

## The Conspiracy of the Miscellaneous in *Foucault's Pendulum*

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### I

The recent release of 90,000 pages of secret documents from the investigation of the Kennedy assassination has contributed little to what is known about the case, except, according to one commentator, to show that this is the most investigated crime in history. No conspiracy theory was too bizarre to be ignored, not even Oswald's mother's theory that Neiman Marcus was in on it. That there could be 90,000 pages of secret documents that do little to clarify the investigation or to lend credence to one theory over another, suggests that this case is going the way of the novels it has done much to inspire: from its inception, it has tended toward sprawl. The modern conspiracy novel, ranging from *Gravity's Rainbow* to semi-fictional novels like *Libra* and *Harlot's Ghost*, has broken free of its parent genres, the spy or detective novel, and is characterized now by nothing so much as sprawl—the accumulation, rather than the rejection, of the miscellaneous. The telescoping of details into clues and of clues into solutions that typifies the novel of detection has become inverted in the conspiracy novel; the narrowing of focus from a group of suspects to a single perpetrator has been reversed. In the modern conspiracy novel, all may be in on it. It may, in fact, be impossible not to be in on it.

Many generic features from the novel of detection remain—for instance, the themes of implication and involvement. What distinguishes the conspiracy novel may only be the matter of emphasis. In the detective novel, certain items become significant as clues, which, as the code is broken, point toward an explanation, a point of simplicity; in the conspiracy novel, the number and variety of such items becomes

excessive and the protagonists risk being overwhelmed by miscellaneous significance. Instead of solution, there is theory. The detective novel emphasizes the acts of detection or ratiocination that relieve the threat of conspiracy; the conspiracy novel concentrates on implication in the conspiracy. In the detective novel, suspicion leads to solution; in the conspiracy novel to further suspicion and implication, which are not the pretext, but the end and grounds of the conspiracy novel. At the end of the conspiracy novel there is a mimicking pair of questions: *Was I, too, involved? Was I too involved?*

That Umberto Eco would be led to the conspiracy novel after writing a detective novel is not surprising, given the drift of his recent theoretical work. *Name of the Rose* was largely concerned with interpreting signs as clues and the relation of such interpretation, loosely identified with Renaissance science, to Medieval modes of interpretation. *Foucault's Pendulum* is less concerned with signs as clues and more concerned with the limits of interpretation, particularly mistaken versions of unlimited semiosis, of taking clues too far, which, in *The Limits of Interpretation*, Eco identifies with Renaissance hermeticism and postmodern deconstruction.

At the center of the conspiracy in *Foucault's Pendulum* is a short cryptic text brought to the attention of the young editors, Belpo and Casaubon, by a mysterious Colonel Ardeni. It holds the secret of the Templars in code, he says. Years later, Belpo, Casaubon, and their kabbalistic colleague, Diatallevi, will invent an elaborate parody conspiracy, "The Plan," based on their interpretation of Ardeni's text. Later, Casaubon's lover, Lia, will research and offer her own interpretation of the text. Far from a cryptic statement of the Templar's plan, she finds it a merchant's miscellaneous delivery list.

So here we have it—either the secret plan of the Templars or a common list. A devotee of the occult might reject the commonplace interpretation out of hand as too mundane. A skeptic might accept it equally readily, for the skeptic is guided by what Eco calls "economy." Presented with a text, a "sane" interpreter searches for the context that provides for the easiest or most efficient interpretation. In most cases, economy will favor the mundane interpretation, which appears to require the least belief. The occult interpretation, however, is often more appealing psychologically, satisfying a craving for a fullness or even an excess of meaning in the world. For some, the occult may also be more economical, because excess meaning may be easier to believe than deficient meaning.

Unlike either the skeptic or the occultist, the conspiracist would accept Lia's interpretation without rejecting the Plan, for what could be more subtle than to disguise the Plan as a delivery list? A conspiracist sees an excess not only of meaning, but also of design or strategy.<sup>1</sup> And this gets at the crux of the problem the conspiracist presents: such an excess is unfalsifiable, not because it admits no proof of truth and falsity, but because it admits no possibility of uninvolvedness. Once launched on this kind of reasoning, one can find nothing certain to be not-conspiracy. Everything, even the most trivial and miscellaneous of details, must fit, and in the effort to make it all fit together within a theory, the conspiracist comes to suffer from interpretative paranoia. It is against such paranoia that Eco's recent work, including *Foucault's Pendulum*, seems to be directed.<sup>2</sup> The paranoid interpreter does not misinterpret, but overinterprets. He or she doesn't see the trees for the forests. And this presents Eco with a number of interesting problems about which, for all his humorous self-assurance, he is ambivalent—an ambivalence shown in the different tacks his fiction and his theory have been taking.

