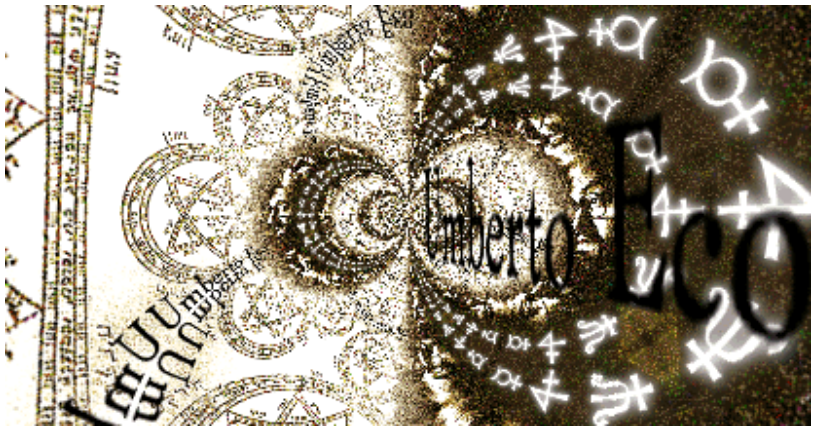

The Author and his Interpreters

By Umberto Eco

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I think that a narrator, as well as a poet, should never provide interpretations of his own work. A text is a machine conceived for eliciting interpretations. When one has a text to question, it is irrelevant to ask the author.

In 1962 I wrote my *The Open Work* (Cambridge, Harvard U.P., 1989). In that book I was advocating the active role of the interpreter in the reading of texts endowed with aesthetic value. When those pages were written, my readers mainly focused the 'open' side of the whole business, underestimating the fact that the open-ended reading I was supporting was an activity elicited by (and aiming at interpreting) a work. In other words, I was studying the dialectics between the rights of texts and the rights of their interpreters. I have the impression that, in the course of the last decades, the rights of the interpreters have been overstressed.

In various of my writings I elaborated upon the Peircean idea of unlimited semiosis. But the notion of unlimited semiosis does not lead to the conclusion that interpretation has no criteria. First of all unlimited interpretation concerns systems not processes. A linguistic system is a device from which and by using which infinite linguistic strings can be produced. If we look in a dictionary for the meaning of a term we find definitions and synonyms, that is, other words, and we can go to see what these words mean, so that from their definition we can switch to other words -- and so on potentially ad infinitum. A dictionary is, as Joyce said

words -- and so on potentially ad infinitum. A dictionary is, as Joyce said of *Finnegans Wake*, a book written for an ideal reader affected by an ideal insomnia.

But a text, in so far as it is the result of the manipulation of the possibilities of a system, it is not open in the same way. In the process of producing a text one reduces the range of possible linguistic items. If one writes "John is eating a..." there are strong possibilities that the following word will be a noun, and that this noun cannot be staircase (even though, in certain contexts, it could be sword). By reducing the possibility of producing infinite strings, a text also reduces the possibility of trying certain interpretations.

To say that the interpretations of a text are potentially unlimited does not mean that interpretation has no object. To say that a text has potentially no end, does not mean that every act of interpretation can have a happy end. I have proposed a sort of Popper-like criterion of falsification by which, if it is difficult to decide if a given interpretation is a good one, and which one is better between two different interpretations of the same text, it is always possible to recognize when a given interpretation is blatantly wrong, crazy, farfetched.

Some contemporary theories of criticism assert that the only reliable reading of a text is a misreading, that the only existence of a text is given by the chains of the responses it elicits and that a text is only a picnic where the authors brings the words and the readers the sense. Even if that was true, the words brought by the author are a rather embarrassing bunch of material evidences that the reader cannot pass over in silence, or in noise.

In my book *The Limits of Interpretation* I distinguish between the intention of the author, the intention of the reader and the intention of the text.

A text is a device conceived in order to produce its Model Reader. This Reader is not the one who makes the 'only/ right' conjecture. A text can foresee a Model Reader entitled to try infinite conjectures.

How to prove a conjecture about the intention of a text? The only way is to check it upon the text as a coherent whole. This idea, too, is an old one and comes from Augustine (*De doctrina christiana*): any interpretation given of a certain portion of a text can be accepted if it is confirmed and must be rejected if it is challenged by another portion of the same text. In this sense the internal textual coherence controls the otherwise uncontrollable drives of the reader.

