The Name of the Rose

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF UMBERTO ECO

Umberto Eco was a literary critic and professor of semiotics at several universities in Italy and the United States, including Columbia University, Harvard University, and the University of Bologna. He pioneered the field of interpretative semiotics—the study of how meaning is conveyed through language—and has also written on anthropology, political theory, and aesthetics. But Eco is perhaps best known as a novelist; his first novel, *The Name of the Rose* (1980), was an international bestseller, and he later wrote other critically and popularly acclaimed books including *Foucault's Pendulum* (1988). He died of pancreatic cancer in 2016.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Name of the Rose was written and published in the 1970s and 1980s, a period in which postmodernist theory was becoming an increasingly powerful force in European and American literary and intellectual life. Postmodernism is characterized by skepticism about the objective nature of any truth, a distrust of universal explanations, and an emphasis on "intertextuality" (the way in which texts reference or respond to other texts). Many pieces of dialogue and plot points in the novel testify to its postmodern themes, such as William's statement that "books always speak of other books" and the ultimate failure of his theory that the murders are following a grand design according to the Book of Revelation. William tells Adso that "I behaved stubbornly, pursuing a semblance of order, when I should have known well that there is no order in the universe"—this is a central idea of postmodernist theory. In his lifetime, Umberto Eco witnessed the rise of fascism in Italy and the dictatorship of Benito Mussolini (1922-1943). His later writings argue that fascism is not only a phenomenon of early twentieth-century Europe, but an "eternal" threat than had oppressed people in the past and could continue to do so in the future. *The Name of the Rose* features a different historically oppressive political regime: the Inquisition, a court used by the medieval Catholic Church to arrest, persecute, and punish heretics and all those accused of subverting the authority of the church. Eco's interest in the repressive political regimes of medieval Europe in *The Name of the Rose* is perhaps informed by his perspective as someone who had himself lived under fascism.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The novel is set in the fourteenth century, and so alludes to works familiar to its medieval protagonists: the writings of Aristotle, especially his *Poetics*; the scientific discoveries of Roger Bacon, an early natural philosopher; and the theories of William of Occam, a medieval logician who popularized the "Occam's razor" principle (which holds that among many competing hypotheses, the simplest is probably true.) At the same time, however, Eco also anachronistically references later works. He alludes frequently to tropes of nineteenth and twentieth-century detective fiction, particularly Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes series (ca. 1890s – 1920s); with his astonishing powers of deduction and logical reasoning, William of Baskerville bears a strong resemblance to Conan Doyle's detective. Indeed, his name is probably a nod to the well-known Sherlock Holmes novel *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1901). The character of Jorge of Burgos is clearly an allusion to the Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986); like Eco's Jorge, the historical Borges was blind and worked for many years as a librarian. The library in Borges's short story "The Library of Babel" (1941) is also a labyrinth of hexagonal rooms strongly resembling the medieval abbey's library in *The Name of the Rose*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The Name of the Rose*
- **When Written:** 1970s
- **Where Written:** Italy
- **When Published:** 1980
- **Literary Period:** Postmodernism
- **Genre:** Historical murder mystery
- **Setting:** Italy, 1320s - 1390s
- **Climax:** A medieval monastic library burns to the ground in a struggle over the lost second book of Aristotle's *Poetics*.
- **Antagonist:** Jorge of Burgos
- **Point of View:** First-person

EXTRA CREDIT

Eco on Film. *The Name of the Rose* was adapted into a 1986 film starring Sean Connery and Christian Slater. The movie received mixed reviews, including from Eco, who critiqued its simplification of the book's political and theological content: "A book like this is a club sandwich, with turkey, salami, tomato, cheese, lettuce. And the movie is obliged to choose only the lettuce or the cheese."

Eco's Library. The labyrinthine monastic library in *The Name of the Rose* might not be entirely fictionalized: Eco himself owned

over 50,000 books spread out between his houses in Milan and Urbino.

PLOT SUMMARY

The Name of the Rose begins with a prologue by an unknown narrator, who explains how he found a transcription of a medieval manuscript containing the account of Adso of Melk, a fourteenth-century German monk. Although the narrator expresses doubts about the authenticity of the text and the veracity of the incredible story it tells, he has decided nonetheless to translate and publish it in Italian. He explains that the manuscript is divided into seven days, and each day into eight sections corresponding to the times of the day at which the monks prayed (matins, lauds, prime, terce, sext, nones, vespers, and compline). The second prologue introduces us to Adso of Melk, a Benedictine monk who is writing this manuscript at the end of his life. The action then shifts to the late 1320s, when Adso was a novice of about eighteen years old, traveling Italy in the service of William of Baskerville, an English Franciscan and former inquisitor.

On the first day, William and Adso visit an unnamed abbey somewhere in northern Italy, where William plans to attend a theological disputation on the contentious problems of whether Christ had been poor and whether the pope or the Holy Roman Emperor should hold political authority in Europe. William reveals his powerful skills of deduction when he locates a runaway horse on the scant evidence of prints in the snow. The abbot, Ado of Fossanova, tells William about a strange and mysterious event: a monk named Adelmo of Otranto, who worked as an illuminator in the scriptorium, recently fell to his death from the tallest tower of the abbey. Ado asks William to discreetly investigate before the envoys arrive, and William agrees. While Adso admires the beauty of the abbey, William debates with Ubertino of Casale, a Franciscan monk who has fled the order because of political persecution. Adso and William also meet other monks: Remigio of Varagine, the cellarer; Salvatore of Montferrat, a monk who speaks an odd combination of several different languages; Severinus of Sankt Wendel, the herbalist; Malachi of Hildesheim, the librarian; Berengar of Arundel, his assistant; Venantius of Salvemec, a translator; Benno of Uppsala, a rhetorician; Jorge of Burgos, a blind monk; and many others. Malachi allows Adso and William to visit the scriptorium but explains that only the librarian is permitted to enter the labyrinthine library. William and Jorge argue about the merits and permissibility of laughter.

Venantius is found dead in a barrel of pig's blood on the morning of the second day, although it appears that he didn't die from drowning. Benno tells William and Adso about Adelmo and Venantius's request for a **forbidden book** in a room in the library called the "**finis Africae**," and alludes to an illicit relationship between Berengar and the deceased Adelmo.