In *Interpretation and overinterpretation*, a set of lectures given after *Foucault's Pendulum* appeared, Eco sets up an admittedly far-fetched example of a "bad interpretation" of a text just to "disprove the hypothesis that interpretation has no public criteria" (25). If we admit, as Eco asks us to when given such an example, that there may be an "intention of the text," quite apart from the intention of the author and intention of the reader, then we must have interpretations that conform to these intentions and those that do not. To leap from misinterpretation to overinterpretation, however, is a tricky step. In a conspiracy, the text, like the author, is powerless to assert its intentions. If J. Edgar Hoover decides I am a part of the Communist conspiracy, every text I have produced shows my involvement. If I have lectured on the virtues of capitalism and democracy, I was just putting up a front. Letters I've written to my mother—whether or not they contain coded messages—may have been part of my effort to create an illusion of innocence and normality. The paranoid interpreter, like James Jesus Angleton (the model for Mailer's Harlot), most suspects those persons and events that seem most innocent. As the makers of *The Manchurian Candidate* realized, it would likely be the boldest conspiracy hunter, McCarthy himself, who headed the conspiracy.

These "real world" examples echo a refrain that occurs throughout the development of the Plan: "The rule is simple: Suspect, only suspect.

You can read subtexts even in a traffic sign that says 'No littering.' ” (*Foucault's Pendulum* 314) Elsewhere, Eco has said of such “paranoid interpretation”:

One may push this to its limits and state that there is a relationship between the adverb 'while' and the noun 'crocodile' because—at least—they both appeared in the sentence that I have just uttered. But the difference between the sane interpretation and the paranoid interpretation lies in recognizing that this relationship is minimal, and not, on the contrary, deducing from this minimal relationship the maximum possible. The paranoid is not the person who notices that 'while' and 'crocodile' curiously appear in the same context: the paranoid is the person who begins to wonder about the mysterious motives that induced me to bring these two particular words together. The paranoid sees beneath my example a secret, to which I allude. (*Interpretation and overinterpretation* 48)<sup>3</sup>

Against such overinterpretation, he appeals to the principle of economy:

Hermetic semiosis goes too far precisely in the practices of suspicious interpretation, according to *principles of facility* which appear in all the texts of this tradition. First of all, an excess of wonder leads to overestimating the importance of coincidences which are explainable in other ways. (50)

The apparent ease and suitability of economical interpretation raises a question, especially as Eco begins to suggest affinities between hermeticism and current modes of interpretation, concerning the elaborateness of Eco's response to paranoid or suspicious interpretation. Why, if a community of sane interpreters can economically dispense with matters that preoccupy paranoid interpreters, has Eco spent so much time on them? In their comments on Eco's lectures, both Rorty and Culler note a division in his loyalties: for all his apparent disparagement of the paranoids, he seems strangely attracted to them. Eco himself notes that he and his students spent several years combing through the arcane and extensive works of “the Followers of the Veil” concerning Dante. And *Foucault's Pendulum* can be seen as a further pursuit of this mania, an overindulgence in what it would, apparently, dismiss. If nothing else, it provides an outlet for a tremendous quantity

of learning, which must have taken some time to acquire, but for little purpose. Unless Eco is of the devil's party without knowing it.<sup>4</sup>

## II

Conspiracy theorizing is marked by radical fluctuations between doubt and belief. Plausible explanations, like "Oswald shot Kennedy," are undermined by those inevitable inconsistencies and gaps that bedevil certainty. But instead of treating them as such, which would involve accepting the most probable, rather than the certain, conclusion, the conspiracist regards inconsistencies as automatically invalidating the explanation. Once invalidated, another explanation, usually on higher or more designed grounds, must be sought. This process ultimately proves self-undermining, and through it irony, history, and consensus—the ways we find to make do with uncertainty—go by the boards.

