UMBERTO ECO AND RABELAISIAN GROTESQUE

Bakhtinian Echoes and Sociopolitical Criticism in the Fictional Works of Umberto Eco

Trinity College Dublin

Ph.D. Thesis

School of Languages, Literatures & Cultural Studies

2013

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Declaration

This thesis is entirely my original work and has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at any university.

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Summary

Subject: An analysis of Umberto Eco's novels and their use of the Rabelaisian grotesque as a means for sociopolitical criticism in the light of Mikhail Bakhtin's theory on the grotesque.

Keywords: Grotesque, Subversion, Carnival, Humour, Revolution, Satire, Parody, Sociopolitical Criticism and Literature, Folk and Mass Culture.

Despite the fact that Eco is a world-renowned public intellectual with an evident desire to contribute to the changes of contemporary Italian society, scholarly literature has given little attention to the sociopolitical criticism contained in his novels. The fact that Eco is a scholar has frequently led to his novels being confined to the academic sphere, for which their author is such an authoritative voice.

My thesis engages with Umberto Eco's fiction in order to point out how it expresses Eco's views on contemporary society in satirical and parodic ways. I proceed by identifying the Rabelaisian grotesque as something that characterises the tone of Eco's novels. The grotesque, as Bakhtin's analysis of Rabelais and the wider tradition of carnivalistic literature shows, is an instrument for expressing subversion. Bakhtin's politicised reading of the Rabelaisian grotesque thus serves the purpose of revealing the targets of Eco's criticism. Thanks to Bakhtin's theory on the grotesque, the carnival, and folk culture, it is possible to mark, by Eco's use of the grotesque, an evolution in his criticism of contemporary society from the late 1960s to today.

Acknowledgments

I am indebted to the staff of the School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies for their encouragement and support while I was working on this thesis. I would like to thank Dr Roberto Bertoni for his help on the Italian side of the project, and Dr Sarah Smyth for generously sharing her knowledge on structural and administrative issues.

It has been greatly helpful to be able to interview Professor Umberto Eco, who was encouraging, easily approachable and had the patience to answer all my questions.

This work was enriched also thanks the talks I had the opportunity to give in Trinity College and elsewhere. It especially benefited from the "Fourteenth International Mikhail Bakhtin Conference," held in Bertinoro in July 2011, because of its multidisciplinary international approach to Bakhtin and its Italian angle.

Dr Patricia Kennan from my undergraduate and postgraduate institution, Università del Piemonte Orientale "Amedeo Avogadro," made herself available throughout the whole process to help resolve all my doubts in English-language matters.

Finally, I would like to thank my family and all my friends for continuing to believe in me and in my project over the past few years. Many friends and colleagues have assisted me by proof-reading and by giving their opinions on my work. Others had the burden of supporting me during the more challenging moments of the PhD. I mention in particular Renato, Evelina, and John, without of course forgetting my parents, my grandmother and my sister.

Grottesco non vuol dire scherzoso. Ovvero, la rivisitazione ironica di fatti e miti può costituire, talvolta, l'unico modo desiderabile di capire.

Umberto Eco

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Note on Referencing

In the body text I quote Eco's novels in English and then in Italian in the footnotes. When I refer to a passage in Eco's novels but I do not add a quote, the reference is given to the Italian version only.

All of the quoted English translations of Eco's works are from existing translations with the exception of those for some more recent or obscure articles, for which I provide my own translation. When that is the case, indication will be given in brackets.

I refer to two interviews that I conducted with Umberto Eco. Prof. Eco requested that I do not provide full transcriptions as an appendix to my thesis. For this reason I refer only to the dates when the interviews took place: 28 March 2011 and 13 December 2011.

INTRODUCTION

0.1 Statement of Hypothesis

Umberto Eco's writing has offered an influential critique of Italian society over the last five decades. The present study analyses the sociopolitical criticism advanced by Umberto Eco through his fictional works. It argues that Eco's novels challenge power holders and power brokers, clergymen, politicians, and intellectuals by revealing the processes through which they reach power and hold on to it. Eco aims to demonstrate that their authority is transient and encourages his readers to understand this by becoming critical observers of contemporary society. In order to ridicule his targets, Eco incorporates into his novels satire and grotesque images derived from Rabelais.[1] Although the subversive value of Rabelais's writings was immediately recognised in the Renaissance,[2] it was only made the object of an extensive study in the late 1930s by the Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, who, in *Rabelais and His World* (1965), drew unprecedented attention to Rabelais's revolutionary potential. Given the pervading influence of the Rabelaisian grotesque in Eco's sociopolitical criticism, it follows that

[1] In "Nadia Bobbio Interviews Umberto Eco," March 28, 2011. Eco declared that he had read Rabelais as a child and that it influenced his work as an adult. See also Umberto Eco, *Sulla letteratura* (Milan: Bompiani, 2002/2008), 131.

[2] Rabelais published his books with the pseudonym Alcofribas Nasier, a wise precaution since his books were immediately condemned by the Sorbonne. As Ian McFarlane points out, Rabelais is an enigmatic figure. Not much is known of his life. His work is ambiguous, allusive, and it has often been complicated by religious prejudice. His work has been differently appreciated throughout over time: seventeenth-century France and Italy considered him a humorist, whereas the eighteenth century opted for a more allegorical interpretation of his work. Critics stress how Rabelais's monastic training—first as a Franciscan, then as a Benedictine—influenced his style of writing, imbuing it with the sermon idiom of the preaching friars and providing material for his satires. Rabelais was also well informed about law, which he ridicules in many occasions, and the fact that he was a doctor explains his anatomical knowledge and his frequent references to the body as well as why medicine is turned into a source of humour for his novels. From 1532 to 1546 he wrote the four books on Gargantua and Pantagruel (most of the posthumous fifth book is of doubtful authenticity). Ian Dalrymple McFarlane, *Renaissance France: 1470-1589*, ed. Patrick Edward Charvet (London; Tonbridge: Ernest Benn Limited Edition, 1974), 171-2.

Bakhtin's reading of Rabelais is a useful instrument for analysing the political value of the Rabelaisian grotesque in Eco.

The Bakhtin/Eco connection was first pointed out by scholars such as Christina Farronato and Theresa Coletti, but their work is limited to Eco's first and most popular novel, *Il nome della rosa* (1980). They show that the close connection made between Bakhtin's reading of Rabelais and Eco's *Il nome* is justified in two ways. Firstly, it is motivated by the similar medieval setting. Secondly, the connection is encouraged by the importance that the question of laughter—at the core of Bakhtin's theory in *Rabelais and His World*—has in *Il nome*.

Indeed, Eco declared in an interview with *El Paìs* in 1983 that he had been reading Bakhtin's monograph on Rabelais when writing his first novel.[3] Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World* was then of great interest. Its publication in Russia had been delayed by censorship until 1965 and did not appear in Italian until 1979, translated by Mili Romano for the Italian publishing house Einaudi. The Rabelais study had already been translated in 1968 into English by Hélène Iswolsky for the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press and into French in 1970 by André Robel for Gallimard. However, Bakhtin's work on the polyphonic novel, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1963), a revisited version of the work written in 1929,[4] had appeared relatively early in Italian in 1968, translated by Giuseppe Garritano for Einaudi. The French edition, translated by Isabelle Kolitcheff and introduced by Julia Kristeva, followed in 1970 for Éditions du Seuil.

[3] Interview with Rosa Maria Pereda on *El Paìs* (Madrid), January 31, 1983.

[4] The 1929 text (*Problem's of Dostoevsky's Art*) is substantially different from the 1963 version thus constituting a different work instead of an early version of *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1963). The 1963 book shows changes in the structure and it varies because of cuts and additions. The most evident change is dictated by a determined cut of the explicit elements of sociological analysis as explained in detail by Galin Tihanov. Galin Tihanov, *The Master and the Slave: Lukács, Bakhtin, and the Ideas of their Time* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 207-10.

In a recent interview, when asked to comment on the dense intertextuality of *Il nome*, Eco expressed his interest for Bakhtin's notion of textual dialogism.[5] This is made evident by the protagonist of *Il nome* arguing that texts talk to each other.[6] Eco, who participated with enthusiasm in the French intellectual environment of the 1960s and therefore entered into contact with the debates on structuralism, semiology and intertextuality,[7] claimed to have approached Bakhtin through Julia Kristeva.[8] Kristeva coined the term "intertextuality" in the 1960s when she introduced Bakhtin's work to the French-speaking intellectual world, at the same time as the Franco-Bulgarian literary theorist and philosopher Tzvetan Todorov. Her theory advances the concept that meaning exists between a text and the texts it echoes intentionally or unintentionally. This way, meaning moves from the single text to a network of textual relations.[9]

It is thus possible to distinguish two lines of analysis that Eco's connection with Bakhtin leads to: one is determined by Eco's interest in intertextuality and textual dialogism, the other by Eco's tendency to use the grotesque in his fiction. Whereas the former encourages a stylistic analysis of Eco's fiction, the latter motivates the current investigation of Eco's criticism of his contemporary society. Furthermore, Eco confirmed his connection to *Rabelais and His World* at a conference on the rhetoric of the comic, held in Bressanone in July 1980, which was later published as an essay entitled "Il comico e la regola."[10] In this essay, analysed in Chapter Two, Eco expresses his position in

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[5] Antonio Gnoli, "Così ho dato il nome alla rosa," Milan, July 9, 2006. http://www.artblog.comli.com/intervista-umberto-eco-nome-della-rosa/

[6] Umberto Eco, *Il nome della rosa* (Milan: Bompiani, 1980/2000), 289.

[7] He contributed to issue 8 (1966) of the French academic Review *Communications*. The issue offered a structural analysis of the *récit* by semiology luminaries of the time such as Roland Barthes, Algirdas Julien Greimas, Claude Brémont, Jules Gritti, Violette Morin, Christian Metz, Tzvetan Todorov and Gérard Genette, as well as Umberto Eco. *Communications 8* was more than just a review issue; it dictated a programme for structuralism. Eco's piece examined the reactionary role of formulas in Ian Fleming's popular James Bond series. Deborah Glassman, *History of Structuralism,* vol.1, *The Rising Sign, 1945-1966* (Minneapolis, Minnesota; London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 320-22.

[8] "Nadia Bobbio interviews Umberto Eco," March 28, 2011.

[9] Graham Allen, *Intertextuality* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 1-5.

[10] Originally published in the journal *Alfabeta*, February 21, 1981, the essay is now in Umberto Eco, *Sette anni di desiderio* (Milan: Bompiani, 1983/2004), 253-60, and translated in English as "Frames of Comic

relation to Bakhtin's notion of carnival and questions its revolutionary worth. Thus, Eco's acknowledgment of Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque and his response to it enrich the present analysis of Eco's novels and in particular his use of the grotesque.

The present thesis goes beyond the widely accepted relationship between Eco's *Il nome* and Bakhtin. It expands the relationship to include Eco's five other novels: *Il pendolo di Foucault* (1988), *L'isola del giorno prima* (1994), *Baudolino* (2000), *La misteriosa fiamma della regina Loana* (2004), and *Il cimitero di Praga* (2011). The recurrence of the Rabelaisian grotesque throughout Eco's novels not only justifies and encourages this reading, but also leads to the question of what role the grotesque plays in Eco's work and how this can enrich the understanding of Eco's position in regard to contemporary culture and society. Therefore, what this work seeks to contribute to Eco studies is twofold: it explores Eco's engagement with contemporary sociopolitical reality while simultaneously developing the Bakhtinian connection that still remains tied to *Il nome* alone.

Although Eco is a left-wing intellectual, his journalism and cultural criticism tend to focus more frequently on a semiotic analysis of culture and other social phenomena and do little to explain Eco's political position. Semiotic analysis is to be understood here as Eco's systematic reading of contemporary Italian society from the perspective of a cultural theorist. A good example of Eco's broad cultural criticism is his column in Eugenio Scalfari's left-wing paper *l'Espresso* entitled "La bustina di Minerva." There the topics of analysis vary from book reviews to the role of the university and education in Italy, different aspects of popular culture and intellectual debates, and the semantics of the language of the Smurfs, the fictional blue creatures from the eponymous Belgian cartoon which became famous in the late 1950s. Eco likes to identify himself as an intellectual

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Freedom," in Umberto Eco, Vyacheslav Vsevolodovich Ivanov, Monica Rector, *Carnival!* (Berlin: Mouton Publishers, 1984), 1-9.

who uses semiotics as a tool for investigating contemporary society. In other words, he is first and foremost a scholar, and it is through the lens of his literary and semiotic theory that, as Chapter One shows, his novels are usually investigated.

However, a landmark in his career was his first novel, published in 1980. A significant comment by Eco on the dust jacket of the first edition reads: "the author refuses to reveal … what the book means. If he has written a novel, it is because he has discovered upon reaching maturity that those things which we cannot theorise about, we must narrate."[11] It is this comment that motivates a reading of Eco's novels that is not only limited to a connection with his theoretical works but also with a broader cultural, historical and sociopolitical context. Therefore, on the one hand, this work extends the search for Rabelaisian elements and Bakhtin's theories to all of Eco's novels, not only *Il nome*. On the other hand, it employs those elements in order to achieve a more politically oriented reading and therefore analyse a field of study less explored than the connection between Eco's own theory and his fiction (i.e., the appearance of his sociopolitical criticism in his novels). Significantly, the key element that differentiates Eco's fiction from his theory is the use of the Rabelaisian grotesque as one of its distinctive traits. For this reason, the theory of Bakhtin—one of the best known and most politicised critics of Rabelais and of the tradition of parody, laughter and the grotesque—is employed as a significant instrument to understand Eco's use of the grotesque.

[11] Quoted in Walter E. Stephens, "Ec[h]o in Fabula," in *Umberto Eco*, eds. Mike Gane and Nicholas Gane (Sage: London, 2005), vol. 2, 62.

0.2 Methodology

In order to justify the Bakhtin/Eco connection it is essential to point out how the two authors' ideas reveal an affinity on a theoretical level, since they are both literary theorists whose central focus is on dialogue and confrontation. Bakhtin also helps to interpret what Eco's fiction implies but, as Eco points out, cannot be theorised about. The lens of this work will be, more specifically, Bakhtin's notion of the grotesque which represents the expression of folk culture exemplarily through the ritual of carnival. Chapter Two explains these Bakhtinian concepts within the context of a broad tradition of satire and bodily liberation as an instrument to subvert the repression of the church, which was in favour of an ascetic and devoted life. Similarly, Eco brings into discussion several topics central to contemporary society through the concrete dimension of the body and the confrontation with what Bakhtin calls folk culture; that is, the culture of the simple, characterised by an ancient wisdom whose aim is the self-preservation of the poor and subjugated, revisited in Chapter Two in more detail.

In order to define the kind of textual relationship between Bakhtin's and Eco's works, it is necessary to consult Eco's theory of intertextuality. In *Sulla letteratura* (2002) he distinguishes two kinds of intertextual reference. One consists of what Eco refers to as the author's "cultured wink," a sign of secret understanding which can be perceived or ignored, thus producing different levels of reading.[12] The other is the result of what he calls the "anxiety of influence." Quoting Harold Bloom,[13] Eco argues that when speaking of the relationships between two authors, the third element that must be considered is what

[12] Umberto Eco, "Ironia intertestuale e livelli di lettura," in *Sulla letteratura*, by Umberto Eco (Milan: Bompiani, 2002), 234.

[13] Umberto Eco, "Borges e la mia angoscia dell'influenza," a shortened version of Eco's paper presented at the congress "Relaciones literarias entre Jorge Luis Borges y Umberto Eco" held at the University of Castilla-La Mancha in May 1997, now in Eco, *Sulla letteratura*, 128-46. According to Bloom the study of poetic influence, or poetic misprision, is not simply the study of the patterning of images but rather the indispensable study of the life cycle of the poet-as-poet. Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 7.

he calls "X." Broadly speaking, X is culture, intended to be the chain of previous influences, or, in other words, the universe of the encyclopaedia. There are various ways to determine the relationship between two authors, "A" and "B:" B could find something in the work of A without knowing about X; B finds something in the work of A and through this process B gets to X; B refers to X and only afterwards finds out about the work of A.[14] Eco explains that his readers have told him of the many influences his works reflect: some of them he is fully aware of, others he finds unjustifiable since he had no access to the source, and still others he had not thought of but he accepts their logic on the grounds of their probability. Furthermore, Eco points out that the relationship between two authors and X is complicated additionally by the *Zeitgeist* (literally, the "spirit of the time"). He believes that the *Zeitgeist* should not be perceived as an abstract legacy (metahistorically or metaphysically determined) but rather as a concrete chain of reciprocal influences. Eco gives as an example a story he wrote at the age of ten about the diary of a magician who claimed to have discovered an island in the Arctic Ocean called Acorn. Eco points out that, although the story seems very Borgesian, he could not possibly have read Borges at such a young age.[15] In other words, Eco believes that some influences are simple coincidences and caused more by chance and similarity than conscious choices.

In the present case, there are three terms entering the textual relationship examined here: Eco, Bakhtin and Rabelais. The aspect of Rabelais's work that is relevant for this work is how Bakhtin inserts it in the wider tradition of parodic literature that is defined by Bakhtin as "carnivalised," as analysed in Chapter Two. Eco, a medievalist who graduated with a thesis on Thomas Aquinas, did not need Bakhtin in order to approach the carnivalesque aspect of the Middle Ages and the marks it left on the parodic literature of the following centuries. However, using Bakhtin's reading of the grotesque, non-

[14] Eco, *Sulla letteratura*, 129.
[15] Ibid., 130.

medievalist readers of Eco's novels can be informed of the socio-critical value of the grotesque and thus be led to an understanding of Eco's own criticism of society. This thesis contends that Bakhtin's reading of Rabelais completes Eco's fiction because it provides his work with a link to its contemporary society and determines the nature of Eco's position towards that society.

It is important to highlight that, unlike other apparently more naïve writers who are only novelists, Eco was a theorist and critic for more than twenty years before becoming a novelist. He still writes essays about literary criticism and replies to the critics writing about his novels from the point of view of a theorist, for instance in *Sulla letteratura* (2002). Also, Eco's awareness as a literary theorist of the question of intertextuality and literary indebtedness becomes evident in the use he makes of literary palimpsests. *Il nome*, *L'isola del giorno prima* (1990), *Baudolino* (2000) and, to some extent, *Il pendolo di Foucault* (1988) are all presented as unearthed manuscripts, found and refined by a narrator. Eco's choice implies a fondness for the literary palimpsest which he defines as "a manuscript that is 'etched' in such a way that another text can be written over it. In this sense … all my writings are rewritings or rethinkings of preceding writings."[16]

In particular, there is in the choice of the palimpsest a conscious reference to Gérard Genette, whose famous work *Palimpsestes: La littérature au second degré* (1982) is a rewriting of Kristeva's theory or, in Genette's words, a licensed imitation.[17] Genette substitutes Kristeva's term "intertextuality" with "hypertextuality," which he describes as a universal characteristic of all literature.[18] The "hypertext" is a text deriving from a pre-existing "hypotext" by means of transformation. Although the hypertext is its own new text, it incorporates an existing hypotext, without which it could not exist. For example,

[16] Umberto Eco, "How I Write," in *Illuminating Eco: On the Boundaries of Interpretation*, eds. Charlotte Ross and Rochelle Sibley (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2004), 194.
[17] Mary Orr, *Intertextuality: Debates and Contexts* (Cambridge: Polity, 2003), 107.
[18] Gérard Genette, *Palimpsestes. La littérature au second degré* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1982), 16.

both the *Aeneid* and Joyce's *Ulysses* are well-known hypertexts of the same hypotext, the *Odyssey*. According to Genette, they differ in the kinds of transformations they bring about: a simple one, in Joyce's case, because he transplants the *Odyssey* directly into twentieth-century Dublin, and a complex one for the *Aeneid,* which tells an apparently completely different story but imitates Homer's style.[19]

From this perspective, Rabelais may be seen as a hypotext of Eco's novels, which echo for instance Rabelais's typically sarcastic use of the narrative device of the list.[20] A closer connection can be made with *Baudolino*, whose story imitates the travels of Pantagruel to the fantastic land of Prester John while encompassing a previous cycle of legends known as the "Indian Wonders."[21] More broadly, the palimpsest is Eco's way of dealing with the unavoidable indebtedness any author has to the universal encyclopaedia of writing. The intertextual connection with all that has been and will be written, together with the notion of textual dialogism, is something Eco takes as a fact at the basis of all texts. However, there are connections whose meaning goes deeper than the mere reference to a text with which the author has some affinity or disagreement. In this sense, Eco's connection with Rabelais goes beyond the hypotext as Eco does not aim to imitate and retell Rabelais. Nor can it be limited to the author's "cultured wink" since it does not

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[19] Ibid., 12-3.

[20] The list is a narrative device which closely refers to Rabelais, famous for his infinite and comical lists, as Eco analyses in his theoretical work *La vertigine della lista* (Milan: Bompiani, 2009). For instance it is a typical tool used in *Il cimitero di Praga* (2011) to express its protagonist's grotesque representation of his enemies:

"L'ebreo, oltre che vanitoso come uno spagnolo, ignorante come un croato, cupido come un levantino, ingrato come un maltese, insolente come uno zingaro, sporco come un inglese, untuoso come un calmucco, imperioso come un prussiano e maldicente come un astigiano, è adultero per foia irrefrenabile." Umberto Eco, *Il cimitero di Praga* (Milan: Bompiani, 2010), 12.

"The Jew, as well as being as vain as a Spaniard, ignorant as a Croat, greedy as a Levantine, ungrateful as a Maltese, insolent as a gypsy, dirty as an Englishman, unctuous as a Kalmuck, imperious as a Prussian and slanderous as anyone from Asti, is adulterous through uncontrollable lust." Umberto Eco, *The Prague Cemetery*, trans. Richard Dixon (London: Harvill Secker, 2011), 5-6.

[21] Bakhtin points out how the cycle of the "Indian Wonders," extremely popular in the Middle Ages, influenced not only all medieval writings but also the "cosmographic literature in the broad sense." The cycle collects a series of tales, started with Ctesias, a Greek who lived in Persia in the fifth century before Christ, about the "treasures, wondrous flora and fauna, and the extraordinary bodily forms of [the] inhabitants" of India. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1984), 344-6.

simply offer satisfaction to the reader who recognises a cultured quotation. Rather, the Rabelaisian grotesque in Eco's fiction points the reader towards a viewpoint that challenges society. Eco's incorporation of the Rabelaisian grotesque in his novels is a way of engaging with the concept of subversion against contemporary society. By interpreting Eco's novels by way of Bakhtin's politicised understanding of Rabelais and of the balance between the authority and the official, on the one hand, and popular culture and the unofficial on the other, Eco's intertextual relation with Rabelais can be placed into a politically meaningful perspective.

To summarise the methodology employed by this thesis, the objective of this work is firstly to identify through Bakhtin's theory a set of key elements from Rabelais that determine the subversive character of the grotesque. Secondly, this thesis analyses those elements within Eco's novels. Finally, it investigates how in Eco's case those grotesque elements are connected to subversion, which part of the accepted order they wish to subvert and which alternatives they suggest.

0.3 Biographical Notes

Some biographical information will help identify the origins of the affinities between Eco (1932-) and Bakhtin (1895-1975). Eco's academic career began when he graduated from the University of Turin, defending a dissertation on Thomas Aquinas, under the supervision of the Catholic philosopher Luigi Pareyson. The year was 1952 and he was twenty. A militant Catholic, he then started writing for *Gioventù cattolica*, published by the powerful Catholic association known as *Gioventù Italiana di Azione Cattolica* (GIAC). Eco's writings expressed the hope that the Catholic Church would follow the

more liberal policies of the French clergy of the period. When in 1958 the highly conservative Pius XII forced Mario Rossi, president of GIAC since 1952, to resign, Eco also left the organisation and for the next six years avoided any involvement in politics.[22]

In 1965, he was encouraged to become an essayist and reviewer for *l'Espresso* and since then his collaboration with the magazine has been constant. In 1985, thanks to his popularity as a novelist, he obtained his own weekly column in the magazine, which rapidly became one of the most successful editorial ventures in contemporary Italian journalism.[23] The image Eco creates for himself by writing steadily for various Italian newspapers such as *La Stampa*, *La Repubblica*, *Il Corriere della Sera,* and *Il Giorno* is that of a public intellectual who actively expresses his opinions. Since the beginning of his career as an intellectual, Eco has placed himself on the front line of academic, cultural and social criticism.

The late Sixties and early Seventies were marked for Eco by his new interest in public commitment. He registered in the *Partito Socialista Italiano di Unità Proletaria* (PSIUP), a very active left-wing party during the student protest years, and wrote for *Il Manifesto*, a Marxist-oriented newspaper under the Joycean pseudonym of Dedalus. He assumed the position of a sceptical witness aiming to demystify the motivations and modalities of the ruling ideology.[24] This was in part due to his experience working for Italian Radio-Television (RAI) from 1954 to 1958. Television was a new instrument with unprecedented powers for controlling public opinion, and during those years of monopoly and censorship it represented the political majority. Accessing such a powerful media instrument initiated Eco's long career of study of communication and signs. The experience was certainly

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[22] Peter Bondanella, *Umberto Eco and the Open Text* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 2.
[23] Ibid., 45.
[24] Bruno Pischedda, *Come leggere "Il nome della rosa"* (Milan: Mursia, 1994), 27-8. Pischedda points out that these articles are now collected in: *Il costume di casa* (1973), *Dalla periferia all'impero* (1977), *Sette anni di desiderio* (1983), *Sugli specchi e altri saggi* (1985).

influential from the point of view of the contacts he made, but it also marked his transition from an elitist academic environment to the everyday world of mass culture.[25]

In 1959, Eco left RAI to start a career with Valentino Bompiani's publishing house in Milan as the director of *Idee Nuove*, a philosophical series. These were the years which also saw the beginning of his academic career as a charismatic lecturer. In 1961, he was granted the *libera docenza* and he started giving seminars at the universities of Turin and Milan in 1962. He was then offered the Chair of Visual Communications in the Faculty of Architecture at the University of Florence (1966). Five years later, he moved to the experimental faculty of DAMS (*Discipline dell'arte, della musica e dello spettacolo*) at the University of Bologna, where he was awarded Italy's first chair in semiotics. DAMS was founded by Benedetto Marzullo, a scholar of classical Greek who perceived the increasing necessity of specialisation in the field of mass communication, which was not yet covered by traditional academic departments. In 1993, Eco became the chairman of a new doctoral programme in communications and media studies. He remained Chair of Semiotics in both programmes until his retirement in 2007.

The diversity of Eco's experience contributed to his formation as an eclectic scholar known for applying intellectual tools of analysis to both highbrow culture and mass culture. Eco demonstrated from his early career a taste for parody and the demystification of high culture, the only form deemed worthy of scholarly attention for Crocean idealism, which dominated the academic scene until the 1960s as Chapter One explains. Back in the 1950s Eco wrote a parodic pamphlet, *Filosofi in libertà*, which, according to Peter Bondanella, exemplifies his sense of humour.[26] The purpose of the pamphlet was to set philosophy free from its exaggeratedly serious character. The small volume, whose title

[25] Bondanella, *Umberto Eco*, 6.
[26] Ibid., 16.

mockingly recalls the futurist motto "parole in libertà," was published in 1958 by Marianne Abbagnano with an edition of 550 copies under the pseudonym of Dedalus.[27]

Eco's interest in popular culture and mass communication owed much to his early experience of totalitarianism and the incontestable power wielded by Mussolini through his oratory. As a teenager, Eco had come to realise that freedom of speech also meant freedom from rhetoric; he came to understand this in the historic moment when Mimo, a partisan leader, gave a public speech during the liberation of Milan in April 1945. Instead of the resonant tones and high-flying rhetoric so dear to fascism, Mimo "spoke in a hoarse voice, barely audible. He said: 'Citizens, friends. After so many painful sacrifices...here we are. Glory to those who have fallen for freedom.' And that was it."[28] Totalitarianism and popular culture are therefore the key elements that make Eco similar to Bakhtin, whose life choices were influenced by the Stalinist regime.

Bakhtin, grandson of the founder of a commercial bank, was born in Orel, south of Moscow, in November 1895. He grew up in a liberal intellectual family and travelled much in his early youth, following his father's work in spite of suffering from osteomyelitis, an infective process that attacks all bone components. In 1914, he entered the classics department at St. Petersburg University. He regularly met for discussions with a group of intellectuals who were later referred to as the Bakhtin Circle. They believed their mission was to enlighten the masses and share their cultural privilege with the less fortunate by means of free concerts and free lectures.[29]

Bakhtin's opportunities were limited by his worsening health and he remained almost unknown to most of the Saint Petersburg intellectual circles until the 1920s. He wrote

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[27] *Filosofi in libertà* was reprinted in 1959 and in 1989. Due to the high demand it was eventually included in Eco's *Secondo diario minimo* (1992).
[28] Umberto Eco, "U-Fascism," *The New York Review of Books*, June 22, 1995.
[29] Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist, eds. *Mikhail Bakhtin* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London: Harvard University Press, 1984), 44.

intensely about philosophy and aesthetics,[30] but was also forced to face the restrictions of censorship. With the first Five Year Plan (1928-33), political pressure increased and the government exerted direct control over the production of art and literature. Consequently, fiction writing was strictly monitored and forced to conform to a tightly formulaic socialist realism, which required that works be for and about the workers and the national industrial effort. From 1929, satire, formal experimentation, and great writers of the past suspected of being subversive—including Pushkin, Gogol and Dostoevsky—virtually disappeared from the scene. Even after Stalin's death, the persecutions of dissident intellectuals continued, as demonstrated by the incarceration of Andrei Sinyavsky in 1965 for publishing his work abroad. Until the mid-1970s, Stalin's ghost was indeed still haunting Soviet literature.[31]

In 1929, the year of publication of *Problems of Dostoevsky's Art*, Bakhtin was arrested along with many intellectuals and members of religious groups. He faced charges which varied from association with anti-communists to the corruption of young people during his Petersburg courses and was sentenced to five years' exile in Kazakhstan. What eventually became *Rabelais and His World* was submitted first as a doctoral dissertation in the 1940s. As one would suspect, it suffered greatly from the politics of the times. The Party demanded stricter adherence to its socialist canon. Since Rabelais was on the blacklist, Bakhtin's postgraduate degree was withheld until 1952 and even then the monograph had to wait another fourteen years for publication.

Although Bakhtin was never formally blacklisted, it was deemed unwise to refer to him in academic works. The first to break the long silence was Vladimir Seduro, an American scholar who in 1955 quoted Bakhtin's work on Dostoevsky. The first Soviet

[30] These essays, written between 1919 and 1924, were collected by Michael Holquist in *Art and Answerability* and *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, both published by Texas University Press in 1990 and 1993, respectively.

[31] M. Keith Booker and Dubravka Juraga, *Bakhtin, Stalin and Modern Russian Fiction: Carnival, Dialogism, and History* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1995), ix-x.

mention was made by Viktor Shklovsky two years later in 1957,[32] so that by the late 1950s *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* was being discussed in senior seminars at Moscow State University. Having remained almost unnoticed during his exile and long years of teaching at Saransk University, Bakhtin's name was overwhelmed with popularity in the two decades after his death.[33] His writings were pointed out to the public attention in the early 1960s by Moscow scholars Sergey Bocharov, Vadim Kpzhinov and Georgy Gachev among others. After the 1963 edition of Bakhtin's book on Dostoevsky and the study on Rabelais (1965) were published in Russia, both books were translated in the West in 1968. In the same years, a key role was played by Kristeva who wrote the first influential article on him and gave a talk during one of Roland Barthes's private seminars. However, it was only with Michael Holquist's and Caryl Emerson's translation of Bakhtin's essays on the novel (1935-41) and Holquist's and Clark's first biography in the early 1980s that Bakhtin was "elevated to an honoured place in the canon of the twentieth-century thought."[34] Differently from the Western reception, in Russia, as Caryl Emerson argues, the Russians did not have to deal with the problems of translating Bakhtin's texts and peculiar lexicon, nor with the site-specific ideologies that accompanied Bakhtin's entry into the West. The examples given by Emerson are the fact that Kristeva wrote about Bakhtin's book on Dostoevsky during her high structural phase and that the British Marxists found themselves so attracted to the utopian aspects of the Bakhtinian carnival.[35]

Having traced the academic and literary paths of Eco and Bakhtin, a set of similarities can be highlighted, such as their dealing with repression and their propensity for critical analysis, dialogue and individual responsibility.

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[32] He commented on the Dostoevsky book in his *Pro and Contra: Notes on Dostoevsky* (*Za i protiv. Zametki o Dostoevskom*, 1957). Quoted in Clark and Holquist, *Bakhtin*, 331.
[33] Galin Tihanov, "Making Virtue of Necessity," *The Times Literary Supplement*, 24 October 1997.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Caryl Emerson, "The Russians Reclaim Bakhtin," *Comparative Literature* 44, no. 4, Autumn (1992): 415.

0.4 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into five chapters. The first two establish the rationale and the context for the present analysis while the last three focus on examining Eco's six novels through Bakhtin's theory. Chapter One contextualises primary sources and outlines the positions taken by secondary sources in relation to Eco's fiction and Bakhtin's political stance in his work. Firstly, the focus is put on identifying an intellectual affinity between Eco's and Bakhtin's academic formation that is intended to legitimise the current reading of Eco through Bakhtin. Secondly, an overview is offered on the aspects of Eco's fiction that critics in both the Italian and Anglophone environments have studied and how those critics have positioned themselves. Two predominant lines of thought are highlighted: one that engages consistently with Eco's own literary criticism, and another that with his interest in the Middle Ages. Thirdly, this section examines how critics have interpreted the link between Eco and his contemporary context and how they have theorised on Eco's sociopolitical criticism. In a similar fashion, attention is directed to how critics have explained the link between Bakhtin and politics, especially in his work on Rabelais, in order to identify how this may inform the current reading of the relationship between Eco's fiction and his sociopolitical criticism. Lastly, in order to analyse which aspects of this relationship have been examined, it outlines what comparative studies have made the connection between Eco and Bakhtin's study of Rabelais. Both through the investigation of previous comparative works on Eco and Bakhtin and through the attention brought to the connection between Eco's fiction and his contemporary context, this chapter identifies a gap in the studies of Eco's fiction that this piece of research strives to fill.

The objective of Chapter Two is to suggest a way to fill the gap in Eco's studies identified in Chapter One. Chapter Two offers the theoretical model which will be used in

the textual analysis of Eco through Bakhtin. Firstly, Chapter Two outlines the relationship between Eco and Bakhtin in terms of ideology in the context of their experience of totalitarianism. In a thesis about Eco's sociopolitical criticism, it is important to identify what ideologies determine Eco's political position as a left-wing liberal intellectual. Eco's relation with fascism and anti-fascism is illustrated in order to point out what marks were left in the formation of Eco's political persona. As far as Bakhtin is concerned, his interaction with Stalinism and with the Kazakh resistance needs to be taken into consideration. Bakhtin's work on Rabelais is analysed here in the light of the Stalinist censorship and purges. Furthermore, Bakhtin and Eco share a common engagement with Marxist theories and both propose critical responses to them.

Secondly, Chapter Two points out how, for both Eco and Bakhtin, authority bases itself on what Bakhtin defines as the "authoritative language." It compares the role of rhetoric in Eco and Bakhtin and shows how the role relates to ideology. For both, the response to the rhetoric of ideology is connected with the experience of totalitarianism. For both also, the potential of rhetoric leads to an interest in popular culture and mass communication. Eco started his critical attack on the media in the late 1960s, particularly on the intellectuals who refused to recognise that mass culture and highbrow culture were both products of the modern era. Likewise, he questioned the power of mass communication by means of his semiotic analysis. In Eco's view, mass culture needed to be studied in the same way as highbrow culture was, just as the dangers it carried—of shifting culture from the typically elitist level to a more broadly accessible mass level, and of causing the loss of individual critical thinking—needed to be recognised. This chapter also examines the evolution of Eco's commitment towards the media in the following decades in relation to Eco's sense of parody and humour. Eco's critical response to the media is connected to the importance Bakhtin gives to dialogue in his theory.

Thirdly, this chapter highlights the connection between Eco and Bakhtin through their positions towards laughter, rhetoric, and ideology. Bakhtin was influenced by Henri Bergson's notion of laughter as a social gesture constituting the "corrective" of "a certain rigidity of body, mind and character" in order to increase the "elasticity and sociability" of society's members.[36] The chapter goes on to place Bergson's idea of laughter as a corrective for social rigidity in relation to Eco's source, Baudelaire's romantic notion of satanic laughter, and investigates the social significance of laughter in Eco. Two essays by Eco are used as guidelines to interpret his theory of laughter: one is "Il comico e la regola,"[37] and the other is "Elogio di Franti."[38] Along this line, here is an investigation of Eco's reaction to carnival, specifically of how he replaces carnival with humour as a means of subverting authority.

Finally, the chapter clarifies the relationships among the authors under discussion: Eco, Rabelais and Bakhtin. In other words, it investigates how Eco is connected to Rabelais, how Bakhtin is connected to Rabelais and how Rabelais constitutes a bridge between Eco and Bakhtin. The specific selection of Bakhtin and Rabelais as terms of comparison with Eco to investigate Eco's social criticism is justified here. Not only do Eco and Bakhtin both highlight the importance of the relationship between the novel and its social context, but they also show a common interest in the subversive power of the grotesque and what Bakhtin defines as "heteroglossia:" that is, the mixture of social voices that is characteristic of the novel. For Eco too, the novel has the potential to be political, as he analyses in his theoretical work *Il superuomo di massa* (1976). Here Eco points to the question of the potential of the novel to appear to challenge the social order while actually supporting it.

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[36] Henri Bergson, "Laughter" (1956), in Wylie Sypher, ed. *Comedy* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1956), 73-4.

[37] See Intro., n. 9.

[38] Originally published in 1962 by *Il Verri*, the essay is now in Umberto Eco, *Diario minimo* (Milan: Bompiani, 1992/2008), 81-92.

In the light of the relationship that this thesis establishes, a set of three Rabelaisian paradigms are proposed as categories linked to a bodily physicality that Bakhtin identifies as typical of Rabelais and of the carnivalesque tradition. These recurring paradigms—the grotesque body, the banquet and the marketplace—are subsequently used to identify the connections to Bakhtin's reading of Rabelais in combination with the broader concepts of the carnivalesque and folk culture.

The subsequent three chapters of textual analysis focus on a close reading of the connection between Eco's novels and contemporary Italian reality in the light of Bakhtin's theory. Each chapter analyses Eco's novels by grouping them according to the object of Eco's sociopolitical critique. The chapters on textual analysis show how an evolution takes place in Eco's position regarding the role of the intellectual in society and of the intellectual's political commitment. For this reason, the novels are analysed in chronological order and divided into three main groups, each of which reflects a specific period of time in Italian contemporary society in relation to Eco's own experience from the 1950s to the 2000s. In each chapter, textual analysis is preceded by an introduction to the novels' sociopolitical context, which constitutes a background to Eco's critique on contemporary society.

A fundamental dichotomy running through all three groups of novels is that of official and unofficial culture, which is central in Bakhtin's reading of Rabelais. The current analysis clarifies how Eco sees the interaction between what is established as the official culture and what is left out and is, therefore, unofficial. Not only do Eco's novels show the dynamics set into motion by those in power, but they also reveal the volatile nature of the distinction between official and unofficial. What is official today may not be official tomorrow if the people in power are not the same.

Chapter Three analyses Eco's first two novels, *Il nome* and *Il pendolo*, in the light of Italian political events from the late 1960s to the early 1980s. This chapter uses the paradigms of the banquet and the grotesque body within the broader context of the carnival to investigate how Eco represents subversion and revolution. The purpose of the chapter is to point out how Eco's representation is opposed to Bakhtin's carnival and to show what alternative he suggests. It is argued that Eco wants to show the strength of the balance between the official and the unofficial: he discusses the church's rules and their deviations in *Il nome*, and the rules of the state and terrorism in *Il pendolo*. If the carnival and revolution are just performances of subversion, Eco suggests that humour and critical thinking are the real threat to the respective authorities of the church and state. Focus is put on how both novels deal with issues of power, fear of authority, and the uncrowning of authority through laughter. Both are connected with the terrorism of the 1970s in Italy and they also both face the moral question of resistance to an unjust ruler. In particular, the contemporary setting of *Il pendolo* gives Eco the opportunity to analyse the role of terrorism, political demonstration, and anti-fascism. Ultimately, the chapter concludes that, using the Rabelaisian grotesque, Eco satirises the authority of both the church and the state.

The second group of Eco's novels is shown in Chapter Four to use intellectuals as the target of criticism. From the political criticism of the first two novels, Eco moved on to intellectual criticism, thus suggesting that he was moving away from politics. This group includes *Il pendolo*, which differs from *Il nome* because it talks about terrorism but only as a background to a story on the Templars and contemporary secret societies, together with the later *L'isola del giorno prima* (1994) and *Baudolino* (2000). Besides criticising the Italian state from the 1950s to the early 1980s, *Il pendolo* also attacks contemporary literary debates on critical interpretation, Jacques Derrida's deconstructionism in

particular. Whereas *L'isola* is about fiction writing and therefore almost entirely about intellectuals, *Baudolino*, with its critique of the intellectuals—in this case, historians—enables Eco to go back to political criticism. In fact, *Baudolino* also satirises Umberto Bossi's sectarian party, the *Lega Nord,* and its invention of a Northern Italian identity that is opposed to the identity of the rest of the country. The paradigms of the grotesque body and the marketplace help define Eco's critique of the deconstructionists, whose theory is briefly summarised in Chapter Four. The grotesque body and the notion of heteroglossia are the tools used to read Eco's criticism in *L'isola* and *Baudolino.* Also, Italian politics from the late 1980s to the 1990s is examined in order to clarify the connection between *Baudolino* and the *Lega Nord.*

This set of novels shows Eco's belief that the lower classes are endowed with a deep-rooted wisdom that is able to resist the rhetoric of ideology employed by those in power. In *Il pendolo*, a group of fanatics makes itself powerful by hanging on to a tradition allegedly inherited from the Templars only to reveal in the end its true grotesque and ridiculous nature. Baudolino scrapes the parchment clean where the historian Otto of Freising writes his *Chronica sive historia de duabus civitatibus* in order to write his own version of history. He writes it in local dialect rather than in Latin so that knowledge can also be accessed by common people, not only by intellectuals. *L'isola* dismantles the devices of fiction writing and satirises its purported complexities. The three novels use the Rabelaisian grotesque to debase the seriousness of the intellectuals they mock: deconstructionists in *Il pendolo*, popular fiction writers in *L'isola,* and historiographers in *Baudolino.*

Chapter Five investigates the link between mass culture and hegemony in *La fiamma* and *Il cimitero. La fiamma* questions the relationship between mass communication and power in an investigation of the relationship between popular culture and fascism in Italy

during the media monopoly. Eco's latest novel, *Il cimitero,* shows the power of popular culture to turn fiction into reality by means of an emotional appeal rather than rational confrontation. However, *Il cimitero* also shows the machinery that the government secret services put into action to retain power. The paradigm employed for the textual analysis in this chapter is the grotesque body in relation to the distinction between the role of mass and folk culture in society. The context is fascism and anti-fascism for *La fiamma*, and the secret services and secret organisations like Propaganda 2 (P2), which this chapter analyses, from post-war Italy to their discovery in the 1970s. In addition, this section concludes with an investigation of the relationship between the media and politics in Italy and with an analysis of Eco's position in relation to them.

After demonstrating the presence of certain Rabelaisian paradigms in Eco's work, an assessment is offered of the sociopolitical criticism of Eco's fiction. It is shown that Eco challenges the ruling class's "monologism," a Bakhtinian term that implies closure to dialogue as explained in Chapter Two, by dismantling the very foundations of its authority through an evolution represented by Eco's fiction from his first novel (1980) to the present. This thesis identifies three phases of Eco's sociopolitical criticism transmitted through his novels. The first—a cautiously political phase—covers from the late 1960s to the late 1980s and includes *Il nome della rosa* (1980) and *Il pendolo di Foucault* (1988). The targets of its satire are the church and the state (Chapter 3). The second—an intellectual and academic phase—includes *Il pendolo*, which marks the transition as it contains elements of both phases, *L'isola del giorno prima* (1994), and *Baudolino* (2000) and goes therefore from the late 1980s to the early 2000s. It is characterised by the parody of intellectuals—deconstructionists, historians, novelists—but it also ends in the 2000s with a resurfacing of the political interest by satirising Umberto Bossi's sectarian party *Lega Nord* (Chapter 4). The last phase in Eco's criticism returns to politics but with more

conviction and less positivity as compared to the first phase. The analysis of Eco's more recent novels *La misteriosa fiamma della regina Loana* (2004) and *Il cimitero di Praga* (2010) offers a conscious criticism of fascism and the government secret services (Chapter 5).

This thesis shows that the distinctive character of Eco's satire is that it is not aimed at a destructive mocking of the authorities but is rather intended to develop critical thinking and lead his readers to participate intellectually in contemporary problems. As an intellectual who is known to the wider public through his best-selling novels, Eco is conscious of his authority in Italian society. For this reason, Eco gives central importance in his novels to encouraging his readers to engage in criticism and show individuality in a country where uniformity is the main trend forged by a monopolised media.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the theoretical framework for the textual analysis of Eco's novels that appears in the following three chapters. It establishes the theoretical bases for the present analysis by asking how Bakhtin's reading of Rabelais can enlighten an understanding of Eco's use of the grotesque in his novels, and by connecting Bakhtin with his sociopolitical criticism. The Bakhtinian concepts referred to in the textual analysis are introduced, including the notions of "authoritative discourse," "heteroglossia," "monoglossia," "dialogism," "monologism," the "polyphonic novel" and the "carnivalisation" of literature. Various points of contact between Bakhtin's and Eco's theories of literature, language and aesthetics are identified.

Chapter One has shown how Eco's novels are embedded with his semiotic, literary and cultural theory and how, as a result, critics tend to approach them in the light of Eco's own theory. From the point of view a comparative study of ideas, Eco's novels are full of possible theoretical trails which could be read in association with the works of several theorists: Roland Barthes on myth[1] and semiotics;[2] Michel Foucault on the paradigm of similarity[3] and madness;[4] Giorgio Agamben on openness;[5] and Paul Radin, Carl Jung,

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[1] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1957).
[2] Roland Barthes, "'Éléments de sémiologie," *Communications* 4, 1964.
[3] See Umberto Eco, *Interpretation and Overinterpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 83. Eco explains that although the Foucault of his novel is based on Léon Foucault, inventor of the pendulum, the fact that the other characters are obsessed by the research of analogies—coupled with Michel Foucault's writings on the paradigm of similarity (*Les mots et les choses* [1966])—some readers have marked a parallel between Eco's *Il pendolo di Foucault* and Michel Foucault's theory. An example is Linda Hutcheon's "Eco's Echoes: Ironising the (Post)modern" in *Umberto Eco*, vol. 3, eds. M. Gane and N. Gane, 24-41.
[4] Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (London: Tavistock Routledge, 1964/1989).
[5] Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2004).

Karl Kerényj on the trickster.[6] However, while acknowledging the contribution of such theory-oriented interpretations, this thesis looks to a different direction. Being interested in the political nature of Eco's novels, this thesis chooses to employ Bakhtin's theories since Bakhtin attaches a great deal of attention to the social aspects of the novel. As this chapter illustrates, for Bakhtin the novel is a carrier of the author's sociopolitical context, which it can never be isolated from. The novel is dialogical and representative of various social voices and in this sense it is ideological.

This chapter is divided into four sections. Section 2.2 investigates how the experience of an encounter with a totalitarian regime, shared by Eco and Bakhtin, influenced their individual approaches to cultural criticism. After engaging with a definition of the term "totalitarianism," this chapter pinpoints what characteristics of totalitarianism have left the deepest impressions on Eco and Bakhtin. Subsequently, it identifies the ideologies Eco and Bakhtin engage with and how they respond to them. It is important to give a brief overview of both authors' political contexts in order to be able to conclude to what extent Bakhtin's theory and Eco's novels engage with their contemporary realities. Finally, this part investigates how Eco and Bakhtin face the question of the commitment of the intellectual in order to justify the politicised reading of their work.

Section 2.3 enters into more detail on the question of the rhetoric of totalitarianism and its appeal to the masses, which is the central concern for both Eco and Bakhtin. In order to analyse this issue in Eco, Bakhtin's definition of "authoritative discourse" is introduced and it is shown how, according to Bakhtin, such discourse can be challenged. Furthermore, this section asks how Eco engages with the increasing power of the mass media and how his positions evolve from the 1960s to the present, also in the light of his early experience of Mussolini's rhetoric and fascism. Lastly, the place Eco sees for the

[6] Paul Radin, *The Trickster: A Study in Native American Mythology* with commentaries by Karl Kerényi and C. G. Jung (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1956).

intellectual in society and how he describes his/her role is investigated. The intellectual understands the power behind mass culture that rests especially in its mythical halo. For this reason it is important to examine the nature of the relationship between popular culture and myth in Eco and Bakhtin.

