Nostri Jesu Christi! Et anco jois m'es dols e plazer m'es dolors....Cave el diabolo!" (Eco 51)

Salvatore, is grotesque in appearance, and thus Adso, the narrator, calls him a "creature" (50) and says of his language:

I realized Salvatore spoke all languages, and no language. Or rather, he invented for himself a language which used the sinews of the languages to which had been exposed – and once I thought that his was, I thought that his was, not the Adamic language...but precisely the Babelish language of the first day after the divine chastisement, the language of primeval confusion. Nor, for that matter, could I call Salvatore's speech a language, because in every human language there are rules and every term signifies ad placitum a thing, according to a law that does not change, for man cannot call the dog once dog and once cat, or utter sounds to which a consensus of people has not assigned a definite meaning, as would happen if someone said the word "blitiri" And yet, one way or another, I did understand what Salvatore meant, and so did the others. (51)

It could be said that Salvatore does have language, if language is understood as a structure of codes and not solely a structure of signs. Here, Adso is claiming that the difference between

/dog/ and /cat/, as signifiers (or as Eco would call them sign-vehicles), is tangibly linked to their referents. However, going back to Saussure, the distinction between /dog/ and /cat/ as utterances is arbitrary, as it is only what they signify that creates the meaning of the distinction. Words themselves do not have intrinsic meaning; they only signify their referents. Adso only has a medieval grasp of linguistics, so he cannot understand that languages are not pure, they change over time as a necessity, and that the only real indication that a language functions is whether or not it can be used to communicate, which Adso admits is true Salvatore's "non-language."

In a sense Salvatore's proclivity to tie the language chosen in any given phrase to the experience in which he learned the language shows the cultural and experiential connection to language, refuting the notion that language is tied to God. Salvatore's speech is almost a prototypical example of language families and language derivation. Adso has a misunderstanding of language as being based on an Adamic ideal of language, meaning that there is a pure language that can be corrupted. This is because Adso, like the other monks, sees language, as well as every other concept or object on Earth, as signifying the will and power of God. Therefore, any corruption of this language is a corruption of God. This is why there is a general distain for the "vulgarity" of the common people who live beyond the monastery. As the abbot says,

The stink of the cities is encroaching upon our holy places...down below in the great settlements, where the spirit of sanctity can find no lodging, not only do they speak (of laymen, nothing else could be expected) in the vulgar tongue, but they are already writing in it, though none of these volumes will ever come within our walls—fomenter of heresies as those volumes inevitably become (Eco 40).

Corruption or change is foundational to language because what matters less is the arbitrary signifier, but rather that the signifier is socially accepted as referring to a signified object or

concept. Further, the ambiguity allows for languages to evolve, or what Eco would consider a change in code, “A semiotic theory must not deny that there are concrete acts of interpretation which produce senses that the code could not foresee, otherwise the principle of the flexibility and creativity of language would not hold. But these interpretations sometimes produce new portions of the code” (133). Key to Eco’s understanding of the interpretant of a sign is that it is constantly evolving (71). This means that any signification or meaning that can be derived from a sign (its interpretant) eventually becomes a referent for a further sign, thus signs, and their tri-relative parts, are constantly evolving. This serves as the basis of language evolution, and the reason why language is able to be interpreted, and why there can be multiple meanings from one sign or text. It is correct that humans are free “ad placitum” (Eco 375) to evolve language, and that these languages are linked to core families, but the implication of this understanding is limited by its ties to Christianity. However, this also highlights the difficulty for signs to reveal a concrete or definitive truth, as their meanings are constantly shifting and evolving. The act of interpreting a sign adds another link in the chain of unlimited semiosis.

There is a metatextual aspect to Salvatore’s language as well. The novel itself is an English translation of the original Italian. Further, Umberto Eco exists as a character within the frame narrative of the book. In the opening section, *Naturally, a Manuscript*, Eco writes (fictitiously) that the novel is a translation of Abbé Vallet work, *Le Manuscrit de Dom Adson de Melk, traduit en français d’après l’édition de Dom J. Mabillon* from 1842. This manuscript is, within the fiction of the novel, a translation of a fourteenth century Latin manuscript discovered, and pieced together from an additional publication by a scholar named Mabillon (1). In the postscript of the novel, Eco writes that he is, “saying what Vallet said that Mabillon said that Adso said” (549). Therefore, Salvatore’s use of multiple concurrent languages in his speech is

simply a time dilated representation of the layers of translation necessary to write and read the novel. With Salvatore, the interconnectivity of various languages is shown as a disorganized conversational stream instead of an ostensibly organized, layered textual product. This puts into question the validity of using literature, or texts in general, as a basis for understanding.