Later, an obviously guilty Berengar tells William and Adso about his encounter with the "ghost" of Adelmo in the cemetery. Benno explains that Berengar had persuaded Adelmo to have sex with him in exchange for access to the mysterious book. William and Adso decide to break into the scriptorium to investigate, where they find a manuscript written in code on Venantius's desk. While William is distracted, someone steals his **glasses** to prevent him from being able to read the manuscript. In the library, William and Adso get lost in the labyrinth: there are dozens of rooms, and they don't understand the words above each doorway.

On the third day, Berengar disappears, leaving only a blood-stained cloth behind in his cell. Wandering through the abbey, Adso reflects on the monks' thirst for the knowledge contained in books and talks with Salvatore, who tells him about his life as a follower of the Franciscan heretic Fra Dolcino. Disturbed by what he has heard, Adso asks William and Ubertino to explain the story of Dolcino and the factional divisions within the Franciscans. Eventually, William mentions that he has deciphered a cryptic message from Venantius's manuscript: "The hand over the idol works on the first and the seventh of the four." He also has some theories about how the rooms in the library might be organized, after examining the building from the outside. That night, Adso encounters a girl from the village in the abbey kitchen; they have sex, but she flees the next morning, leaving an ox heart behind. Adso confesses his sin to William, who is compassionate. In the kitchen, they find the body of Berengar drowned in a tub.

On the fourth day, Severinus observes that Berengar's tongue is black. Salvatore explains the presence of the girl in the kitchen, admitting that he procures women from the village for Remigio, who offers them food in exchange for sex. Severinus finds the stolen glasses in Berengar's pocket and returns them to William, who is then able to decipher the Greek portion of Venantius's manuscript—but the words seem nonsensical. William eventually theorizes that the Greek words refer to the Book of Revelation, and that the crimes are following a sequence according to the Apocalypse. Meanwhile, the Franciscans and the pope's envoys begin to arrive at the abbey. William and Adso visit the labyrinth again, discovering that the labels above the doors refer to regions of the world, and that books are organized according to their country of origin. They locate the finis Africae—a walled-up room concealed behind a mirror—but are unable to figure out how to enter. When they return from the library, they find that Salvatore and the girl Adso met the night before have been arrested, since Salvatore had been using superstitious rituals to try to cast a love spell on her. The girl is accused of witchcraft and condemned to death; Adso is devastated but unable to help her.

At the theological disputation on the fifth day, the envoys debate whether or not Christ owned property and how much political influence the pope should have in Europe. William

argues that the church should confine its influence to the religious sphere. Severinus tells William that he has found a strange book among his library, but is murdered before he can explain further; William and Adso realize too late that the book in question is an Arabic manuscript, but when they return to the infirmary someone has stolen it. Under the interrogation of Bernard Gui, an inquisitor, Remigio falsely confesses to the murders. Benno admits that he stole the book and returned it to Malachi. That evening, Jorge gives a sermon predicting that the Last Judgement is at hand and reproaching those who seek to know more than God intended.

On the sixth day, Malachi dies—his fingers, too, are blackened. This proves decisively that Remigio is not the murderer, although Bernard had declared the case closed. Adso falls asleep in church and dreams of the *Coena Cypriani* (the "Feast of Cyprian," a Latin carnival comedy), which reminds William to check the library catalogue: and sure enough, the mysterious book contains a copy of the *Coena* along with several other texts. Examining the handwriting in the catalogue, William comes to the conclusion that there is a nameless other librarian not mentioned in the official record. When he brings his conclusions to Ado and asks to see the mysterious book, the abbot tells him to stop investigating. In defiance of the abbot's orders, William and Adso return to the library and discover the secret entrance to the finis Africae.

That evening, on the seventh and final day, William and Adso enter the finis Africae. There they find Jorge, who admits that he has controlled the library for decades; Malachi takes orders from him. He also confesses to the murders: he poisoned the pages of the book, thus killing Venantius, Berengar, and Malachi (explaining their blackened fingers and tongues), and incited Malachi to murder Severinus. There was no scriptural pattern to the murders. Instead, he has done all this to keep the secret of the finis Africae: the room holds the only surviving copy of the lost second book of Aristotle's *Poetics*, a treatise on comedy that Jorge thinks would undermine religion and overturn the order of society. Rather than allow William to take the book, he eats the poisoned pages himself. In the ensuing struggle, Jorge knocks over a lamp and sets the library aflame. The fire quickly gets out of control, burning down not only the library but also the entire abbey.

In the wake of the destruction, the monks disperse and Adso returns home to Melk. Adso reports that William gave him his glasses as a parting gift, and died shortly afterwards during an outbreak of the Black Death. Years later, a much older Adso returns to the site where the abbey had once stood to collect what remains of the library: a few scattered leaves and **fragments** of parchment. As he finishes writing his story, he prepares himself for his own death.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Unnamed Narrator – This narrator writes a preface titled "Naturally, A Manuscript," in which he gives an account how he found a copy of the manuscript by the fourteenth-century German monk Adso of Melk. He explains how he has edited and presented the manuscript, and the division of the story into units corresponding to the abbey's hours of prayer. The narrator's preface adds yet another dimension of "intertextuality" to the novel by establishing that the story readers are about to hear is a transcription of a translation, and it also introduces the idea of the instability of symbols and their meanings by suggesting that the text's authenticity is uncertain.

Adso of Melk – When he writes the story of his life, Adso is an old man living in a German monastery and preparing for his own death. However, much of the novel's action takes place much earlier, when he was a Benedictine novice in his late teens. The younger Adso is described as young and handsome, and is very curious and inquisitive. He loves reading and studying and is fascinated by the mysteries of the abbey's library. Throughout the novel, he consistently questions authority and ponders the impossibility of arriving at definitive solutions to any of the many mysteries and arguments that unfold around him, since it seems everything can be interpreted in many different ways. The older Adso, by contrast, is more comfortable accepting the limitations of his ability to comprehend the ways of God and the mysterious order of the universe. Adso recounts how he journeyed to an abbey in northern Italy as a servant and companion to William of Baskerville. There, he meets many prominent theologians, explores the greatest library in Christendom, has his first and only sexual experience, helps William solve the mystery of a series of murders, and witnesses the final, tragic destruction of the abbey. The novel's final section returns to the point of view of the older Adso, who visits the site where the abbey had once stood to gather up the **fragments of the library**.

