



Original article

Bridging Gaps: Mechanism of Indeterminacy as a Narrative Strategy in Dan Brown's Inferno

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ABSTRACT

Indeterminacies and gaps are narrative strategies that engage readers and escalate the momentum of the plot. Hence, indeterminacy is an effective mechanism in thriller novels that aim to integrate readers in meaning making. In *Inferno* (2013), by Dan Brown (1964), the mechanism of indeterminacies is used as a narrative strategy to maintain suspense as the text contains many gaps and mysterious events to make readers fill in the blanks. The current study argues that indeterminacies and gaps in Brown's *Inferno* are narrative strategies by applying Reader Response Theory and Wolfgang Iser's notion of indeterminacy, which is demonstrated in his article titled "Indeterminacy and the Reader's Response." The study relies on textual analysis to find gaps and how they are used as a narrative strategy, including cliffhangers, the prologue, the epilogue, and the blend of past and present by referring to Dante's *Inferno*. The findings demonstrate the importance of indeterminacies as a strategy for evoking readers' interaction.

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Keywords: Indeterminacy, mechanism, Iser, cliffhangers, Dan Brown

ردم الفجوات: آلية اللاتحديد كاستراتيجية سردية في رواية "الجحيم" لدان براون

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المُستخلص

تُعد العناصر غير المحددة والفجوات استراتيجيات سردية تعمل على إشراك القارئ وتضعيد زخم الحكمة ، لذا فإن اللاتحديد هي الية فعالة في روايات الاثارة والتي تهدف الى دمج القراء في تشكيل المعنى. في رواية "الجحيم" بقلم دان براون (١٩٦٤) ، يجري استعمال آلية العناصر غير المحددة كاستراتيجية سردية للحفاظ على التشويق، ويحتوي النص على العديد من الفجوات والاحداث الغامضة لغرض حث القراء على ملئ الفراغات. تذهب هذه الدراسة الحالية الى ان الفجوات واللاتحديد هي استراتيجية سردية في رواية "الجحيم" لدان براون من خلال تطبيق نظرية استجابة القارئ ومفهوم اللاتحديد لـولف غانغ ايزر والذي يتمثل في مقالته بعنوان "اللاتحديد و استجابة القارئ". تعتمد الدراسة على التحليل النصي لإيجاد الفجوات وكيف أُستعملت كاستراتيجية سردية، بما فيها فاتحة النص، وخاتمته، والجمع بين الماضي والحاضر من خلال الإشارة الى "الجحيم" بقلم دانتي. تبين نتائج الدراسة اهمية اللاتحديد كاستراتيجية لإثارة تفاعل القارئ.

الكلمات المفتاحية: اللاتحديد، آلية، إيزر، النهايات المشوقة، دان براون..

1.1 Introduction

In Brown's *Inferno*, the plot encompasses the components that produce an interesting story, due to the fact that his novels encompass plot twists, suspense, conspirators, adventures, and multi-dimensional religious, scientific, and historical background. In terms of form, his texts are infused with narrative shifts, but each text maintains a different narrative technique and presents a new theme (Zhu and Zhang, 2016, p. 228). As for the genre of Brown's texts, his texts are classified as thriller and criminal novels, because his characters always try to demystify the mysteries in the novel (Dogan and Erten, 2013, pp.43-44).

Brown's *Inferno* is about a virus intentionally released; it is a virus that will cause sterilization in a third of the world population. The virus is the only method to prevent overpopulation (Lundquist et al. 82). This epidemic is the outcome of an environmentalist who pursues balance in order to ensure sustainability in resources (Lundquist et al., 2015, p.87). The text accentuates contemporary issues by incorporating overpopulation, historical sites, and various cities in the world, which are presented through fiction.

1.2 Literature Review

Many studies were conducted to discuss Dan Brown's *Inferno*. In "A Malthusian Reading of the Pandemic in Dan Brown's *Inferno*," Mirkhan and Sharif (2023, pp. 1270-1271) analyze the text