Section 2.4 analyses the role of laughter in Eco and Bakhtin and the connection between laughter and subversion. This section compares the notion of laughter for Bakhtin and for Eco and searches for similarities and differences between the two authors. The guiding question is the role of laughter in society according to Eco and Bakhtin and how it relates to social subversion. In particular, a close reading of Eco's essay "Elogio di Franti" (1962) leads the present analysis of Eco's interpretation of laughter both as Bakhtinian subversion and Bergsonian social corrective. The analysis of this essay investigates which type of subversion Eco refers to when he uses the concept of laughter, how he criticises it, and what alternative he offers as a means of subversion. Following that, the values that Bakhtin and Eco attribute to laughter are compared in order to find out what subversive potential they give to laughter and what their shared positions are in relation to it. However, this section also highlights a significant difference between Eco's and Bakhtin's perception of laughter and its celebration in carnival.

Finally, section 2.5 illustrates the reason for analysing Eco's novels through Bakhtin's theory of the Rabelaisian grotesque. Before engaging in a close reading of Eco's novels, it is necessary to clarify how this work perceives the relationship among the three authors that enter into contact within the present analysis: Eco, Bakhtin and Rabelais. Strengthening the ties among the three authors helps to justify the assumptions of this thesis. Here Bakhtin's definition of the grotesque is compared to that of Wolfgang Kayser, and it is shown that Bakhtin's definition applies specifically to Eco's use of the grotesque in his novels. Also, the connection between Eco and Bakhtin is justified on the grounds of the particular power they both attribute to the social context of the novel. It is relevant to

question how Bakhtin defines the novel, what specific characteristics he attributes to it, and what he sees it in dialectical opposition with. The concepts of heteroglossia, monoglossia, the polyphonic novel and carnivalised literature are analysed in this section in order to explain Bakhtin's perception of the relationship between the novel and society. To complement that, Eco's interpretation of the connection between literature and ideology (as represented especially in *Il superuomo di massa*) will be analysed in this section. In this work, Eco engages not only with the role of myth in mass literature but also with the presence of ideology in such a variety of literature. The particular importance Eco and Bakhtin attach to the relationship between the novel and society leads to an analysis of the role of the grotesque in Eco's novels as a possible link to the parody and criticism of contemporary society. Thus, a set of Rabelaisian paradigms are identified in order to constitute the theoretical framework of the present textual analysis of Eco. The term "Rabelaisian paradigms" refers to a group of recurring paradigms in Rabelais that carry an element of potential subversion to the established hierarchical order of society or that demonstrate how such an order can be challenged. They are specific paradigms that Bakhtin identifies in Rabelais thanks to a broader medieval and Renaissance tradition which interconnects laughter, carnival, and folk culture (i.e., the culture of the people, characterised by popular wisdom).

To summarise, this chapter justifies the reading of Eco through Bakhtin in order to show how Eco's novels say something explicit about Eco's political stance. It shows how the theories of both authors are concerned with notions such as the official and unofficial order, dialogue with and challenge to the social order, the sign as a concrete linguistic fact inserted into a social moment, laughter as a creative element and potentially in charge of renewing society, and myth as something that is deeply connected with the sociopolitical dimension. Although the involvement in political issues is a constant concern in Eco's

theoretical work, it is more subtle in his novels. This is where Bakhtin's reading of Rabelais becomes relevant, as the subsequent chapters on textual analysis demonstrate.

2.2 Totalitarianism, Ideology and the Masses

Bakhtin and Eco were both confronted with a totalitarian regime. This section investigates the marks this experience has left and how it has influenced their intellectual life and critical thinking. It therefore becomes necessary to define clearly what is meant by "totalitarianism." The term, strongly debated, describes the forms of dictatorship—believed to be new—that emerged in Europe between the two world wars.[7] It marked the more horrifying form of tyranny represented by the regimes of Hitler, Stalin and, to a certain extent, Mussolini, as compared to dictatorships of earlier ages.[8] In the 1950s, Carl J. Friedrich gave one of the most influential descriptions of totalitarianism with a list that became later known as the "six-point syndrome." The aspects he describes as being characteristic of a totalitarian regime are: an official ideology to which everyone should adhere; a single mass party usually led by one man; a technically conditioned monopoly of control and an effective use of weapons; a near-complete monopoly exercised over all means of effective mass communication; a system of physical or psychological terroristic

[7] As Simon Tormey points out, very shortly after establishing itself in the 1950s and 1960s, the concept of totalitarianism became the subject of intense criticism which tended broadly to take three forms. A first group questioned the manner in which the concept of totalitarianism was applied and whether Stalin's and Hitler's regimes could be defined as totalitarian at all (Ian Kershaw's *The Nazi Dictatorship. Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation* [London, 1985]; Gabor Rittersporn, "Rethinking Stalinism," *Russian History* 11, no. 4, Winter 1984). A second group of critics questions the very analytical basis of the "totalitarian model" itself and argue that the term can only describe the dystopic societies as imagined by Orwell or Huxley rather than a real historical society (Robert Orr, "Reflections on Totalitarianism, Leading to Reflections on Two Ways of Theorising," *Political Studies* 21, 1973; Michael Walzer, "On 'Failed Totalitarianism,'" in *1984 Revisited. Totalitarianism in Our Century*, ed. Irving Howe [New York: 1983]). Finally, a number of critics such as Herbert Spiro, Benjamin Barber and Fredric Fleron have described totalitarianism as a simplifying concept used to label regimes as bad (Benjamin Barber and Herbert J. Spiro, "Counter-Ideological Uses of 'Totalitarianism,'" *Politics and Society* 1, 1970). See Simon Tormey, *Making Sense of Tyranny* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 1-7.

[8] Tormey, *Making Sense*, 1.

police control; the central control of the entire economy.[9] Mass manipulation is the key aspect that Eco and Bakhtin are especially interested in, as their attention to popular culture as a means of mass culture demonstrates.

Ideology is a central concept for totalitarian regimes. According to Hannah Arendt, ideologies are "isms which to the satisfaction of their adherents can explain everything and every occurrence by deducing it from a single premise."[10] Arendt stresses how ideologies claim to explain history and philosophy in terms of science and pretend to be in possession of all the mysteries behind the historical process. Furthermore, she argues that ideologies contain totalitarian elements which are fully developed only by totalitarian regimes. She identifies three main elements characterising ideologies. The first is their claim to have a total explanation of the past that can lead to the total understanding of the present and the reliable prediction of the future. The second is ideologies' emancipation from reality in favour of a "truer," but concealed, reality. The third is their achievement of this emancipation through an absolutely logical procedure, starting from an axiomatically accepted premise and deducing everything else from it, thus proceeding with a completely unfounded consistency.[11] As Leonard Schapiro points out, Marx sees ideology in close connection with social class: the content of ideology is determined by the production of social relations. Ideas reflect the material interests of the ruling class—in Marx's case, the bourgeoisie. This condition can only be changed by the revolution of the proletariat, which will abolish classes and class rule forever so that there will no longer be a need for ideology. For Marx, ideology is a fraud perpetrated by bourgeoisie which only the revolution of the proletariat can put an end to.[12] Finally, the leader of a totalitarian regime needs to persuade his followers of his ideas. In order to do so, "ideology must appeal to

[9] Leonard Schapiro, *Totalitarianism* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1972), 18.
[10] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1951/1967), 468.
[11] Ibid., 469-71
[12] Schapiro, *Totalitarianism*, 46-7.

the deep instincts of the mass of the people, to their traditions, their emotions, their hatreds and hopes."[13] The reactions to the three ideologies analysed by Schapiro—fascism, National-Socialism and Marxism-Leninism—demonstrate the leverage they make on emotions: mass hysteria, the search for the enemy (e.g., imperialists, capitalists, Jews), and the appeal to nationalism. Everything is based the most primitive mass emotion.[14]

This definition of totalitarianism and ideology helps clarify what Bakhtin and Eco placed themselves against. For both Eco and Bakhtin the totalitarian regime represents an attempt to put the masses into a state of silence and obedience, though this can be fought through critical and individual thinking. Ideologies are, according to Schapiro and Arendt, dangerous instruments in the hands of wilful leaders who need the support of the masses to carry out those leaders' project of becoming a ruling class. In order to do that they need to appeal to the masses, please them, and, eventually, dictate what the masses should desire. For this reason, both Eco and Bakhtin use critical analysis to answer the attempts made by those in power to obtain control of not only the bodies but also the minds of their subjects. This can take place through political propaganda as much as through more subtle means such as popular literature. The manipulative power of mass literature emerges as a concern in Eco, as analysed further on. Significantly, in "Sullo stile del *Manifesto*," an article that appeared in *l'Espresso*, 8 January 1998, Eco analyses the "extraordinary rhetoric and argumentative structure"[15] of Marx' and Engels's *Communist Manifesto*. (1848) Eco points out how the *Manifesto* can alternate apocalyptic tones with irony, brilliant slogans, and clear explanations in a way that should be studied by advertisers. The opening lines especially show their authors' desire to appeal to the emotions of the masses: "a spectre is haunting Europe."[16] According to Eco, the appeal to the masses and

[13] Ibid., 48.
[14] Ibid., 48.
[15] Umberto Eco, *On Literature*, trans. Martin McLaughlin (London: Secker & Warburg, 2005), 23.
[16] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1848/2008), 2.

the effective use of political rhetoric are the main characteristics of the *Manifesto*. As the following textual analysis illustrates, Eco shows a concern for the manipulation of the masses through the appeal to their emotions, which is a phenomenon typical in popular culture. Chapter Five, which deals more closely with the dangers of the connection between the totalitarian regime and popular culture, illustrates how popular culture can become an instrument for spreading hate, in this case against the Jews. This chapter will also tie Bakhtin's notion of the grotesque body with Eco's idea of the enemy.

Although they differ in their levels of personal involvement, Eco and Bakhtin both encountered the ideology of a totalitarian regime. For Eco, it was fascism and its response in the anti-fascist movement. For Bakhtin, it was Stalinism. What was particularly influential for Eco in fascism—in negative and critical terms of course—was the pompous nature of Mussolini's speeches and, generally, the rhetoric of totalitarianism. The relationships between such an empty rhetoric, totalitarianism, and the reactions of the masses are relevant in Eco's early semiotic works, as shown below. Other important aspects of the criticism of fascism that contributed to the formation of Eco's thought are the use of popular culture as one of Mussolini's means of propaganda, the special attention given to the education of children, and the restrictions against freedom of the press. Reflecting Eco's own experience of fascism, these aspects of the regime emerge in two of his two novels, *Il pendolo* and *La fiamma,* which have a contemporary setting. But what left a much deeper impression on Eco was his experience of anti-fascism, which is also strongly present in his fiction, especially in *La fiamma*, as Chapter Five will show.

Bakhtin's direct experience with Stalinism consisted not only of his arrest, exile, and censorship but also—as for Eco—of resistance. During his exile in Kazakhstan, he witnessed the results of collectivisation and the Kazakhs' resistance.[17] Collectivisation and the first Five-Year Plan both started 1929, the year usually marked as beginning of

[17] Clark and Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 255.

Stalinism, which itself continued even after Stalin's death in 1953.[18] Many *kulaks*, land-owning peasants, had their land confiscated and were killed or fled. By the end of 1934, 87% of farmland was collective; by 1937, it was 99%. The chaos of collectivisation led to poor harvests and famine: about 10 to 15 million people died in 1932-34. Furthermore, the government did not want the outside world to know about the famine and made every effort to hide it. There was no attempt to get international aid—in fact, the USSR continued to export grain in exchange for industrial technology. For Stalin, this was an effective way to break the peasants' resistance.[19] Bakhtin's witnessing of both the results of collectivisation and peasant resistance to Stalin's rule must have helped to shape his opinion of the regime. Both Eco and Bakhtin were exposed to the double face of a totalitarian regime: repression and resistance.

Like fascism, Stalinism eliminated its political adversaries and all opposition. No art, newspapers, or novels that were suspected of going against the regime were allowed to be published. Many artists who failed to comply were, like political adversaries, imprisoned or executed. Most members of the Bakhtin Circle were affected, and some members were purged, among them Medvedev.[20] The Stalin Constitution of 1936 imposed the doctrine of Social Realism on the arts.[21] In literature, scholars were condemned for claiming that many European works had influenced Russian literature, and Dostoevsky's novels disappeared from the bookstores because of the disturbing psychology of his heroes. Novels, plays, and films represented the Americans as good-for-nothing gum chewers, busy making money or biological weapons, while Stalin was depicted as a war hero. In academic life, formalism and objectivism were banned for their inability to bring benefit to the socialist state.[22] In this context, then, any criticism of Stalinism had to be

[18] Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Stalinism: New Directions* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 2.
[19] John Norton Westwood, *Russia: 1917-1964* (London: Batsford Ltd, 1966), 85-7.
[20] Clark and Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 153.
[21] Westwood, *Russia*, 108.
[22] Ibid., 159-60.

subtle. Bakhtin's book on Rabelais and on the Renaissance tradition of carnival and laughter is therefore often read as having an underlying critique to Stalinism, as was previously pointed out.[23]

For Bakhtin, as for Eco, contact with the totalitarian regime also meant engagement with Marxism. Firstly, with reference to Eco, the consequences of the capitalist restructuring which culminated in Italy with the industrial development of 1958-63 need to be considered. The communist political culture—which was confronted during the Cold War by both the "American way of life" and the attraction of personal advantage—was shaken in two of its essential strategic points: firstly, in the role of the intellectuals, which had been somehow changed by the shift of culture from the typically elitist level to a more broadly accessible mass level; and, secondly, in the fact that some of them moved from studying a realistic aesthetics to the neo-avant-garde.[24] *Gruppo 63* marks the beginning of Eco's involvement with mass culture and with the debate about the work of best-selling authors. The neo-avant-garde, including some Marxists such as Sanguineti, engaged with the new phenomena of literary marketing and mass culture. Some other Italian communist intellectuals contest the question of the relationship between ideology and freedom of research. In *Rinascita*, the communist journal founded by Palmiro Togliatti in 1944, Eco, talking about a general culture of opposition not limited to Marxism, reproached the historicist tendency of Italian traditional Marxism to accept the Marxist analysis of historical facts and processes uncritically. According to Eco, despite the new values in the technical field which might have demanded a new perception of reality, many still refused to update strictly orthodox interpretations of Marxism.[25] Eco argued that new social values needed new judgement criteria instead of sterile polemics against the mass media as

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[23] Clark and Holquist, *Bakhtin*, xv.

[24] Andrea Ragusa, *I comunisti e la società italiana. Innovazione e crisi di una cultura politica (1956-1973)* (Manduria, Bari, Roma: Pietro Lacaita Editore, 2003), 187-9.

[25] Umberto Eco, "Per un'indagine sulla situazione culturale," *Rinascita* 39, October 5, 1963; "Modelli descrittivi ed interpretazione storica," *Rinascita* 40, October 12, 1963. Quoted in Ragusa, *I comunisti*, 194.

such.[26] What is important to Eco is therefore not so much one's identification with Marxist ideology but rather the acceptance of it with a critical distance. In line with his critical semiotician's view of society, Eco refuses to adhere to an ideology for its own sake; although he does welcome cultural changes, he remains sceptical towards ideologies.

For the same independent and critical attitude towards ideology in general and Marxism in particular, the relationship between Bakhtin and Marxism can be defined as a vexed one, as Brandist argues.[27] Scholars, such as Allon White and Tony Bennett, have called Bakhtin both a Marxist and an anti-Marxist. Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson have also seen Bakhtin as an anti-Marxist, considering his understandable hostility towards the ideology that the Soviet state claimed as its guiding principle.[28] In addition, as Michael Gardiner argues, the relationship between Bakhtin and Marxism is complex and equivocal since Bakhtin did not follow an existing Marxist theory on language and culture but rather attempted to formulate a completely new analytical framework that drew on a mix of philosophical and theoretical sources.[29] Gardiner shows how Bakhtin shared his central interests with those of the Western Marxist tradition. As is the case for Western Marxists such as Ernst Bloch, Antonio Gramsci, and Theodor Adorno, Bakhtin's thought matured during the political and cultural tumult of the interwar period, which produced a libertarian-humanist vision of socialism and opposed it to the authoritarian tendencies of Leninism and Stalin. On the theoretical plane, Bakhtin, like the Western Marxists, focused on the so-called "superstructural phenomena" rather than the causal efficacy of political and economic structures. He fully participated this way in the general realignment towards aesthetics and cultural themes that characterised left-wing European thought after the early 1920s. Both Bakhtin and the Western Marxists were strongly concerned with the

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[26] Ragusa, *I comunisti*, 14-5.
[27] Craig Brandist, "Bakhtin, Marxism and Russian Populism," in *Materializing Bakhtin*, eds. Craig Brandist and Galin Tihanov (Oxford: MacMillan Press Ltd, 2000), 70.
[28] Ibid., 70.
[29] Gardiner, *The Dialogics of Critique*, 5.

destruction of human values and with the progressive incursion of the commodity into every sphere of cultural and civil life in modern society. In addition, both Bakhtin and Western Marxists denounced human alienation and reification, and rejected the orthodox Marxist scientific approach (particularly the Soviet variety) in favour of critical study and a humanist approach. Gardiner argues that critique in this Western and Bakhtinian sense is projected towards a reflexive understanding of repressive social structures and impoverished modes of thought which characterise contemporary social relations.[30]

An interesting point made by Gardiner about Bakhtin's own perception of ideology allows for a clearer understanding of Bakhtin's relationship with ideology. Gardiner explains that the Bakhtin Circle does not interpret ideology in the usual ways—for example, as a form of false consciousness or as a coherent belief system. As Voloshinov's study on Marxism and the philosophy of language demonstrates, for the Circle ideology is the essential symbolic medium through which all social relations are necessarily constituted. Voloshinov, like Louis Althusser and Antonio Gramsci, sees ideology as a material force in its own right while also attempting to conceptualise ideology along linguistic and semiotic lines. Since ideology—understood as a social practice—is intimately connected with wider antagonisms in the social world, Voloshinov does not reject the Marxist emphasis on the centrality of class conflict. Given that language is inherently dialogic, it is always the site of ideological contestation, what Voloshinov calls the "struggle over the sign."[31] Such a strong presence of ideology in the works of the Bakhtin Circle helps to contextualise his political engagement as an intellectual. Although Bakhtin's writings treat philosophy and literary theory, his concerns for his political reality emerge tangentially in his theory, as a direct approach would have been censored and kept away from any real audience, not to mention that it would have led to his

[30] Ibid., 5.
[31] Ibid., 7.

imprisonment. Bakhtin transmits the urge to engage with political and historical issues through the analysis of ideologically-charged cultural products such as language and the novel.

While the association of Bakhtin with Rabelais' transgressive character has led scholars to define Bakhtin's writings as political, Eco's context and position put him in quite a different light. Being labelled a postmodernist for his use of pastiche, irony, and intertextuality, he risks being numbered among those intellectuals that the philosopher Richard Rorty would call "ironists." Such intellectuals practice a laid-back attitude towards their own beliefs while the masses, for whom such self-irony might be too subversive a weapon, continue to salute the flag and take life seriously.[32] The opinion expressed in this thesis is that Eco chose to follow a successful academic career and decided, at its beginning, to create for himself the image of a professional and objective scholar. He was soon considered one of the "semiocritics" of the 1970s together with Cesare Segre, Maria Corti, D'Arco Silvio Avalle and Dante Isella of the semiotic school of Pavia.[33] As Luperini argues, the hegemony of "semiocriticism" takes over Marxist criticism,[34] which in the 1970s underwent a moment of crisis as critics started to doubt the necessity of their sociopolitical commitment. Under the influence of what he calls "Americanisation," Luperini argues that semiocriticism reduced the work of art to scientific and technical neutralisation. Although certain semiocritics remained linked to Marxism, such as Eco himself, the dialectic tension of the class conflict was fundamentally wiped out of the text, and no reference is made to social laceration or to

[32] Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). Quoted in Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London: Verso, 2006), 11.
[33] Luperini, *Il novecento*, 874-97.
[34] Pier Luigi Cerisola points out that even before the end of the war the Italian communist party was quick to take advantage of the regained freedom of expression with the journal *Rinascita*. Marxist criticism took two main lines: the first was an accusation of the literature that complied with the fascist regime or did nothing to rebel against it. The second line consisted of the attempt by the Marxist aesthetics to elaborate an independent conception of literature and of art in general. Communist intellectuals were inspired by the theories of Georg Lukács and Antonio Gramsci. Giorgio Baroni, ed., *Storia della critica letteraria in Italia* (Turin: Utet, 1997), 497-500.

resistance set in motion against contemporary alienation.[35] Eco, however, became more open over time in expressing his ideas on the sociopolitical life of his country. This coincided not only with the affirmation of his authority as a scholar and university professor, but also—significantly for this thesis—with his plunging into his work as a popular novelist. How, then, should Eco's novels help to understand Eco's political commitment in the light of his professional scholarly detachment? The textual analysis will be directed to give an answer to this question.

2.3 "Authoritative Discourse," Rhetoric, and Myth

In order to analyse the way Eco engages with the representation of authority, one needs to take a close look at his understanding of "authoritative discourse" and rhetoric, both of which, according to Bakhtin, are connected to parodic stylisation. Bakhtin believed that the assimilation of others' discourse has a "basic significance in an individual's ideological becoming."[36] In this context, as Holquist points out, the Russian *ideologiya* (ideology) is not intended to be politically oriented, as it is in English. In Russian it refers more broadly to an "idea-system."[37] Bakhtin explains that the history of an individual consciousness is determined by the dialogic interrelationship of two categories of ideological discourse: "authoritative discourse" and "internally persuasive discourse." It is the essential characteristic of the authoritative word that we acknowledge it and that we make it our own without necessarily being persuaded by it. In addition, the place of the authoritative word is in a distanced zone which is closely connected to a past that is felt to be "hierarchically higher." As it belongs to our fathers, its authority is

[35] Luperini, *Il novecento*, 874-97.
[36] Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," 342.
[37] Michael Holquist, Glossary to *The Dialogic Imagination*, by Mikhail Bakhtin, 429.

already consolidated in the past. The authoritative word does not belong to the familiar environment but rather to those "lofty spheres" where it can only be pronounced. Like a taboo, it must not be used in vain.[38] Bakhtin points out that authoritative discourse is "indissolubly fused with its authority ... [I]t stands and falls with that authority."[39] An essential aspect of the authoritative discourse is that it can only be transmitted: it cannot be represented. It can be the carrier of different contents: of the authority, the authoritativeness of tradition, or generally acknowledged truths.[40]

A different scenario is that of the internally persuasive word. It is the opposite of the authoritative word, which is accepted as a given because of the authority it bears. The persuasive discourse is accepted because it is convincing and it is associated with the image of a speaking person (e.g., ethical discourse is associated with preachers, philosophical discourse with wise men, sociopolitical discourse with leaders, etc.).[41] There is therefore a neat distinction between the accepted and the imposed word, which Bakhtin likely derives from his experience of Stalinism. On the one hand, there is a closed, monologic, authoritative word that accepts no interaction. On the other hand, there is the independent and active discourse that, according to Bakhtin, is "the fundamental indicator of an ethical, legal and political human being."[42] Monologism and dialogism are therefore key terms in Bakhtin's theory because they reflect the dichotomy between authoritative discourse and the free word. Monologism is the word of the authority that does not want to be discussed and is therefore closed to any kind of dialogical encounter. Conversely, the notion of dialogism represents more than openness to dialogue. It is dialogue in response to the monologic authority which refuses it in order to retain its position. The term itself was never used by Bakhtin, but it was later introduced by scholars studying his work

[38] Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," 342.
[39] Ibid., 343.
[40] Ibid., 344.
[41] Ibid., 347.
[42] Ibid., 349.

because it synthesised his meditations on dialogue as well as on the problematic relationship between self and otherness. Holquist stresses that dialogue is the essential guide throughout Bakhtin's career. His reflections, though not unique, lay claim to a field of action much wider than mere literary theory and had the ambition to extend further to the analysis of any sort of theoretical approach.[43]

Because of its persuasive purpose and its essentially dialogical character, rhetoric has an important role in Bakhtin. Although rhetoric always represents the social man embodied in his words, it often limits itself to pure verbal competition. In this case, rhetoric reduces itself to a linguistic game. Bakhtin observes that "when discourse is torn from reality, it is fatal for the word itself as well: words grow sickly, lose semantic depth and flexibility."[44] It is important to underline how for Bakhtin the persuasive word cannot be separated from its social context; otherwise, it would lose all meaning. But then he also concludes that in most cases the double-voicedness of rhetoric is abstract and thus lends itself to a purely logical analysis of ideas.[45] In other words, Bakhtin points out the thorny nature of rhetoric as that of a linguistic game enacted by the speaker to win the listener to his or her side.

As the introduction has pointed out, Eco is also suspicious of rhetoric, having seen it at work in Mussolini's speeches. Although he was only thirteen, Eco realised the fundamental role that mass manipulation had played during the twenty years of the fascist regime. Later on, as a critical observer of society, he decided to intervene in the social environment by educating his readers in how to receive mass communication. In 1967, he lectured about declaring "semiological guerrilla warfare" against the mass media.[46] He was already aware of the consequences of living in the communication age, where

[43] Holquist, *Dialogism*, 15.
[44] "Discourse in the Novel," 353-4.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Umberto Eco, "Towards a Semiological Guerrilla Warfare," in *Faith in Fakes*, 135-44.

whoever controls the means of communication controls the country. Eco's interest in popular culture does not imply a resignation to the power of mass communication. He campaigned for a balanced attitude towards the mass media by rejecting both "apocalyptic" and "integrated" intellectuals. Eco judged the "apocalyptics" (e.g., Theodor Adorno) to be people for whom only negativity comes from mass culture and the consumerist society; the "integrated" are those who live in the world without ever questioning it or even trying to decipher it. Both approaches were condemned by Eco as being highly counterproductive. The apocalyptic intellectuals are accused of misrecognising the kitsch products of mass culture as mere fetish objects and of attempting to eliminate them from their vision of culture.[47] Equally, according to Eco, passive acceptance cannot possibly be an answer to the new phenomenon of the industry of mass culture.

In the last chapter of *La struttura assente*, Eco explores the potential for the semiotic study of communication to be an active cultural response.[48] For Eco, active participation in cultural reception is crucial. In *Opera aperta* and *Apocalittici e integrati*, he argues that popular culture tends to find one of its strengths in the reiteration of its patterns. Since man is a creature of habit, the encounter with the same types of characters, plots, and situations is comforting. Popular culture uses repetition to be liked by its public because the popular culture novelist or artist knows that the public likes its comfort zone. But also, popular culture exploits the desire of its public for comfort and uses it to persuade it of the inevitability of its conditions: things are the way the are and the way they should remain. Eco argues that only modernism and the avant-garde offer an escape from this redundancy typical of popular culture because they intentionally break the rules of communication. Eco argues that works of kitsch such as Michael Curtiz's *Casablanca* (1942) and Joseph

[47] Umberto Eco, *Apocalittici e integrati* (Milan: Bompiani, 1964), 3-4.
[48] Eco, *La struttura assente*, 413-8.

Heller's *Catch 22* (1955) potentially have the same effect as avant-garde works because they also break through the otherwise sterile repetitiveness of popular culture. In an article entitled "La moltiplicazione dei media" Eco argues that in modernised mass society there is a mutual borrowing between the avant-garde and kitsch. And, since the 1980s, he has suggested a re-elaboration of the receiver's relationship with popular and high culture.[49] On the whole, Eco's approach, as indicated so far, results in the playful tone of his non-theoretical writings from the mid-1970s onwards.[50]

According to Maurizio Rebaudengo, some critics believe that the 1970s led to Eco's transformation into an "opinion maker." On the one hand, works like *Secondo diario minimo* might be interpreted as exhibiting a "crisis of ideology" and Eco's recanting of the importance of social intervention. On the other hand, irony became Eco's new tool to approach changes taking place in the cultural order.[51] In the preface to *Sette anni di desiderio* (1983), Eco mentions "grotesque inversion," implying the grotesque not as mere playfulness but also a desirable mode of understanding.[52] In other words, after the "semiological warfare," Eco saw parodic uncrowning and ironic revisiting as new ways to confront the new aspects of culture. The comic is often exploited by mass media because it implies, under the surface of transgression and freedom, the confirmation of the rule underneath. The media allow us to laugh because they are sure that before and after laughter we will be crying.[53] Conversely to the comic, humour involves identification with the characters of the piece that makes us laugh but also it leads us to reflect on the part they play in society. Humour thus acts like the tragic. But while the tragic confirms the rule in its universe and it is reiterated by its characters, humour poses the rule as a hidden

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[49] Umberto Eco, "La moltiplicazione dei media," in *Sette anni di desiderio*, by Umberto Eco (Milan: Bompiani, 1983/2004), 213.
[50] Maurizio Rebaudengo, "Between Shelves and Columns: Scattered Fragments of a Semiotic Discourse," in *Umberto Eco*, vol. 3, eds. M. Gane and N. Gane, 247.
[51] Rebaudengo, "Between Shelves," 248.
[52] Eco, *Sette anni*, 7.
[53] Umberto Eco, "Il comico," 258.

question to authority. In this case, it is the author who reflects with detachment on the social environment his/her characters occupy and believe in.[54]

Although Eco's provocative social critique of the 1960s and 70s (with the "semiological guerrilla warfare") turns into irony in the 80s and 90s, his approach to culture remains firmly committed to active participation in the socio-cultural environment. Despite this change in approach, Eco has never given up on trying to understand reality critically and has insisted on developing those critical tools that are necessary to account for the change undergone by cultural communication.[55] What Eco has felt the need for, increasingly, has been intellectual autonomy from any political party. Eco compares the intellectual with Cosimo Piovasco in Calvino's *Il barone rampante* (1957), Eco stays on a tree not to flee from his duties but to observe events with the critical detachment of the participating outsider. Although he may lose the advantages one has by staying with one's feet on the ground, he gains a broadness of perspective.[56]

According to Eco, one has to become a critical individual in order to not be swallowed up by mass communication. Whereas the apocalyptic intellectuals argue that the mass media do not transmit ideologies (they are, rather, ideologies in Marx's sense of false representations), Eco answers by making the object of his analysis the message rather than the content.[57] Eco's critical essays are in fact about virtually anything: James Bond, Superman, Charlie Brown, comic strips and football. Eco identified in semiotics the general science of culture, aesthetics, and cognition, which was capable of providing a

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[54] Ibid., 259.

[55] Rebaudengo, "Between Shelves," 249.

[56] Umberto Eco, "Norberto Bobbio: la missione del dotto rivisitata," in *A passo di gambero: guerre calde e populismo mediatico*, by Umberto Eco (Milan: Bompiani, 2006), 69.

[57] Eco, "Towards a Semiological Guerrilla Warfare," 142-4: "The battle for the survival of man as a responsible being in the Communications Era is not to be won where the communication originates, but where it arrives … A political party that knows how to set up a grass-roots action that will reach all the groups that follow TV and can bring them to discuss the message they receive can change the meaning that the Source had attributed to this message. An educational organisation that succeeds in making a given audience discuss the message it is receiving could reverse the meaning of that message … I am proposing an action to urge the audience to control the message and its multiple possibilities of interpretation … The threat that the 'medium is the message' could then become, for both medium and message, the return to individual responsibility."

methodology to cultural anthropology, and some deep revealing aspects of human culture. However, in a recent interview, Eco explained that this distinction between apocalyptic and integrated intellectuals is no longer possible in the present phase of history since the distinction between the critics of mass communication and those who identified themselves with the new system does not exist anymore nowadays. Eco gives as an example the pop art in which avant-garde art adopts mass communications and comic strips for its images rather than criticising them, as the apocalyptic intellectuals would have done.[58]

Eco focuses his semiotic analysis on the "persuasive word" used by the newspapers and other means of mass communication in order to dismantle their allegedly innocuous devices and demonstrate how they are not to be trusted.[59] An example is the essay he dedicated to the analysis of the communiqué from the Red Brigades concerning the fate of Aldo Moro, the DC leader (Democrazia Cristiana) who was kidnapped and murdered in 1978. Eco argues that the message, which attacks the extreme power of multinationals governing the world, is presented as an attempt to strike at the heart of the state. Conversely, he suggests that terrorism is a natural counterbalance to the multinationals.[60] Chapter Three expands on Eco's analysis of the role of terrorism in society and its relation to the system of the multinationals. In particular, the relationship between heresy and the church is analysed in broader terms—that of the officially established order and its rebelling counterweight. Here it is important to point out how Eco too is interested, like Bakhtin, in the dialogical power of rhetoric and in the mechanism of the construction of this power.

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[58] "Valentino Parlato intervista Umberto Eco," posted on November 5, 2011. http://thescribblerist.wordpress.com/2011/05/10/valentino-parlato-intervista-umberto-eco/

[59] Umberto Eco, *Il costume di casa* (Milan: Bompiani, 1973), 5.

[60] Umberto Eco, "Striking at the Heart of the State," in *Faith in Fakes*, 113-8.

Eco is aware of the fact that mass communication is not only used by totalitarian regimes—it also becomes the engine of a new era. In particular, both Eco and Bakhtin are concerned with the power of popular culture over the masses and its intimate connection with myth. Chapter Five examines the role of popular culture as political propaganda. Under Ernst Cassirer's influence,[61] Bakhtin sees the mythical world as characterised by its conflicting powers and therefore charged with emotional qualities. Although scientific thought can free the observer of all trace of mythical perception of a certain phenomenon, it cannot destroy myth. The main conflict of social forces is that between mythical and non- (or anti-) mythical conceptions of the world. According to Cassirer, the role of critical thought is to minimise this influence by showing the fundamental gap between sign and object signified.[62] Myth in Bakhtin entails a confrontation of the past with the present. It is made powerful by the dialectic encounter of opposite forces which have the potential of undermining the accepted order of things.

For Bakhtin, the realistic symbolism of the carnivalesque tradition as expressed by Rabelais combines with an analysis of carnivalesque poetics aimed to highlight some generalities of mythological consciousness. Its symbolism is thus interconnected with a concrete corporality. According to Eleazar Meletinsky "the motifs of the various forms of vital activity (sexual, alimentary, intellectual, and social) not only interact but are understood as identical on a symbolic level in exactly the same way that the microcosm (the human body) is identified with the macrocosm (the principles that govern nature and the universe)."[63] Rabelais' cosmic vision of the human body derives therefore from this principle. It extends corporal life outside the single individual and towards a cosmic body of all people. The mythical dimension in this sense opposes religion, since while the

[61] Brandist points out that it is confirmed that Bakhtin read Cassirer's second volume of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (1955) entitled *Mythical Thought*. Brandist, *The Bakhtin Circle*, 107.
[62] Brandist, *The Bakhtin Circle*, 107.
[63] Eleazar M. Meletinsky, *The Poetics of Myth*, trans. Guy Lanoue and Alexandre Sadetsky (New York; London: Garland, 1998), 111.

former proclaims the corporal life of the body as universal and eternal, the latter places the same values in the soul, not the body. For Bakhtin, myth embodies the natural roots of all human beings and therefore responds with atavist spontaneity to the artificiality of rules imposed by men, be they imposed by the hand of the church or that of the totalitarian state. Therefore, Bakhtin perceives myth as the expression of folk culture and its eternal wisdom, whereas for Eco myth has a dangerous power of manipulating the masses through art and literature.

The final section (2.5) analyses how Eco sees myth as having an important role in the connection between literature and ideology. Because Eco is a semiotician and scholar of the mass media, he talks about "mythification" instead of myth. He argues that in a mass society of the industrial age a process of mythification similar to that of primitive societies can be found. This process takes place in the notion of the *status symbol*: an object is identified with an image and an ultimate finality. Such mythopoeia has the character of universality because it comes from below, although in reality its mythifying tendency is given from above through the stimulating action of the industrial society based on consumerism.[64] An example of mythification in the production of the mass media is the industry of comic books, which are read more by adults than by children. Eco studies the symbolic image of Superman: he is a hero who comes from space who can do almost anything with his powers, yet he lives among men as the clumsy, shy and bullied journalist Clark Kent. Eco argues that from the mythopoeic point of view Superman's double personality is clever because it allows the reader to identify with the character: anyone from any American city can secretly dream of one day turning into a superman and enact his revenge for years of mediocrity.[65]

[64] Eco, *Apocalittici*, 222-3.
[65] Ibid., 226-8.

Although Eco's theory could be seen in a close relationship with Roland Barthes's study of myth as a class-determined function of society,[66] as a literary author Eco is attracted to the distinction of the effect myth has in folk and mass culture. Folk culture is intended here in the sense of being the culture of the people, the rooted and transmitted tradition of wisdom whose power Bakhtin highlights in his work on Rabelais. For this reason, Bakhtin's understanding of myth is more relevant for the present work than Barthes's. As Chapter Five shows, the traditional culture of the people in Eco has an important role in the critical reception of a kind of mass culture which is aimed at consolidating a regime. This chapter illustrates how mass literature can carry an ideological programme that it hopes to spread by means of its popularity, especially among the lower classes.

2.4 Theory of Laughter and Subversion

In Eco's novels, laughter is a way to respond to the influence of myth and the Bakhtinian concept of the authoritarian word. In both Eco and Bakhtin laughter enters into a key relationship with subversion. In the essay entitled "Elogio di Franti" (1962), Eco makes a few important points in his analysis of Franti, a character from Edmondo De Amicis's novel *Cuore*, which show his concern with the social dimension of fiction and the potential impact it has on the reading public, thus again going back to the question of the power of mass literature. Published in 1886, *Cuore* immediately became a best-selling work. By 1923 it had sold a million copies.[67] In this novel De Amicis dealt with a number of issues, including the problem of school organisation in the new Italy, which had been

[66] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (London: Jonathan Cape, 1974).
[67] *Letteratura italiana*, vol. VIII (Turin: Einaudi, 1990-91), 569-70.

unified only twenty-five years earlier. It is the story of an eight-year old schoolboy named Enrico who writes a diary about his life at school, from the first day to the final exams. Occasionally, Enrico's narration is interrupted by his father's letters, full of a contrived variety of ethics and constant reminders to behave respectably.[68] The pedagogic purpose of the novel is made evident by its recurring motifs, such as discipline; moral integrity; the worship of duty, sacrifice and patriotic ideals; a vocation for work; and belief in a society based on inter-class solidarity.[69] Its great success demonstrates the appealing effect that De Amicis's combination of literature and ideology had for the masses.

In his essay, Eco closely analyses Franti, the negative character of the story. While De Amicis takes Franti out of his context to turn him into pure evil, Eco places his investigation within the context of society. De Amicis intentionally leaves out any information on Franti's social class, his passions, and even his physical traits. While Enrico gives accurate narrative details of all the other classmates, Franti is simply described as "tosto e tristo" [70] (tough and sad). Franti is a flat character who exists simply as a dialectic symbol in De Amicis's discourse: Franti is the incarnation of evil. Conversely, Eco investigates Franti by situating him within his social frame. The only mention of Franti's family in *Cuore* is made when his mother rushes into the class to beg Franti's teacher for her son's forgiveness after he is punished. She is breathless, her grey hair is all ruffled, and she is stooping, wrapped in a shawl and coughing. Eco points out how from this small amount of information it can be assumed that Franti's family live in poor economic conditions, probably in an unhealthy place and that his father is underemployed.[71] With this in mind, Eco turns to investigate Franti's laughter in the light

[68] Ibid., 570.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Eco, "Elogio," 81.
[71] Ibid., 84.

of his economic condition rather than as a purely evil character. This changes the perception both of Franti as a character and of his evil laugh.

From this perspective, Franti's laugh is not simply the product of his evil character because he laughs at society—he laughs because he has a mission. For Eco, Franti's laughter at a military parade represents the last stand of common sense against the military frenzy that was starting to seize young boys and prepare a path to fascism.[72] Eco concludes that Franti's laughter demonstrates a corrective value and thus refers to Henri Bergson's theory of laughter. This is relevant because Bergson is also one of the main sources for Bakhtin's conception of laughter, according to Brandist.[73] Bergson stresses the social nature of laughter which he describes as a corrective to the rigidity of body, mind, and character "that society would still like to get rid of in order to obtain from its members the greatest possible degree of elasticity and sociability."[74] He argues that life constantly brings two opposite forces into play: tension and elasticity. Society is suspicious of all forms of inelasticity because they signal laziness and separatist tendencies. In other words, inelasticity is a sign of eccentricity.[75] Laughter is the social gesture employed by society in reply to this rigidity: it involuntarily "pursues a utilitarian aim of general improvement."[76] Laughter is therefore a positive force that corrects a deviation in society.

For Eco too, laughter has a positive social value because it measures the strength of a situation: that which survives laughter is valuable, and that which is destroyed by it is meant to be destroyed. Thus, laughter provides a service to the thing it laughs at in that it speeds its evolution.[77] In Franti's case laughter represents the sign of a social struggle. It is

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[72] Ibid., 85.
[73] Brandist, *The Bakhtin Circle*, 127.
[74] Henri Bergson, *Laughter. An Essay on the Mechanic of the Comic,* trans. Cloudesley Brereton and Fred Rothwell (London: MacMillan, 1911), 20-1.
[75] Ibid., 18-9.
[76] Ibid., 20.
[77] Eco, "Elogio," 90.

the shape taken by Franti's negation of what was—to him—the hostile cosmos of *Cuore*.[78] Conversely, Enrico has no reason to reject his world because his family is wealthy and he lives well. That is why he demonises Franti, unhappy about that world and potentially threatening it with his derision. Eco defines the sociology of *Cuore* as fake. Franti's laughter is considered evil and destructive only because Enrico identifies goodness with the existing order, which he uses to get rich. Therefore, if goodness is the only thing a society values as favourable, badness is its opposite. Its means that laughter is also evil because it sheds doubt on what society elects as good. The laughing person, in this context, is the one suggesting that society can be different from what it is now.[79]

However, whether De Amicis wants it or not, Franti comes to embody a figure of universal conscience.[80] The parallel Eco makes is, significantly, Rabelais's Panurge, who is neither a giant nor a Dipsode, and he does not enter Pantagruel's society, and instead shows off his desire to undermine it. Panurge accepts the court's conventions, but only to make fun of them. He goes to mass and takes the opportunity to spread lice. He changes his clothes according to the fashion of Pantagruel's court, but he turns them into a hiding place for his tricks. In other words, Panurge installs himself inside Renaissance culture in order to undermine it from within, and laughter is his weapon.[81] It is therefore important to understand the difference between the despised outcast Franti and the accepted revolutionary, Panurge. They both threaten the order imposed by society, employing laughter as their instrument, but they act in different ways: one works from within, the other from the outside.

Franti's role in *Cuore* has the potential to measure his society's strength, which would allow only what is valuable to survive. The comic is the established order that,

[78] Ibid., 86-7.
[79] Ibid., 89-90. The capital letters are Eco's.
[80] Ibid., 88.
[81] Ibid., 89.

when accepted and exacerbated by widening social gaps, turns into something else. It would have been Franti's task to change this order if De Amicis had not eliminated the character so soon. Eco argues that we are only now able to see the liberating and corrective germs of Franti's laughter because we understand that the Franti we read about is seen and described from Enrico's perspective only. Franti cannot be a comical avenger because the story is told by Enrico, who hates him, nor can Franti develop in a dialectical interaction with Enrico. Franti, who remains an outcast and is eventually sent to life imprisonment, is an unexplained fault in Enrico's system. And yet, he stands out as an example of how you laugh at the order imposed by those living in good conditions in society. According to Eco, one can either pretend to accept the order to make it explode from within, like Rabelais, or one can pretend to reject it to have it reborn in different forms.[82]

For Eco, laughter has a positive role in society since it carries forward necessary changes to what Bergson refers to as "social rigidity." Eco believes that although Franti is depicted as an evil character in *Cuore*, he has the positive potential to put the accepted order into discussion with his mocking laugh. According to Eco it is relevant to note who Franti laughs at: old women, wounded workers, crying mothers, and elderly teachers. His laughter is a stereotype that stands for more than his evil character. Also, it is joyless because it is not produced by amusement but by bitterness at the social conditions of the characters Franti laughs at. Franti's laughter is the product of his hate for a society to which he belongs but from which he does not get the same benefits as the narrator of the story. It is not jealousy, but rather the attack of someone who knows that society could be different from what it is.

Both Bakhtin and Eco consider laughter positive because of its power to stimulate social change. Eco makes this clear in his essay on Franti, whose laughter fails to

[82] Ibid., 91-2.

challenge the order of society only because it is not given a voice. Bakhtin sees laughter as connecting death and birth. He gives as an example the banquets that were held by the clergy in honour of dead patrons or benefactors when they were buried in the church.[83] In these circumstances, the gaiety and laughter of the festive forms met funeral rites and thus celebrated the process of death and rebirth. The meeting of death and renewal, which is at the centre of popular feasts, is a typical characteristic of grotesque. Like in Eco, in Bakhtin laughter challenges the old and gets rid of it. If something survives laughter, then it earns its place in society; if it does not, then it deserves to be left behind in the past. Laughter for Eco and Bakhtin points forward rather than backward: it is able to free the present of the stale past and lead it to the future.

For both Bakhtin and Eco, laughter is the subversive act of challenge to the accepted order. It is therefore not the simple expression of joy but rather a means of liberating oneself from the tension caused by social unhappiness. Also, for Eco and Bakhtin laughter has the power to bring about doubt. It interferes with the certainties of the social order and thereby suggests that that order could be different from what it is. But to be able to laugh at the order one has to believe in it in the first place, as they both argue. The necessity of accepting the order is also a determinant characteristic of Bakhtin's notion of carnival. Carnival is possible at a specific time of the year because it inverts an order that is respected for the rest of the year. Hierarchies are a good example, as during carnival fools become kings and vice versa.

An important idea about laughter shared by Bakhtin and Eco is its association with dialogism, while seriousness pairs with monologism. This is particularly evident in Eco's *Il nome* where seriousness coincides with the unquestionable dogmatism of the church. This connection is also made evident in Bakhtin's analysis of the Middle Ages and Renaissance. For Bakhtin, medieval seriousness was infused with fear, violence,

[83] Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 80.

intimidation, and prohibitions. As the spokesman of power, seriousness commanded, forbade, and made people distrustful. Lastly, "seriousness had an official tone and was treated like all that is official."[84] In this sense, then, laughter threatens the order because it puts the authority of seriousness into question. Laughter asks to start a dialogue that the authority tries to avoid by imposing its seriousness. A dialogue would question the legitimacy of its own authority.

It is important to stress that Eco, while sharing some of the Russian critic's views, is strongly critical of Bakhtin's notion of carnivalesque revolution. Eco agrees with Bakhtin in seeing the "manifestation of a profound drive towards liberation and subversion in medieval carnival."[85] Carnival means revolution for the people: kings are overthrown and the people are crowned. Eco points out how those in power have used *circenses* —mass entertainments—to keep the crowds quiet, how most dictatorships censor parodies and satires but not clowneries, and how even today's mass media are based mainly on being funny—that is, based on "a continuous carnivalisation of life." As a result, Eco does not accept the "hyper-Bakhtinian ideology of carnival as *actual* liberation."[86] Carnival is not real transgression because it is authorised while the social and political order remains unthreatened. In order to be enjoyed, carnival requires laws it can break and that these rules be accepted. If during the Middle Ages rituals such as the Mass of the Ass or the Feast of Fools were enjoyable, it was because during the rest of the year serious masses and kings were respected.[87] Eco concludes therefore that comedy and carnival are far from being real transgressions. On the contrary, they represent examples of law enforcement because they remind us of the rule.[88] According to Eco, "if there is a possibility of transgression, it lies in humour rather than in comic … Humour does not pretend, like

[84] Ibid., 94.
[85] Eco, "Frames," 3.
[86] Ibid.
[87] See below note n. 98.
[88] Eco, "Frames," 6.

carnival, to lead us beyond our limits. It is never off limits, it undermines limits from the inside … Humour does not promise us liberation: on the contrary, it warns us about the impossibility of global liberation, reminding us of the presence of a law that we no longer have reason to obey."[89] It is argued here that Eco contrasts the coldness and calculation of humour with the heat of uncontrolled carnival: in Eco's words, "humour is a *cold* carnival."[90] Whereas the former may succeed in undermining the official order, the latter is merely bound to fail. Chapter Three focuses on the analysis this intricate web of relationships between humour, carnival, authority and subversion.