William of Baskerville – William is a Franciscan friar from England, where he studied under the scientist and philosopher Roger Bacon. William is a very tall and thin man of about fifty with "sharp and penetrating eyes" and "clumps of yellowish hair." Very unusually, he wears **glasses**. William is skeptical about whether some truths can ever be known. He used to work for the Inquisition, prosecuting heretics, but became disillusioned because he found the church's regime too harsh and was never sure whether the confessions he elicited were true or not. At the same time, however, he hungers for knowledge and longs to uncover the causes of things. He is preoccupied by the relationship between signs and their meanings, which makes him an ideal detective, able to look at the physical evidence he sees in the world and devise plausible explanations. For example, immediately upon his arrival at the

abbey, he deduces the location of the abbot's lost horse based only on the evidence of footprints in the snow and a few broken twigs. William is intellectually brilliant, but also compassionate and sensitive, his tolerance for human fallibility standing in stark contrast to the hypocrisy and judgment of the clergy. William brings Adso to the abbey to attend a theological disputation on the conflict between the Holy Roman Emperor and the pope, but his astonishing powers of deduction and logical reasoning are soon called into a very different kind of service: solving murders. Although William comes up with various ingenious explanations, he ultimately fails to protect the abbey, its monks, and its invaluable library from the murderous Jorge of Burgos. Adso reports that William died soon after the fire, in an outbreak of the Black Death.

Abo of Fossonova – Abo is abbot of the unnamed Benedictine abbey in northern Italy. He asks William to discreetly investigate the murders before the arrival of the envoys from the pope and the Emperor, since he worries that the recent mysterious events will foster suspicion and undermine negotiations. Above all, he is obsessed with protecting the reputation of the abbey. William observes cynically that Abo would commit murder to ensure that the abbey remained respectable. Although at first Abo seems supportive of the investigation, he later becomes more secretive, and at the end of the novel, when William questions him about the unknown handwriting in the library catalogue, he asks him to stop this line of questioning, suggesting that preserving the appearance of order in they abbey may be more important to Abo than saving the lives of his monks. Abo dies when Jorge traps him inside the secret passageway to the **finis Africae**, where he suffocates.

Severinus of Sankt Wendel – Severinus is in charge of the infirmary, where he works as the abbey's herbalist and doctor, ministering to the sick and dispensing medicine. He quickly strikes up a friendship with William, with whom he shares a passionate intellectual curiosity. When he finds a mysterious Arabic manuscript in the infirmary's library, he immediately informs William, but by the time William arrives at the infirmary to see the book, it is too late: Severinus is found dead and the **forbidden book** is stolen shortly afterwards.

Malachi of Hildesheim – Malachi is the abbey's librarian. He is suspicious of outsiders and jealously guards the secrecy of the library, which he alone is allowed to enter. Adso observes that Malachi has a face that looks as if he has once felt deep passions, but has suppressed them. William and Adso later discover that Malachi does not read Greek or Arabic and thus has been doing the bidding of Jorge of Burgos for decades, since he lacks the learning to understand many of the books in the library. He had a long-running affair with Berengar of Arundel—this was perhaps the suppressed passion that Adso noticed—and murdered Severinus in a jealous rage, after Jorge told him that Berengar and Severinus had a sexual relationship.

Berengar of Arundel – Berengar is assistant librarian, described by Adso as "vain" and "lustful"; his sexual desires and intellectual ambition both have tragic consequences. He is consumed with guilt after the death of Adelmo of Otranto, whom he persuaded to have sex with him in return for access to a mysterious book. He steals William's glasses from the scriptorium at night in order to prevent him from reading some notes left behind by the murdered Venantius of Salvemec. William and Adso find him drowned in a tub in the infirmary, his tongue blackened with poison after trying to read the mysterious book, the pages of which had been poisoned by Jorge.

Adelmo of Otranto – Adelmo was an illuminator known for the beauty and ingenuity of his illustrations. He was very intellectually curious and lively, having engaged in a spirited debate with Jorge on the permissibility of laughter before his death. His dead body is found at the base of the library tower, setting off William's murder investigation. It later emerges that he had engaged in a sexual relationship with Berengar in an attempt to gain access to a book that the librarians seemed intent on hiding, and committed suicide as a result.

Venantius of Salvemec – Venantius is a translator who worked in the scriptorium with Adelmo. He is found dead in a barrel of pig's blood the day after William and Adso arrive at the abbey. Like Adelmo, he was intellectually curious, ambitious, and frequently argued with Jorge. He had also been pursuing the **forbidden book**. William finds notes on his desk in Greek and a zodiacal language relating to his attempt to break into the **finis Africae**, including the seemingly incomprehensible direction that "the hand over the idol works on the first and the seventh of the four." He died from the poison Jorge had used to contaminate the pages of the manuscript, after frantically reading through the forbidden book.

Benno of Upsala – Benno is a student of rhetoric who worked in the scriptorium with Venantius and Adelmo. After Berengar's death, Malachi makes him assistant librarian. When the book falls into Severinus's possession, he steals it back and returns it to Malachi without opening it—and thus does not die of poisoning. At the end of the novel, however, he throws himself into the flames in the library and burns to death, echoing the complete spiritual and physical ravaging of the abbey and its occupants.

Jorge of Burgos – Jorge is one of the oldest monks at the abbey. Despite his blindness, he has a prodigious memory and knowledge of the library, and the other monks clearly hold him in high regard. He debates with William several times on the subject of laughter, which Jorge finds deeply threatening, believing that to laugh is to mock God's truth and fail to combat the enemies of the Christian faith. As William and Adso's days at the abbey draw to a close, he preaches an apocalyptic sermon predicting the Last Judgment. On the seventh and final day, William and Adso break into the labyrinth and find Jorge in

the **finis Africae**. Jorge admits that he has been the real power in the library for the past decades, and that he masterminded the murders in order to keep the secret that the library holds the sole surviving copy of the lost second book of Aristotle's *Poetics*, on comedy. Jorge believes this book is dangerous and would subvert the order of religion and society. Rather than allow William and Adso to take the book, he eats the poisoned pages. As William and Adso struggle with him, they knock over a lamp, setting the library on fire.