According to Eco's postscript, this use of frame narrative shields his work from any errors or fears of any deficiencies in his narrative (549). Within the fiction of the novel, the accuracy of perception and truth is immediately put into question, as the fictional manuscript is a pieced together work of numerous texts that interact with one another from different languages, time periods, and authors. This is emphasized on pages four to five of the novel where the fictional Eco highlights the considerations that he must make in translating the manuscript, including attempting to make the prose engaging to modern readers while still attempting capture the essence of 14<sup>th</sup> century Benedictine speech. Ultimately within the fiction of the novel, what the reader is engaging with is a dialectic of philosophical, linguistic, and temporal variations of a source text.

## **Part Four: Intertextuality and Hyperreality**

*At a certain point the iconic representation, however stylized it may be, appears to be more true than the real experience, and people begin to look at things through the glasses of iconic convention (Eco 205).*

In “The Precession of Simulacra,” Jean Baudrillard discusses how constructs of reality are often perceived more than reality itself, as the simulacra is as realistic as the original. Baudrillard references Jorge Luis Borges’ “On Rigor in Science,” where a map is so accurate that it encompasses the entirety of a country (it is worth noting that the blind antagonist of the novel, Jorge of Borgos, is a reference to Borges). Similar to how language is a structure of words founded on other words, art and media are produced in response to other art and media, and this art and media is how we perceive and understand the world. This is what Baudrillard terms the hyperreal. Life becomes a reflection of art, instead of art being a reflection of life. Baudrillard also uses an example of iconoclasts who destroy sacred representations of God, saying that “God himself was never anything but his own simulacrum” (218). It was not the “distortion of truth” (218) that the iconoclasts feared, but the absence of this truth, and through the destruction of these images is the revelation of their importance.

Umberto Eco discusses the symbiosis between humans and literature:

Man and words reciprocally educate each other; each increase of a man’s information involves and is involved by, a corresponding increase of a word’s information...it is that the word or sign which man uses *is* the man himself. For, as the fact that every thought is a sign, taken in conjunction that life is a train of thought, proves that man is a sign (316).



This idea is present in the very first page of the prologue, where Adso writes, “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (Eco 11). This establishes the inextricable link between reality and literature, as for the Benedictine monks, all signs either reflect the will of God or the corruption of the Devil. It was already established by William on the *First Day* of the novel that the entire world can be read and understood as literature. This also ties into the work of Lakoff and Johnson, where metaphorical structures of understanding precede the experience and interpretation of sense-data, as well as Eco’s notion that ideology establishes the code for understanding and interpreting signs.

Further, Eco writes in his postscript of the novel that “books speak of other books” (Eco 549), a sentiment that is directly echoed by Adso in the novel. This personification of literature relates to the unlimited semiosis that is integral to Eco’s theory. No object can be understood beyond the perception of the person interpreting it as a sign, and this interpretation is an idea, a construct that is culturally tied. These cultural understandings of signs are ambiguous and thus lead to interpretation and interplay between signs that create long chains of constantly evolving meaning. Thus, unlimited semiosis: “Semiotics can define the subject of every act of semiosis only by semiotic categories; thus the subject of signification is nothing more than the continuously unaccomplished system of systems of signification that reflects back on itself” (Eco 315).

Adso discusses the library and the scholarly work of the monks, “the library could not be threatened by any earthly force, it was a living thing” (Eco 199). Adso’s personification of the library as a living entity is not because of something supernatural or divine, but because of the work and connection of the people who inhabit it, create within it, and learn from it. This collective human experience and knowledge is simply metaphorically understood by Adso as

being religious, or divine, or tied to God; it is a Lakoffian method of understanding this intangible metaphysical phenomenon. Of course, this quote is ironic foreshadowing to the fact that the library burns down at the end of the novel. If humans influence words and words influence humans, then literature can destroy humans (as Jorge believes) and humans can destroy literature and in turn destroy themselves.