Eco's different perception of the notion of carnival also results in a significant divergence between Bakhtin's and Eco's conceptions of laughter. Bakhtin sees laughter in the context of popular festivity and therefore as the laughter of the people as a group, as a community which temporarily takes the liberty of defying and mocking the social order. Carnival laughter in particular is described by Bakhtin for its universal character: it is the laughter of all people, directed at everything and everyone, including the carnival's participants.[91] It is the collective revenge taken by all people against everything and everyone. Laughter for Bakhtin is therefore joyful and liberating because it momentarily frees the mass of peasants living under the dogmatism of the church from fear for the rest of the year. Conversely, laughter for Eco is not collective but individual. As the textual analysis shows in more detail, in Eco's novels, those who laugh at the social order are not a group of people belonging to the same ruled class. Rather, an individual can be seen as a "comical avenger,"[92] someone who acts on his own but possibly in the interests of the oppressed majority. In both Eco and Bakhtin, laughter serves a social purpose in that it speaks about a social malaise. But while Bakhtin sees the community using laughter to

[89] Ibid., 8.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 7-11.
[92] Eco, "Elogio," 90.

discard—even temporarily—the accepted order, Eco puts just one person in charge. In Eco's point of view, the true threat to the accepted order is the individual that comes from within. Because of this, getting rid of the social order cannot happen at the hand of a mob but by that of a individual—a Panurge, say—who not only accepts the order but is also accepted by it so that he can launch his attack where it hurts the most. This is the important difference with Bakhtin, for whom laughter is clearly placed outside officialdom, or in any case regulated by it and limited to specific times of the year. Bakhtin analyses the subversive and social character of laughter by recognising the place it had in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, but he does not draw conclusions about a general principle or idea that could somehow speak for his present. Eco, on the other hand, is free to consider laughter for its potential to threaten the present social order. Eco not only studies the figure of Franti in his essay but also puts him into a relationship with the present when he claims that only now can the potential dialectic created by Franti in *Cuore* be understood, despite De Amicis's attempt to block out dialogue.

2.5 The Grotesque, the Novel, and Rabelais

In order to systematise the study of the relationship between Eco and Rabelais through Bakhtin, a central theme in Bakhtin's theory—heteroglossia—has been used in an analysis of a set of Rabelaisian paradigms that appear frequently in Eco's fiction. The Rabelaisian paradigms, empowered in Bakhtin by a broader and older satirical tradition, set the tone for Eco's novels and bring them out into his contemporary society, as the textual analysis in the following chapters will show. The "Rabelaisian paradigms" under consideration in this study are those which are identified by Bakhtin as recurring in Rabelais and which all share the same fundamental praise of subversion. This research

shows how these paradigms also appear persistently in Eco's novels and it uses Bakhtin's theory both to identify them and to suggest a way of interpreting them. The Rabelaisian paradigms which constitute the theoretical tools for the present textual analysis are those of the grotesque body, the banquet, and the marketplace. The paradigms are derived from Bakhtin's broad notion of the grotesque as the free expression of the popular wisdom of folk culture, which finds its most representative moment in the carnival and in the laughter typical of popular festive forms. In other words, Bakhtin's notion of the grotesque contains the three paradigms here selected and it is also the means through which folk culture expresses itself during carnival and liberates itself. Whereas the paradigms are chosen for their recurrence in all of Eco's novels, the theme of heteroglossia is selected from Bakhtin and applied to a particular phase of the criticism of Eco's novels that is characterised by his derision of the privileged position of the intellectuals in *Baudolino*, as illustrated in Chapter Four. As shown in more detail below, heteroglossia is a social mixture of languages that erases the boundaries of social division.

Folk culture is the culture typically associated with popular wisdom: idioms, sayings, farces and colourful expressions used by fools and clowns represent the "genius of the age."[93] In Rabelais, folk culture is transmitted through the attention given to bodily activities as a response to the official culture of the church. Bakhtin defines the images of the bodily principle in Rabelais that descend from the culture of folk humour as "grotesque realism." In grotesque realism the bodily element is deeply positive because it represents the freedom of the body through its natural acts of eating, drinking, defecating, and having sex.[94] Eco also attributes a wisdom to the lower class and the poor, one that is different from that of the intellectual.[95] The poor can understand reality thanks to a genuine connection with their surroundings. In an essay entitled "Il linguaggio mendace in

[93] Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 2.
[94] Ibid., 18-9.
[95] Eco, *Il nome*, 288.

Manzoni," Eco argues that Manzoni distrusts human history. In *Promessi sposi,* Manzoni distinguishes between natural and artificial semiosis. The former is exercised instinctively by people belonging to the lower class who are able to understand the facts of life through their experience and by interpreting real *signa o semeia*, or indexes. Conversely, the artificial semiosis is a verbal language that is used maliciously to mask reality in order to gain power. This is made possible by the deceptive nature of language itself. Natural semiosis leads to error only when corrupted by language or obfuscated by emotions.[96] Although "folk culture" is a Bakhtinian term that Eco does not use, it represents well this idea that Eco refers to when mentioning the distinction between natural and artificial semiosis. This idea is that the poor are in possession of an ancient wisdom that allows them to read through the artificial lies of those who want to retain power at the poor's expense.

Bakhtin's theory of laughter has already been mentioned but it is worthwhile now to point out those characteristics of laughter that are significant in relation to the Rabelaisian paradigms used for textual analysis. Firstly, laughter is a key element in understanding the balance between the official and unofficial order in the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Bakhtin argues that in the Middle Ages folk humour existed and developed outside the official sphere of high ideology and literature. Because of its unofficial existence, it was marked by exceptional radicalism, freedom, and ruthlessness.[97] The intolerant seriousness of official church ideology created the need for the legalisation of laughter on occasions such as the *risus paschalis*.[98] The rite of carnival in particular had the power to liberate

[96] Umberto Eco, "Il linguaggio mendace in Manzoni," in *Tra menzogna e ironia*, by Umberto Eco (Milan: Bompiani, 1998), 26-7.
[97] Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 71.
[98] During the Middle Ages laughter remained outside the official serious culture of the church but it was allowed at specific times of the year. Some examples are the "feast of fools" (*festa stultorum*) celebrated by schoolmen and lower clerics on St. Stephen's day and other occasions; the "feast of the ass" and the "asinine masses" celebrated with the comic braying "hinham!"; the tradition of allowing laughter in church during Easter, *risus paschalis*. Laughter was a permission granted by the church as much as was eating meat or resuming sexual intercourse, both of which were forbidden during Lent. Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 73-9.

people from religious dogmatism and allowed the parody of ecclesiastic cults. While the official feast excluded the element of laughter in its affirmation of all that was stable and perennial, such as social hierarchies, carnival used it to celebrate temporary liberation. As opposed to the stability of the official, carnival is the feast of becoming, changing and renewing. The experience of carnival challenges all pretence of immutability with the dynamic expression of ever-changing, playful, and undefined forms. The logic is that of the "inside out" (*à l'envers*), the continual shift from top to bottom through parodies and travesties, humiliations, comic coronations, and depositions. Medieval life had a twofold orientation because it allowed for the coexistence of the official and the carnivalesque.[99]

The three Rabelaisian paradigms need to be analysed in more detail. A typical image of popular celebration is that of the joyful banquet which, according to Bakhtin, is strictly linked with the elements of victory and triumph. A banquet is always universal and victorious. A key aspect in Bakhtin's theory of popular festive forms is their inherent celebration of life over death in the act of renewal.[100] In addition, the banquet is directly connected with the power to dispel fear and liberate the word. Banquet images materialise "sublime" themes on the bodily level where they are uncrowned and renewed. The grotesque symposium does not have to respect hierarchical distinctions and it is allowed to bring together the sacred and the profane, the low and the high, and the spiritual and the material.[101]

The grotesque body is an open body, as opposed to the closed body derived from the classical canon.[102] It is a body in the act of becoming, continually being built in fusion with other bodies, never representing an individual body but rather the endless chain of bodily life in which one body is born from the death of another.[103] The locus of the

[99] Ibid., 96.
[100] Ibid., 283.
[101] Ibid., 285-6, 296.
[102] Ibid., 24-9.
[103] Ibid., 318.

grotesque body is the marketplace, a space outside officialdom where everything is permitted. Traditionally, representations of the grotesque body participated in festive popular processions: this included, for instance, "a monster combining cosmic, animal and human features, …giants (traditionally symbolizing the great body), negroes and moors (a grotesque deviation from the bodily norm), and a group of youngsters performing folk dances (like quasi-indecent Spanish sarabande)."[104] Monsters are also associated with hell and its many manifestations, all of them embedded with the conception of entertainment. At the end of the Middle Ages, the *diableries* combined carnival elements and the underworld in the joyful popular spectacle of the marketplace.[105]

The common denominator in all these images is their power to dispel fear. The reaction to fear is the response of folk culture to the rule established by the church through the threat of eternal damnation. According to Bakhtin, all religious systems are founded on a cosmic terror that oppresses man and his consciousness.[106] For this reason, popular festive forms direct all their energetic liberation at lower bodily functions. They promote the enjoyment of earthly life, even if for the short-term, as opposed to the ascetic life promoted by the church. Grotesque realism is characterised by images of rebirth that fight the fear of death. Folk wisdom understands the impossibility of living under a constant regime of terror and of the people's need to let off steam in order to retain their sanity. It represents the survival instinct of the subjugated.

The reason why these paradigms are useful for an analysis of Eco's novels is first and foremost because Rabelais is not only a key influence for Eco but also a clear model for his humoristic fictional tone. Eco's tone as a novelist is characterised by the use of the grotesque references to bodily activities, and abusive language, all of which is typical of Rabelais. The term "grotesque," however, has a longer history which precedes and follows

[104] Ibid., 229-30.
[105] Ibid., 393-4.
[106] Ibid., 335-6.

Rabelais in a much wider context. As Wolfgang Kayser shows in his analysis of the grotesque, the term comes from the Italian *grottesco* which referred to *grotta* (cave) and which was coined to designate a hitherto unknown ancient form of ornamental painting that came to light during late-fifteenth-century excavations, first in Rome and then in other parts of Italy. This new style reached Italy at the beginning of the Christian era and did not originate with the Romans. Vitruvius condemned such a new barbarian manner because it did not respect verisimilitude.[107] This trend peaked with the Renaissance, during which the word *grottesco* came to designate an ornamental style which combined the fantastic and playful together with the sinister face of a world entirely different from the familiar one: a world where plants, animals and human beings are no longer separated and where the laws of proportion are not respected.[108] The term "grotesque" then evolved in Europe and became a popular way to indicate a style that erases boundaries and subverts order. A key aspect of the grotesque, according to Kayser, is its ambivalent character that provokes laughter and horror simultaneously.[109] This sense of horror is caused both by the monstrous ingredients of its style and by the way in which the grotesque totally destroys the accepted order, thus depriving us momentarily of our stable connection with reality.[110]

Two more approaches to the grotesque are worth being mentioned here: one is the feminist approach and the other is Giorgio Agamben's. Julia Kristeva's *Pouvoirs de l'horreur* (1980) plays a significant part in defining the relationship between the feminine and the grotesque. The ambivalent character of the body of the woman, causing simultaneously fear and desire throughout history and cultures, reflects Kayser's version of the grotesque. The woman is pictured in mythological, literary and artistic

[107] Wolfgang Kayser, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, trans. Ulrich Weisstein (New York, Toronto: McGraw-Hill Book Company: 1957/1966), 19.
[108] Ibid., 21.
[109] Ibid., 31.
[110] Ibid., 59.

representation as powerful but also impure and corrupt.[111] In particular, the myth of the vagina with teeth (*vagina dentata*) concretises the fear of the vagina into a grotesque image.[112] An attempt to dominate this primordial dread is to be seen in the polished representation of the woman typical of the saintly Madonna of Christian art but also of the modern Hollywood film star, perfect in aspect and family values.[113] Conversely, in this respect, Kristeva argues that the abject –what we most dread, the hidden object of primordial repression – is that which "disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules."[114] Kristeva's idea of the grotesque as that which defies borders –bodily but also social– is to be seen in the light of Bakhtin's notion of the grotesque body and grotesque realism which is essentially defined by the breaking of bodily boundaries.

The question of the grotesque and border-crossing builds also a connection with Agamben's theory on the *homo sacer* (sacred man). According to the archaic Roman law *homo sacer* is a juridical term that defines an individual who, having committed a grave trespass, is cast out of the city. The *homo sacer* is forced to leave the social and legislative life of the community. He therefore can be killed with impunity by anyone but his life cannot be taken in sacrificial rituals.[115] Agamben highlights how Károly Kerényi explains the ban on sacrificing the *homo sacer* because by being "sacred" he is already possessed in

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[111] Jane M. Ussher, *Managing the Monstrous Feminine. Regulating the Reproductive Body* (London & New York: Routledge, 2006), 1. The relationship between the woman and the grotesque is evident in Eco's *Il nome* and *Baudolino* because of their medieval setting. The question of the representation of the woman is approached from the medieval perspective and therefore results in the ambiguity of the woman as a saint/the woman as a whore and grotesque container for disgusting fluids. This image can be found more loosely in the other novels as well, but this aspect of Eco's novels provides the material for an entire different study and therefore cannot be expanded here.

[112] Ibid.

[113] Ibid., 2.

[114] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror. An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980/1982), 4.

[115] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovreign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998), 71-4.

a special way by the gods of the underworld.[116] However, Kerényi does not explain why anybody can kill the *homo sacer* without being stained by sacrilege. The *homo sacer* is therefore a man placed outside the borders of the community: because of his crime not only his rights have been rendered forfeit and his status as a member of the group suspended, but he has also been declared unclean and therefore unfit for rituals.[117] The grotesque character of the *homo sacer* is due as much to the crime he has committed as to the fact that he is placed outside the community. Finally, Agamben refers to the grotesque also in his *L'aperto: L'uomo e l'animale* (2002) where he puts under discussion the border between the space of the man and that of the animal, as well as the very distinction between man and animal.[118]

Bakhtin's description of the Rabelaisian grotesque, and more broadly of the Menippean tradition,[119] also focuses on the characteristics of ambivalence, boundary erasure, and subversion as being typical of the grotesque. However, Bakhtin's political context permeates his work and places his definition of the grotesque in an entirely specific and different light. Bakhtin stresses the important role played by the bodily

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[116] Károly Kerényi, *La religione antica nelle sue linee fondamentali*, trans. Delio Cantimori (Bologna: N. Zanichelli, 1940), 76.

[117] Leland de la Durantaye, *Giorgio Agamben: A Critical Introduction* (Standford, California: Standford University Press: 2009), 207.

[118] Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2004), 57-62, 71-77.

[119] While Renaissance satirists believed that the poetic genre of satire had descended from ancient Greek *satyr* plays and thus made use of the crude and animated language of the coarse-but-wise woodland creature, other critics, like Bakhtin, believed that satire originated from the popular cultural festivals, such as Roman *Saturnalia* and the medieval carnival. The tradition of poetical refinement that evolved in the Roman period, named then *satura* and now commonly referred to as *formal verse satire*, consisted of the satirical poet providing an offering of theme, tone, parody, and figurative expression in a variegated but artful composition. For the first-century Roman rhetorician Quintilian, *satura* was a totally Roman creation, metrically disciplined into hexameters and stylistically shaped into an identifiable verse genre by the Roman poets Lucilius, Horace, and Persius. Typically, formal verse satire is directed by a first-person persona of a poet, attacking forms of vanity or hypocrisy. A different kind of satire is that of the Cynic philosopher Menippus, whose prosimeric work has been lost. This form of indirect satire, which has become the most popular and inclusive type, is used to "lambaste, parody, or make ironic fun of its satiric objective, usually through dialogues between fools, knaves, or ironists. An obtuse fool or naïf may also narrate." Ruben Quintero, ed. *A Companion to Satire* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 6-7.
As W. Scott Blanchard defines it: "Menippean satire is a genre for and about scholars; it is at the same time paradoxically anti-intellectual. If its master of ceremonies is the humanist as wise fool, its audience is a learned community whose members need to be reminded, with Paul, of the depravity of their overreaching intellects, of the limits of human understanding." W. Scott Blanchard, *Scholar's Bedlam: Menippean Satire in the Renaissance*, (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1995), 14.

principle in Rabelais, namely the references to the human body in relation to food, drink, defecation, and sexual life.[120] Grotesque realism degrades and uncrowns all that is high and spiritual, transferring it to the material level of the body. Since it gives the opportunity to dethrone the old and replace it with the new, the renewing activity of grotesque realism is inherently positive.[121] But it is equally inherently subversive because it "discloses the potentiality of an entirely different world, of another order, of another way of life."[122] What is significantly different in Bakhtin from the tradition indicated by Kayser is that the grotesque stops being horrifying. For Bakhtin, grotesque realism assumes entirely positive characteristics such as its regenerative power and the dialogical erasure of all boundaries which allow entire freedom of bodily encounters. It is no longer horrifying because it becomes a weapon to fight fear through its parodic dimension. It is in this sense specifically that Bakhtin's grotesque realism becomes political and encourages a parodic reading of Stalin's regime of terror in order to defeat it.

Bakhtin's work on Rabelais, despite the politicised readings of later critics, was presented with an eye to the censorship of the time, and therefore it reads as a perfectly normal and objective scholarly analysis of Rabelais. It should not be forgotten that *Rabelais and his World* originated as an academic dissertation, so it was intended to be read by a cultivated reader under a totalitarian regime. Bakhtin could only hope to have his study of subversion approved by Stalin's censors if such a study was shown to be coldly scientific. Bakhtin analyses a potentially dangerous topic but does it in a way that can only be that of a scholar studying any other topic. In this sense, Bakhtin treats Rabelais in a purely academic, although not formalistic, way. He analyses the social role of laughter and carnival in the Renaissance and Middle Ages, a time characterised like his own by oppression, but with the detachment of the cultural critic. Conversely, writing

[120] Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 18.
[121] Ibid., 19-24.
[122] Ibid., 48.

under different conditions, Eco does not need to worry about censorship or reprisals. In his time, he is free to use the Rabelaisian grotesque and parody both in his novels and journalistic writing. Where Bakhtin can only theorise about subversive acts in society and point out their mechanisms, Eco can put them into practice. Also a cultural critic analysing the mechanisms of society, Eco is at liberty to mock authority with his writings. This chapter argues in particular that his novels openly satirise several social practices by means of a set of Rabelaisian paradigms.

The textual analysis in the following chapters is based on tracking this group of Rabelaisian paradigms in Eco. Applying Bakhtin's reading of Rabelais to Eco's novels shows how the use of the Rabelaisian grotesque in Eco is aimed at a social criticism. Thus, Bakhtin's theory becomes meaningful for an understanding of Eco's use of the grotesque and its role in his novels. Both Eco and Bakhtin are literary critics, but while the former analyses with the same interest and semiotic instruments all cultural phenomena and artefacts, the latter has a particular interest in the novel. For Bakhtin, literature is capable of penetrating the social laboratory where "ideologemes" are formed: the novel always carries sociological significance.[123]

The fundamental characteristic of the novel for Bakhtin is its heteroglossia (*raznorechie*), which he describes as the social diversity of speech types.[124] A novel is distinguished by its double-voicedness, which is represented by people speaking different social languages.[125] The novel is dialogical because it represents "all the social ideological voices of its era, that is, all the era's languages that have any claim of being significant, the novel must be a microcosm of heteroglossia."[126] In Bakhtin, heteroglossia is opposed to monoglossia (*odnoyazychie*), which is closely dependent on the notion of unitary

[123] See Chp 1, n. 153.
[124] Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," 262.
[125] Ibid., 356.
[126] Ibid., 411.

language that constitutes the theoretical expression of the historical processes of linguistic unification. The forces to which a unitary language responds are the centripetal forces of language that aim to achieve linguistic conformity and centralisation. A unitary language is therefore never given but always in essence posited. It is the force that tries to overcome heteroglossia, imposing limits on it in order to guarantee understanding and "correctness." Conversely, heteroglossia is the condition that governs any utterance that decentralises and fragments language. Since language is alive and developing, it is pervaded at the same time by centripetal and centrifugal forces.[127]

Both the attention given to the social element in the novel and the interest in the socially diversifying role of heteroglossia show how for Bakhtin the novel is closely linked to its social context. In addition, the novel reproduces the hierarchical dynamics of society, as Bakhtin points out with his notion of the polyphonic novel, whose creator he identifies in Dostoevsky. According to Bakhtin, the novelistic genre has three roots: the epic, the rhetorical, and the carnivalistic.[128] The last leads to what Bakhtin defines as the polyphonic novel and evolves from the serio-comical, in particular the Socratic dialogue and Menippean satire. According to Bakhtin, Dostoevsky creates a new novelistic genre in which the voice of the hero equals the voice of the author. As it becomes more obvious in *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin increasingly sees the necessity of a challenge to a hierarchical structure of society in favour of an egalitarian one. Bakhtin argues that the master-slave hierarchy—which ruled, for example, in the relationship between author and hero in Tolstoy's novels—disappears in Dostoevsky. The character is no longer a mere vehicle of the author's voice who uses the author's "surplus of seeing"—one way Bakhtin describes the author's advantageous position as creator and outside observer—only to still

[127] Ibid., 270-1.
[128] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1929/2006), 109.

be subjected to the author's will.[129] The hero's psychology is investigated through the confrontation with the other, while the author's discourse about a character is dialogically addressed to the character. It is not about him but rather *with* him in what Bakhtin calls "the great dialogue."[130]

A strong dialogic element is present, according to Bakhtin, in the carnivalisation of literature, which he defines as the influence that carnival had on literature. According to Bakhtin, carnival has its own language of "symbolic concretely sensuous forms" which cannot be translated into any kind of verbal language, though carnival "is amenable to a certain transposition into a language of artistic images that has something in common with its concretely sensuous nature; that is, it can be transposed into the language of literature."[131] The carnivalisation of literature is precisely this kind of transposition. Bakhtin highlights the connection between the parodies of the Renaissance and carnival, giving Rabelais as an example. Since carnival is closely related to subversion and Rabelais is both an example of carnival given by Bakhtin and an early influence for Eco, it becomes evident how Bakhtin's reading of Rabelais may assist the understanding of Eco's use of Rabelaisian elements and his own relationship with and representation of social subversion.

If for Bakhtin carnivalised literature gives voice to the subversive character of carnival thus bringing together literature and society, for Eco, too, literature can have a political value which reflects its contemporary society as he argues in particular of mass literature in *Il superuomo di massa* (1976). Eco's *Il superuomo* focuses in particular on best-selling novels from the eighteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries. The work is a sociological analysis of popular fiction that was inspired by Gramsci's notion of the superman of the masses. As Gramsci points out, most of the trends that followed

[129] Ibid., 49, 72.
[130] Ibid., 63.
[131] Ibid., 122.

Nietzsche's notion of *übermensch* were rooted in Dumas's *Count of Monte Cristo* (1844-5) rather than Zarathustra. All those who live as powerless and ordinary people dream, under the influence of Monte Cristo, of being avengers for one day.[132] However, Eco argues that popular literature denounces the terrible contradictions of society while at the same time offering consolatory solutions because it does not want to leave the reader unsatisfied.[133] In a way, popular novels play a similar role to the carnival in Bakhtin's analysis of Rabelais. They offer a temporary satisfaction to the oppressed in order to confirm the rule that they pretend to defy whereas their real intention is to make revolution impossible.[134] As was already mentioned briefly, according to Eco the unity of repetition and stability of the given meaning constitute the form of the popular novel since no narrative form exists that can possibly be separated from its meaning.[135] The reiteration of the expected in the novel consoles, while ideologically it appears as a reform that changes something in order to not change anything. Ideology and narrative structure are perfectly connected to one another. Eco concludes that popular narrative, from Eugène Sue to our days, is dominated by "mystifying consolation."[136]

Both Eco and Bakhtin are conscious of the role played by literature in representing the outside world and of the implications such a role entails. Bakhtin's insistence on the social value of the novel and literature is therefore important to understanding his work on Rabelais. As a subversive writer, Rabelais uses his novels as a means to express a challenge to the official order of his time. Bakhtin is the critical investigator of this challenging language. Since Bakhtin's focus remains specifically on the social and ideological stratification taking place within the novel, his work becomes a useful channel

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[132] Antonio Gramsci, *Letteratura e vita nazionale*, III "Letteratura popolare" (Turin: Editori uniti, 1975), 149-51.
[133] Umberto Eco, *Il superuomo di massa. Ricerca e ideologia nel romanzo popolare* (Milan: Bompiani, 1978/2005), 14.
[134] Ibid., 85-7.
[135] Ibid., 28.
[136] Ibid., 64-5, 67.

to interpret Eco's use of the grotesque in his novels in connection with his contemporary society.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has legitimised the study of Eco's novels through Bakhtin's theory of grotesque realism as expressed in his study of Rabelais. For Bakhtin, Rabelais is a means of veiled criticism disguised in a coldly objective academic study. Conversely, Eco, who is also an academic and critic, is free to mock society with his fiction. While his academic writing is characterised, like Bakhtin's, by seriousness and critically objective analysis, Eco's novels freely use a humoristic tone. The textual analysis undertaken in the following chapters will show that such a tone is closely connected with Bakhtin's notions of grotesque realism, parody, and heteroglossia. With fiction, Eco is free to satirise authorities like the church, the state, and the intelligentsia. Eco's ample use of the grotesque in his novels constitutes the bridge to his sociopolitical criticism on contemporary society.

To support this idea, this chapter has shown how the connection between a novel and its sociopolitical context is central for both Eco and Bakhtin as literary theorists. With its representation of social heteroglossia, the novel is a challenge to monologism. For Bakhtin, the novel—like laughter—is charged with forces of renewal because of its dialogism and its capacity to satirise, and thus destroy, the old. In addition, the novel brings to the centre what the authorities attempt to marginalize by consolidating their authority by means of monoglossia. The novel is dialogical and therefore potentially dangerous because it encourages us to question the rule of the political authority. Thus, Bakhtin's definition of the subversive functions of the novel supports the current political

reading of Eco's fiction by means of Bakhtin's reading of Rabelais. This adds to the fact that Eco also reflects on the connection between literature and ideology, and on how popular literature can serve the purpose of consolidating the status of society and consoling the lower classes, whose condition is inevitable.

It has been illustrated how in both Eco and Bakhtin popular wisdom, mass culture, myth, and ideology are closely connected. This connection results from the two authors' shared experience of totalitarianism: in particular, the appeal that totalitarian regimes make to the emotional response of the masses. It has been shown how the totalitarian regimes encountered by Eco and Bakhtin, fascism and Stalinism respectively, instilled a profound suspicion towards rhetoric in both theorists. Also, Eco and Bakhtin witnessed the popular resistance to totalitarian rule. For both of them, laughter is the response to the attempt of rhetoric to persuade the masses into joining a unique uncritical community controlled by its leaders. This chapter has demonstrated how laughter has a social corrective value for both Eco and Bakhtin. It has the potential of renewal but also to resist the seriousness of totalitarianism. Furthermore, for both Eco and Bakhtin, laughter provides society with a service because it gets rid of the old.

However, this chapter also points out a significant difference in Bakhtin's and Eco's theory of laughter: for Bakhtin, laughter is the collective response of those who are forced into a life of fear by an uncompassionate and power-driven ruling class. For Eco, laughter is an individual response: if the established order is to be unsettled from within, then only one comic avenger can sneak unnoticed into society, pretending to accept the order only to later laugh at it. A group of people could not undertake the same mission, but the comic avenger is supposed to speak for a larger number of people wanting change. Eco does not see laughter as an effective means of social subversion, although he agrees on its fundamentally dialogical potential. It is in humour that Eco places the real possibility of challenging the present order. This is reflected also by Eco's critical response to the

optimistic Bakhtinian carnival as true liberation. For Eco, carnival does not represent any real challenge to an authority which is only confirmed by the carnival's practice. It is in humour that the possibility of threatening the stability of the official order lies. Eco's analysis of Franti is motivated by a critical investigation of Franti's social context, which therefore confirms Eco's interest in the link between literature and society.

Humour is the path Eco has taken over the years as a committed intellectual. From the heat of the "semiological warfare" to the media, Eco shifts to cold irony as a more powerful instrument to make society an object of discussion from within society itself. This also fits in well with the position of Eco's model in terms of the intellectual's place in society. Like Norberto Bobbio and Italo Calvino, Eco sees the intellectual as an impartial observer of society who asks more questions than he gives answers. Thus, the intellectual acts as the opposite of a totalitarian leader since he does not impose a unitarian point of view for a community to share, but rather stimulates individuals in a community to make their own political choices without confirming set majority views.

In this sense, the next chapters demonstrate how Eco's novels employ the grotesque in order to ridicule the existing social order and to suggest that things can be different from how they appear on the surface. This is why the grotesque plays a central role in the present analysis and why it is at the centre of the Rabelaisian paradigms selected for this approach to Eco's fiction. Fear is a key element of totalitarian regimes and it is therefore significant that all paradigms are linked to popular festive forms and share the common function of dispelling fear. They allow for liberation—although temporary—from the oppression of the seriousness of the medieval church. As this chapter has shown, the set of Rabelaisian paradigms aim at finding a similar dichotomy in Eco between the dialogism of laughter, carnival, and grotesque realism and the monologism of the seriousness of those in power whose sole objective is to retain their authority.

The three chapters of textual analysis group Eco's novels by the affinity of the object of his criticism and analyse them in relation with their most evident Rabelaisian paradigms. Chapter Three focuses on the notions of banquet, carnival, laughter, folk culture, and the marketplace in *Il nome* and *Il pendolo di Foucault*. It investigates how Eco represents revolution in his novels, what he defines as authorised revolution, and what he suggests as a real revolution. Chapter Four looks for the paradigms of the grotesque body and the marketplace in *Il pendolo*, *L'isola del giorno prima,* and *Baudolino* and demonstrates how they contribute in constructing a satire of intellectuals. The chapter also investigates to what extent heteroglossia in *Baudolino* is linked to the grotesque and analyses its role in Eco's parodic style. Chapter Five then examines how the notions of the grotesque body and laughter intersect in Eco with the idea of the construction or destruction of an enemy in *La misteriosa fiamma della regina Loana* and *Il cimitero di Praga*. The chapter shows that behind the distinction made by Eco between mass culture and popular wisdom lies the idea that the ideology carried by the former can be uncovered by means of the latter. Folk culture in Eco is the natural response to the artificial rhetoric of power to which a certain kind of mass literature also responds.

CHAPTER 3

GROTESQUE SUBVERSION, TERRORISM, AND REVOLUTION IN *IL NOME DELLA ROSA* AND *IL PENDOLO DI FOUCAULT*

3.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses how Eco criticises the institutions of the church and the state in his first two novels, *Il nome della rosa* (1980) and *Il pendolo di Foucault* (1988). The first phase of Eco's criticism is shown to be characterised by political criticism and a cautious detachment. Focus is put on Eco's use of what Chapter Two defined as the paradigms of the grotesque body and the banquet. Although *Il nome* has a medieval setting while *Il pendolo* is contemporary, both novels have been equally impacted by the heavy political atmosphere that characterised Italy from the late 1960s to the early 1980s. These decades experienced the excitement of social change, and the struggle for human rights. However, these years are also associated with the degeneration of a rightful political struggle into the violence of terrorism committed by both left and right, which caused the death of many innocent civilians.

The peculiar and ambivalent character of these two decades imposes itself unavoidably on Eco's first two novels. He experienced intimately the changes that the university as an institution encountered in these years. The following section (3.2) will introduce the political context surrounding Eco's first two novels in addition to a brief summary of their plots. The analysis focuses on the crucial events that characterised the decades running from the early 1960s—the starting point of both the students' and workers' social movements—to the early 1980s including the radicalisation of the protests and the repressive reactions by the state. The role of the students' movements is

highlighted: in particular, the way they evolved by interacting with the institutions of the state and the universities, and the final descent into violence. How the escalation of violence took place and how the universities first reacted in comparison with the state is examined. This section defines the dynamics involved by the so-called "Strategy of Tension" of the late 1960s and 1970s. It also highlights how different types of violence developed during these years and the different extents to which the state was aware of this violence.

Section 3.3 analyses the background of *Il nome* through Bakhtin's reading of the role of laughter in Rabelais, the Renaissance and the Middle Ages. As the liberation of bodily activities challenges the strict rule of the church, focus is placed on the frequent references made in *Il nome* to the enjoyment of food and sex, which is in direct contrast to the life the church prescribed to monks. Situations of banqueting are analysed in connection with Bakhtin's ideas of the free word and of death and renewal. These are aspects of life that openly challenge the austere rule imposed by the church and are concretised in the discussion over the legitimacy of laughter, which runs as a constant through the whole novel. Laughter plays an essential role in defining a dichotomy between the monologic church and its dialogical counterpart, which is represented by William of Baskerville, the novel's protagonist. On the one hand, the church consolidates its rule by using two forms of physical punishment: terrestrial, by means of the Inquisition, and eternal, by means of hell. On the other hand, William is ready to question this monologism and force it to engage in a philosophical dialogue. William does not accept the so-called Truth simply because it is given by the church; he demands solid arguments in its support, as any good semiotician would do. The mystery of laughter being so strictly forbidden in the monastery of *Il nome* is added to the mystery of other secret events taking place underneath an appearance of obedience. Section 3.3 also shows how Eco tries to topple and ridicule the authority of official discourses through the Bakhtinian paradigms of the

banquet and the grotesque body. The rebellion of the body, especially of the lower body as the centre of sexual pleasure as well as of the discharging of food and wine, enters into close connection with a conscious revolution against authority.

Section 3.4 examines how *Il pendolo*, a contemporary novel set in the 1970s and 1980s, represents revolution. Dealing more openly with the students' demonstrations of 1968, terrorism, political activism, and anti-fascism, the novel gives a deeper insight into Eco's perception of revolution. The analysis is centred on how Eco's characters participate in the revolutions of their lifetime and how they feel about their participation. Political commitment is represented through images of the lower body, the chief element of the Rabelaisian paradigm of the grotesque body. In Bakhtin, too, the grotesque body represents rebellion because it transgresses and defies all kinds of physical confines. The freedom of the body, with its enjoyment of earthly life, challenges the rules imposed by the church and its threat of eternal damnation.

In addition, section 3.4 illustrates how *Il nome* and *Il pendolo* criticise the state, those in power during the so-called "Years of Lead" of the late 1970s and early 80s, and the students' movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s. It investigates what Eco's criticism is based on and the reasons why he takes those positions. In the light of Eco's approach to the question of subversion, the way that authority is represented in *Il nome* is also investigated. The question of how authority establishes itself is closely linked to authoritative discourses and rhetoric. In both novels, Eco engages with various aspects of rebellion: the rebellion through bodily enjoyments against the austerity imposed by the church; carnival as the rebellion authorised by the church; the rebellion of the individual mocking the official order from within; the 1968 student protests; political terrorism as one of the reactions against the governing class; and the partisan resistance against fascism. This chapter tries to explain how Eco places himself in relation to these kinds of rebellions and whether he describes any of them as effective.

The last section of the chapter (3.5) investigates what Eco describes as an effective revolution. As in *Il nome*, carnival appears persistently in *Il pendolo* as a reminder of the inefficacy of the carnivalesque reversal in terms of real social changes. If carnival is described as authorised revolution, then it is necessary to point out what Eco sees as an effective way to truly challenge the authority. Eco shows different kinds of rebellions in order to point out their weaknesses; he also shows why they do not work so that he can suggest possible ways of real subversion. This part makes evident that such subversion happens by means of humour, not a universal carnivalesque laughter. Several questions are asked: Who is in charge of rebelling against the system, and how would Eco's revolution take place? Is this a revolution of the masses or of the single well-educated intellectual having a great laugh because he understands perfectly well the incompetence of the ruling class?

To summarise, this chapter focuses on the way Eco represents the relationship between revolution and the official order in *Il nome* and *Il pendolo*, bearing in mind the specific political context of the two novels. Eco criticises the state in both texts and in *Il nome* he also questions the church. In order to bring this criticism to light, a combination of Rabelaisian paradigms and broader concepts of laughter and carnival is employed. Eco uses the former to investigate the possibility of the rebellion to the authority in place, while the latter lead Eco to investigate both novels for the nature of true and authorised revolution in the light of the thinning line between heretic and saint, terrorist and politician.

3.2 The Background to *Il nome della rosa* and *Il pendolo di Foucault*: The "Years of Lead," Terrorism, Rebellion, and Repression

Italy came out of the Second World War as a deeply divided nation because of the civil war between the fascist supporters of Mussolini's Republic of Salò and the partisans of the anti-fascist resistance. Political relations slowly normalised after the elections of 1948 with the victory of the Christian Democrats over *Fronte popolare*, a coalition between the Italian Socialist Party and the Italian Communist Party. For most of the 1950s, the government was in the hands of stable coalitions of centre and centre-right parties with firm anti-communist sentiments.[1] However, in the early 1960s the centre-right coalitions started to lose political support and had to enter into a relationship with the Italian Socialist Party. While the Italian Communist Party was increasing its popularity, the trade unions were going on a wage offensive in the early 1960s and again in 1968-69. The waves of protests from students and workers were signs that the country was ready for revolution.

During the years preceding the mass revolution Eco was a university student. The 1950s in Milan and Turin—and in Italy in general—were exciting years, the time of the "economic miracle." Milan was the financial and publishing capital, as well as host to a large portion of the Italian avant-garde in art, music, and literature. Turin became the centre of the automobile industry thanks to the Fiat Corporation, the industrial leader of Italy; the country entered the post-war period not only as a consumer society but also as a magnet for migrants from the south of Italy. Even with overall statistics reporting that Italy's growth was exceptional, they hid deep sectarian and regional differences; it was the north that received the real benefits of the miracle. Emerging from the industrial triangle

[1] Anna Cento Bull, *Italian Neofascism: The Strategy of Tension and the Politics of Nonreconciliation* (New York; Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007), 2.

(Genoa, Milan, Turin), industrialisation had reached most of the Po Valley by 1963; this was also due to the rise of the petrochemical industries along the Adriatic coast.[2]

As far as social movements are concerned, Donatella Della Porta points out that the 1950s were characterised by the repression of all forms of political protest: between 1948 and 1962, ninety-five protestors were killed after police responded to protest marches with firearms.[3] In 1948, a new law was introduced that gave more power to the police to use firearms when confronting threatening protesters and allowed them to arrest protesters on the spot for blocking traffic. The severe repression of the 1950s, reflecting the tension of the Cold War, was left behind in the 1960s, which saw softer control strategies from the police, with no protester deaths from 1963-67. The police tolerated marches and did not make use of firearms.[4] The police's tolerance during this period of time is criticised by Eco in *Il pendolo di Foucault,* as illustrated in section 3.4.

For Italy, the 1960s were years of great mass mobilisations and anti-fascist protests. In 1965, students started to organise the first sit-ins in universities—in Pisa, Trento and Turin—and by spring 1968 the protest spread to all universities. Initial clashes between students and police forces took place when sit-ins were forcibly broken up, in the same way that neo-fascist groups were. Della Porta points out that in the early 1960s, the first mass movements what she calls the "libertarian left" began and defined some of their core ideological and organisational characteristics. Della Porta argues that the students' movement was based on the principle of participatory democracy, which used the assembly as its main organising form.[5] The students' movement began addressing issues internal to the academic world. Already from the early 1960s, student organisations started to demand teaching reforms, better services, and more opportunities to participate in the

[2] Jonathan Dunnage, *Twentieth Century Italy: a Social History* (London: Longman, 2002), 149-50.
[3] Donatella Della Porta, *Movimenti collettivi e sistema politico in Italia, 1960-1995* (Rome: Laterza, 1996), 45.
[4] Ibid., 46.
[5] Ibid., 21.

management of the university.[6] In addition, they criticised the traditional approach to education and demanded that intellectuals should be made more aware of the real world. What the students defined as the "didactic of liberation" meant the students' critical approach to education. The students of Turin argued that university was a tool of political and ideological manipulation whose purpose was to inoculate a spirit of subordination to authority no matter what the authority was.[7] As Chapter Two has pointed out, Eco began thinking about semiotics in the second half of the 1960s. He believed that modern society needed to be perceived through a critical eye, so he declared "semiological guerrilla warfare" on the communication age.

Expanding from problems related to the university, the students' protest moved on to demand changes in other spheres of social life. The students' strategies of action were inspired both by the workers' movement, with their marches and mass mobilisation, and by the movement for civil rights in the United States. From the latter, the students imitated symbolic actions, like sit-ins and pacifist resistance, which was aimed at attracting media attention. Both forms of student protest—the one inspired by the workers' movement and the other by the civil rights movement in the United States—were essentially peaceful, with the exception of a wave of radicalisation that took place after the police interventions in 1968.[8]

The atmosphere began to change towards the end of the 1960s when leftist students and the neo-fascist groups started to have more frequent conflicts, which resulted in a strengthening of forceful police intervention. The tolerant tendencies of the 1960s that was promoted by the centre-left was abandoned: three protesters were killed in a trade union

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[6] Ibid., 27.
[7] Marco Revelli, *Il '68 a Torino. Gli esordi: la comunità studentesca di palazzo Campana*, in Aldo Agosti, Luisa Passerini, Nicola Tranfaglia, eds. *La cultura e i luoghi del '68* (Milan: Angeli, 1991), 235. Quoted in Della Porta, *Movimenti*, 28-29.
[8] Della Porta, *Movimenti*, 30-4.

march in 1968, and three more were killed in 1969.[9] These years, which saw a constant increase of violence, were characterised by three main types of subversion: the bombing campaign, referred to as *stragismo* (from *strage*, or "mass murder"); the planned coup d'état or "putschism;" and finally the armed conflict carried out by paramilitary groups.[10] Anna Cento Bull dates the beginning of the *stragismo* to 1969, when a series of bomb attacks at Milan's Fiera Campionaria and Central Station wounded twenty people on 25 April; later that year, attacks on a number of trains resulted in ten people being injured from 8-9 August. On 12 December, a series of bombs were placed in various public places in Milan and Rome, one of which exploded in a bank on the Piazza Fontana in Milan, killing seventeen people and injuring eighty-four. There were more attacks in the following years. On 28 May 1974, a bomb exploded at a crowded anti-fascist demonstration at the Piazza della Loggia in Brescia, leaving eight people dead and 103 wounded. In August of the same year, in San Benedetto Val di Sambro, a bomb exploded on a train, the *Italicus*, killing twelve passengers and wounding forty-four. The following six years showed a decline in violence, but the bombing campaign resumed on 2 August 1980 with an attack at Bologna railway station that resulted in the deaths of eighty-five people and the wounding of a 200 people. It seems that the explosion of another bomb on a train, the *Rapido 904*, on 23 December 1984, was the last act of a campaign for which no organisation ever claimed responsibility.[11]

Cento Bull argues that the second type of subversive acts began in 1964, shortly after the beginning of the cooperation between the Socialist Party and the Christian Democrats in the so-called "Opening to the Left," a coalition of centre-left parties. General Giovanni de Lorenzo, the commander of the Carabinieri militia and head of the Italian secret services, then called SIFAR, prepared a plan for a coup d'état, known as "Plan Solo,"

[9] Ibid., 46-7.
[10] Cento Bull, *Italian Neofascism*, 3.
[11] Ibid., 4.

which was supported by President of the Republic Antonio Segni. The plan was made public in 1967 by two journalists, Lino Jannuzzi and Eugenio Scalfari, in *l'Espresso*. In 1970, Prince Junio Valerio Borghese, ex-supporter of the Italian Social Republic, attempted a coup called "Night of Tora Tora," whose name was inspired by the code used by the Japanese after Pearl Harbour to indicate a complete surprise. The purpose of the coup was to force the president to dissolve the parliament and to create an emergency government of military and civilians. Other attempted plots took place between 1972 and 1974, under the leadership of the former ambassador Randolfo Pacciardi and the ex-partisan Edgardo Sogno.[12]

The third and last type of violence were acts of guerrilla warfare like the shootings of individuals, kidnappings, threats, and beatings practiced by both the extreme right and the extreme left. The main organisations of the latter, predominant in numbers, included the *Brigate Rosse* (Red Brigades), *Prima Linea* (Front Line), *Potere Operaio* (Workers' Power), and *Nuclei Armati Proletari* (Proletarian Armed Nuclei). Other organisations, such as *Lotta Continua* (The Struggle Continues), *Lotta di Popolo* (People's Struggle), and all of the *Nuclei Armati Rivoluzionari* (Revolutionary Armed Nuclei), did not participate in the armed struggle, but they often justified, and sometimes practiced, the revolutionary use of political violence. The targets of the extreme-left were politicians, judges, journalists, and police officers because they all served the "imperialist state" which had to be destroyed in order for the proletarian revolution to start. They also targeted the neo-fascists, thus perpetrating the fights started by the anti-fascists; just as the Italian Socialist Republic served as a model for the right-wing terrorist activity. The final type of violence is distinguished from the other two as a result of it being ideologically inspired, directed against the "system" and the "falsely revolutionary" parties.[13]

[12] Ibid., 4.
[13] Ibid., 5.

The first type of violence, the *stragismo*, is the bloodiest and remains the most mysterious type because no organisation has claimed responsibility for any of the attacks. Cento Bull argues that judicial evidence showed that *stragismo*, at least until 1974, was part of a neo-fascist strategy to place the blame on the left. In addition, investigations also demonstrated that extreme-right culprits of these acts of violence were placed out of magistrates' reach by sections of the intelligence services and armed forces. According to Cento Bull, the main interpretation on the objective of *stragismo* was to create a so-called "Strategy of Tension," aiming to place the country in an atmosphere of terror in order to promote the rise of a right-wing authoritarian type of government. Judicial findings have shown a connection between *stragismo* and putschism, with the mass murders being committed in order to create the conditions for an authoritarian coup d'état. Therefore, *stragismo*, at least until 1974, played a part in a wider conspiracy of anti-communist forces.[14]

The combined workers' and students' movements and political subversion of 1968-69 were followed by a phase known as *riflusso* (reflux), which was characterised by the movements' decreasing interest in politics and replaced with an interest in questions of a cultural and individual kind.[15] During the 1970s the image, spread in the left counterculture, of a violent and unfair state that was involved in enacting the Strategy of Tension to justify the use of violence in the years to follow. The clues showing that the secret services were protecting the culprits of the massacre of Piazza Fontana in 1969 caused the radicalisation of the left.[16] Furthermore, the radicalisation of the left interacted with an institutional strategy of firm repression of the most radical groups. In the 1970s, the state reacted with a heavy-handed repression that recalled the 1950s.[17] Violence reached its peak in 1977. In this year, which marked the end of the movements that were

[14] Ibid., 7.
[15] Della Porta, *Movimenti*, 62.
[16] Ibid., 66-7.
[17] Ibid., 84-8.

infiltrated and finally fragmented by terrorism, the state had to introduce emergency laws against terrorism which remained in place until 1983. These years are known as the "Years of Lead:" they were grey and heavy.[18] The escalation of violence in the 1970s also added to the effects of an economic crisis that the government had not been able to address. In 1973, OPEC's pressure on the global oil market marked the beginning of a long economic recession. The recession, characterised simultaneously by stagnation and inflation, became known as "stagflation." The weak structure of the Italian economy and the scarcity of energy resources contributed to worsening the effects of the crisis, causing the movement of money outside Italy, increasing public debt, and reducing production.[19]

The experience of the years of revolution, repression, and terrorism appears in Eco's first two novels, demonstrating Eco's scepticism towards the nature of these social dynamics. In his novels, Eco intertwines the carnivalesque with the 1968 revolution and thus questions its efficacy. His characters embody his reflections on political commitment and the role of the individual in social changes, as shown below. It will be demonstrated that Eco criticises mass revolution and terrorism, and the choices of both the state and the individual. The different settings of the two novels, medieval for *Il nome* and contemporary for *Il pendolo*, result in a more veiled criticism to contemporary society in the former and a more direct one in the latter. The shift marks an increased desire in Eco to comment more openly on his contemporary context.

Eco's narrator of *Il nome*, the Benedictine Adso of Melk, tells the story of his journey as a novice to a rich Italian monastery in 1327 with William of Baskerville, his Franciscan mentor. In a meeting in the monastery, William is meant to represent the position of the theologians of Emperor Louis the Bavarian concerning a dispute with Pope John XXII over the power of the church. When he arrives at the monastery, however, William is asked to investigate a mysterious death that turns out to be only the first in a terrible series

[18] Ibid., 88.
[19] Ibid., 51.

of murders. Using his acumen and trust in the veracity of signs,[20] William finds out that the murderer is Jorge, a blind old monk who is obsessed with the control of knowledge symbolised in prohibiting access to the monastery's library. Most of all, Jorge wants to preserve the power of the sacred scriptures to provoke fear in the faithful. Jorge is in possession of the second book of Aristotle's *Poetics*, the most dangerous book in matters of fear-dispelling and laughter, and he soaks its pages in poison in order to keep people from reading it.

Despite the medieval setting, Eco points to a dynamic which he refers to more openly in *Il pendolo*. In his first novel, Eco shows how the church treats heresy as its greatest enemy whilst at the same time making sure that heresy is never completely defeated. Evelyn Cobley argues that, in *Il nome,* orthodoxy depends on heresy: "without the threat of heresy, there would be no need for an orthodox order to guide and protect the faithful."[21] Heresies function symbolically because they stand for a symbol of rejection coming from the official order. They are therefore interchangeable: once the orthodox order manages to eliminate heresy, it quickly replaces it with a new one.[22]

Eco applied this idea also in his theoretical writings of the years preceding the publication of *Il nome*, in the middle of the Years of Lead. In an essay from 1978 Eco argues that even terrorism is a somehow accepted subversion. It is indeed naïve to believe that terrorism is the enemy of the great systems because in reality it is simply their

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[20] Eco, *Il nome*, 495.