Alinardo of Grottaferrata – Alindardo is the oldest monk at the abbey, and is thus a useful source of information, showing William and Adso how to enter the labyrinth. He believes that he should have been appointed as librarian many years ago, and bears a grudge against Malachi as a result. Throughout the novel, he maintains that the Last Judgment is at hand. His persistent apocalyptic rhetoric makes William begin to wonder if the murders are following a pattern according to the Book of the Apocalypse. Although this is later proven to be untrue, Alinardo's words are significant in that they also convince Jorge that the murders are the result of a divinely-sanctioned plan. William and Adso later learn that Alindardo alone was aware of Jorge's secret, but his words were discounted as the ramblings of an old madman.

Remigio of Varagine – Remigio is the abbey's cellarer, a former Franciscan who joined the Benedictines to escape religious persecution. Remigio admits that he was the first to find Venantius's dead body in the abbey's kitchen, but wasn't sure what to do with it that wouldn't incriminate himself, so decided to leave it until the morning. When he returned, the corpse was gone. He confesses to William that he was wandering the abbey so late at night because he trades food from the abbey's cellars in exchange for sex with village girls, using Salvatore of Montferrat as an intermediary, which is why Adso encounters the girl from the village in the kitchen. Since he was in the infirmary around the time that Severinus was murdered, Remigio is arrested by Bernard Gui, who accuses him of heresy. Under the pressure of the interrogation and threat of torture, Remigio admits that he followed Fra Dolcino and concealed heretical letters and papers, and—rediscovering the conviction, faith, and defiance that had once animated him—he also confesses (falsely) that he and Salvatore killed Severinus and the other monks.

Salvatore of Montferrat – Salvatore speaks a strange combination of multiple languages, including Latin, an Italian dialect, and Provençale. Adso describes his face and body as "bestial." Like Remigio, he was a follower of Fra Dolcino and has taken sanctuary in the abbey. He is arrested by Bernard Gui for using superstitious rituals to try to cast a love spell on a girl from the village, and Remigio accuses him of collaborating in the murders. His bad Latin accidentally gives William and Adso the key to opening the **finis Africae**: he refers to a horse as "of the third" instead of "the third," which helps William understand Venantius's riddle. Salvatore's bizarre language demonstrates that even confusing and incoherent signs can have meaning.

Nicholas of Morimondo – Nicholas is the abbey's master glazier. He is fascinated by William's glasses—an invention he had only heard of before—and makes William a new pair when his are stolen. After Remigio's arrest, Nicholas is appointed cellarer, and he uses the authority of his new position to let William and Adso into the crypt, where he tells them the history of the power struggle over who would become abbot and the enmity between Malachi and Alinardo.

Fra Dolcino – Although Fra Dolcino does not appear in the story, other characters frequently refer to him, and Remigio and Salvatore were among his followers. Dolcino was a radical reformer who split off from the Franciscan order, preaching absolute poverty and renunciation of property. He and his followers lived in the hills and raided local villages, until they were defeated by the authorities and Dolcino was publicly executed.

Ubertino of Casale – Ubertino is a Franciscan monk and one of the leaders of the Spiritualist movement, a faction within the order that advocates for a return to a state of poverty in the church—a position that puts him on the wrong side of the pope, who values property and political power and favors a more lenient interpretation of the Bible, making him an ally of the Emperor. Consequently, Ubertino is in exile at the abbey. He is an old friend of William's, who is sympathetic to him but disagrees with his extreme views. Ubertino believes that the abbey's over-preoccupation with books and learning is vanity, and accuses William of "intellectual pride"—a recurrent theme in the novel, and the same crime of which Jorge accuses his fellow monks for their attempts to read the **forbidden book**. After Bernard arrests Remigio and Salvatore for heresy and witchcraft, Ubertino decides to flee, since he can see that the tide is turning against the Emperor's supporters.

Michael of Cesena – Like Ubertino, Michael is a Spiritualist and ally of the Emperor, and believes that the church should adopt a lifestyle of strict poverty. At the end of 1327, Michael has been summoned to Avignon to see the pope, but fears he is walking into a trap. Adso reports that after the events at the abbey, Michael's diplomatic mission to Avignon fails and he escapes by joining the Emperor's entourage.

Bernard Gui – Bernard is a Dominican who works for the Inquisition—the legal court used by the church to prosecute heresy. He is a staunch supporter of the pope and hates the Spiritualists, and is thus hostile to Ubertino and Michael and suspicious of William. He is cold, ruthless (he has Salvatore tortured), and less interested in finding out the truth than in using the Inquisition to further his political and ideological agenda. By accusing Remigio and Salvatore of the murders, he is able to use the mysterious and bloody events at the abbey to undermine the Emperor's supporters.

Girl from the village – This girl is in her late teens and speaks a northern Italian dialect. She is brought to the abbey by Salvatore to have sex with Remigio in exchange for food for her family. Instead, however, she meets Adso in the kitchens. They have a sexual encounter, but she runs away in the morning without telling him her name. Salvatore brings her to the abbey again to cast a love spell on her in a ritual involving a black cat, but when Bernard discovers this he accuses her of witchcraft. Adso is powerless to save her, and because the monks don't speak her language, she is unable to defend herself. She is sentenced to be burned at the stake and taken from the abbey along with Remigio and Salvatore.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Aymaro of Alessandria – Aymaro is a monk known for his often malicious gossip and what Adso calls his "perpetual sneer." He insults the current abbot, makes insinuations about the relationship between Adelmo and Berengar, is contemptuous of foreigners, and accuses Malachi of sleeping with the novices.

Pacificus of Tivoli, Peter of Sant'Albano, Waldo of Hereford, Magnus of Iona, Patrick of Clonmacnois, Rabano of Toledo – These monks also work in the scriptorium under Malachi. Pacificus and Peter are aligned with the Italian faction, a group of monks including Aymaro and Alindardo who grumble against the increasing power of "foreigners" in the abbey.

Jerome of Kaffa – Jerome is Bishop of Kaffa and also a Franciscan. He shares many of Ubertino and Michael's views on the poverty of Christ. However, William calls him a fool and doesn't find his arguments at the disputation very persuasive.