In spite of this use of doubt, the conspiracist is no skeptic; rather, doubt serves as the pretext for a leap of faith. The search for new explanations leads him or her to mysticism, magic, the diabolical and the supernatural. In the quest for certainty, the conspiracist is willing to accept what is merely unfalsifiable, rather than what is certain. Conspiracy theories involve an infatuation with, a seduction by, the uncanny—the neverneverland of *could*: X could have been here; Y could have been there; they could have met in Bulgaria in 1959. A Lee Harvey Oswald is a ripe figure for conspiracy theorists because his erratic lifestyle presents such an opportunity for *could*. Paradoxically, conspiracy theory thrives in contexts where there is a good deal of randomness and miscellaneousness. If Ardeni's text is a merchant's list, it is the miscellaneousness of the notes, their reliance upon an immediate and specific context, that allows their use for conspiracy when placed in other contexts.

*Foucault's Pendulum* is both a satire on and an indulgence in conspiracizing. "You don't go crazy because you work in an asylum," the narrator tells his lover, who fears he's becoming too involved with the Diabolicals (300). Events prove him wrong. Similarly, one wonders if *Foucault's Pendulum* proves Eco, the satirist, the would-be limiter of interpretation, wrong. As a satire on the tradition of paranoid interpretation, which in Eco's eyes culminates in various postmodern schools of interpretation, *Foucault's Pendulum* is as excessively postmodern as what it mimics, and when you mimic something too

well, the mimicry replaces the real thing (one of the lessons of the book).

When I say that Eco is taken in by his own conspiracizing, I mean he reaches a point where he has to abandon his ironic posture and produce a valid conspiracy, and he takes a great deal of pleasure in doing so. Validity, in the case of conspiracizing, means only that the conspiracy can take others in. In this important respect, Eco, as a novelist, is successful only if some readers take him seriously, which is to say that one intention of the text has to be to invalidate its own irony.

Irony and conspiracy have more in common than their apparent opposition would suggest. At their extremes, neither is falsifiable. The ironist's statement, "No meaning can be certain," can no more be falsified than the conspiracist's statement that Lee Harvey Oswald did not act alone. And certainly the ironist's multiplication of doubts or perspectives comes to resemble the conspiracist's tangle of intrigue. You would never think of the ironist as spinning a web, though. The conspiracist inhabits a world of excess form, where everything is motivated. It is a world of terrible symmetries, where every "accident" is suspicious. If conspiracizing invalidates irony, it also argues against accident. In a conspiracist's work it is not unusual to see much attention devoted to accidents of little consequence because their status as accidents or miscellaneous inconsistencies is ontologically troubling.

In a peculiar way, though, accident is the friend of the conspiracist, since you can't have a sense of the uncanny without accidents. Early in *Foucault's Pendulum*, when a forgotten appointment interrupts Belpo and Casaubon's afternoon drink, it happens that the client, Colonel Ardeni, is one of the Templar cranks and Casaubon just happens to be an expert on the Templars: "Chance," remarks Belpo, "has a taste for conspiracy." As we popularly use the term, chance is thus that portion of the random or the contingent that has something uncanny about it. The point of a conspiracy theory is to generate the uncanny out of the miscellaneous.

Because of these relations of conspiracy with irony and contingency, I had thought of treating the book under the themes of Richard Rorty's title, *irony, contingency, solidarity*. That was before reading Rorty's response to Eco's *Interpretation and overinterpretation* lectures, in which Rorty apologizes for misreading *Foucault's Pendulum* as a "send-up of structuralism" (Rorty 89). But let me go ahead with this

organization, for it still seems to me that the novel is structured in three sections that loosely respond to these three terms.

### III

Much of what we learn about the conspiracy in the prologue and first sections of *Foucault's Pendulum* comes from Belpo's computer files, access to which requires elaborate exercises in password decoding. This provides both Casaubon and Eco with an opportunity to demonstrate their ingenuity with codes, though it is obvious that anyone wishing to hide something from the Diabolicals would use the "purloined letter strategy," leaving the files out in the open. To put something in code for an anticipated audience of dedicated code-breakers is an open invitation. Importantly, it is an invitation as much to Eco's readers as to the Diabolicals: "Dear Reader, sane interpreter that you are, you must be interested enough in what I expect you to reject to wade through a long and gratuitous display of it." If we are to regard *Foucault's Pendulum* as "a cure for the common code," it seems we must show we suffer the disease before being allowed access to the cure.<sup>5</sup> (It turns out that the disease—addiction to the conspiracy—is much more interesting than the cure anyway.)