[21] Evelyn Cobley, "Closure and Infinite Semiosis in Mann's *Doctor Faustus* and Eco's *The Name of the Rose*," in *Umberto Eco*, vol. 2, eds. M. Gane and N. Gane, 347.

[22] Cobley, "Closure," 347.

"Non ci fa paura il rigore del donatista, la follia suicida del circoncellione, la lussuria del bogomilo ... li conosciamo tutti e conosciamo la radice dei loro peccati che è la radice stessa della nostra santità ... Anzi vorrei dire, la loro presenza ci è preziosa, si iscrive nel disegno di Dio perché il loro peccato incita la nostra virtù, la loro bestemmia incoraggia il nostro canto di lode..." Eco, *Il nome*, 480.

"We are not afraid of the severity of the Donatists, the mass suicide of the Circumcellions, the lust of the Bogomils ... we know them all and we know the root of their sins, which is also the root of our holiness ... Indeed I would say that their presence is precious to us, it is inscribed in the plan of God, because their sin prompts our virtue, their curses encourage our hymn of praise..." Eco, *Rose*, 476.

"natural counterweight."[23] The multinationals' system needs to accept a few local wars or acts of terrorism as a relief valve for the natural drives of biological aggression. On the other hand, when terrorism goes too far, it is the masses themselves who stand up against it. Although the terrorist is someone who has nothing to lose, the system of multinationals sets things in such a way so that everybody would end up losing something in a situation of generalised terrorism.[24]

In the relationship between heresy and orthodoxy, another aspect that needs to be taken into account is the definition of heresy and its opposition with sanctity. William decides to give up being an inquisitor precisely because he finds it hard to trace a definite line between the two.[25] For instance, the ideas of the heretic Dolcino are close to those of Ubertino, who for William is an inspiring saint-like figure. What caused the condemnation of Dolcino and his followers was that they put into practice a life of poverty that the orthodox *fraticelli*, or "Friars of the Poor Life,"[26] only theorised about.[27] According to William, Ubertino came close to being both one of those heretics he helped to burn and a cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church.[28] Eco underlines how the distinction between sanctity and heresy is feeble, especially because, as Adso points out, "often inquisitors create heretics."[29]

As highlighted below, this idea returns more clearly in *Il pendolo di Foucault* (1988), whose three protagonists, Casaubon, Belbo and Diotallevi, meet in the mid-1970s while working for Garamond, a publishing house in Milan. With detachment and a sense of humour, they approach the works of writers who send them their articles for a collection

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[23] Eco, "Striking at the Heart," 116.
[24] Ibid., 117.
[25] "Mi mancò il coraggio di inquisire sulle debolezze dei malvagi, perché scoprii che sono le stesse debolezze dei santi." Eco, *Il nome*, 67.
"I lacked the courage to investigate the weakness of the wicked, because I discovered they are the same weaknesses of the saintly." Eco, *Rose*, 60.
[26] Eco, *Rose*, 51. Eco, *Il nome*, 59.
[27] Cobley, "Closure," 347.
[28] Eco, *Il nome*, 73.
[29] Eco, *Rose*, 50. "[S]pesso sono gli inquisitori a creare gli eretici." Eco, *Il nome*, 58.

on occultism, paying particular attention to the story of the Templars and their contemporary legacy. They jokingly refer to the writers as the "Diabolicals." For the sake of a game of cultivated associations, the three invent their "Plan" establishing connections drawn from the Diabolicals' conspiracy theories. According to their conjectures, the Templars are looking for a map which is the key to the command of telluric currents of the earth. The three protagonists are in the end punished by a demonic cult which sees their plan as a real one and destroys them.

The political context of the years from the late 1960s to the early 1980s leaves its marks on Eco's first two novels. Eco, as a semiotician and objective observer of society, uses irony to engage with this critical period of Italian history. In his novels more than his journalism, he is free to respond to an ideal authority with humour, which Eco combines with the grotesque and the carnivalesque. In the years when he was writing the two novels, the clash between police and state authority and the revolutionary masses of students and workers was at its peak. As this chapter shows, Eco not only uses irony to destabilise the authority—the church in *Il nome* and the state in *Il pendolo*—but also uses it to criticise the very reaction of the masses against what they believe to be an unjust authority.

3.3 Grotesque Subversion in *Il nome della rosa*

Il nome della rosa echoes the atmosphere of the years of terrorism and violence through its dark story of murders taking place in a mysterious abbey during the Middle Ages. This section shows how Eco represents the authority of the Catholic Church in this novel and how he allows this authority to be challenged. Two players in society are highlighted: the first is the self-legitimised and irremovable authority, and the second is the liberal spirit who can understand the way the authority retains its power and who

therefore holds the potential to unsettle it. These two players appear as Jorge, the murderer (the authority), and William of Baskerville (the liberal spirit). Eco defines the positions of both men through their relationship with laughter; this is the reason why the connection to Bakhtin's theory is so significant. As Bakhtin points out, although preachers of early Christianity such as Tertullian, Cyprian, and John Chrysostom condemned laughter, the medieval church also had to recognise its liberating power. Therefore, laughter was made both official and unofficial, tolerated and condemned.[30]

Jorge, who represents the monologic and authoritarian position of the medieval church, values the tension-dispelling property of legalised acts of laughter. In other words, laughter and its official rituals are good ways of keeping the people entertained and to thereby distract them from what the authority is not willing to reveal for discussion. Jorge's main concern is not so much the dangers of the carnivalesque concessions that the church grants its flock; he is concerned with preventing them from achieving the knowledge to which only ecclesiastics should have access. The motive pushing Jorge to kill is the necessity to stop a philosopher such as Aristotle from giving any kind of authority to laughter. Laughter can be the peasant's temporary escape from the control of the church, but it cannot be made the object of philosophical discussions. Otherwise, having been passed from the hands of simple people to the hands of thinkers and philosophers, it would become a tangible threat. Jorge knows that the effect of laughter is that of casting doubt on the *auctoritas* of the church.

Jorge highlights clearly that all knowledge has to be controlled by the church, not only a dangerous book. The church does not mind if the peasants are informed of some particular theory on laughter; what it wants to ensure is that they remain ignorant, because it is easier to rule over someone who does not ask questions, as opposed to someone with a critical mind like William. Preaching on the Anti-Christ, Jorge warns those monks who

[30] Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 73.

want to know too much. The sermon portrays the novel's theoretical concerns and its representation of the repressive control of information in medieval culture.[31] Jorge underlines the duty of the monk of preserving knowledge, not searching for it. Knowledge is a divine thing, complete and defined since the beginning. He argues that there is no evolution in the history of knowledge, only sublime recapitulation and awed contemplation of divine truth.[32] He also highlights that the pride monks take in their knowledge and their desire for more result from the seduction of the Antichrist.[33] From this perspective, Jorge's rule takes the shape of a modern totalitarian regime, one of whose main concerns is the control over information. In *Il nome*, Jorge only allows the monks to read material if he has authorised it, forbidding everything else. Controlling information is also a way for the totalitarian state to keep its people under control: restricted knowledge means easier manipulation of the subjects, who are resigned to accept their reality as the only possible condition in which they could live. For this reason, in the modern age, whoever controls the media controls a large part of the population.

In contrast, William is a supporter of laughter and acts as the representative of a modern dialogic mentality that does not fear confrontation. He defies Jorge because they are both intellectuals. William can respond to witty remarks against laughter, which would convince the less educated, with equally witty remarks in favour of laughter. Three main discussions occur between the two before their final encounter in the library with Aristotle's book at hand. The first discussion takes place in the scriptorium where William and Adso are investigating the first murder. They find the victim's marginalia portraying a ridiculous world that is upside down populated by monsters and creatures of all kinds.[34]

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[31] Coletti, *Naming the Rose*, 122.

[32] "Io sono colui che è, disse il Dio degli ebrei. Io sono la via, la verità e la vita, disse Nostro Signore. Ecco, il sapere non è altro che l'attonito commento di queste due verità." Eco, *Il nome*, 402.
"I am He who is, said the God of the Jews. I am the way, the truth and the life, said our Lord. There you have it: knowledge is nothing but the awed comment on these two truths." Eco, *Rose*, 399.

[33] Eco, *Il nome*, 400-8.

[34] "Si trattava di un salterio ai margini del quale si delineava un mondo rovesciato rispetto a quello cui ci hanno abituati i nostri sensi. Come se ai limini di un discorso che per definizione è il discorso della verità, si

Jorge reproaches the monks and reminds them of Benedict's proscription against laughter: "Verba vana aut risui apta non loqui."[35] He argues that the images depicting the world upside down are bad because they lie about God's creation. William defends their didactic value.

The discussion of the topic arises again during a meal, when Jorge quotes St John Chrysostom, who says that Christ never laughed. William replies that laughter is proper to man, according to Aristotle, and gives the example of Saint Laurence. The saint, who is being roasted on a gridiron, asks his torturer to turn him on the other side as he is already cooked on one. To Jorge this only demonstrates how close to death and bodily corruption laughter really is.[36]

In a third discussion, William confronts Jorge over a fable he finds in the library about a man transformed into an ass. Jorge explains that the library has the duty to hold both truth and error, such as that fable. According to William, fables, like comedy, can tell the truth in unexpected and surprising ways. But to Jorge, the real problem is the legitimacy of laughter. He argues that Jesus never told jokes or stories, only straightforward parables. Also, he maintains that laughter is a sign of foolishness because those who laugh do not believe in or hate what they laugh about. Jorge's crucial point is that laughter is the sign of doubt and that that is why Jesus never laughed. Although William suggests that sometimes it is good to doubt, for Jorge doubt should always be resolved by an authority.[37] The role of laughter in questioning the authority is at this point

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svolgesse profondamente legato a quello, per mirabili allusioni in aenigmate, un discorso menzognero su un universo posto a testa in giù, dove i cani fuggono davanti alla lepre e i cervi cacciano il leone. Piccole teste a zampa d'uccello, animali con mani umane sulla terga [...]" Eco, *Il nome*, 84.
"This was a psalter in whose margins was delineated a world reversed with respect of the one to which our senses have accustomed us. As if the border of a discourse that is by definition the discourse of truth, there proceeded, closely linked to it, through wondrous allusions in aenigmate, a discourse of falsehood on a topsy-turvy universe, in which the dog flees before the hare, and the deer hunt the lion. Little bird-feet head, animals with human hands on their back [...]" Eco, *Rose*, 76.

[35] Eco, *Il nome*, 86. "Do not engage in babbling or joking,'" Terrence G. Kardong, *Benedict's Rule: A Translation and Commentary* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Order of St. Benedict, Inc., 1996), 90.

[36] Eco, *Il nome*, 103.

[37] Ibid., 136-9.

clearly evident. It is interesting how William frankly reveals to Adso that he does not care whether Christ ever laughed.[38] The topic is clearly only an excuse to engage in a discussion with one of the strongest authorities in the abbey and to find out more information for his investigation.

During the final dialogue between Jorge and William, Jorge explains that Aristotle's book is too dangerous to be found because it would destroy a part of Christian knowledge by turning the image of God upside-down. Even the church allows feast, carnival and laughter in its wisdom, but only as a defence for the poor.[39] Conversely, Aristotle would turn laughter into art with the risk that the poor would forget their fear for the devil, who during the feast is depicted as poor and foolish. Jorge argues that it is through fear that the law of God is respected, not laughter.[40] William replies by calling Jorge the devil because, as he defines it, the devil is the arrogance of the spirit, the faith without a smile, and the truth that never confronts doubt.[41] Bakhtin, too, underlines just how important Aristotle's observation was as a source for the philosophy of laughter during Rabelais's time: "of all living creatures only man is endowed with laughter" (*De Anima*, Book 3, Chapter 10).[42] Laughter was seen as man's highest spiritual privilege. Another source of the Renaissance philosophy of laughter is Lucian's "Menippus, or the Descent into Hades," which

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[38] Ibid., 166.

[39] "Il riso è la debolezza, la corruzione, l'insipidità della nostra carne. È il sollazzo per il contadino, la licenza per l'avvinazzato, anche la chiesa nella sua saggezza ha concesso il momento della festa, del carnevale, della fiera, questa polluzione diurna che scarica gli umori e trattiene da altri desideri e da altre ambizioni...Ma così il riso rimane cosa vile, difesa per i semplici, mistero dissacrato per la plebe... Eleggete il re degli stolti, perdetevi nella liturgia dell'asino e del maiale, giocate a rappresentare i vostri saturnali a testa in giù..." Eco, *Il nome*, 477.
"Laughter is weakness, corruption, the foolishness of our flesh. It is the peasant's entertainment, the drunkard's licence; even the church in her wisdom has granted the moment of feast, carnival, fair, this diurnal pollution that releases humours and distracts from other desires and other ambitions...Still laughter remains base, a defence for the simple, a mystery desecrated for the plebeians... Elect the king of fools, lose yourselves in the liturgy of the ass and the pig, play at performing your saturnalia head down..." Eco, *Rose*, 474.

[40] Eco, *Il nome*, 477-9.

[41] "Il diavolo è l'arroganza dello spirito, la fede senza sorriso, la verità che non viene mai presa dal dubbio." Eco, *Il nome*, 480-1.
"The Devil is the arrogance of the spirit, faith without smile, truth that is never seized by doubt." Eco, *Rose*, 477.

[42] Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 68.

exemplifies the laughter's connection to death and the underworld and the freedom of spirit and speech. These sources define laughter as a universal philosophical principle that heals and regenerates. Rabelais and his contemporaries were also familiar with Homer's famous words about the indestructible laughter of the gods, with the Roman tradition of free laughter during the Saturnalia and with the role of laughter during triumphal marches and the funeral rites of important people.[43]

However, William remains the only one who openly challenges Jorge's authority. Jorge can rule over the majority of the monks through terror, which recalls the years when the novel was written. Keeping people in fear is an instrument used to achieve power and retain it. For example, the forbidden library of *Il nome* is protected through the use of hallucinatory herbs and tricks to scare the intruders.[44] One of these tricks is a distorting mirror. Adso sees his image reflected but in the darkness gets scared and thinks it is a devil. It is significant to point out in the current reading of Eco's novel in the light of Bakhtin's theory that William's reaction is to laugh at this "devil."[45] Bakhtin underlines how terror and laughter in the Middle Ages are closely related. He argues that the defining characteristic of medieval and Renaissance laughter is its relationship between terror and laughter. He distinguishes it from romantic grotesque laughter, which is reduced to humour, irony, and sarcasm. The difference between the romantic grotesque and the medieval and Renaissance grotesque is even more evident in relation to terror. Bakhtin argues that the romantic world is an alien and terrifying one. On the other hand, medieval and Renaissance folk culture was familiar with terror in the form of comic monsters that are defeated by laughter. This process is present at its high point in Rabelais' novel where fear is destroyed in its very origin and everything is turned into gaiety.[46] Medieval

[43] Ibid., 68-70.
[44] Eco, *Il nome*, 178.
[45] Ibid., 176.
[46] Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 37-9.

laughter is therefore a victorious one that celebrates the defeat of fear. People play with terror and laugh at it while the "awesome" becomes a "comic monster."[47]

Although the monks live in fear of Jorge's blind gaze and his tremendous sermons on the torments of hell, they also, like William, find ways to escape Jorge's repressive rule. The ways used by the monks to subvert Jorge's rule, which are more material than intellectual, are identifiable as the paradigms of the grotesque body and the banquet. Also, the constant presence throughout the novel of the monks' marginalia, representing an upside-down monstrous world, is a continuous challenge to Jorge's notion of controlled knowledge. Eco shows how the monk's austere models are overcome by passions, both carnal and intellectual, which take over in the monastery. A connection can be established between the enjoyment of food, wine, and sex in *Il nome* with the Rabelaisian paradigms of the grotesque body and the banquet. The lower body is the grotesque body's centre of activity. In Eco's *Il nome* the *demone meridiano* (noonday demon) leads the actions of several monks in his story:[48] Berengario, the assistant librarian, is in love with Adelmo;[49] the librarian Malachi kills Severino, the herbalist, out of jealousy for Berengario with whom he thinks Severino had intercourse;[50] Salvatore provides the cellarer with girls from the village, giving them food in exchange for sexual favours;[51] and Adso has sex with a peasant girl.[52]

Bodily images of enjoyment of life crowd *Il nome* also in banquet scenes which are frequently intertwined with parody, blasphemy, and the grotesque body. There are several examples of banquets in *Il nome* that apply positive Bakhtinian principles, such as the free word or the renewal and rebirth, which oppose with the murders taking place in the monastery. When William and Adso arrive at the abbey, they are welcomed by the

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[47] Ibid., 91.
[48] Eco, *Il nome*, 143. Eco, *Rose*, 137.
[49] Eco, *Il nome*, 143.
[50] Ibid., 469.
[51] Ibid., 271.
[52] Ibid., 247-52.

cellarer, a vulgar fat man with a jovial aspect. They are offered wine, cheese, olives, bread, and raisins, which they both consume with pleasure. Adso remarks that his mentor does not have the Benedictine habit of austere silence during supper and that they converse pleasantly.[53] The connection between freedom of expression and eating is important in Rabelais, according to Bakhtin.

Some more specific examples of the free word over a meal can be found in the novel. One is Adso's meeting in the kitchen with Salvatore, an ex-Dolcinian lustful monk with grotesque animal-like features who speaks a disrupted language made up of a free ungrammatical mix of all the languages he has encountered during his travels. Another example is the banquet prepared by the Abbot to welcome the Franciscan delegation representing Emperor Ludovico of Austria. Salvatore tells Adso his story of starvation, murder, grave-robbing, dismemberment, and cannibalism while voraciously eating his mutton pie. When Salvatore bites into his food with Rabelaisian appetite, Adso sees on Salvatore's face the grimace of the desperate eating a corpse. Coletti highlights how Salvatore's ideal world is the "land of Cockaigne." [54] The land of Cockaigne is typical of the legends about giants such as the story of Gargantua, as Bakhtin points out.[55] Salvatore's travels among the worst kinds of impostors and thieves are justified by the hope of finding such a land of Cockaigne, where cheese and sausages grow on trees that ooze honey.[56] The image of gigantic sausages and buns "solemnly carried in carnival processions" is evoked by Bakhtin as well.[57] Journeying to a land of food is a theme in Rabelais too: during his travels Panurge sees a utopian country with mountains of butter, rivers of milk, and hot pies springing from the soil like mushrooms.[58] In both cases, the

[53] Ibid., 35.
[54] Coletti, *Naming the Rose*, 134.
[55] Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 297.
[56] Eco, *Il nome*, 190-2.
[57] Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 278.
[58] François Rabelais, "Travels and Voyages of Panurge, Pantagruel's Disciple to Unknown and Wondrous Islands" (1537). Quoted in Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 297-8.

land of Cockaigne represents a utopian alternative world where food overwhelms everything else and is within everyone's reach. For Eco this no doubt implies a reference to the economic miracle of the 1950s which was coloured with a halo of mythical richness after the crisis of the 1970s.

A sequence that is directly identifiable with Bakhtin's concept of grotesque realism is Adso's hallucinatory dream, which is based on the parodic *Coena Cypriani*. As Bakhtin points out, the essential aspect of parody is the debasement to the material bodily principle and the depiction of the human body with images connected with food, drink, defecation, and sexual life.[59] Adso's dream, that starts with a descent into a hellish kitchen,[60] recreates a version of the *Coena* enacted not only by biblical characters but by real characters that belong to the mysterious life of the abbey. The Abbot sits at the centre of the banquet, brandishing a fork like a sceptre, and Jorge drinks wine, laughs, and exclaims blasphemies.[61] The procession of guests includes Jesus, who is richly dressed and holds a chalice of pig's blood. This recalls at the same time the debate over the richness of the church as well as the murders taking place in the abbey since a body is found drowned in pig blood. In addition, during the banquet, Jesus eats an ass. The ass is identified by Bakhtin as one of the most ancient and lasting symbols of the material lower stratum of the body. The ass degrades and regenerates at the same time.[62] In this sense, in the scene depicted by Eco, the ass is consciously blasphemous as it is associated with Jesus.

The final part of Adso's dream can be closely linked with Bakhtin's idea of the grotesque body. Like in the story also in the dream, the peasant girl with whom Adso has a sexual encounter is found in possession of a black rooster and called a witch. This part of the dream reflects various aspects of grotesque realism. All the guests turn against her:

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[59] Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 18.
[60] Eco, *Il nome*, 429.
[61] "Tu sarai il prossimo Abate, ventre di Dio!" Eco, *Il nome*, 430.
"You shall be the next abbot, by God's belly!" Eco, *Rose*, 428.
[62] Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 78.

they throw faeces at her, urinate on her, fart in her face, and vomit on her breast. The body of the girl is dismembered and ends up in the reliquary of the abbey's crypt and is later re-made with those dismembered pieces. It is like one whole immense body created throughout time. It is as if the substantial form of the body of man had been fragmented into accidental and separated forms, thus becoming its own opposite image of a terrestrial rather than an ideal form, of dust signifying death and destruction.[63] Firstly, the images of the faeces and urine are described by Bakhtin as ambivalent: as all images of the material bodily lower stratum, they debase, destroy, regenerate, and renew simultaneously. They are a blessing and humiliation at the same time.[64] Secondly, there is a direct connection with Rabelais' notion of the cosmic body of all people, which is universal and immortal because it dies and is regenerated in another body.

Coletti points out that the concrete level of the kitchen of food, drink and the basic corporal functions of eating and drinking constitute a bonding of the place with the material level of things. She argues that Eco's choice of making the kitchen a prominent locus of ludic materiality reflects his acknowledgment of an ancient tradition associating various comic *topoi* with kitchens and imagery of food and drink. It is the same tradition, as Coletti underlines, that Rabelais used for his chapter in *Gargantua* entitled "Why Monks Love Kitchens."[65] Needless to say that Bakhtin too is aware of this tradition and of Rabelais's use.[66] In Eco, the kitchen is a threshold between the official and the unofficial. The kitchen is the place of Adso's sexual transgression and Salvatore's exchange of food for sex with hungry peasants. Coletti points out that the grotesque imagery of banqueting and the body with its oppositions signified by the monastic kitchen and Salvatore are

[63] Eco, *Il nome*, 435.
[64] Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 151. For the purpose of this thesis, Eco is here directly connected with this tradition through Bakhtin's reading of Rabelais. However, the literature on *topoi* such as those of the kithcens and materiality is much broader and surely well known by Eco. For example, E.R. Curtius's *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (1948) dedicates a section of his study to kitchen humour. Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Middle Ages*, trans. William R. Trask (London & Henley: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1979), 431-5.
[65] Coletti, *Naming the Rose*, 130.
[66] Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 300.

brought together in Adso's dream of the *Coena Cypriani,* which she calls "the novel's most impressive instance of transgressive corporality."[67] What is relevant is that the dream is the reason that the mysterious book is discovered. Adso tells his dream to William, who then works out that the book they are looking for is bound together with the *Coena Cypriani* they have already seen in the library. This step is significant because it shows how parody is dialogical. It gives the clue that enables them to overcome Jorge's attempt to monologise reality and monopolise the truth.

To conclude, the atmosphere of terror that dominates *Il nome* is fatally challenged by laughter and bodily freedom. If placed into this context of terror, Eco's example of the prohibition of laughter becomes politically significant. It recalls the impotency of the wider population in comparison to the few in power, who depend on people's fear. But at the same time it encourages one to look at the situation from another angle: laughter defeats fear. Apart from reproducing the atmosphere of tension that was characteristic of the years during which the novel was written, Eco also reproduces other aspects of life from that specific context. The church is not only imposing its rule through terror but also defining its power through the public punishment of criminals, such as the burning of Remigio, Salvatore, and the girl in *Il nome*. The three are obviously taken as scapegoats for the murders in the abbey, although no concrete proof can be produced. As in the years of terror in Italy, a halo of mystery surrounds the mass murders, and the real culprits fall under the protection of those in power. Jorge cannot possibly be accused by Bernardo Gui, the inquisitor who takes over William's investigation, when the verdicts are delayed and more people are killed, whereas a poor cellarer, an ex-Dolcinite, and a woman can take the blame and be sacrificed in order to maintain the clean image of the church.

[67] Coletti, *Naming the Rose*, 134-5.

3.4 The Representation of Revolution and the Lower Body in *Il pendolo di Foucault*

Due to the contemporary setting, *Il pendolo* deals more openly than *Il nome* with the questions of revolution, terrorism, and political commitment. The questions are approached through the perspectives of two generations: one is Eco's own generation, since Belbo is the exact same age as Eco,[68] and the other is the generation of people who were young in 1968 as seen and represented by Casaubon. Belbo and Casaubon share a common disillusionment and frustration about not being politically active enough. Both characters see a connection between political commitment and the lower body, the centre of the Rabelaisian paradigm of the grotesque body. It is interesting, however, to point out that Eco treats the two generations differently: Belbo's is predominantly characterised by political frustration—and is ultimately defeated through bodily renewal—while Casaubon's generation faces with determination the question of carnival and authorised revolution. Carnival already appears as a constant in *Il nome*, but only as part of its medieval setting. Medieval life was split between the official—the church—and the unofficial—that which the church marginalised. This unofficial side is represented in *Il nome* on the allegorical level by the monks' marginalia and on the concrete level by heretics. However, the political value of the carnival and its subversive character are discussed only in *Il pendolo* both because Eco is well aware of the role of the carnival as the safety valve for the peasant in medieval society, and also because the setting of the novel in a Benedictine monastery determines the serious tone of the place. As it has been shown, carnival is not only despised: in the abbey, laughter itself is punished by death. It is therefore with a contemporary novel like *Il pendolo* that Eco can use his characters to

[68] Because some autobiographical elements justify a certain level of identification of Eco in Belbo, *Il pendolo* becomes relevant to understand Eco's approach to political commitment. Not only Eco's age is the exact same as Belbo's, Belbo also tells an anecdote which was told by Eco in "Ur-Fascism" as a memory of his childhood. Like Eco, Belbo assists to a speech of a partisan leader when the city is taken and like Eco he is surprised by the simplicity of the speech. Umberto Eco, *Il pendolo di Foucault* (Milan: Bompiani, 1988), 665.

investigate the subversive value of carnival, which—being associated with the generation of people who were young in 1968 —also questions the revolutionary nature of the 1968 movements. The image of the carnival offers Casaubon a means to reflect on the distinction between real and authorised revolution, which this section will discuss.[69]

Belbo's political frustration is made evident from the very start. He expresses resentment towards the generation of those who were young in 1968 because it reminds him that his own generation is not associated with any revolution. He argues that when 1968 came it was a feast for people in their early twenties, but for people like him in their forties it was a day of reckoning, regret, and repentance. Despite feeling frustrated at having missed the opportunity to react against fascism because he was too young, Belbo sees 1968 as a renewal and the opportunity for a fresh start. Belbo accuses Casaubon's generation of having made his generation feel like a group of spineless cowards but then only ended up engaging with the purposeless violence of terrorism.[70] Here, Belbo reproaches both the uselessness of political terrorism and his own political laziness.

Throughout the novel it can be noted that his calm and seemingly detached personality is tormented by his failure to make firm decisions. On the one hand, he despises his own generation for not having been able to react against the repressive state as young people did in 1968. On the other hand, he looks at the partisan resistance with admiration, but also with the remorse of not having participated in it. When Belbo is summoned by the Diabolicals to Paris to justify his Plan, he leaves behind a series of notes on his computer, which he named Abulafia, after a famous Kabbalist of the thirteenth century. Trying to reconstruct the story of the Plan, Casaubon finds out about Belbo's humiliating love for a woman called Lorenza Pellegrini,[71] and his feeling of cowardice

[69] For a theory on revolution see Chalmers Johnson, *Revolutionary Change*, Second Edition (London: Longman, 1966/1983); Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963).
[70] Eco, *Il pendolo*, 252-3.
[71] Ibid., 269.

experienced during the Second World War.[72] Too young for the partisan wars and too old for the 1968 demonstrations, Belbo cannot forgive himself for his passivity. During a demonstration that ends in violence, Belbo leads Casaubon to escape and then confesses with embarrassment his role as an observer of the partisan resistance.[73] Since he always remains on the borders of all events, always observing but never intervening, Belbo defines himself as a potential traitor.[74]

For Belbo, having missed the opportunity to standing up against the oppressor when he was twelve is like becoming impotent for a lifetime after having missed the first erection.[75] The connection between the lower body and political commitment is represented more clearly in Belbo's episode with the trumpet. Although assigned to the bombardon in the parish band during the war, Belbo aspired to play the trumpet because it received all the public's attention. This would have given him a chance to be noticed by Cecilia, with whom he was in love. The memory of the trumpet simultaneously reflects Belbo's sexual and political frustration. After practicing very hard, he is eventually allowed to play as the lead trumpet, but Cecilia is not among the audience.[76] In addition, Casaubon finds some of his friend's last writings in which he remembers another missed opportunity for making a choice: before the arrival of the partisans, the fascist brigades ask Don Tico, the parish priest and leader of the band, to play a fascist song. They have to accept and play, and Belbo, who was not present, regrets having missed the chance to say no.

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[72] Ibid., 123-8.

[73] "'Così lei si è fatto la resistenza, come si suol dire.'
'Da spettatore,' disse. E avvertii un lieve imbarazzo nella sua voce. 'Nel quarantatré avevo undici anni, alla fine della guerra ne avevo appena tredici. Troppo presto per prendere parte, abbastanza per seguire tutto, con un'attenzione direi fotografica. Ma che potevo fare? Stavo a guardare. E a scappare, come oggi.'" Eco, *Il pendolo*, 121.
"'So you were in the Resistance.'
'As a spectator,' he said. I sensed a slight embarrassment in his voice. In 1943 I was eleven, and at the end of the war, barely thirteen. Too young to take part, but old enough to follow everything – how shall I put it? – photographic attention. What else could I do? I watched. And ran. Like today.'" Umberto Eco, *Foucault's Pendulum*, trans. William Weaver (London: Secker & Warburg, 1989), 110.

[74] Eco, *Il pendolo*, 121.

[75] Ibid., 128.

[76] Ibid., 351.

Yet, it is the trumpet in the end that redeems Belbo. Although unprepared, he volunteers to play at the assembly where the partisans are being celebrated after Mussolini's fall. At that moment of success and liberation, he possesses Cecilia.[77] Those elements of lower bodily liberation interestingly engage with Bakhtin's interpretation of the body in Rabelais, especially regarding the union between death and renewal. When the assembly is over, Belbo is the last to leave, and Don Tico forgets to bring him back home. Alone, with the cemetery behind him, Belbo is on the verge of tears when the hearse driver offers him a lift.[78] Riding in the hearse, Belbo leaves his old fears behind and goes back to a renewed life.

As a representative of the generation of those who were young in 1968, Casaubon describes himself as a sceptic.[79] Unlike Belbo, who is too young to participate in the partisan revolution, Casaubon finds himself involved in the 1968 revolution as a university student. However, since he is still young, his political commitment is driven more by his sexual urges than ideology: he follows demonstrations in the hope of meeting girls.[80] As was the case for Belbo, revolution and political choices are seen in a close relationship with love or sex. The political activity corresponds to the liberation of the lower body from the constraints imposed by a well behaved bourgeois society. However, the comparison with Belbo stops here. Belbo finds in the lower body both sexual and political renewal; Casaubon does not give as much weight to this association as Belbo does. The identifying image for Casaubon is carnival, whose contradictory atmosphere he introduces when talking about the 1968 students' movement. Studying philology at the University of

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[77] Ibid., 670.

[78] "L'uomo era benigno. Jacopo era salito a cassetta accanto a lui, e sul carro dei morti era iniziato il ritorno verso il mondo dei vivi. Quel Caronte fuori servizio spronava taciturno i suoi corsieri funebri lungo le balze, Jacopo ritto e ieratico, con la tromba stretta sotto il braccio, la visiera lucida, compreso del suo nuovo ruolo, insperato." Eco, *Il pendolo*, 672.
"The man smiled. Jacopo climbed up beside him on the box, and so it was on a hearse that he began his return to the world of the living. That duty-off Charon, taciturn, urged his funeral chargers down the scope, as Jacopo set erect and hieratic, the trumpet clutched under his arm, his visor shining, absorbed in his new, un-hoped for role." Eco, *Foucault's*, 635.

[79] Eco, *Il pendolo*, 57.

[80] Ibid., 59.

Milan, he experienced a peculiar environment. According to Casaubon, while in the rest of the country classes were being invaded and professors were being forced to talk only about proletarian science, in Milan there was a territorial compromise between the revolution, ruling outside and in the big halls, and the official culture, which receded safely into the internal halls and onto superior levels where it continued with its activities undisturbed.[81] Like in the Renaissance and Middle Ages as described by Bakhtin, the official coexists with the carnivalesque unofficial. Both universes accept each other and do not interfere with the balance that keeps them together. Casaubon was downstairs debating proletarian science in the morning and upstairs practising aristocratic knowledge in the afternoon. He saw no contradiction with this. For Casaubon the reconciliation of the two opposed realities is due to the practical realisation that society is bound to be run by people holding different roles.[82]

Amparo, Casaubon's Brazilian girlfriend, plays an important role in the story that is connected with revolution and carnival rites. After college, Casaubon moves to Brazil with her. In the big cities of the south, many migrants get absorbed by local churches and cults that evoke African deities, thus reconnecting with their folk culture. For some of Amparo's activist friends, this meant a return to the roots. Others thought that cults are the drugs used by those in power to keep those oppressed under control.[83] Amparo in particular despises the rite of carnival and talks with sarcasm about the deep and orgiastic religiosity surrounding the rite. It is a tribal rite that encourages the poor to waste all their revolutionary energy over charms and witchcraft. However, the natural powers that Amparo keeps under control explode when she assists Casaubon at an *umbanda*, an African rite that involves possession by superior spirits who brings the participants back to their roots, in touch with Mother Earth. During the ceremony Amparo falls into a trance

[81] Ibid., 60.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid., 176.

and throws herself into a lustful dance. Casaubon understands that the archetypes she may have rationally destroyed are still alive in her womb.[84] The intimate connection of the lower body with the earth is a bond that reason cannot willingly break.

When he returns to Italy, Casaubon has lost contact with Italian politics; he becomes more sceptical of revolutions and ideologies. He defines the 1968 demonstrations as the most splendid simulation of revolution ever made.[85] Before the escalation of violence, the student protests are accepted by the police. Life at the University of Milan continues like before for Casaubon because revolution and tradition coexist without contradicting each other. As pointed out in section 3.2, the first part of the social movements of the late 1960s was characterised by tolerance until the escalation of violence; tolerance is only possible as long as there is no genuine threat to the state. Consequently, Eco seems to show a disillusioned detachment from the movements of the late 1960s because the state tolerated them and therefore did not see them as a real challenge that could lead to social transformation. In this context, Casaubon constantly wonders whether the revolution is real or simulated and authorised, a thought that evokes Bakhtin's carnival and the official order. Through the concept of carnival Eco expresses his view of the students' movements of the 1960s as naïve and controlled within society. Although reforms were eventually achieved and changes were made in the 1970s, the students' movements of the 1960s claimed to change the world; in reality, they were slowly absorbed by the very system the students thought they were fighting against. This was true until terrorism took over, and even then the social cause was lost along the way.[86]

Using Casaubon's description of the students' movements, Eco seems to depict an ambivalent and carnivalesque society that is held together by a balance of mutual acceptance between opposing forces: the authority, in this case the state or the university,

[84] Ibid., 224-8.
[85] Ibid., 58.
[86] Ibid., 252-3.

does not try to repress the students' movements because it knows they are harmless up to a certain stage; the students do not really try to challenge the authority with their protests. This society is carnivalesque in the sense that the official order contains the unofficial and allows limited transgression as long as the rule of the authority is followed overall. In other words, those in power make sure to maintain a balance between authority and what supposedly challenges it. Eco had already developed this idea in *Il nome*, as Cobley points out (see Chapter 3.2). There, the dependency of the church on heresy to confirm its authority is a way to show how those in power need to place somebody on the margins so that they can be in the centre. The idea is given through the notion of carnival and its accepted presence on the margins of society. In the contemporary setting of *Il pendolo*, Eco drops the metaphor and points out how ineffective the accepted revolution of the late 1960s movements was and how even the terrorism of the late 1970s and early 1980s was somehow incorporated into a bigger plan that remains in the hands of the state.

For this reason, Eco wants to clarify that terrorism is not just an instrument of political fighting: terrorism is motivated by the personal goals of those who want to obtain power. Both Eco and Bakhtin are interested in the relationship between rhetoric and power. In *Il nome*, if it is uncertain whether someone is a heretic or a saint, it is the authority of the church that makes the final decision. The church makes rules, verdicts, and heretics. This happens through the use of what Bakhtin calls authoritative language. It is specifically the rhetoric of the authoritative discourse that Eco wants to reproduce and satirise. In Bakhtin's view, authoritative language cannot be reproduced or it would lose its power. By reproducing the authoritarian language of the church, Eco questions its authority and reveals the strategy that keeps it in place. An example can be seen in Bernardo Gui's speech, when Remigio and Salvatore are being tried for heresy.[87] Gui, an inquisitor, finds Salvatore with a girl and a black rooster, which Gui claims is for use in

[87] Eco, *Il nome*, 373-93.

satanic rites. Therefore, he decides that Salvatore, who confesses about his and Remigio's past as Dolcinite, is a heretic and the girl a witch. The trial is a set up only to prove Gui right. His strategy is the use of rhetoric to confuse those who are interrogated and make them confess for fear of torture. Gui in the end is successful but what emerges is the idea that Remigio, Salvatore and the girl are put to the stake because Gui decides so.

In other words, authority consolidates itself through both physical violence and authoritative discourse. It is through rhetoric that a rising group can reach a position of power. Persuasion is the essential element to achieve power while the monologism of authoritative discourse is the key to retaining that power. This justifies Casaubon's scepticism towards ideologies because he knows them to be based on rhetoric. He points out that to pass from one political group to another one just needs to find the right quotation.[88] Eco dedicates the last chapter of his *Trattato di semiotica* to the analysis of the mechanism of the organisation of ideology rather than to its mechanism of motivation. In other words, he makes the object of his study its structure, not its genesis.[89] The way one organises reality is dictated by one's personal goals. In addition, Eco seems to point out that ideologies are empty vessels filled by the ruling class to its need and that, in the same way, terrorism is also this kind of empty vessel. Section 3.2 has illustrated how terrorism intertwines with the secret services during the Years of Lead in Italy. One interpretation is that the acts of terrorism should have scared the population and pushed the government into a new authoritarian rule. The apparently purposeless cruelties of the Strategy of Tension may have served a well-defined and premeditated political plan.

Il pendolo shows how terrorism can be used as a means to achieve personal goals. Agliè, a mysterious and educated middle-aged gentleman who turns out to be one of the leaders of the Diabolicals, uses terrorism to set Belbo up. When Agliè comes to believe that Belbo, Diotallevi, and Casaubon are in possession of the Templars' plan to rule the

[88] Eco, *Il pendolo*, 58.
[89] Eco, *Trattato*, 360.

world—not knowing, of course, that it is a fake—he wants to take it from them. Agliè, in order to force the secret out of Belbo, wants to interrogate him together with the other Diabolicals during a rite held in Paris, at the museum of Saint-Martin des Champs where Foucault's pendulum is held. To force Belbo to his will, Agliè asks him to carry a suitcase that is apparently full of books on a train going to Florence and leave it on the train after he gets off at his stop in Bologna, so that a friend of Agliè's can collect it in Florence., Belbo agrees to help carry the suitcase, which actually contains a bomb that Agliè's accomplice discovers after Belbo gets off the train. In this way, under the threat of being turned in by Agliè, Belbo becomes a fugitive and is forced to comply with the request to join him in Paris. It is the beginning of the 1980s, shortly after the bomb in the Bologna train station. As the situation is so tense Agliè is sure to create panic and to put Belbo's reputation at risk. In this instance, the panic motivated by the atmosphere of the Years of Lead is unjustified because caused to serve a specific purpose, not to harm anyone on the train. Agliè takes advantage of the atmosphere of terror caused by the ideological fighting of the time.

To conclude, Casaubon's claim of scepticism towards all ideologies and all revolutions is not that of a naïve or easily-deluded young student. He rather takes the detached and disillusioned look typical of the older generation, like Belbo's and, thus, Eco's. Casaubon does not participate actively in political life, but he comes to terms with it; he chooses not to participate because of his disillusioned view of revolution. In this sense, he seems to be using Eco's voice more than Belbo does. Eco takes the detached viewpoint of the semiotician who dismantles the surface of society in order to see how it works and what its goals are, without blindly trusting any of its ideologies. In *Il pendolo*, Eco engages with the representation of the social movements of the late 1960s and terrorism, but not from a collective point of view. He looks at those critical times through the eyes of two individuals and colours them with some biographical detail.

3.5 Eco's Effective Revolution: Humour versus Carnival

Prior to investigating Eco's idea of effective revolution, some points need to be made about the concept of revolution and subversion in relation to Bakhtin and Rabelais. Rabelais's writings provoked scandal, especially in view of their scatological references and their satirising of the church. However, Rabelais was no revolutionary but rather a rich intellectual who amused himself by provoking the system that kept him rich and made him famous. He had no intention of subverting society. Bakhtin recognised in Rabelais and in the Renaissance tradition a deeper social criticism and a subversive potential, which could encourage the masses to react against an unjust authoritarian ruler—in his case, Stalin. As Hannah Arendt points out, revolution is a modern phenomenon that was triggered by the American revolution.[90] She argues that when America became the symbol of a society without poverty—even before the unique technological development of the modern age—the idea of revolution reached the European people. It was at this point that the social question and the rebellion of the poor started to play a truly revolutionary role. Before this, the ancient cycle of life had been based on the "natural" distinction of rich and poor.[91] In addition, Arendt points out that medieval and post-medieval theory shows an awareness of the ideas of rebellion and disobedience against established authorities. However, the purpose of these rebellions was not to challenge authority or the order of things: "it was always a matter of exchanging the person who happened to be in authority" with someone who could replace him.[92]

What kind of revolution does Eco portray in *Il nome* and *Il pendolo*? *Il nome* is set in the Middle Ages, hence the use of the grotesque in *Il nome*'s medieval setting defies the order established by the authority of the church, while *Il pendolo* shows revolution in the

[90] Arendt, *On Revolution*, 15.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Ibid., 33.

modern sense, a revolution of the masses, who demand a general change, not just a change of ruler. Both novels react ironically to the grotesque subversion of the official order. Two characters in particular respond to the absurdities of their contemporary societies with humour: William in *Il nome* and Belbo in *Il pendolo*. It is relevant here to analyse their types of humour. Casaubon describes Belbo's tone as derisive; Belbo is a sceptic and shows it to his interlocutor through embarrassing statements and ironic questions. For Belbo, however, derision also leads to melancholy, a thirst for the absolute which is embodied Foucault's pendulum, being the only fixed point on earth. Apart from using his cold humour, Belbo also engages with carnivalesque, although he does this not as a careless participant but rather as an intellectual. The carnivalesque is Belbo's way to express his frustration at the immensity of knowledge and the human incapacity to contain it. For this reason, he toys with imagining a Faculty of Compared Irrelevant Disciplines with courses called Nomadic Town Planning or Mass Psychology of the Sahara.[93] But Casaubon realises that this humorous *Sorbona rabelaisiana* only reflects Belbo's feeling of exile from absolute knowledge.[94] In some manner, he mirrors Eco's disillusioned reaction to the mirage of structuralists to be able to turn the humanities into a science as well as Eco's idea of culture as unfinalised. For Eco and Bakhtin the unfinalised character of the study of humanities is positive because it produces continually renewed dialogue. Alternatively, Belbo cannot find peace because of the vastness of knowledge.

It is Belbo's humour that sets him free from remorse during a final act of bravery. In Saint-Martin des Champs, with the cord of Foucault's pendulum tied around his neck, Belbo reacts humorously to the grotesque situation which he finds himself in: the Diabolicals hold a satanic ceremony, interrogating Belbo on the Plan he has created which they take for real. The atmosphere is eerie, and Belbo fears—with reason—for his life. Here, as Bakhtin points out, laughter is the key to defeating fear and winning against an

[93] Eco, *Il pendolo*, 86.
[94] Ibid., 64.

oppressor who, having already decided the verdict, has closed all avenues to dialogue. Belbo realises, it would be impossible to convince the Diabolicals that the Plan they think he has is an invention. Instead of trying to reason with them, he overcomes fear and mocks them, telling their leader: "Ma gavte la nata,"[95] Piedmontese dialect for "get the cork out," an expression used to describe people overwhelmed with their own arrogance. Reaching the grotesque shape of a swollen balloon, they can only return to their normal shape if they remove the cork that is keeping the air inside them. Belbo explains that in this case the cork is believed to be stuck in the anus.[96] His humour is cold but also grotesque because of the use he makes of an image of the lower body. In a way similar to what Eco does with his novels, Belbo absorbs the authorised rebellion of the carnival but makes it dangerous through his cold humour. The grotesque can either remain in a position of legitimised subversion or it can open a window to the real challenge, which is humour. Eco seems to argue that humour is the only effective means to defeat a group convinced of its own absolute truths. What Belbo knows, and the Diabolicals do not, is that the truth they fight so hard to extract from him does not exist: it was a joke they took for a truth. Although he is about to lose his life, Belbo appreciates the funny side of the story. Because he is able this time to laugh in the face of danger, Belbo is redeemed for a lifetime of cowardice. The Diabolicals, on the other hand, are left with nothing but confusion.

Belbo's humour is successful because it truly goes against the official order: in this case, the rule established by the Diabolicals. Conversely, being accepted by the authority is the fundamental characteristic of carnival. As Bakhtin highlights, medieval art shows

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[95] Ibid., 630.

[96] "A chi non conoscesse quell'espressione piemontese, qualche volta spiegava: 'Ma gavte la nata, levati il tappo. Si dice a chi sia enfiato di sé. Si suppone che regga in questa condizione posturalmente abnorme per la pressione di un tappo che porta infitto nel sedere. Se se lo toglie, pfffiiisch, ritorna a condizione umana.'" Eco, *Il pendolo*, 64.
"For anyone who didn't know that Piedmontese expression, he would occasionally explain: "Ma gavte la nata. Take out the cork." You say it to one who is full of himself, the idea being that what causes him to swell and strut is the pressure of a cork stuck in his behind. Remove it and, phsssssh, he returns to human condition." Eco, *Foucault's*, 56.

the coexistence of the pious and the grotesque.[97] Eco underlines in *Il nome* that although the church allows carnival, it still places it on the margins, in opposition to the official order. As mentioned in Chapter 1.5, Coletti stresses how medieval culture is divided between a divinely ordained model and an "anti-model:"[98] in other words, between the official and unofficial. This basic binary opposition is at the root of the distinctive dichotomisation of medieval culture which contrasts the high with the low, the official with the unofficial, the centre with the margins, and the saint with the heretic. Carnival turns the official and divinely-ordered world upside down and thus implies a connection with the demonic. Adelmo's marginalia are an example of this demonic reversal placed on the margins of sacred scriptures.[99] They introduce the topos of the world upside down, or "topsy-turvy,"[100] while at the same time they represent the novel's concerns with the established order and its reversal. Jorge uses examples of an upside-down world to demonstrate the monstrosity of the world's lies,[101] while Adso describes his contemporary world as walking on its head.[102]

One of the most vivid examples for the topsy-turvy world is Adso's dream of the *Coena Cypriani* previously discussed in section 3.4. It is described by Jorge as a diabolical transfiguration of the sacred scriptures.[103] Once again, the reversal of the order holds negative connotations in the official view of the church, while for William it is edifying.

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[97] Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 96.
[98] Coletti, *Naming the Rose*, 123-4.
[99] Eco, *Il nome*, 84-5.
[100] Stallybrass and White analyse the social implications of this concept. They argue that cultures think of themselves through combined symbols of four hierarchies: psychic forms, the human body, geographical space, and social order. They identify a growing body of research devoted to the topic of an upside-down world and hierarchy inversion. According to Stallybrass and White, repugnance and fascination are the twin poles of the process in which a political imperative to reject and eliminate the debasing "low" conflicts powerfully and unpredictably with a desire for this other. Stallybrass and White, *Politics and Poetics*, 3-5.
[101] Eco, *Il nome*, 87-8.
[102] "La gioventù non vuole apprendere più nulla, la scienza è in decadenza, il mondo intero cammina sulla testa, dei ciechi conducono altri ciechi e li fan precipitare negli abissi, gli uccelli si lanciano prima di aver preso il volo, l'asino suona la lira, i buoi danzano ..." Eco, *Il nome*, 23.
"The young no longer want to study anything, learning is decline, the whole world walks on its head, blind men lead others equally blind and cause them to plunge into the abyss, birds leave the nest before they can fly, the jackass plays the lyre, oxen dance..." Eco, *Rose*, 15.
[103] Eco, *Il nome*, 479.

The reversed order of the *Coena* helps him in his investigation: the upside-down world shows the world anew, from a different perspective, thus giving a better understanding of the mysterious events taking place in the abbey.