from an ecocritical and Marxist lens to discuss the overpopulation. The paper takes into consideration the notions proposed by the English economist Thomas Malthus (1766-1834) and his theories on population and natural resources by applying these notions to Brown's text. This study tackles Karl Marx's notions regarding distributing resources as well as the Marxist's standpoint of history as a continuous conflict between the working classes and capitalists (Mirkhan and Sharif, 2023, pp. 1286-1287). Whereas the previous study explores Karl Marx's notions, other studies focus on New Marxism, as well as the notions of Karl Marx, for instance, in "A Marxist Study of Dan Brown's *Inferno*," by Al-Hamadawai and Al-Moussawai (2023, pp. 29-30), Dan Brown's *Inferno* is analyzed from a Marxist lens, by explaining the theoretical and ideological assumptions of Marxism, hegemony, false consciousness, and power relations in the text. Al-Hamadawai and Al-Moussawai (2023, pp. 26) address Marxism by applying Louise's Althusser's notions of ISA or "ideological state apparatuses," which are represented by the State's institutions that promote for the State's ideology, such as media and education. Additionally, Louise Althusser's RPS or "repressive state apparatuses," which are represented by coercive institutions, such as army and police. Althusser's two notions are respectively applied to Langdon and Zobrist as representatives of the State's apparatuses.

In "Rewriting the History of Hell through the 21st Century Scene in Dan Brown's *Inferno*," Ouertatani (2018, p.26) draws a comparison between the representation of hell in *Inferno* by the Italian poet Dante Alighieri (1526-1321) and Brown's novel by following the analytical approach and the theory of parody. The previous study also explores the historicity of the text and probes into its intertextuality. It argues that "the traces of hell are established metaphorically not just through plagues but through the obsessive use of science as a deconstruction under the claim of changing the world" (Ouertatani, 2018, p.27). Some scholars analyzed Brown's *Inferno*, relying on their own personal analysis. For instance, the article titled "Reader Response: Death of the Author, Rise of the Reader" (2017) where the article's author counts on the notions of Reader Response Theory; the author assigns to herself/himself the role of the reader; and gives a personal interpretation of two texts, namely, Dan Brown's *Inferno* and the poem "I am the Universe" by the Filipino poet, Alejandro Abadillan.

The point of divergence between the current study and the early research lies in the application of Wolfgang Iser's notion of indeterminacy in Dan Brown's *Inferno*, and by tracing the indeterminacies that are exemplified in cliffhangers, prologue, the epidemic, and the epilogue. The earlier studies explored themes or applied theories to Brown's novel without referring to the gaps and the indeterminacies in the text.

2.1 Dan Brown's *Inferno*: A Sketch

Dan Brown's *Inferno* revolves around Robert Langdon's journey in three cities, namely, Florence, Venice, and Istanbul to stop the outbreak of an epidemic that was bioengineered by a scientist. Langdon is one of the central characters in the text; he is a Harvard Professor in Symbology, who suffers from amnesia at the beginning of the text. He goes through many ordeals in order to demystify mysteries and unravel the truth regarding the epidemic that threatens humanity. He is accompanied by the physician Sienna Brooks, who tended him in the hospital and helped him flee from the assassin who wanted to kill him. Other characters have their influence in the text, such as Zobrist, who is already dead, but his influence is pervasive throughout the text. He is the antagonist, who unleashes a bioengineered epidemic to control overpopulation.

The text is saturated with literary and artistic references; the first of which is Dante's *Divine Comedy* that is considered the source of inspiration for Brown's text. In addition, there are "The Map of Hell" by Sandro Botticelli¹ and "The Battle of Marciano" by Giorgio Vasari². As for the themes tackled in the text, Brown addresses important issues, such as ethics of science, overpopulation, and the role of the individuals as well as organizations to take a stand and assume their responsibilities, especially in critical times. In addition, the text blends fact and fiction by citing real geographical sites, such as Palazzo Vecchio³ and Florence Baptistery. WHO (World Health Organization) links fiction with reality; its role is embodied in the Director-general Elizabeth Sienskey who accounts for many mysteries found in the text.

Further, the text is full of suspense and thrill as it engages the reader through the movement from one clue to another to reach revelation that might satisfy the reader's curiosity, but sometimes the text poses questions that are left to the reader to reflect upon and answer. Hence, the text will be approached by applying Reader Response Theory, particularly, Wolfgang Iser's indeterminacies.

2.2 Discussion

¹Sandro Botticelli (1445-1510) was one of the prominent painters in Italy during the Renaissance, see "Sandro Botticelli."

Giorgio Vasari (1511- 1574) was an Italian architect, author, and painter; he is well known for his Renaissance paintings, see "Giorgio Vasari."

³ Palazzo Vecchio is one of the historic sites in Italy and the residence of many governors, see "Palazzo Vecchio."