The semiotic theory that no understanding of objects or the world can be understood beyond signs is exemplified in the following quote by Adso:

Until then I had thought each book spoke of the things, human or divine, that lie outside books. Now I realized that not infrequently books speak of books: it is as if they spoke among themselves. In the light of this reflection, the library seemed all the more disturbing to me. It was then the place of a long, centuries-old murmuring, an imperceptible dialogue between one parchment and another, a living thing, a receptacle of powers not to be ruled by a human mind, a treasure of secrets emanated by many minds, surviving the death of those who had produced them or had been their conveyors (Eco 306).

This is humans and signs educating one another, personified. Further, the notion of an external barrier that separates the physical world from the world of ideas becomes disillusioned for Adso, as he starts to understand reality as a semiotician. He finally understands that no external, material world can be understood by humans beyond their conception as an idea, a sign. Metatextually, Adso *is* simply words on a page, a fictional idea.

However, Adso, recounting the narrative as an old man, still holds on to the distinction between intangible ideas and physical features. He precedes the events of the novel by writing,

In the pages to follow I shall not indulge in descriptions of persons—except when a facial expression, or a gesture, appears as a sign of a mute but eloquent language—because, as Boethius says, nothing is more fleeting than external form, which withers and alters like the flowers of the field at the appearance of autumn; and what would be the point of saying today that the abbot Abo had a stern eye and pale cheeks, when by now he and those around him are dust and their bodies have the mortal grayness of dust (only their souls, God grant, shining with a light that will never be extinguished) (Eco 15).

First of all, this passage has an emphasis on death, which is central to the mystery of the novel. If worldly features or phenomena are insignificant because they are temporary in comparison to the eternity of heaven, then this would negate the need to understand and recreate the world, which goes against the purposes of the scholarly monks, given that the Benedictines focus largely on crafting images to show devotion to God. Secondly, by calling a facial expression or a gesture a “sign of a mute but eloquent language,” Adso is implicitly revealing that physical phenomena can be read as a text as much as words on a page. Finally, this disconnect between spiritual essences and material reality would be both a refutation of the Christian notion that everything in the perceivable universe acts as a sign of God’s will and truth, and of the more secular semiotic notion that nothing can be understood beyond the inextricable link between the physical object and the denotative and connotative interpretants in which they are signified.

A prime example of how reality is seen through fictional text is when Adso is investigating a book in the library.

I was struck by the image of a lion. I was certain it was a lion, even though I had never seen one in the flesh, and the artist had reproduced its features faithfully,

inspired perhaps by the sight of the lions of Hibernia, land of monstrous creatures, and I was convinced that this animal, as for that matter the Physiologus says, concentrates in itself all the characteristics of the things at once most horrible and most regal (Eco 257).

The description of the lion that Adso gives is inaccurate, “The lion I saw had a mouth bristling with teeth, and a finely armored head like a serpent’s (257). However, Adso as a novice Benedictine monk, experiences his life through scripture, through literature, and has an unwavering faith in scholasticism. Thus, even though the lion is inaccurately represented as an iconic sign, Adso never doubts its accuracy. This full faith in an iconic sign not only shows the limitations of iconic signs, but it also brings into question many etymological considerations. If scholars and illuminators are trusted to depict physical objects and animals accurately, yet they cannot do so, then how are they to be trusted to accurately convey metaphysical truths, especially relating to God and the nature of the universe. Further, Adso references Physiologus, drawing connotative markers that are both positive and negative, as he considers the lion to represent the notions “regal” and “horrible.” This shows, as Eco mentions in his *Theory* that the power of a sign is that one referent can have multiple interpretants.

Eco uses an example of how iconic signs represent perception and human understanding of an object more so than it actually faithfully recreates that object:

Villard de Honnecourt...claimed to be copying a real lion, and yet reproduced it according to the most obvious heraldic conventions of the time. His perception of the lion was conditioned by current iconic codes’ or else his codes of iconic transformation prevented him from transcribing his perception in any other way;

and probably he was so used to his own codes that he thought he was transcribing his perceptions in the most suitable possible way (205).

This shows the dialectic of semiotic and cultural influence, specifically how iconic signs influence cultural perception, and how this cultural perception further influences the iconic signs. This unlimited semiosis is a double-edged sword, it can increase understanding of the world, or it can increase the distortion and inaccuracy of this understanding. To further complicate this, both can happen at the same time.

