

ECO'S ECHOES: IRONIZING THE (POST)MODERN

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Umberto Eco. *FOUCAULT'S PENDULUM.* Trans. William Weaver. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1989.

When one theorist publishes a book—a novel, at that—which contains in its title the name of another theorist, the academic reader is likely to be unable to resist looking for “in-group” ironies. When that novelist-theorist is Umberto Eco, who just happens to be someone who rarely mentions Michel Foucault by name, puzzlement may jostle for position with irony, even if we realize that Jean Bernard Léon Foucault was a nineteenth-century physicist whose famous pendulum hangs in the Conservatoire des Arts et Métiers in Paris. Nevertheless, I want to argue that it is almost impossible *not* to think of Michel Foucault when reading this novel. But as the puzzlement dissipates, the ironies remain.

Eco has made it his specialty to write learned novels, bringing together his two worlds as creative writer and critical theorist, media darling and dissertation fodder. He has also made it difficult for reviewers and critics to engage with those novels, despite the tantalizing lures, because he self-reflexively ironizes the position not only of author but also of reader, thus reminding critical commentators of their secondary, even parasitic role. Given that, what do we do with a novel like *Foucault's Pendulum* that ironizes all attempts at either deconstruction or construction of meaning? What happens when pages of contradictions get welded into a totalized vision of order, when life imitates art, when the narrative structure, while seemingly loose and baggy, is in fact obsessively ordered around the form of the occult Tree of the Sefirot? And what has any of this to do with Michel Foucault?

Despite its overt trappings and publicity blurbs, *Foucault's Pendulum* is not really an adventure story, a thriller, or a detective story, like *The Name of the Rose*, Eco's first novel. *Foucault's Pendulum* ends, rather than begins, with the requisite deaths. There is a plot—or rather, a plethora of plots—all brought together into something called the “Plan.” Instead of the causality we have been taught to expect in traditional plotting of popular genres, this Plan is governed by what Eco elsewhere calls “a sort of spiral-like logic of mutually sympathetic elements. If the universe is a network of similitudes and cosmic sympathies, then there are no privileged causal chains” [*The Limits* 19]. And this novelistic universe is just such a network, as we shall see.

Michael Holquist has argued in “Whodunit and Other Questions” [135] that the detective story is to postmodernism what myth and depth psychology were to modernism. In Eco's perverse version of the postmodern, however, the detective as the metaphor of order and logic is ironized by the decisive

presence of chance or accident (in *The Name of the Rose*) or by hyperbolic expansion and inversion (in *Foucault's Pendulum*). In this latter novel, the “belief that the mind, given enough time, can understand everything” [Holquist 141] is taken to an overstated, ironic extreme: it is the portrait of the totalizing mind imploding. Eco's ultra-contrived plot about plots operates much like Pynchon's paranoia in *Gravity's Rainbow*. But it is not the “scientifically charted and organized familiarity of the totalized world” [Spanos 155] that gets ironically subverted here; rather it is the flip side of positivism—hermetic thought. Its self-confirming, circular mode of including contradictory elements is at the same time put in motion and called into question. For the mystic adept, every word becomes a sign of something else, the truth of what is not said. Therefore one must learn to read with suspicion, lest something be missed. Irony, of course, is also a sign of something else—the not said—and to be sensitive to irony is to read with suspicion. *Foucault's Pendulum* shows what happens to hermetic thought when it confronts the irony that is structurally its twin.

In 1986 Eco gave a course on hermetic semiosis at the University of Bologna's Istituto di Discipline della Comunicazione, in which he studied the interpretive practice of seeing both the world and texts in terms of relations of sympathy and resemblance. His time frame ranged from prehistoric times to the present. Now, perhaps, we can begin to see what all of this has to do with Michel Foucault. In *The Order of Things (Les mots et les choses)*, Foucault argued that this kind of thought was historically limited, a Renaissance paradigm which gave way to a modern, scientific one. The epistemological space up to the end of the sixteenth century was one Foucault saw as governed by a rich “semantic web of resemblance” [17]. In his course Eco clearly wanted to challenge this temporal periodization, to argue that this kind of thought never really disappeared, that there was no final epistemic break. In his view the hermetic semiosis discernable in documents from the early centuries of the Christian era (for example, *Corpus hermeticum*) developed clandestinely in the medieval period, triumphed in the humanistic rediscovery of hermetic writings in the Renaissance and Baroque periods, and continues to exist parallel to the quantitative science that then developed (often crossing it, more often opposing it) [Eco, “Introduzione” 9–10]. Newton, for example, is known to have combined modern science and cabalistic speculation. More recently he points out that Gilbert Durand, in *Science de l'homme et la tradition*, linked contemporary structuralist and poststructuralist thought with the same logic that accepts the plurivocal nature of both interpretation and texts. We might recall, in this vein, Derrida's notion that “[b]etween rationalism and mysticism there is . . . a certain complicity” [80]. In other words, the pendulum has continued to swing between the extremes of some form of reason and some form of mysticism, and this is one of many meanings of the titular pendulum. The others require more context to be understood.

Foucault's Pendulum is narrated by a young Italian scholar, Casaubon, in the hours following the climax of the Plan's plotting as he awaits what he imagines to be his death. It is in this light—knowing the end of the story, so to speak—that he fills in the background. He recounts how, while writing a dissertation on the medieval Knights Templar, he had become an unofficial consultant to Jacopo Belbo and his colleague, Diotallevi, editors for a small, serious press, when a certain right-wing Colonel Ardeni had approached the press about publishing a problematic book. According to its author, this book would act as a call to pool knowledge and solve the mystery of the Templar plan to conquer the world, a plan that involved a secret about some immense power source. Such a publication would enable contact with others “in the know” that might lead to picking up the thread of the plot that had been lost because of a missed meeting and thus a missing piece of the puzzle. Ardeni disappears under mysterious circumstances, possibly murder, and the book remains unpublished—but its contents lie dormant in the minds of the editors and their consultant. Casaubon completes his dissertation on the

Templars, goes to Brazil, falls in love with the beautiful Amparo, attends some Afro-Brazilian religious rites, and meets a singular Signor Agliè who seems to be the Comte de Saint-Germain *redivivus*. It is in Brazil that Casaubon begins to be lulled, as he puts it, by the notion of resemblance, by the feeling that everything might be related to everything else. When he returns to Italy, he converts this “metaphysics” into “mechanics” with the help of Belbo and Diotallevi, who employ him to do research for their publishing house’s vanity press division. From his initial task—finding illustrations for a science book on the history of metals—Casaubon finds that magic and science go hand in hand; soon he feels he has one foot in the cabala and the other in the laboratory. Eco’s pendulum has begun to swing. The two presses decide to publish a new series of hermetic texts, and Signor Agliè is brought in as a consultant to help them deal with the vast number of manuscripts written by what they call their “Diabolicals.”