When a text is put in the bottle -- and this happens not only with poetry or narrative but also with the *Critique of the Pure Reason* -- that is, when a text is produced not for a single addressee but for a community of readers, the author knows that he/she will be interpreted not according to his/her intentions but according to a complex strategy of interactions which also involves the readers, along with their competence of language as a social treasury. I mean by social treasury not only a given language as a set of grammatical rules, but also the whole encyclopedia that the performances of that language have implemented, namely, the cultural conventions that that language has produced and the very history of the previous interpretations of many texts, comprehending the text that the reader is in the course of reading.

Thus every act of reading is a difficult transaction between the

competence of the reader (the reader's world knowledge) and the kind of competence that a given texts postulates in order to be read in an economic way.

The Model Reader of a story is not the Empirical Reader. The empirical reader is you, me, anyone, when we read a text. Empirical readers can read in many ways, and there is no law which tells them how to read, because they often use the text as a container for their own passions, which may come from outside the text, or which the text may arouse by chance.

Let me quote some funny situations in which one of my readers has acted as an empirical and not as a Model reader.

In Chapter 115 of my *Foucault's Pendulum* the character called Casaubon, on the night of the 23rd to the 24th of June 1984, having been at a occultist ceremony in the Conservatoire des Arts et Metiers in Paris, walks, as if possessed, along the entire length of rue Saint-Martin, crosses Rue aux Ours, arrives at Centre Beaubourg and then at Saint-Merry Church. Afterwards carries on along various streets, all of them named, until he gets to Place des Vosges. I have to tell you that in order to write this chapter I had followed the same route for several nights, carrying a tape recorder, taking notes on what I could see and the impressions I had.

Indeed, since I have a computer program which can show me what the sky looks like at any time in any year, at whatever longitude or latitude, I had even gone so far as to find out if there had been a moon that night, and in what position it could have been seen at various times. I hadn't done this because I wanted to emulate Emile Zola's realism, but I like to have the scene I'm writing about in front of me while I narrate: it makes me more familiar with what's happening and helps me to get inside the characters.

After publishing the novel I received a letter from a man who had evidently gone to the Biblioteque Nationale to read all the newspapers of June 24, 1984. And he had discovered that on the corner of Rue Réaumur, that I hadn't actually named but which does cross Rue Saint-Martin at a certain point, after midnight, more or less at the time when Casaubon passed by there, there had been a fire, and a big fire at that, if the papers had talked about it. The reader asked me how Casaubon had managed not to see it.

I answered that Casaubon had probably seen the fire, but he hadn't mentioned it for some mysterious reason, unknown to me, pretty likely in a story so thick with mysteries both true and false. I think that my reader is still trying to find out why Casaubon kept quiet about the fire, probably suspecting of another conspiracy by the Knights Templars.

There are certain rules of the game, and the Model Reader is someone eager to play such a game. That reader forgot the rule of the game and superimposed his own expectations as empirical reader on the expectations that the author wanted from a model reader.

Now let me tell you another story concerning the same night. Two students from the Parisian Ecole des Beaux Arts recently came to show me a photograph album in which they had reconstructed the entire route taken by my character, having gone and photographed the places I had mentioned, one by one, at the same time of night. Given that at the end of the chapter Casaubon comes up out of the city drains and enters through the cellar an oriental bar full of sweating customers, beer-jugs and greasy spits, they succeeded in finding that bar and took a photo of it. It goes

without saying that that bar was an invention of mine, even though I have designed it thinking of the many bars of that kind in the area, but those two boys had undoubtedly discovered the bar described in my book. It's not that those students had superimposed on their duty as model readers the concerns of the empirical reader who wants to check if my novel describes the real Paris. On the contrary, they wanted to transform the "real" Paris into a place in my book, and in fact, of all that they could have found in Paris, they chose only those aspects that corresponded to my descriptions -- or, better, to the descriptions provided by my text.

In this dialectics between the intention of the reader and the intention of the text, the intention of the empirical author becomes rather irrelevant. We have to respect the text, not the author as a person so and so. Frequently authors say something of which they were not aware and discover to have said that only after the reactions of their readers.