According to Wolfgang Iser (1997, pp.197-198), the indeterminate elements are the most significant tie between the literary text and the reader. These elements instigate the reader to use his own thoughts to actualize the intention of the text. “The indeterminate sections” and “the gaps” in any literary text are considered fundamental elements in order to evoke the reader’s response. They are not flaws and should not be intentionally imposed. The reader bridges these gaps by taking part in formulating the meaning of the text. Texts that contain indeterminacy are far from being boring because the reader contributes to formulate the meaning of the text. Hence, “indeterminacy is the fundamental precondition for reader participation.” Gaps and indeterminacies are related to Iser’s notion of the “Implied Reader,” which is deeply rooted in the structure of the text and it can never be resembled to any real reader. further it is textually structured to anticipate readers’ response and interaction. Hence, the “Implied Reader” is a “network of response-inviting structures” (Habib, 2005, p.230).

Amnesia is the cornerstone for the indeterminacies in Brown’s *Inferno*. Langdon wakes up after he had a nightmare to find that he had lost his memory and cannot remember anything for the last two days. Amnesia in Langdon’s case is caused by a bullet in the head, from which he survived, but who shot him and why? Readers are invited to trace any clue that might answer this question. Physicians “diagnosed [him] with retrograde amnesia, which is very common in head trauma. [His] memories of the past few days may be muddled or missing, but [he] should suffer no permanent damage” (Brown, 2013, p.21). Amnesia leads to a chain of incidents that cause indeterminacies for the reader and for Langdon himself: the doctor explains the whole thing: “recurring visions are common with amnesia. The brain function that sorts and catalogs your memories has been temporarily shaken up, and so it throws everything into one picture” (Brown, 2013, p.32).

The first of these visions is the one he had in chapter one when he sees a bloodred river and a woman who keeps repeating: “Time grows short... seek and find” (Brown, 2013, p.16). The woman tells him to seek in order to find. This is another source of indeterminacy, because Langdon could not comprehend the implicit meaning of the sentence. Though the vision is attributed to amnesia, it is foreshadowing used by the author in order to engage readers and instigate them to bridge the gaps. Nevertheless, this is not the only vision he had, visions recurred again when he saw the bloodred river and the silver-haired woman, but this time with a mask:

once again, the woman reached up and lifted her veil to reveal the striking visage that Langdon had seen earlier. I am life, she said. Without warning, a colossal image materialized

in the sky above her—a fearsome mask with a long beaklike nose and two fiery green eyes, which stared blankly out at Langdon. And ... I am death, the voice boomed (Brown, 2013, p. 38).

Surprisingly enough, what readers took for granted at the beginning of the text is revealed to be an unknown gap; Langdon's amnesia was not caused by a bullet in his head, the reason was totally unexpected: "Langdon stared at the tiny man in disbelief. 'you gave me amnesia!' The provost let out an apologetic sigh. 'I'm afraid so. Chemically induced. Very safe, but yes, a deletion of your short-term memory (Brown, 2013, p.292). The amnesia suffered by Langdon was part of a larger scheme by an organization called the Consortium headed by the Provost in order to use Langdon to find the epidemic bioengineered by Zobrist.

Zobrist is an "off stage" character, but his presence looms over the text. He is "a Swiss billionaire... a biochemist and Dante fanatic" (Brown, 2013, p.145). The prologue is fully devoted to his words and his statements baffle readers owing to the symbolic nature of his language. Readers are confronted by Zobrist from the very first line of the prologue, where he identifies himself: "I am the Shade" (Brown, 2013, p.14). The very nature of this character causes indeterminacy and readers must fill in the blanks to understand his personality and motives. What readers receive is what the other characters say about Zobrist, for instance, Dr. Sienna is the character who provides rich information regarding Zobrist. First she identifies him: "Bertrand Zobrist. Famous biochemist. Made a fortune in biological patents at a young age... [he] basically invented the field of germ-line manipulation" (Brown, 2013, p.145). Dr. Sienna also discusses Zobrist's radical views, such as "Population Apocalypse Equation" and the "mathematical recognition that the earth's population is rising... Zobrist has publicly predicted that the human race will not survive another century unless [people] have some kind of mass extinction event" (Brown, 2013, p.145). He is a scientist who had been "once quoted as saying that 'the best thing that ever happened to Europe was the Black Death'" (Brown, 2013, p.145).

