

# Swinging between East and West: Intertextuality in Eco's *The Name of the Rose*

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### Abstract

In 1980, Umberto Eco, an Italian philosopher, essayist, and semiotician, began writing novels with *The Name of the Rose*. It exemplifies many features of postmodernism. Several elements of postmodernism can be identified in the book, including historiographic metafiction, pastiche, magical realism, and intertextuality. This historical detective story is complex, filled with intricate signs and symbols. This paper will focus on intertextuality as a postmodern feature, highlighting its use of references in Western and Eastern texts and showcasing Eco's extensive knowledge of literature.

**Key Words:** Eco, intertextuality, William, Adso, oriental tales

بين الشرق والغرب: التناسل في رواية إيكو/ اسم الوردة  
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### المستخلص

في عام ١٩٨٠، بدأ أومبرتو إيكو، الفيلسوف والكاتب والمتخصص في علم السيميائية الإيطالي، في كتابة الروايات بكتابه "اسم الوردة". وهو يجسد العديد من سمات ما بعد الحداثة. يمكن تحديد العديد من عناصر ما بعد الحداثة في الكتاب، بما في ذلك التلفيق التاريخي، والتقليد، والواقعية السحرية، والتداخل النصي. هذه القصة البوليسية التاريخية معقدة وملينة بالعلامات والرموز المعقدة. سيركز هذه البحث على التداخل النصي كسمة ما بعد حداثة، وتسليط الضوء على استخدامها للمراجع في النصوص الغربية والشرقية، وتبرز معرفة إيكو الواسعة بالأدب.

الكلمات المفتاحية: إيكو، التناسل، ويليام، أدسو، حكايات شرقية

## Introduction

The term "intertextuality" was first used by Julia Kristeva in her 1966 essay "Word, Dialogue, and Novel" to describe how literary works are interdependent and how every given literary work is dependent upon everything that came before it. Todorov, Eco, Corti, Kristeva, Genette, and several others have all restated the concept of intertextuality in one way or another. Mikhail Bakhtin suggests that a literary text is "a mosaic of quotations" and involves the embodies the absorption and alteration of other writings.<sup>1</sup> According to Kristeva, texts are constantly filtered through codes that carry the burden of prior meanings with them due to the impact of other texts on the reader's awareness. As a result, it already contributes to many meanings created by other texts and the inferred meaning that surrounding them, rather than deriving meaning simply from the structure of symbols. She claims that intertextuality is the absence of a text and the presence of intertext, which is a tissue of unavoidable allusions to and citations from other works. In turn, these shape what it means the text is an act of intervention in a culture system. The present culture is understood as the product of the previous one. The intertextuality of postmodern fiction, the reliance on literature that has been formed earlier, attempts to comment on how literature and society found themselves in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> C.

Eco's usage of quotes and other literature is an excellent match with Bakhtin's list of the many ways medieval authors employed the words of other authors. He stated that during the Middle Ages, the link to another person's word was complicated and unclear. At that time, the other person's word played a huge role. Some quotes were openly and respectfully emphasized as such, while others were "half-hidden, completely hidden, half-conscious, unconscious, correct, purposefully distorted, unintentionally distorted," purposefully reinterpreted, and so on.<sup>2</sup> The distinctions between one's own speech and that of others were pliable, frequently purposefully twisted, and unclear. Some texts were built from the texts of others, much like mosaics.

Eco stated in his book *The Open Work* that all communication, especially modern writing, can be understood in different ways reliant on the reader's experiences and background knowledge. He wrote in his article "Prelude to a Palimpsest":

I believe that a text – as an object (a textual linear manifestation), insofar as it is referred to in an encyclopedic background, comprehending in some way both the encyclopedia of the time in which it was written and the encyclopedias of its readers – can work as the public parameter of its interpretations.<sup>3</sup>

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He differentiates certain parameters for interpretation, in which he may participate; however, he does not have complete control over the composition of the novel. The author presents a work to be completed to the interpreter, the performer, and the addressee. The precise manner in which his work will be completed is unknown to him; however, he is aware that the work will remain his property upon its completion. It will not be a distinct work, and at the conclusion of the interpretative dialogue, a form that is his form will have been organized, despite the fact that it may have been assembled in a manner that an external party could not have anticipated. The author is the one who suggested a variety of options that had already been logically organized, oriented, and provided with the necessary specifications for proper development.<sup>4</sup> The Renaissance and Baroque eras, primarily intellectual historical problems, "the archaeology of knowledge relating to ancient works for glory and power, "like the Holy Grail, Kabbalah, secret societies" and the secrets they are said to hold, are some of the noticeable elements that are obvious in Eco's writings. The central issue at hand is whether this occurrence is merely coincidental or if it constitutes a deliberate reference by Eco to other authors and their respective works, which would, in turn, reinforce the assertion made by Eco through the character of William of Baskerville.<sup>5</sup>