There is however a case in which it can be interesting to resort to the intention of the empirical author. There are cases in which the author is still living, the critics have given their interpretations of his text, and it can be nice to ask the author how much and to what an extent he, as an empirical person, was aware of the manifold interpretations his text supported. At this point the response of the author must not be used in order to validate the interpretations of his text, but to show the discrepancies between the author's intention and the intention of the text. The aim of the experiment is not a critical one, but rather a theoretical one.

There can be, finally, a case in which the author is also a text theorist. In this case it would be possible to get from him two different sorts of reaction. I certain cases he can say "No, I did not mean this, but I must agree that the text says it, and I thank the reader that made me aware of it." Or: "Independently of the fact that I did not mean this, I think that a reasonable reader should not accept such an interpretation, because it sounds uneconomic".

A typical case where the author must surrender in face of the reader is the one I told about in my *Reflections on The Name of the Rose*. As I read the reviews of the novel, I felt a thrill of satisfaction when I found a critic who quoted a remark of William's made at the end of the trial: (page 385 in the English-language edition). "What terrifies you most in purity?" Adso asks. And William answers: "Haste." I loved, and still love, these two lines very much. But then one of my readers pointed out to me that on the same page, Bernard Gui, threatening the cellarer with torture, says: "Justice is not inspired by haste, as the Pseudo Apostles believe, and the justice of God has centuries at its disposal." And the reader rightly asked me what connection I had meant to establish between the haste feared by William and the absence of haste extolled by Bernard. I was unable to answer. As a matter of fact the exchange between Adso and William does not exist in the manuscript, I added this brief dialogue in the galleys, for reasons of concinnity: I needed to insert another scansion before giving Bernard the floor again. And I completely forgot that, a little later, Bernard speaks of haste. Bernard's speech uses a stereotyped expression, the sort of thing we would expect from a judge, a commonplace on the order of "All are equal before the law." Alas, when juxtaposed with the haste mentioned by William, the haste mentioned by Bernard literally creates an effect of sense; and the reader is justified in wondering if the two men are saying the same thing, or if the loathing of haste expressed by

two men are saying the same thing, or if the loathing of haste expressed by William is not imperceptibly different from the loathing of haste expressed by Bernard. The text is there, and produces its own effects. Whether I wanted it this way or not, we are now faced with a question, an ambiguous provocation; and I myself feel embarrassment in interpreting this conflict, though I realize a meaning lurks there (perhaps many meanings do).

Now, let me tell of an opposite case.

[Helena Costiucovich before translating into Russian (masterfully) *The Name of the Rose*, wrote a long essay on it.]

At a given point she remarks that there exists a book by Emile Henriot (*La rose de Bratislava*, 1946) where it can be found the hunting of a mysterious manuscript and a final fire of a library. The story takes place in Prague, and at the beginning of my novel I mention Prague. Moreover one of my librarians is named Berengar and one of the librarians of Henriot was named Berngard Marre.

It is perfectly useless to say that, as an empirical author, I had never read Henriot's novel and that I ignored that it existed. I have read interpretations in which my critics found out sources of which I was fully aware, and I was very happy that they so cunningly discovered what I so cunningly concealed in order to lead them to find it (for instance the model of the couple Serenus Zeitblom Adrian in Mann's *Doktor Faustus* for the narrative relationship Adso-William). I have read of sources totally unknown to me, and I was delighted that somebody believed that I was eruditely quoting them (recently a young medievalist told me that a blind librarian was mentioned by Cassiodorus). I have read critical analyses in which the interpreter discovered influences of which I was unaware when writing but I certainly had read those books in my youth and I understood that I was unconsciously influenced by them (my friend Giorgio Celli said that among my remote readings there should have been the novels of

Dmitri Mereskovskij, and I recognized that he was true).