A trip to Portugal and a chance encounter with the police inspector in charge of the earlier Ardeni case remind Casaubon of the theory of the Templar plot to rule the world. This leads to the three editors’ conceiving “the Plan” out of their formalist (even modernist) “desire to give shape to shapelessness, to transform into fantasized reality that fantasy that others wanted to be real” [337]. Out of data and desire, with the aid of a computer program to randomize information, they set out deliberately and ironically to deploy—rather than decode—the hermetic semiosis. Feeding hermetic data into the computer, along with connectives and neutral data, they randomize the order and then create connections: “Any fact becomes important when it’s connected to another. The connection changes the perspective; it leads you to think that every detail of the world, every voice, every word written or spoken has more than its literal meaning, that it tells us of a Secret. The Rule is simple: Suspect, only suspect” [378]. The ironic play in English on E. M. Forster’s “Connect, only connect” marks its exaggeration, not its negation. Starting with Ardeni’s notion of the Templar plot, they “narrativize” isolated data, making connections—causal, temporal, spatial. They start with verifiable facts; the fictionalizing is in the “order of things,” so to speak. Soon, everything from the cabala to Bacon to Shakespeare to the Templars to the Rosicrucians to the Masons to the Jesuits to Hitler is linked in a plot whose climax should, by the Plan’s reasoning, take place in Paris at the Conservatoire des Arts et Métiers (where hangs Foucault’s pendulum, the laboratory proof of the earth’s diurnal rotation). Nothing they discuss or consider remains innocent; all is interconnected once this hermetic thinking is set in motion. In tandem with this male creation of artifice, Casaubon’s child is gestating in the womb of his partner, Lia, who is endowed with the “wisdom of life and birth” [365]. The pendulum swings.

Parallel to this narrative is the revelation by Casaubon of the contents of Belbo’s computer files. Having decided he was one of life’s spectators, not actors, and thus having chosen to be an editor, not a writer, Belbo nevertheless uses his new computer to record stories of his childhood in the wartime Italian countryside, to work out his feelings for the beautiful Lorenza, and to write/create. But what he creates is a parody of Eco’s own radical intertextual play in the novel itself, as we shall see.

The three Planners have to keep reminding themselves that the idea is to *create*, not discover, the Templars’ secret and that their Plan is a fake [387; 391]: “We consoled ourselves with the realization—unspoken, now, respecting the etiquette of irony—that we were parodying the logic of our Diabolicals” [467]. But the problem is that their “brains grew accustomed to connecting, connecting, connecting everything with everything else, until [they] did it automatically, out of habit”; gradually they lose the ability to tell the similar from the identical, the metaphoric from the real [467; 468]. They come to decide that their “story was plausible, rational, because it was backed by facts, it was true” [493]. Unfortunately, others decide likewise: Agliè believes them and, when they will not reveal the Secret they claim to know, he disappears.

At this point, things begin to go badly for the Planners. As Belbo works Hitler into the Plan, Diotallevi (who wants to be Jewish) becomes sick. Convinced that he has developed cancer because they have “sinned against the Word” by mocking knowledge [564], Diotallevi sees his cancer cells as inventing a Plan of their own in a diabolical allegory of their hermetic Plan [566]. As Diotallevi lies dying, Belbo falls into the trap of belief. Desperate to be an actor instead of a spectator, an author instead of an editor, he thinks of himself as a god-like creator: “Inventing, he had created the principle of reality” [531]. Given the importance the Plan had granted to the Conservatoire and the pendulum in Paris, Belbo leaves to fulfill his destiny on the day of the summer solstice. A mysteriously interrupted call from Belbo to Casaubon sends the latter to Belbo’s apartment to read his computer files and, from there, to follow him to Paris, where he hides in a periscope in the Conservatoire and waits for the solstice midnight.

The TRES or the *Templi Resurgentes Equites Synarchici*—an invention of the Planners, or so they thought—appear on time and almost the entire cast of characters of the novel is to be found among these reborn Templars. As Casaubon says, “if you invent a plan and others carry it out, it’s as if the Plan exists. At that point it does exist” [619]. Belbo and the pendulum are the center of the bizarre ceremony in which, as Casaubon witnesses, they try to wrest from him the Secret. Since there is no Secret, of course, Belbo dies—refusing “to bow to unmeaning” [623]. Early in the novel we had read one of Belbo’s computer files in which a slip of the finger is said to have the power to erase memory: “I have no Message to reveal. But later on—who knows?—I might” [27]. But if he does have a message, he does not reveal it, even later on; he dies, hanging from the pendulum. Casaubon flees back to Italy, to Belbo’s country house, and waits. He finds the “Key Text” there, the story of the most glorious moment of Belbo’s life. But one way of interpreting what he learns from this key is that there is nothing to learn: he understands that there is nothing to understand. He waits in peace, offering a self-reflexive warning to the reader (earlier referred to, in a parody of Baudelaire by Eliot, as “apocryphe lecteur, mon semblable, mon frère” [200]): “I would like to write down everything I thought today. But if They were to read it, They would only derive another dark theory and spend another eternity trying to decipher the secret message hidden behind my words. It’s impossible, They would say; he can’t only have been making fun of us. No” [641]. Then he adds: “It makes no difference whether I write or not. They will look for other meanings, even in my silence” [641].

And so They will. So do we all: it is the job of critics and readers to “derive another dark theory” and “decipher the secret message hidden behind” the words of texts. This is what I meant by the notion that Eco makes his works hard to write about. But I would still argue that, although this is a novel about connections and resemblances that is structured, obsessively so, on connections and resemblances, it is irony—the canker or cancer beneath overt resemblance—that makes Eco’s plot different from Casaubon’s Plan. Without irony, Eco’s novel would be an exemplar of hermetic semiosis; with irony, it becomes simultaneously both an exemplar and a critique.