Bertrand del Poggetto – Bertrand is a cardinal who arrives at the abbey in the papal legation to meet with Ubertino and Michael. Like Bernard, he is firm supporter of the pope and a harsh persecutor of heretics.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

THE INTERPRETATION OF SIGNS

Umberto Eco was a professor of semiotics—the study of how people understand and make meaning out of signs and symbols. So it's no surprise that *The Name of the Rose* is so concerned with the process of interpretation and the relationship between signs and their meanings. William of Baskerville and Adso of Melk spend much of the novel trying to solve a series of mysterious murders at an abbey, so they're constantly searching for and trying to make meaning out of the evidence—whether it's a corpse, an ox heart, or someone's suspicious behavior. However, amassing enough evidence to explain the suspicious events proves to be a more complex process than either William or Adso had anticipated. Ultimately, the relationship between signs and their meanings unfolds into a difficult philosophical problem for the characters.

A central concern of Christian religious life is "hermeneutics," or the study of interpretation. As monks, therefore, William, Adso, and the novel's other characters are deeply concerned with how to correctly interpret all texts, and the Bible in particular. William explains that in the "words of a holy text…meaning goes beyond the letter," such that words convey higher truths than their literal meanings. "When we consider a book, we mustn't ask ourselves what it says but what it means," William avows. This can also be true of non-religious texts: even in a "pagan" story about magical creatures, William tells Adso, the unicorn represents an "allegorical, or analogical" truth, "the idea of chastity [as] a noble virtue." With this example, William demonstrates that anything can be a symbol for something else—an idea, concept, or moral precept.

Because correct interpretation is associated with piousness and morality, characters are particularly concerned about interpretive failure. For example, William tells Adso that God meant for people to understand lepers as a "wondrous parable," meaning that they symbolically represent all people who are "outcast, poor, simple, excluded, uprooted from the countryside, humiliated in the cities." The problem, William asserts, is that people were unable to understand the metaphor: "the mystery of leprosy has continued to haunt us because we have not recognized the nature of the sign." In this way, William demonstrates his belief that everything has symbolic worth, and that when people fail to read the signs, they are failing to see the greater, hidden significance of the world.

Eco also uses the abbey's labyrinthine library as a metaphor for the difficulty of interpreting signs. "How beautiful the world would be if there were a procedure for moving through labyrinths," William exclaims, seeming to lament not only the difficulty of solving the library's labyrinth, but the difficulty of solving the mysterious murders that seem to revolve around it. At first William and Adso get lost in the labyrinth—which consists of dozens of identical-looking rooms, each bearing an inscription above the doorway that is sometimes repeated, seemingly with no rhyme or reason. William deduces the internal organization of the library by viewing the abbey at a distance and imagining how the rooms are connected to each other. "So one can know things by looking at them from the outside," Adso concludes. In this way, Eco seems to suggest that correct interpretation depends not only on looking carefully at signs, but on considering them in their broader context.

Adso becomes increasingly worried about how to seek truth in a world in which the same signs can produce different interpretations, and in which different signs point to the same things. Much of the novel's action centers on a debate that takes place in the abbey over the theological distinctions between different "heretical" groups and factions within the Franciscan order. Adso begins to feel muddled about what distinguishes one group from another, and even suggests that the categories are meaningless when he says "the trouble is, I can no longer distinguish the accidental difference." Other characters admit confusion as well. When Adso points out that the Franciscans and the Spiritualist faction both denied the authority of the Pope, Ubertino of Casale concedes that "it is difficult, boy, to make distinctions in these things…the line dividing good from evil is so fine." Things that seem identical to one person, Eco shows, might have radically disparate meanings for other people. Eco also highlights the ways in which even the same words can have wildly different meanings to different people. For example, Adso tells a German lord that people search the Italian countryside for "truffles," but the German thinks he means "der Teufel"—the devil. "Such is the magic of human language, that by human accord often the same sounds mean different things," Adso muses. Similarly, visual signifiers can sometimes look the same but be meant to signify entirely different things. As Adso reads the Book of Revelation in the abbey's library, he finds that the forms of the Virgin Mary and the whore of Babylon were "womanly in both cases, and at a certain point [he] could no longer understand what distinguished them."

In later life, Adso reconciles himself to the difficulty of interpreting signs by turning to the authority of the writings of eminent churchmen. He writes, "the fact is that the correct interpretation can be established only on the authority of the fathers." Still, the novel leaves many questions unanswered, including the meaning of the title itself: what is the name of the rose? Eco may have intended to leave this open-ended, writing in the *Postscript* that a novel "is a machine for generating interpretations." He writes that he chose the title, in fact, "because the rose is a symbolic figure so rich in meanings that by now it hardly has any meaning left," and thus the reader "is unable to choose just one interpretation"—a problem, not incidentally, shared by the novel's protagonists. *The Name of the Rose* shows that making a single and incontestable interpretation of any sign is an impossible task, since the nature of symbols is to spawn as many different interpretations as there are different interpreters.

KNOWLEDGE AND SECRECY

William of Baskerville and Adso of Melk's investigation into the mysterious deaths at the abbey increasingly revolves around the abbey's library, where many of the dead monks worked as scholars, scribes and illuminators. Although monks may work in the scriptorium, few are authorized to enter the library, a vast labyrinth accessible only through hidden doors. As William and Adso find their way through the labyrinth, they also come closer to unraveling the mystery—not only of the identity of the murderer, but of the **forbidden book** hidden in the library's secret chamber, the "**finis Africae**." In this sense, the overlapping of the murder mystery plot and the discovery of the lost book of Aristotle's *Poetics* suggests that the quest for knowledge and the process of solving a murder are inherently linked. Both plots involve fighting for justice and bringing the truth to light. However, the library and its labyrinthine design also poses other philosophical questions, such as whether the ideas contained in books can be dangerous, and if so, who should have access to them.

