

The Recognition of Brunellus, master-apprentice dynamics, and a new interpretation of the ending of *The Name of the Rose*

Michele Domenico Todino¹

¹ University of Salerno, Italy; mtodino@unisa.it

Abstract: This study explores the intellectual and allegorical layers in Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, focusing on two key themes: the allegorical concept of speculum in medieval thought and literature, and the interpretation of the novel's closing line. Through Eco's use of the rose as a metaphor, the study contrasts interpretations of the phrase as either a symbol of the vanishing of tangible things, leaving only names, or a reflection on the ontology of universals, thus offering a rich field of analysis for readers. The work also situates these ideas within the context of the Franciscan intellectual tradition, which influenced Eco's protagonist, William of Baskerville, and, above all, the master-apprentice dynamics.

Keywords: *The Name of the Rose*; Umberto Eco; teaching-learning process; Master-Apprentice; Empathy; Franciscanism.

1. Notice

This article contains spoilers, according to the term currently used in contemporary jargon, regarding the plot and conclusion of *The Name of the Rose* of Umberto Eco. Readers who have not yet read the book or watched the film and wish to avoid spoilers are advised to return to this article after completing their engagement with the work. The content of this article is an extended version of what was discussed at the conference and the session is available in video format on YouTube (Todino, 2024a).

2. Introduction: a position paper in dialogue with Umberto Eco's educational legacy

This work is a position paper that presents a debatable opinion on the interpretation of the ending of *The Name of the Rose*. The objective of this paper is to persuade the audience that the opinion put forward is valid and worthy of consideration. It takes a stance contrary to the documentary *La Rosa dei Nomi* by Francesco Conversano and Nene Grignaffini (1987), while aiming to align with the interview conducted with Umberto Eco for *La Domenica di Repubblica* on July 9, 2006. This position stems from the recognition that Umberto Eco was, first and foremost, an academic, who regularly interacted with students. It is important to note that Umberto Eco was a highly respected university professor at the University of Bologna. In addition to being a writer, semiologist, literary critic, medievalist, and translator, Eco was also a Professor of Semiotics at the Alma Mater Studiorum, and the founder of the



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Department of Communication Sciences and the School of Advanced Studies in Humanities. Furthermore, Eco himself was once a student and dedicated much of his work to the field of education. Notably, he is recognized for offering guidance to students, a fact that is particularly evident in his essay on how to write a thesis (Eco, 2001). This paper seeks to examine the concept of “educere,” derived from the Latin meaning “to lead out” or “to nurture,” composed of *ex-* (“out”) and *ducere* (“to lead”)¹, in order to explore the teacher-student dynamic within the works of Umberto Eco. The term “educator” naturally evokes the verb “educare,” whose etymology traces back to *educare*, the intensive form of *educere*. To educate the protagonist of *The Name of the Rose*, he placed his young assistant/student in front of the resolution of complex riddles, encouraged critical thinking, and urged him to cultivate empathy: the ability to put oneself in the shoes of others in order to understand how and why they acted in one way rather than another.

Figure 1: *La rosa dei nomi*, Documentary by Conversano e Grignaffini (1987).



3. Brunello is more than wine.

How did this idea and this paper come into being? It is appropriate to begin with a preface outlining the genesis of this work and, to some extent, the UBIQ 2024 conference. It all began in Switzerland, in a medieval monastery. From February 11 to 14, 2024, a collaborative research activity² was conducted under the coordination of Stefano Tardini (Università della Svizzera italiana), Michele Domenico Todino (University of Salerno), and Pio Alfredo Di Tore (University of Cassino and Southern Lazio). This activity took place at the Benedictine convent of San Giovanni Battista in Münstair, Built by the will of Charlemagne³, a UNESCO World Heritage site since 1983. During those days spent in the monastery amidst snow and mountains, thoughts naturally turned to *The Name of the Rose*, the masterpiece by Umberto Eco,

¹ Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana. (n.d.). Educare. In Vocabolario Treccani. <https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/educare/>

² The research focused on the digitalization of cultural heritage, with particular emphasis on the application of artificial intelligence and virtual and augmented reality learning environments to inclusive museum education

³ Legend has it that it was built at the behest of Charlemagne, and the stucco statue still preserved in the church bears witness to this. <https://www.muestair.ch/it/>

which celebrates its 44th anniversary this year (Pinna, 2024). A discussion arose among the participants, including Stefano Di Tore, who joined remotely, about the meaning of the novel's famous and enigmatic closing phrase

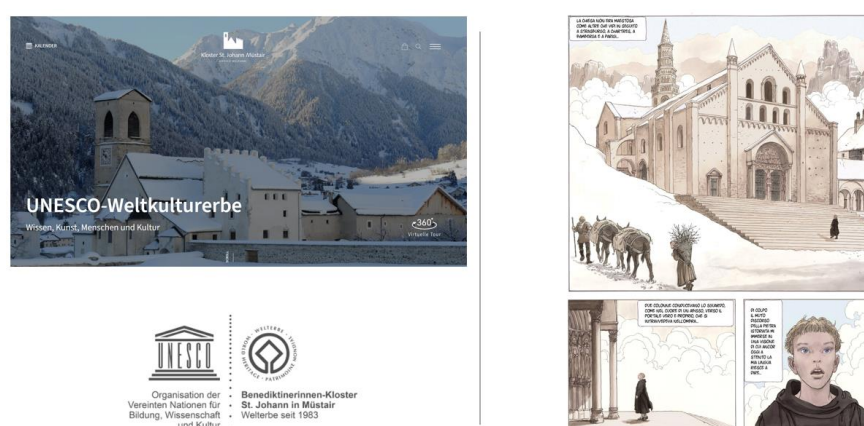
*Stat rosa pristina nomine,
nomina nuda tenemus.*

This conversation also brought to light the fact that 50 years have passed since Umberto Eco's publication of *Apocalyptic and Integrated* with Bompiani, providing inspiration for the UBIQ 2024 conference.