Scholars as readers analyze Zobrist's character to fill in the gaps. For instance, in "An Analysis of the Main Villain Character Bertrand Zobrist in Dan Brown's *Inferno*: a Psychological Approach," Citra Kartika Devi (2018, p.12) argues that Zobrist is a psychotic obsessive character, who has been through stress. He reaches the utmost of his stress when he decides to commit suicide by falling from the Badia tower, which is an abbey and a church, into the abyss. In "Character Archetypal Approach Transcending the Shades of the Antagonist Bertrand Zobrist in Dan Brown's *Inferno*," Malathy and

Lalitha (2022, p.62) argue that Zobrist is a rebel, who is willing to be an outcast. He rebels against the society and he is ready to endure rejection and backlash. A panoramic view was given by Sienna:

Zobrist was immediately attacked from all sides-politicians, clergy, the World Health Organization-all of whom derided him as a doomsayer lunatic who was simply trying to cause panic. They took particular umbrage at his statement that today's youth, if they chose to reproduce, would have offspring that literally would witness the end of the human race (Brown, 2013, p. 173).

Moreover, some scholars analyze Zobrist's character by applying the theory of Criminology, which studies crime from the lens of society, economics, anthropology, and motives. In "Criminology and literature: a criminologist's critique of Zobrist from Dan Brown's *Inferno*," Komal Raichura (2019, p.86-87) considers the text as "narrative criminology," where Zobrist has studied all the details regarding overpopulation, which justifies his stance. Raichura (2019, p.90) adds that Zobrist believes that the world is in chaos and the only solution is to make a drastic change via an epidemic. In addition, in "The Fatal Disease of Autoimmunity in Dan Brown's *Inferno*," Abdul Ridha and Hadi (2022, pp. 539) analyze Zobrist's character from a psychological perspective by diagnosing Zobrist with autoimmunity, which affects human behavior. Hence those who suffer from autoimmunity want to change the current condition, because they believe their propositions are better. The two scholars argue that Zobrist suffers from autoimmunity "which haunts sufferers with death, until they actually perform suicide at the end" (Abdul Ridha and Hadi, 2022, p. 540). Some of the gaps regarding Zobrist's character were filled in the following chapters, still, his personality is a mystery that can be variously interpreted by readers.

Another gap that needs to be bridged and decoded by readers and characters alike is Dante's Death Mask. In terms of history, it is an artifact kept in the Palazzo Vecchio, but it is also a source of indeterminacy. Death Mask is defined by Sienna as "a very common practice in the 1500s. It's essentially just a plaster cast of someone's face, taken a few moments after that person dies" (Brown, 2013, p.131). Death mask is one of the manifestations of mourning at that time. Abd and Muhi (2025, 1106) argue that mourning has undergone a process of change, because it "included a transition from physical indicators of memory, such as tombstones and photographs, to more conceptual and digital analogues to the departed." Dante's death mask serves another function; its theft is connected to Langdon's amnesia, who stole it with another character, but in the present he does not remember

anything. Later in the text, the theft is revealed by a video tape: “Langdon was shocked when he watched himself in utter disbelief as he reached into the case, gently gripped the Dante Alighieri’s Death Mask with both hands, and lifted it out” (Brown, 2013, p. 146).

Basically, Zobrist bought the mask, but let the museum keep it because he wanted to make a grant to the museum “without registering the gift as charity” (Brown, 2013, p.143). The mask was covered by gesso, but under the gesso, there was “a second layer of calligraphy-nine letters written directly onto the pale yellow surface of the original plaster” (Brown, 2013, p.202). The aforementioned text is a poem written in spiral form to be read sideways. The poem is framed by Dante’s words and style as the first stanza is Dante’s verbatim and the rest of the poem is an imitation to Dante’s style. The Mask functions as a source for many indeterminacies and clues. First, the poem refers to a certain city, which is an important clue to find Zobrist’s Inferno:

Langdon’s eye found the word, which he had skimmed over on his first pass. It was the name of one of the most spectacular and unique cities in the world. Langdon felt a chill, knowing it also happened to be the city in which Dante Alighieri famously became infected with the deadly disease that killed him (Brown, 2013, p.205).

Actually, this is an anachronism used by author, because Dante died in 1321, whereas Black Death inflicted Europe in the years 1347-1352.