This is “both/and” thinking of the first order. As the temporal pendulum swings, medieval hermeticism and contemporary postmodernism share the ability to juggle “complexity and contradiction” in what postmodern architect Robert Venturi calls “the difficult unity of inclusion” [16]. *Foucault’s Pendulum*—structured as tightly, as rigidly as any modernist novel—carries structure to such an extreme that it implodes: it ironically turns in on itself and metamorphoses into an “open” work, by Eco’s own definition. It both continues and contravenes the modernist project. The pendulum swings, and it is irony that provides the magnetic field to make it swing. In calling *The Name of the Rose* postmodern, Eco himself once foregrounded this double-talking trope: “Irony, metalinguistic play, enunciation squared. Thus, with the modern, anyone who does not understand the game can only reject it, but with the postmodern, it is possible not to

understand the game and yet to take it seriously. Which is, after all, the quality (the risk) of irony" [*Postscript* 68]. In *Foucault's Pendulum* it is the ironizing of the twin modernist elements of reflexivity and intertextuality that activates the particular game of resemblances and connections.

Textual reflexivity operates on many levels in this novel. Each of the 120 sections of the work begins with a citation—presumably one of the 120 that Casaubon found in Belbo's computer files and in the light of which he interprets "the whole story" [43]. The 120 sections are divided into 10 chapters of uneven length, each labelled according to one of the parts of the mystic Tree of the Sefirot and each explained within the text itself. The first (Keter), for instance, is called "the Crown, the beginning, the primal void" [18]; the second (Hokhmah) is strangely described as the sign of wisdom in a box—strangely, that is, until we realize that this is the section in which Casaubon finds out how to enter Belbo's computer system and acquire, if not wisdom, at least information. It is also the source of much of the story line to follow, just as Hokhmah is said to hold "the essence of all that will emanate from it" [41]. This patterning continues throughout the novel.

Eco actually printed a visual representation of the Tree of the Sefirot as the frontispiece to the novel [see Fig 1], and not merely to help us follow the order, for that is not particularly difficult. It is there, I think, to help us visualize the swing, the rhythm, for the movement of the order of the named chapters is, not surprisingly, that of the horizontal swing from side to side on the diagram. It also forms an overall elliptical shape if viewed vertically. The famous pendulum of Foucault does exactly the same thing. In naming his novel as he did, Eco was pointing us to multiple, complex levels of reflexivity. The actual pendulum, hung from "the only Fixed Point in the universe, eternally unmoving" [5], but representing, indeed demonstrating, the working of time [*Vita-Finzi* 225; *Berardinelli* 5], is itself as inherently paradoxical a symbol as the place in which it hangs. The Conservatoire des Arts et Métiers in Paris is a post-revolutionary museum, deliberately set up in a church (St.-Martin-des-Champs); it is a run-down museum of industry and technology housed in part in a gothic priory, here used as the setting for a climactic occult ritual. It is an apt place for Eco's climax for other reasons than these ironic paradoxes: it is situated in front of former Templar towers and is historically connected to a figure important to the Plan, Bacon, and his House of Solomon in the *New Atlantis*, where all the inventions of humankind are found collected.

From the first pages of this novel, the pendulum itself is presented to us in language both mystic and scientific, both overblown and precise, signalling in language the swing between magic and reason. What we might call pendular thinking, oscillating between opposites, has always characterized Eco's work—both creative and theoretical. We need only remember the importance of nonorder to order and instability to stability in his semiotic theorizing, or the undercutting of reason by chance in *The Name of the Rose*. That pendular binaries also end up moving more or less in circles, like Foucault's pendulum, is not unrelated to Eco's theory of the self-reflexive circularity of semiotic systems in his *Theory of Semiotics*. The titular pendulum, in other words, becomes a plurivalent sign whose allegorical meanings proliferate in the text to form a complex set of reflexive *mises-en-abyme*. But at the climax of the novel, as Belbo hangs from the pendulum, something seems to change. While the pendulum is described in binary terms both as Belbo's Sinai and as his Calvary [600], the ironic paradoxes that have constituted its identity seem to resolve as it is identified with Belbo's moment of understanding. It is described as "no symbol, no sign, symptom, allusion, metaphor, or enigma: it was what it was. It did not stand for anything else" [633]. Yet it is hard not to notice that this resolution into nonparadox, nonirony comes (ironically) at the moment in which a literalization of the so-called postmodern death of the subject results in the affirmation of subjectivity, when the so-called postmodern crisis in representation is resolved—doubly resolved, in both literary and scientific terms. The very next section of the novel opens with a letter from

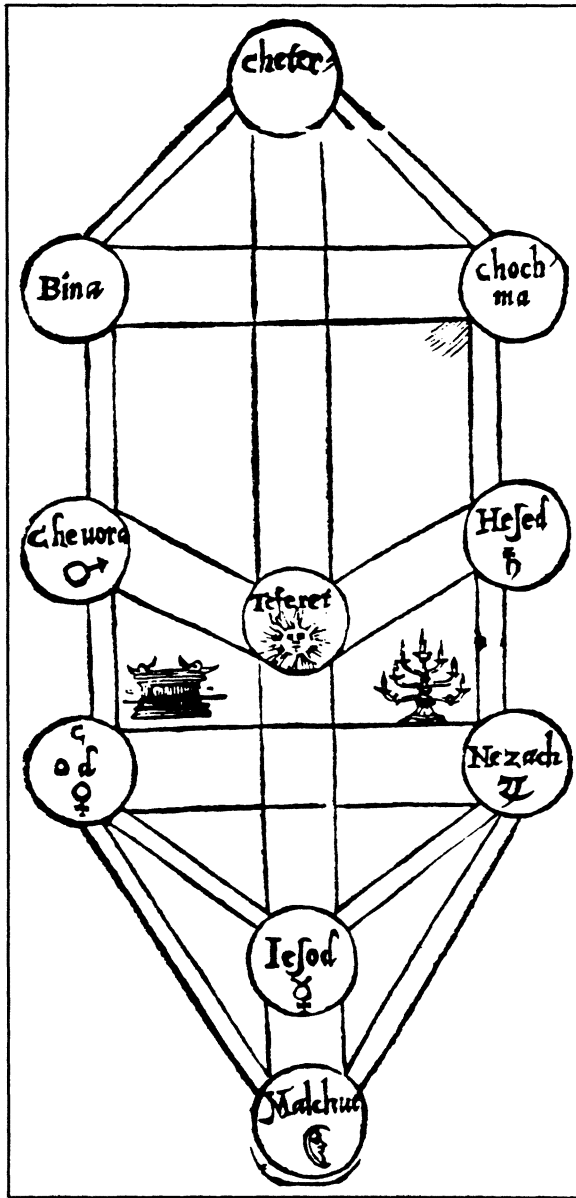


Fig. 1. Tree of the Sephirot. From Cesare Evola, *De divinis attributis, quae Sephirot ab Hebraeis nuncupantur* (Venice: 1589) 102.