The result of discussions with Alfredo Di Tore and Stefano Di Tore, led me to reflect on a different way to explain the final sentence of Eco's book set in an ancient snowy monastery. From the outset, it is important to state the aim of this paper, which is to propose a distinctive, didactic, pedagogical, empathetic, and Rogersian interpretation of the novel's ending. Rogersian here means that the teacher (in the case of the book a master) will teach the alumnus to put himself in the shoes of others in order to interpret reality with greater depth and empathy (Rogers, 1951, 1961, 1973, 2012, 2018, 2019; Ariano, 1990, 2010). It is preferable to remind the reader that Carl Rogers proposed that every caring relationship whether with a patient, a student, or a child, should be based on a humanistic perspective of psychology. Such relationships foster change in the person being cared for or educated when they are built upon three essential conditions: empathy, unconditional positive regard, and congruence. Empathy, the factor that primarily concerns us here, in Rogers' framework, entails adopting the perspective of the other, understanding them "as they are", from their own point of view; to get out of an egocentric view of truth and look at things from a heterocentric point of view. This approach highlights the importance of acknowledging and validating the lived experiences and subjective realities of others. Rogers' emphasis on empathy illustrates his profound and forward-thinking contributions, particularly within the Rogerian tradition, when compared to other psycho-pedagogical theories. This perspective remains highly relevant in contemporary educational contexts, particularly in addressing the needs of individuals with Special Educational Needs (Gulliford, Upton, 1992), where the focus is on centering the educational process around their unique challenges and circumstances. In practice, empathic engagement requires several key actions. First, it is essential to have a clear and coherent understanding of one's own perspective, ensuring consistency throughout interactions (Ariano, 2010). At the same time, practitioners must immerse themselves in the subjective world of the other, seeing things from their perspective and helping them achieve greater coherence in their understanding. This process often involves sustained dialogue, which should continue until the concerns or issues at hand are fully explored and addressed. However, when dialogue is not feasible, it is preferable to adopt a compassionate and loving silence (Ibidem). In such cases, attention can be redirected to metacognitive strategies, focusing on external factors such as behavioral styles or contextual influences, rather than internal metacognitive variables of the individual (Cottini, 2017). By adhering to these principles, educators and caregivers can create supportive environments that foster personal growth and well-being, while maintaining a deep respect for the unique needs and perspectives of those they serve (Zavalloni, 1972). To substantiate this interpretative approach, that there is a relationship between Rogers' approach to the caring relationship and that

the relationship between pupil and teacher in Umberto Eco's book is a caring relationship, I have focused extensively on a specific section of the book: the "First Day" of the narrative, specifically the chapter titled Prime: 'In which the abbey is reached, and William demonstrates his great acumen'. In this segment, William and Adso, the protagonist and the co-protagonist, encounter the monks searching for Brunello (referred to as Brunellus in the English version) as we shall see later in a brief summary. This episode allowed me to formulate the hypothesis presented here. During the cold evenings in Münstair, discussions about Brunello (the horse) led to the exclamation: *"But then, Brunello is much more than a wine! It is the key to deciphering the final enigma of the phrase concluding The Name of the Rose, within the possible 'rose of names.'"*

Figure 2: On the left the Benedictine convent of San Giovanni Battista in Münstair, Switzerland, a UNESCO World Heritage site since 1983; on the right a drawing by Milo Manara depicting the monastery from Umberto Eco's novel.



To understand that rambling by associations of ideas is something that is not far removed from Umberto Eco's multifaceted idea of culture, he renowned for his appreciation of popular culture, including comics like *Dylan Dog*, consistently emphasized the pivotal role of collective imagination in shaping narrative landscapes and cultural exploration. In *The Book of Legendary Lands* (Eco, 2015), he delves into how human imagination brings mythical places to life, transforming them into tangible constructs within literature, art, and thought. This notion aligns with his interest in comics, where fantastical worlds and characters serve as mirrors reflecting universal fears, desires, and existential questions. Just for example, Eco's sympathy by Tiziano Sclavi comics highlights his recognition of narratives that blend the fantastical with profound reflections on the human love of mystery. This sensitivity is equally evident in *The Name of the Rose*, where Eco masterfully combines historical precision with an archetypal sense of mystery. The abbey and its labyrinthine library, infused with an aura of the sublime and the forbidden, Eco the imaginative power of myths like Atlantis, the biblical lands, beginning with the Garden of Eden, the eastern territories from Alexander the Great to Prester John (described by Marco Polo), the Isles of the Blessed and El Dorado, Ultima Thule and Hyperborea; the migrations of the Grail, Agartha, and many others (Eco, 2013, 2015). These spaces are not merely fictional settings but serve as symbolic arenas where philosophical and theological inquiries

unfold. Both Eco's scholarly works and his literary creations underscore the capacity of imagination to construct coherent narrative universes that transcend escapism. Comics, like the myths and legendary lands explored in his writings, fulfill a dual purpose: they entertain while simultaneously offering profound insights into the human experience. For Eco, the imaginative faculty is not merely an artistic "device" but a fundamental mechanism through which humanity interprets, organizes, and gives meaning to the world. This perspective permeates his intellectual legacy, bridging the gap between popular culture and academic inquiry into the dynamics of storytelling and the construction of symbolic meaning.

Figure 3: On the left *Storia delle terre e dei luoghi leggendari*, this text reveals Umberto Eco's fascination with the magical, not in the sense of actual sorcery, but rather his enchantment with ancient texts, legends, and myths; on the right the cover of the comic strip *Il nome della rosa* illustrated by Milo Manara.



4. A brief introduction of *The Name of the Rose*

Before proceeding, a summary of *The Name of the Rose* is warranted. The book was published in Italy in 1980, the English version in 1984. The novel is one of the most successful works in the history of Italian publishing, translated into dozens of languages, and regarded as one of the 15 most important literary works of the 20th century, with about 55 million copies sold worldwide. While it can be read as a historical detective story, the novel delves deeply into philosophical, theological, eschatological and semiotic reflections, captivating millions of readers over the decades and inspiring artists and creators across various media (Pinna, 2024). Set in 1327 AD., the story unfolds in a northern Italian abbey, where Franciscan friar William of Baskerville and his young novice Adso of Melk investigate a series of mysterious murders disrupting the monastic community. murders committed in connection with each other and with the book of Revelation of St John the Apostle (also known as Book of Apocalypse). The Apocalypse was experienced in the Middle Ages and, for

many, could occur at any moment. William, Franciscan friar and former inquisitor⁴, applies his sharp intellect and worldly knowledge to uncover hidden secrets and confront profound theological and philosophical issues. In 1986, the success of Eco's novel, already substantial, became global with the film adaptation directed by Jean-Jacques Annaud, starring Sean Connery as William and Christian Slater as Adso (Rai News, 2016). The film was a global success, marking the return to the screen of a remarkably fit Sean Connery, albeit without hair, portraying a friar inquisitor and detective with exceptionally sharp thinking and wit that kept audiences on the edge of their seats. He seeks to dismantle the apocalyptic fears that were circulating among the various brotherhoods of the medieval abbey. While the film differed from the book in some respects, it was met with skepticism by purists but significantly contributed to making *The Name of the Rose* one of the most renowned literary works of the last century, with a lasting impact on contemporary culture and literature (Pinna, 2024).

