
Book Review

A tale of Benedictine monks, liturgy, and ritualistic murder. . .

by G. Allen Douglas and Pietro Cicconi

The Name of the Rose

by Umberto Eco

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During 1983 and 1984, *The Name of the Rose*, a detective novel about a murder in a 14th century Benedictine Abbey, topped fiction best-seller lists worldwide. Without a massive public relations hype, this turgid chronicle would have gone nowhere. However, it is the story behind the story which is truly interesting.

While the fiction described its own series of brutal ritualistic murders, in real life another series of four bizarre murders have taken place among the students and faculty of the institute at the University of Bologna headed by the book's author, Umberto Eco. In each instance the corpse, invariably a homosexual weighing over 200 pounds, has been tattooed with 47 little knife wounds and a plastic rose left on the body. Given this symbolism, it is relevant that Eco is a prominent board member of a recently formed Italian "cultural" magazine, *FMR*, which, besides its overt promotion of sodomy, drugs, and other perversions, has as its chief symbol, a rose.

As to why he wrote his novel, Eco says, "I felt like murdering a monk."

Known internationally as a leading theoretician in the field of semiotics—the study of the structure of language and the use of signs, symbols, etc., to convey meaning—Eco's theoretical work has a very practical application. Like semiotics specialist and linguist Noam Chomsky of MIT, the main application is in the field of artificial intelligence. Since creative intelligence cannot be replicated by machine, artificial intelligence means recreating the formal logical worldview of a paranoid schizophrenic, usually by computer, whose most immediate application has been, and is, brainwashing.

Eco first became famous around 1963 as one of the founders of Gruppo 63, a circle of intellectuals specializing in the "culture of revolution," one of whom, Nanni Balestrini, is currently wanted for terrorism. During several years of preparatory work for the student upsurges of 1968, Eco played a

major role in forming the leftist Situationist gang whose slogan was, "God is dead—now we must free ourselves of the pieces of his stinking body." Backed by powerful oligarchical patrons, reportedly including the Princess Pallavicini, a major benefactress of the University of Bologna, Eco was given an entire faculty, the Department for Art, Music, and Spectacle (DAMS). DAMS rapidly produced the entire "creative wing of the [leftist] movement" which led in 1977 to days of bloody battles with the police and the death of one student.

The plot of the novel

The Name of the Rose is situated in a wealthy Benedictine Abbey in northern Italy in the third decade of the 14th century, containing the most extensive library in Christendom whose use is strictly circumscribed by the rule of the abbot and the labyrinthine design of the tower housing the library. The library guards a great secret, and one after another, many monks die in the attempt to discover it. Following the first homicide, the Abbot entrusts, within limits, the visiting English Franciscan, William of Baskerville, with the necessary investigations. The latter sets to work with the aid of his assistant, a young German Benedictine named Adso, who on his death-bed decades later, records the story for posterity.

William engages in a fierce battle with his antagonist who, unknown to him, is the old blind monk who is the moral and intellectual authority of the abbey. Against the "faith" of the old monk, Eco arms William with Sherlock Holmes-style inductive "reason." However, where the British intelligence specialist and devout spiritualist Conan Doyle had his character solve cases by dint of drug usage and a supernatural, computer-style memory, Eco has William discover the murderer entirely by chance, in spite of his Holmes-like reasoning powers. The discovery itself comes as a bitter failure since the abbey, library and all, is going up in flames.

The message is direct: Since the actual universe is unknowable to man, the procedures of thought which man may employ to attempt to discover its lawfulness are impotent (indeed, the formal method of hypothesis Eco gives William is impotent). The book itself becomes like the library—a

labyrinthine nightmare in which the further the reader proceeds, the more disoriented and demoralized he becomes, a fact which Eco gleefully notes in his sequel, "How I Wrote The Name of the Rose."

Into this abyss, all situated in theological terms for maximum psychological effect, Eco introduces his trump card: the ontological paradox. God cannot possibly be both omniscient and omnipotent, since one excludes the other. If God is all-seeing and sees his acts until the end of time, he can not act differently than what he sees and is therefore impotent. And if he is free to act at any point in any way he chooses, how could that have been foreseen ahead of time? The apparent paradox is a result of formal-logical reasoning in a static universe, but on it, Eco bases his and his Situationists' triumphant conclusion: God is dead, i.e., there is no lawful ordering principle of ongoing Creation. Any apparent ordering (such as William's logical attempts to solve the murder) will be revealed to be just that—apparent. Chaos, like the terrorists Eco spawned, will reign.