Langdon and Sienna must solve the riddle in the poem, which is multilayered, especially, in terms of geographical sites. The first layer is related to Venice, specifically, a certain figure in Venice: “seek the treacherous doge of Venice” (Brown, 2013, p. 221). The characters believe it is a reference to the Doge/Duke Enrico Dnandolo, the Venetian Doge, who betrayed Constantinople. Consequently, they go to Venice to inspect St. Mark Basilica in order to find the next clue, but they discover that “the tomb was probably nowhere near St. Mark’s or the Doge’s palace” (Brown, 2013, p. 267). To their disappointment, they discover later that the tomb is not in Venice; it is in another place outside of Italy. The second layer of the riddle is when the poem instructs them to “follow deep into the sunken palace... for here, in the darkness, the chthonic monster waits” (Brown, 2013, p.205), which is the “Basilica Cistern” beneath Hagia Sophia, in Istanbul, Turkey. Some blanks are filled later in the text, for instance, the reason why Zobrist chose Istanbul is due to the fact that it is “straddling the geographic boundary between Europe and Asia” (Brown, 2013, p.209). In addition, this site is a perfect choice to ensure the spread of the virus:

As soon as this virus was released into the cistern's lagoon, a chain reaction began. Every person who descended into that cavern and breathed the air became infected. They became viral hosts... unwitting accomplices who transferred the virus to others, sparking an exponential proliferation of disease that will now have torn across the planet like a forest fire. By now, the virus will have penetrated the global population. You, me... everyone (Brown, 2013, p. 348).

Sienna's accounts for the choice of Istanbul by explaining the mechanism by which the epidemic will spread, but her explanation is not the end of the story. The chapter ends with a "cliffhanger," which engages readers in an atmosphere of suspense. Galton (2012, p.30) notes that the "cliffhanger" is a narrative technique, which is used at the end of an episode of chapter in a novel in order to maintain suspense in the text. The author's intention is to withhold the revelation and engage readers. Usually cliffhangers are characterized by the uncertainty about the events in the text. This technique should instigate the readers' curiosity by leaving unanswered questions.

In Dan Brown's *Inferno*, cliffhangers are used from the very beginning of the text. First of all, the prologue ends with the lines that describe the epidemic described as "inferno" which was bioengineered by Zobrist: "my gift is the future. My gift is salvation. My gift is Inferno. With that, I whisper my amen... and take my final step, into the abyss" (Brown, 2013, p. 15). The prologue inaugurates the technique of cliffhanger in the text. The final lines leave the reader with uncertainty and many questions, such as: what is the gift? Why is it considered salvation and inferno at the same time? Who is going to commit suicide? All these questions are left unanswered. They are blanks and gaps to be bridged later in the following chapters. Cliffhangers are heavily used in the early chapters to maintain suspense. In chapter one, the chapter ends with a description of the assassin assigned to kill Langdon, but readers are left with uncertainty whether her mission is accomplished or not. Hence, they must move to the next chapter to find out what follows. Suspense continues in chapter three when the chapter ends with Dr. Macroni, a physician in the hospital, being shot on the ground without explaining what will happen next. In chapter Fifty-seven, the chapter ends with the line: "this time, however, the letters formed a word" (Brown, 2013, p. 202), but the word is not given. The reader must move to the next chapter to know the word is "possessed" (Brown, 2013, p. 203). The word baffles Langdon, who studies the spiral poem to understand its implications. Langdon notes, "it's taken from one of the most famous stanzas of Dante's *Inferno*" (Brown, 2013, p. 203), and it refers to those who are interested in

knowledge: ““O, you possessed of sturdy intellect... observe the teachings hidden here... beneath the veil of verses so obscure”” (Brown, 2013, p. 203).

The vision at the end of chapter Eight is a cliffhanger, where symbols of life, death, and medieval plagues are displayed. The vision is a continuation of the first vision in chapter one; the same silver-haired woman but in the second vision a mask appears to instigate Langdon’s curiosity and readers’ uncertainty as well. The vision is full of blanks and symbols that need to be decoded; thereby, increasing suspense and engaging readers.

Cliffhangers are also found in chapter Nine and chapter Ten, which end with the contents of a video. Though the speech in this video echoes and complements the prologue, the content here is more concise:

I am the Shade. If you are watching this, then it means my soul is finally at rest. Driven underground, I must speak to the world from deep within the earth... soon you will know what I have left behind. And yet, even here, I sense the footfalls of the ignorant souls who pursue me... with purity of conscience I have bequeathed to you all the gift of hope, of salvation, of tomorrow (Brown, 2013, p.43).