Figure 4: On the left Sacra di San Michele, that has inspired filmmakers
Source: Di Elio Pallard, CC BY-SA 4.0⁵; on the right monastery illustrated by Milo Manara.



The film by Jean-Jacques Annaud grossed \$80 million and received numerous accolades, including four David di Donatello awards. Eco himself described it as a consensual betrayal, emphasizing the necessity of creative interpretation to transition effectively from page to screen. Further extending the novel's reach, a television miniseries adaptation, *The Name of the Rose* (2019), was created and directed by Giacomo Battiato for Rai Fiction and Tele München, continuing the legacy of Eco's timeless masterpiece, the subsequent debut of the television series starring John Turturro marked another milestone, it being sold to 136 countries, ranging from France to South America, Germany, and the United States (Corriere della Sera, 2019). John Turturro gave another masterful performance that, thanks to the longer running time of the TV series, allowed this great actor to be able to recite many more brilliant

⁴ His character will be a kind of 'good' inquisitor with a high sense of criticism and mercy who will contrast himself with another inquisitor, a Dominican friar, who has another idea of inquisition. Here monlo from afar may recall a famous theme: *Uccellacci e uccellini* of 1966 written and directed by Pier Paolo Pasolini, in which the same message, the Gospel, is interpreted in a completely different way.

⁵ <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=43848367>

phrases from the book, giving the viewer a more faithful transposition of the pages of Eco's literary masterpiece.

5. "First Day - Prime. In which the foo of the abbey is reached, and Willam demonstrates his great acumen".

To fully understand the arguments presented in this text, it is necessary to read the pages of *First Day - Prime. In which the foo of the abbey is reached, and William demonstrates his great acumen*⁶. To ensure clarity for all readers, the following excerpt is provided in the version translated from the Italian by William Weaver. In the translation, pages 16 through 18 state:

"As our little mules strove up the last curve of the mountain, where the main path divided into three, producing two side paths, my master stopped for a while, to look around: at the sides of the road, at the road itself, and above the road, where, for a brief stretch, a series of evergreen pines formed a natural roof, white with snow. «A rich abbey,» he said. «The abbot likes a great display on public occasions.» Accustomed as I was to hear him make the most unusual declarations, I did not question him. This was also because, after another bit of road, we heard some noises, and at the next turn an agitated band of monks and servants appeared. One of them, seeing us, came toward us with great cordiality. «Welcome, sir,» he said, «and do not be surprised if I can guess who you are, because we have been advised of your visit. I am Remigio of Varagine, the cellarer of the monastery. And if you, as I believe, are Brother William of Baskerville, the abbot must be informed. You—»he commanded one of his party—«go up and tell them that our visitor is about to come inside the walls.» «I thank you, Brother Cellarer,» my master replied politely, «and I appreciate your courtesy all the more since, in order to greet me, you have interrupted your search. But don't worry. The horse came this way and took the path to the right. He will not get far, because he will have to stop when he reaches the dunghill. He is too intelligent to plunge down that precipitous slope. ...» «When did you see him?» the cellarer asked. «We haven't seen him at all, have we, Adso?» William said, turning toward me with an amused look. «But if you are hunting for Brunellus, the horse can only be where I have said.» The cellarer hesitated. He looked at William, then at the path, and finally asked, «Brunellus? How did you know?» «Come, come,» William said, «it is obvious you are hunting for Brunellus, the abbot's favorite horse, fifteen hands, the fastest in your stables, with a dark coat, a full tail, small round hoofs, but a very steady gait; small head, sharp ears, big eyes. He went to the right, as I said, but you should hurry, in any case.» The cellarer hesitated for a moment longer, then gestured to his men and rushed off along the path to the right, while our mules resumed their climb. My curiosity aroused, I was about to question William, but he motioned me to wait: in fact, a few minutes later we heard cries of rejoicing, and at the turn of the path, monks and servants reappeared, leading the horse by its halter. They passed by us, all glancing at us with some amazement, then preceded us toward the abbey. I believe William also slowed the pace of his mount to give them time to tell what had happened. I had already realized that my master, in every respect a man of the highest virtue, succumbed to the vice of vanity when it was a matter of demonstrating his acumen; and having learned to appreciate his gifts as a subtle diplomatist, I understood that he wanted to reach his destination preceded by a firm reputation as a man of knowledge. «And now tell me—in the end I could not restrain myself—how did you manage to know?» «My good Adso,» my master said, «during our whole journey I have been teaching you to recognize the evidence through which the world speaks to us like a great book. Alanus de Insulis said that

⁶ The titles are very long because if read all in succession they are a summary of the book and this is reminiscent of a book that came out the year before, *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore* by Italo Calvino (1979) in which the ten incipits of the text together form a frame for the reader that read in succession give a complete sense.