a scientist explaining precisely how a pendulum would swing if a man were hanging from it—a literal re-presentation of the scene we have just read. And yet, what one critic calls the charm of a pendular mind [Berardinelli 4] still seems to endure, no matter what the thematic and structural resolution that might seem to stop the pendulum’s swing. These ideological ironies, these undercuttings of contemporary theoretical truisms, constitute yet another layer of reflexive *mise-en-abyme*.

There are still other layers, of course. The naming of characters, as well as of the novel itself, functions ironically. As we have seen, the Foucault of the title is both the French physicist, Jean Bernard Léon Foucault (1819–68), and Michel Foucault (1926–84), the French theorist of the “order of things.” Casaubon, the text tells us, is the name

of both a character in George Eliot's novel *Middlemarch* and a Renaissance philologist [63]. Eliot's "learned provincial clergyman" [Eliot 18] bears little physical resemblance to Eco's narrator, who is no "dried bookworm towards fifty" [17]. But on another level, he may not be unrelated to the man who says, "My mind is something like the ghost of an ancient, wandering about the world and trying mentally to construct it as it used to be, in spite of ruin and confusing changes" [13]. Eliot ironizes her Mr. Casaubon considerably as the novel proceeds, however. His young wife is forced to see that "the large vistas and wide fresh air which she had dreamed of finding in her husband's mind were replaced by anterooms and winding passages which seemed to lead nowhither" [145]. Like the Planners with their computer files, Mr. Casaubon arranges his research documents in pigeonholes [14], and the aim of his work—to find the "Key to all Mythologies"—is clearly an intertextual commentary on the Plan. Eliot's Mr. Casaubon wanted

to show (what indeed had been attempted before, but not with that thoroughness, justice of comparison, and effectiveness of arrangement at which Mr. Casaubon aimed) that all the mythical systems or erratic mythical fragments in the world were corruptions of a tradition originally revealed. Having once mastered the true position and taken a firm footing there, the vast field of mythical constructions became intelligible, nay, luminous with the reflected light of correspondences. [17–18]

This intertext turns back reflexively and ironically upon the Plan of Eco's Casaubon. Eliot's own explicit ironies at her Casaubon's expense are a warning to the reader of Eco's text about trusting anything, even the final discovery of what is ominously referred to as the "Key" text. Eliot writes of the search for the "Key to all Mythologies":

Mr. Casaubon's theory of the elements which made the seed of all tradition was not likely to bruise itself unawares against discoveries: it floated among flexible conjectures no more solid than those etymologies which seemed strong because of likeness in sound, until it was shown that likeness in sound made them impossible: it was a method of interpretation which was not tested by the necessity of forming anything which had sharper collisions than an elaborate notion of Gog and Magog: it was as free from interruption as a plan for threading the stars together. [351]

In explicitly sending his readers to a text that ironizes totalizing thinking, underlining its "constructedness," Eco points to the Plan's obvious fabrication. He also signals the equally suspiciously "constructed" nature of *all* totalizing systems of thought—including, of course, his own.

The other series of cultural intertexts behind the name of Casaubon are as ironically invoked as Eliot's is. The Renaissance philologist Isaac Casaubon (1559–1614) was known for his apposite but profuse illustrative commentaries on texts. Here I would like to think that it is Eco himself as much as his character who is being ironized. But the historical Casaubon also wrote a book which challenged the authenticity of certain hermetic texts which were crucial to Renaissance occultism and also changed the idea of when hermetic thought originated. With the proliferation of apt intertextual echoes like these, Eco enacts both what he has called "hermetic drift" and Peirce's "unlimited semiosis". In fact, he uses each to ironize the other. The following is his definition of the similarity and difference between the two terms: "There is a fundamental principle in Peirce's semiotics: 'A sign is something by knowing which we know something more' (8.332). On the contrary, the norm of Hermetic semiosis seems to be: 'A sign is something by knowing which we know something else'" [*The Limits* 28]. The ironic literalization

and the exaggeration—that is, the not only unlimited but rampant semiosis—of the Plan provide the “something else” which becomes, to the Planners’ shock, the “something more.”

As in *The Name of the Rose*, Peirce’s theories are important intertexts to *Foucault’s Pendulum*, though often in ironic ways. For example, the immediate contact of signs and their referents that is *not* part of Peirce’s semiotic theory is what the climax of the novel is all about: the autonomy of the semiotic system (the Plan) is jeopardized by the occult believers’ need to link signs and world. The system becomes a “true philosophy” according to Eco’s description in *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*: “A philosophy is true insofar as it satisfies a need to provide a coherent form to the world so as to allow its followers to deal coherently with it” [11]. Here, however, there are fatal consequences of that urge toward coherent form. The flip side is that the Plan itself becomes the ironic literalization of the structuralist theory that sign systems exist independently of reality and are thus autonomous of any referent. The opening parodic words of the prologue of *The Name of the Rose*—“In the beginning was the Word” [11]—become ironic in this context.

