

DECONSTRUCTING THE NARRATIVE OF THE FRAGMENTED SELF IN UMBERTO ECO'S "THE NAME OF THE ROSE"

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Abstract

Literary theory was pronounced dead by Derrida in the mid-1960s. Barthes declared the death of the author, almost five decades following Nietzsche's ominous announcement that God is dead. In response literary theory continued to thrive in disparate ways from structuralist theory and psychoanalytic theory but more importantly it signalled the shift away from the writer to the reader in reader-response theory.

This research paper will argue that identity, which is inextricably linked with the understanding of how the self in relation to context, undergoes a shift in responses to shifting contexts through the lens of postmodern theory. Umberto Eco's novel "The Name of the Rose" is a complex work that deals with various themes and ideas, including the concept of a fragmented self. Through an examination of the structure, setting, characters and plot of Eco's novel, this research will attempt to elucidate the complexity of the self, arguing that as long as binaries exist, the idea of the holistic self as opposed to the fragmented self, will remain a distant dream.

Keywords: Fragmentation, non-linear narratives, intertextuality, metafiction, pastiche, selfhood, self-reflection

A theoretical framework that derives from a range of psychological, philosophical and sociological perspectives helps conceptualize the fragmented self and identity. One such framework is postmodernism which emphasizes the ways in which identity is socially constructed and fragmented. One must agree that the self is not a stable, fixed or an essential or unified entity but rather a product of social and linguistic prompts that are fluid: constantly being negotiated and re-negotiated in relation to social and cultural contexts, is contingent and is hence subject to change.

Psychoanalysis provides another framework useful to an understanding of the fragmented self and identity, with its emphasis on the ways in which the self is a construct of unconscious processes of identification and disidentification. This perspective proposes that the result of the fragmentation and disintegration lies in repressed, unresolved conflicts and traumas divorced from conscious awareness.

From a sociological perspective, the fragmented self and identity can be understood in terms of the pressures and demands of modern society, which often result in feelings of alienation, disconnection, and anomie. This perspective emphasizes the ways in which social structures and institutions such as the media, education, and the workplace can shape and fragment individual identities, leading to a sense of dislocation and disorientation.

The shared goal of all these frameworks will depend on the disciplinary perspective and the research questions being addressed. This research will explore the complex nature of identity of the protagonist of Umberto Eco's novel, "The Name of the Rose," William of Baskerville and the ways in which it was shaped, transformed and fragmented since the novel itself addresses the theme of the fragmented self through its protagonist. It will also address the structure, setting and other characters in an attempt to elicit the binaries through which the narrative constantly traverses.

Postmodernism, the literary movement that emerged in the mid-20th century, characterized by a rejection of modernism's emphasis on rationality, progress, and the concept of an objective truth emphasizes the subjectivity of reality and the blurring of boundaries between high and low culture, as well as the use of fragmented narratives and a self-reflexive style. Umberto Eco's novel "The Name of the Rose," which can be considered a prime example of postmodern literature, is a historical murder mystery that takes place in a 14th-century Italian monastery. The story follows the investigations of William of Baskerville, a Franciscan friar, and his apprentice Adso of Melk as they attempt to solve a series of murders that have taken place in the monastery.

Characteristic features of the postmodern novel are fragmented narratives, non-linear timelines, and multiple perspectives, which reflected the fragmented and subjective nature of reality. There is also a tendency of postmodern novels to often comment on themselves, their own writing style, and the act of writing itself. This

self-reflexivity and self-consciousness is often achieved through techniques such as that of metafiction, which acknowledges the novel as a construct rather than an objective representation of reality. Parody and pastiche, the imitating or borrowing from various literary and cultural forms to create new meanings or to critique traditional narratives also form part of the style of the postmodern novel. Irony and humour are also common elements used to subvert traditional narrative expectations and to create distance between the reader and the text. The intertextual elements which characterise the postmodern novel, emphasize the interconnectedness of cultural and literary texts, often referencing or alluding to other works of literature, art, or popular culture to create new meanings leading to the reshaping of the fragmented self.

“The Name of the Rose” is highly self-referential, with the narrator frequently commenting on the act of writing the story and the nature of storytelling itself. Eco also includes references to other works of literature, such as Sherlock Holmes stories and works by Borges and Joyce. The intertextuality of the novel arises out of the constant allusions to other texts, both fictional and non-fictional. For example, the novel's structure and plot are modelled after the detective fiction genre, and the characters discuss numerous theological texts throughout the story. The fragmented structure is seen in the division of the novel into seven days, each having its own unique narrative structure and style, including numerous digressions and tangents, as the characters often speak in riddles and allusions. A blending of a variety of genres and styles, including detective fiction, historical fiction, and philosophical treatise as well as elements of humour, satire, and tragedy make the narrative structure a pastiche, another highly questioned feature of postmodernism.

In the novel, Eco's reflects various aspects of culture in different ways. Set in the 14th century, a period of great social, political, and religious upheaval in Europe, it reflects the historical culture of this period, with its focus on the power struggles between the papacy and the Holy Roman Empire, the rise of the merchant class, and the intellectual ferment of the Renaissance. The religious culture of the time, with its emphasis on the authority of the Church, the importance of ritual, and the debates over the interpretation of scripture, reflects the religious culture of the time and in spite of its period setting, “The Name of the Rose” is a work of postmodern fiction that reflects the literary culture of the late 20th century, of intertextual references to other works of literature, both ancient and modern, with literary conventions and genres in a self-conscious and playful way.