While the carnivalesque in Bakhtin has a positive connotation of renewal and freedom, Eco underlines its marginal and transitory place in society. Jorge makes clear that carnival is nothing but an instrument used to dominate the peasant's passions:[104] carnival is an authorised revolution. In the novel, however, carnival comes dangerously close to a real or unauthorised revolution. On the one hand, carnival is depicted by the novel as a reproachful but harmless depiction of a world turned upside down contained on the margins of society. On the other, it also is related to Dolcino's heresy. Fra Dolcino, who like San Francesco preached in favour of the poverty of the church, was burnt at the stake for heresy in 1307. Dolcino's heresy was a response to the strict rule of the church by means of the liberation of the body. Ubertino explains to Adso that heresy is often associated with the revolt against the lords. Dolcino himself preaches against private propriety.[105] Even if this is not taken as a reference to communism, it should be understood that Eco places the subjected poor on the one side and the ruling rich class on the other. The contradiction Eco points to is that the church preaches the austerity of morals in this life in order to be rewarded in the afterlife. While the church forbids the enjoyment of earthly life by means of the fear of eternal damnation, ecclesiastics seem to be the first to be attached to material goods and property; when someone speaks up for the poor, they are branded as heretics and silenced, like Dolcino.

Like carnival, the heretic and the revolutionary are both placed on the margins of society. This emerges from an example used by William to talk about marginality, that of San Francesco's preaching to crows and magpies. William explains the outcasts' function in society through the perception of a modern cultural theorist. Adso asks William to

[104] Ibid., 477.
[105] Ibid., 229.

clarify the differences among the various heretical groups. William's answer is significant because, instead of simply enunciating the different characteristics of each heretical group, he explains the one thing they have in common: they all include groups of simple people who are fascinated by the idea of rebelling against those in power. The simple-minded do not care for the subtle differences one could find in the heresies of the Catharists or Waldensians.[106] The simple-minded do not choose their own heresy but rather follow people who go to their lands and preach about freedom from the rich oppressors.[107] When Remigio confesses his Dolcinite past, he argues that he joined the group because it was a great carnival but also because he, Remigio, could not understand the intellectual disputes of the ecclesiastics.[108] Remigio also points out how, for Salvatore, Dolcino meant rebellion against those in power who were to be blamed for his poor childhood, which was full of hunger and disease. But for Remigio, who was not poor, following Dolcino was more a carnival, a feast of fools.[109]

This passage holds the key to understanding Eco's understanding of revolution. People like Dolcino use the poor to attack the propriety of the rich because they need a large number of people to challenge the rich ruling class (here: the church). Conversely, San Francesco does not want to lead the outcasts to revolution but rather to reintegrate them into God's flock. San Francesco fails because he creates an order that is accepted by the church and therefore places the outcasts back on the margins of society.[110] Eco gives a modern analysis of the function of revolution, both genuine and opportunistic, and shows

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[106] The Catharists are a dualistic sect of the later Middle Ages who believed in a good and an evil principle. The Waldensians, are a sect of dissenters that originated in Southern France in the late twelfth century.
[107] Eco, *Il nome*, 203.
[108] Ibid., 276.
[109] "Per Salvatore è stato comprensibile, veniva dai servi della gleba, da una infanzia di carestie e di malattie...Dolcino rappresentava la ribellione, e la distruzione dei signori. Per me è stato diverso, ero di famiglia cittadina, non sfuggivo dalla fame. È stata...non so come dire, una festa dei folli, un bel carnevale..." Eco, *Il nome*, 275-6.
"For Salvatore it was comprehensible: his parents were serfs, he came from a childhood of hardship and illness...Dolcino represented rebellion, the destruction of the lords. For me it was different: I came from a city family, I wasn't running away from hunger. It was – I don't know how to say it – a feast of fools, a magnificent carnival..." Eco, *Rose*, 272.
[110] Eco, *Il nome*, 205.

how in both cases it is doomed to failure. Whether through repression by the hands of those in power or through self-destruction, the revolution of the masses is not achievable in Eco's view. He argues against carnivalesque revolution because he views it as deceptive.

The other character who is identified for his cold humour is William. With the novel being set in the Middle Ages, his humour is ever more rightfully connected with Bakhtin's notion of grotesque realism as it is used intentionally to dispel the fear of authority. In the end, when he discovers that Jorge is the murderer and meets him face-to-face in the library, William first calls Jorge the devil and then threatens to ridicule him, dress him with feathers, and have all the monks laugh at him so nobody would by afraid of his authority any longer:

> You are the Devil, and like the Devil you live in darkness. If you wanted to convince me you have failed. I hate you Jorge, and if I could, I would lead you downstairs, across the ground, naked with fowl's feathers stuck in your asshole and your face painted like a juggler and a buffoon, so the whole monastery would laugh at you and be afraid no longer.[111]

Although carnivalesque laughter is characterised positively in *Il nome* for its dialogical character and for its power to temporarily challenge authority, Eco argues that humour offers the only concrete way to discard the dynamics that allow those in power to retain their position. Therefore, there is the attempt of those in power to dominate the masses by letting them have a series of safety-valve revolutions or by diverting their attention from the facts that relate directly to their submission. In contrast to this, there is the possibility of revealing the tricks of those in power through humour. Carnivalesque laughter defeats fear but is not an efficient threat to authority, which accepts and

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[111] Eco, *Rose*, 477.
"Tu sei il diavolo e come il diavolo vivi nelle tenebre. Se volevi convincermi, non ci sei riuscito. Io ti odio, Jorge, e se potessi ti condurrei giù nel pianoro, nudo con penne di volatili infilate nel buco del culo, e la faccia dipinta come un giocoliere e un buffone, perché tutto il monastero ridesse di te, e non avesse più paura." Eco, *Il nome*, 481.

assimilates it. The real threat is humour, or "cold carnival," as Chapter Two has explained, the weapon used by William against the monologic authority of Jorge.

William's sense of humour emerges in several circumstances. When Jorge describes the Antichrist during his terrible sermon, William alleviates Adso's fear by comparing Jorge to the Antichrist: "it seems [Jorge's] own portrait."[112] William mocks the crypt the Abbot is so proud of, saying that if all the pieces of Christ's cross were real he would have been crucified not on two boards but on an entire forest.[113] William is ironic when he tells Bernardo Gui how glad he is to meet someone who has had such great influence in his life choices. Apparently flattering, the comment refers to the fact, well known to Bernardo, that William's most significant choice was that of leaving the inquisition.[114]

Through William's character Eco illustrates the possibility of undermining order. Even if he cannot save Aristotle's book or the library, William is victorious because he identifies the real murderer and the true reasons behind his acts. By breaking some smaller rules and sticking to the main ones,[115] William breaks the social order from within, like the Panurge in Eco's essay on Franti.[116] The reason why *Il nome* is crowded with Bakhtinian images of the carnivalesque topsy-turvy world is that Eco wants to show how they are integrated within the official culture. For instance, Adelmo's sort of marginalia are common in medieval manuscripts, and Dolcino's heresy was eventually repressed. Eco's idea of cold carnival as represented by William goes beyond the accepted transgression and suggests how to introduce real transgression from within the official culture.

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[112] Eco, *Rose*, 403.
"'Sembra il suo ritratto,' sogghignò Guglielmo in un soffio." Eco, *Il nome*, 406.
[113] Eco, *Il nome*, 427. Adso adds, shocked, that he never knows when his master is joking: "Non capivo mai quando celiasse ... Gugliemo ... rideva solo quando diceva cose serie, e si manteneva serissimo quando presumibilmente celiava." Eco, *Il nome*, 427.
"I never understood when he was jesting ... William laughed only when he said serious things, and remained very silent when he was presumably joking." Eco, *Rose*, 425.
[114] Eco, *Il nome*, 304.
[115] William and Adso enter the forbidden library but many before them had also done this. On the other hand William does not dare intervene against Bernardo's sentence for the innocent girl, Salvatore, or Remigio.
[116] Eco, "Elogio," 89.

Il nome reveals Eco's perception of revolution and challenge to the established order. By populating *Il nome* with carnivalesque images well integrated within the ecclesiastic system, Eco expresses a hopeless vision of carnival as an ineffective and controlled liberation. In contrast, he gives the stories of Dolcino's heresy and San Francesco's dangerous preaching to the outcasts of society. Finally, for Eco to allow that a challenge is effective, he needs for it to occur unexpectedly and within the social order it wishes to undermine. For this reason, only an individual who acts with detachment to dismantle the system from inside can be successful; a group simply lacks the ability to do this. Both Belbo and William are intellectuals who keep to themselves but perfectly understand the dynamics of their societies: not those dynamics that are enacted so that they can be accepted by the wider majority, but rather the deeper dynamics that act from below and allow the others to function. In summary, both characters are defeated by the blinded supporters of the system while still being winners within their own political consciences.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined how Eco's first two novels represent his position towards the political events that shocked Italy during the years from the 1960s to the 1980s. It has demonstrated how the first phase of Eco's sociopolitical criticism is characterised by engagement with the political issues of his time but also by a cautious detachment from them. Eco wants to show in his novels that the effective challenge to the order is achieved not by the clamorous act of terrorism or violence but rather by following the general rules in order to be able, step by step, to change some of them.

Eco witnessed the progression of events leading to the violence of the 1970s: the repression of the 1950s, the tolerance of the 1960s, and the explosion of violence and the

return of repression in the 1970s. Both *Il nome* and *Il pendolo* express his discontent with those events but also disillusionment caused by the bitter realisation that the good state needs the evil terrorist and viceversa. The theory that the Strategy of Tension was enacted by the neo-fascists with a wider coalition of anti-communist forces, coupled with the possible involvement of the secret services in covering the identities of the Piazza Fontana bombers are possibilities that understandably leave many Italians confused. Eco feels the urge to criticise these political dynamics but also to strip down the mechanisms that make them work.

It emerges therefore from Eco's novels that authority is intimately linked to the groups who challenge it; here, authority is linked to heretics and terrorists. In *Il nome,* the line between sanctity and heresy is subtle and it is determined by the church according to the church's interests. The example in *Il nome* is that of Dolcino and San Francesco both preaching in favour of those excluded from society, with one of them willing to go against the system of the church and the other willing to bow to it in the hope of helping the excluded from within. The church identifies a threat in Dolcino and decides he is a heretic, while San Francesco is made into a saint because he accepts the rule of the church.

Eco sees the challenge to the monologic neither in carnivalesque freedom nor in mass revolution. Subversion is a recurring theme in *Il pendolo* and it is analysed through situations ranging from carnival to anti-fascism, the student protests of 1968, and terrorism. The characters of *Il pendolo* share scepticism about the revolution of 1968 and disappointment when it turned into terrorism. The fact that both protagonists of *Il pendolo* have some significant biographical connections to Eco tightens their own reaction to the events of contemporary Italy and Eco's position towards the same. Eco's insistence on giving carnival as an example of a failed revolution because it is accepted by the authority reflects the revolutionary nature of both the 1968 social movements and terrorism. In both

cases, the revolutionary acts of students and terrorists seem to fall into a broad plan dictated by the interests of the multinationals.

Eco's novels show how those in power are capable of absorbing subversion in order to reinforce their position in a delicate but fully conscious balance. As Bakhtin points out in relation to the Middle Ages, the unofficial coexists with the official; the unofficial does nothing that could really threaten this accepted balance. All the forces put into motion therefore respect of the interests of those in power. The dynamics of carnival and the diversion of attention are used to make sure this balance remains in place.

According to Eco, humour has the potential to threaten this balance; as he argues in his essay on Franti, it undermines the order from within. A revolution of the masses is not possible, according to Eco, as it is ultimately assimilated by the official order. It is the duty of the single individual to infiltrate the system and then learn how to ridicule it from within in order to show to the masses its weaknesses, its contradictions, and its true interests. The comic is represented in *Il nome* as an instrument of social control. However, William's humour turns him into a threatening challenger of the dogma of the church. His sense of humour coincides with his dialogical research for the real truth about the murders, as opposed to Bernardo's monologic desire to re-establish order.

A semiotician in the modern sense, William has much in common with his author. Understanding the sociopolitical dynamics makes both Eco and William disillusioned observers of society, but insiders nonetheless. William laughs about the Abbot's reliquaries but does nothing to save Salvatore, Remigio, and the girl from Bernardo. He accepts the decisions of the official order but criticises it in his individual private sphere. Representing the emperor's delegation he has the opportunity to oppose the church officially, in terms of theology. Eco expresses a strong feeling against ideologies and their rhetoric and he makes a firm assertion that one can be part of the system or agree with an

ideology but still be critical towards it. Eco's rebellion amounts to critical thinking and dialogue.

The image of revolution represented in *Il pendolo* also results in showing humour as a good tool for an effective rebellion. Humour defeats the Diabolicals through Belbo's last mockery and redeems him from a life of political laziness. He faces the movements of 1968 with the envy and anger of an outside observer. Like William, he is an intellectual who understands society and its dynamics and coexists alongside them, though he might disapprove. The only tool he uses to possibly challenge them is the coldness of his humour. Casaubon is a young graduate who might have been closer to the movements of 1968, but does not allow himself to get involved because of his sceptical attitude towards all ideologies.

The subversive element in *Il nome* is given a voice by the debate around laughter, an excuse, for Eco, to celebrate the power of dialogical encounters. Eco criticises the fact that many movements of the late 1960s may have been simply lived through as a great carnival, the way Remigio became alive through his participation in Dolcino's heresy. But there is more to this: the grotesque and carnival belong to a primal way of challenging authority. The Rabelaisian appeal to the liberation of the body through the enjoyment of food and sex is subversion; it is not, however, revolutionary. Eco values subversion because it opens the door to revolution, but carnival needs to be taken further for real change to happen.

In contrast, William's society reveals the iron rule of the church, its restrictions, its order, and its punishments. If the carnival in *Il nome* can be equated with the late-1960s movements, the regime of the church can be seen in the light of the atmosphere of the years of terrorism. William looks at carnivalesque laughter with a benevolent eye, because it carries the seeds of revolution, or at least of a reaction against an oppressive regime and a dialogical challenge to the monologic rule of the church. Banqueting and the lower body

are paradigms that help to draw a connection between these two extremes of carnival and repression, and to offer an understanding of how the interaction of the two can finally lead to a more consistent threat to the oppressive authority. Heresy is contained within the system of the church because the church needs it to establish its own rule. However, some heresies need to be abolished, like Dolcino's, because they get too close to being a threat. Even then, they can live on in the lives of supporters of earthly enjoyments, like Remigio or Salvatore. This resembles the persecution of laughter, which ran the risk of becoming too serious a threat during the Middle Ages, which is why the church fought hard to contain it before banishing it completely from official events. Although carnival and laughter in medieval society have some good potential, for William the real challenge to his society comes from within, with the irony of the intellectual whose voice is recognised and listened to, not dismissed like that of the fool.

In conclusion, whilst William, Belbo and Casaubon similarly reflect Eco's point of view on Italian society from the 1960s to 1980s, they represent different stages in Eco's thinking. Firstly, there is a significant gap of eight years between the two novels. Secondly, there is a consistent change of the political landscape: from the dark and violent Years of Lead to a relatively peaceful decade in the 1980s. The carnivalesque setting of William's story reflects the absurdity and the contradiction of Eco's contemporary society. It is evident that this carnivalesque setting somehow mirrors the full bodily and existential liberation of the late 1960s and 1970s, the stimulating political confrontation, the reforms, the sit-ins and other forms of protest in demand of a fairer and more egalitarian society. In addition, there is a stronger desire to participate politically within the debates in the public sphere and to contribute to bringing changes to a society that needs them. Moreover, protesters believed in the necessity of becoming more knowledgeable of the real world and critical in understanding its dynamics.

William strongly believes in the interpretation of signs and in the potential of philosophy and science. He is witty and merry, proud of his knowledge and his ability to understanding the world. Although his story was written during the darkest years of terrorism, he is a jovial character. In summary, however, he has to face his defeat and remains discomfited by his inability to protect Aristotle's book, or the library, from the devouring power of the church, which ultimately manages to decide what can reach posterity and what cannot. Belbo and Casaubon are, on the other hand, pessimistic characters throughout the novel. Belbo in particular lives with his guilt for living a life of political inactivity. Casaubon is characterised by his cold detachment and sceptical approach to all events and ideologies. As opposed to William, they both deal from the start with the disillusionment of social changes and political involvement. They are defeated from the start and at the end they are redeemed, due to their own personal reactions to their contemporary political events. William, alternatively, is positive at the start and disillusioned at the end.

The common line that connects William and Belbo is humour, and in both cases Eco suggests humour as a possible means of reacting against the impositions of an unjust society. Eco's disillusionment concerning the possibility of change leads him to reflect on his own position in society and on his own ability to bring about change. William and Belbo are intellectuals and like Eco they accept the society that surrounds them only so that they may be critical of it. Following this analysis of the first phase of Eco's criticism and the political critique given in *Il nome* and *Il pendolo*, Chapter Four will discuss the second phase of his criticism, which already begins in *Il pendolo* for some aspects, as it is characterised by an interest in using satire against intellectuals.

CHAPTER 4

ECO'S SATIRE OF INTELLECTUALS IN *IL PENDOLO DI FOUCAULT*, *L'ISOLA DEL GIORNO PRIMA* AND *BAUDOLINO*

4.1 Introduction

This chapter traces the evolution of Eco's criticism in his novels *Il pendolo di Foucault* (1988), *L'isola del giorno prima* (1996), and *Baudolino* (2000). These three novels make up the second phase in Eco's critical commentary made through his fiction. Eco's criticism in this phase is directed at intellectuals rather than the political events of the previous phase, as Chapter Three analysed. The previous chapter showed how *Il pendolo* engages with the contemporary political events surrounding terrorism, the Years of Lead and the Strategy of Tension. This chapter analyses a different aspect of the same novel: namely, its confrontation with contemporary theories of interpretation. From this angle, Eco's *Il pendolo* becomes critical of specific techniques of interpretation, which this chapter will discuss, by way of this novel's treatment of the grotesque body and the marketplace. *Il pendolo* marks a transition towards the second phase in the evolution of Eco's social criticism. Also, this chapter demonstrates that *L'isola* mocks, using the grotesque body, genre distinctions and the writers of popular fiction. Moreover, Eco's *Baudolino* ridicules historians while at the same time briefly referring to the political events of the time when the novel was written. This is especially noticeable in the context of the political party of the *Lega Nord*. The grotesque body and the Bakhtinian concept of heteroglossia are the instruments used here to bring Eco's criticism to light.

The chapter begins with an analysis of the context that surrounds Eco's criticism of intellectuals and continues with a discussion of the political perspective that finds its way back into *Baudolino*. The groups of intellectuals that attract Eco's criticism in his novels are defined and their main theories summarised. These groups are the deconstructionists, the postmodernists, and historians. The last two groups are closely interconnected because the figure of the historian is brought into discussion by the postmodernists. Both postmodernists and deconstructionists react to a previous tradition and reconsider the certainties of binary oppositions. They advocate on the behalf of the blurring of the boundaries between genres but also the distance between the self and the other. The positions of the major figure in deconstructionism, the French philosopher Jacques Derrida, are introduced, and his technique of interpretation is discussed.

Similarly, this section investigates what characterises postmodernist theory and in what way it challenges the figure of the historian. One of the authorities in the area of postmodernism and its critique of historiography is Linda Hutcheon, who, in her seminal text *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988), suggests a definition. Hutcheon clarifies what tradition postmodernism sets its task against and she analyses what its main points of action are against such a tradition. Finally, Hutcheon highlights that a major difference that distinguishes postmodernism from modernism is the attitude towards history.[1] This chapter shows what position postmodernism takes towards the past and its representation. Finally, this section introduces Umberto Bossi's *Lega Nord* party and the political context of Italy in the 1990s, the years when *L'isola* and *Baudolino* were written.

[1] Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York; London: Routledge, 1988), 4-11.

The three sections that follow (4.3, 4.4, 4.5) are dedicated to the textual analysis of the three novels in chronological order so that the evolution of Eco's social criticism can be followed. Section 4.3 illustrates how the grotesque body in *Il pendolo* is linked to Eco's theoretical work on literary criticism and interpretation. The novel parodies the concept of interpretation and the way interpretation can become grotesque and turn into a comical farce. This section investigates the ways in which Eco uses the motif of the grotesque body as an image of his notion of "aberrant" interpretation and prepares it for a final mocking. The last step in the ironical deconstruction of such an interpretation takes place via the paradigm of the marketplace within the broader parameter of folk culture. *Il pendolo* is characterised on the one hand by a serious tone because of the tension arising from contemporary events like terrorism, as the previous chapter has shown, and the meticulous historical detail about the Templars. On the other hand, it prepares the reader for a mockery of the entire concept of interpretation. This chapter analyses how *Il pendolo* is connected to Eco's theory on interpretation and how the novel leads to a critique of those who have different opinions on the same subject. It is shown here how Eco responds to the theories of other intellectuals in his fiction and how those theories differ from his own theoretical academic work. While Eco-the-scholar needs to remain objective and detached, Eco-the-novelist is free to use parody to make fun of his intellectual adversaries.

The section analysing *L'isola* (4.4) investigates the relationship between Eco's writing and postmodernism. This part points out how Eco's text is postmodern and what issues it confronts. Also, it shows how Eco's use of the grotesque helps to question the values of structuralist and modern traditions. The grotesque also means a confrontation with the concept of otherness and the definition of the self. Roberto, the

protagonist of this novel, is an insecure and lonely person with a strong imagination and a desire for drama, all of which stems from his passion for popular literature. He is the writer of the kind of popular fiction satirised by Eco that is placed here in relation to Eco's critical theory in *Apocalittici e Integrati* and *Il superuomo di massa*. This section shows how parody takes place and what specific aspects are mocked. Roberto's experience as a novelist is read through Bakhtin's theory on the author-hero relationship and the postmodern debates over the death of the author. More important, this section shows how the relation between self and the other revealed by the grotesque also suggests the postmodern notion of the erasure of the boundaries between neat structuralist distinctions. Here it is demonstrated how Eco reproduces this notion with his novel and how in doing so he parodies his protagonist both for being a novelist and an obsessed reader with too vivid an imagination.

The last part (4.5) is dedicated to the analysis of *Baudolino* in order to point out Eco's engagement with the concept of historical truth and historiography. It is the story of a liar and polyglot who is given responsibility, in Eco's fictional work, for the creation of a famous historical fake: the letter of the Prester John. Baudolino is a trickster-like character whose power to create chaos and disrupt the accepted order of things lies in his use of heteroglossia. This part evaluates how Baudolino's use of socially mixed languages threatens the stability of the court of Frederick Barbarossa from the inside. The grotesque body has another strong presence in *Baudolino* since the novel is about a journey to a fantastic land of monsters. Finally, this section analyses Baudolino as a character and describes his own monstrosity and his subversive role in society. *Baudolino* is argued to enable Eco to return to a criticism of the political class in Italy, which in this case is achieved in association with the paradigm of the grotesque body.

To summarise, this chapter traces the evolution of social criticism in Eco's novels from the 1980s through the 1990s. It points out the changes in Eco's approach to criticism, which is more cultural than political in this phase. It illustrates how his criticism can be unveiled by using the Bakhtinian categories of the grotesque body and the marketplace, and the notion of heteroglossia, to interpret Eco's fiction.

4.2 The Targets of Eco's Satire in *Il pendolo di Foucault, L'isola del giorno prima* and *Baudolino*

Before starting the textual analysis of Eco's social criticism in *Il pendolo*, *L'isola* and *Baudolino*, the context outlining the objects of Eco's social criticism needs to be set. The novels are analysed chronologically in the next three sections in order to better show how they relate to contemporary intellectual and political events. This set of Eco's novels covers a period of time dating roughly from the 1980s to the late 1990s but also carries clear influences from the two preceding decades. The purpose of the current section is to clarify the groups that Eco criticises with his three novels: the deconstructionists in *Il pendolo*; the postmodernists, through the figure of the popular fiction writer, in *L'isola*; and historians and *Lega Nord* in *Baudolino*.

Christopher Norris thinks deconstructionism is partly a reaction against the widespread structuralist tendency to domesticate objects of analysis by means of an objective textual structure. Deconstruction begins by rejecting the correspondence, established by structuralism, between mind, meaning and the concept of method which claims to unite them.[2] In addition, deconstruction crosses the line that could be

[2] Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2002), 1-3.

traced between the kind of close reading appropriate to a literary text and the techniques used to understand the subtler implications of critical language. According to Derrida, literary works have always been regarded as uniquely privileged because of a deep mistrust that pervades Western attitudes towards language.[3] The deconstructionist reading of literary texts refuses to acknowledge the primal authority attached to the literary work or to place criticism at a respectful distance. The interpretative style of deconstruction actively invades the text and draws into question all the traditional attributes of literary meaning.[4]

Terry Eagleton notes that Derrida defines as "metaphysical" any thought-system that depends on an unassailable foundation and creates the first principle upon which a whole hierarchy of meanings may be constructed. According to Eagleton, Derrida does not suggest that we free ourselves from these first principles, which are deeply rooted in our history, but argues that they can be deconstructed and shown to be the products of a particular system "rather than what props it up from the outside."[5] These first principles are commonly defined by what they exclude and thus answer to the "binary opposition" that was at the centre of structuralism. In a male-dominated society, man is the founding principle whereas woman is the excluded opposite, the defective version of the first male principle. Although deconstruction does not deny this distinction, it points out how man parasitically depends on the exclusion of woman to define his own self and that, consequently, borders are not always so definitive and insurmountable. Deconstruction tries to show how the binary oppositions characteristic of structuralism are sometimes forced to collapse or to banish certain uncomfortable details to the text's margins. Derridas's typical method of analysis is to find an apparently insignificant piece of information in the text, such

[3] Ibid., 22-3.
[4] Ibid., 24.
[5] Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 132.

as a recurrent minor term or a casual allusion, and work through it to the point that it threatens to dismantle the oppositions which govern the text as a whole.[6] The term deconstruction recalls "destruction" which seems to be the aim of its interpretative activity. Once the act of deconstructing a text succeeds in dismantling its binary oppositions, what remains are the fragments of its narration deprived of the purpose of their logic glue.

The next two groups of intellectuals, the postmodernists and the historians, are closely interrelated. Linda Hutcheon points out that postmodernism is a contradictory phenomenon that installs the very concepts it challenges into all the fields it is applied to. Postmodernism is a cultural phenomenon that is "fundamentally contradictory, resolutely historical, and inescapably political."[7] Postmodernism seeks to assert difference and it challenges, therefore, the increasing uniformisation of mass culture and the idea of homogenous identity but without rejecting it. Hutcheon points out that postmodern differences are always multiple and provisional. Moreover, postmodern culture has a conflicted relationship with what is normally identified as liberal humanist culture which postmodernism contests from within this culture's own criteria.[8] In its contradictions, postmodernist art (e.g., Brecht's plays) has the potential to provoke change from within because the world can be repaired. However, all of the repairs would be human constructs and would therefore be comforting and illusory at the same time. Hutcheon connects this contradiction with a possible inheritance of the 1960s belief that challenging and questioning the status quo are a positive values. More important, the political, social, and intellectual experience of the 1960s helped

[6] Ibid., 5.
[7] Hutcheon, *Poetics of Postmodernism*, 3.
[8] Ibid., 6.

make possible the postmodern "writing-as-experience-of-limits:"[9] the limits of language, subjectivity, and sexual identity.[10]

Another key characteristic of the postmodern is that it transgresses all previously accepted limits such as those of art and genres. Hutcheon argues that postmodernism does not stop at breaking down the borders among literary genres: it also implies a radical crossing of the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction, between art and life.[11] Postmodernist texts have a tendency to be parodic in their intertextual connection with the genre conventions. Thus Hutcheon argues that "parody is a perfect postmodern form, in some senses, for it paradoxically incorporates and challenges what it parodies."[12]

Finally, as Hutcheon highlights, the postmodern is characterised by its inquiry into the very nature of subjectivity and its subsequent challenge of the traditional notions of perspective. The perceiving subject is no longer identified with a coherent entity capable of generating meaning. Narrators in fiction become multiple and hard to locate (as in D.M. Thomas's *The White Hotel*) or find themselves challenging their own apparent omniscience (as in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*).[13] This also results in a reconsideration of the value of the margins when the centre is no longer able to hold its privileged position. It also implies that "our culture is not really the homogenous monolith (that is middle class, male, heterosexual, white, western) we might have assumed."[14] With these contrasting characteristics, the postmodern challenges, parodies, and fragments the traditional canons of art, but without losing sight of its duty towards contemporary social issues.

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[9] Hutcheon quotes Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art.* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), 137.
[10] Hutcheon, *Poetics of Postmodernism*, 7-8.
[11] Ibid., 9-10.
[12] Ibid., 11.
[13] Ibid., 11.
[14] Ibid., 12.

The contradictions of the postmodern manifest themselves in the important postmodern concept of the "presence of the past," as Hutcheon points out.[15] This concept helps in illustrating the last group of intellectuals which Eco satirises, the historians. The postmodern attitude towards the past consists of a critical revisiting of "an ironic dialogue with the past of both art and society,"[16] and irony is indeed one of the main aspects of postmodernism. Hutcheon defines as "historiographic metafiction" those novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet which paradoxically also incorporate historical events and characters. Whereas in most of the critical work on postmodernism the main focus is on narrative, whether in literature, history, or theory, with historiographic metafiction all three of these domains are merged. The rethinking and rewording of the past takes place through the theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs. According to Hutcheon, the characteristic contradiction which defines postmodernism is that it is both metafictionally self-reflexive and yet able to speak to us about the real political and historical realities.[17]

Furthermore, Hutcheon describes history as an issue inevitably tied up with challenged cultural and social assumptions. She opposes the postmodernists' critical rediscovery of history to the ahistorical formalism and aestheticism, which in her view characterise the modernist period. The postmodern writing of history teaches us that both literature and history are discourses and systems of signification that we use to deal with the past. While postmodernism re-establishes the historical context as relevant, it also problematizes the very notion of historical knowledge.[18] According to Hutcheon, postmodernism undermines all assumptions of objectivity, neutrality and

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[15] Ibid., 4.
[16] Ibid., 4.
[17] Ibid., 5.
[18] Ibid., 87-9.

impersonality claimed by historical narration. Historiography is a method of selecting and writing the realities of a past which is an object of study in the present. The postmodern demonstrates a desire to deal with the problematic nature of the relationship between history-writing and narrativisation (and, by extension, fictionalisation).[19]

Eco, a theorist of the postmodern as well as a novelist, argues that there are three ways of writing about the past: the romance, the adventurous tale, and the historical novel. *Il nome* is written as a historical novel since it not only identifies in the past the causes of subsequent facts, but also traces the process that led those causes to result in certain specific effects.[20] He further argues that the postmodernist reply to modernism is to revisit history with irony because the past cannot be destroyed.[21] For Eco, parody is a means of questioning the past rather than destroying it. In Hutcheon's theory, irony challenges the conventional forms of fiction and historiography through the acknowledgement of their inescapable textuality. The authority of any act of writing is questioned since the discourse of both history and fiction is located within an "ever-expanding intertextual network that mocks any notion of either single origin or simple causality."[22]

Finally, the last group Eco satirises is the *Lega Nord*, a separatist Italian party. Italy used to be divided between a poor south, a largely agricultural centre and a richer north with a triangle of intense industrialisation in the north-west based in the three major cities of Milan, Turin and Genoa. From the 1960s on, the north was the main beneficiary of a boom in production and investment, and in the north-east this

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[19] Ibid., 91-3.
[20] Eco, *Postille*, 531-2.
[21] Ibid., 530.
[22] Hutcheon, *Poetics of Postmodernism*, 129.

was especially visible in the area of family-owned businesses.[23] The *Lega* presented itself to elections for the first time in 1985 with the name of *Lega Autonoma Lombarda*, taking 2.5 percent of votes cast in the wealthy Alpine province of Varese. Its electoral symbol was the image of a medieval warrior with a drawn sword superimposed over an outline map of Lombardy. The warrior was Alberto da Giussano, a twelfth-century knight who in 1167 led an army drawn from the city-states of northern Italy against the invading forces of Frederick Barbarossa, the Holy Roman Emperor from 1152 to 1190. The *Lega* promised to revitalize Lombard culture, history and language, demanded that preferences were to be given to Lombards in healthcare, housing, education and jobs, and asked to be given a special constitutional status normally reserved for regions with a substantial non-Italian minority, such as Trentino-Alto Adige, the Val D'Aosta and Friuli-Venezia Giulia.[24]

In 1987, the *Lega* obtained enough votes to send Umberto Bossi, one of the *Lega*'s most skilled representatives, to the Senate, and Giuseppe Leoni, one of Bossi's oldest friends, to the Chamber of Deputies. Bossi's power as a propagandist was that he attacked the nature of the Italian state concentrating on the following main themes: namely, that the small businesses and manufacturing industry in northern Italy were endangered by the misgovernment of Italy; and that the south of Italy, which had stagnated economically for a number of reasons, was a burden unfairly given to the north, whose taxes were sent straight to the south and—in *Lega*'s propaganda—went directly into the pockets of the Mafia. The party's view was that the Italian political élite acted like corrupted gangsters and needed to be swept away for a fresh start. *Lega* activists also campaigned against immigration, with tones that at times bordered on discrimination, if not outright racism: they

[23] Anna Cento Bull and Mark Gilbert, *The Lega Nord and the Northern Question in Italian Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 2.
[24] Ibid., 9.

maintained, for example, that Italy was being forced into a multicultural society against the will of its citizens by mass immigration from Maghreb countries and (after 1989) Albania.[25] According to the interpretation of *Lega Nord*, the Italian government failed to undertake a systematic approach to manage the demand created by the Italian economy for migrant labour and allowed a series of amnesties that legalised the entry of thousands of migrants until after 1990 when, faced with the collapse of the Albanian economy and the prospect of hundreds of thousands of new migrants, Italy closed the door to new migration. To celebrate a successful 4.4 percent of the national vote at the elections of 1990, the *Lega* organised a mass rally of its members and supporters at Pontida, a small town where the original *Lega Lombarda* had sworn an oath of fidelity to the struggle against the Holy Roman Empire.[26]

In the early 1990s Italian politics collapsed under the so-called "clean hands" scandal. The Christian Deomocrat-Socialist government in place was defeated in the general elections of 1992 and then devastated by investigations into political wrongdoing which were carried out by teams of prosecutors in Milan and elsewhere. By the spring of 1993, hundreds of national and local politicians had been indicted for extortion, illegally financing political activity, corruption, and collusion with organised crime. The political figures who had dominated the political stage in the 1980s had lost all their legitimacy.[27] The *Lega* came out victorious from the collapse of Italian politics. As section 4.5 shows, *Baudolino* reflects the concerns of fragmentation and grotesque renewal that characterise this period in Italian politics.

Following this introduction of the groups that are satirised in Eco's *Il pendolo*, *L'isola* and *Baudolino*, the next sections engage with a textual analysis of the novels to define the nature of Eco's criticism and satire. In order to do so, attention is

[25] Ibid., 13.
[26] Ibid., 18-21.
[27] Ibid., 26.

focused on the way these groups of intellectuals, and the *Lega Nord*, are satirised through the paradigms of the grotesque body and the marketplace in the context also of carnival, folk culture and heteroglossia.

4.3 The Grotesque and Folk Culture: Ridiculing of the Deconstructionists in *Il Pendolo di Foucault*

Il pendolo is connected to Bakhtin's theory mainly through two of the selected Rabelaisian paradigms: the grotesque body and the marketplace. In addition, it confronts the broader notion of folk culture, described in Chapter Two as the wisdom of the lower classes which is motivated by a necessity of self-preservation in a context of oppression enacted by the authority in power. These Bakhtinian elements appear in the story in connection with the Diabolicals' interpretation of a mysterious text by a certain Ingolf, the three protagonists' Plan, and the answer given to the Diabolicals' interpretation and the Plan by Lia, Casaubon's last girlfriend. Bakhtin's notions of the grotesque body, the marketplace and folk culture intersect in Eco's reflections on textual interpretation and result in his mockery of deconstructionist criticism and hermetic theory. Eco's *Il pendolo*, a "critifictional novel,"[28] was written around the same time as *Semiotica e filosofia del linguaggio* (1984) and *I limiti dell'interpretazone* (1990), and to some extent uses fiction as a platform for the theoretical reflections on interpretation and deconstruction found in those critical works.

[28] Bouchard, "The Case," 69. See Chapter 1.3.

The interpretation of texts and its forced deviations are central themes of the novel.[29] Belbo, Casaubon, and Diotallevi are first introduced to the Templars' story by Colonnello Ardenti, a fascist-sympathising ex-soldier who brings them Ingolf's mysterious text. Ardenti interprets the message as a confirmation of the secret existence of the Templars, who have continued to meet every 120 years to bequeath a plan for controlling Earth's telluric energies until technology would be ready for it. Encouraged by Ardenti, who mysteriously disappears, the three decide to start their intellectual game and invent their own mocking interpretation based on their research on the story of the Templars.[30]

For Eco, as for Bakhtin, texts are dialogical. As Eco argues in *Lector in Fabula*, the reader's cooperation is a necessary element for a text which would otherwise remain silent. After Eco became a novelist, his position towards textual openness and cooperation become more moderate. While *Opera aperta* is provocative and drastically suggests that all works are open and engages with the neo-avant-garde, Eco's later works on interpretation go back on that idea. Eco's idea of a "lector" (i.e. a reader) contributing to the formation of meaning in narrative texts is the outcome of

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[29] An example of how the author cannot control or foresee all the connections the readers may notice is Casaubon's name. In *Confessions of a Young Novelist* (2011) Eco explains how he chose the name thinking of Isaac Casaubon, a philologist who demonstrated in 1614 that the *Corpus Hermeticum* was a forgery. Before publishing his novel, Eco found out that Casaubon is also a character in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*. In Chapter 10, Eco eliminates the allusion having Casaubon admitting that he has the same name as Eliot's character as well as that of a Renaissance philologist: "but we are not related" (Eco, *Foucault's*, 63) he concludes ("ma non siamo parenti," Eco, *Il pendolo*, 72). Umberto Eco, *Confessions of a Young Novelist* (Cambridge: Massachusetts; London: Harvard University Press, 2011), 51-2. Whereas in this case Eco is able to leave a message to the reader that would disambiguate Casaubon's name, he laments some frustration for the connection that "many smart readers" have made between *Foucault's Pendulum* and Michel Foucault and his writings on the paradigm of similarity. The Foucault of the novel is not Michel but Léon, the inventor of the pendulum. Eco remarks bitterly that he did not approve the connection between the title of his novel and Michel Foucault: "it sounds like a joke, and not a clever one. [...] maybe I am responsible for a superficial joke; maybe the joke is not that superficial. I do not know. By now, the whole affair is out of my control." Eco, *Confessions*, 52-3.

[30] "Noi - i sardonici - volevamo giocare a rimpiattino coi diabolici mostrandogli che se, complotto cosmico aveva da esserci, noi sapevamo inventarne uno che più cosmico non ce n'è." Eco, *Il pendolo*, 464.

"We, the sardonic, insisted on playing games with the Diabolicals, on showing them that if there had to be a cosmic plot, we could invent the most cosmic of all." Eco, *Foucault's*, 438.

his semiotic theory of knowledge, as influenced by Peirce. Peirce's notion of unlimited semiosis reminds us of the hermetic drift of *Il pendolo* which is theoretically analysed in *I limiti dell'interpretazione* (1990) and *Interpretation and Overinterpretation* (1992). In those works, Eco stresses that, although interpretation has a potentially unlimited character, that does not justify it being used for its own sake. Every work has an *intentio operis*, an *intentio auctoris* and an *intentio lectoris* (the intention of the work, the author, and the reader). Eco's defence of the *intentio operis* does not imply excluding the reader's collaboration. It rather shows how a pre-textual unscrupulous reading of a text can result in an unlimited semiosis or drift.[31] Eco points out with his metaphor that deconstructive interpretations push themselves too far and forget that their objective is to gain a better understanding of a text. He considers a text dialogical and therefore makes clear that the voice of the text must also be listened to in order to understand it, whereas the deconstructionists take total control of the text and thus monologise it by allowing only their voices to be heard.

Hermetic semiosis, like Peirce's unlimited semiosis, moves from one sign to another without end. The key difference with Peirce is that for him a sign is something that stands for something else, while in hermetic semiosis the sign is something that points to a different meaning.[32] The Greek god Hermes symbolises the idea of eternal metamorphosis and the concept of identity and non-contradiction. The image carries the idea of universal resemblance and interconnection between ideas, which is often repeated in *Il pendolo*. There is, however, a centre: the initiated secret. The final secret of the hermetic initiation is that everything is a secret and a plot.

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[31] Umberto Eco, *I limiti dell'interpretazione* (Milan: Bompiani, 1990), 38.
[32] Ibid., 327.

There is therefore an underlying element of conspiracy and paranoia in hermetic semiosis.[33]

The Diabolicals' main characteristic is indeed a paranoia that is triggered by their fantastic interpretations, as will be shown later. This reference to paranoid associations reflects the paranoia of the 1970s in Italy. The previous chapter has illustrated that *Il pendolo* is a novel that marks Eco's transition from a political phase to a more intellectual one, but its transitional nature also causes a meeting of the two phases. The novel investigates the nature of revolution, political commitment, and terrorism, but these only form a background to the story of the Diabolicals and the creation of the Templars' Plan. However, paranoia in the novel cannot simply be attributed to the Diabolicals—it also comes from the political terrorism of the late 1970s and the widespread suspicion of conspiracy connected to the Strategy of Tension. There was on the one hand the belief that the secret services were involved with the terrorists. On the other hand, people had to watch out for the neo-fascist right and the armed left as much as from the mysterious P2 (Propaganda 2) Masonic lodge, which was penetrating the highest levels of the government and acting secretly to their own advantage. People lived the "syndrome of the secret" every time they opened their newspapers or switched on the television.[34] In other words, they were tormented by the idea that their state was involved in plots that allowed few privileged people to become rich at the expense of the broad majority of citizens.

Chapter Five analyses the role of the secret services and P2 in Italy as it becomes more relevant in Eco's later novels. For the moment, what needs to be pointed out is how *Il pendolo* shows that this paranoia can also extend to literary interpretation. According to Eco, deconstruction, like hermetic theory, makes the fundamental

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[33] Ibid., 43-50.
[34] Caesar, *Umberto Eco*, 146.

mistake of separating the utterance from its context. There can be no fixed point, like Foucault's pendulum, because meaning is ineffable and ever-moving. Both hermeticists and deconstructionists founded their theories on the misrecognition of a fundamental semantic concept: words might be "paradigmatically open to infinite meanings but syntagmatically, that is textually, open only to the indefinite, by no means infinite, interpretations allowed by the context."[35] Deconstruction practices move the responsibility fully to the receiver and leave him/her with the infinite power of free interpretation.[36] They, like Eco and Bakhtin, claim that no final fixed truth can be established. However, for Eco, the absence of a final truth implies not that the reader should chose freely from any of the infinite possible options but rather that he should concentrate on motivating the choice through textual evidence. Eco's view of interpretation is positive because it helps the text develop within the limits of its intention where possible, while deconstructionism risks breaking the text into incoherent units of meaning only to show the many ways these can be recombined.

Eco historicises deconstruction and then disputes it on grounds of a faulty premise about the nature of speech acts.[37] In *Il pendolo*, Ardenti represents both the hermeticists and the deconstructionists. Ignoring the syntagmatic tie of the word to the message, he interprets a text according to his own pre-designed plan. Yet, Eco does not discourage the active intervention of the reader as long as it moves along concrete textual evidence, as a good investigator would do. As he argues in *Lector in Fabula*, since our human understanding is always mediated by our senses, and therefore never absolutely clear, we are forced to complete it by formulating conjectures or abductions based on physical perceptions. These conjectures involve creative skills and lead the reader to make new connections and produce new

[35] Umberto Eco, *Limits of Intepretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 21.
[36] Eco, *I limiti*, 25.
[37] Bouchard, "The Case," 74.

meaning. As a result, the reader is both the receiver and generator of knowledge. *Lector in fabula* places the reader actively inside the text, in charge of those inferences and assumptions necessary for the story to achieve meaning. This reader is not the empirical one but the Model Reader. Eco defines a text as a lazy machine, full of unsaid things, information gaps, and blank spaces that the author leaves for the reader to fill in. Without the action of the addressee a text remains incomplete.[38]

The actualisation of a text therefore depends on the postulated cooperation of the reader. In order to generate a text, one also needs to create a strategy, as in war or in a chess game, the one difference being that the author usually wants his counterpart to win. An author refers to a series of abilities, presuming that the reader refers to the same acting interpretatively where the author moved generatively. The author both foresees and institutes the competence of the model reader, who, in the end, is a textual strategy, the system of instructions offered by the text. Through certain choices—such as language, the encyclopaedia, or cultural references, style, vocabulary and genre—the author also selects his/her reader.[39] However, where many interpretations are possible, the author will try to get them to reinforce or echo—but not exclude—each other.

When Eco defines the text as "nothing else but the semantic-pragmatic production of its own Model Reader,"[40] he also stresses the importance of limits and necessary choices, thus returning on the distinction between "use" and "interpretation." He distinguishes between the free use of a text as an imaginative stimulus and the interpretation of an open text.[41] A text is the strategy constituting the universe of its legitimisable interpretations. The empirical reader can decide how

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[38] Umberto Eco, *Lector in fabula* (Milan: Bompiani, 1979/2002), 52.
[39] Ibid., 55-6.
[40] Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader*, (London: Hutchinson, 1981), 10. Eco's capital letters.
[41] Farronato, *Eco's Chaosmos*, 71.

much to broaden this universe by means of unlimited semiosis and whether to pursue the semiosis or the interpretation of the text, which is the empirical reader's choice. The failure of the reader to comply with the *intentio operis* and the *intentio auctoris* is defined by Eco as an "aberrant" decoding, which uses a background of codes different from those applied by the author.[42] The aberrant decoding distorts the universe created by the author because it reads it through a different code. The term "aberrant" recalls a deviation from normality and in this way, through Foucault,[43] it connects Eco with Bakhtin. The monster is a deviation from normality. Therefore, an interpretation that deviates from the norms encrypted in the text by the author is monstrous, according to Eco. In other words, Eco thinks an interpretation is aberrant when it goes against the author's will and uses the text for its own purposes rather than for interpretation. It is significant that this idea grew in Eco after he became a novelist, while before he was more inclined towards free interpretation.

As a result, the aberrant decoding produced by the Diabolicals may be seen in the light of the Rabelaisian paradigm of the grotesque body. An example is the druidic rite in which the three protagonists and Agliè participate. It is a particularly mixed experience of inebriation and loss of rational behaviour caused by a hallucinatory drink. They breathe in vapours exhaled from the earth that smell of

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[42] Eco, *Trattato*, 198.

[43] Foucault observes how abnormality is destined to confinement. Stallybrass and White point out that, for Foucault, strong forms of functional purity led by the eighteenth century in England to the age of institutionalisation and therefore to the birth of asylums, hospitals, schools, barracks, prisons, insurance and finance houses. As Foucault suggests, these institutions embody and assure the maintenance of classical bourgeois reason. Foucault also argues that the "outsiders-who-make-the-insiders-insiders" such as for instance the mad, the criminal, the sick, and the sexually transgressive are identified by the dominant culture with the grotesque body. The marginal is grotesque from the perspective of the classical body. Stallybrass and White, *The Politics*, 22-3.
Foucault argues that the bourgeois revolution of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century was characterised by "the invention of a new technology of power whose essential elements were the disciplines" (Michel Foucault, *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France 1974-1975*, ed. Valerio Marchetti and Antonella Salomoni, trans. Graham Burchell (London; New York: Verso, 2003), 88). In this historical moment psychiatric power focussed on illness within the mental asylum "to exercise a general jusrisdiction, both within and outside the asylum, not over madness, but over the abnormal and all abnormal conduct" (Ibid., 134).

dung, humus, mud, and menstrual blood.[44] Like Adso, who dreamt of the *Coena* in *Il nome*, Casaubon remembers the ceremony as a vision where nothing and nobody is closed. In the dream, everything mixes with everything else, moving from a wedding banquet into a crypt. The people in the wedding are decapitated, but in the crypt they are reborn from the ashes of a bird. They are miniature men and women growing out of horse manure and representing the rebirth of man through passion and death.[45] This image recalls an orgiastic view of carnival where the bodies lose their individual nature to be united in the grotesque body of all people, as Bakhtin theorises. In the same way as in the rite of the carnival, the druidic ceremony represented by Eco connects death with life in the act of the dying characters that are reborn from the ashes of a bird.

