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## A Befuddling Book

University of Bologna's Professor Umberto Eco was famously author of best sellers "The Name of the Rose" and "Foucault's Pendulum," published in English, respectively, in 1983 and 1989. The drama of the first, for me, was a pull until the last page. On the other hand, the arcane mysteries of semiotics in "Foucault's Pendulum," beginning from the 12<sup>th</sup> century, and the too numerous arcane titles and words, led to my early aborted read about 25 years ago. I felt the call for an uninterrupted lifetime of study to get to Professor Eco's baseline and to appreciate his humor. The book was thus book-ended to "The Rose" on a shelf and never opened again until this December. This time, for whatever reason, I vowed to actually see it through.

I have finished it, but the semiotics and strange word references were still too much to handle short of taking a college-level immersion from Professor Umberto Eco himself, a distinguished academician dealing in symbols, codes, hidden meanings and conspiracies. It is as though he dumped everything from a four-year college curriculum into this one 641-page tome (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers hard cover) to get it all documented in one place. I had to go to a New York Times book review of October 5, 1989 by Anthony Burgess. "Not an easy book," he wrote. And..."not a novel in the strict sense of the word." And ..."encyclopedic." I felt better about my own inability to digest "Foucault's Pendulum."

And, Burgess also said,..."great are the rewards for those who actually manage to read it."

A few of Professor Eco's own, broadly applicable, in-text words helped me eventually gain traction however. He stopped the semiotic dust storm for a moment to make a brief point that frames the whole of this work.

Almost at the end, on page 618, he writes through a character named Lia about the mysterious, but unsubstantiated Plan of the cult that is the centuries-old Templar Knights, to which her cult-learned husband subscribes: "People are starved for plans. If you offer them one, they fall on it like a pack of wolves. You invent, and they'll believe. It's wrong to add to the inventions that already exist." Her protagonist husband, Casaubon, being among the Plan "inventors," if inventors they actually be, is fully absorbed by the Plan, and thus her voice in the narrative is counterpoint to him in the search to put substance into a want-to-be-believed Plan.

Is the Plan real or counterfeit? It's real for Casaubon, and that's the story, but you can decide for yourself, and decide, too, if you are willing to treat this important book with due respect for its semiotics, without the requirement that you absorb it all. That is another way of accepting a work of art, which I personally had not previously been too easy about. I am the more so now.

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A single copy of the book is available in the WLN collection, which suggests that it has never experienced high demand locally, though it deserves more, despite my being befuddled. Some memorable books are just like that, calling for trust in the erudition of the author. I have scratched my itch with this article to trust and to give it more visibility.

And, writing about the book has forced me to understand better. That's how that works too.

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