William describes the abbey's library as "the greatest in Christendom," containing books in Latin, Greek, French, Italian, English, German, Arabic, and many other languages. However, all that knowledge is, quite literally, under lock and key: only the librarian may enter the library. As the librarian Malachi of Hildesheim explains, the monk asks the librarian for the text he wishes to consult and the librarian fetches it from the library above—but only if the request is "justified and devout." Access to books, then, is regulated by the librarian, who alone can enter the library and who decides whether a request is "justified." When Adso asks how Malachi locates books in the library, the librarian says sternly that it is "right and sufficient that only the librarian know how to decipher these things." And indeed, the library is designed as a labyrinth for the very purpose of deceiving intruders: it takes William and Adso several visits to discover that the plan of the library is laid out as a map of the world, and that the books are organized according to their country of origin.

The effect of all this mystery, shrouding, and secrecy is that many of the books in the library are never read and are not accessible to the monks at the abbey, let alone the broader public. William laments this state of affairs when he says that "without an eye to read them, a book contains signs that produce no concepts; therefore it is dumb" (the word "dumb" here meaning "unable to speak"). In the absence of readers, in other words, a book is just a collection of marks on a page and signifies nothing. The librarians—Malachi, and then Benno of Upsala after him—claim that the library exists to preserve and protect its collections. Although the library may have been created "to save the books it houses," William observes, "now it lives to bury them." William's words prove prophetic: when the abbey's library burns to the ground at the end of the novel, it becomes a graveyard for the books it had been built to protect.

Throughout the book, religious officials associate certain forms of knowledge with sin—a direct reference to the story of the Garden of Eden, in which Adam and Eve are cast out of the garden because they eat the forbidden fruit of the Tree of

Knowledge. Therefore, the secrecy surrounding the library is intended to rein in the monks' appetite for knowledge. For example, Ubertino of Casale accuses the dead Adelmo of Otranto of "pride of the intellect," connecting desire for knowledge to the sin of pride. He accuses William of this vice too, advising him to "mortify [his] intelligence, learn to weep over the wounds of the lord, [and] throw away [his] books." Several monks make the link between sexual desire and desire for the knowledge contained in books: Ubertino asks Adso if he is troubled by "yearnings of the flesh," and Adso responds that he is disturbed instead by "the yearnings of the mind, which wants to know too many things." And when Berengar of Arundel offers to acquire a mysterious book for Adelmo in exchange for sex, Berengar is impelled by physical desire, but Adelmo is motivated by his passion for learning. As William observes, "there is lust not only of the flesh." *The Name of the Rose* suggests that lust for books can be as powerful as more physical forms of desire, and that attempting to suppress either impulse can lead to disaster. Adelmo, for instance, is tormented by guilt after his sexual encounter with Berengar and kills himself, while Venantius of Salvemec and Malachi both die when they are tempted to try to read the forbidden book. Desire is natural, Willam implies, but the disastrous fates that befall Adelmo, Venantius, and Malachi are anything but natural, suggesting that there are murderous forces of repression at work in the abbey.

People tend to think of a library as a repository of knowledge preserved for future generations and made accessible to all. The abbey's library, however, seems to operate on opposite principles: secrecy, obscurity, confusion, and exclusion. "Is a library, then, an instrument not for distributing the truth but for delaying its appearance?" Adso asks. Just as the truth of the murders becomes ever more shrouded in mystery, the secret at the center of the library proves similarly elusive. Eventually, Jorge of Burgos burns down the library in his attempt to keep the hidden book from coming to light, in a final demonstration of the way the library's secrecy proves its undoing. As Adso observes sadly, "the library had been doomed by its own impenetrability, by the mystery that protected it, by its few entrances." In this sense, the novel's tragic ending strongly suggests that a library should not be a fortress designed to keep out intruders, and the destruction of the library demonstrates that attempts to suppress the mind's hunger for knowledge can lead only to violence and catastrophe.

RELIGION AND POLITICS

Although William of Baskerville and Adso of Melk become embroiled in the mystery of Adelmo of Otranto's murder, their original purpose in visiting the abbey was to attend a theological disputation on two subjects that caused significant controversy in the Catholic church in the early fourteenth century: the conflict between the pope and the Holy Roman Emperor, and "Apostolic poverty" (that is, the question of whether Jesus and his followers had renounced wealth and property). Both controversies center on discussions about the appropriate role of the church in political, economic, and intellectual life, since medieval popes and high-ranking clergymen possessed significant wealth, power, and sway in government, in addition to executing their duties as spiritual leaders. At the core of these conflicts, then, is a philosophical disagreement about the extent to which the church should be involved in earthly affairs at all—including issues of politics, the economy, and the private lives of citizens.

In the 1320s, the Holy Roman Emperor, Louis IV, was in active conflict with Pope John XXII. Since the Crusades, increasingly powerful popes had clashed with political leaders over the question of who held supreme authority in Europe. The Pope claimed supreme authority as head of Christendom, but the Emperor could also claim that God had given him complete dominion over his realm. When William weighs in on this question at the disputation, he comes down on the side of the Emperor, whom he believes must have supreme political power because "if the pope, the bishops, and the priests were not subject to the worldly and coercive power of the prince, the authority of the prince would be challenged"—and that authority, he alleges, has been "decreed by God." The church cannot have dominion over secular matters because it is not decreed in scripture, William argues, asserting that "if Christ had wanted his priests to obtain coercive power, he would have laid down specific precepts." The logical extension of this argument is that the church should stay out of politics, since issues of politics are not part of its spiritual purview.

The question of whether or not Jesus was poor—although seemingly an abstract theological debate—is closely related to the issue of the church's power at the time the novel takes place. William argues that if the apostles did not have "worldly or coercive power," then it follows that "the successors of the apostles should be relieved of any worldly or coercive power." Likewise, if it can be proven that Jesus and his first followers did not own property, then the church leadership of the present day may appear less than Christian in their values because of their palaces, jewels, large landholdings, and luxurious lifestyles. This line of reasoning is why the Spiritualists—a faction of the Franciscan monastic order who advocate for a return to absolute poverty and renunciation of property—are so threatening to the establishment and face violent persecution. As Adso is told by a fellow audience member at the execution of a Spiritualist for heresy, "a monk who practices poverty sets a bad example for the populace, for then they cannot accept monks who do not practice it." The debates on poverty are thus threatening to the wealth and land holdings of the church. But as William explains later, "'poor' does not so much mean owning a palace or not; it means, rather, keeping or renouncing the right to legislate on earthly

matters." This, Adso says, is why Franciscans like Michael of Cesena and Ubertino of Casale have become the Emperor's political allies. Arguments for apostolic poverty also have the effect of confining the church's influence to spiritual affairs. This pleases the Emperor, whose aim is to reduce the power of the pope.