Belbo, Casaubon, and Diotallevi's Plan is itself monstrous. The three create something that is not natural, a Golem that turns against them.[46] The monstrosity of the lie they produce to mock the Diabolicals is paralleled by this image of the Golem. Giving life to something so unnatural leads to their destruction. Diotallevi gets cancer while they are writing the Plan, which seems to be one of the destructive effects of their monstrous creation. When Belbo visits him in hospital, his skin is almost transparent, with no real limits between the inside and the outside, his bowels showing under the thin skin on his belly. According to Diotallevi, his illness is the punishment for having created the Plan. Using the literature of the occult, they exposed themselves to its infectious nature.[47] Diotallevi explains that they have

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[44] It is interesting to see how Eco's treats the alchemic discourse in *I Limiti*. Eco discusses the paradoxical nature of the alchemic discourse, which talks endlessly about only one thing. This thing is the secret which is always named but never revealed. In other words, the alchemic discourse mentions continuously only itself. Eco, *I limiti*, 71-86.

[45] Eco, *Il pendolo*, 360-8.

[46] Eco, *Il pendolo*, 599.

[47] Victoria V. Vernon, "The Demonics of (True) Belief: Treacherous Texts, Blasphemous Interpretations and Murderous Readers," in *Umberto Eco*, vol. 3, eds. M. Gane and N. Gane, 48.

sinned against the word because they have mocked it. As a result of defying the truth of the written word they have altered the world and by altering the world they have altered the body. He points out that they have created a Golem out of derision of the Diabolicals' texts. The reason why his body is out of control is that *they* have gone out of control, ignoring the rules of the world. The cells of Diotallevi's body have been convinced by his brain that there are no rules and they acted accordingly.[48] In other words, a monstrous textual interpretation can result in confusing the natural laws that rule outside the text. In Eco's representation, an aberrant interpretation is so disastrous that it causes the death of all three protagonists.

The answer to the madness of the Diabolicals' grotesque interpretation of Belbo, Casaubon and Diotallevi's Plan is, on the one hand, Belbo's humour, as shown by Chapter Three. On the other hand, the "aberrant" and thus unnatural nature of the Diabolicals' interpretation calls for an answer that is embedded with the spontaneity rooted within the Bakhtinian concept of folk culture. The latter is empowered by the use of laughter as a response to the seriousness of monologic rule. It brings back to the lower earthly level that which has raised itself unjustly to a pompous level: in this case, the Diabolicals' reading of the Templars' story. Casaubon's last girlfriend Lia is the representative of this response. Throughout the novel, she represents the down-to-earth wisdom of the people: she is the one who realises first how the Plan is eating into Casaubon and transforming from a game into a dangerous obsession. She reads his work about the Diabolicals and says simply that everything the Diabolicals may argue is already in her body: belly, hips, thighs and forehead. Hers is a "serene wisdom that illuminate[s] her and [gives] her a matriarchal authority."[49] Lia's wisdom

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[48] Eco, *Il pendolo*, 597-600. Eco, *Foucault's*, 564-7.
[49] Eco, *Foucault's*, 362.
"Una saggezza pacata la illuminava di autorità matriarcale." Eco, *Il pendolo*, 382.

goes through the concrete level of the body, which has a deeply positive character as in Bakhtin.

Lia argues in favour of the body and against the archetypes over which the interpretations of the Diabolicals feed. For instance, she explains the positive charge of the underworld because it reproduces a mother's womb. The sun is good because it makes the body healthy but also because it comes back every day. Everything that comes back is good. The circle is the handiest shape for celebrating a rite or for the crowd in a marketplace surrounding a show. The number three is magic because it represents union between man and woman which gives life to a third element.[50] Lia matches the pomposity of the Plan with popular wisdom. Eco shows how even the highest and most complicated intellectual hypothesis can be read in simple terms of bodily life and experience. He acts thus similarly to Bakhtin who reads in Rabelais's works a major attempt at debasing the official culture of the Middle Ages through the notion of the grotesque body.

In addition, Lia tightens the link between the monstrosity of the Plan and the Rabelaisian paradigm of the marketplace, which is also closely connected to the grotesque body as it constitutes the place where monsters and *diableries* are shown. Lia calls the Plan a "nasty joke" and demonstrates that Ingolf's text is nothing but a merchant's shopping list. The text around which the whole diabolical conspiracy evolves is not a Templar plan but rather Ingolf's joke. Ardenti then takes the joke for real and ends up with a monstrously aberrant interpretation. Lia reads Ingolf's second text, a sort of demonical litany, using, like Ardenti, Tritermio's coding wheel. She demonstrates that Ardenti's interpretation, "the six invisibles separated in six bands," is only one of the possibilities, the one that appears on the outer level of the wheel

[50] Eco, *Foucault's*, 362-4. Eco, *Il pendolo*, 382-4.

while the inner level says: "Shit, I'm sick of this hermetic writing."[51] Using only her common sense, Lia destroys Casaubon's complicated conjectures and proves that they are not the inventors of the joke. Ingolf was joking too, except Ardenti took him for real. She manages to bring the Plan down to its mundane origins. Unfortunately, Lia's revelation arrives too late because Belbo has already told Agliè about the Plan. The game may be over and the object of the quest revealed as non-existent, but the chase is still on.[52]

The downward carnivalesque and uncrowning movement represented in *Il pendolo* reflects Eco's will to discuss contemporary culture. As a committed intellectual, his strongest weapon is a critical analysis of society that dismantles what is considered sacred and demonstrates that it, like everything else, belongs to the human experience. Through *Il pendolo* Eco shows how the highest of the intellectual vanities can be overthrown by common sense and how its pompousness can be uncrowned even by the lowest members of society. The Diabolicals' masquerade is shown for what it really is: a ridiculous conjecture spread over decades by a group of fanatics.

4.4 Postmodernism and the Erasure of Boundaries Between Fiction and Reality in *L'isola del giorno prima*

L'isola (1994) is set in the seventeenth century during a period of new science and discoveries. The novel investigates issues that were part of the intellectual debates of the time such as the measuring of longitude, the *punto fijo*, the existence of

[51] Eco, *Foucault's*, 536-40.
"[M]erde i'en ai marre de cette steganographie." Eco, *Il pendolo*, 565-71.
[52] Vernon, "Demonics," 51.

the void or of particles, the geocentric model of the universe, and possibility of the existence of parallel worlds. The plot, itself very simple, is complicated only by means of the narrative flashbacks of its protagonist Roberto De La Griva, the heir of the Pozzo di San Patrizio family, whose lands lie on the border of the territories of Alessandria, which at the time was under Spanish rule. Roberto survives the shipwreck of a Dutch vessel called *Amarilli* and lands on a deserted ship, the *Daphne*, anchored within view of an island in the South Pacific. Roberto cannot reach the island because there are no lifeboats on the ship or tools to build one, and he cannot swim. In the solitude of the ship he recalls the events which led him there, until he meets Father Caspar, the mysterious inhabitant of the equally mysteriously abandoned *Daphne*. They share the secret of their missions: Roberto is a spy who was sent to the *Amarilli* by Cardinal Mazarin to discover the secret of calculating longitude measurement and Father Caspar is a Jesuit scientist who is trying to solve the same mystery.[53]

The story is told by an anonymous narrator who reconstructs Roberto's annotations, memories, love letters, and also an attempted novel that he writes while on the *Daphne*. *L'isola* discusses the notions of alterity (i.e. the act of confrontation with the other which causes a questioning of the self) and genre definition and thus engages with the questions of binary oppositions and boundaries, as introduced in section 4.2. Bakhtin also finds that the erasure of boundaries is essential for the grotesque body, which loses the individuality of its cavities and branches in the union with other bodies. *L'isola* shows that the postmodern questions—of self-definition, the distinctions between art and life, truth and falsity—are mocked by the Rabelaisian

[53] Umberto Eco, *L'isola del giorno prima* (Milan: Bompiani, 1994/2003), 235.

bodily grotesque and those questions point to a parody of genre distinction and of the popular fiction novelist.

The solitude experienced by Roberto on board of the *Daphne* leads to two important actions. Firstly, it drives Roberto to create a fictional world where he can dream of overcoming his loneliness and boredom. Secondly, it forces him to confront a long-avoided problem: the fact that he does not relate well with other, or, in other words, that he is scared to face alterity without feeling a threat to his selfhood. Roberto, insecure and introverted, does not interact spontaneously with human society, starting with the distanced relationship he had with his father, old Pozzo. Old Pozzo is a heroic and fearless man who died fighting in the siege of Casale by the Spanish during the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648). When old Pozzo dies, Roberto inherits his family's fortune but he does not feel he can match his father's standard so he goes to Paris to study and experience the city's social life; he is never able to fit in.

Alone on board of an abandoned ship that he cannot leave, Roberto is soon in danger of losing his wits. In the hope of mastering the chaos of his thoughts, he decides to write a novel. Roberto desperately attempts to escape his forced exile on the *Daphne* through the power of his imagination and by becoming the reader of his own story.[54] However, his attempts at becoming an author are grotesque and comical. Through this character, Eco parodies the author of popular fiction, whom he theorises about in *Apocalittici e integrati* and *Il superuomo di massa*. Chapter Two pointed out how Eco identifies two key characteristics of popular fiction: it pleases its readers and allows them an escape from a life of mediocrity. Chronologically, Eco overlaps the seventeenth-century baroque novel with the popular novel of the eighteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries, which he theorises about in *Il superuomo*. Eco engages with

[54] Ibid., 341.

the philosophical debates that were discussed in the seventeenth century about God and scientific discoveries. He uses a typical device from baroque literature, using a "double," who he introduces in the novel as Roberto's imaginary evil brother Ferrante. Eco explains in an essay entitled "How I Write" that he introduced a double for Roberto in conformity to the spirit of the seventeenth-century novel. [55] However, he allows Roberto to become a modern popular fiction writer and thus shifts the debate back to one of his main interests, popular fiction.

The way Eco parodies such popular literature is by reversing the role of the author as creator and of the character as passive creation. Roberto writes a novel about his love, Lilia, but his evil brother bursts into the novel against his will. Since his father refers to him as his firstborn—though Roberto is apparently an only child—Roberto starts developing an obsession for a rejected evil twin brother named Ferrante, who soon turns into the cause of all misfortunes in his life.[56] Although Roberto believes in Ferrante's existence, both the Ferrante and the Lilia acting in his novel are fictional characters. Chapter Two has pointed out how Bakhtin describes the author-hero relationship in the polyphonic novel. Following Bakhtin's theory, Roberto's relationship with his character is complicated both by Roberto's necessity of his double to give a sense to Roberto's own self and by the autonomy Ferrante acquires while Roberto's authorial voice loses control of his creation. Despite Roberto's attempt to bend Ferrante to his authorial will by punishing him in several different ways, Ferrante acts freely against Roberto. The more Roberto proceeds in his novel writing, the less he can control Ferrante's actions and thus becomes frustrated and angry at his own creation. Roberto is angry also because Ferrante enjoys what he cannot: Ferrante has the opportunity to enjoy the love of Roberto's

[55] Umberto Eco, "How I Write," in *Illuminating Eco: on the Boundaries of Interpretation*, eds. Charlotte Ross and Rochelle Sibley (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 187.
[56] Eco, *L'isola*, 25.

dreams[57] and to tell Lilia all Roberto ever wrote for her and also what he never dared to say.[58]

This rebellion of the character against the author is a parodical approach to literary theory debates discussed by intellectuals, for example in Barthes's "The Death of the Author" (1967). According to Barthes, writing destroys every voice and succeeds in complete neutrality, whereas the concept of the "Author" is nothing but the tool used by the critic to interpret a text.[59] Barthes argues that, linguistically, the author is "never more than the instance writing."[60] In other words, for Barthes the author and his writing coincide because the text is a fully independent entity of its own whose existence is not preceded by that of the author but rather fused with it: "the modern scriptor is born simultaneously with the text."[61] A text coming into being is not an act of creation but rather an act of imitation, since no writing can be original.[62] Finally, Barthes concludes that the reader is the only place where the multiplicity of texts coming from various cultures meets. But for the reader to be able to take his role, the author must be declared dead.[63] Like Eco, Barthes recognises the fundamental role of the reader but he does not believe in an interaction between reader and text that maintains the *intentio operis* and the *intentio autoris*. For Barthes, there is no intention beyond the text apart from the universe of the already-written, which a reader can perceive only if the author disappears from the picture.

In Eco's novel, the author is not dead, but he is powerless and tormented by the his character's lack of discipline. For this reason, Eco's *L'isola* engages with

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[57] Ibid., 415.
[58] Ibid., 355.
[59] Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), 142, 147. The capital "A" in Author is Barthes's.
[60] Ibid., 145.
[61] Ibid., 145.
[62] Ibid., 146.
[63] Ibid., 148.

Bakhtin's idea of the author-hero relationship rather than with Barthes's death of the author. Chapter Two illustrated how Bakhtin found in Dostoevsky's novels that the author had lost his privileged position and the characters could freely unravel the expression of their consciousness. Roberto's hero—or anti-hero given that he is a villain—achieves so much freedom that he literally turns into an independent being. This pushes Roberto to lose the distinction between fiction and reality, eventually driving him to his death. Roberto depicts himself as a gentleman and thinks that if he were a character in his story, he would be what Eco in his theory calls a superman of the masses (Chapter 2.5). In reality, the personality that emerges from Roberto's narration is that of a jealous, infantile, weak character: a follower rather than a leader. For this reason, the Ferrante that Roberto creates in his story is at the same time his evil double and also the enactor of Roberto's un-confessed desires. Roberto hates Ferrante but enjoys writing about Ferrante's relationship with Lilia because he can identify with his evil brother and enjoy Lilia's love. Eco uses Roberto's folly to show the absurd side of literary enchantment. His is a metaphor of the abandonment of fictional illusions. The boundaries between Roberto's and Ferrante's worlds are gradually erased: Ferrante looks for Roberto and pretends at times to be him, and viceversa.[64]

The second effect of Roberto's experience as an author leads him to confront an alterity that he finds threatening and which is in Ferrante's case, seen in relation to the paradigm of the grotesque body. There are two essential figures of alterity in Roberto's story. The first figure is Father Caspar, the Jesuit who shares Roberto's fate on the *Daphne*, while the second is Ferrante. Firstly, Roberto's realisation when he arrives on the *Daphne* that someone else is on board is accompanied by feelings of

[64] José Sanjinés, "Baroque-Shores of Eco's *The Island of the Day Before*," in *Umberto Eco*, vol. 3, eds. M. Gane and N. Gane, 127-9.

paranoia due to the presence of what he calls the "Intruder." In Roberto's mind, the Intruder immediately becomes associated with a dangerous competitor who is also looking for answers that would solve the mystery of the longitude measurement.[65] Roberto tends to see in his opponent a threat and explains the other's actions as an intentional obstacle to prevent him from reaching his goals. The Intruder comes to personify Roberto's fear of failure and his obsession with interpretation. Roberto sees all the changes that take place on the ship as a sign left by the Intruder, a challenge to be interpreted by him. This way, every sign is turned into an enterprise.[66] This aspect recalls Eco's earlier *Il pendolo* and its central themes of paranoia and obsessive interpretation. Of course, Roberto's paranoia turns out to be insubstantial when he meets a good-natured Jesuit with a passion for science, Father Caspar.

The second element of alterity in the novel is Roberto's double, Ferrante. Roberto entertains himself on the ship writing fictional stories about the woman he loves. After he meets Caspar, he seems to be so absorbed by the intellectual dialogues with the Jesuit that he forgets about his fictional world and returns to the real one. For this reason, after losing Caspar during a fatal attempt to reach the nearby island, Roberto returns to fiction with even more intensity and eventually allows his evil twin into his fictional world. In general, Roberto uses Ferrante to make sense of events he finds confusing. For instance, when Lilia shows some interest in him, Roberto becomes suspicious and guesses that she must have been speaking with Ferrante without knowing it.[67] Ferrante is what Roberto would like to be but does not dare become. He is not the inimical other, as Roberto would want his reader to believe, but rather the desired other who has the life Roberto wants.

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[65] Eco, *L'isola*, 143.
[66] Ibid., 189.
[67] Ibid., 166.

Ferrante bursts unexpectedly into Roberto's story with the result that Roberto becomes frustrated because he is not able to avoid his evil brother's arrival on the scene. Jealous of Lilia's love for Ferrante, who deceives her into believing he is Roberto, Roberto makes sure Ferrante gets punished in his story. Ferrante is imprisoned by Mazarin, and forced to wear a ridiculous mask as a mark of his shame.[68] In this scene, alterity in *L'isola* can be reconnected with the paradigm of the grotesque body. To Roberto, the threat of Ferrante grows stronger throughout Roberto's story. It is significant that, to deal with this threat, Roberto forces Ferrante to wear a degrading mask so that he can be ridiculed in the eyes of his imaginary reader. Roberto takes revenges on Ferrante by ridiculing him. Ferrante sees his reflection in the mirror and cannot help feeling ashamed for the grotesque nose that deforms his face: "the disfiguring black snout."[69]

The reference to the deformity of the face and the protruding nose is particularly relevant in the Bakhtinian notion of the grotesque body. Here Roberto uses it as a tool to ridicule what scares him. However, it is not Ferrante or difference that scare Roberto but rather Roberto's won resemblance with Ferrante. The encounter with the other forces him to discover the self. While this is a positive dialogic process for Bakhtin, for Roberto it is negative because it shows him a self he does not want to identify with. Instead of the romantic gentleman he imagines himself to be, Roberto finds out that he is a man with a carnal desire for Lilia. For this reason, he also sees carnivalesque liberation and the grotesque as low and negative. Roberto is tormented by the aspiration to identify himself with the classical body on the one hand and the desire for carnivalesque and spontaneous freedom on the other. Only when his reason

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[68] Ibid., 375.
[69] Umberto Eco, *The Island of the Day Before*, trans. William Weaver (London: Minerva, 1995), 406. "La carruba che gli svergognava il ceffo." Eco, *L'isola*, 376.

is asleep, can Roberto not block out carnivalesque liberation, and he enjoys Lilia's love, so that he finally identifies himself with Ferrante.[70]

Another example of Roberto's wish as an author to associate Ferrante with the grotesque body takes place when Lilia, to save him from prison, asks for help from the Pitocchi" [the Beggars], grotesque creatures living underneath the city as castaways in Paris. The theme of the underground is connected with marginality, the grotesque body, death and rebirth, both in Bakhtin and *L'isola*. The Pitocchi are a real army of cripples and lepers whose leader has canine teeth and a harelip. They march to Ferrante's prison and overpower the guards and Biscarat, the colonel in charge of Ferrante's captivity. They break through the battlements of the fort, thus threatening its very borders with their grotesque bodies. With their distraught eyes and terrible faces, they look like devils. Moreover, they behave like beasts by tearing the throats of the guards with their own teeth and sharp nails. Some are seen to open a guard's chest and eat his heart.[71] Their grotesque bodies are also bodies that cross the boundaries between man and animal when they feed on a human heart. They are ambivalent: although they show a ferocious nature against the guards, they set Ferrante free and show loyalty to Lilia who enlisted their service. The Pitocchi serve Roberto's project of punishing Ferrante on account of Lilia's love for him. Roberto cannot accept that Lilia wants to save Ferrante from prison, so he allows her to help only with the support of the Pitocchi, monstrous half-human, half-beastly creatures.

Finally, when Ferrante dies, Roberto sends him to hell. The way Ferrante's hell is represented is particularly significant in terms of the link between the grotesque body and the erasure of boundaries: it is an island where the damned show the inside of their bodies. As one of them—a man who carries his skin in his hands like Saint

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[70] Eco, *L'isola*, 409-12.
[71] Ibid., 386-90.

Bartolommeo—explains, they are condemned to an eternal and never-ending dismemberment. The theme of dismemberment is a key element in Bakhtin's notion of the grotesque body because it forces the body to enter into contact with the outside world and thus to lose its confined limits.[72] The connection with Bakhtin's notion of the grotesque body can be made more evident by the fact that the damned show their intestines which contain half-digested tripe.[73] The role of the tripe is significant in Bakhtin since it recalls the cycle of life. The tripe is described as positive because it brings together life and death, birth, excrement and food and ties them into one grotesque knot. It embodies the idea of bodily topography which sees the upper and lower stratum penetrate each other. The bowels are related to defecation, and even animal bowels, after having been cleaned, salted, and cooked, were still believed to contain ten percent excrement. In grotesque imagery, the belly is the very centre of the life of man and it is characterised by ambivalence with the image of the tripe which eats intestines and is eaten as intestines. Since to disembowel is to kill, the belly is linked with death but also with birth because it also generates.[74] Ferrante's hell represents the ultimate connection with the alterity of the grotesque body; even though the grotesque body here is an unrealistic one, he fears and treats it as if it were real.

Roberto wants to set a clear distance between himself and his evil brother. In the terms of the postmodernist critique of structuralism, he wants to show the binary

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[72] Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 317.
Nietzsche, too, describes Dionysus as a "dismembered" God who was torn to pieces by the Titans as a boy. His dismemberment (*Zerstückelung*) is like a "transformation into air, water, earth, and fire." Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* in *"The Birth of Tragedy" and "The Case of Wagner"* ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 73-4. For Nietzsche, the dismemberment of Dionysus means his rebirth through suffering while for Bakhtin the key characteristic of dismemberment is the loss of limits of the body with the outer world, although in Bakhtin too there is no death without rebirth,. In this sense, Bakhtin's definition of dismemberment is closer to Eco's *L'isola*, a novel whose main concern is the loss of borders of all kinds.
[73] Eco, *L'isola*, 451-3.
[74] Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 162-3.

oppositions in place between them. Roberto's attempt to protect the boundaries between his reality and the fictional world of his evil twin results in an unavoidable failure. In his delirium, which erases all boundaries between fiction and reality, leads Roberto to have his characters make land on the island. Because in his fictional story Lilia is shipwrecked on the island and in danger of dying, Roberto, an inexpert swimmer, sets his real boat on fire and throws himself into the sea in order to save her, putting himself at great risk of drowning. Roberto's story of madness and his confusing of the boundaries between fiction and reality allow Eco to represent in a parodical way the postmodern critique of genre distinction and the structuralist faith in binary oppositions. At the same time, he satirises the popular fiction writers, who are so overwhelmed by a concern to please the public that they lose control of their own production.

In addition, the whole novel echoes this erasure of boundaries, typical of postmodern writing, by parodying genre distinctions. *L'isola* has potentially various genre labels: it can be read as an adventure novel, a love story, a historical novel, a *Bildungsroman* which follows the growth of a character from childhood to adulthood and his/her process to gain a place in society,[75] or a *conte philosophique*, an essay novel engaging with scientific and epistemological arguments of the baroque period.[76] On the one hand, Eco seems to show desire to follow the rules of a literary genre by, for example, remaining faithful to the baroque device of the double. On the other hand, he mixes contemporary genres with old ones, which results in postmodern pastiche.

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[75] Generally, the *Bildungsroman*, or novel of formation, is seen as a nineteenth-century phenomenon which was ended by the modernists' attention for human experiences such as epiphanies and their use of the stream of consciousness, while the novel of formation required "narrative attention to minute and long-term changes." Tobias Boes, "Modernist Studies and the *Bildungsroman*: A Historical Survey of Critical Trends," *Literature Compass* 3/2 (2006): 231.

[76] Joris Vlasselaers, "*The Island of the Day Before*: A Quest for the Semiotic Construction of a Self,' in *Umberto Eco*, vol. 3, eds. M. Gane and N. Gane, 139.

Eco plays with genre conventions and mocks their distinctive characteristics. Roberto, weak and scared, is far from being the adventurous type and seems unlikely to be able to deal with any love affair that is not the product of his imagination. The historical events presented in the first part of the story are quickly supplanted by Roberto's fantasies and the absurd theories he enthusiastically engages with. Furthermore, as Norma Bouchard argues, *L'isola* only mimics the conventions of the *Bildungsroman,* but Roberto is only filled with doubts by those who should be guiding him.[77] Roberto is a young man with few and confusing mentors who question everything to the extreme that they shake Roberto's perception of reality down to its foundation. Also, although Roberto pictures Ferrante as a picaro, the novel does not follow the most basic rules of the picaresque novel that can be found for instance in *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1554), Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1748), and Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1722). Ferrante is not redeemed in the end, nor does he gain a stable social position in the world: he is killed and sent to hell. Like *Il pendolo*, *L'isola* is also an anti-detective story because it evolves around the detection of empty secrets: in the case of *Il pendolo,* the Plan; in *L'isola*, the discovery of the *punto fijo*, a mystery which never existed and was elaborated from an absurd theory.[78] As a *conte philosophique*, *L'isola* is also a parody because it deliberately pushes its questions into farcical metaphysical reasoning, such as Roberto's analysis of the thoughts of a stone.[79]

L'isola is the most intellectual and least political of Eco's novels because it engages with theoretical debates on popular fiction, genre distinctions and the boundaries between reality and fiction, self and otherness. Eco mocks all these

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[77] Norma Bouchard, "Umberto Eco's *Lisola del giorno prima*: Postmodern Theory and Fictional Praxis," in *Umberto Eco*, vol. 3, eds. M. Gane and N. Gane, 113.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Vlasselaers, "*The Island*: A Quest," 139.

distinctions. To do so he makes much use of the paradigm of the grotesque body. The grotesque for Eco offers a way to satirise intellectuals, like Barthes or Hutcheon, who argue against the systematisation of human sciences but only to suggest the replacement of old boundaries with new ones, just as Barthes does when he places the author outside the text and thus creates a new clear-cut distinction between author and reader whereby only one or the other can exist.

4.5 The Narration of History and Monstrosity in *Baudolino*

After *L'isola*, *Baudolino* continues the criticism of intellectuals—historians in this case—but it also opens to a more politicised criticism of Italian society because it refers ironically to Bossi's *Lega Nord*. Published in 2000, *Baudolino* is the story of the witty son of a modest couple of peasants living in Alessandria, Eco's hometown. Baudolino finds Frederick Barbarossa lost in the woods near his village because of a thick fog, which is typical of the area. Thanks to an unnatural gift for learning languages, Baudolino manages to communicate with the emperor in German and helps him leave the woods. Baudolino becomes the most trusted counsellor of the emperor, although he is depicted comically as a "confirmed liar."[80]

As opposed to *Il nome*, whose protagonists are intellectuals, the characters of *Baudolino* are uneducated simple lower-class people who speak in a local dialect and are as interested in the political matters of land-ownership and rebellion as much as they are in good food, women, and taverns. At a moment of crisis for Frederick Barbarossa's rule over Italy, which continually rebelled against him, Baudolino and a

[80] Umberto Eco, *Baudolino*, trans. William Weaver (London: Secker & Warburg: 2002), 40. "Bugiardo matricolato."Umberto Eco, *Baudolino* (Milan: Bompiani, 2000), 45.

group of friends decide to find the legendary kingdom of Prester John so that they can increase the emperor's glory. According to Baudolino's tale, the outskirts of the Prester's land is defended by monsters. The novel starts on 14 April 1204 during the siege of Constantinople. Baudolino, already past the age of sixty, is returning from his adventure and tells his story to Nicetas Choniates, historian and officer of the Byzantine Empire, while he helps him escape from the city. In the end, Baudolino leaves to look again for the Prester.

The novel is interesting for the current study in two ways: firstly, the novel's mocking of both historians and the postmodern debates about historiography can be explained through Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia; secondly, the land of monsters visited by Baudolino can be interpreted, through the paradigm of the grotesque body, as a criticism of Italian political parties in general and of Bossi's *Lega Nord* in particular. As shown below, the two concepts of heteroglossia and the grotesque body are fused into Baudolino's character and this fusion has itself a political significance.

To begin with, the novel's concern with linguistic mixture is made evident by Baudolino's gift for learning languages. However, Eco's concern is not so much to mix foreign languages in a singular character as it is of mixing socially different languages, which is Bakhtin's definition of heteroglossia. Baudolino is a peasant who becomes a member of the emperor's court. He can speak easily with the upper-class people of the court even though he grew up speaking a local dialect. When he arrives at court he decides to write his story on a piece of parchment which he takes from the Emperor's official historian Otto Von Freising's *Chronica sive Historia de duabus civitatibus*.[81] Baudolino scratches clean the parchment, written on in Latin by a historian, and writes his own personal story in the Alexandrine dialect.

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[81] Eco, *Baudolino* (Italian), 5.

Baudolino, mischievous but clever, is sent to Paris to study rhetoric. Even though Otto knows that Baudolino is a liar, Otto makes him his successor in the quest for the Prester and explains him his idea of the historian's role. It is under the encouragement of the dying Otto that the legend of the Prester John becomes Baudolino's obsession. Historically, the Prester is a Nestorian Christian priest king, descended from the Three Kings, who offers to help the church and Jerusalem to fight Islam. Prester John's letter to Frederick Barbarossa, dated 1165, was extremely popular: there are over two hundred Latin manuscripts, as well as translations in French, German, English, Russian, Hebrew, and Serbian. Between 1483 and 1565 it appeared in fourteen printed editions.[82] Eco analyses this historical fake in depth in *Serendipities: Language and Lunacy* (1998), along with others such as the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Here Eco asserts the power of the false as demonstrated by how well known fake documents in history that have changed the destiny of humanity. Parodying these historical forgeries, Eco's protagonist writes the letter of Prester John with the help of a hallucinatory green honey.

Secondly, Baudolino learns from Otto that it is not important that the events are true but only that historians or authors believe they are. To testify falsely to something that is believed to be true is a virtuous act because it compensates for a lack of proof of something that certainly exists.[83] What is really important is that the narrative holds together and that it opens the vortex of interpretations.[84] Baudolino's journey to Prester John's kingdom is dangerous only in a limited way: it does not matter if he actually finds it or if he only says he finds it, so long as it satisfies the political interests of the emperor.

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[82] Coletti, *Naming the Rose*, 82.
[83] Eco, *Baudolino* (Italian), 61.
[84] Ibid., 146.

In the end, fascinated by Baudolino's story, Nicetas wants to include Baudlino in his account of the siege of Constantinople but a wise man named Paphnutius advises him against it because Baudolino is not to be considered a reliable source. But he also advises Nicetas not to mention some facts Baudolino told him concerning the commerce of fake relics. Paphnutius argues that in great histories little truths can be altered so that a greater truth may emerge.[85] And when Nicetas expresses his sorrow because Baudolino's story will never be told, Paphnutius replies that he is not the only story-teller. Baudolino's story will be told by someone more of a liar than Baudolino himself.[86] Paphnutius's conclusion terminates Eco's parody of history, writing with a blunt remark which puts into even more doubt the whole story and turns it into a complete lie in the face of all the debates on historiography and narration.

The introduction to this chapter pointed out how Eco argues that the postmodern answer to modernism is to revisit history with irony. Eco's irony in revisiting the past is determined by his choice of having the story of the creation of a historical fake told by a self-declared liar. If a lie can be spread in the form of history, this happens because, as Hutcheon argues, historiography, like fiction, is bound to an inescapable textuality.[87] More than in the intertextual nature of historical texts, Eco is interested in the transformation of an invented story into history. For this reason, Baudolino's story slides gradually from the historical account of the provinces rebelling against Frederick Barbarossa to the fantastic tale of Baudolino's travel to the land of the Prester John. There is no change in the tone of narration. It thus challenges the very notion of Hutcheon's historiographic metafiction: if historians also have to use the narrative tactics necessary to reproduce a comprehensible and coherent sequence of

[85] Ibid., 525.
[86] Ibid., 526.
[87] Hutcheon, *Poetics of Postmodernism*, 129.

events, as Hayden White argues,[88] then a historian is a narrator and, it can be argued, a narrator is a historian. Eco plays with the reversal of this statement when he makes all lies told by Baudolino become truth in the eyes of his followers. If for Bakhtin truth can only be reached through dialogue and it is a truth which is never final, always open to discussion, then language is the means to reach this truth. Conversely, Baudolino's truth is not dialogical because he manufactures his own truth. Everything he says becomes true just because he says it.[89] When he takes his biological father's bowl to his friends and makes them think it is the Holy Grail, his friends know he is lying but they see a holy light on the bowl and believe him.[90] Baudolino recognises the power of languages and the potential of rhetoric, which he redefines as the art of saying well what is not certain to be true.[91] Thanks to the combination of his charismatic personality and his skills in rhetoric, Baudolino turns lies into truth and remains in the novel as a warning against the power of rhetoric, one of Eco's and Bakhtin's main concerns.

The other key aspect of the novel is the meaning taken by Eco's representation of monstrosity. During their journey to the land of the Prester, Baudolino and his friends meet men walking with four legs, women with venomous snakes in their vaginas, and men with testicles hanging down to their knees. The travellers are attacked by scorpions, two-headed snakes with three tongues, and a basilisk.[92] They face harpies and three beasts: a cat with fiery eyes, known to be the messenger of Satan; a chimera with a lion's head, a goat's body, a dragon's back; and a manticore with lion's body,

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[88] Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in the Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 7.
[89] Eco, *Baudolino* (Italian), 41.
[90] Ibid., 287.
[91] Ibid., 60.
[92] Ibid., 341-9.

a scorpion's tail and an almost-human head.[93] The three beasts are monstrous versions of Dante's allegorical beasts: the leopard, the lion and the she-wolf, which represent respectively lust, pride, and avarice, which are the illnesses of a humanity that has abandoned virtue to embrace evil.[94]

Although the group reacts with horror to the monsters, the strange encounters also generate questions and doubts. As Farronato points out, the purpose of the monsters is to make us face the "other," and thus ultimately our own selves.[95] Monstrous images existed only in the human consciousness and unconscious and were perceived in the Middle Ages as necessary to explain the relation between matter and thought.[96] There is in Eco's representation of monsters a semiotic concern but also the awareness that, as Bakhtin argues, the grotesque is dialogical. Eventually made curious by the differences among the monsters, some members of Baudolino's group want to stop and live in strange lands (e.g., in the land of darkness where they communicate with its invisible inhabitants through music).[97] They become friends with the monsters, in particular with Gavagai, their guide, who is a sciapode (a one-legged creature with an enlarged foot that can be used as a protection from the sun).

Gavagai leads Baudolino and his friends to Pndapetzim, the capital of the Kingdom of the Deacon John, the designated successor of Prester John. The city is inhabited by many diverse beings: blemmyae, with headless human bodies who have their eyes, nose and mouth on their chests; panotii, with long ears covering their bodies; pygmies; single-eyed giants; Nubians; tongueless beings; eunuchs, camaleopards; unicorns; and satyrs who are never seen. Significantly for the present study, the city where the monsters live is described as a huge market where every

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[93] Ibid., 356.
[94] Farronato, *Eco's Chaosmos*, 176.
[95] Ibid., 191.
[96] Ibid., 180.
[97] Eco, *Baudolino* (Italian), 354-5.

available space is dedicated to tents, pavilions, and tables. There are expositions of fruits, meat, carpets, knives, hats, and much more.[98] The marketplace, one of the selected paradigms, was characterised during the Middle Ages as the space where the monstrous or the different was accepted, where parodies and abusive language prevailed and everyone was treated equally.

The monsters of Pndapetzim, too, are used to one another: they refuse to see the monstrosity of their neighbours and ignore their own.[99] In a humorous dispute between Gavagai and the Poet, one of Baudolino's friends, it emerges that the monsters do not see physical difference as a significant trait of distinction.[100] The Poet tries to explain to Gavagai that he is different because he only has one leg, Gavagai answers that the Poet, too, only has one if he raises the other. While the Poet cannot make sense of the monster's refusal to see his physical deformity, Gavagai finds it ridiculous that the Poet should formalise such differences as the number of legs one has.[101] Thus, the monstrous other is paradoxically not marked for his physical deformity. Although grotesque, the body of the other is accepted, whereas Baudolino points out that his own society judges dwarves as a mistake of nature.[102] In this sense, the society of monsters is positive because it does not stigmatise the grotesque but rather welcomes the grotesque body as a positive one. Although their physical monstrosities are different, in essence they are all monsters and therefore they accept each other for their deformities.

However, the monsters too are keen on distinctions and oppositions in their own way. Even if they accept each other's monstrosities, each group of monsters recognises itself in a specific religious belief. All believe to be the true holders of the

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[98] Ibid., 378-9.
[99] Ibid., 389.
[100] See Eco's semiotic theory on significant traits of distinction in *Trattato di semiotica*.
[101] Eco, *Baudolino* (Italian), 373-4.
[102] Ibid., 376.

Christian faith and call the others heretics. In this sense, the grotesque body of the monsters of Prester John's kingdom is a mark for ideological differences: the sciapodes all share the same credo, as do the blemmyae and every other group. Their monstrous bodies, therefore, are not a sign of openness to dialogue because the monsters are ultimately stuck beyond solidified theological boundaries. They are monological because each group believes themselves to be the holder of theological truth.

While Baudolino and his followers are in Pndapetzim the city is attacked by the White Huns. The monsters unite against the enemy, setting aside their different theological beliefs. They prepare for battle by sing a *pater noster*, each group in their different language and yet in a harmonious multi-voiced chorus. Although their common concern for the invasion keeps them united, their theological differences are fatal when the attack begins. Instead of fighting the enemy, they end up killing each other to honour their religious beliefs.[103] As Farronato points out, with this scene Eco caricatures the inability of humanity to fight under a common banner.[104] The world of monsters is a parody of the typically human tendency to create distinctions and categorisations, and also of man's incapacity to set aside personal disputes for the greater good of the community. The fragmentation that is represented in this episode can also reflect the image of the political class in Italy during the "clean hands" scandal which revealed the corruption of a number of politicians. Corruption is nothing but the result of the valuing of personal interests over the interests of the community.

In addition, the monsters' battle mirrors and mocks the battles Frederick fights to keep his empire together despite frequent insurrection. The battle echoes the claim of

[103] Ibid., 455-7.
[104] Farronato, *Eco's Chaosmos*, 179.

Bossi's *Lega Nord* of a glorious origin from the *Lega Lombarda* that fought against the emperor. In reality, as Eco shows as a parody in *Baudolino*, fourteen years before the battle, Barbarossa razed Milan to the ground with the help of towns that later united in the League to fight the emperor. In an interview, Eco mentions that he was thinking of Bossi's *Lega Nord* when writing about the battle of Legnano.[105]

In conclusion, it is important to underline that heteroglossia and monstrosity are united in the figure of Baudolino. Baudolino is a polyglot and therefore a monster. Polyglots were considered monsters in the Middle Ages because they went against the distinction made by the fall of the Tower of Babel. Also, they were believed to lure human beings by speaking their language and then eating them.[106] This gift makes Baudolino a shape-shifter.[107] Baudolino is not physically grotesque, nor is he monstrous because he speaks different languages; he is monstrous because he speaks different *social* languages. He is a man both of the court and of the people who challenge the separation between official language and lower-class vernaculars. Although he studies rhetoric in Paris and becomes a well educated courtier, he remains faithful to his roots and demonstrates this by using vernacular when he goes back to his people. What makes Baudolino monstrous is the fact that he breaks the separation between two socially distinct languages. For Bakhtin the main characteristic of the novel is that it is heteroglot because it portrays the interaction of

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[105] "Nadia Bobbio Interviews Umberto Eco," December 13, 2011.
[106] Farronato, *Eco's Chaosmos*, 187.
[107] In "Nadia Bobbio Interviews Umberto Eco," December 13, 2011, Eco explained that Baudolino was modelled on the myth of the trickster. Eco contributed to the publication of Paul Radin's *The Trickster* in Italian. The myth of the trickster is closely connected to picaresque literature, as Kerényi argues in his section in Radin's book. *Picaro* is the Spanish for rogue or villain. In Kerényi's words: "the trickster could be defined as the timeless root of all picaresque creations of world literature" (Paul Radin, *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology* with commentaries by Karl Kerényi and Carl G. Jung [London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1956], 176). Since the archaic social hierarchies were very strict, the totality of life and freedom is disorder, and Trickster is the spirit of disorder. The function of his mythology is to add disorder to order and in this way break the boundaries between what is allowed and what is forbidden. Kerényi goes on to explain that such a function has been taken over by picaresque literature, of which Rabelais is an example (Radin, *The Trickster*, 185). Baudolino is a trickster who crosses borders, brings disorder, lives on lies and his shape-shifting skills.

different social voices. Eco shows these different social voices in action but also decides to make them meet in one individual character.

Baudolino's character, who erases Otto's history in Latin to write his personal story in dialect, represents well the conflicting relationship between a unitary language and a vernacular. Although he sides with the emperor and the intellectual court, he remains loyal to the peasants of his home town, even when the two sides face one another in a siege. His witty and plurivocal personality allows him to maintain the trust of both sides. While Baudolino respects and admires the emperor's authority, he actually acts according to his own interests. He crosses all types of boundaries to achieve what he wants, be it the false identification of the Three Kings' corpses or the falsification of Prester John's letter to Frederick.

In a way, it may be argued that the monsters of Pndapetzim represent Eco's view of monstrosity as a carnivalesque safety valve in the marketplace under close control of the authority. Baudolino, on the other hand, acquires a role similar to Panurge's, as in Eco's essay on Franti. As Eco argues, the official order needs to be questioned from within if one wants to be successful in breaking it. Marginality, which is the typical characteristic of the monster, is a serious obstacle to the subversive, who cannot get close enough to the authority in order to defy it. But Baudolino can get close to the authority because he understands from a very young age the necessity of being part of the order to be able to undermine it. He is accepted by the court thanks to his sense of humour and ability to amuse Frederick. Once admitted to the court, he acts in the interest of the people against the official culture by scratching clean Otto's parchment. His strength is that he can count on the support of his adoptive father, the powerful emperor, who bases his liking ironically on Baudolino's honesty.[108]

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[108] Eco, *Baudolino* (Italian), 113.

Eco's *Baudolino* returns therefore to the theme of subversion, arguing, like *Il nome*, that the established order can only truly be undermined by an insider. While *L'isola* parodies the theories of a group of intellectuals—the deconstructionists—in order to dismantle their assumptions, *Baudolino*'s parody of the historians has a double objective. Eco parodies both the postmodern debate on the subjectivity of the narration of history and the falsification of the history of the *Lega Nord,* which claims a united and glorious, but historically inaccurate, past in order to motivate its followers. Baudolino's heteroglossia challenges the writing of history while the grotesque body establishes a parody of the *Lega Nord.* The heteroglot and grotesque Baudolino synthetises the example of effective subversion, according to Eco. For this double tendency, the novel brings Eco back towards a third phase in his fiction which is, like the first, characterised by political criticism, as Chapter Five will discuss.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has shown how Eco's novels from the 1980s and 1990s belong to a distinct middle phase in the criticism. Located between the two predominantly political phases, this middle phase is more intellectual than political. Eco's attack focuses mainly on intellectuals, so the novels analysed in this chapter can be read alongside Eco's literary theory. The grotesque that is used to attack the church and the state in *Il nome* and *Il pendolo* offers Eco a possibility to deride the intellectuals, as this chapter has analysed. In all cases, Eco's attack is towards an authority; in the previous phase, the authorities were the church and the state, while in this phase the authorities are the deconstructionists, the holders of the literary tradition that

establishes genre distinction, and the historians. *Il pendolo* appears both in the previous chapter and in this one because it shows the transition from one phase to the other. In this phase, Eco is positive that the humble can ridicule the dominant class and challenge their truths.

Chapter Two has highlighted how, for Eco, the 1960s and 70s represent years of provocative social criticism culminated in what he called "semilogical guerrilla warfare." In other words, the 1960s and 70s witness an Eco fighting for the privilege of the humanities to decipher cultural messages. However, this chapter has also pointed out how the 1980s and 90s mean a shift to irony, although without a loss of commitment to a critical understanding of society. Eco's increasingly dwindling enthusiasm about the potential of the humanities to interpret the signs of society better than anyone else is reflected also in his novels of those decades. Eco becomes more cautious in engaging with political matters in his fiction and uses his parody to satirise his colleagues, intellectuals like him. Although he discusses their theories in an academic environment, he shows their weaknesses more passionately by ridiculing them in fiction.

Although *Il pendolo* strongly refers to the contemporary background of the Years of Lead and terrorism in Italy, it concentrates most of its attention on the interpretation of the Templars' story. This chapter has shown how Eco's theory on textual interpretation stresses the importance of respecting the text's intention, although not necessarily the author's intention. All interpretations must be justified by textual evidence and tied into a bigger picture that contributes to an understanding of the text. With *Il pendolo*, Eco argues that the deconstructionists, who focus on small details in order to point out textual contradictions, lose the bigger picture and thus achieve only one result, that of destroying the text in a way that is not productive.

They create grotesque and aberrant textual interpretations that dangerously distort the truth beyond what the text can contain. Although a final truth is unreachable, Eco says that it is possible to approach it by respecting the clues of the text's intention.

L'isola parodies both readers of popular fiction, who abandons themselves to the enjoyment of the tricks of popular fiction, and the writers of popular fiction, who lose control of their creations. The novel is a reference to the theoretical debates around the death of the author, Bakhtin's polyphonic novel, and also Eco's theory on popular fiction. As it can be gathered from Eco's theory, the writer of popular fiction cannot be the master of his artistic product because popular fiction has to be popular (i.e., sell copies) and thus please the reader. Roberto starts writing his romance to defeat the maddening solitude of the ship but the novel takes its own direction without Roberto being able to do anything about it. In the end, he is only a disappointed reader of his own story who gets himself killed in the attempt to change its course, forgetting that he cannot intervene in the world of fiction. With a postmodernist taste, *L'isola* mixes literary genres and conventions. Also, Eco mocks the postmodernist tendency to erase boundaries between art and reality. Eco's *L'isola* erases boundaries of all kinds to show ultimately how grotesque the postmodernist theory is when it is put into practice. It's all very well for the deconstructionists to reject the binary oppositions that were so popular with the structuralists, but some differences must remain for us to make sense of our reality. By losing these differences, the sense of what is real and what is not is also lost.

Baudolino also contains some political criticism. Firstly, Baudolino's kind of boundary-crossing is more political than Roberto's. While Roberto remains in the domain of literary theory by challenging the boundary dividing fiction and reality, Baudolino makes the physical journey from a poor village to the court of the emperor.

He challenges the given distinction between the poor and the rich and, significantly, he can do so because of ability to learn languages. However, he is not merely a polyglot but also a trespasser from one social sphere to another. His picaresque, though loyal, figure brings disorder to the court and does not obscure his origins. When he can, he helps his own people, even if that means going against the emperor's will. Alongside the subversive figure of Baudolino, the novel more broadly points to the malcontent within the Italian political class of the 1980s and 1990s and the contradictions in the creation of one of the strongest and most xenophobic parties in contemporary Italy, the *Lega Nord.* Here the debate on "historiographic metafiction" contextualises Eco's criticism of Umberto Bossi's invention of a collective, but selective, culture for the people of northern Italy. History is told in a different way in order to make voters from the north believe that the *Lega Lombarda* fought bravely and in a united way against Frederick Barbarossa and the Roman Empire. Conversely, Eco satirises the original *Lega Lombarda* in his *Baudolino*, showing how it was internally fragmented and composed by people who were ready to fight one another if the situation called for it.

In conclusion, Eco's *Il pendolo di Foucault* and *L'isola del giorno prima* tend to drift away from the political criticism of its contemporary times (i.e. the late 1980s and 90s) because they tend to focus on criticising intellectual and theoretical debates. However, with *Baudolino*, Eco returns to comment on the politics of the state and to satirise the political message of its political parties. Having analysed the second phase of Eco's criticism, aimed at intellectuals, the following chapter will introduce the return of Eco's political focus in his third phase of fiction writing.

CHAPTER 5

POPULAR CULTURE, MEDIA, AND MASS MANIPULATION IN *LA MISTERIOSA FIAMMA DELLA REGINA LOANA* AND *IL CIMITERO DI PRAGA*

5.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses the role of popular culture for the phenomenon of mass manipulation perpetrated by those in power, the fascists in *La misteriosa fiamma della regina Loana* (2004) and the secret services in *Il cimitero di Praga* (2010). These two novels constitute Eco's last phase of criticism in his fiction, spanning the years 2000 to 2010. The Bakhtinian concepts that determine the textual analysis of these two novels are: 1) folk culture, which is opposed to mass culture, and 2) the grotesque body. *La fiamma* critically responds to the phenomenon of mass manipulation through the wisdom of folk culture. Folk culture is here understood to be the culture of the carnivalesque and of bodily liberation in the Bakhtinian sense, as Chapter 2.5 has defined it. It is the culture of the people—that is, of the medieval poor—that expresses the people's "criticism, their deep distrust of official truth, and their highest hopes and aspirations."[1] The wisdom of folk culture is thereby endowed with a critical distancing from the "official truth" and directed to self-preservation. The means through which this distancing takes place is the carnivalesque and its expression in festive forms, in laughter, in the banquet and in the grotesque body.

While folk culture has the potential to offer a critical response to attempts at mass manipulation, Eco's *Il cimitero* does not seem to entertain this as a real possibility. This chapter will show that popular culture plays a decisive role in mass

[1] Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 268-9.

manipulation by producing the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion,* which will eventually justify a plan for the mass extermination of the Jews. Here, popular culture is understood to be the culture produced for the enjoyment of the masses; "mass culture" is therefore used as a synonym for popular culture. Because of its appeal for the masses, mass culture becomes a dangerous instrument in the hands of a totalitarian regime such as fascism (as seen in *La fiamma)* or in the hands of those who want to reach power by getting rid of their enemies (*Il cimitero).*

Section 5.2 gives an overview of the political context that surrounds Eco's last two novels, *La fiamma* and *Il cimitero. La fiamma* investigates the relationship between mass culture and the years of fascism and post-fascism. Popular culture plays a central role in *La fiamma*, where it is forced into dialogue with folk culture. An overview is given of the interaction between fascism and the culture industries, political propaganda, the hostility towards all foreign cultural artefacts and the role of mass organisations of the fascist party. The next part of the section then focuses on the contextual elements that contribute to an understanding of *Il cimitero*. These are anti-Semitism, the organisation of the Italian secret services, and the relationship between the media and politics. As far as the latter is concerned, *Il cimitero* needs to be seen in the light of Eco's *A passo di gambero* (2006), a work on politics and the media in Italy.