The files themselves are hyperbolic musings and overheated allegories. With Belpo, irony has been a guard, and Casaubon opens the files expecting that Belpo has kept his up: "In Abulafia's files I found many pages of a pseudo diary that Belpo had entrusted to the password, confident that he was not betraying his often-repeated vow to remain a mere spectator of the world." But betray it he has. This time, irony has only served as the pretext for involvement, not the means of disengagement.

Aglié is also brought into the scheme through his irony: "He's certainly erudite," says Casaubon, "he takes these things fairly seriously, but with elegance, even irony, I'd say" (231). This irony qualifies him to be a consultant to the editors. Later, Casaubon finds that, concerning his attitude toward the superstitions of the Diabolicals, Aglié "could not be pinned down. I didn't know how to define it—hermetic skepticism? liturgical cynicism?—this higher disbelief that led him to acknowledge the dignity of all the superstitions he scorned" (295). Throughout the novel, Belpo and Aglié are paired as adversaries, mainly for Lorenza's affections. In a deeper sense, though, they

represent the two faces of irony: suave erudition and cynicism, neither of which provides a defense against conspiracy.

The other editors have other defenses against the conspiracy—love of learning (Casaubon), religiosity (Diatallevi)—but for each, the conspiracy finds a way to form itself as a Trojan horse and be taken inside their defenses:

When we traded the results of our fantasies, it seemed to us—and rightly—that we had proceeded by unwarranted associations, by shortcuts so extraordinary that, if anyone had accused us of really believing them, we would have been ashamed. We consoled ourselves with the realization—unspoken, now, respecting the etiquette of irony—that we were parodying the logic of our Diabolicals. But during the long intervals in which each of us collected evidence to produce at the plenary meetings, and with the clear conscience of those who accumulate material for a medley of burlesques, our brains grew accustomed to connecting, connecting, connecting everything with everything else, until we did it automatically, out of habit. I believe that you can reach the point where there is no longer any difference between developing the habit of pretending to believe and developing the habit of believing. (386)

As irony loses its vigor, as it becomes merely an etiquette (and silent), the shape of believing is lost. The conspirators are neither inside nor outside the conspiracy, they neither parody nor contribute to it, for they've lost the sense of not-conspiracy. They, themselves, become part of the text of conspiracy. Like the spies in an older story, "they infiltrate the secret service of the enemy, they develop the habit of thinking like the enemy, and if they survive, it's because they've succeeded. And before long, predictably, they go over to the other side, because it has become theirs" (386).

What is worse, as Casaubon realizes in the end, there is no way of not being one of them. Alone in Belpo's apartment, reading the last of his files, waiting for them to come for him, he:

would have liked 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. They would say, he can't only have been making fun of us. No. Perhaps, without his

realizing it, Being was sending us a message through its oblivion. It makes no difference whether I write or not. They will look for other meanings, even in my silence. (533)

The last line's ambiguity—whether they will look for meaning elsewhere or will interpret Casaubon's silence as a message—suggests again an allegory of modern criticism, with its mania for interpreting silences, absences, erasures. Forced into silence, without even the dignity of being not-text, irony becomes merely another text for interpretation, as does *Foucault's Pendulum*.<sup>6</sup>

In the novel, recovering irony proves dependent upon accepting contingency. Contingency has two facets—miscellaneousness and presence—which become the focus of denial in a conspiracy. "History does not happen randomly," Aglié reminds Casaubon. "It is the work of the Masters of the World, whom nothing escapes" (174). These masters have only one secret: that there is a secret. Although Aglié may be facetious here, by the end of the novel it will be apparent that the power of conspiracy is self-sustaining. Indeed, all three editors eventually talk of the conspiracy as something they cannot escape because it accepts no eventualities. The conspiracy is suppressed in one place; it reappears in another, far removed. Its texts seem to self-generate out of the barest of outlines. Aglié himself may be the legendary charlatan of the Enlightenment, Saint-Germain, who is rumored never to have died.

The conspiracy's hyper-historicity, in which everything miscellaneous connects both across time and space, appeals to those for whom real history is largely a set of missed and missing connections. *Foucault's Pendulum* is full of missed appointments: the Templars miss their appointments with each other, Belpo and Casaubon miss their revolutions, Casaubon misses the birth of his son, and the Plan itself has its origins in a forgotten appointment with an obscure researcher. But the conspiracy holds out the promise that nothing is ever really missed, just as nothing is miscellaneous. The threads of the Plan are always there for someone, even as a joke, to pick up if he happens upon the right set of correspondences.