### ***The Name of the Rose* (1980)**

The story takes place in an abbey with a vast and magnificent library during the Middle Ages (the 14<sup>th</sup> Century). William of Baskerville, a Franciscan monk, and his inexperienced pupil Adso are the main characters of the book. William is sent to the Abbey to mediate a disagreement between the Franciscan monks and the pope. However, when he gets there, he finds himself in the middle of a string of killings. William can solve the mystery of crime by applying his high intelligence and logical thinking. During his investigation, he learns that identifying the murderer is directly tied to learning the secret of the library, which is guarded and guided by a blind librarian who conceals the entrance. Theresa Coletti (2009) and Peter Bondanella (2009) refer to the book as a historical novel and a detective story, respectively. Believing it is hard to categorize, Capozzi lists several titles for this novel, including "metaphysical, mystery, detective or anti-detective story, post-modern, historiographic metafiction; historical, gothic or essay novel; bildungsroman".<sup>6</sup>

The main characters in this novel, William of Baskerville and Adso of the Melk, are named after people in other books. The characters are based on Sherlock Holmes and Watson from Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles*,

which Eco enjoys.<sup>7</sup> Eco uses more than simply the names of Doyle's characters; there is more intertextuality in the interactions between Adso and William. William regularly addresses Adso as "my dear Adso" throughout the tale. A comparison of *The Name of the Rose* and *The Hound of the Baskervilles* reveals similar investigative methods and inferential frameworks. Both texts feature dry humor, as well as ambiguous relationships between their central characters Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson, similar to William and Adso. Additionally, the physical settings, such as the castle and Baskerville Hall, are depicted with remarkable fidelity by Eco.<sup>8</sup>

Eco possesses a remarkable ability to construct a fantastical yet plausible surroundings in his literary works, where characters, features, and actions range from "Dante to Disney, Galileo to Jules Verne, and Sherlock Holmes to Peirce," alongside the legends of the Templars and Indiana Jones, all featured in his extensive repertoire.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, readers can enjoy a mystical experience and better comprehend the author's thoughts and images suggested by popular culture and history, which are intrinsically connected to the fundamental characters, locations, and imagery. *The Name of the Rose* contains extra intertextuality beyond the already stated Doyle. Cobley claims that Eco himself detailed that Adso, the book's narrator, was inspired by Zeitblom a character from Mann's novel *Doctor Faustus*. Zeitblom assists the narrator of Doctor Faustus, providing readers with insight into the character's more profound meaning and symbolism.<sup>10</sup> This leads the readers to Hutcheon's claim that "for the mystic adept, every word becomes a sign of something else, the truth of what is not said. Therefore, one must learn to read with suspicion, lest something is missed."<sup>11</sup>

This novel references a wide range of topics and earlier works by other authors and artists. A novel is composed of other texts and stories that have been told before, both fictional and real, but all of them seem to be familiar from some past events; well-known quotes, passages, unique 'lexicons', 'codes', and characters are all used in the book and presented as if they were taken straight out of a general reference book.<sup>12</sup> Capozzi stated that an analysis of this shows that in the early 1970s, Eco abandoned "structuralist codes", dictionaries, and Chomsky's syntagmatic chain models in favor of Porphyrian trees, encyclopedias, paradigmatic frameworks, and intertextuality. Eco's theory, application of his encyclopedic concept, and the creation of meaning by bonding in several complex techniques.<sup>13</sup> This further hints at Eco's "description of the Deluzian rhizome" that each track can be linked to all the others. Since "the space of conjecture" is potentially limitless, it lacks a center, a periphery, and an exit.<sup>14</sup>

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Capozzi stated that sing quotation-based collages and the elaborate pastiche of historical, philosophical, and popular culture elements that shared Eco's cultural viewpoint prove that Eco wrote a hybrid book. The reader's encyclopedic understanding of these references and their capacity to connect them and return to what they reference are the only factors that make this idea transmission successful. Eco employs intertextual allusions to imply deeper meanings through relationship, contributing to developing a novel that could be classified as "new-historicism." In their quests for power and universal knowledge, Foucault cites his works on 'archaeology and knowledge genealogy' among other related ideas. Eco references and alludes to the works of many authors throughout this novel, including Guattari, Derrida, Derrida, White, Borges, Barthes, Calvino, and Pynchon.<sup>15</sup>