Section 5.3 investigates the distinction between folk and mass culture in *La fiamma*. It demonstrates how Eco represents the role of mass culture in fascist and post-fascist Italy and how he sees in folk culture a potentially subversive response to the fascist regime. It is important to underline that Eco starts writing about popular culture in the second half of the 1960s, when the position of popular culture towards social changes was an essential question. In *La fiamma* Eco analyses the role of mass

culture during fascism and in the post-war period. It is shown that Eco places mass culture in relation with folk culture in order to find an expression of dissent towards the fascist regime. *La fiamma*, the story of Yambo, a man who loses his memory, deals with the reconstruction of a lost personal and political self through the clues left by the past and daily routine. This section analyses what role mass and folk culture have in the rediscovery of the protagonist's past. It is illustrated how mass and folk culture help Yambo understand the formation of his civic and political sense from different perspectives.

Section 5.4 examines a different aspect of popular culture: its power of persuasion through its appealing character. It investigates what role popular culture plays in the rise of anti-Semitism and how this connects to the Bakhtinian paradigm of the grotesque body. The protagonist of *Il cimitero*, Simone Simonini, is responsible for the creation of a historical forgery: the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Simonini looks for a justification for his hatred of the Jews (which he inherited from his grandfather) in works of popular fiction such as Eugène Sue's *Le juif errant* (1844). In *Il cimitero,* Eco traces the origin of the *Protocols* in popular literature, in particular in the works of Eugène Sue and Alexandre Dumas. The relationship between popular culture and mass manipulation is central to an understanding of *Il cimitero*. The aspects of popular fiction that Simonini uses, along with how those aspects influence his intention to manipulate the masses against the Jews, will be analysed.

The last section (5.5) analyses the relationship between mass culture and politics in both *La fiamma* and *Il cimtero* which shows a different and a more complex representation of the role of popular culture in *La fiamma*, a novel investigating the relationship between mass culture, fascist propaganda, Yambo's civic sense as a

child, and folk culture. While investigating his past, Yambo looks for the marks of fascism in his school texts and compares them with fascist propaganda in order to find out how far the rhetoric of a regime can permeate the mind of a child both consciously and unconsciously. As an adult, Yambo is confused by the contradictory stimuli the Italians received during the years of fascism. He distinguishes, on the one hand, the nation's seriousness and its readiness for sacrifice, which were promoted by the fascist propaganda. On the other hand, there he sees the optimism and light careless entertainment in the media and comic books, which could take a child to wonderful and faraway places. Eco analyses how fascism was introduced to children through school education and how it paradoxically combined the fascist logic of sacrifice with the escape offered by popular culture.

In addition, the last section focuses on identifying the instruments employed by those in power to manipulate the masses and retain their power in *Il cimitero*. In the novel, this means the devices used by the Jesuits, the Freemasons, and the Italian, French, and Russian secret services to manipulate the masses against the threat of the Jews in order to consolidate their own powerful position in society. After identifying such devices as the plot syndrome, the friend-and-enemy distinction, the diversions, and the desire to appear on television, the devices are then placed in connection with Eco's contemporary political context in order to show how Eco uses the representation of these instruments of mass manipulation to criticise contemporary Italian society. This chapter also examines Eco's approach to mass and folk culture connecting his idea of subversive humour with the Bakhtinian notion of the grotesque body. To contextualise Eco's perspective, the role of mass and folk culture in his last two novels is placed in relation with totalitarianism and mass manipulation.

5.2 Politics and the Media in Italy: Fascism, Mass Culture, Anti-Semitism, and Secret Services

As in the previous two chapters, this first section establishes the political context that provides a background to the analysis of Eco's novels. *La Fiamma* (2004) is set in the 1990s and retraces a past that starts in fascist Italy. Although *Il cimitero* (2010) is set in the nineteenth century, it establishes a dialogue with its author's contemporary events. The purpose of this section is to contextualise the political and social factors influencing the two novels so that Eco's response to these factors can be investigated. His response can be interpreted through the Bakhtinian notion of folk culture and the paradigm of the grotesque body. Certain aspects of the political and social context require examination for a better understanding of both novels. The links between fascism and mass culture are vital for the analysis of *La fiamma*, while for *Il cimitero* the essential factors are the definition of anti-Semitism and illustrations both of the role of secret services and of the interaction between the media and politics in Italy.

As David Forgacs and Robert Gundle point out in their study, mass culture and the media in Italy have been seen as tools to shape public opinion and promote consent both during the fascist regime and in its aftermath, while mass entertainment has been seen as a way of integrating people into a more consumerist way of life.[2] Mass culture was responsible for two opposing processes from the 1930s to the 1950s. First, it strengthened Italian citizens' awareness of their own society and thus increased participation in national events, such as sports or song festivals. Secondly, by circulating words and images from other societies, it inflamed private aspirations

[2] David Forgacs and Robert Gundle, *Mass Culture and Italian Society from Fascism to the Cold War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 1-2.

and desires and changed the preconceptions of acceptable sexual behaviour, gender roles, and generational identity. As a result, mass culture could not be limited to an instrument of political consensus-formation. However, if the fascist regime did not entirely manage to shape the mentality of the Italian people, as it would have wished, it did bind them in a "transient emotional complicity,"[3] by creating a "lay religion" or a "rite of communion" during mass rallies.[4]

Studies like Philip V. Cannistaro's *La fabbrica del consenso* (1975) argue that mass communication and mass culture under fascism were efficiently used as instruments to organise mass consent. Forgacs and Gundle refer to Cannistaro's documented account of the controls exerted by the Ministry of Popular Culture over the press, radio, and cinema. Yet they argue that Cannistaro exaggerated their overall significance and underestimated the weight of the non-state forces in the cultural economy.[5] For Forgacs and Gundle the Italian popular culture that developed from this varied environment was not the product of autarkic protectionism but of a series of exchanges of cultural goods between the regions of Italy and between Italy and other countries.[6]

The analysis of *La fiamma* in section 5.3 shows also Eco's representation of fascist censorship and propaganda engages with the possible plurality of its messages. However, Eco underlines that fascism remains a form of authoritarian rule and its censorship condemned those who did not respect it. Eco addresses the comprehensive character of fascist propaganda and the way people responded to it more than he addresses the pluralism of fascist Italy.

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[3] Ibid., 1-2.
[4] Emilio Gentile, *The Sacralisation of Politics in Fascist Italy*, trans. Keith Botsford (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996), 13. Mario Isneghi, *L'Italia in piazza, I luoghi della vita pubblica dal 1848 ai giorni nostri*, 2d ed. (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2004), 356. Quoted in Forgacs and Gundle, *Mass Culture*, 2.
[5] Forgacs and Gundle, *Mass Culture*, 199.
[6] Ibid., 4.

Another aspect that is interesting for the analysis of *La fiamma* is the fascist opposition to all foreign influences including translated books and popular imported genres like thrillers and comics. As Gherardo Casini explained in "Il libro e la cultura italiana," love for foreign things (*esterofilia*) was a form of intellectual snobbery because foreign culture was vacuously cerebral, as opposed to the healthy and vigorous Italian traditions.[7] In particular, children's magazines were made the object of the strongest requests for protectionism. A national conference on children's literature in 1938 firmly attacked American-style cartoons and their use of "bubbles" for the characters' speech as opposed to the European-style cartoon which placed speech or narrative underneath the drawings in captions (*didascalie*). The American-style cartoons were believed to be too visual because the predominance of the image over the text was not educational, and this prompted fears of a return to illiteracy.[8]

One last characteristic of the relationship between fascism and mass culture needs to be pointed out: its use of mass entertainment. From the early 1930s Mussolini made a fundamental shift in his policy when he declared his intention to "go towards the people" ("*andare verso il popolo*"). Until then the regime's main concern had been to organise and discipline the masses in the workplace. With this new policy, the regime targeted leisure and education. By the mid-1930s, there were many thousands of recreational-educational circles in Italy with several million participants.[9] This aspect of the fascist regime is important for understanding the analysis in *La fiamma* of its protagonist's past through the interferences of fascism. *La fiamma* recognises how such interferences took place at all levels, including that of sports, entertainment as well as the most obvious level of education.

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[7] Gherardo Casini, "Il libro e la cultura italiana," *Il libro italiano II*, no. 2 (1938): 52-4. Quoted in Forgacs and Gundle, *Mass Culture*, 206.
[8] Domenico Lombrassa, "La difesa del ragazzo italiano," *Il libro italiano II*, no. 11 (1938) 460, 462. Quoted in Forgacs and Gundle, *Mass Culture*, 206.
[9] Aristotle A. Kallis, *The Fascism Reader* (London; New York: Routledge, 2003), 280.

The question of anti-Semitism makes its first appearance in *La fiamma*[10] and returns with vigour in *Il cimitero*, a novel about the creation of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Albert Lindermann and Richard S. Levy refer to anti-Semitism as a form of hatred like no other: the longest, most tenacious and most mysterious in human history.[11] In addition, they also point out how the uniquely toxic brew of emotions, which varied from hatred to fear, jealousy and contempt, had been enriched, over the course of Christian history, with grotesque images. Such imagery somehow infected believers with a unique tenacity of belief, a strong resistance against contrary evidence, and, eventually, an inclination to violence. Anti-Jewish images were characterised by abnormality and included the conviction that the Jews practiced cannibalism, poisoned wells, spread the plague, and drained the blood of non-Jewish children for various rituals.[12] In some of the most influential definitions of anti-Semitism, given by distinguished scholars such as Saul Friedländer and Bernard Lewis, anti-Semites have a particular attention for the mystical and for the demonization of Jews. Friedländer talks about "redemptive anti-Semitism" in light of the Nazis' claim to be standing up for godliness and humanity against the demonically destructive Jews. Similarly, Lindemann and Levy point out that the historian Bernard Lewis used the term "cosmic evil."[13]

Il cimitero is as much about anti-Semitism as it is about the secret services. It is therefore important to give a brief introduction to the role of the secret services in Italy. Chapter Three has already mentioned how they were suspiciously connected to the Strategy of Tension. Here it is necessary to recount how they were organised and

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[10] The question of the race is central to both Fascist and Nazi regimes as the "*leggi razziali*" (racial laws) introduced in Italy in 1938 confirm. However, since this aspect is only marginal in *La fiamma* it will not be expanded on in this overview.

[11] Albert Lindemann and Richard S. Levy, eds. *Antisemitism: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 8.

[12] Ibid., 7.

[13] Ibid., 8.

how they interacted with other spheres of Italian society. As Philip Willan highlights, a series of scandals caused several attempts at reform and removal of the so-called deviant elements within the secret services. This only resulted in a confusing series of name changes that meant little change in reality.[14] Since the World War I, the name of the military intelligence service has changed three times. The *Servizio Informazioni Militari* (Military Information Service) or SIM was established in 1925 and disbanded in 1945 at the end of World War II. In 1949 the Allies allowed the service to be re-established as SIFAR (*Servizio Informazioni Forze Armate* - Armed Forces Information Service). In 1977 the current system was established with SISMI (*Servizio per le Informazioni e la Sicurezza Militare* - Military Information and Security Service) taking over from SID and a new domestic intelligence, SISDE (*Servizio per le Informazioni e la Sicurezza Democratica* - Democratic Information and Security Service). Despite the many reincarnations, the secret services retained the same objectives and were frequently accused of colluding with terrorists.[15]

On this last topic, Willan's argument could be added to what has already been said concerning the relationship of the secret services with right-wing terrorism and the police forces. Quoting Gianfranco Sanguinetti, Willan says that it was easy for the secret services to infiltrate and take control of spontaneously arising terrorist groups "either through arrests made at the appropriate moment, or through the killing of the original leaders, which normally occurs in a shoot-out with the police, tipped off by their own infiltrators."[16] In 1974, the *carabinieri*, tipped off by an infiltrator, arrested most of the leaders of the first generation of the Red Brigades.[17]

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[14] Philip Willan, *Puppetmasters: The Political Use of Terrorism in Italy* (London: Constable, 1991), 14.
[15] Ibid., 12.
[16] Gianfranco Sanguinetti, *Del Terrorismo e dello Stato*, Milan, 1980, 28 Quoted in Willan, *Puppetmaster*, 28.
[17] Willan, *Puppetmasters*, 21-5.

The salient characteristics of the secret services mentioned by Willan are the connection with the United States and the Masonic lodge known as Propaganda 2 (P2), along with the links to right-wing terrorism. Although the growth of the electoral consensus for the Italian Communist Party (PCI) was accompanied by the party's progressive self-distancing from Moscow in favour of a Eurocommunism that sought an intermediary position between Soviet-style Marxism-Leninism and Western free-market capitalism, the United States still saw a threat in the popularity of the PCI. Mysteriously, its increase in electoral support was paralleled by the increasing amount of terrorist activities in the country. When the Yalta Agreement of 1945 divided Europe into two geopolitical blocs, it also made it unthinkable that a communist party could be allowed to come to power in a Western capitalist country. The Italian Communist Party received special attention from the CIA, as confirmed by Director William Colby.[18]

In 1967, many of the most sensitive files from the SIFAR archives were passed to Licio Gelli, who later became Venerable Master of the secret P2 Masonic lodge. Among its members were senior officers from all branches of the military, including the secret services, parliamentarians, civil servants, members of the judiciary, and prominent figures from the worlds of finance and industry. Gelli and his associates became extremely powerful in influencing government appointments, helping to advance the careers of P2 members in all fields, and enriching themselves by converting political influence into wealth. This period coincided with the most radical application of the Strategy of Tension and violence in Italy. Willan believes it unlikely that such a widespread organisation was not acknowledged by US intelligence agencies. The true nature of the organisation was uncovered in 1981

[18] Ibid., 16-9.

when two Milan magistrates ordered a search of Gelli's Arezzo home and office that uncovered membership lists and other documents relating to the lodge. Over the years investigations have confirmed the connection between the P2 and right-wing terrorism.[19]

The last aspect of Italian society that emerges from *Il cimitero* is the relationship between politics and the media in Italy. Martin Bull and Martin Rhodes mention five periods in the history of the connection between Italian media and politics. The first period goes from the end of the World War II until 1954, the year television was introduced to Italy.[20] This period is characterised by the domination of the media by the popular political parties (the Christian Democrats, Italian Communist Party and Italian Socialist Party). The second period covers the fifteen years after the introduction of television to the outbreak of the students' and workers' movements. During this period, television began to offer political parties a medium for communicating their manifestoes. During the third period, from the end of 1960s, the subordination of television to the political parties began to break down due to the onset of a difficult period of political upheaval caused by students' and workers' revolts, terrorism, feminism, and so on. A process of pluralising televisual broadcasting, which a few years later resulted in the law reforming the Italian Radio-Television (RAI)—the state broadcasting corporation—began with the creation of the third RAI channel, mainly connected to the PCI and commercial television.[21]

The fourth period goes from the 1970s to the end of the 1980s and is characterised by the takeover of the RAI by the *pentapartito*, a coalition of four small parties and the DC. After an initial period of excessive proliferation, small private

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[19] Ibid., 48-63.
[20] Martin Bull and Martin Rhodes, eds. *Crisis and Transition in Italian Politics* (London: Frank Cass, 1997), 135-7.
[21] Ibid., 135-6.

channels were virtually all absorbed by larger groups by the beginning of the next decade. At the end of the 1980s, the purchase of almost the entire commercial network by Silvio Berlusconi and his company Fininvest (now Mediaset, after the floating of the shares in the securities market), led to radio and television developing into a duopoly. This was based on a division of the audience between the private and the public sectors. The so-called Mammì Law (1990), for the first time regulated radio and television broadcasting and served only to confirm this situation in the legal domain. The 1980s meant a significant transformation in the relationship between the media and the political system. The influence of commercial television pushed politicians to experiment with new ways of communication such as appearing on talk shows and entertainment programmes.[22]

The fifth period starts in the aftermath of the "clean hands" affair, introduced in Chapter 4.2, and sees the media acting to aid the transition from the first to the second Republic. This process culminated with the entry of Silvio Berlusconi into politics and the creation of *Forza Italia* (FI). Bull and Rhodes argue that the key to Berlusconi's success was his faultless timing and the means he used to act, rather than his over-emphasised skills as a communicator. Television relies on events, and Berlusconi's chief success was turning the political novelty of the FI into exactly what television was looking for. The birth of the FI was the central event in politics for many weeks. Berlusconi's media control contributed to Berlusconi's victory in 1994.[23]

This introductory section has offered a foundation for the analysis of *La fiamma* and *Il cimitero* within their political context. It has underlined the importance of the connection between propaganda and mass culture in fascist Italy as well as

[22] Ibid., 136-7.
[23] Ibid., 137-8.

Mussolini's attempt to take control of all levels of Italians' lives, which included education and entertainment. To prepare the ground for the analysis of *Il cimitero,* two ideas needed to be clarified: the nature of anti-Semitism and the role of the secret services in Italy.

5.3 Popular Culture and Folk Culture in *La misteriosa fiamma della regina Loana*

The protagonist of *La fiamma* (2004) is Giambattista Bodoni, nicknamed Yambo, a man in his sixties who wakes up in 1991 having lost his memory after a heart attack. The accident forces Yambo to deal with his past and his role in fascist Italy. Yambo is left with a perfect public or encyclopaedic memory, but he remembers nothing about himself or his personal life. Although the effect is comical at time, his situation is tragic. He has to go back to the places of his childhood to retrace the steps of his life in order to reconstruct it. Yambo relives his youth through comic books, songs, and popular fiction. With the analytical look of an adult, he recognises with concern the deeper messages of fascist propaganda which he fears he may have absorbed as a child.

As already pointed out, Eco's work from the late 1960s onwards demonstrates his commitment to critically engage with all forms of cultural production, including popular culture. Yambo's situation parodically represents the characteristic reiteration of the already-read or seen typical of popular culture in order to respond to the desire of the reader or spectator. As Chapter 2.3 has underlined, in his *Apocalittici e integrati* and *Il superuomo di massa* Eco argues that reiteration is one

of the main characteristics of popular culture. In an essay on *Casablanca*, Eco analyses the role of clichés in popular culture and points out that the shameless way in which clichés are brought together makes *Casablanca* reach Homeric depths. While the effect of bringing together two clichés is humorous, the union of clichés in *Casablanca* brings banality to such a height to allow us to catch a "glimpse of the sublime."[24] The first part of *La fiamma* reproduces a similar reunion of clichés. Yambo is left by the accident with no memories of his private life. The only way he has to interact with the outside world is by communicating through the quotations of popular novels, songs and movies. The shared knowledge of popular culture constitutes for Yambo the only bridge with an outside world that he has lost all connections with as an individual.

The second part of the novel is an account of the post-war Italian neorealist narratives treating fascism and the Resistance through books, notebooks, cartoons, and images of Yambo's childhood, which leads him to reconstruct a different side of his memory. While the first part is concerned with the reconstruction of superficial social habits, the second focuses on the political and civic sense Yambo formed as a child living under fascism. In this section of the novel, mass culture is shown to be closely connected with totalitarianism. In his search through his childhood books Yambo looks at the fascist propaganda with the eyes of an adult. He is sixty years old in 1991 and was therefore a young boy and a Balilla during the regime. Balilla was the name of a school-grade scouting paramilitary youth organisation under the fascist government. The first remark about fascism noticed by Yambo concerns two editions of the same book, by M. Bourcet, entitled *L'erede di Ferlac* in 1932 and *L'erede di Ferralba* in 1941. Obviously, between the two there is a change in politics towards

[24] Umberto Eco, "Casablanca: Cult Movies and Intertextual Collage," in Eco, *Faith in Fakes*, 209.

foreign culture, as pointed out earlier (5.2). The stories of novels and comic books are Italianised in accordance to the nationalistic education suggested by the regime. Buffalo Bill's comic book carries an amendment saying that in reality William Cody's name was Domenico Tombini and that he came from Emilia Romagna, which is also where *Il Duce*, Benito Mussolini was from.[25]

The collection of artefacts and various items of popular culture for his primary school education, taken between 1937 and 1945, make Yambo the adult question the double message of Italian society under fascism. He is confused by the evident dichotomy in Italian culture between the regime and mass culture, between sacrifice for the nation and the optimism of the media. As a child, he is exposed to messages of national glory while he fantasises about the stories of his comic books. At the same time, he listened to songs on the radio that promoted a vision of the ideal life: that of an accountant with no great expectations but who has a mediocre wage and could buy presents for his pretty wife.[26]

Realising this paradox as an adult, Yambo is concerned that the fascist propaganda may have had success in shaping his thoughts or those of his parents and grandfather. He listens to fascist hymns on an old gramophone and wonders if the Balilla used to sing popular children's songs like *Maramao*.[27] In school, he was taught the vowels and diphthongs with the fascist cry "eja eja." The examples given to teach the letter "B" are Benito and Balilla. But Yambo wonders where he learned

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[25] Umberto Eco, *La misteriosa fiamma della regina Loana* (Milan: Bompiani, 2004), 145.

[26] Gilberto Mazzi's song (1938) went: "Se potessi avere mille lire al mese/ senza esagerare, sarei certo di trovar/ tutta la felicità!/ Un modesto impiego, io non ho pretese,/ voglio lavorare per poter alfin trovar/ tutta la tranquillità!/ Una casettina in periferia,/ una mogliettina, giovane e carina..." Eco, *La fiamma*, 170.
"If I could make a thousand lire a month/ it wouldn't be a lie to say that it would buy/ all the joy a man would want./ I'm just an office man, I don't aim too grand,/ and if I keep on trying, maybe I can find/ all the peace a man could want./ A nice little house on the edge of the city,/ and a little wife too, so young and so pretty ..." Umberto Eco, *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana. An Illustrated Novel,* trans. Geoffrey Brock (London: Secker & Warburg, 2005), 169.

[27] Eco, *La fiamma*, 174.

the "B" from, when at the same time the radio was singing "*ba- ba – baby come and kiss me.*"[28] This demonstrates how from a very early stage children were exposed to the war lexicon as well as the fascist ideology. The idea of the necessity of war is transmitted already with the teaching of language. The learning of the language reconciles contradictions such as the "bullets,"[29] a word given as an example to teach the letter "L" and the guardian angel. The association of a war vocabulary (bullets) with religion (the guardian angel) is a contradiction which is taken as such with the awareness of an adult but accepted as natural in the mind of a child because they coexist on his/her spelling-book. An adult can recognise in the contradictory combination of war and religion the result of the Lateran Treaty. The 1929 Treaty, a concordat between the Roman Catholic Church and the regime, was signed by Pietro Gasparri and Mussolini and gave the papacy state sovereignty and financial compensation for the seizure of church lands by the liberal state in the nineteenth century.[30]

To the eyes of Yambo, who acts like a semiotician, all heroic propaganda contains an unconscious allusion to the uselessness of sacrifice. If you read deeper into the songs encouraging sacrifice you can find a sense of defeat. The song entitled "*Ritorneremo!*" can only communicate the hope of going back to where there once had been defeat in the first place.[31] Yambo tries to recreate an environment as close to that of his childhood as possible. He plunges into fascist propaganda while listening to popular songs of the time. The effect is the impression that life followed two tracks: on one side, the war bulletins, carefully amended by the regime in order

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[28] Eco, *Flame*, 182.
"*Ba, ba, baciami piccina.*" Eco, *La fiamma*, 181.
[29] Eco, *Flame*, 182. "Per insegnare il suono *gl* il libro portava a esempio *gagliardetto, battaglia, mitraglia.*" Eco, *La fiamma*, 182.
[30] Stanley G. Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914–1945* (Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2005), 119–120.
[31] Eco, *La fiamma*, 199.

to show Italy as strong and winning, and the continual lesson of optimism on the other. The contradicting extremes of this double track insistently confirm one another. To encourage an increase of population the regime introduced a tax on celibacy in 1927 and the radio sings that jealousy is out of fashion. Many Italian soldiers start dying at the beginning of the war in Spain while Luciana Dolliver sang "you don't know what love is."[32] The war explodes and people have to stay inside their houses in the dark listening to Alberto Rabatagliati on the radio whispering for people to lower the volume so that they could "hear his heart beat through the radio."[33] The countless examples of such double-track life illustrate what Yambo defines a "schizophrenic Italy" whose internal fracture is kept together by the combined glue of popular culture and fascist propaganda. Eco shows how the apparently contradictory message sent by popular culture serves the programme of cultural hegemony promoted by fascism. Popular culture under fascism adopts the role of nineteenth-century popular fiction: it defies the rule only superficially while actually confirming it.

A significant aspect of this second part of the novel is that it moves the novel's setting from the city, where Yambo is a successful antiquarian bookseller, to his parents' house in the countryside. In order to shift from the collective memory of popular clichés to the rediscovery of his own personal memories, Yambo needs to get in touch with his personal, political, and historical roots. In other words, he has to reconnect with folk culture. This means both a rediscovery of the bodily activities and of the genuine self-preserving wisdom that, in Rabelais, responded with laughter to the serious impositions of the church. Two characters in particular facilitate

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[32] Eco, *Flame*, 201.
"Bimba tu non sai cos'è l'amore." Eco, *La fiamma*, 202.
[33] Eco, *Flame*, 203.
"Alberto Rabatagliati ci sussurrava abbassa la tua radio per favore se vuoi sentire i palpiti del mio cuore." Eco, *La fiamma*, 202.

Yambo's reconnection to folk culture: Amalia, the housekeeper of Yambo's parents' house, and Yambo's grandfather.

Amalia is a peasant whose life was formed in the countryside during the two world wars. Amalia leads Yambo to rediscover fundamental pleasures, like food, and fears, such as of the *masche,* witch-like creatures that were believed to live in the Piedmont countryside and frighten people at night.[34] Amalia's grandmother used to tell her that one of these *masche* once turned herself into a cat to steal a baby. The baby's parents discovered her in the room and cut off one of her paws. The next day, an old woman was found to be missing a hand and she was burned at the stake. Folk culture feeds superstition, but it also helps dispel fear by using laughter. Amalia tells Yambo a comic story about her grandfather going back home from the tavern shouting that he had been attacked by the *masche*, only to get beaten up by her grandmother who knew he scared himself because he was drunk and only thought he saw a witch.[35]

The other figure that returns to Yambo's memory in association with folk wisdom is his grandfather, who responds to the fascist rule through laughter and the bodily grotesque. At first Yambo is not sure of his grandfather's political position during the war because he finds things like official newspapers and fascist music records in his studio.[36] As it turns out, Yambo's grandfather was a bookseller and collector of magazines, books and newspapers, an educated man who critically analysed the information disseminated by the regime. Yambo later understands that

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[34] Eco, *La fiamma*, 92.

[35] "Ma la mia nonna ci ha detto sta' zitto te malnato che non sei altro, eri ciucco come una biglia e andavi da una parte all'altra del sentiero così infilavi tu il manico nei rami degli alberi, altro che masche, e giù botte." Eco, *La fiamma*, 256-7.
"But my grandmother said, Hush up you good-for-nothing, yes, that's what you are, you were soused as herring and wobbling from one side of the path to the other getting that handle caught in the tree branches, hellcats nothing, and then she thrashed him good." Eco, *Flame*, 259.

[36] Eco, *La fiamma*, 171.

his grandfather kept the official news in order to compare it with the news transmitted by *Radio Londra*, an independent radio station that was against the regime. He carefully read through all articles looking for information that one could miss at a first reading.

Yambo realises as an adult that Italian state-controlled newspapers let through what was really going on if you gave them a close reading, as opposed to proper official newspapers like *Pravda*. For example, an article from January 1941 was entitled "Battle on the Bardia front waged with great ferocity," while inside the article one could obtain a different perspective.[37] The comment "other strongholds fell after courageous resistance from our troops, who inflicted substantial losses on the adversary" communicates the fact that Bardia, in North Africa, was taken by the English despite the great losses the Italian army may have inflicted on its enemy. Yambo's grandfather commentary confirms this: "RL, lost B. [Bardia] 40,000 pris."[38] The official news reassures the public of the successes of the Italian army, while the unofficial news, RL or *Radio Londra*, tells the story as it really happened.

Later, Yambo finds out that his grandfather was checking the news so carefully because he was waiting for a sign that the times were changing and kept telling his friends: "*s'as gira*," (if it turns),[39] reminding them that the moment the fascists are out of power he will enact his revenge. While he was working as a journalist in a socialist newspaper in 1922, the fascist *squadristi* showed up and destroyed the newspaper's office. In addition, to purge the journalists of all subversive ideas, Merlo, a *squadrista*, forced a large quantity of castor oil down the throat of Yambo's grandfather. In small doses, castor oil was used as a purgative but in bigger doses it

[37] Eco, *La fiamma*, 179.
[38] Eco, *Flame*, 180. Eco, *La fiamma*, 179-80.
[39] Eco, *La fiamma*, 264.

was a typical fascist punishment for subversion.[40] The fascists employ a properly grotesque punishment on Yambo's grandfather and his colleagues: the journalists spend hours on the toilet with unstoppable diarrhoea.

While experiencing the explosive effects of his punishment, Yambo's grandfather coldly plans revenge, managing to save some of his liquid faeces mixed with castor oil in a bottle. As far as his political commitment is concerned, he officially abandons journalism and any suspicious activities to become a bookseller. After that he waits, reading through official and unofficial news to catch signs of the fascists' downfall, always keeping the bottle ready for the man responsible for his humiliation. When Mussolini is dismissed some twenty years later, Yambo's grandfather gets the chance to pay Merlo back for his treatment. He and a group of men force Merlo to drink the disgusting liquid from the bottle.[41] Once the regime collapses, the situation is turned upside down, and the punisher becomes the punished. Yambo finds the situation comical and talks about the bottle as if it was a precious 1922 vintage, looked after with care and kept at just the right temperature for twenty years.[42]

The revelation of Yambo's intimate contact with folk culture explains how that folk culture is the lens through which Yambo perceives the general media and propaganda schizophrenia of fascist Italy. An interesting example is the popular song "*Pippo, pippo non lo sa,*" which is about a ridiculous character named Pippo who believes he is beautiful while in reality everyone laughs at him. Comparing the figure of Pippo with that of the proud Balillas marching down the streets in their fascist uniforms, Yambo asks himself:

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[40] Walter Laqueur, *A History of Terrorism* (New York: Little Brown, 1997), 75.
[41] Eco, *La fiamma*, 264-6.
[42] Ibid.

> [W]ho was walking through the streets of the city, the Balilla boys or Pippo? And at whom were people laughing? Might the regime have recognised in the figure of Pippo a subtle allusion? Might our popular wisdom have been offering us that almost infantile drivel as consolation for continually having to endure that heroic rhetoric?[43]

Popular wisdom is endowed with the capacity to save us from the bombastic rhetoric of heroism by means of laughter. Here Eco's essay on Franti becomes relevant again, along with his analysis of laughter as the last stand of sanity against the madness of the totalitarian regime. Chapter 2.4 has pointed out that Franti laughs at everything, including the military parade. His laughter, however, is not due to insanity or carelessness; rather, it is his final attempt to ridicule the military frenzy that would eventually lead to fascism.[44] Franti's laughter has a Bergsonian aura in that it is endowed with a social corrective value. As in Rabelais and in medieval culture, the oppressive fear of the official culture is subverted through humour and parody. Popular culture brings back to earth the pomposity of any heroic tone of voice. This is why popular culture plays such a key role in Yambo's formation as a child. It is only by retracing the role that popular culture, in Gramsci's sense, and folk culture, in Rabelais' sense, had in Yambo's education that he manages to answer a problematic question: "where did I stand?"[45] Thus, humour provides folk culture with a disillusioned approach towards the grandeur of the fascist rhetoric.

For Yambo, popular culture represents not only a medium of fascist propaganda but also conduit to more liberal ideals. Yambo points out how the fascist practice of replace American names with Italian names was not enough to repress the potentially controversial content. Yambo learns about the freedom of press from a Micky Mouse

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[43] Eco, *Flame,* 184.
"Ma chi passava per le vie della città, i Balilla o Pippo? E la gente di chi rideva? Forse il regime avvertiva nella vicenda di Pippo una sottile allusione? Era forse la saggezza popolare che ci consolava con tiritere quasi infantili di quella retorica dell'eroismo che si doveva subire a ogni istante?" Eco, *La fiamma*, 183-5.
[44] Eco, "Elogio," 85.
[45] Eco, *Flame*, 156. "Con chi stavo io?" Eco, *La fiamma*, 158.

comic book, where Micky Mouse is a journalist who is ready to fight to print "all the news that is fit to print," quoting the famous *New York Times*'s motto, despite the threats of gangsters and bribed politicians.[46]

As Yambo works to recollect his past, he finds both war heroes and everyday heroes, like his father, who does not get involved in politics and does not leave his office during the bombardment so that he can keep his job. Eco criticises not only the propaganda that persuaded young men toward blind sacrifice for the glory of their country, but also consumerism. Yambo's father fights his own battle for financial independence from his own father and for the welfare of his family. Bitterly, Yambo says that what his father fights so hard for is represented by a car, the object of desire for so many, which eventually becomes the cause of his and his wife's death.[47] Without being apocalyptic, Eco does criticise certain aspects of popular culture that spread the illusion that happiness can be bought through material objects like cars, radios, phones, or Vespas.

To conclude, Eco's use of popular clichés in the first section of *La fiamma* shows his interest in pointing out the consolidating role of popular literature which lacks any social innovation and thus results in a form of artistic expression that repeats formulas and conventional expressions. The redundancy of content in support of dominant ideologies repeats itself in a redundancy of form.[48] As Eco argues in "The structure of bad taste," in *Apocalittici e integrati*, kitsch is typical of a popular culture that substitutes an involved and responsible aesthetic fruition with the enjoyment of ready-made feelings.[49] In this way, popular culture turns into a carrier of conservative ideas that are transmitted by the reiteration of the form of its

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[46] Eco, *Flame*, 242. Eco, *La fiamma*, 240.
[47] Eco, *La fiamma*, 304.
[48] Norma Bouchard, "Eco and Popular Culture," in *New Essays on Umberto Eco*, ed. Peter Bondanella (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 7.
[49] Eco, *Apocalittici*, 67-9.

aesthetic experience. For this reason, the first section of the novel represents Yambo's connection with society from a superficial point of view, devoid of any civic or political meaning. Conversely, it is thanks to his reconnection with folk culture, its wisdom and its ability to laugh at the absurdities of the regime in charge, that Yambo regains his deeper self: not the artificial one that interacts with society, but his real self, imbued with political and critical thinking. In *La fiamma*, Eco proposes that folk culture can make a positive contribution to contemporary society by bringing its members back to an understanding of those natural and individual roots that mass culture attempts to erase in order to make everyone conform.

5.4 Popular Culture and Mass Manipulation in *Il cimitero di Praga*

Eco's latest novel, *Il cimitero di Praga* (2010), is set during the Italian Risorgimento, the movement started in 1750 which led to the unification of Italy in 1861. The personal story of its protagonist, Simone Simonini, a forger and spy for different governmental groups, intertwines with historical events that changed the history of Europe, such as Garibaldi's expedition and Italy's unification, the riots of 1848, the Commune in Paris and, most important, the creation of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Simonini, the grandchild of a military captain who is consumed with hatred for the Jews, becomes directly involved in all these events thanks to a natural propensity for fraud, spying and impersonation. Simonini is the only non-historical characters in the novel. His spiteful grandfather, Captain Simonini, was a reactionary admirer of Augustin Barruel, a Jesuit who argued that the French revolution had been the result of a universal conspiracy plotted by the Templars against the king. Captain

Simonini sends a letter to congratulate Barruel for his acumen in discovering the conspiracy and to share with him his idea of a Jewish conspiracy.[50]

Like *La fiamma*, *Il cimitero* also focuses on the potential of popular culture to manipulate people's opinions. *Il cimitero* is published in *feuilleton*-style and shows how the *Protocols* achieved their popularity by appealing to the emotions of the masses, especially to their fear, in a way that is similar to the appeal of popular fiction. Eco's last novel is different from all the previous ones for two main reasons. Firstly, the grotesque body is no longer endowed with the positive character of dialogism and the potential to challenge the established order. In *Il cimitero*, the grotesque body becomes an instrument to incite hatred against the Jewish people in response to their economic success. Secondly, popular culture loses entirely the positive element it has in *La fiamma*, that of giving the opportunity of reading liberal values between the lines. In *Il cimitero*, popular culture combines with the representation of the grotesque body for the purpose of manipulating the masses against the Jews.

On several occasions, Eco demonstrates a strong interest in both the theory of conspiracy and in the creation of historical forgeries. The story of the Templars' plan for ruling the world in *Il pendolo* represents people's susceptibility to conspiracy theories, which Chapter 5.5 analyses. For the moment, it is sufficient to highlight how Simonini's involvement with different branches of national and international secret services, as well as with the Jesuits and Freemasons, parodies the role of the Italian secret services from the late 1960s to the 1980s. Chapter 5.2 mentioned that secret services in Italy collaborated with all sort of groups, including the P2, the CIA and the mafia, in order to prevent the Italian Communist Party from becoming too

[50] Umberto Eco, *Il cimitero di Praga* (Milan: Bompiani, 2010), 65.

popular. Simonini, too, is pulled from all sides by different groups, including the Jesuits, the Freemasons, and the Italian, French and Russian secret services, who all want the Jews to be eliminated according to their own specific interests. Although all of them, including Simonini, struggle towards the same goal, each group wants to be the leader. The effect of Simonini's involvement with all these groups is both comical and grotesque.

The creation of historical forgeries is already a central concern in *Baudolino*, whose story revolves around the letter of the legendary Prester John. *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, another historical forgery that interests Eco, was published for the first time in Russia in 1903. *Protocols* was already declared fake by *The Times* in 1921, where it was demonstrated that it had been partially copied from Maurice Joly's *Dialogue between Machiavelli and Montesquieu.* And yet, Hitler considered the *Protocols* to be true in his *Mein Kampf* (1925-6). Even a contemporary scholar like Nesta Webster argued that, even if it were a forgery, it still reflects what Jews are like and is therefore true.[51] Previously showing his interest in the *Protocols* in his theoretical works, with *Il cimitero di Praga* Eco reflects on the specific power of literature to imprint ideas on us.[52] For this reason, *Protocols* owes its popularity to the power of literature. *Protocols* became an authority among the anti-Semites because of its appealing charge. Eco's contribution to the topic was that he uncovered the origins of the *Protocols* in Sue's *Mysterès du peuple* (1849-1856) and Alexandre Dumas' *Joseph Balsamo* (1848). The appeal that fiction has for the

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[51] Nesta Webster, *Secret Societies and Subversive Movements* (London: Boswell, 1924), 408-9: "The only opinion I have committed myself is that, whether genuine or not, the Protocols represent the programme of a world revolution, and that in view of their prophetic nature and of their extraordinary resemblance to the protocols of certain secret societies of the past, they were either the work of some such society or of someone profoundly versed in the lore of secret societies who was able to reproduce their ideas and phraseology." Quoted in Umberto Eco, Preface to Will Eisner, *The Plot* (New York; London: W. W. Norton & Company), vii.

[52] "Nadia Bobbio Interviews Umberto Eco," December 13, 2011.

reader's emotionality has the unique power of influencing the reader's opinion on contemporary social issues.

Like in *La fiamma*, popular culture plays a significant role in *Il cimitero*. Firstly, *Il cimitero* choses to imitate the *feuilleton* style by integrating its narration with images, a typical component of popular literature. Secondly, it is thanks to the appeal exerted by Sue's *Le Juif errant* (1844-5) that Simonini finds justification for his hatred towards the Jews. Although the news of a tax on the publication of serialised novels (the Riancey Law) goes almost unnoticed, Simonini does notice and he thinks that the reason for the tax is to suppress voices like Dumas or Sue, who were denouncing the evils of society.[53] However, Simonini also perceives that popular culture has the power to manipulating public opinion. For instance, Sue used his *Les mystères du peuple*, written from exile, to criticise Louis Napoleon. Sue shows how Napoleon's conquest of power was inspired by the Jesuits, the big enemy of Republican France.[54]

Eco shows with his *Il cimitero* how the *Protocols* were born from popular literature. In 1868, Herman Goedsche, under the pseudonym of Sir John Ratcliffe, writes *Biarritz*, a popular novel that describes an occult ritual taking place in the cemetery of Prague. The novel copies a scene from Dumas's *Joseph Balsamo* describing the encounter between Alessandro Cagliostro, head of the Higher Unknowns, and other Illuminati who meet to plot against Louis XVI and Queen Marie Antoinette. Goedsche uses the same setting but replaces the participants with the representatives of twelve tribes of Israel, whose objective is to prepare their conquest of the world. Five years later, the story appears in a Russian pamphlet, *The Jews: Masters of the World*, as a factual reportage. In 1881, *Le contemporain*

[53] Eco, *Il cimitero*, 97.
[54] Ibid., 118-9.

publishes the story as evidence provided by an unimpeachable source, the English diplomat Sir John Readcliffe. In 1806, François Bounard uses the speech of the Grand Rabbi—here, called John Readclif—in his book *Les Juifs, nos contemporains*. Finally, in order to help his political protector Count Sergei Witte, Rachovsky, an informer of the Okhrana, the czarist political police, set up his rival, Eric de Cyon. He has Cyon's house searched, and a compromising pamphlet is found: Cyon copied Joly's text ascribing it to Witte instead of Napoleon III. A fierce anti-Semite, Rachovskij deletes all the references to Witte and attributes them to the Jews instead. This becomes probably the primary source of the *Protocols*, which is, according to Eco, a scarcely credible document where the "bad guys" express shamelessly their evil plan.[55]

Simonini witnesses the power of mass literature when he enters into contact with Léo Taxil, a former Freemason. Taxil studied in a Jesuit school and then became a popular anti-clerical pamphleteer, publishing parodic and blasphemous booklets such as *La vie de Jésus*. He joins a sect but he is then expelled. Simonini convinces him to convert to Catholicism for money and popularity. An eccentric man who enjoys his popularity, Taxil denounces all the rites used in the Masonic sect on a *feuilleton* entitled *Le diable au XIXe siècle*.[56] The review is a series of two hundred and forty booklets distributed over thirty months, written by Taxil and a certain Dr Bataille, which offers a grotesque account of the rites of freemasonry and imbedding them with satanic elements. Eventually, the grotesque accounts in the *feuilletons* turn into *colportage*,[57] a form of cheap popular literature, originally sold by itinerant

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[55] Umberto Eco, *Serendipities: Language and Lunacy*, trans. William Weaver (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1998/1999), 14-16. For Eco's study on the subject see also Chapter Six ("Fictional Protocols") of *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London: Harvard University Press, 1994), 117-40.
[56] Eco, *Il cimitero*, 335-72.
[57] Ibid., 344.

hawkers called *colpolteurs*. In the end, Taxil converts back to Catholicism and, for the sake of retaining his popularity, he declares everything he has written in the review was invented.[58]

The experience is useful for Simonini because he sees how popular literature can be adapted to one's beliefs—even when they change—and used to convince others. Stealing Joly's *Dialogues* and combining it with Dumas's *Giuseppe Balsamo*, Simonini elaborates his idea of the Jewish plot under the behest of the Russian government. Taking popular literature as an example, Simonini knows that his representation of the Jewish plot has to be dramatic: a group of Rabbis meeting in a cemetery at night, wearing hoods over their grotesque features, leaning over the tomb of Rabbi Löw, the sixteenth century creator of the Golem, a monster whose task was to avenge all Jews. The Rabbis announce what community they represent and then start calculating their earnings over the centuries.[59] Simonini follows the principle that the Rabbis should have said something easily understandable and of popular appeal, such as their desire to suppress Christian education and to control the trade in alcohol, butter, bread, and wine, and of the professions of law and medicine, as well as the press.[60] In conformity with popular literature, Simonini wants to reach a wide audience with a clear message that manages to disturb the public at different levels.

Once the alleged report is ready, Simonini sells it to the Russians. With Paris being invaded by the Prussians, Simonini becomes a spy for the Germans and eventually ends up working for the new French government (i.e. the government led by Adolphe Thiers after he suppressed the revolutionary Paris Commune in 1871). At the same time, the Jesuits get in touch with Simonini and encourage him to finish his story before other forgers like him claim ownership of it, since the Jesuits are also

[58] Ibid., 449.
[59] Ibid., 233-8.
[60] Ibid., 244-7.

interested in getting rid of the Jews. The Jesuits, feeling threatened, want Simonini's report to shock all classes. In order to do so, Simonini is to prepare a different version of the speech for each different audience: socialists, priests, Russians, and others.[61] It is significant that Simonini prepares a different version of the Jews' speech for each group that could be affected by it. It is yet another connection with popular literature, given that one of its most typical characteristics is that it is interested in getting the audience's attention. The difference is that popular literature reaches out to different types of audiences in order to increase its sales, while Simonini's objective is the ruin of the Jews. Simonini is not tempted by money. He sells his service as a spy only to make sure that he is the one who gets credited with the creation of a plan that will destroy the Jews. His desire is not for wealth or popularity but merely the personal achievement of realising his grandfather's sick dream.

After a long series of events that see Simonini involved with various secret and powerful groups that all share the desire to get rid of the Jews because they threaten their power, Simonini is forced to write the *Protocols* for the Russians. Once more, he is reminded to write an appealing story that would make everyone feel threatened for their own particular reasons. What is relevant is that, in Simonini's account, the Jews boast about the simplicity with which masses are controlled because of the well known "pettiness, inconstancy and lack of common sense of the crowd. The crowd is blind and has no insight ... The crowd is barbaric, and behaves barbarically at every opportunity. Look at those terrible alcoholics, reduced to idiocy by their drink, whose consumption is limitless and tolerated by liberty!"[62] Simonini, who calls himself a

[61] Ibid., 307-13.
[62] Eco, *Cemetery*, 412-3.

good narrator,[63] tries to evoke the final indignation of the crowd, which is typical of popular fiction. In the end, Simonini succeeds in reaching the masses thanks to the skilful use he makes of the devices of popular fiction.

Another aspect of Simonini's use of popular fiction for mass manipulation is the fact that he connects it with the bodily grotesque. *Il cimitero*, like *La fiamma*, revolves around the reconstruction of its protagonist's memory, lost in the aftermath of a traumatic event. In order to regain his memory, Simonini starts writing a diary with the help of an artificial representation of himself, named Abbé Dalla Piccola. The split of personality is caused by a traumatic event that causes Simonini's loss of memory. This event is a black mass during which he is forced to have sexual intercourse with a woman whom he later murders because he discovers that she is Jewish. Through the exercise of writing Simonini recalls his isolated childhood and his growing hatred towards virtually every category of humanity.

Simonini channels his hatred into an association of the hatred of the other with the grotesque body. He provides an allegedly physiological explanation for the inferiority or the monstrosity of the Germans, the French, the Italians, priests, Jesuits, women, and Jewish people. The Germans are characterised in terms of Rabelaisian lower body activities, such as their continually embarrassing stomach problems they have due to the consumption of beer and greasy sausages. According to Simonini, the Germans produce on average twice as much faeces as the French. His argument is that the hyperactivity of the lower body denotes a lower cerebral activity, thus demonstrating their physiological inferiority. During the German invasions the barbaric hordes left unreasonable amounts of faeces in their wake. In addition, the

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"Incostanza e la mancanza di equilibrio morale della folla. La forza della folla è cieca e senza acume …è barbara, e agisce barbaramente in ogni occasione. Date uno sguardo a quei bruti alcolizzati ridotti all'imbecillità dalle bevande il cui consumo illimitato è tollerato dalla libertà!" Eco, *Il cimitero*, 492-3.

[63] Eco, *Il cimitero*, 506.

smell of their sweat is stronger than anyone else's and their urine contains twenty percent nitrogen while other races only have fifteen percent.[64]

The dual nationality of Simonini, born from a French mother and an Italian father, does not result in any sympathy towards the two nations. Simonini describes the French as lazy, impolite, greedy, and hostile. To all questions they answer "*sais pas moi*, and he'll pout as if he's about to blow a raspberry."[65] The connection with the lower body is used to debase a group of people to the indecency of corporality. Simonini hates the Italians too because they are liars, cowards, and traitors.[66] For Simonini, Neapolitans and Sicilians are monstrous and degenerate because of their mixed origin.[67] Simonini evidently does not share Bakhtin's view on how hybridity can enrich languages and cultures as Bakhtin explains with his concept of heteroglossia. Racial and linguistic mixture generates unnatural monsters that need to be stigmatised for their difference.