As an uncommitted reader of *The Name of the Rose* I think that the argument of Helena Costiucovich is not proving anything interesting. The research of a mysterious manuscript and the fire of a library are very common literary topoi and I could quote many other books which use them. Prague was mentioned at the beginning of the story, but if instead of Prague I mentioned Budapest it would have been the same. Prague does not play a crucial role in my story. By the way, when the novel was translated in some eastern country (long before the perestrojka) some translators called me and said that it was difficult to mention, just at the opening of the book, the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia. I answered that that I did not approve any change of my text and that if there was some censure the responsibility was of the publisher. Then, as a joke, I added: "I put Prague at the beginning because it is one among my magic cities. But I also like Dublin. Put Dublin instead of Prague. It does not make any difference." They reacted: "But Dublin was not invaded by Russians!" I answered: "It is not my fault."

Finally, Berengar and Berngard can be a coincidence. In any case the Model Reader can agree that four coincidences (manuscript, fire, Prague and Berengar) are interesting and as an empirical author I have no right to react. O.K.: to put a good face upon this accident , I formally acknowledge that my text had the intention to pay homage to Emily Henries.

However, Helena Costiucovich wrote something more to prove the

analogy between me and Henriot. She said that that in Henriot's novel the coveted manuscript was the original copy of the *Memorie of Casanova*. It happens that in my novel there is a minor character called Hugh of Newcastle (and in the Italian version, Ugo di Novocastro). The conclusion of Costiucovich is that "only by passing from a name to another it is possible to conceive of the name of the rose".

As an empirical author I could say that Hugh of Newcastle is not an invention of mine but a historical figure, mentioned in the medieval sources I used; the episode of the meeting between the Franciscan legation and the Papal representatives literally quotes a medieval chronicle of the XIV century. But the reader has not the duty to know that, and my reaction cannot be taken into account. However I think to have the right to state my opinion as an uncommitted reader. First of all Newcastle is not a translation of Casanova, which should be translated as New House, and a castle is not a house (besides, in Italian, or in Latin, Novocastro means New City or New Encampment). Thus Newcastle suggests Casanova in the same way it could suggest Newton. But there are other elements that can textually prove that the hypothesis of Costiucovich is uneconomic. First of all, Hugh of Newcastle shows up in the novel, playing a very marginal role, and has nothing to do with the library. If the text wanted to suggest a pertinent relationship between Hugh and the library (as well as between him and the manuscript) it should have said something more. But the text does not say a word about that. Secondly, Casanova was -- at least on the light of a common shared encyclopedic knowledge -- a professional lover and a rake, and there is nothing in the novel which casts in doubt the virtue of Hugh. Third, there is no evident connection between a manuscript of Casanova and a manuscript of Aristotle and there is nothing in the novel which alludes to sexual incontinence as a value to be pursued. To look for the Casanova connection does not lead anywhere.

(Obviously, I am ready to change my mind if some other interpreter demonstrates that the Casanova connection can lead to some interesting interpretive path, but for the moment being -- as a Model Reader of my own novel -- I feel entitle to say that such a hypotheses is scarcely rewarding.)

Once during a debate a reader asked me what I meant by the sentence "the supreme happiness lies in having what you have". I felt disconcerted and I sweared that I had never written that sentence. I was sure of it, and for many reasons: first, I do not think that happiness lies in having what one has, and not even Snoopy would subscribe such a triviality. Secondly it is improbable that a medieval character would suppose that happiness lied in having what he actually had, since happiness for the medieval mind was a future state to be reached through present suffering. Thus I repeated that I had never written that line, and my interlocutor looked at me as at an author unable to recognize what he had written.

Later I came across that quotation. It appears during the description of the erotic ecstasy of Adso in the kitchen. This episode, as the dullest of my readers can easily guess, is entirely made up with quotations from the Song of Songs and from medieval mystics. In any case, even though the reader does not find out the sources, he/she can guess that these pages depict the feelings of a young man after his first (and probably last) sexual experience. If one goes to re-read the line in its context (I mean the context of my text, not necessarily the context of its medieval sources)

context of my text, not necessarily the context of its medieval sources), one finds that the line reads: "O lord, when the soul is transported, the only virtue lies in having what you see, the supreme happiness is having what you have." Thus happiness lies in having what you have, but not in general and in every moment of your life, but only in the moment of the ecstatic vision. This is the case in which is unnecessary to know the intention of the empirical author: the intention of the text is blatant and, if English words have a conventional meaning, the text does not say what that reader -- obeying to some idiosyncratic drives -- believed to have read. Between the unattainable intention of the author and the arguable intention of the reader there is the transparent intention of the text which disproves an untenable interpretation.