Eco's creation of the blind librarian refers to Jorge Borges' *The Library of Babel*.<sup>16</sup> The literary themes of journey, sentimental education, descent into Hades, remembrance of things past, and the aftermath of reason all illustrate how personal and critical history intertwine in this "tale of books," as de Lauretis stated.<sup>17</sup> The political inquiry and the mythical quest are strongly twisted with the Socratic dialogue, the conte a la Voltaire, and the Conan Doyle enigmatic story. According to Capozzi, Eco's library is so massive and intertextually rich that the reader is both intimidated and in awe of its sheer volume of volumes and how many they have not yet read.<sup>18</sup>

At least in terms of form and style, Eco was definitely influenced by Borges. *The Name of the Rose* is a detective novel, among other things. Eco acknowledges that Borges' *Death and the Compass* had an effect on him when he wrote this book. In that narrative, Borges breaks down the structure of the detective story. The investigator Lonrot can't discover any design in the murders and figures out that it was only a trick to catch him. In the same way, Eco destroys the detective fiction and the investigator by not having a plan for the murders.<sup>19</sup> We readers, like the murderer Jorge, are astonished to hear that William the detective just found out who the murderer was by chance. As Jorge asks William, "You have shown me that you have arrived here by following a false reasoning. What do you mean to say to me?"<sup>20</sup> In Eco's book, Jorge had been waiting for William to arrive just like the killer in *Death and the Compass* had been waiting for the investigator to arrive. In fact, Jorge had been waiting for William in the library. William tells Adso, "I arrived at Jorge through an apocalyptic pattern that seemed to underlie all the crimes, and yet it was accidental... I arrived at Jorge pursuing the plan of a

perverse and rational mind, and there was no plan..." (Rose, 472). A detective who is defeated by his fascination with signals and designs when he ultimately learns there is no design reminds the readers to the exhaustion of some literary forms.

The story "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote" comes to mind in this context. Borges' use of the Quixote text reveals that he has found a technique to get around the possible end of literary forms. "Pierre Menard's Quixote" is a unique work because modern readers would see the story in a different way than readers of the time. You might say the same thing about Eco. It's noteworthy that Eco lists the Pierre Menard story as one of the things that influenced him from Borges. The narrator has a lot of questions regarding the Adso manuscript's truth, yet they nonetheless go ahead and reveal it. Eco has him do this because he wants to be the Pierre Menard of this old book. He realized that retelling the medieval story in a way that was true to the original would signify something different to modern readers.<sup>21</sup>

Eco's intertextuality employs a comparable introductory style to that found in the famous gothic novel of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*. Eco's novel commences with an individual acquiring an original copy that has not been observed nor disseminated, which parallels *The Castle of Otranto*. Eco started this novel with Adso citing John, "And in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (Rose, 11). Additional intertextualities that derived from Bible are apparent in the erroneous motif of the seven seals of the apocalypse that come from the *Book of Revelation*, which serves as a rationale for the murders committed by Jorge. Copley stated in his statement "books speak of books," that Adso realized that words found in books—whether novels, reference texts, or other works—are intertextual, granting them a significance that transcends the specific context of each reading.<sup>22</sup>

Eco, like Mann, employs intertextual quotations to summarize a significant portion of history and culture in a single sentence. This avoids repeating large amounts of information while conveying the writer's argument because a reader may understand difficult information in brief phrases. Eco himself stated in *The Role of the Reader* that "the meaning of allegorical figures and emblems... is already prescribed by... encyclopedias, bestiaries, and lapidaries,"<sup>23</sup> which means that every symbol or item in the Cosmos has a restricted variety of possible meanings.

In the book's initial pages, before entering the monastery, a little narrative is presented to illustrate William's astute intellect and enhance his status as a sagacious and discerning individual. William recognizes an escaped horse, the one



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most cherished by the Grand Monk of the abbey.<sup>24</sup> This loss has generated considerable apprehension for the equerry. Besides conveying the horse's appearance through traces on the route, William successfully locates the horse and notifies the equerry. William explains his method of thinking about the indications left about and then deciphering them in response to Adso's surprise at how he recognized the attributes of a horse he had never seen. Adso and everyone else in the room are stunned by this. According to him, identifying human footprints in the snow is as simple as figuring out the secret by reflecting on the indications