This denial of contingency is accompanied by a denial of the physical. The Diabolicals celebrate incorporeity, though their rituals often become associated with second-rate spiritualist and primitivist sideshows. Casaubon's Brazilian lover, Amparo, a skeptic and celebrant of the body, finds herself entranced and transported during an

African-Brazilian ritual. Embarrassed at her apparently instinctual ties to such forms of belief, she leaves him. Later, as he becomes involved in the Plan, he, too, finds himself carried away by something he doesn't believe in:

I said to myself: I'm like Amparo; I don't believe in it, yet I surrender to it. Yes, I caught myself marveling over the fact that the height of the Great Pyramid really was one-billionth of the distance between the earth and the sun, and that you really could draw striking parallels between Celtic and Amerind mythologies. And I began to question everything around me: the houses, the shop signs, the clouds in the sky, and the engravings in the library, asking them to tell me not their superficial story but another, deeper story, which they surely were hiding—but finally would reveal thanks to the principle of mystic resemblances. (300)

The parallel drawn suggests that for the European intellectual, the diabolical, though intellectualized in tangled conspiracies, stirs something in the blood. Its dances are not to the beat of drums, but to numbers and resemblances.

However, in the central section of the novel, there arises a powerful argument for the body, which comes again from Lia. Her interpretation of Ardeni's script is actually the second of her skeptical responses to the Plan. The first is her recasting of the body, the forces and tools of procreation and digestion, as a parody of numerological design, and at the end of this passage—which is the one verbal *tour de force* of the novel—she casually announces that she is pregnant.

The world of the body is the world of the contingent, its resemblances and attractors those of genetics and environment. Casaubon and Lia nickname their son "the Thing," making obvious a contrast between him, the representative of the substantial world, and the Plan, another child, but of the insubstantial world of the Diabolicals. Like the Templars in the Plan, Casaubon has missed his appointment, missed the birth. While he was lost in his numerological reveries, Lia "had to count all by [herself]." But still there is the Thing, and "I, too, had made him, and not with chunks of dead bodies or arsenic soap. He was whole, all his fingers and toes were in the right place" (371).

At the end of the novel, it is again images of physicality joined with contingency that are pitted—quite literally—against the Plan: a ripe peach, whose pit comes out "almost whole, as clean as if it had been

chemically treated, except for an occasional bit of pulp, white, tiny, clinging there like a worm." The imagery is very detailed for a reason. Here, the center of things, the pit, is both the seed and the waste; it emerges cleanly, almost as if chemically treated (a reference to the *Chemical Wedding of Christian Rosencreutz*), but not quite. Bits of the pulp (does this pun play in Italian too?) stick to it. The peach trees are surrounded by "rows and rows of vines," and "no doctrine of numbers can say if they are in ascending or descending order."

Even at this final moment of recognition, when the taste of the peach thrills him to the groin, Casaubon's alternative to the conspiracy is mystical, in the romantic way that sees infinity, not history, in a grain of sand. As with irony, a valid sense of contingency, of placing oneself within history, is not recovered and may be irrecoverable. And this suggests a deeper problem: the editors cannot identify themselves within history, because they cannot identify themselves with others, within communities.

Both Belpo and Casaubon feel that they've just missed out on participating in those moments of history that have given meaning and shape to their generation. Belpo was a little too young to be a member of the Resistance, missing the opportunity to display his heroism for the girls. Casaubon missed out on the uprisings of 1968. Both find that the Plan, which thrives by explaining the missed appointments of the Templars, weirdly satisfies this yearning not to have missed things. In the end, it gives Belpo the opportunity of heroic self-sacrifice that he missed in the last days of the war. Significantly, though, it is a sacrifice to silence and anonymity. He knows no secret to withhold from his torturers, except that he knows no secret. And his intended audience, the beautiful Lorenza, is drugged beyond recognizing him. Hanging by his neck from the wire of the pendulum, the symbol of the center of things, he serves as a reminder that conspiracies, unlike the defining movements of history, tend not to converge but fall into disorganization. In an Orwellian world, conspiracy collapses in mutual betrayal. The ridiculous spectacles staged by the Diabolicals, as well as Aglié's loss of control over the gathering, certainly suggest this. In its final version, the Plan suggests that the Templar's conspiracy went awry not by accident but by conspiratorial backstabbing, by a loss of the sense of community Eco seems to feel necessary among interpreters.