An author who has entitled his book *The Name of the Rose* must be ready to face manifold interpretations of his title. As an empirical author (*Reflections*, p.3) I wrote that I chose that title just in order to set the reader free: "the rose is a figure so rich in meanings that by now it has any meaning left: Dante's mystic rose, and go lovely rose, the Wars of the Roses, rose thou art sick, too many rings around Rosie, a rose by any other name, a rose is a rose is a rose is a rose, the Rosicrucians..." Moreover someone has discovered that some early manuscripts of De Contemptu

Mundi of Bernard de Morlay, from which I borrowed the exameter "stat rosa pristina nomine, nomina nuda tenemus", read "stat Roma pristina nomine" -- which after all is more coherent with the rest of the poem, which speaks of the lost Babylon. Thus the title of my novel, had I come across another version of Morlay's poem, could have been *The Name of Rome* (thus acquiring fascist overtones).

But the text reads *The Name of the Rose* and I understand now how difficult it was to stop the infinite series of connotations that word elicits. Probably I wanted to open the possible readings so much as to make each of them irrelevant, and a result I have produced an inexorable series of interpretations. But the text is there, and the empirical author has to remain silent.

There are however (once again) cases in which the empirical author has the right to react as a Model Reader.

I have enjoyed the beautiful book by Robert F. Fleissner, *A Rose by Any Other Name - A survey of literary flora from Shakespeare to Eco* (West Cornwall, Locust Hill Press, 1989) and I hope that Shakespeare would have been proud to find his name associated with mine. Among the various connections that Fleissner finds between my rose and all the other roses of world literature there an interesting passage: Fleissner wants to show "how Eco's rose derived from Doyle's "The Adventure of the Naval Treaty," which, in turn, owed much to Cuff's admiration of this flower in *The Moonstone*" (p.139).

I am positively a Wilkie Collins' addict but I do not remember (and certainly I did not when writing my novel) of Cuff's floral passion. I believed to have read the opera omnia of Doyle but I must confess that I do not remember to have read "The Adventure of the Naval Treaty." It does not matter: in my novel there are so many explicit references to Holmes that my text can support also this connection. But in spite of my open mindedness, I find an instance of overinterpretation when Fleissner, trying to demonstrate how much my William 'echoes' Holmes' admiration for roses, quotes this passage from my book:

> "Frangula," William said suddenly, bending over to observe a plant that, on that winter day, he recognized from the bare bush. "A good infusion is made from the bark..."

It is curious that Fleissner stops his quotation exactly after bark. My text continues, and after a comma reads: "for hemorrhoids." Honestly, I think that the Model Reader is not invited to take frangula as an allusion to the rose -- otherwise every plant could stand for a rose.

Let me come now to the *Foucault's Pendulum*. I called Casaubon one the main character of my *Foucault's Pendulu*m, and I was thinking of Isaac Casaubon, who demonstrated that the Corpus Hermeticum was a forgery, and if one reads *Foucault's Pendulum* one can find some analogy between what the great philologist understood and what my character finally understands. I was aware that few readers would have been able to

catch the allusion but I was equally aware that, in term of textual strategy, this was not indispensable (I mean that one can read my novel and understand my Causaubon even though disregarding the historical Casaubon -- many author like to put in their texts certain shibboleths for few smart readers). Before finishing my novel I discovered by chance that Casaubon was also a character of *Middlemarch*, a book that I read decades ago and which does not rank among my *livres de chevet*. That was a case in which, as a Model Author, I made an effort in order to eliminate a possible reference to George Eliot. At p. 63 of the English translation can be read the following exchange between Belbo and Casaubon:

> "By the way, what's your name?"
> "Casaubon."
> "Casaubon. Wasn't he a character in Middlemarch?"
> "I don't know. There was also a Renaissance philologist by that name, but we are not related."