This narrative is derived from ancient Oriental texts concerning the fabled ancestry of the Arab populace. In this story, Nizar, the son of Adnan, an Arab forebear and one of the progenitors of the Islamic Prophet, had to choose a successor among his four children, Mazer, Rabi'a, Ayyar, and Anmar, who represented four fictional Arab tribes. It was difficult for him to judge. So he consulted an Arab specialist. The lads had to be smart to succeed their father. They also had to find a lost camel. Its oldest source is Muhammad ibn Jarir Tabari's *History of Prophets and Kings* (d. 310 AH / 921 AD). Since then, the same story—modified for context, time, culture, and audience—has appeared in historical, imaginary, and popular literature. Tabari says the lads saw the camel's footsteps and used each gesture to show their intelligence. Anmar claimed the camel had one eye. Rabi'a said his tail was short.<sup>25</sup> The story continued when Mazer called it a fugitive and Ayyar called it cross-eyed. Interesting that the lads solve the camel riddle exactly like William did when he finds the horse, utilizing the clues left behind to identify the camel. They describe its characteristics appropriately. The fact that William explains to his inexperienced pupil the qualities of the perfect horse is another significant aspect of the horse story in this novel.

The tale of the dreaming man is another example that derived from the Eastern tales. The book contains a narrative about a man who had some oil in his jar and dreamed of selling it to make money. His dream vanished as he made a thoughtless action that caused the jar to drop to the ground, wasting the oil. Kalilah and Demna (*Panchatantra*) tell the same tale. Monshi reported that a religious man living near a vegetable nectar and oil seller. The merchant gave him honey and oil every morning to improve his energy. The poor man ate and jarred. Jar was steadily filling. He saw the jar and decided that if he sold this nectar and oil for ten drachmas, he could buy five sheep that would produce five newborns each month, allowing him to marry a woman from a prominent family. My wife was having a boy. Give him a good name, instruct him, and strike him with this stick if he's rude.

The stick cracked the container and poured honey and oil on him while he fantasized.<sup>26</sup>

The layout of the citadel's enigmatic structure, particularly its library, is one of the story's most complex elements.<sup>27</sup> Before writing the story, Umberto Eco explained how this portion was designed and edited. He said that he carried out extensive architectural research to determine the abbey's layout by looking at pictures and floor plans in architectural encyclopedias (Rose, 25). In addition to making the story more credible, he seemed obligated to give the reader the map of the abbey at the start of the book. Both before they approach the monastery and at the end of the convoluted walk leading to it, William and Adso's discourse reveals their amazement at the abbey's remarkable structure.

The library has a special layout. It is the highest structure in the complex, and according to Adso, its north side rests on the mountainside. This was an octagonal structure that, from a distance, appeared to be a tetragon with its southern sides positioned on the abbey's plateau. In contrast, the northern sides appeared to ascend from the precipitous slope of the mountain, a vertical descent to which they were tethered. From below, at specific intervals, the cliff appeared to ascend, stretching into the skies, reminiscent of the work of giants well-versed in both earth and sky. Additionally, he observes that the abbey's structure and form are incredibly terrifying when viewed from a stormy day: "I can certainly see the sign of omens inscribed in the stone the day that the giants began their work..." (Rose, 16).

So, it is said over and over again that the giant built the building, and it is also said that it was erected for an unknown purpose in ancient times (according to William, Adso, and other monks) and then used as an abbey later. Even though the abbey's location, the time of the events, and even the time of day are all clearly stated, the abbey's location is still a mystery. Adso strives to stick to the book's story and the wishes of the people who live there, but he never tells anyone where the abbey is. The fact that there is no record of its location even after the abbey fell down and was completely destroyed is what makes it placeless. One way to look at the abbey in this book is as a representation of the divine towns in mythology and eastern texts that look like paradise. Though these cities are meant to be utopias, Eco's mocking language turns them into dystopias because people in them are really bad and mean.<sup>28</sup>

Var-e Jamkard, which is originally described in the book of Avesta, is one of the most famous celestial cities. It's conceivable that Eco has read about it. The myth goes that King Jamshid, who had Ahuramazda's complete support, was told to establish a garden or a location to keep the animals safe from the terrible winter



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that was coming and would threaten the lives of all living things. Ahuramazda then told him to create the Var to keep the greatest male and female seeds secure up there.<sup>29</sup> The word "up there" means that this place is not on the ground. This city is a sanctuary for stars, and the moon and sun only come out once a year since a day in this city is like a year on earth. The Shahnameh makes it clearer that the giants built the city. The Shahnameh says that the giants built the city for Jamshid. Along with Shahnameh, stories and myths, such as the Nizami's Haft Paykar and other literary works, also talk about these kinds of cities. Usually, the giants or fairies live in these cities. Adso's picture of the Citadel in the fog makes this picture of a mountain with a building in the middle of the cloud make sense. The observer doesn't know if the fog comes from the valley floor or the other way around, covering the citadel, the building and then the whole valley.