In this novel, as in his first, there are so many other reflexive recalls of Eco’s own theorizing and that of others that it is hard to know where to start. For example, the Planners’ (and Eco’s) holistic thinking is relatable to Eco’s notion of the encyclopedia and how we make meaning by tracing units of signification through wonderfully varied and tangled avenues of connections. It also suggests his description of the Deleuzian rhizome: “Every path can be connected to every other one. It has no center, no periphery, no exit, because it is potentially infinite,” for it is “the space of conjecture” [*Postscript* 57]. Is it not also possible to read *Foucault’s Pendulum* as an example of abduction run amok, with the Planners making too much meaning by connections and relations between signs? It is certainly an example of what Eco has wittily called “cogito interruptus,” a mode of thought common “both to the insane and to the authors of a reasoned ‘illogic’” [*Travels* 222] that sees the world as inhabited by symbols or symptoms.

In an earlier essay, “Dreaming the Middle Ages,” Eco provided a succinct description of a particular literary use of that period that he links to “so-called Tradition” or occult philosophy. This description functions as perhaps the best possible summary of his own later novel. He writes of

*an eternal and rather eclectic ramshackle structure, swarming with Knights Templars, Rosicrucians, alchemists, Masonic initiates, neo-Kabbalists . . . mixing up René Guénon and Conan the Barbarian. . . . Antiscientific by definition, these Middle Ages keep going under the banner of the mystical weddings of the micro- with the macrocosm, and as a result they convince their adepts that everything is the same as anything else and that the whole world is born to convey, in any of its aspects and events, the same Message. Fortunately the message got lost. [*Travels* 71]*

This essay provides not only an example of this kind of ironically reversed thinking (“*propter hoc ergo ante hoc*”), but a clue to the naming of the narrator of the later novel: “It is well known that the *Corpus hermeticum* was written in the first centuries of the Christian era but the adepts of the Tradition firmly maintain (even after the decisive demonstrations of Casaubon) that it was written at the time of Moses or of Pythagorus and, in any case, before Plato” [71–72]. In *Foucault’s Pendulum*, this kind of thinking by the adepts of the occult, as ironized and literalized by the Planners, turns on resemblances and connections. As Casaubon the narrator claims, “No piece of information is superior to any other. Power lies in having them all on file and then finding the connections. There are always connections; you only have to want to find them” [225]—or they will find you, as

he learns. Indeed, Casaubon's description of the Plan as "a great feast of analogies, a Coney Island, a Moscow May Day, a Jubilee Year of analogies" [361] is an apt way to describe Eco's entire novel.

The purpose of this proliferation of relations is not, I think, simply a big joke, despite Casaubon's hypothesis about the New Testament: "Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are a bunch of practical jokers who meet somewhere and decide to have a contest. They invent a character, agree on a few basic facts, and then each one's free to take it and run with it" [200]. In casting doubt on the "naturalness" of the narrative of one of the most sacred of texts, the Bible, as well as of the infamous Plan, Eco's irony points to the un-natural, constructed nature of all narrative, including his own. The Plan is an ordered, narrativized, connected account of historical data; the fictionalizing is in the construction, in the connections—and these are ironically man-made (not, significantly, woman-made). As in many postmodern "historiographic metafiction" [Hutcheon 5], history and fiction are both revealed as constructions, as fictionalizations. In both showing and ironizing the process of construction within the novel itself, Eco has produced an aesthetically self-reflexive *mise-en-abyme* of his own novelistic act and, at the same time, an ideologically de-naturalizing allegory of the structuralist insight that language constructs rather than reflects reality.

Eco not only alludes to but makes ironic (again through the device of literalizing) Foucault's exact description of sixteenth-century thought: "The heritage of Antiquity, like nature herself, is a vast space requiring interpretation; in both cases there are signs to be discovered and then, little by little, made to speak" [33–34] by using either *divinatio* (magic, perhaps fiction) or *eruditio* (learning, history). Both are part of the same hermeneutic, however. According to Foucault, the esoterism of the sixteenth century is a phenomenon of the written word. The spoken is seen as the "female part of language" [39], the sign of the passive intellect. In Eco's version the pregnant Lia's common-sensical talk to Casaubon about the "mysteries" of the human body provides the antidote to the male-generated Plan. But the irony is that it is Lia who is literally creative and (re)productive, and not the males, even if the "male principle" of language—that is, writing—is said to harbour "the truth" [Foucault 139]. But Eco provides yet another ironic twist here. Given what Foucault calls "a non-distinction between what is seen and what is read" [39], both the Planners and their occult enemies make this writing their own "truth."

The very linear form of writing is itself parodied in the novel as the Planners construct their plot from data drawn from the computer, which they have named Abulafia. So the plotting literally moves from *a* (Abulafia) to *b* (Belbo, the computer operator) to *c* (Casaubon, the narrator) to *d* (Diotalleivi, the man whose cancerous body enacts its own diabolical plan). Even Abulafia takes on allegorical and ironic functions. It comes to stand for the sign of the true Secret of world power: information, not telluric currents (as the Planners speculated), is the real source of power today. An ironized Grail, information is what "nourishes, heals, wounds, blinds, strikes down . . ." [141].

The ironic play on this theme does not stop there: the computer's binary thinking is both emblematic of the pendular thought of the novel and tied in with the occult numerology of the Plan. And Abulafia has a role in the ironizing of the Foucault as well as the pendulum of the title. In *The Order of Things*, Foucault wrote, "man is only a recent invention, a figure not yet two centuries old, a new wrinkle in our knowledge, and . . . he will disappear again as soon as that knowledge has discovered a new form" [xxiii]. In the age of information technology, many have wanted to see the computer as that "new form" of knowledge. But, as presented in the novel, the computer can never replace "man," for it cannot create knowledge but can only combine and randomize knowledge that is given to it—and even that is done more effectively by a human (the press's assistant, Gudrun [373]). It is not even used to make cross-referenced connections: Casaubon uses index

cards to help him do that [225]. Belbo, the main user of the computer in the story, says he will employ it to order, and edit the work of others, not to create or write about himself. He names it Abulafia after the man who dedicated his life to the science of the combination of the letters of God's name, and one of his first exercises on the computer is to work out all those 720 combinations—duly printed in the text we read. Despite his stated intentions, Belbo does use it to write about his own life and even to fictionalize by parodying, with a kind of Joycean euphoria, the texts of others, including those of Eco himself. He begins with: "O what a beautiful morning at the end of November, in the beginning was the word, sing to me, goddess, the son of Peleus, Achilles now is the winter of our discontent" [24].