This becomes further complicated when it is considered that iconic signs function not to represent the true physical conditions of a physical object or entity, but rather to depict how they are perceived and understood. Eco shows this through the fact that before the invention of cameras (which also only create visual texts based on sign-vehicles; there is no overcoming semiotics), rhinoceroses were still inaccurately replicated as iconic signs, even though the receivers of these iconic signs were aware that the replicas were not visually accurate:

Dürer portrayed a rhinoceros covered with scales and imbricated plate, as a result this image of the rhinoceros remained constant for at least two centuries and reappeared in the books of explorers and zoologists; and although these latter had seen actual rhinos and knew that they do not have imbricated plates, they were unable to portray the roughness of their skin except by imbricated plates, because they knew that only these conventionalized graphic signs could denote <<rhinoceros>> to the person interpreting the iconic sign... Thus one could say that Dürer's rhinoceros is more successful in portraying, if not actual rhinoceroses, at best our cultural conception of a rhinoceros (205).

This means that semantic understandings and communications of concepts can only ever be an approximation of what is visually perceived. Communication, in any form or medium, can never be a direct one-to-one translation of what is intended to be communicated to what is communicated. Instead, distortions exist both as a necessity of communication and as an unintended consequence. Therefore, if we think back to unlimited semiosis, this means that the distortions play as much a role in the development of understanding through signs as the more accurate replications do.

One passage that perfectly exemplifies the experience of reality through fiction is when Adso is seduced in the kitchen by the unnamed peasant girl. In describing the encounter, even decades after it occurs, Adso can only describe the experience through religious and medieval texts...the passage is “constructed entirely on the basis of quotations from religious texts, from the Song of Songs to Saint Bernard, and Jean de Fécamp, or Saint Hildegard of Bingen. Even readers unfamiliar with the medieval mystics realize this, if they had any ear” (Eco 560). Thus, Adso’s understand of the event, both in the moment and described retroactively, is only understood through literary allusion. Adso’s only methods of understanding and expression are through texts. Even the guilt he feels, as he breaks his oath as a novice, is understood through the scriptures. Thus, no moral, religious, sexual, or other framework of thought or feeling can be removed from literature.

The film adaptation of *The Name of the Rose* depicts the sex scene entirely differently. Instead of the spiritually transcendent experience that is expressed through Adso’s narration (“O lord, when the soul is transported, the only virtue lies in loving what you see” (Eco 264), the scene plays out in virtual silence, with no non-diegetic score to even indicate a sense of subjective experience. This creates the opposite effect and foregrounds the physical over the

spiritual. However, this does not eliminate the semiotic implications of the scene. Instead, the viewer is forced to understand the impact of the event through visual signifiers. The trepidation of Adso and his vulnerable innocence is exemplified through Christian Slater's performance. In the scene Slater is around seventeen, younger than the character Adso's eighteen years. His trepidation gives way to excitement. He is clean and dressed in monk's robes, where the peasant girl is visibly dirty and naked, with oily hair. The high angle of the shot reveals his tonsure<sup>1</sup>, a symbolic devotion to God, which is being rejected in this moment of lust. The high angle also reveals his vulnerability, as the girl is above him literally ripping off his robes. The scene highlights the animalistic lust where in the novel Adso posits it as a spiritual and divine moment. This shows a stark contrast between what is occurring and what Adso is perceiving. The film forces

---

<sup>1</sup> An important aspect of the monk's lifestyle and aesthetic is the tonsure, which is the fabulous haircut where the scalp is shaved, leaving a crown of hair. This represents a rejection of vanity, an embrace of pious humility, and is sported by virtually every character in the 1986 film adaptation of *The Name of the Rose*. However, in attempting this, the haircut actually signifies itself. By adopting a haircut that says, "I reject fashion to show my humility," the haircut actually connotes fashion, as an aesthetic style is adopted to show one's piety, which can be considered vain. In *Mythologies*, Barthes writes of Abbé Pierre, a 20<sup>th</sup> century French priest, who adopted a beard in the Franciscan manner as a rejection of fashion standards. Barthes writes, "Here...neutrality ends up functioning as the *sign* of neutrality, and if you really wanted to go unnoticed, you'd be back to where you started (53). This means that the conscious construction of signs often distorts the signification of the sign, aiming the focus on the sign itself and not on what it is meant to signify.

the viewer to interpret the significance of the scene through visual indicators and signs. The thematic implications are communicated non-verbally, and the viewer both encodes and decodes the meanings, motivations, and dynamics of the characters through non-verbal, semiotic communications that are integral to the visual medium of film.