William's arguments against the church's "coercive" political power are even more radical than they may at first seem: not only does he believe that each member of the clergy "is on this earth to serve and not to be served," but he also suggests that political power should reside with neither the pope nor the Emperor, but with an "elective general assembly." Such an assembly should be "empowered to interpret, change, or suspend the law," he argues, because when one person holds all the power there is potential for abuse. Thus, William also lays the groundwork for an argument for a much more egalitarian and democratic form of government than the regimes of either the pope or the Emperor.

In the theological disputation at the abbey, William argues for a radical separation between the institutions of religious and political power—a division that has become the cornerstone of post-Enlightenment governance, but was not at all obvious in the fourteenth century. At the same time, however, these debates show how deeply intertwined the institutions of religious and political power were at the time. At the heart of William's argument is a rejection of the corrupting force of political and economic power, and a belief that the religious must be insulated from such influences if they are to have any legitimate claim to morality and righteousness.

THE SUBVERSIVE POWER OF LAUGHTER

Over the course of seven days at the abbey, Jorge of Burgos and William of Baskerville share several debates on the subject of laughter. The significance of these conversations only becomes clear at the end of the novel, when Jorge is revealed as the perpetrator of the murders. All of his actions were intended, in one way or another, to preserve the secrecy of a **forbidden book** hidden in the abbey's library: the sole surviving copy of the lost second book of Aristotle's *Poetics*, a treatise on comedy. In Jorge's eyes, this book is threatening and dangerous because it elevates comedy to the status of an art form and a subject of serious intellectual inquiry, but to Jorge's mind, laughter has the power to disrupt the stability of society, religion, and even truth itself.

In contrast to Jorge, William argues for the virtues of laughter. He points out that the Scriptures are silent on the subject of whether Jesus laughed or not—and in such cases "God demands that we apply our reason to many obscure things about which Scripture has left us free to decide." In other words, just because the Bible doesn't mention that Jesus laughed, it doesn't necessarily mean that he never did. William's emphasis on there being room for interpretation in the Scriptures demonstrates that he sees truth as fundamentally unknowable and mysterious: there is much in the world and in God's word that Christians do not understand. In Jorge's view, by contrast, all truth is known, and so all laughter is by definition subversive of that truth. While Jorge condemns laughter because it "foments doubt," William argues that "sometimes it is right to doubt." Unlike Jorge, William believes that laughter can be a weapon against liars and those who deny the truth of God because it allows us "to undermine the false authority of an absurd proposition that offends reason." Sometimes the best defense against absurdity is to laugh at it.

William asks Jorge why he has gone to such great lengths—even murdering his fellow monks—to hide Aristotle's treatise on laughter, since "there are many other books that speak of comedy, many others that praise laughter." Jorge explains that Aristotle is particularly subversive, since materialist philosophy (i.e. science) has turned the universe into "dull and slimy matter," when the Book of Genesis has already explained everything there is to know about the origins of the cosmos. The ultimate implication of Aristotle's philosophy, Jorge argues, is to "overturn the image of God," putting science in the place of religion. The other threat posed by Aristotle's *Poetics*, in Jorge's view, is that it would turn comedy into an appropriate object of philosophical inquiry. Whereas before laughter was commonly regarded as a "base" entertainment and a "defense for the simple," this book would elevate laughter to the realm of art, for if "the doors of the world of the learned are opened to [comedy], it becomes the object of philosophy, and of perfidious theology." And the laughter of the learned, Jorge fears, is much more dangerous than the laughter of the "simple."

By the end of *The Name of the Rose*, then, Jorge and William's theoretical discussions about the merits and appropriateness of laughter in Christendom are revealed as the driving force behind all the catastrophes that have befallen the abbey in the past seven days. Jorge sees laughter as the subversive power that would destroy everything he holds dear—ushering in a new era where "the rhetoric of conviction [is] replaced by the rhetoric of mockery," and where "every holy and venerable image" is turned upside down. In a sense, Jorge is right: in his zealous campaign against laughter, he accidentally burns down the library and the entire abbey, obliterating not only the dangerous treatise on laughter but also every other book in the library. Jorge's passionate opposition to laughter was so destructive because he was convinced that he possessed the truth of God's word, and his fanatical certainty left no room for doubt. For William, however, "the only truth lies in learning to free ourselves from insane passion for the truth." Because he made room for doubt, William had the intellectual flexibility to accommodate new ideas. By contrast, Jorge's zealotry and "insane passion for the truth" left him so resistant to any challenges to his worldview that he preferred to destroy all the

books he held dear rather than to allow that single, subversive book to come to light.

JUDGEMENT AND HYPOCRISY

Throughout the novel, William of Baskerville critiques the medieval church for the extreme harshness of its judgments—against religious dissenters, against those standing accused of "heresy," and even against the behavior of the clergy. The medieval Catholic Church set up the Inquisition, a church judicial body tasked with arresting and executing those who refused to conform to the prevailing theological orthodoxy. Jews, sectarian splinter groups like Fra Dolcino's Pseudo Apostles, and even people accused of "witchcraft" were among those sentenced under the Inquisition, as well as the pope's political enemies. The Inquisition was notorious for its harsh tactics, including torture and burnings. William once worked for the Inquisition, but disapproves of its methods and now believes that the Devil works through the judges as much as through the accused. For William, the church officials who abuse their authority to make such unfair judgments in the name of God are hypocrites—as guilty as or guiltier than those they sentence to death.

The Catholic Church's tendency toward the draconian is exemplified in the figure of Bernard Gui, an Inquisitor and staunch supporter of the Pope. Bernard's hatred of heretics and zeal for punishment is so extreme that he elicits false confessions under torture, showing little regard for the truth in the process. He arrests the girl from the village for witchcraft and sentences her to be burned at the stake without trial, and he charges Remigio of Varagine and Salvatore of Montferrat with heresy and with murdering their fellow monks at the abbey despite their innocence. As Adso of Melk observes, Bernard uses Remigio's trial to achieve his own political aims by charging a Franciscan (and therefore an ally of the Emperor) with heresy. In other words, Bernard is dedicated, not to seeking out the truth, but to the punishment, control, and the persecution of the pope's political enemies.