Perhaps the greatest Foucauldian irony in the novel's presentation of the computer, however, is that its limitations—its ability to randomize, to use only what is fed to it—turn out to be the limits that Foucault ascribes to the mechanisms of resemblance in pre-seventeenth-century hermetic thought. He writes of "the plethoric yet absolutely poverty-stricken character of this knowledge" [30], always working with the same things: "Hence those immense columns of compilation, hence their monotony" [30]. (Some reviewers have said similar things about *Foucault's Pendulum*.) Though Eco, as I mentioned earlier, rarely refers openly to Michel Foucault's work, the ironic intertextual allusions to that work in the novel abound: "Knowledge . . . consisted in relating one form of language to another form of language. . . . Language contains its own inner principle of proliferation" in the Renaissance [Foucault 40], leading to commentaries and interpretations of interpretations. Eco's novel literalizes and ironizes at the same time many like statements about occult thought based on a theory of resemblance: the Plan is its literal enactment and the irony comes from both its overttness of construction and its temporal dislocation. If Foucault were right, this mode of thought should have died out by the end of the Renaissance. But has it?

Ironic intertextuality—or parody—is clearly one of the major modes of reflexivity in *Foucault's Pendulum*. Eco is responsible for many wonderful academic parodies, such as his Beckettian/Joycean parody, "My Exagmination Round his Factification for Incamination to Reduplication with Ridecolation of a Portrait of the Artist as Manzoni" [in Almansi 125]. The changing of the title of the famous book on Joyce from "of Work in Progress" to the ironic signal of "to Reduplication with Ridecolation" is a clue, as is the parodic "Portrait of the Artist as Manzoni." Furthermore, in the understated style of the *Times Literary Supplement* or American New Criticism, Eco reads Manzoni's novel *I promessi sposi* as if it were a posthumous work by Joyce. The ironies at the expense of reviewing and criticism in general are multiple—and deadly.

This same kind of parodic play occurs on almost every page of *Foucault's Pendulum*, making the novel into an "intertextual collage"—his term to describe the film *Casablanca*. Likewise his novel could share that film's label as "a palimpsest for future students of twentieth-century religiosity, a paramount laboratory for semiotic research into textual strategies" [Travels 197]. It is hard to read any of Eco's essays of the last decade or so without seeing intertextual allusions or reflexive *mises-en-abyme* of the novel he was then writing. Certain passages have been fictionalized and dropped, almost verbatim, into the novel: the description of two Afro-Brazilian rites he attended, as recounted in "Whose Side Are the Orixá On?" [Travels 103–12], reappears in Casaubon's narrative, just as pages of *The Sign of Three* found their way into *The Name of the Rose*. Is it utterly coincidental that Eco in *The Role of the Reader* analyzed Alphonse Allais's *Un drame bien parisien*, in which the character Raoul goes to a ball disguised as a Templar?

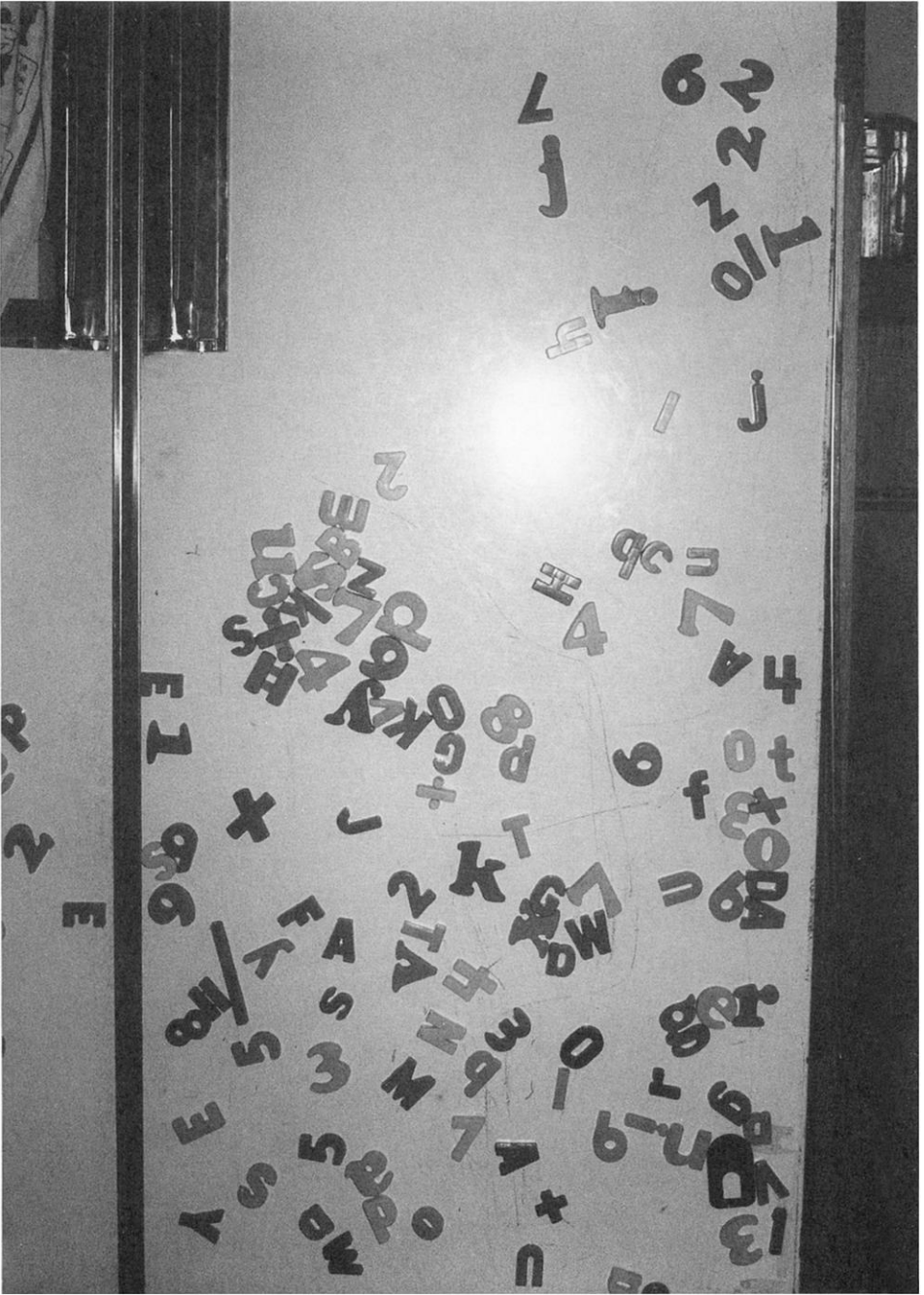
Reviewers have had fun pointing to other intertexts in the novel besides the author's own works, making connections to Calvino and Del Giudice [Berardinelli 4] as well as to films featuring both Sam Spade and Indiana Jones. That these latter are overt in the novel [54, 435 and 275 respectively] makes this task somewhat straightforward. Other