*omnis mundi creatura
quasi liber et pictura
nobis est in speculum*

and he was thinking of the endless array of symbols with which God, through His creatures, speaks to us of the eternal life. But the universe is even more talkative than Alanus thought, and it speaks not only of the ultimate things (which it does always in an obscure fashion) but also of closer things, and then it speaks quite clearly. I am almost embarrassed to repeat to you what you should know. At the crossroads, on the still-fresh snow, a horse's hoofprints stood out very neatly, heading for the path to our left. Neatly spaced, those marks said that the hoof was small and round, and the gallop quite regular—and so I deduced the nature of the horse, and the fact that it was not running wildly like a crazed animal. At the point where the pines formed a natural roof, some twigs had been freshly broken off at a height of five feet. One of the blackberry bushes where the animal must have turned to take the path to his right, proudly switching his handsome tail, still held some long black horsehairs in its brambles. ... You will not say, finally, that you do not know that path leads to the dungheap, because as we passed the lower curve we saw the spill of waste down the sheer cliff below the great east tower, staining the snow; and from the situation of the crossroads, the path could only lead in that direction.» «Yes,» I said, «but what about the small head, the sharp ears, the big eyes ...?» «I am not sure he has those features, but no doubt the monks firmly believe he does. As Isidore of Seville said, the beauty of a horse requires 'that the head be small, *siccum prope pelle ossibus adhaerente*, short and pointed ears, big eyes, flaring nostrils, erect neck, thick mane and tail, round and solid hoofs.' If the horse whose passing I inferred had not really been the finest of the stables, stableboys would have been out chasing him, but instead, the cellarer in person had undertaken the search. And a monk who considers a horse excellent, whatever his natural forms, can only see him as the *auctoritates* have described him, especially if—and here he smiled slyly in my direction—«the describer is a learned Benedictine.» «All right,» I said, «but why Brunellus?» «May the Holy Ghost sharpen your mind, son!» my master exclaimed. «What other name could he possibly have? Why, even the great Buridan, who is about to become rector in Paris, when he wants to use a horse in one of his logical examples, always calls it Brunellus.» This was my master's way. He not only knew how to read the great book of nature, but also knew the way monks read the books of Scripture, and how they thought through them. A gift that, as we shall see, was to prove useful to him in the days to follow. His explanation, moreover, seemed to me at that point so obvious that my humiliation at not having discovered it by myself was surpassed only by my pride at now being a sharer in it, and I was almost congratulating myself on my insight. Such is the power of the truth that, like good, it is its own propagator. And praised be the holy name of our Lord Jesus Christ for this splendid revelation I was granted.” (Eco, 1984, pp.16-18).

William possesses the ability to describe an animal he has never seen. The master explains to Adso how he arrived at his conclusion, and the latter realizes that his mentor possesses remarkable intellectual acumen. Furthermore, the master plants a seed of reflection by citing a passage from Alan of Lille (Alanus de Insulis). Here, William's act of drawing out recalls an action of “orientation”, from the Latin *oriens*, the participle of the verb *orior*, which specifically means “to turn toward the east” and, in a broader sense, denotes rising, being born, beginning, deriving (Zollo & Alii, 2016). This serves as a metaphor for the educational guidance provided to Adso, implicitly highlighting the master's pedagogical commitment to harmonizing the young novice's knowledge (Ibidem).

6. What is the typical interpretation offered by readers regarding the ending of *The Name of the Rose*? What does the ‘vulgate’ say?

Now, let us momentarily set aside the encounter with Brunellus and proceed directly to the final sentence. Given the widespread readership of the book and the extensive viewership of the film (or the TV series), the narrative has been widely disseminated: following the execution of the ‘witch’ and the heretics, as well as the destruction of the tower by fire, William and Adso bid farewell, leaving behind the tragic events that have transpired. However, within this conclusion lies an enigmatic statement that evokes both intrigue and ambiguity among readers and viewers alike. This phrase has become so renowned that many consult Wikipedia⁷ to interpret its meaning, relying on what could be considered the “vulgate” of the Internet. The final page has been extensively analyzed, summarizing it as follows: the Latin phrase *Stat rosa pristina nomine, nomina nuda tenemus* (“the original rose exists only in name; we hold only naked names”) is a variation of line 952 from the hexameter poem *De contemptu mundi* by Bernard of Cluny (not to be confused with the prose work of the same name by Cardinal Lotario di Segni, the future Pope Innocent III). Modern editions of Bernard’s poem, based on certain manuscripts, present a significantly different reading: *stat Roma pristina nomine, nomina nuda tenemus* (“ancient Rome exists only in name...”). The phrase owes its contemporary fame to Umberto Eco, who used it as the closing line of his novel *The Name of the Rose*. In his *Postscript to The Name of the Rose*, Eco explains: “Bernard elaborates on the theme of *ubi sunt* (which inspired Villon’s *Mais où sont les neiges d’antan?* — ‘But where are the snows of yesteryear?’). Bernard, however, adds to the conventional *topos* (the greats of the past, famous cities, beautiful princesses, all fading into nothingness) the idea that all that remains of these vanished things are bare names.” The phrase, particularly the word *pristina* (literally “former,” “ancient,” “past,” “original,” or “pristine” that means pure), has led to multiple interpretations. Eco’s version emphasizes that after the existence of a specific rose ceases, only the universal name remains. This interpretation contrasts with the theory of William of Champeaux, a French philosopher, theologian and Catholic bishop who lived between 1070 and 1121, who argued that universals retain an ontological reality even after the particulars disappear. Another possible reading suggests that “the original rose, the rose preceding all particular roses, the universal rose, exists only as a name, not as a reality.” This interpretation also challenges William of Champeaux’s extreme realism, which held that universals exist ontologically before individuals; the phrase instead asserts that, at the foundation of reality, only the name of the universal can be found, not a tangible being. The discussion is further enriched by the fact that William Shakespeare also used the rose as a metaphor for reflecting on the essence of things. In *Romeo and Juliet* (Act II, Scene II), he asks: “*What’s in a name? That which we call a rose, / By any other name would smell as sweet.*” While Eco denied any direct inspiration from Shakespeare for his rose, this juxtaposition invites a comparison between their approaches to the meaning of names and essence, despite their differing conclusions. and here ends the part related to the way one usually tries to explain the final sentence on Wikipedia and on most websites. But back to our William, the one from Baskerville, and his apprentice Adso.

⁷ https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stat_rosa_pristina_nomine,_nomina_nuda_tenemus

Figure 5: The red-haired Occitan girl and one of his encounters with Adso.