I did my best to avoid what I thought to be a useless reference to Mary Ann Evans. But then came a smart reader, David Robey, who remarked that, evidently not by chance, Eliot's Casaubon was writing a Key to all mythologies. As a Model Reader I feel obliged to accept that innuendo. Text plus encyclopedic knowledge entitle any cultivated reader to find that connection. It makes sense. Too bad for the empirical author who was not as smart as his readers. In the same vein my last novel is entitled *Foucault's Pendulum* because the pendulum I am speaking of was invented by Léon Foucault. If it were invented by Franklin the title would have been Franklin's Pendulum. This time I was aware from the very beginning that somebody could have smelled an allusion to Michel Foucault: my characters are obsessed by analogies and Foucault wrote on the paradigm of similarity. As an empirical author I was not so happy of such a possible connection. It sounds as a joke and not a clever one, indeed. But the pendulum invented by Léon was the hero of my story and could not change the title: thus I hoped that my Model Reader would not have tried a superficial connection with Michel. I was wrong, many smart readers did it. The text is there, maybe they are right, maybe I am responsible for a superficial joke, maybe the joke is not that superficial. I do not know. The whole affair is by now out of my control.

Giosue Musca wrote a critical analysis of my last novel that I consider among the best I read. From the beginning he confesses however to have been corrupted by the habit of my characters and goes fishing for analogies. He masterfully isolates many ultraviolet quotations and stylistic analogies I wanted to be discovered, he finds other connections I did not think of but that look very persuasive, and he plays the role of a paranoiac reader by finding out connections that amaze me but that I am unable to disprove -- even though I know that they can mislead the reader. For instance it seems that the name of the computer, Abulafia, plus the name of the three main characters, Belbo, Casaubon and Diotallevi, produces the

series ABCD. Useless to say that until the end of my work I gave the computer a different name: my readers can object that I unconsciously changed it just in order to obtain an alphabetic series. It seems that Jacopo Belbo is fond of whisky and his initials make JB. Useless to say that until the end of my work his first name was Stefano and that I changed it into Jacopo at the last moment.

The only objection I can make as a Model Reader of my book is that (i) the alphabetical series ABCD is textually irrelevant if the names of the other characters do not bring it until X,Y and Z, that (ii) Belbo also drinks Martini and furthermore his mild alcoholic addiction is not the most relevant of his features. On the contrary I cannot disprove my reader when he also remarks that Pavese was born in a village called Santo Stefano Belbo and that my Belbo, a melancholic piedmontese, can recall Pavese. It is true that I spent my youth on the banks of the river Belbo (where I underwent some of the ordeals that I attributed to Jacopo Belbo, and a long time before I was informed of the existence of Cesare Pavese). But I knew that by choosing the name Belbo my text would have in some way evoked Pavese. And it is true that by designing my piedmontese character I also thought of Pavese. Thus my Model Reader is entitled to find such a connection.

I can only confess (as an empirical author, and as I said before) that in a first version the name of my character was Stefano Belbo. Then I changed it into Jacopo, because -- as a Model Author -- I did not want that my text made such a connection so blatantly perceptible. Evidently this was not enough, but my readers are right. Probably they would be right even though I called Belbo by any other name.

I could keep going with examples of this sort, and I have chose only those that were more immediately comprehensible. I skipped other more complex cases because I risked to engage too much myself upon matters of philosophical or aesthetical interpretation. I hope my listeners will agree that I have introduced the empirical author in this game only in order to stress his irrelevance and to re-assert the rights of the text.

Let me now to mention some cases in which the reader can help the author to write another book, or in any case to understand better the way he/she writes. The first movie director who asked me to make a film out of *The Name of the Rose* was my friend Marco Ferreri. Among other nice things he said: "Moreover, I don't even need to rewrite the dialogues, because they look as if they were designed for a movie". I felt astonished, and a little upset, because certainly I didn't write thinking for a movie script. But suddenly I realized tyhat while writing I had under my eyes the map of the abbey (as a matter of fact before writing I carefully design the world where my story has to take place) and obviously, if two characters

world where my story has to take place) and obviously, if two characters were crossing the abbey's court I made them to speak more or less the time needed to walk from one point to another. It was not as much a problem of realism as a question of rhythm control.

After *Foucault's Pendulum* a French journalist asked me how did I succeed in describing spaces so well. I felt flattered, and I repeated that perhaps that happened because I usually write by looking to a sort of visual setting that I have previously designed. But it was not enough: as a matter of fact, what does it mean to look to a spatial setting and to render it through words?