films mentioned by name and usually cited ironically are *Star Wars* [54]; *A Man Called Horse* [114], *Gone with the Wind* [323], *Hellzapoppin* [328], *Rosemary's Baby* [437], and the Pink Panther films [354]—not all film classics, to be sure, but all equally fodder for Eco's broad echoic cultural play. Popular culture and high art meet in all of Eco's work, theoretical and novelistic, and in all cases the allusions are not usually hidden. The intertextual scenarios are repeated, discussed, recalled, inverted. As Casaubon and Eco know [588], any story about a pendulum inevitably suggests Poe's "The Pit and the Pendulum," and indeed Eco tries to one-up Poe in the macabre and the terrifyingly fatal. Similarly any tale about the occult with references to the Tetragrammaton, the names of Yahweh [31], and the aleph [41] recalls such stories by Jorge Luis Borges as "Death and the Compass" and "The Aleph."

But it is the character Belbo, rather than the narrator Casaubon, who is the past master of intertextual ironies. His computer files, obsessively examining childhood memories, are appropriately full of references to Proust's fiction [25, 64, 230, 371, 495]. At one point he and Diotallevi try to construct an "ars oblivionalis," rules for forgetting, but they find it impossible. It is easy to search for lost time, they decide, but impossible "to misplace time refound" [25]. While reading those files, Casaubon realizes that he is privy to the story of Belbo's Combray [327]. Indeed, the Plan is conceived by Belbo as a way out of this: "We're here to create a story of the future, not a remembrance of things past" [333].

There are also in Belbo's computer files direct citations or ironic allusions to the work of T. S. Eliot: the opening of *The Waste Land* [24] and, appropriately, a reference to "Madame Sosostriis, the famous clairvoyante" [411]. Conrad's Lord Jim and Kurtz make a number of appearances in Belbo's parodic chronicle of cowardice and lost or evaded opportunities [70, 497]. Joyce's "incomprehensible message," the *Wake*, is cited several times as well [24, 416]. While each intertextual echo functions in a different way, the cumulative references to Proust, Eliot, Conrad, and Joyce in Belbo's writing create a chain of allusions to the specifically *modernist* masters. And one way of looking at the modernist aesthetic and linguistic paradigm is to see it as a combinatory process within a closed field, where what is important is the relations of elements with each other [see Hugh Kenner]. From this perspective, modernism too reveals itself to be modelled on hermetic semiosis. If Belbo is the modernist, does that make his collaborative reader, Casaubon, the postmodernist? Certainly he sounds like it at times. He alludes to Derridean themes in associating Hermes, the god of trickery, with "writing, which is the art of evasion and dissimulation, a navigation that carries us to the end of all boundaries" [185]. At the climax of the novel, Casaubon ironically recalls what Roland Barthes had proclaimed in his famous essay announcing "The Death of the Author": "The author has to die in order for the reader to become aware of his truth" [633]. In the end, then, Belbo becomes an author.

One of the features that makes it difficult to decide precisely what kind of allegorical fun Eco is having with the tenets of either modernism or postmodernism is the persistent, scatter-gun effect of his irony. While irony is clearly a frequent trope of the postmodern today, it also characterizes much modernist writing. I have argued that *Foucault's Pendulum* is an obsessively formalist novel that is about the implosion of formalism in upon itself. It is also a novel that foregrounds its own ironies. Thematically, irony is presented as the stance of detachment, of spectatorship, as willed by Belbo and desired by Casaubon: "I had to play this ironically . . . not letting myself become involved" [10]. Irony is also literalized in Belbo and Diotallevi's playful syllabus for the School of Comparative Irrelevance, with its list of subjects such as Adynata or Impossibilia (such as Morse Syntax and Urban Planning for Gypsies) and Oxymoronics (such as Heraclitean Statics and Spartan Sybaritics) [75]. There are many verbal ironies, too many to list, so a single example will have to suffice: from the perspective of Signor Agliè, a man hundreds of years old, historical materialism becomes an "apocalyptic cult that came out of the Trier region" [182].



But there are other, less playful uses for the trope of the unspoken, as Belbo writes on his computer: “Ah, irony of language—this gift nature has given us to keep silent the secrets of our spirit!” [500–01]. The structural and thematic irony of this statement, is that this is a novel in which there is no final Secret—or is the Secret simply kept silent? The rug is constantly pulled out from under the figurative feet of the reader. Chapter epigraphs that conventionally look forward and guide the interpretation of the reader here often look backward and comment ironically on the last chapter [particularly good examples are the epigraphs to chapters 51, 53, 57] or else become totally integrated in and illustrate the holistic logic of the Plan.

In a novel full of images of inversion, of upside-down worlds and mirrored reversals, it may not be surprising to find allegories of the hermeneutics of irony. I mentioned at the start that irony demands an attitude of suspicion as much as hermetic thought. Casaubon describes two Rosicrucian manifestoes in terms that also function to allegorize the need for markers that tell us to interpret, not literally but ironically: “Taken literally these two texts were a pile of absurdities, riddles, contradictions. Therefore they could not be saying what they seemed to be saying. . . . They were a coded message. . . . I had to read with mistrust” [394]. If *The Name of the Rose* is, by Eco’s own admission, “ironclad” in its obvious scaffolding [in Rosso 7], then *Foucault’s Pendulum* must be “irony-clad.”