### Conclusion

One of the best examples of postmodernism is Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*. This fictional work explores the connections between civilizations, cultures, and nations through its intertextual use of various ideologies, folktales, and both religious and secular traditions. Eco is well-known for his imaginative blending of historical facts with creativity. The novel's intricate many thoughts and symbols that reflects the complex nature of human existence. According to the principle of intertextuality, all texts are interconnected, meaning that referencing previous authors is not an issue. Throughout this novel, Eco alludes to numerous works, locations, and events, many of which are ancient texts and places he has personally visited.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Julia Kristeva, "Word, Dialogue, and Novel," in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 37.

<sup>2</sup>Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981). 69.

<sup>3</sup>Umberto Eco, "Prelude to a Palimpsest," in *Naming the Rose: Essays on Eco's The Name of the Rose*, ed. M. Thomas Inge (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1988), xi.

<sup>4</sup>Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, trans. Anna Cancogni (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 19.

<sup>5</sup>Alphy Paul, "Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* as a Postmodern Gothic Fiction" (master's thesis, Kristu Jayanti College, 2020), 31.

<sup>6</sup>Rocco Capozzi, "Palimpsests and Laughter: The Dialogical Pleasure of Unlimited Intertextuality in *The Name of the Rose*," *Italica* 66, no. 4 (1989): 412. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/479254>. (accessed July 2, 2025)

<sup>7</sup>Cristina Farronato, "The Theory of Abduction and *The Name of the Rose*," in *Semiotics*, ed. Charles W. Spinks and John Deely (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 76.

<sup>8</sup>Teresa De Lauretis, "Goudy Rose: Eco and Narcissism," *Sub-Stance*, no. 47 (1985): 17.

<sup>9</sup>Rocco Capozzi, "Libraries, Encyclopedias, and Rhizomes: Popularizing Culture in Eco's Super-fictions," in *Umberto Eco's Alternatives*, ed. Norma Bouchard and Veronica Praradelli (New York: Peter Lang, 1998), 136.

<sup>10</sup>Evelyn Cobley, "Closure and Infinite Semiosis in Mann's Doctor Faustus and Eco's *The Name of the Rose*," *Comparative Literature Studies* 26, no. 4 (1989): 341. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40246688>. (Accessed July 4, 2025)

<sup>11</sup>Linda Hutcheon, "Eco's Echoes: Ironizing the (Post)modern," *Diacritics* 22, no. 1 (1992): 3. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/465234>. (Accessed July 3, 2025).

<sup>12</sup>De Lauretis, 16-17.

<sup>13</sup>Capozzi, 1998: 133.

<sup>14</sup>Hutcheon, 9.

<sup>15</sup>Capozzi, 1998: 134-135.

<sup>16</sup>Jeffrey Garrett, "Missing Eco: On Reading *The Name of the Rose* as Library Criticism," *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy* 61, no. 4 (1991): 379. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4308639>. (Accessed July 2, 2025).

<sup>17</sup>De Lauretis, 16.

<sup>18</sup>Capozzi, 1998: 130.

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<sup>19</sup>Rakib Uddin Talukdar, "The 'Influence' of Borges in Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*," *North East Journal of Contemporary Research* 8, no. 1 (2021): 58.

<sup>20</sup>Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose*, trans. William Weaver (London: Martin Secker & Warburg, 1992), 471. (All subsequent references are to this edition and are cited parenthetically in the text, following the abbreviation Rose.)

<sup>21</sup>Talukdar, 58.

<sup>22</sup>Cobley, 344.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid. 343.

<sup>24</sup>N. Jayanth Murthy, *Historicizing Fiction/Fictionalizing History: Representation in Select Novels of Umberto Eco and Orhan Pamuk* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 103.

<sup>25</sup>Abū Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jarīr Tabari, *Tarikh-e Tabari*, trans. Abolghasem Payande (Tehran: Asatir, 1989), 820-821.

<sup>26</sup>Abomaali Nasrollah Monshi, *Kelile va Demne*, ed. Mojtaba Minovi (Tehran: Tehran University Press, 1983), 263.

<sup>27</sup>Manijeh Abdollahi, "Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* and Intertextuality: Eastern Themes," *SCRIPTA*, no. 16 (2020): 255.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid. 256.

<sup>29</sup>Abolqasem Ferdowsi Tusi, *Shahname*, ed. Saeed Hamidian (Tehran: Ghatre, 1997), 41.

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