Two last necessary things to know: 1) young Adso will meet and love a girl; 2) remember that the narrator of the book is Adso as an old man. Let us now delve more deeply into the question of the girl Adso loved. The red-haired Occitan girl is young (yes, hair as red as roses are red, we have to admit this), wild, and beautiful, desperately fleeing the war that devastates the south of France. This war is linked to the fact that, in the 12th century, heresy reemerged in new forms in Christian Europe, with strong political and social implications. Among the medieval heresiarchs, Dolcino is undoubtedly one of the most famous (Garofani, 2009), and the history of the Dolcinian movement plays a significant role in Eco's book (Masone, 2024). Dolcino is also immortalized by the great poet Dante Alighieri in Canto 28 of the *Inferno*, where he is placed in the *bolgia* for sowers of discord and schismatics (Ibidem) and this fact shows how famous Dolcino was in his time. Having said that, the conflict has taken everything from the Occitan girl. Her home destroyed, her family murdered, and her body violated. In this harrowing context, Adso becomes captivated by her beauty, and they begin to meet secretly. Despite the language barrier between them, they share a deep, unspoken connection, for true love, as they discover, needs no words. Through the intensity of her eyes and the warmth of her embraces, Adso learns what love truly is. However, Adso's situation is complicated. As a novice living among monks, he is bound by vows that forbid carnal love (Maggio, 2025). The rose in the final sentence, for many, represents the girl, making the interpretation straightforward and seemingly conclusive. However, can a work by Eco truly culminate in such a simple resolution? Perhaps not...

7. Intellectual contributions of the Franciscan Order: key figures and their lasting impact on Umberto Eco's William of Baskerville

In the book, the focus also shifts to the intellectual contributions of the Franciscan Order, with a particular emphasis on those figures who have had a lasting impact on philosophy, theology, and science. Franciscanism is a religious movement originating from the spiritual testimony of St. Francis of Assisi. The development of Francis's 'conversion' between 1206 and 1209 remains obscure in many respects, although its outcomes are clearly evident in his own writings. One of the most interesting facts is that the Franciscan Order initially risked being considered heretical. However, through the famous Dream of Innocent III, in which the Pope saw the

Lateran Basilica in Rome on the verge of collapse, the order was saved and supported by a humble man, Saint Francis of Assisi. This led to a favorable resolution of the issue. From that moment, the order began to proliferate, multiply, and influence other orders as well. For example, it is said that Saint Dominic, upon witnessing the example set by the saint of Assisi, recognized the importance of being a mendicant order and decided to adopt the same approach within his own monastic order as il possibile read in chapter XVIII *Del meraviglioso Capitolo che tenne santo Francesco a santa Maria degli Agnoli, dove furono oltre a cinquemila frati* of Little Flowers of St. Francis (Bughetti, 1926, p.23).

Figure 6: Giotto, Legend of St Francis, Dream of Innocent III. Source: https://it.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Giotto_-_Legend_of_St_Francis_-_06_-_Dream_of_Innocent_III.jpg#metadata



As highlighted by Agostino Gemelli O.F.M. (1878–1959) in his book on Franciscanism, which was reissued in 2001, there are numerous prominent figures who have shaped the movement (Gemelli, 2001). The protagonists of this tradition include several remarkable intellectuals whose works shaped both religious thought and broader intellectual developments. Among the most influential is St. Bonaventure of Bagnoregio (1221–1274), a philosopher and theologian who became known as the “Seraphic Doctor.” He sought to reconcile Aristotelian philosophy with Christian doctrine, and his major work, *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, profoundly influenced Christian spirituality. Similarly, Roger Bacon (1214–1294), another Franciscan was an English philosopher and scientist, is often regarded as a precursor to the scientific method due to his emphasis on experimentation and observation. His *Opus Majus* remains a key text in the study of optics, mathematics, and linguistics. John Duns

Scotus (1266–1308), a Scottish philosopher and theologian, is another key figure in this tradition, earning the title “Subtle Doctor” for his nuanced approach to theology and philosophy. His theories on the will and contingency, as well as his defense of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, significantly impacted Catholic theology. Although Duns Scotus Eriugena (815–877) was not a Franciscan, his philosophical and theological ideas had a significant influence on the Order, especially in terms of his contributions to idealism and Neoplatonism. William of Ockham (1287–1347), an English philosopher, is known for his principle of simplicity, often referred to as “Ockham’s Razor” and he was a Franciscan. A critic of papal authority and a defender of Franciscan poverty, Ockham’s nominalist philosophy, helped shape the trajectory of later thought. Francis of Marchia (c. 1290–1344), an Italian philosopher, contributed to the development of Aristotelian physics and made important advancements in ontology and metaphysics. His work influenced numerous later philosophers and was a Franciscan. Francisco Suárez (1548–1617), though a Jesuit by formation, was profoundly shaped by Franciscan theology, particularly that of Scotus. Suárez became one of the leading metaphysicians of the late Renaissance, with his *Disputationes Metaphysicae* playing a pivotal role in philosophical debates of the time. James of Viterbo (c. 1255–1308), an Italian philosopher and theologian, is known for his work on natural law and political theology. Drawing on the influences of both Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventure, he contributed significantly to discussions surrounding political legitimacy. Alexander of Alexandria (c. 1270–1314), another Franciscan theologian, was noted for his defense of Franciscan poverty and his contributions to mystical theology, which influenced subsequent mystical thinkers. Albert of Sarteano (1385–1450), an Italian Franciscan, was a key figure in promoting peace and diplomacy within the Church, while also playing a central role in spreading the Franciscan reform across Europe. Similarly, Bernardine of Siena (1380–1444), known for his eloquent preaching and reformist agenda, became one of the most influential figures of his time, particularly through his innovative use of the vernacular in his sermons. These figures not only advanced theological and philosophical thought but also left a lasting intellectual legacy that has had a profound impact on Western culture, shaping both medieval and modern intellectual traditions contributing to the natural sciences, mathematics and logical thinking. It is good to remember that all European universities in the Middle Ages were full of Franciscans studying and teaching, from Oxford to the Sorbonne, from Bologna to other Italian, Portuguese and Spanish universities or the currently German-speaking territory. This is clearly evident when examining *The Culture of the Studio*, as documented by the funerary monuments of the doctors (professors) who taught in Bologna, preserved at the city’s Civic Medieval Museum⁸. In such monuments (generally marble bas-reliefs), it is possible to observe students dressed as Franciscan (and Dominican) friars. It is worth noting that Adso is neither a Dominican nor a Franciscan; he is a Benedictine monk, identical in monastic affiliation to those of the abbey where the narrative of the book unfolds. Inquisitors, however, could belong to the Franciscan or Dominican orders, both of which are classified as mendicant orders, meaning they do not possess property. In a beautiful documentary, Philippe Daverio reminds us that while monks had to live in monasteries, friars (Franciscans and Dominicans) were born to spread the word, primarily to counter the Cathar heresy. They can be considered a means of mass communication

⁸ <https://cultura.gov.it/luogo/musei-civici-d-arte-antica-museo-civico-medievale-di-bologna>

(a true medium) that the papacy used to regain prestige and affiliation. The convents of these two orders were always placed, whenever possible, in the city centers and near universities, one need only think of Naples, for example (Daverio, 2002).