One of the effects of this pervasive irony is that ambiguity reigns, even unto the end. How are we to read Belbo’s death? Is it murder or suicide? Is it accidental or planned? Even the language of his Conservatoire death scene, as narrated by Casaubon, is an ambivalent one of science overlaid with magic, as suggested earlier. Its choice of words plays off the names of the inventions of the other Foucault (after whom were named not only a pendulum, but magnetic currents, mirroring prisms, a polarizer, and a “knife-edge” test—all of which figure in the language of the scene). But Michel Foucault isn’t far away either. In fact this scene and the remainder of the novel can be read, once again, as ironic literalization of the latter Foucault’s description of the Renaissance semiosis of resemblance, specifically as described in the chapter on “The Prose of the World” in *The Order of Things*. In this section Foucault analyzes the four principal figures that determine the knowledge of resemblance. The first, spatial adjacency or resemblance by contact, is called “convenientia” and is represented by the image of an “immense, taut, and vibrating chain” [19]. In Eco’s novel, this is literalized in the pendulum’s physical form. The second figure of hermetic knowledge is “aemulatio,” or mirroring across distances, a polarization into imbalanced weak and strong forces: “Similitude then becomes the combat of one form against another—or rather of one and the same form separated from itself by the weight of matter or distance in space” [20]. The importance of the “one and the same form” for the novel is clearer in conjunction with Foucault’s third epistemological figure, analogy. Here the principles of resemblance include reversibility and polyvalency in a universal field of application which is drawn together through a “privileged point” saturated with analogies: man’s body, “the fulcrum upon which all these relations turn” [22]. Belbo dies by being hanged from the pendulum by the neck. The effect this has on the movement of the pendulum is that it starts to move from Belbo’s body downward. His body becomes the point of suspension, “the Fixed Pin, the Place from which the vault of the world is hung” [597]. As the scientific epigraph of the next chapter explains, a body hanging from a pendulum becomes the fulcrum, thus literalizing in a horrific image Foucault’s “privileged point.” But Belbo’s body, at first jerked about by the pendulum’s movement (that is, before it becomes its fulcrum), is said to describe a shape in the air—the shape of the Tree of the Sefirot, the shape that is visible on the novel’s frontispiece and that structures the entire novel.

Belbo is not the only one to die at midnight on the summer solstice: Diotallevi also dies at that moment, a victim of the Plan of the cancer cells attacking his body. Earlier, Diotallevi had warned that the computer was dangerous because, like the historical

Abulafia's science of the combination of the letters of the name of God, it risked becoming a tool of magic and power in the hands of the unscrupulous [33]. As he put it, "every letter is bound to a part of the body" [34]. For sinning against this knowledge, he must pay the price in and with his own body. He too falls prey to what Foucault describes as thinking by analogy, drawing connections between the body and external things, and transmitting resemblances "back into the world from which he receives them" [23].

The fourth and final figure of resemblance described in *The Order of Things* is called "sympathies," the powerful play of the "Same" in a free state throughout the universe: "It is a principle of mobility: it attracts what is heavy to the heaviness of the earth" [23]—not unlike Jean Bernard Léon Foucault's eternally moving pendulum. But the figure of "sympathies" is dangerous: it has the power to assimilate, to make all things the same, destroying individuality—unless counterbalanced by "antipathy" [23]. The pendular thought of the entire novel offers countless examples of this binary figure at work, just as the plot structure opposes the Planners' totalizing assimilation of everything into their Plan, thanks to the factionalism and divisiveness of the various credulous occult groups. There is more than one Foucault's pendulum.

Michel Foucault himself turns ironic when discussing the need for visible markers or "signatures" of these various kinds of often secret resemblances operating in hermetic thinking—not accidentally, a need shared by irony itself: "Now there is a possibility that we might make our way through all this marvellous teeming abundance of resemblances without even suspecting that it has long been prepared by the order of the world, for our greater benefit" [26]. In Eco's ironic literalizing of Foucault's irony, the Plan is not "prepared by the order of the world" but is prepared very much by the order of man. And resemblance, as Foucault describes it, becomes the inversion of the trope of irony: both "require signatures" to be interpreted, so that "the space inhabited" by both "becomes like a vast open book; it bristles with written signs. . . . All that remains is to decipher them" [27]. The "signature" image is also used by Eco to describe the interpretive habit of hermeticism in a recent essay, but with no reference to Foucault: "It is through similitudes that the otherwise occult parenthood between things is manifested and every sublunar body bears the traces of that parenthood impressed on it as a *signature*" [*The Limits* 24]. In Eco's hands, irony becomes a kind of inverted extension or perverse variant of hermetic similitude, exploiting the inevitable if "slight degree of non-coincidence between the resemblances" of which Foucault speaks [30]. This slight degree of noncoincidence provides the space for irony. What Foucault writes concerning the process of deciphering similitude also defines the intent of ironic reading: "To find a way from the visible mark to that which is being said by it and which, without that mark, would lie like unspoken speech, dormant" [32].

Eco has been called "an author who has irony in his soul" [Vita-Finzi 618]; his novel has been dubbed a work of irreverence and irony [Toscani 618], and no doubt this is what caused the Pope to get upset at what he saw as a desecration of faith. But if, as in Eco's own words, "Lacan is interesting because he resumes Parmenides" [*Travels* 127], so Eco is interesting in part because he resumes Foucault—and many others. Though I've claimed that he rarely discusses Foucault's work in detail, Eco did once define the postmodern as "the orientation of anyone who has learned the lesson of Foucault, i.e., that power is not something unitary that exists outside us" [in Rosso 4]. Foucault was describing his own affiliation when he talked about the "great warm and tender Freemasonry of useless erudition" [*Power* 79], but Eco seems to be part of that same cabal.

The pendulum has come full swing again but with another of those "slight degrees of non-coincidence" that turns resemblance into irony, hermetic semiosis into postmodern semiosis. Foucault characterized sixteenth-century language as that which "simultaneously promises and postpones" [*Order* 41], as what offers all signs as "written matter for further discourse" [41]. But for Eco the "perennial shift and deferral of any possible

meaning” [*The Limits* 27]—the unstoppable slippage of meaning [“Introduzione” 14] that constituted hermetic thought—has become the postmodern deferral of meaning, the intertextually ironic deference to other texts, other commentaries, other discourses. In Foucault’s words, “It is the traversal of this futile yet fundamental space that the text of literature traces from day to day” [44]. So too does the text of theory.

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