The Benedictines: liturgical terrorism

The book's propaganda for a New Dark Age and an irrationalist outlook is clear enough. But the deeper evil of both the novel and Eco's own personal deployments cannot be understood without appreciating his choice of a Benedictine abbey as the novel's setting. The Benedictines, with roots in the sixth century and before, are the self-appointed cultural masters of the Church, and indirectly, of its Protestant church split-offs. While other orders, such as the Dominicans and Jesuits, were spun off by the Benedictines for specific purposes and carry out a rather high-profile activity in the world, the more sedentary Benedictines attempt to steer the long-wave cultural processes determining the outlook and beliefs of the Church as a whole.

Their chief tool for this purpose is the liturgy, that is, the public worship of the church, including the sacraments (marriage, baptism, etc.), the music and poetry of the Mass, to the architecture of the individual church itself. From the Judeo-Christian standpoint, as in the codification of liturgy under Charlemagne's great advisor Alcuin, or Europe's great cathedrals, this can be a profoundly important statement of man's place and duty in the universe in continuing the work of Creation. In the hands of the Benedictines, representing the ancient Gnostic heresies of the East, mediated through the most fanatical Desert Fathers of third- and fourth-century Egypt, it becomes an instrument of profound evil.

As a theoretician of Vatican II, organized by Venetian-run Pope John XXIII to produce the first major changes in liturgy since Charlemagne, put the point: "During Hitler's regime, his equally evil genius Josef Goebbels applied the term [liturgy] to Nazi functions when millions of men stood at attention in the enormous stadium near Nuremberg while Goebbels limped side by side with Hitler through the silent crowds of his followers to an enormous altar-like contraption

at the head of it; Goebbels once referred to the activities as a liturgy in which Hitler was the pontifex. . . ." Or, in the words of another apologist for the Benedictines' "liturgical revolution" of the past two decades, "One is astounded at the sound liturgical sense revealed in modern secular cults—from Comte to Mussolini, Hitler, and Stalin. New symbols are imposed—gestures, vestments, slogans, insignias, uniforms, mass meetings; heroes and saints. . . ."

There is much more here than "sound liturgical sense." Hitler spent crucial formative years at the Benedictine Abbey of Lambach, which, for decades before the Nazis, sported the Buddhist cross—i.e., the swastika. Hitler, referring often to these early years, was explicit, "He who thinks National Socialism is a movement is sadly mistaken; it is a religion." Since the Benedictines are committed to a Gnostic, evil version of Christianity, it is not surprising to see them allied also to the current Russian imperial drive, fueled by the dreams of the Russian Orthodox Church of Moscow becoming the Third and Final Rome. Not only are they crucial leaders of the nuclear-freeze campaign in the West, but throughout the 20th century, numbers of key Benedictines "converted" to Russian Orthodoxy and became prelates serving as representatives in Western Europe of the Russian church branches loyal to the Moscow Patriarchate. Nor is it surprising that many of the Benedictines' liturgical changes designed to facilitate the "reunion" of Eastern and Western churches, are proposed from the world outlook of the Eastern liturgy.

Eco of the Benedictines

Eco is, remember, a semiotics specialist, one who is expert in the manipulation of symbols, emotion-laden signs, slogans, etc. His consciousness of his own place in the 1,500-year history of Benedictine liturgical cult-creation is signaled in several unmistakable ways.

First, the book's title, *The Name of the Rose*, is taken from a 12th-century Benedictine poem, "Contempt of the World," a fitting expression of Eco's own attitude. Second, all activity in the book takes place within the context of the hours of the Divine Office, the liturgical division of the day into the hours of terce, sext, none, etc., at each of which there is a celebration of the liturgy in common. Third, and most important, in the foreword to the book, in a Latin passage aimed at awing the average reader, Eco refers to two of the crucial figures in Benedictine liturgical studies, Dom Mabillon of the 17th-century Maurist Benedictine order which sponsored the Jansenist heresy, and Cardinal Giovanni Bona, the initiator of post-Renaissance liturgical studies. As Eco undoubtedly knows, smiling a sly, evil smile to himself, Bona was sponsored by Cardinal Sforza Pallavicini, ancestor of the Princess Pallavicini who reportedly sponsors Eco himself. He knows his roots only too well, and knows that he stands, with his fellow monks, committed to lighting the fires he hopes will consume the beauty and heritage of Judeo-Christian civilization.