8. Umberto Eco: bridging scholarly rigor and imagination in the study of mythical worlds

All these observations/facts are gradually becoming the premises for a potentially more appropriate interpretation of the ending of *The Name of the Rose*, from a perspective more closely related to education (in the sense of drawing out from the student and orientate its training). This brings the focus back to the fact that Umberto Eco was, first and foremost, a professor. He writes the following assertion in his book on how to write a thesis in the humanities (Eco, 2001). Today, this book appears more suited to a doctoral dissertation; however, that is another matter. In this essay, he aims to demonstrate that even a fantastical subject can be treated in various ways while always maintaining scholarly rigor, naturally, problems arise when a thesis discussing, for example, a mythical being whose nonexistence is commonly acknowledged, such as the centaur. In such a scenario, three alternatives present themselves (Ivi, p.39) It is appropriate to present his thoughts in their entirety.

First, one could choose to discuss centaurs as they are depicted in classical mythology. In this case, the subject becomes publicly recognizable and identifiable, as it involves engaging with texts (whether verbal or visual) that refer to centaurs. This approach would require defining the characteristics that a being must possess, according to classical mythology, to be identified as a centaur (Ibidem).

Second, one might decide to conduct a hypothetical investigation into the characteristics that a living creature would need to have in a possible world (distinct from the actual world) to qualify as a centaur. This approach would necessitate specifying the conditions for the existence of this possible world, while clarifying that the entire discussion takes place within the framework of this hypothesis. By adhering strictly to the initial assumption, one could claim to be examining an “object” that holds some potential as a subject of scientific inquiry (ibidem).

Third, one could assert that sufficient evidence exists to demonstrate that centaurs truly exist. In such a case, establishing a credible subject of discourse would require producing evidence (such as skeletons, fossil remains, footprints in volcanic ash, infrared photographs taken in Greek forests, or other such findings), provided there is consensus that, regardless of the validity of the hypothesis, there is a legitimate basis for discussion (Ivi, p.40).

Eco explains that this example is intentionally paradoxical, and he doubts anyone would choose to write a thesis on centaurs concerning the third alternative. However, his intention is to show that a research topic can always be constituted in a recognizable and justifiable manner. If this can be achieved with centaurs, the same principle applies to concepts such as moral behavior, desires, values, or the idea of historical progress (Ibidem). As a side note, a university in the United States put a fake centaur skeleton in a display case in its library⁹, maybe the person who made it had read Umberto Eco’s book on how to write a dissertation.

⁹ the John C. Hodges Library at the University of Tennessee <https://volumes.lib.utk.edu/news/the-centaur-excavations-at-volos/>

Figure 7: On the left, a depiction of centaurs serves as an illustration for a book discussing these mythological creatures. On the right, a fabricated reconstruction of a centaur skeleton is displayed in a university library (University of Tennessee).



Figure 8: On the left, an imitation of a unicorn's twisted horn preserved in a museum in Bologna, identical to the one described at the beginning of the book *Baudolino* (Eco, 2000); on the right, a photograph of the city. All this serves to remind us of the magical atmosphere that hovers around the ancient University of Bologna.



9. The allegorical concept of *Speculum* in Medieval thought and literature

We now throw ourselves into the way medieval monks could think through the books they read, to follow William of Baskerville. In the Middle Ages, the concept of *speculum* (mirror) took on both a technical and deeply allegorical meaning, partly based on the statement by St. Paul: *Videmus nunc per speculum in enigmate, tunc autem facie ad faciem* (Now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face, 1 Corinthians 13:12)¹⁰.

¹⁰ It is possible to quickly compare 1 Corinthians 13 across different versions online, such as the New Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition, which provides a modern and accessible translation, and the I Corinthis 13 from the *Biblia Sacra Vulgata*, the Latin Vulgate translation. To understand the reasoning even better, it is suggested to read this whole text of St Paul also called in English 'The Gift of Love' is called in Italian 'The Hymn to Charity'.

These versions offer valuable perspectives for understanding the passage, allowing readers to explore both contemporary and classical interpretations of the text. Even though Paul sees the mirror more as a distinction between us and life after death, as he addresses the Corinthians (people of classical Greek culture), he adopts a more Platonic perspective because, as is well known, St Paul knew Greek culture and society and all the people of the Mediterranean very well. For medieval culture, often reality was interpreted as a symbol, and nature appeared as an allegorical tapestry in which God concealed His Truth. The mirror became the means through which humans could read divine signs in the world and discern the interpretative keys to God's will, reflected in reality. In this context, the *speculum* was not only a reflection but also a model to imitate and a work of wisdom: the world itself was seen as a mirror of divine Truth. This conception gave rise to the first "encyclopedic"¹¹ works and medieval moral treatises, often called *specula*. These works provided ethical and behavioral paradigms: for example, *Specula principum* offered guidelines for rulers, while *Specula poenitentiae* instructed Christians on moral conduct. This allegorical vision is also found in the poetry of Alan of Lille (1125–1203), you remember well it is Alanus de Insulis mentioned by William during the recognition of Brunellus, who, in his *De Planctu Naturae*, describes every creature as a book or a painting that acts as a mirror (Stella, 2014), faithfully representing life, death, and human destiny:

*Omnis mundi creatura
quasi liber et pictura
nobis est in speculum;
nostrae vitae, nostrae mortis,
nostri status, nostrae sortis
fidele signaculum.
Nostrum statum pingit rosa,
nostri status decens glosa,
nostrae vitae lectio;
quae dum primo mane floret,
defloratus flos effloret
vespertino senio.*