Like most of those who have argued for interpretative communities to restore a sense of, if not rightness, at least limit and sanity of interpretation, Eco seems unable to identify a compelling historical or

social reason for such communities. Jonathan Culler, in his response to Eco's lectures, says:

Let me add here that, whatever Umberto Eco may say, what he does in these three lectures, as well as what he has written in his novels and his works of semiotic theory, convinces me that deep down, in his hermetical soul which draws him to those who he calls the 'followers of the veil', he too believes that overinterpretation is more interesting and intellectually valuable than 'sound,' moderate interpretation. (110)

Culler goes on to note other paradoxes: those now calling for interpretative communities made their names by undermining the interpretative communities of a generation before; the community that takes an active interest in interpretation is economically dependent upon producing different, not sane, interpretations. There is no more benefit on agreeing on limits than there is for Eco's editors to publish only sane books.

To read *Foucault's Pendulum* only as a cautionary tale to critics probably strains things and is simplistic. It is, however, safe to say that the novel wells up out of anxieties about overinterpretation, and that these anxieties have turned for expression toward a tale of obsession which itself becomes obsessive. But just as in exposition Eco has never been able to forge a consensus about the limits of interpretation and the grounds of unlimited semiosis, so in narration he has not been able to form a response to his dissatisfaction with the excesses of interpretation. Lia's responses, ingenious as they are, serve only to marginalize conspiracy. They don't satisfy whatever need there is for it. Accepting them, we lose the chase, and may end up preferring overinterpretation to ordinary interpretation. Miscellaneousness and contingency may be worth accepting in real life—may do much for our historical humility—but there's no real kick in making interpretation conform to their standards of plausibility.

## Notes

1. Because he uses technology, science and mathematics as foci for his conspiracies, Pynchon seems to me the most rigorous of conspiracy novelists at distinguishing the conspiratorial from the occult. His conspiracy symbols, the V or the double trumpet, are more or less what Hitchcock referred to as a MacGuffin, a device that creates a suspicion of meaning, but which only

serves to get the plot going. It's really the excess of design that Pynchon is fascinated with. Eco is much less insistent on distinguishing occultism and conspiracy, with the result that the big displays in the book, such as the one in the museum at the end of the novel, are really displays of trashy occultism that detract from the focus on *The Plan* or the excess of design.

2. The occult interpreter would correspond more to the schizophrenic than the paranoid. Her or his various states of mind would produce sudden shifts, and hence an apparent infinitude, of meaning, which would largely replace awareness of reality. The paranoid interpreter would find multiplications of design, rather than meaning, and would keep looking for evidence of design. To use a distinction Eco brings up, the occult interpreter's actions are paradigmatic, the paranoid's syntagmatic.

3. Notice in this example that Eco, who often conflates occult and paranoid interpretation, here concentrates on the paranoid, for it is a matter of what design brought "while" and "crocodile" together, not what affinities of meaning they might have, given their rhyme.

4. Eco has always regarded fiction as a pretext for displaying and playing with his learning, and in this way, it is essayistic. Ironically, the formal essay, particularly in its academic form, provides little opportunity for rummaging with arcanity. Just as Eco's characters can't figure out exactly what to write about the conspiracy they're participating in, unless it is to write a conspiracy, so Eco can't seem to find an expression for his rummaging except in a fiction about rummaging.

5. In his response to Eco, Rorty writes, "I had hoped that my interpretation of *Foucault's Pendulum*—my reading of it as what Daniel Dennet calls 'a cure for the common code'—might be confirmed, despite the disconfirmation I had found in 'Intentio lectoris.' " (98)

6. Elsewhere, Eco has said, "To all of these (ways of reading *Name of the Rose*) the 'author' refuses to reveal . . . what the book means. If he had wanted to advance a thesis, he would have written an essay (like so many others he has written). If he has written a novel, it is because he has discovered, upon reaching maturity, that those things which we cannot theorize about, we must narrate" (Collini 8). Such deference, which seems normal enough in the present climate, seems odd coming from one interested in limits of interpretation and interpretative communities. Later, in discussions of offbeat interpretations of *Foucault's Pendulum*, Eco seems confused—though charmingly so—about what authority of interpretation he retains over the text, and I suspect that one reason for Eco's fondness for the arcane as subject matter is that it allows him a certain authority over his own material due to his scholarly expertise—an authority he would not be necessarily granted on the basis of authorship alone.

7. In their version of the birthing technique, the coach is supposed to count to time the contractions. With all the numerology in the book, this counting becomes a sort of reckoning with real numbers.

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