It was after that interview that I stated being concerned with the theoretical problem of hypotiposis. As you probably know hypotipoisis is the rhetorical effect by which words succeed in rendering a visual scene; unfortunately all the rhetoricians that wrote about hypothiposis, from the eniquity up to our times, provided only circular definitions -- that is, in order to answer the question they restated the question as if it was the answer. They said more or less that hypotiposis is the figure by which one creates a visual effect through words. Requested to say how does it happen, they simply repeated that this happens.

In the last years I have analyzed many literary texts in order to isolate different techniques by which a writer, using sounds, brings so to speak images under the reader's eyes, and I particularly focused my attention on the description of spaces. But at the same time I felt the blind compulsion to write a novel in which the main characters were space and light. The very reason why in my last novel, *The Island of the Day Before*, I put a shipwreck on a boat, in face of an island that he was unable to reach, is exactly that: I wanted to tell a story of spaces (and light) and in order to keep my space untouched I wanted to write a story of an insuperable distance.

That is the reason why I decided that my main character was unable to swim. There are many authors that, in order to give the reader the impression of a sort of unending space, look at it, so to speak, from the point of view of an ant. I can walk from here to there in few steps, but the same space, from the point of view of an ant, is a long and tiring way (Eliot used such a technique in *Prufrock*, by describing the streets from the point of view of the fog). Let me call this technique fractalisation of space. Thus my character, trying to swim, and making few feets at any attempt, always remained far from the island which, in some way, never approached but rather shrank back at every effort of the swimmer. If in the course of this process you keep describing the sea and the image of the coast, you provide your readers with the experience of a continuously broadening space.

At the end of my speech I feel however the impression to have been scarcely generous with the empirical author. There is at least a case in which the witness of the empirical author acquires an important function. Not so much in order to better understand his texts, but certainly in order to understand the creative process. To understand the creative process also means to understand how certain textual solutions come to being by serendipity, or as the result of unconscious mechanisms. This helps to understand the difference between the textual strategy, as a linguistic object that the Model Readers have under their eyes (so that they can go on independently of the empirical author's intentions), and the story of the

growth of that textual strategy.

Some of the examples I have made can work in this direction. Let me add now two other curious examples which have a privilege: they really concern only my personal life and do not have any detectable textual counterpart. They have nothing to do with the business of interpretation. They can only tell how a text, which is a machine conceived in order to elicit interpretations, sometimes grows out of a magmatic territory which has nothing -- or not yet -- to do with literature.

First story. In *Foucault's Pendulum* the young Casaubon is in love with a Brazilian girl called Amparo. Giosue Musca found, tongue-in-cheek, a connection with Ampère who studied the magnetic force between two currents. Too smart. I did not know why I chose that name: I realized that it was not a Brazilian name, so that I was pulled to write (p. 161) "I never did understand how it was that Amparo, a descendant of Dutch settlers in Recife who intermarried with Indians and Sudanese blacks -- with her Jamaican face and Parisian culture -- had wound up with a Spanish name." This means that I took the name Amparo as if it came from outside my novel.

Months after the publication of the novel a friend asked me: "Why Amparo? Is it not the name of a mountain, or of a girl who looks at a mountain?" And then he explained: "There is that song, Guajira Guantanamera, which mentions something like Amparo."

Oh my God. I knew very well that song, even though I did not remember a single word of it. It was sung, in the mid fifties, by a girl with which I was in love at that time. She was Latin American, and very beautiful. She was not Brazilian, not Marxist, not black, not hysterical, as Amparo is, but it is clear that, when inventing a Latin American charming girl, I unconsciously thought of that other image of my youth, when I had the same age of Casaubon. I thought of that song, and in some way the name Amparo (that I had completely forgot) transmigrated from my unconscious to the page. This story is fully irrelevant for the interpretation of my text. As far as the text is concerned Amparo is Amparo is Amparo is Amparo.

Second story. In my last novel, my character Robereto has a double, Ferrante, and during his childhood he suspects that his parents did not tell him about his existence. I decided to put in my story a secret and unknown brother because the double was a sort of must, of mandatory presence in the framework of the Baroque novel. I adopted this sort of narrative standard before knowing what I could have done with such an intruding and embarassing brother, and only at the middle of the story his quasi-necessary presence encouraged me to make Roberto to invent a story within the story.