A possible translation into English is: In the world, every creature is like a book and a painting for us in a mirror, a faithful symbol of our life, death, state, and fate. The rose paints our condition, the rose, a gloss that fits our state, a commentary on our life. It blooms in the morning, and the withered flower fades with the evening of old age. Let us note that it refers to rose and gloss. This allegorical view continues in 13th-century spiritual works, such as the *Legende versificate sanctae Clarae*, in which God is invoked as *lumen de lumine* where Christ is a mirror of the Father, able to illuminate

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Corinthians%2013%2CI%20Corinthios%2013&version=NRSVCE;VULGATE;DRA;RSVCE>

¹¹ Using this term improperly, which is obviously subsequent.

the mind and spirit, dispelling the “cloud of vices” and lighting the soul with divine strength. Similarly, Bardo Presbyter’s text in the *Vita Anselmi episcopi Lucensi* reflects the idea of Christ as a mirror to which the soul turns for help and moral guidance: *Monstra te nobis propitium, in quem semper respeximus unicum, quem nobis inspiciendum proponimus speculum*. As we have tried to demonstrate with some examples, the theme of the *speculum* is deeply rooted in medieval culture as a symbol of the divine Truth reflected in the world, inviting humanity to a symbolic reading of reality in which the essence of the divine message resides. Probably based on a statement by St. Paul, the entire Middle Ages was led to interpret reality as a symbol and nature as a complex allegorical fabric in which God hid His Truth.

Figure 9: On the left, William teaches Adso that the mirror distorts reality, and this occurs within the labyrinth of the library; on the right, Alan of Lille (1125–1203), Obviously, Umberto Eco is correct; Alan exists prior to the year in which the story is set.



The term *speculum* became technical in this sense: it was the task of humans to read in the mirror and find the interpretative keys to God’s will. God “reflected” Himself in the world, and the *speculum* became a reference point, a model to imitate, or even a collection of wisdom. It is possible that Adso, over the course of his life, deepened his understanding of the quotation from William regarding Alan of Lille made on the first day and dedicated the conclusion to the vision of the world as expressed by St. Paul in Corinthians. When he is old and writes the story that saw him with his master from Baskerville, and at the ending of the book and life, he reflects on the mirror, which is related to death, or rather the life beyond death that every medieval monk should believe in, or at least hope for, in this mirror game to know what is next when we see face to face the truth beyond the veil of time and resound the three words by Alan, one implied (mirror), and then rose in the clear, and another implied (gloss).

Figure 10: the life of Adso of Melk, which is definitively changed during the events that take place in *The Name of the Rose*, between apocalyptic visions, murders, enigmas and the discovery of love, pictured here is this moment from Manara's comic strip.



10. Eschatological interpretation of the ending of *The Name of the Rose*

Going deeper, the recognition of Brunellus represents a significant moment what could be described as a true illustrated case of Rogersian shift in perspective, it delves into the complex relationship between student and teacher and offers a new interpretative key to the famous conclusion. In *The Name of the Rose*, the life of Adso of Melk, the young pupil of William of Baskerville, undergoes a profound transformation, evolving from naive and inexperienced to mature and intellectually refined. At the outset of the narrative, Adso is portrayed as an unworldly and impressionable young man, deeply rooted in the dogmatic teachings of his monastic education. His worldview is limited, shaped by an almost unquestioning faith in spiritual and intellectual authority. Over the course of the story, under William's guidance, Adso is exposed to a complex and often ambiguous reality, where doubt becomes a necessary tool for understanding the world. The investigation of the murders, linked to the mystery of an impending Apocalypse, within the abbey and the confrontation with the secrets hidden in the library teach him that knowledge is never absolute and that both spiritual and secular power are frequently tainted by corruption. A pivotal moment in Adso's transformation occurs through his encounter with love and desire, embodied in the red-haired Occitan girl. This episode represents Adso's first exposure to the emotional and carnal dimensions of life, challenging the rigid asceticism that had previously defined his existence. Although fleeting, this relationship leaves an indelible mark on him, deepening his humanity and self-awareness. By the end of the novel, Adso, an old man who spent his life rewriting Sacred Books by hand, reflects with melancholy and wisdom on the events of his youth. It is evident that his experiences under William's mentorship have shaped him into a cultivated individual, capable of viewing the world with critical insight and intellectual maturity. His personal growth symbolizes an inner and intellectual journey, culminating in a more nuanced and complex understanding of life. For this reason, it can be said that *The Name of the Rose*

is also a coming-of-age novel. We go even deeper. Let us consider the application of a well-known educational approach: role-playing¹². We can imagine placing ourselves in Adso's position and immersing ourselves in his life experiences. When Adso remembers his master, he says:

"This was my master's way. He not only knew how to read the great book of nature, but also knew the way monks read the books of Scripture, and how they thought through them".

And that for Rogers is teaching them to put themselves in the shoes of others as they are there. So if you want to know how a monk thinks, you have to know that they read and write in the *scriptorium* and think that reality is what is written in their books. always on that day, where it all began, the master says to Adso:

"I have been teaching you to recognize the evidence through which the world speaks to us like a great book. Alanus de Insulis said that *omnis mundi creatura/ quasi liber et pictura/ nobis est in speculum*"

This is where the little role play¹³ comes in, let's imagine this brief exchange of jokes: 'what did St Paul say about mirrors?', Adso replies as a novice monk: 'he says that for now we see as in a mirror, but one day we will see face to face in the letter to the Corinthians', which is a basic text since it is in the Acts of the Apostles, and William adds: 'when you get to the abbey or when you have time don't forget to read the full text of Alain of Lille, it will be very useful to you in life' where you will find the full text i.e: Every creature in the world is like a book and a painting to us in a mirror, a faithful symbol of our life, our death, our condition, and our fate. So the conclusion of *The Name of the Rose* would be as two verses, the first known:

The primal rose exists only in name and a second verse implied for those who know Alan of Lille that we could say thus:

The rose depicts our state, the rose, a gloss that adapts to our condition, a commentary on our life. It (the rose) blooms in the morning, and, as a faded flower, it wilts with the old age of the evening.