Concerning priests, Simonini points out their greed for food and women. It is interesting how he debases them to their lower bodily activities of sex and defecation: "they talk with horror about sex but every day you see them getting out of an incestuous bed without even washing their hands, and they eat and drink their Lord, then shit and piss him out."[68] The act of physically consuming the body of Christ and then expelling it is marked as a disrespectful and even blasphemous act. Having spent a childhood in isolation, far from any sexual initiation, Simonini demonises everything that involves the lower body. He mentions defecation and any

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[64] Ibid., 12-5.
[65] Eco, *Cemetery*, 9.
"*Sais pas moi*, e protrudono le labbra come se petassero." Eco, *Il cimitero*, 15.
[66] Eco, *Il cimitero*, 17.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Eco, *Cemetery*, 11.
"Ti parlano con orrore del sesso ma tutti i giorni li vedi uscire da un letto incestuoso senza neppure essersi lavati le mani, e vanno a mangiare e bere il loro signore, per poi cacarlo e pisciarlo" Eco, *Il cimitero*, 18.

activity of the lower body as a result of debased nature. He considers Jesuits to be Freemasons dressed like women, and women are disgusting because of their "disgusting white flesh, those swollen breasts, those dark sweaty armpits that unnerve you."[69]

Simonini's greatest enemies are, however, the Jews, and his description of them is meaningfully filled with all possible physical deformities. In particular, he notes the slimy smiles, the animal-like teeth, and most of all their noses, "like the beak of a southern bird."[70] His description of the protrusion of the nose, typically positive in Bakhtin's theory of the grotesque body, is in this case a true stigmatisation of the features of the enemy in order to represent a whole race as naturally deformed and, therefore, evil. The grotesque nature of the Jew's body is not positive Bakhtinian openness but rather the expression of their evil plans. According to Simonini, the dark colour of the Jews' eyes reveals diseases of the liver, corrupted by the secretions produced by ages of hatred.[71] Jews can be recognised by their smell, what Victor Hugo called *fetor judaica*, due to what they eat: too much garlic, onion, mutton, and goose. It is also caused by their infected blood.[72]

However, since Simonini identifies as grotesque not only the Jews but all of the other categories he hates, there is little room here to expand an analysis of the Jewish body as grotesque (this has been done in detail, for example, by Sander Gilman and Jeffrey Herf.)[73] It is more important to point out how Simonini justifies his demonization of the Jews, as that of women and priests, by pointing to their allegedly

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[69] Eco, *Cemetery*, 15.
"Schifose carni bianche, quei seni turgidi, quelle ascelle brune dall'afrore che ti snerva." Eco, *Il cimitero*, 22.
[70] Eco, *Cemetery*, 5.
"Come il beccaccio di un uccello australe." Eco, *Il cimitero*, 11.
[71] Eco, *Il cimitero,* 12.
[72] Ibid., 48-9.
[73] Sander Gilman, *The Jew's Body* (New York and London: Routledge, 1991); Jeffrey Herf, *The Jewish Enemy: Nazi Propaganda During World War II and the Holocaust* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: 2006).

high sexual activity, which connects to Bakhtin's notion of the grotesque body characterised by the freedom of the lower body. Simonini describes the Jews as doomed by purported "uncontrollable lust- the result of circumcision, which makes them more erectile, with a monstrous disproportion between their dwarfish build and the thickness of their semi-mutilated protuberance."[74] Bakhtin finds both the element of disproportion of the male member and that of dismemberment—in this case, mutilation—in Rabelais and marks its comic and defying character. Conversely, Simonini describes the Jews' appetite for sex as a monstrous expression of viciousness. In fact, the Jewish plot that Simonini finally exposes in the *Protocols* involves the importation to Paris of alcoholism and pornography, a "triumph of the Anus" in Simonini's words.[75] According to Simonini, in order to dominate the world, it is important to seduce its people with what is appealing to the lower body.

The stigmatisation of the body of the enemy as grotesque plays a significant role in Simonini's plan to set up the Jews in a plot to take over the world. In Simonini, Eco combines the fear of the different and the grotesque with the potential of popular culture in order to appeal to the emotions of the masses in a forgery, the *Protocols*, that will play a significant part in determining the destiny of millions of people.

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[74] Eco, *Cemetery*, 6
"Foia irrefrenabile – dipende dalla circoncisione, che li rende più erettili, con una sproporzione mostruosa tra il nanismo della corporatura e la stazza cavernosa di quella loro escrescenza semimutilata." Eco, *Il cimitero*, 12.
[75] Eco, *Cemetery*, 338.
"Trionfo dell'ano." Eco, *Il cimitero*, 405.

5.5 Media and Politics in *La fiamma* and *Il cimitero*

The previous two sections have shown how popular culture can, by losing the genuine and natural character of folk culture and replacing it with the artificiality of consumerism, become an instrument of pure manipulation of the masses. After all, the popularity of an item of mass culture is a result of how much attention a novel or a comic book attracts and how profitable the item is. Although Eco is in favour of erasing all neat boundaries between cultural categories and instead explaining in broad terms how human society works, his last two novels strongly contrast the natural character of folk culture and the artificial character of popular mass culture. His objective is to illuminate the political interests at work behind manipulation. With this in mind, this section analyses on the one hand how the media are seen as interacting with fascism and reacting to its downfall in *La fiamma*. On the other hand, it points out how Eco identifies various mechanisms of mass manipulation in *Il cimitero*.

Despite the fact that *Il cimitero* is set in the nineteenth century, the novel reflects many concerns relating to a more contemporary society, in an even more troubled manner than the contemporary setting of *La fiamma*. In fact, *La fiamma* investigates the influence of the fascist ideology on the media and it leaves it to the critical observer to discover its manipulating traps. Overall, the novel has a light, humorous tone. It deals with the problematic issue of mass manipulation by placing it in the humorous light of folk culture. Conversely, *Il cimitero* is characterised by a bitter tone that is more sarcastic than humorous. Its purpose is to dismantle a series of artifices used by those in power to stay in power, but at the same time, the novel

lacks the optimistic belief that such a dismantling can be achieved by a single critical observer of society.

La fiamma spreads a positive notion that popular culture is so vast and universal that it makes futile any attempts by those who, like the fascists, want to keep it under tight control. A child bombarded by fascist propaganda—like Yambo, or Eco himself—can still find a way to come to value liberal ideas, such as the right to a free press (as Chapter 5.4 shows), in the very same popular culture used by the system to manipulate the masses. Freedom of the press and the role of the journalist are biographically important aspects to Eco, because he has been an active journalist since his early youth. The fact that Yambo's grandfather is a journalist and that he abandons his paper after the fascist punishment, is significant because it marks a shift from the political to a personal battle against the regime.

Although he remains engaged with following the news about the war, Yambo's grandfather does so only with his personal revenge in mind. He gives up politics to focus on the punishment of a single man who once humiliated him. Therefore, the fact that he reads the news of the regime in parallel with unofficial channels and that he helps a group of boys trying to join the partisans does not really indicate his political commitment. He is certainly against the fascists, but only because of what they did to him as an individual. The shutting down of his newspaper coincides with his abandonment of politics and his resistance. In order to be able to punish Merlo, he decides to stay put until fascism is over. He knows that if he resists he could get killed and will never get to punish Merlo. But by remaining an insider and externally accepting the fascist rule he would survive and be ready to take the opportunity when it arises. Also, by pretending to accept the fascist rule, Yambo's grandfather manages to help the boys join the partisans because the fascists know he is a wealthy farmer

who is not opposed to the regime. They never suspect he could be hiding fugitives. Like William of Baskerville and Baudolino, he tries to subvert the system from within. Also, like the other two characters, he acts as an individual pushed by his own selfish reasons.

It is interesting how Eco's iconographic account of fascist Italy in *La fiamma* is followed by an analysis of journalism in the aftermath of the regime's downfall. Yambo is interested in how the newspapers enthusiastically report the fall of Mussolini, but he also points out that the journalists were the same ones writing fascist propaganda for him when he was still in charge. Journalists have to adapt fast and keep their own ideas secret until they are allowed to express them.[76] By pointing out the ideological flexibility of journalists, Eco underlines how journalism, like all mass culture, answers to the laws of the culture industry. Newspapers need to make money and in order to do so they follow the trends suggested by the consuming public. Whether because of a dictator's censorship or the desire to make a financial profit, there is not much room for the freedom of the press.

Eco also underlines how the media represent the world turning upside down after Mussolini's fall, which reconnects with the notion of carnival that is central to Eco's first two novels, *Il nome* and *Il pendolo*. The carnivalesque environment characterising the aftermath of the dictator's fall celebrates the liberation from the oppressor in its wildest and most grotesque way. This is best represented by Mussolini, his mistress Claretta Petacci, and some fascist leaders being executed and their bodies being hung upside down in Piazzale Loreto. Although the moment was dramatic, the humiliating hanging of Mussolini and his wife recalls the carnivalesque

[76] Eco, *La fiamma*, 266.

dethroning and ridiculing of the fallen king during the carnival. Like in carnival, the leader is uncrowned and ridiculed because his authority is no longer threatening.

In the post-war years, journalists followed this carnivalesque trend of complete freedom of expression and revealed all of the horrors that happened in the war, giving morbid details of the most grotesque ones such as the example of Leonarda Cianciulli, a triple-murderer who made soap bars and biscuits out of the bodies of the women she killed.[77] The media were overflowing in this period with news, stories, and images of all kinds in the safety of total freedom. However, like all carnivals, this freedom was destined to end or, Eco seems to argue, to lose its genuine character of provocation. The media tend to model themselves more based on consumer demand than on their idea of what constitutes good contents. As Eco explains in "Il comico e la regola," one needs to treat carnival with suspicion because its excessive liberation easily results in either the confirmation of the rule or in the introduction of a new one.

The bitter tone of *Il cimitero* is the resigned answer to the fact that the devices used by those in power to retain their positions are too strong for the individual rebellion of a critical observer of society. In *Il cimitero* and in his theoretical work, *A passo di gambero*, Eco points at four main ways of power control in contemporary Italy: the plot syndrome, the identification of an enemy, media diversions, and the creation of the desire to appear on television. What follows is an illustration of how Eco reports each of these political instruments.

The espionage environment that Simonini moves in is based on what Eco defines in a recent article as "empty secrets." The story of the creation of the *Protocols* enacts Eco's idea that in order to reveal a plot one must not denounce

[77] Ibid., 379.

anything new but only what is already known.[78] For the same reason, in an article that appeared in *Libération* in December 2010, Eco questions the real impact of the information on the US government released in November 2010 by *WikiLeaks*, the non-profit organisation publishing allegedly classified information from anonymous sources. It is no coincidence that Eco wrote this article shortly after publishing *Il cimitero* in October 2010. Thus, parallels between the case created by Julian Assange's website launched in 2006 by *The Sunshine Press* and Simonini's story can easily be made. Eco argues that, like in his novel, news for the secret services are made up by "press clippings" of something that is already known. For instance "Berlusconi's sex habits merely relay what could already be read for months in any newspaper (except for those owned by Berlusconi himself, needless to say)." The article reiterates the importance in the secret services of giving information that is already known so that they can corroborate a theory rather than create completely new theories.[79] In this sense, a really powerful secret is an empty one because by being in the public domain it is all the more believable.

Another example given by Eco of a dubious plot believed to be true is 9/11, an example of the "eternal plot syndrome." He points out how there are many versions of the Twin Towers plot, all offered as an alternative to the official reconstruction of the facts: some suggest it was organised by the Jews, some by Bush's administration so he would have an excuse to attack Afghanistan and Iraq, some by the American secret services, among many other theories. Eco states that he is chronically sceptical of all plots. If there were a real secret to be hidden in relation to the twin towers attack even by one person only, the secret would be revealed somehow. To plan a

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[78] Eco, *Il cimitero*, 96.

[79] Umberto Eco, "Diplomacy: Not Such Wicked Leaks," trans. Eric Rosencrantz, *Libération*, Paris, December 2, 2010. http://www.presseurop.eu/en/content/article/414871-not-such-wicked-leaks

plot of such a scale as 9/11, hundreds of people would have been involved and so someone would be bound to let the secret slip.[80]

More pertinent to the Italian situation is the fact that the syndrome of the secret is increased by the frequent and dubious activities of the secret services. As explained in the introduction to this chapter, the intervention of the secret services in Italian society does not correspond to the necessity to protect its citizens, as it ought to. The secret services have been demonstrated to act mainly in the interests of powerful people that could command them. Indro Montanelli bitterly describes the secret services in the life of the republic as a gangrene and a dead weight whose function has been for decades that of legitimising coups d'état. Shortly after the "clean hands" scandal of 1992-93, it turned out that the secret services were directed not by merciless KGB killers, but by thieves, in perfect harmony with Italian society. The *Servizio per le Informazioni e la Sicurezza Democratica* was found to have used billions of lira to buy houses for politicians while they claimed to use government money to pay informants and other expenses.[81] The culture of suspicion and secrecy is encouraged by the presence of the mafia in Italy, but also by freemasonry, as in the previously mentioned case of the P2 group.

More recently, the culture of suspicion and secrecy has been encouraged by Berlusconi as part of his propaganda. Without using the latest events as an example such as his media campaign against the magistrates and the use of the legitimate impediment to avoid appearing in court,[82] already in 1994 he was talking about a

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[80] Umberto Eco, "11/9: La cospirazione impossibile," *l'Espresso*, October 28, 2007. http://www.informazionecorretta.com/main.php?mediaId=12&sez=120&id=22394ciao

[81] Indro Montanelli, *L'Italia del Novecento* (Milano: Rizzoli, 1998), 557-8.

[82] On 7 September 2010 the so-called law of 'legitimate impediment' was approved (*Legge sul legittimo impedimento*), repealed by referendum in June 2011, to provide immunity for criminals who happened to be serving in public offices. The law instituted a legitimate impediment to appear in court, applicable only to the Prime Minister and the Ministers of the Republic. During this time, Berlusconi was supposed to respond to three accusations: of bribing a witness, David Mills, his former tax advisor, to give false testimony in court during two trials in the late 1990s; of fiscal fraud in the Mediaset-tv

three-staged plot in a letter he wrote to President Oscar Luigi Scalfaro. Shortly afterwards, Paolo Berlusconi, Silvio Berlusconi's brother, was accused of bribing a financial institution in a transaction involving the sale of certain properties. A member of Fininvest, Aldo Brancher, was accused of bribing politicians while Adriano Galliani, the president of the football team AC Milan and an associate of Berlusconi, was accused of making and under-the-table payment to the football player Gigi Lentini so that he would transfer from Turin to AC Milan. Three offices of the Attorney General—in Milan, Turin and Rome—were looking into the accounts of Fininvest. Eventually, one of the main leaders of Fininvest, Marcello Dell'Utri, was accused of fraud.[83] This marked the beginning of a long battle between various magistrates and Berlusconi that is still going on. Berlusconi insists that the magistrates are trying to set him up. He identified a concrete enemy and tried to transmit the necessity of considering them a threat not only for him as a person but for the entire Italian nation.

The second point in the list of political mechanisms of mass manipulation is the construction of an enemy. With *Il cimitero*, Eco points out how the identification of the other with the enemy is constant throughout human history. Echoing Carl Schmitt's idea that "the specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that between friend and enemy,"[84] Eco argues that the figure of the enemy cannot be abolished from the processes of civilisation. As agents of the secret services, Eco's characters in *Il cimitero* argue that people need an enemy they can unite against: "People need an enemy. I make my characters, secret

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rights case; and of fraud and misappropriation in the Mediatrade case. Grignetti, Francesco. "Cos'è il legittimo impedimento?" *La Stampa*, January 11, 2011.
http://www3.lastampa.it/domande-risposte/articolo/lstp/383189/

[83] Montanelli, *L'Italia del Novecento*, 577-8.

[84] Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996/2007), 26.

agents, say that. Who is the enemy? The different."[85] Here, too, Eco's comments recall Schmitt's theory, according to which a political community defines itself as a group of people that is distinguished from a group of outsiders and, thus, through the drawing of a distinction between friend and enemy.[86] As Eco argues in a series of lectures in Bologna (2008), the enemy is necessary not only to define the national identity but also to set an obstacle that can be used to compare a certain system of values. What is interesting is that Eco also highlights the stigmatisation of the body of the enemy who is described as ugly, grotesque, and stinking.[87] On this occasion, Eco shows again his interest in the bodily grotesque and the functions that modern society attributes to it.

Eco gives a concrete example of this dynamic at work in Italian society when he points out in an interview that recent elections in Italy have counted heavily on the fear generated by migratory movement: "broadening to an entire ethnic group the characteristics of some of its members living in a marginalised situation, we are today constructing in Italy the image of the Romanian enemy as that of a scapegoat for a society overwhelmed by a process of transformation, which includes ethnic changes, and cannot recognise itself anymore."[88] With *Il cimitero*, as he did previously with *Il nome* and *Il pendolo*, Eco wants to underline the politicisation of the construction of an enemy. An enemy serves the specific purpose of unifying the community and is therefore created, using the association with the grotesque body,

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[85] "La gente ha bisogno del nemico. Lo faccio dire ai miei personaggi, agenti dei servizi. Chi è il nemico? Il diverso." [My translation]. Wlodek Goldkorn, ed., "Eco, gli ebrei e i complotti," *L'Espresso*, October 28, 2010. http://espresso.repubblica.it/dettaglio/eco-gli-ebrei-e-i-complotti/2137284.

[86] Schmitt, *The Concept*, 38.

[87] Umberto Eco, "Costruire il nemico," May 15, 2008. Paper presented at the congress entitled "Elogio alla politica" held at Bologna University. http://www.golemindispensabile.it/index.php?_idnodo=16773.

[88] "Allargando a una intera etnia le caratteristiche di alcuni suoi membri che vivono in una situazione di marginalizzazione, si sta oggi costruendo in Italia l'immagine del nemico rumeno, capro espiatorio ideale per una società che, travolta in un processo di trasformazione anche etnica, non riesce più a riconoscersi." Eco, "Costruire il nemico." [My translation].

by those in power or by those who want to obtain power. Eco's example of the Romanian enemy in Italian society criticises the political choices of Bossi's *Lega Nord*, which, as Chapter Four has shown, exploited the immigration situation to gain voters. As Eco points out in *Il nome*, the authority needs to incorporate an enemy in order to strengthen its position. In *Il nome* the church incorporates the heretic, in *Il pendolo* the state incorporates terrorism, and in *Il cimitero* various powers incorporate the Jews.

Another tool of mass manipulation is that of the creation of diversions that attract the attention of the masses and direct it away from what those in power want to pass unnoticed. This mechanism appears immediately in the epigraph to *Il cimitero*, taken from *La ca' dei cani* (1840) by Carlo Tenca, an Italian man of letters and supporter of the Risorgimento. The quotation argues for the importance in historical accounts of episodes that distract the reader from the main fact:

> We have included the execution of one hundred citizens hanged in the public square, two friars burned alive, and the appearance of a comet - all descriptions which are worth a hundred tournaments and have the merit of *diverting the reader's mind as much as possible from the principal action* [emphasis added].[89]

In *A passo di gambero* Eco analyses his contemporary political scene and labels these kinds of distractions as an "*effetto bomba*" (bomb effect). They consist of big unexpected pieces of news that end up filling the first pages of a newspaper in order to let other uncomfortable news pass unnoticed. An obvious example of this "bomb effect" is Berlusconi's gaffe with Martin Schulz in 2003 at the European Parliament.

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[89] Eco, *Cemetery,* Prefaced quotation.
"Vi abbiamo introdotto la esecuzione di cento cittadini impiccati sulla pubblica piazza, quella di due frati abbruciati vivi, l'apparizione d'una cometa, tutte descrizioni che valgono per quelle di cento tornei, e che hanno *il pregio di sviare più che mai la mente del lettore dal fatto principale* [emphasis added]." Eco, *Il cimitero*, 5.

The Italian prime minister called the then German Member of the European Parliament a "nazi *kapò*," or a concentration camp guard. While the unexplained gaffe occupied the headlines for several days, the fact that the Gasparri Law, which would have allowed Berlusconi's Mediaset to get rid of RAI, was being discussed in parliament went completely unnoticed.[90]

The act of diversion is closely connected with the final mechanism of mass manipulation in the list: the desire to appearing on television. This last aspect of mass manipulation develops around the idea of the beautiful body, and stands therefore in contrast with the Bakhtinian notion of the grotesque body. Italian television is crowded with beautiful young men and women, bombarding the viewer with perfect bodies at all hours of the day. *Videocracy: Basta apparire* (2009), a documentary by Erik Gandini, illustrates the power of the media and of the cult of beauty in Italy. No matter what is going on in the world, the largest part of the television schedule is dominated by programmes showing young scantily-clad women and sculpted young men who are eager to reach the ideal Italian: becoming popular.

Eco responds to this cult of beauty by placing it on the same level as the grotesque. He compares the "televisual Fool"[91] to the "village idiot:" he is an exhibitionist by nature who behaves like a clown in order to be offered drinks in a local tavern. Similarly, society encourages this "televisual Fool" to embarrass him/herself on television the way people used to encourage dwarfs and bearded women to perform at fairs. The exhibition of deformity itself is glorified as long as it is shown on television.[92] The Bakhtinian marketplace and its connection to the

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[90] Umberto Eco, "Demonizzare Berlusconi?" In *A passo di gambero*, by Umberto Eco (Milan: Bompiani, 2006/2007), 131-2.
[91] Umberto Eco, "The Loss of Privacy," in *Turning Back the Clock*, by Umberto Eco, trans. Alistair McEwen (London: Vintage, 2007/2008), 77-88 85.
[92] Umberto Eco, "La perdita della privatezza," in Eco, *Gambero*, 87-9.

monster is evoked in Eco's ironic perception of media exhibitionism as one lowered to the level of the freak shows of medieval fairs.

Both *La fiamma* and *Il cimitero* are concerned with the question of politics and mass manipulation. They investigate the role of the media and popular culture in a changing society and question how this affects the critical reaction of common people who are bombarded by messages imbued with political values. In *La fiamma*, as in *A passo di gambero*, Eco seems to argue that grotesque mockery is the answer of the critical insider who hopes to dismantle, à la Panurge, the effects of mass manipulation from within society itself. Conversely, the changed tone of *Il cimitero* illustrates how the varied and multilevelled attacks exerted by those in power through various means of mass manipulation leave little hope that the individual can engage in any significant challenge to authority.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has shown how Eco approaches mass culture as both a positive instrument for transmitting liberal values and as a potential means of mass manipulation. In the first case it is important to underline that its positive aspects are due to the connection with an older wisdom. The Bakhtinian concept of folk culture plays a central role in Eco's perception of mass culture. Where folk culture prevails, as in *La fiamma*, the danger of manipulation is avoided through the grotesque mocking of the pompous authority. However, where folk culture is rejected, like by Simonini in *Il cimitero*, mass culture loses its connection with folk wisdom and is maliciously and intentionally used only to manipulate the masses. The paradigm of

the grotesque body contributes to a consolidation of this argument. Simonini coldly employs the grotesque body purely to depict the enemy as monstrous and to instigate fear. Conversely, through the grotesque body, Yambo reconnects with his personal and family roots and is thus able to reconstruct both his personal and political self.

It has been pointed out how Yambo is left only with formal intertextuality after the accident. Mass culture, which is part of virtually everyone's common knowledge, helps Yambo reconstruct his past because it gives him emotions and connects him with his personal history. However, mass culture only provides Yambo with the instruments to survive in society; that is, with those recognised superficial acts one needs in order to interact with others. As Eco points out, the mass culture of consumerism has no political message or desire for any change to the given order. The typical characteristic of mass culture is reiteration of situations and events, which demonstrates Eco's argument. Like nineteenth-century popular literature, mass culture in the fascist and post-fascist years did not promote subversion but rather provided escape and stimulated the desire for shallow entertainment and a mediocre life.

For this reason Yambo reconstructs his political and civic sense through the interference of folk culture in mass culture. As an adult, Yambo rereads the fascist propaganda and post-war mass culture of his youth, recognising the response of folk culture to the pretentiousness of fascist propaganda and the disconnection from the Italian social reality of mass culture. Yambo, like Eco, is a semiotician who reads mass communication critically and looks for the mechanisms behind it. He does this because—again, like Eco—he experiences the power of rhetoric during fascism and recognises its potential for mass manipulation.

Thus, mass culture does more than create emotions and leave memories that belong to the encyclopaedia we share as a community. As Eco demonstrates in *Il cimitero*, it can also lead to the creation of a historical forgery that calls for genocide. Simonini's relationship with mass culture is directed purely to move the public into hating the Jews. Simonini wants to appeal to the readers in order to warn them against the danger that the Jews are said to constitute for society. By blaming the Jews for the decadence of society—in particular, for introducing alcohol and pornography—Simonini gives his readers the justification to forget their own weaknesses and identify the cause of those perversities outside themselves. Simonini stresses how the Jews' plan to subjugate people by forcing them into an obsession with the lower body, by lowering the people to the status of animals that are dominated by sexual urges. The fact that Gentiles yield so easily to the vice of alcohol keeps them from realising that they are being manipulated by the Jews. In this way Simonini takes away his readers' guilt while placing it on the Jews.

It has been shown how the serious tone in Eco's last novel and the insurmountable coldness of his protagonist are marks of a new pessimism. The secret organisations that wish to eliminate the Jews finally manage to create the *Protocols* because they are powerful and so deeply anchored in society that no revelations can stop them. Like the Italian secret services, the organisations in *Il cimitero* are ready to negotiate with terrorists, thieves and forgers to ensure that they get what they want.

Conversely, in *La fiamma* the fascist enemy is defeated through the grotesque mocking of the fallen authority. This connects the act of Yambo's grandfather as well as the media of post-fascist Italy to the Bakhtinian carnivalesque, which overthrows authority and defeats it through laughter. Deep down, folk wisdom is

ready to laugh at the nationalist madness of fascism and so it is also ready to constitute sanity's last stand, as Eco argues in his essay on Franti. Yambo's grandfather, like William in *Il nome*, acts as a semiotician who reads critically the state-controlled newspapers and compares them to unofficial news. Also a journalist, he is forced by the fascists to abandon his work and thereafter focuses on his personal revenge. He remains a part of the system in order to strike back once the authority has fallen. On the one hand, Yambo's grandfather abandons any political fight. On the other hand, he can act as an insider of the regime and keep the group of boys from joining the partisans. Like Panurge, he formally accepts the rule only to undermine the authority from within and ridicule it. Conversely, Simonini is an outsider of society who acts in the shadows to spread his hatred of the Jews.

In conclusion, this chapter has identified Eco's last phase of novelistic criticism, characterised by his last two novels and the way that they attack mass manipulation. *Il cimitero* makes evident the dangerous potential of mass literature in the wrong hands, such as those of Simonini, who uses mass culture for his own personal means. While *La fiamma* still has the humorous tones typical of Eco's previous novels, *Il cimitero* is more serious and less hopeful. This phase is different from the first one, although they are both political. In his first phase, Eco expresses a belief that a single individual can infiltrate the official order and challenge it with cold humour. In this final phase, although *La fiamma* still trusts the power of the critical individual—in this case, Yambo's grandfather—to stand up against the regime from the inside, it also displays Eco's shift from public to private interests. William of *Il nome* is also a critical observer who fights the system from the inside, but he participates in the political and public life of his time in hope that his critical way of looking at society can be transmitted and thus be beneficial to others. Conversely, Yambo's grandfather

gives up politics and focuses on punishing his enemy for his own personal humiliation. He acts against the regime from inside but at the same time never does anything too drastic which would have him executed before he could enact his revenge. The tone of the novel is thus humorous, like in the previous novels. It employs the grotesque and the connection with folk culture to deride the pomposity of the fascist regime, but it is also tinted with the bitterness of individual revenge and disappointment towards political commitment.

The tone becomes even more critical in *Il cimitero*, where Eco shows the various means used by those in power to manipulate the masses in order to retain their position. This goes well beyond simple manipulation of the masses by using popular culture. It involves, firstly, encouraging a plot syndrome which makes everyone suspicious about everything and therefore covers all plots with uncertainty and impedes their revelation by mixing them with myriad others. Secondly, this way of manipulating the masses directs the people toward a common enemy who is made into an object of fear by the very same powerful people who claim to be able to defeat him. Thirdly, this strategy employs diversions to distract the masses with trivial information while facts that change lives are kept under cover. Lastly, in his theory Eco criticises the cult of the beautiful body, another form of diversion, in the Italian media and ridicules the widespread desire among Italians to appear on television by way of the exhibitionism of the "village idiot" during fairs and the paradigm of the marketplace.

In this last phase of criticism, folk culture's inclination toward self-preservation, which still has a raison d'être in *La fiamma*, is undermined by the cold calculated use of the masses by the secret services in *Il cimitero*. There is no hope that critical thinking can get rid of mass manipulation because too many mechanisms are in

place. In this last, pessimistic novel, those in power achieve their final manipulation in the publication of the *Protocols*. *Il cimitero* reflects Eco's discouragement in face of the manipulative power of the modern media of the fact that so many Italian voters willingly comply with the media's domination.

6. CONCLUSION

This study has investigated how Eco's sociopolitical and cultural criticism evolves in his novels during the thirty years from the publication of *Il nome* (1980) to *Il cimitero* (2010). The textual analysis of Eco's novels for their widespread use of the grotesque through Bakhtin's politicised reading of Rabelais has shown that the objects of the early and late novels' criticism were primarily political, while those of the middle novels were primarily academic. In any case, Eco's criticism towards contemporary Italian society is characterised by a mild, intellectual and objective type of political commitment. Eco's novels are not an attempt to reproduce allegorically specific political events, but rather they satirise, with their use of Rabelaisian grotesque, specific targets which this work has identified with the church, the state, and selected types of intellectuals. The purpose of Eco's satire is to promote intellectual independence from these self-affirming authorities and critical thinking within a society that too easily conforms to ideas established by the very same authorities.

For this reason, it becomes relevant, in the conclusion, to discuss Eco's commitment as an intellectual and his idea of the intellectual's role in society. David Robey points out a change in direction in Eco's career caused by the events of 1968. He argues that there seems to be a shift in Eco's interests after the publication of *La struttura assente* (1968) that differentiates earlier and later works. Whereas earlier works show the same polemical and socially committed traits as those we find in *Opera aperta* (1962) and *Apocalittici e integrati* (1964), such features become less present in *Trattato di semiotica* (1975). Although Eco never retreats into his earlier view of the intellectual's role, he comes to a more defined separation of functions: in journalism he pursues the line of *Apocalittici e*

integrati while his theoretical work becomes more specialised and academic.[1] Robey's position is supported by Eco's expression of relief in the preface to *Il nome* where he says that, as a man of letters, he can write out of pure love for writing, rather than for a political purpose in 1980s, whereas he could not do so in 1968.

The element of specialisation in Eco's writing is attributable to his increasing commitment to semiotics as a discipline.[2] By contrast, it is interesting to relate this change to the events of 1968 and the consequent dissolution in 1972 of *Gruppo 63*. The students' and workers' movement of those years shook the group's belief in the artist's duty to attack the social system indirectly by means of the aesthetic medium rather than with direct political action. According to Eco, artists and intellectuals in 1968 were challenged by the opportunity to participate actively in politics, an opportunity missed by *Gruppo 63*, which ultimately led to its downfall. For Eco the crisis meant a reduced polemical insistence on the special political function of art, though the new interest for semiotics had also contributed to the same effect. According to Robey, Eco's response does not seem to have led him to a more direct involvement in political affairs, and, despite his continued work in journalism, he moved in the opposite direction instead. The specialisation and academicism of his later theoretic works suggest a degree of post-1968 disillusionment.[3]

Conversely, this thesis has highlighted how Eco goes from a provocative phase of open social criticism in the 1960s and 70s with his "semiological guerrilla warfare" to the irony of the 1980s and 90s. Eco never retreats into academicism, embracing the idea that an intellectual should always be independent and stimulate questions rather than give

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[1] David Robey, Introduction to *The Open Work*, by Umberto Eco (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1989), xix.
[2] In 1971 he founded *VS: Versus – Quaderni di studi semiotici*, the first international semiotics journal published in Italy, and he became the secretary general of the International Association for Semiotics Studies. After *La struttura assente* was published with the subtitle "Introduzione alla ricerca semiologica" the International Association for Semiotic Studies chose to use Peirce's term "semiotics" instead of "semiology" as used in the French structuralist environment such as in Saussure's *Cours* and Barthes's *Éléments de sémiologie*. It was also thanks to Eco's various travels as a visiting professor, mainly in France and in the United States, that semiotics achieved such a great popularity among the academics. Bondanella, *Umberto Eco*, 68-9.
[3] Robey, Introduction to *Open Work*, xx.

answers, as Bobbio's theory inspired him to think.[4] Reflecting on the political and social commitment of the intellectual in the 1950s, Bobbio claimed that the intellectual's role was to spread doubt rather than certainties. Firstly, Eco elaborates on this by arguing that the intellectual needs to bring crisis and confusion to those whose side he takes.[5] Secondly, he quotes Bobbio's idea of the impartiality of the intellectual, according to which an intellectual has the right to participate in cultural debates without unconditionally accepting the terms of the fight. An intellectual takes part in the fight by means of his/her own terms after having critically analysed the debates to which he/she contributes.[6] In other words, Bobbio's claim is that of the right of culture to be autonomous from political ideology.

When intellectuals found themselves powerless in front of the fast and drastic cultural changes of the early 1960s, Eco was quick to understand the inevitability of the changes that mass communications brought to a whole variety of sectors and to make sure he got involved. Putting his academic reputation at risk, Eco decided in his early career to study popular culture. He chose to democratically approach all kinds of cultural messages through semiotic analysis at a time when intellectuals still looked down on mass cultural products as lowbrow culture not worthy of critical analysis. Nowadays, Eco's distinction between apocalyptic and integrated intellectuals is out of date because mass culture and highbrow culture can no longer be separated as distinctly as in the past. Mass media, popular culture and communication studies are now well integrated into the worldwide academic environment. Eco was a pioneering researcher in the early stages of this cultural change that unsettled the traditional perception of culture. He decided to take an active part in his changing cultural environment rather than refuse mass culture or passively adhere to it: that is, he chose to be neither an apocalyptic nor an integrated intellectual.

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[4] Eco, "Norberto Bobbio," 60-71.
[5] Ibid., 68.
[6] Ibid., 68-9.

His semiotic analysis of society, literature and culture is not only an academic approach dictated by a changing society. In a time of social and cultural changes like the late 1960s, Eco seems to have felt that structuralism could no longer be an appropriate answer to the new necessities of a challenged society. Structuralism's formal analysis was leaving out an essential element that became evident in light of the late-1960s: it was missing the social dimension of literature and language. In this context, both for Eco and for the Bakhtin Circle, semiotics, with its attention to the social element, became the valid alternative to formal analysis. Thus, Eco's democratic analysis of all cultural messages constitutes his method of social commitment. In Eco's words:

> I believe it is my job as a scholar and a citizen to show how we are surrounded by "messages," products of political power, of economic power, of the entertainment industry and the revolution industry, and to say that we must know how to analyse and criticise them.[7]

In addition, Eco seeks to provide his readers with "counter-information," which does not necessarily mean that he offers ideas differing completely from the ideology shared by the majority. Rather, to provide counter-information means to show how the news can distort information and how a close reading can bring different messages to light.[8]

This idea of the critical reception of communication and information leads to what has emerged in this thesis as one of Eco's main concerns: the power of rhetoric, especially when it is the rhetoric of an ideology. Rhetoric is the most important instrument in the hands of ideology since the objective of ideology is that of persuading as many people as possible of its validity. Significantly, Eco uses parody in order to show how the power of rhetoric can be dismantled. In this sense, the Bakhtinian notions of authoritative word, of monoglossia, heteroglossia, and of the grotesque, have helped analyse how Eco sends his message against the rhetoric of any ideology. The authoritative word is monologic and not

[7] Umberto Eco, Preface to *Faith in Fakes*, ix.
[8] *Il manifesto* 23 (1971):3. Quoted in Rebaudengo, "Between Shelves," 245.

open to dialogue because it serves the purpose of confirming the authority in power. The power that contrasts the authoritative language is heteroglossia, the uncontrolled mixture of social languages. Heteroglossia is inherently dialogical because it challenges the unitarian nature of the authoritative language. To represent the authoritative language means to deprive it of its power. In parody, this takes place by means of the grotesque.

Although Eco is known for the comical tone of his journalism, it is in his novels that Eco can express the full potential of satire and parody. The power specific to the novel is indeed that of interacting with contemporary society, as Bakhtin argues. According to Bakhtin, contemporaneity cannot become an object of representation for high genres since it is the reality of a "lower" order in comparison with the epic past. The novel belongs to the eternally living element of unofficial language and unofficial thought.[9]

However, Eco does not engage lightly with the parody of his contemporary society which confirms his choice of a cautious political commitment as an intellectual. Eco's prudent approach is demonstrated by the use of palimpsests which marks all his novels. In other words, Eco feels the need to distance himself from his fictional works and from the positions he takes in them. He satirises society while at the same time placing a safe distance between himself and his socio-political criticism. By casting into doubt his whole narration, he warns the reader to be critical towards his novels. Eco as an author is not concerned so much with his authority but rather with the story standing out on its own, thus letting the reader decide what to make of it instead of offering a linear explanation and guided interpretation of the story. Eco's narrators question, assume and interpret a story that they receive from someone else. The analysis of Eco's narrators potentially constitutes the topic of further Eco studies and it cannot be expanded on here. However, it is interesting to point out how Eco casts doubt on the stories in his novels: *Il nome* and *L'isola* are written from unearthed manuscripts; *Il pendolo* consists of Casaubon's

[9] Mikhail Bakhtin, "Epic and the Novel: Toward a Methodology for the Study of the Novel," in Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 16-22.

interpretation of Belbo's notes; *Baudolino* is the story told by a declared liar; Yambo in *La fiamma* has lost his memory and looks at his own past as the reader would, with detachment; and *Il cimitero* is the dialogical diary of a schizophrenic. The choices Eco makes concerning his narrators contribute to the openness of his works and to the necessity of the reader's cooperation.

The destabilising touch of Eco's narrators encourages readers to be critical towards what they are being told and thus sets the ground for a way of looking not only at the novel but also at the society to which the novels belong but at the same time avoiding to take a specific position. As mentioned earlier, Eco believes in the political independence of the intellectual who does sacrifices personal choices to play a significant role in spreading doubts and questions in his/her social environment. In terms of the sociopolitical criticism present in Eco's novels, three phases have been identified. The first phase is that of criticism of the church (in *Il nome*), which was unable to adjust to the changing society of 1950s Italy, and of the criticism of the Italian state in the 1970s (in *Il pendolo*). The second phase shows how Eco turned to a criticism of intellectuals: the deconstructionists as early as in *Il pendolo*, popular fiction writers and postmodernist theories in *L'isola,* and historians in *Baudolino*. However, the latter goes also back to a criticism of contemporary society, of Bossi's *Lega Nord* party in particular. The third phase of the social criticism that Eco includes in his novels, which has developed since 2000, revolves around his two last novels, *La fiamma* and *Il cimitero*, both of which are concerned with popular culture and manipulation.

In other words, Eco's criticism, initially coloured by the enthusiasm of the writer at his first novels, who believes in the power of literature of shaking awake the conscience of its readers and in the possibility that the masses can be constituted by singularly aware individuals, turns bitter in the following phases. Already with the intellectual phase Eco abandons his initial enthusiasm and trust of the masses to direct his satire to the scholars

and their theories. The lack of trust of the masses is demonstrated by the fact that Eco insists more than in *Il nome* on creating a bridge between his academic studies and his novels –this being especially evident in *Il pendolo* and its technical approach to textual interpretation. Whereas *L'isola* can be seen as a Eco's comical representation of the world of popular fiction from the perspective of both the writer, the reader and the hero, *Baudolino* returns to a more political criticism but also to a criticism of the masses, unable to unite to fight for the common cause –be the masses in this case that composed by the monsters or that of the north league fighting Frederick Barbarossa.

However, Eco's disappointment towards the way his contemporary society works in order to manipulate the masses becomes more evident in his last two novels, belonging to the third phase of Eco's fictional criticism. *La fiamma* shows how popular culture served the ideology of fascism and contributed to its spreading, especially among young people. Only folk culture, pushed by the people's natural instinct of self-preservation, can valuably respond to the nationalistic frenzy caused by the rhetoric of fascism. While Eco's first phase is characterised by the optimism that a single individual can act from within the order to destabilise it for the benefit of the many, the only individual in *La fiamma* who acts from within the fascist system to undermine it is Yambo's grandfather. However, his main objective is his own personal satisfaction to humiliate the specific *squadrista* who had humiliated him while he was working as a subversive journalist. Despite this bitter thirst for revenge, the novel retains a humorous tone, which is lost in *Il cimitero* and replaced with Simonini's cold and calculating sarcasm. The only hope left in *La fiamma* is that folk culture could inspire a return to sanity that would allow for the self-preservation of the masses. This hope is lost in *Il cimitero*, where the spontaneous character of folk culture is entirely replaced with the artificial manipulations of mass culture.

The last phase is characterised by a critique of the fact that masses are manipulated by those in power. All of the power holders—the state, secret organisations, Masonic lodges,

the fascist regime—see the power that the masses have when well manipulated. Eco's interest in the power of the mass media during this last phase is especially interesting in the context of the Italy of Berlusconi, who controls much of the country's mass media. Over the last thirty years, his television channels have set the standards for entertainment and behaviour. Talk shows and reality television have entered Italian households and appeal to all ages. As Eco mentions on several occasions, Berlusconi has managed to create the political views of his voters through television: the larger part of voters in Italy made up of housewives and retired people who spend a lot of time watching Berlusconi's channels.[10] The result is that people get absorbed with talking about the superficial topics offered to them by television and stop worrying about matters that actually affect their lives.

Ultimately, the purpose of all these TV-shows is to distract people from politics. The media, Eco says, "[are] undoubtedly instruments of social control," and are based on the continuous "carnivalisation of life."[11] For Eco, carnival is the distraction used by the ruling class to consolidate its position. Chapter Five in particular has shown how Eco considers distraction to be an instrument used for political control and the manipulation of the masses. For the same reason, Eco also stresses how Berlusconi views the media as his most precious ally because it allows him to increase his popularity among the masses. In this sense, Eco defines Berlusconi's government as one that is characterised by a "dangerous populist tendency"[12] because of the importance it gives to popular consensus. Eco argues that the idea of the "people"—as an entity that expresses the same will and sentiments—does not exist. Therefore: "populists are those who create a virtual image of the popular will. Mussolini did this by mustering crowds of one or two hundred thousand

[10] "Umberto Eco: "Berlusconi è un ammaliatore," Euronews Interview, January 3, 2012. http://it.euronews.com/2012/01/03/umberto-eco-berlusconi-e-un-ammaliatore/
[11] Eco, "Frames," 3.
[12] Umberto Eco, "Exploiting the People," in *Turning Back the Clock*, 129.

people who publicly acclaimed him."[13] Conversely, Berlusconi attempts to bring about a "creeping coup d'état,"[14] with his use of the media to create a successful image for himself and to thereby build his own popular consensus.

Eco's last novel warns against the monopolisation of information and of the monologic truth of those in power. The critical and independent observer is the one who learns how to see through the devices used to manipulate the masses. *Il cimitero* deals with the spreading of information and truth, the power of the media, and popular culture. These themes interest Eco throughout his career, and he always suggests openness to dialogue as the solution to the problems they present. As with Bakhtin, there is no finalised truth but only one that is constantly open to discussion. Dialogue means for both Eco and Bakhtin active participation in their contemporary societies. They do not directly promote a specific position but rather the necessity for the crowd to become formed by critical individuals. By means of irony and parody, but also through serious reflection, all of Eco's novels represent the concerns of our times and encourage his readers to reflect and advance their own opinions.

While Eco's journalism directly addresses more his political opinions, his novels focus on the analysis of the dynamics of society and criticism those who set them in motion. Eco's political activism is seen in his articles, where he comments against Berlusconi; in his participation in public protests, such as the one in January 2011 which asked for Berlusconi's resignation; and in the fact that he has been asked by various journalists, especially from outside Italy, to comment on Berlusconi's fall and on Monti's technocratic government. He is a recognised public voice whose political opinion is given great importance both in Italy and abroad.

Conversely, Eco's novels are political in a broader sense. They do not express his specific position towards contemporary issues, but they show how Eco, the semiotician,

[13] Ibid., 130.
[14] Umberto Eco, "Should Berlusconi Be Demonised?" in Eco, *Clock*, 131.

breaks contemporary reality into segments in order to analyse that reality and question its mechanisms of communication, rhetoric, and power control. Eco's novels show his readers the importance of being critical observers of society and the risks one takes by passively accepting the rules of society. And, in so doing, they encourage the reader to observe society critically and become aware of the persuasive power of the rhetoric of ideology. Whereas the masses hold a positive character because they allow confrontation and dialogue, they are also dangerous because they are the target of the manipulative aims of those who want to achieve power or retain it. For this reason, Eco's novels spark revolution in the individual. The only hope for a society to be free from the manipulative rhetoric of the authority lies in the independent thinking of its members who refuse to be manipulated as a unified powerless mass; they have to respond individually to manipulation after using their critical instruments to recognise it.

However, Eco's novels also ultimately display a gradual increase of pessimism towards the concrete result of the commitment of the intellectual in society. Eco's novels go from a phase which sees the intellectual as somehow contributing to the political debate of his society, or at least questioning his political commitment, to a phase of academic criticism and then back to a more pressing engagement with contemporary political issues. His academic criticism seems to show that Eco wanted to remove himself from a sociopolitical commitment and withdraw to the safe sphere of scholarly debates. This, in a way, reflects Robey's observation on Eco's detachment after the disillusionment of 1968 and turn to academia; but it also moves Eco's academicism, as far as the novels are concerned, to the 1990s instead of the aftermath of 1968. Such scholarly withdrawal develops fully only in *L'isola* because the other two novels of the academic criticism phase, *Il pendolo* and *Baudolino*, both also engage with political questions. Pessimism permeates more evidently in *La fiamma* and *Il cimitero*. Here the will of an individual fighting the system from within is broken by forces too powerful to be challenged.

Fascism erases Yambo's grandfather's desire for political struggle, and the secret services manage to coordinate the destruction of the Jews. Simonini fits in perfectly with the world of secrecy and espionage: he is naturally cold, calculating, and merciless. His story both mocks the secret services and shows that they are so extremely powerful that nothing can stop them from getting what they want, not even those who recognise the means they use for mass manipulation.

This thesis has shown how the grotesque, folk culture, and the carnival have been used by Eco in order to defy the social condition. Whether it is for subversion or revolution, the Rabelaisian paradigms identified in Eco's works—and their connection to the broader themes of laughter, carnival and folk culture—create a challenge to the official order. More than that, they serve Eco's criticism because they allow him to satirise social and intellectual practices.

Also, the different interactions between these themes and the three distinct phases in his fiction show how Eco's position towards commitment evolves, even while his use of the grotesque remains as a characteristic of Eco's approach to society. At first, Eco's position towards commitment is represented by the faith that laughter and the grotesque can subvert the official order because of their dialogical nature, in contrast to the monologism of the authority. Later, his approach uses the grotesque body and the marketplace as a way of parodying the pomposity of intellectuals and heteroglossia and challenging the monologic language of the authority. In the last phase, he confronts the grotesque with the very notion of folk culture and its characteristics of self-preserving popular wisdom. The archaic and spontaneous nature of folk culture becomes the rightful opposite to an artificial and manipulative mass culture. Eco's pessimism surfaces at the point when not even folk culture is able to create a protective shield against mass manipulation determined by political interests. Those in power—in *Il cimitero*, the secret

services and the state—manage to erase that instinct for self-preservation that is characteristic of folk culture.

In a way, the traditions of folk culture and carnival are reconsidered in Eco's last novels precisely because of their self-preservative nature. Carnival may not be fit for real revolution, but the wisdom of folk culture warns against the chauvinism of the *squadrista* marching in *La fiamma*, just as it appreciates the value of the rite of carnival. Carnival allows a release, albeit temporary, of the pressure that accumulates throughout the year, and it gives a few moments of happiness to the peasant, who otherwise has no hope of overthrowing authority.[15] Arendt pointed out that revolution is a modern concept—during the Middle Ages, the most radical idea involved was that of subversion of an official order that was too well established to be truly challenged. Carnival is thus not a failed revolution but a successful act of subversion.

Eco's last two novels seem to appreciate more consciously the revolutionary potential of folk culture, though they suggest that it has lost its positive character under the weight of a mass culture that is manipulated by those in power. Mass culture is positive because it is imbued with the wisdom of folk culture, but at the same time it is dangerous because it offers an opportunity to those who want to reach power to create the consensus they need. No one can do much to prevent the manipulation of the masses by the dominant class, not even the critical individual who can challenge its authority from within the social system. Although one can conclude that Eco's last novels are more cynical than the earlier ones (that is, the later ones do not propagate a belief in power of this kind of individual), Eco himself still acts out the role of this individual by continuing to pursue critical thought in his journalism and in his tireless participation in political debates.

[15] Eco, *Il nome*, 477.

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