Each of the characters in the novel is cautiously constructed with their own unique personalities and motivations. William of Baskerville is a complex character, a man of great intelligence and learning who is also haunted by his own past and struggles with his faith. Throughout the novel, William is presented as a man with a divided self, torn between his rational, logical side and his emotional, passionate side. On one hand, William is a Franciscan monk who is devoted to reason, logic, and the pursuit of knowledge. He is a skilled logician and a great admirer of Aristotle, and relies on his intellect to solve the mysteries that he encounters in the abbey.

On the other hand, William is also a man with a strong sense of empathy and compassion. He is deeply affected by the suffering of others, and he is often moved to tears by the plight of the poor and the oppressed. He is also haunted by memories of his past, including his experiences as a soldier in the Crusades, which have left him with deep emotional scars.

William's divided self is reflected in the two main mysteries that he sets out to solve: the mystery of the deaths of several monks in the abbey, which William approaches with his characteristic rationality and logic and the second, the mystery of the forbidden book, which he pursues with a sense of passion and determination that is more typical of a hero in a medieval romance.

Ultimately, William's fragmented self is resolved through his experiences in the abbey, as he comes to realize that reason and passion are not necessarily opposed to each other. He learns to embrace both sides of his nature, and he emerges from the abbey as a more fully integrated and balanced individual.

Jorge de Burgos, a blind monk, isolated himself from the world becoming obsessed with the idea of preserving knowledge contained in books. However, his obsession drives him to commit several murders in the name of protecting the knowledge he considers sacred. Jorge's fragmented self is reflected in his conflicting desires to preserve knowledge and commit acts of violence.

Adso of Melk, William's apprentice, a naive and impressionable young man who is both fascinated and overwhelmed by the world of the monastery, is the narrator of the novel, and his journey to the abbey reflects a journey of self-discovery. Throughout the novel, Adso grapples with his identity as a novice monk, a young man experiencing love for the first time, and a witness to the violence and corruption within the abbey. Adso's fragmented self is reflected in his attempts to reconcile these various aspects of his identity.

Besides the characters, space too presents the idea of the fragmentation and division. For instance, the library within the abbey is a labyrinthine structure that contains knowledge from various cultures and periods in history. However, it is also a space of danger and violence, as several characters die within its walls, the library thus reflecting the idea of a fragmented self in its juxtaposition of knowledge and danger.

The fragmentation of self within the larger society is seen in yet another instance in the trial of Salvatore, a peasant accused of heresy. The trial, besides exposing the conflicts between the religious and secular authorities, as well as the tensions between different social classes, reflects Salvatore's own fragmented self through his ambiguous beliefs and his willingness to confess to crimes he did not commit.

Through its exploration of complex themes of faith, reason, censorship, and power, its richly drawn characters and vividly imagined setting, Eco's “The Name of the Rose” offers thought-provoking views on the nature of

knowledge and the dangers of dogmatism. The clash of cultures between the medieval Christian West and the Islamic East delves deeper into the differences between the various religious orders within Christianity, and the conflicts and tensions that exist between them. The setting of the novel in a Benedictine abbey in 14th Century Italy and the central plot point involving an envoy from the Islamic East to hold theological discussions with representatives of the Christian West, evokes tension as they struggle to find common ground in the face of theological differences.

Societal pressure for a unified, holistic individual often leads to internal conflict, in this case between reason and faith. William of Baskerville is a rationalist who believes in using logic and reason to solve problems, while many of the other monks in the monastery cling to their beliefs and superstitions: the conflict between these two worldviews playing out through the novel, as William's investigations are repeatedly hindered by the monks' reluctance to question their faith.

Fragmentation is also visible in Eco's overturning of the idea of the reliable narrator as well as the concept of the unified, objective truth of traditional narratives. Eco succeeds in challenging traditional literary conventions and tropes, in questioning the authority of organized religion and the notion of a single, universal morality throughout the novel. An important theme in the book is the power of knowledge and the dangers of censorship. The monastery contains a vast library filled with books that have, ironically, been deemed heretical by the Catholic Church. The monks in the monastery believe that these books should be hidden away and kept out of the hands of the common people, lest they be corrupted by their ideas. William, on the other hand, sees suppression of ideas as a form of tyranny, believing that knowledge should be freely available to all. Set in the fourteen hundreds, "The Name of the Rose" is a celebration of the power of knowledge and the pursuit of truth, reflecting the intellectual culture of the time, with its emphasis on logic, reason, and empirical observation, as well as its fascination with the mysteries of the natural world. Cultural differences, including those between Christianity and Islam and in particular, those between various religious orders within Christianity, are powerfully evoked by Eco through the novel's nuanced characters and the intricate plot, in its attempt to find common ground in the face of the differences. Another cultural difference one sees is the divide between the different religious orders within Christianity. The protagonist, William of Baskerville, is a Franciscan friar who is sent to the abbey to investigate a series of murders. However, he quickly finds himself at odds with the Dominican inquisitor, Bernard Gui, who is also investigating the murders. The conflict between the two men is not only personal, but also reflects the larger differences between the Franciscans and the Dominicans, who had different approaches to theology and spirituality.

In this way, "The Name of the Rose" can be seen as a meditation on the nature of the self, and on the challenges that we face in our attempts at integrating our different selves into a coherent and unified whole. Reflecting on the cultural complexity in myriad ways, "The Name of the Rose" is an invitation to the reader to engage with the cultural themes and to critically interrogate the way in which culture shapes our understanding of the world and in turn shapes our identities. Overall, "The Name of the Rose" is a complex work that explores the concept of a fragmented self in various ways. Through its characters, setting, and plot, the novel suggests that identity is not a stable or fixed concept, but rather a constantly evolving and often contradictory one.

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