Thus, it is more of an eschatological reflection, as it should be for a monk. This final sentence takes on a new interpretation, one that is not simply the musings of an old monk remembering a girl, but rather the reflections of a monk who spent his entire life in books. His life, and the life of every man and woman, are but a marginal note in the great book of lives, the vast book of history made up of the stories of men and women; that same book described in Revelation 5:1: "Then I saw in the right hand of the one seated on the throne a book written on the inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals". And in his marginal note, his gloss in this book, everything is

¹² For those who might be interested in the topic, there is a well-known role-playing game called *Ars Magica*, set in Mythic Europe—an alternative version of 13th-century Europe, specifically in the year 1220. The only significant difference introduced by the game compared to the original historical period lies in the concept of the Medieval Paradigm, a framework that asserts that, in this setting, magic exists, along with all the myths and legends that have been passed down to us over millennia. However, this alternate paradigm is not necessary for our purposes.

¹³ To substantiate some doubts in this role-play, it was verified that in the text of the Revelation of St. John (Apocalypse of John), the word mirror and rose is not present.

contained: his encounter with William, his encounter with the red-haired Occitan girl, and the tragic series of events that took place in the monastery during his youth. Still wanting to insist, they are not monks viewed through an Enlightenment lens, nor are they monks of the modern world; they are true monks. The three lines proposed by Alan are presented within the text itself, serving as a clue for the reader. It is not the case that Umberto Eco failed to include a hint for understanding the conclusion.

11. Umberto Eco stated: “books are often smarter than their authors”

In a recent text, Professor Sibilio (2023) asserts that if all those who base their research on the thought of great scholars from the past could meet them in the present, what might occur? In his “fantasy,” many distinguished scholars, upon reading what has been written about their theories and ideas, might complain that it does not fully or partially align with what they originally intended in their theories; some might even express offense or disappointment. In other instances, the dream is much more creative, leading him to envision great intellectuals who are both amused and surprised by the unusual interpretative keys through which their theories have been understood (Sibilio, 2023, pp. 12-13). This perspective aligns with part of Umberto Eco’s thought, as he states in an interview that books are often “smarter” than their authors. In the interview by Antonio Gnoli, “*Così ho dato il nome alla rosa*” published in *La Domenica di Repubblica* on July 9, 2006, a series of questions and answers are particularly relevant to our discussion and are reproduced in below. First, the choice of the title *The Name of the Rose* was not random. It was the last one on a list that included *The Abbey of the Crime*, *Adso of Melk*, and others. “Everyone who read that list said *The Name of the Rose* was the most beautiful,” said Eco. Moreover, it is also the closing line of the novel, the Latin citation. The author admitted that the inclusion of the rose had another purpose: to mislead the reader, who would then search for every possible symbolic meaning of the rose, a flower with multiple interpretations.

The risk of excessive interpretation, however, does not seem to concern the writer, who believes that often a book is smarter than its author. “Readers may find references the author hadn’t considered, and I don’t think I have the right to prevent certain conclusions. But I do have the right to challenge others”. For instance, those who associate the rose with the famous Shakespearean phrase “A rose by any other name would smell as sweet” are, in his view, mistaken. “My quote implies that things no longer exist, leaving only words. Shakespeare means the exact opposite: words don’t matter, a rose would still be a rose by any name”. This statement by Eco gives some serenity to this speculative work. Moving on with the interview, the novel concludes with the image of the rose, but for a writer, especially a debutant, the real challenge is how to begin. The writer approached the first page with an opening idea: “Initially, the idea was to write a kind of detective story”. Soon, however, he realized that his novels never start with a plan, but with an image.

The image that inspired him was of himself standing before an enormous lectern in the Abbey of Santa Scolastica, reading the *Acta Sanctorum* and enjoying himself immensely. From there came the idea of a Benedictine monk in a monastery who dies while reading. In a first moment he thought it was his own invention, but later he discovered that it already existed in *The Thousand and One Nights* and that Dumas had borrowed it for the Valois cycle. “It’s an old literary trope. Being a citational storyteller, I found it amusing”. But in this work the ending, the opening of the forbidden book by William with gloves, the murders, the detective story part goes in the back-

ground, they are events, what counts is that the ending is eschatological, offering a profound reflection on the fleeting nature of individual lives. The old monk, having spent his life in books, views his own existence—and that of every man and woman—as a mere footnote in the vast book of history. His final thoughts encompass his encounters with William, the girl, and the tragic events at the monastery, all seen within the broader context of life's transient nature.

A *Weltanschauung* that has been transmitted over centuries by monks through successive generations, primarily through the recommended readings of texts dedicated to exploring the ultimate fate of the individual, humanity, and the cosmos. This destiny is intrinsically linked to humanity's deepest hopes concerning the afterlife, that is, the realm beyond the visible world. Such a perspective can significantly shape one's worldview and daily conduct. Digressing, we could argue that the portrayal of William is the one remembered by Adso, rather than a self-representation by William himself. This may explain why his character appears particularly perceptive, perhaps even accentuated by memory and nostalgia. In a similar manner, the Socrates to whom we commonly refer is typically the one depicted by Plato and his other disciples. I would like to emphasize that Umberto Eco sought to reconstruct history as faithfully as possible to the historical period in question. Consequently, the monks who animate the narrative are neither Enlightenment-era nor postmodern characters, nor do they “wink” at the reader by resembling a contemporary individual. On the contrary, the strength of the novel - as in other works by Eco - lies precisely in its ability to immerse the reader in a meticulously crafted and historically accurate setting, characterized by careful attention to detail. This is particularly evident in the theological dispute, especially from the fourth day of the story, when “Cardinal du Pouget, Bernardo Gui, and the other men from Avignon arrive” and “William reveals his method for arriving at a probable truth through a series of certain errors.” The technique that William, in turn, teaches Adso - placing oneself in the mindset of a monk - is essential, as Adso, upon his arrival, still belongs to the world outside the monastery walls, being merely a novice.

The suggestion implies that Eco's works, particularly his novels, lend themselves to multiple interpretations, offering a richness that ensures they are never superficial. As a distinguished university professor, Eco's writing is deeply cultured, replete with quotations and references that engage readers intellectually. This complexity invites readers to derive new insights and discover diverse perspectives, providing ample material for reflection and critical thought.

Finally, I apologize to those who may perceive this work as somewhat off-topic in relation to education and special pedagogy. However, I would like to emphasize that it originates from a conference dedicated to celebrating the genius and creativity of Umberto Eco, perhaps all of this was merely a cultural pastime of mine, but I wanted to share it with everyone.

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