The content is symbolic and it does not explicitly state Zobrist’s intentions. Readers must bridge the gaps and continue reading to know more about the “ignorant souls” and “the gift of hope” (Brown, 2013, p.43).

In chapter Ten, the speech in the video is an analogy between Dark Ages and the present. This video epitomizes Zobrist’s views regarding overpopulation and his scheme to unleash a pandemic that will change life in an unprecedented manner: “here in this sunken palace, Inferno smolders beneath the waters. Soon it will burst into flames. And when it does, nothing on earth will be able to stop it” (Brown, 2013, p.47). It is worth noting Zobrist’s name is not mentioned until chapter Forty-one. Thus, readers are only given the word “Shade” and “inferno” which respectively refer to Zobrist and the epidemic, which he bioengineered.

Ultimately, at the end of the novel, characters and readers discover the truth; a revelation by Sienna, who accounts for the blanks and gaps in the text. It answers the questions regarding the prologue, the videos, and Zobrist. Sienna reveals that she is an accomplice in Zobrist’s scheme: “I became more than his love. I became his disciple” (Brown, 2013, p.232). Sienna unfolds the objective

of this epidemic; the epidemic is not meant to cause death. It is meant to cause sterility to one third of the world population. The revelation justifies the choice of Dante's *Inferno* as a frame of reference for the novel. Dante goes through a reversed kind of a journey in hell or "inferno" in order to find paradise. He is exposed to the dire consequences of Man's sins. In the text, the protagonist goes through a journey to find the epidemic or "inferno," as it is named by Zobrist. The end of the text invites readers to think of the important issues in life, such as limits of science, ethics, overpopulation, and correct decisions. The conventional ending is altered by offering the reader an opportunity to interpret and think. Langdon notes that there is a "new breed of thinkers" (Brown, 2013, p.359), thereby, suggesting "a totally new generation, whose catalysts of change are both male and female" (Abdulridha and Taher, 2022, p.40).

The epilogue at the end of the text helps readers understand the purpose of the epigraph: "The darkest places in hell are reserved for those who maintain their neutrality in times of moral crisis" (Brown, 2013, p.11). These lines are repeated in the epilogue when Langdon is on board, but with an addition that elaborates meaning and connects the end to the beginning:

The darkest places in hell are reserved for those who maintain their neutrality in times of moral crisis. For Langdon, the meaning of these words had never felt so clear: In dangerous times, there is no sin greater than inaction. Langdon knew that he himself, like millions was guilty of this. When it came to the circumstances of the world, denial had become a global pandemic. Langdon promised himself that he would never forget this (Brown, 2013, p.367).

These lines generally conceptualize the conditions on the globe, but after this vector virus has spread, life is not the same. What is deemed by Zobrist as a scientific solution is now a threat that counters humanity and calls for a responsible reconsideration of science and other important issues on the globe.

Conclusion

Gaps and indeterminacy help readers introspectively explore the text through textual analysis, and such indeterminate elements urge readers to retrospectively explore other texts, such as Dante's *Inferno*. The use of gaps and indeterminacies in the text is justifiable due to the fact that these gaps instigate readers to interact with the text. Moreover, the act of reading will be an ongoing process where readers' response will intersect with the revelations provided by the author at the end of the novel. In addition, multilayered indeterminacies are found in Dan Brown's *Inferno*: characters must decode symbols and fill in the blanks in order to find Zobrist's virus or "inferno". Likewise, readers are also

invited to demystify the mysteries and gaps in the text. Brown utilizes the mechanism of indeterminacy as a narrative strategy in the prologue as well as the chapters by using many techniques. First, the literary allusion is used through the inclusion of Dante's lines of poetry. Consequently, Langdon must decipher the lines in order to reach Zobrist's inferno. Simultaneously, readers must also decode these symbols in order to understand the text. The second technique is the use of cliffhangers in the prologue and some of the chapter to increase suspense. The third technique is using the motif of the epidemic as the author makes use of the ineffability of the epidemic. Thus, readers are confronted with a mysterious epidemic, which cannot be explained.

Accordingly, the understandability of readers highly depends on the text as readers are given the opportunity to piece together the indeterminate elements to bridge the gap through the act of reading and through the inconclusive end. Nevertheless, the novel conveys significant implications, such as whether there should be regulations to limit science. Ultimately, the novel does not end happily as the epidemic spreads all over the world. Readers are left to think if this is the end or it might be a preparation for another novel by Brown.

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