Later my sister, reading the novel, told me that I had used Rosetta. Who was Rosetta? I had forgotten her, but when my sister mentioned her I recalled the whole story. It happened that when we were children, and playing together, we invented a secret sister, Rosetta, whom our parents concealed to us for some mysterious reasons -- and we had a lot of fun tormenting our mother by asking her to tell us about Rosetta, and the poor woman was absolutely flabbergasted and did not understand what we were talking about. True. I believed to have found Ferrante in some old books while in fact I was disguising under male clothes the ghost of that girl who

obsessed my early years.

Third story. Those who have read my *Name of the Rose* know that there is a mysterious manuscript, that it contains the lost second book of Aristotle Poetics, that its pages are annointed with poison and that (at p. 570 of the paperback edition) it is described like this:

> "He read the first page aloud, then stopped, as if he were not interested in knowing more, and rapidly leafed through the following pages. But after a few pages he encountered resistance, because near the upper corner of the side edge, and along the top, some pages had stuck together, as happens when the damp and deteriorating papery substance forms a kind of sticky paste..."

I wrote these lines at the end of 1979. In the following years, perhaps also because after *The Name of the Rose* I started to be more frequently in touch with librarians and book collectors (and certainly because I had a little more money at my disposal) I became a regular rare books collector. It had happened before, in the course of my life, that I bought some old book, but by chance, and only when they were very cheap. Only in the last decade I have become a serious book collector, and 'serious' means that one has to consult specialized catalogues and must write, for every book, a technical file, with the collation, historical information on the previous or following editions, and a precise description of the physical state of the copy. This last job requires a technical jargon, in order to precisely name foxed, browned, waterstained, soiled, washed or crisp leaves, cropped margins, erasures, re-baked bindings, rubbed joints and so on.

One day, rummaging through the upper shelves of my home library I discovered an edition of the Poetics of Aristotle, commented by Antonio Riccoboni, Padova 1587. I had forgot to have it, I found on the endpaper a 1000 written in pencil, and this means that I bought it somewhere for 1000 liras, more or less 80 cents, probably twenty or more years before. My catalogues said that it was the second edition, not exceedingly rare, that there is a copy of it at the British Museum, but I was happy to have it because it seems difficult to find and in any case the commentary of Riccoboni is less known and less quoted than those, let say, of Robortello or Castelvetro.

Then I started writing my description. I copied the title page and I discovered that the edition had an Appendix "Ejusdem Ars Comica ex Aristotele". This means that Riccoboni tried to re-construct the lost second book of the Poetics. It was not however an unusual endeavor, and I went on to set up the physical description of the copy. Then it happened to me what happened to a certain Zatesky described by Lurja, who, having lost part of his brain during the war, and with part of the brain the whole of his memory and of his speaking ability, was nevertheless still able to write: thus automatically his hand wrote down all the information he was unable to think of, and step by step he reconstructed his own identity by reading what he was writing.

Likewise, I was looking coldly and technically at the book, writing my description, and suddenly I realized that I was re-writing *The Name of the Rose*. The only difference was that from page 120, when the *Ars Comica* begins, the lower and not the upper margins were severely damaged; but

all the rest was the same, the pages progressively browned and dampstained at the end stuck together, and looked as if they were ointed with a disgusting fat substance. I had in my hands, in printed form, the manuscript I described in my novel. I had had it for years and years at my reach, at home.

At a first moment I thought of an extraordinary coincidence; then I was tempted to believe in a miracle; at the end I decided that who *Es war, soll Ich werden*. I bought that book in my youth, I skimmed through it, I realized that it was exaggeratedly soiled, I put it somewhere and I forgot it. But by a sort of internal camera I photographed those pages, and for decades the image of those poisonous leaves lied in the most remote part of my soul, as in a grave, until the moment it emerged again (I do not know for which reasons) and I believed to have invented it.

These three stories have nothing to do with a possible interpretation of my novels. If they have a moral it is that the private life of the empirical authors is under a certain respect more unfathomable than their texts. At least as much unfathomable as the soul of the readers. However, between the mysterious process of textual production and the uncontrollable drift of its future readings, the text qua text still represents a confortable presence, the point to which we can stick.

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