There is a final aspect to the novel that signifies the hyperreal influence of literature on reality. At the end of the novel, it is revealed that Jorge has been orchestrating the events of the novel, yet he has not been actively killing his victims, but passively causing their deaths by exploiting their desires. Adelmo kills himself because of his shame regarding his homosexuality and desire for illicit knowledge. Venatius and Berengar die after being poisoned by Aristotle's book on comedy, which was restricted from them. Additionally, Malachi, the librarian, kills Severinus to guard Aristotle's book.

In attempting to solve the mysterious deaths, William assumes that the killer is orchestrating them to align with the seven trumpets of the Book of Revelation, which signifies the Apocalypse. For example, "The first angel sounded, and there followed hail and fire mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth: and the third part of trees was burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up." from Revelation book 8 can be interpreted through Adelmo falling to his death. "The third part of the sea became blood" (Revelation 8) of the second trumpet is Venatius' body being found in the pool of pig's blood.

However, Jorge never intended for the deaths to align with the seven trumpets. Therefore, it can be inferred that William's fiction and false premise that he abduces actually winds up conforming to reality after Jorge becomes aware of his hypothesis. As William realizes, "I conceived a false pattern to interpret the moves of the guilty man, and the guilty man fell in with it" (Eco 503). In part one of this essay, it was discussed that abduction is the use of two



hypothetical premises to come to a hypothetical conclusion. It can be seen that although the premises were false, the conclusion was correct, because the connections gained significance not because of how they were caused, but because how they were received as signs. The signification came from William's interpretation, not from Jorge's intention. Thus, as mentioned in the prologue of this essay, signification is encoded by the recipient of the sign as much as it is intended by the creator of the sign. William's fictional premise influences real occurrences specifically because the interpretation of reality cannot be divorced by humans from the actual events that occur.

## **Conclusion:**

Umberto Eco encapsulates many of his complex theories of semiotics and the limitations of understanding into a compelling mystery novel with *The Name of the Rose*. Abduction and unlimited semiosis are foundational semiotic concepts that enrich and elucidate the philosophical quandaries found in this novel. Specifically, the novel raises questions about language, reason, hyperreality, and the inextricable link between humans and signs. Semiotics both illuminates and obscures meaning, as it reveals that even the most basic aspects of understanding and interacting with the world are subjective, ambiguous, and ever evolving. This essay only scratches the surface of the themes and topics that constitute *The Name of the Rose*. To fully understand this novel means to be well versed in theology, medieval literature, physics, mathematics, and philosophy. Luckily, an understanding of semiotics is the perfect basis for investigating these dense areas of study as philosophy, linguistics, and all other disciplines stem from semiotics. Semiotics is the basis of human perception and interpretation. Therefore, to have a grasp of the foundations of interpretation allows us to better understand every other avenue of meaning.

## Works Cited

- Aristotle. *Poetics*. Translated by Malcolm Heath, Penguin Books, 1996.
- Barthes, Roland. *Mythologies*. Translated by Richard Howard and Annette Lavers, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013.
- Barthes, Roland. "Myth Today (1957)." *Global Literary Theory: An Anthology*, Routledge, New York, New York, 2013, pp. 53-59.
- Baudrillard, Jean. "The Precession of Simulacra (1981)." *Global Literary Theory: An Anthology*, Routledge, New York, New York, 2013, pp. 215-222.
- Eco, Umberto. *A Theory of Semiotics*. Indiana University Press, 1979.
- Eco, Umberto. *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*. Indiana University Press, 1986.
- Eco, Umberto. *The Name of the Rose*. Translated by Richard Dixon, HarperCollins, 2014.
- Hall Stuart. *Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse*. Centre for Cultural Studies University of Birmingham 1973.
- Kristeva, Julia. "The Semiotic Activity (1997)." *Global Literary Theory: An Anthology*, Routledge, New York, New York, 2013, pp. 60-69.
- Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson. *Metaphors We Live By*. The University of Chicago Press, 2003.

Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. Pantheon Books, 2003.

Saussure, Ferdinand de. "Nature of the Linguistic Sign (1913)." *Global Literary Theory: An Anthology*, Routledge, New York, New York, 2013, pp. 39-43.