By contrast, William abandoned his work with the Inquisition because he did not believe that he had the right to judge people or sentence them to death. While Bernard and many of the church's high-ranking members are quick to make judgments about others, William is circumspect and displays a rigorous, skeptical attitude to the search for truth. He was not convinced by the authenticity of confessions extracted under torture, for as he tells Adso, "under torture or the threat of torture, a man says not only what he has done but what he would have liked to do." False judgments, the book shows, have consequences: Bernard sentenced an innocent girl to death, and because Bernard wrongfully sentenced Remigio and Salvatore, the real murderer—Jorge of Burgos—was allowed to roam free and kill again, leading to another two deaths.

William also has a much more compassionate and forgiving attitude to the failings of others. In cases of illicit sexual conduct, for example—the affair between Berengar and Adelmo, and Remigio's sexual encounters with the village girls—he is not as overtly judgmental as other characters. When Adso has sex with the village girl and is racked with guilt, William comforts him and gives him absolution. Although Adso sinned by breaking his vow of celibacy and must not do it again, William tells him, "it is not so monstrous that you were tempted to do it." And there is a benefit to this experience: he hopes that Adso will one day be able to be "indulgent and understanding with the sinners he will counsel and console." Rather than castigating Adso for his sin, William asks him to be more understanding with others, demonstrating his preference for forgiveness over punishment and compassion over judgment.

Although the church is severe in its judgments, it does not apply these exacting standards equally, especially when it comes to those in power. Michael of Cesena and Ubertino of Casale accuse the church of hypocrisy, pointing out that the teachings of Jesus preach the virtues of poverty, while medieval churchmen hold vast estates of land and wealth and wield significant political influence. The abbey is rich and keeps hundreds of servants, while in the surrounding farmland, the peasants live in abject poverty. William brings this point home when he and Adso visit the abbey's crypt, which is filled with treasure: holy relics, ivory, glass, silver, and jewels. "Now you know why your brothers make mincemeat of one another as they aspire to the position of abbot," he tells Adso. Underneath the façade of holiness, he implies, the monks are engaged in a bitter struggle for wealth and power.

The book shows that the Catholic church of the 14th century is also hypocritical in its use of violence to suppress dissent. Although Jesus advocated non-violence, Bernard uses torture to extract confessions, and issues disproportionately cruel punishments. But perhaps the novel's worst hypocrite is Jorge. He claims to be protecting the divinely-sanctioned order of things, but in the severity of his judgments against laughter and the violence of his reprisals, Jorge's behavior is the opposite of Christ-like: in fact, William even calls him the "Antichrist," since the Christian faith forbids lying and murder. Jorge's efforts to suppress Aristotle's treatise on comedy are hypocritical because he murders his fellow monks in the name of a faith that prohibits violence. Surveying the wreckage of the destroyed abbey and library—burned down by Jorge in an effort to keep **the forbidden book** secret— William tells Adso that "the Devil is the arrogance of the spirit, faith without smile, truth that is never seized by doubt." In other words, like Bernard, Jorge's absolute faith in the righteousness of his judgments makes him hypocritical and intolerant of dissent. In the severity and rigidity of their judgments, the highest ranking religious officials in *The Name of the Rose* become the very embodiment of the evils they profess to condemn.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE FINIS AFRICAE

The finis Africae is a hidden room in the abbey's labyrinthine library. It is called the "finis Africae"—the "end of Africa," in Latin—because it is adjacent to the "Leones" rooms containing books by African authors. When William of Baskerville and Adso of Melk visit the labyrinth, they are perplexed to find that the room is seemingly inaccessible, walled up and concealed behind a mirror that reflects ghostly images. Venantius of Salvemec tried to break into the room, but his cryptic note ("The hand over the idol works on the first and the seventh of the four") serves to further obscure the truth rather than clarify the mystery. The result, then, is yet more misdirection, like the distortions in the mirror; William and Adso only later realize that Venantius was instructing them to press the fourth and seventh letter of the word "quator" (the Latin for "four") in the phrase written above the "idol," or the mirror. As William observes, "this place of forbidden knowledge [i.e. the library] is guarded by many and most cunning devices." Although the ostensible purpose of a library is to preserve knowledge and make it accessible to future generations, this library is designed to keep out intruders and frustrate those who would try to penetrate its mysteries. The finis Africae—the most secret room in the labyrinth—is symbolic of the strict control in place at the abbey over the dissemination of knowledge. When William and Adso do eventually reach the finis Africae by a secret staircase, they find that it contains a **forbidden book** that Jorge of Burgos had tried to conceal by burying it in this hidden room and murdering those who tried to enter. In this sense, the finis Africae is the most extreme example of the way in which, as William puts it, "knowledge is used to conceal rather than enlighten." The purpose of the room and all the "cunning devices" that guard it is to keep knowledge secret and hidden, rather than to bring the truth to light.

THE FORBIDDEN BOOK

Jorge of Burgos orchestrated the deaths of five of his fellow monks in order to protect the secrecy of a single book—a book that comes to symbolize the dangers of forbidden knowledge. This book is shrouded in many layers of secrecy and obscurity: it is concealed in a hidden room in the library, the **finis Africae**; it is a composite volume of several works including a text in Arabic, making it a challenge to interpret; it is written on linen paper, a new and still somewhat unfamiliar technology in medieval Italy; and most disturbingly of all, its pages have been contaminated with poison. In all, it is a book that seems to not want to be read. Rather than inviting the reader in by advertising its contents, the manuscript has mysterious features that work to conceal its true nature, such that when William of Baskerville sees the book in the infirmary, he doesn't realize what he is looking at until it is too late. Even if someone manages to unravel the mystery, Jorge's poison ensures that no one who attempts to read the book will survive to tell the tale: Berengar of Arundel and Venantius of Salvemec both died after ingesting the poison with their hands and tongues, underscoring the book's function as a symbol of the risks of pursuing forbidden knowledge. Jorge believes that the manuscript—which contains the only surviving copy of the lost second book of Aristotle's *Poetics*, on comedy—is a dangerous book that poses an existential threat to the authority of the church and the endurance of God's intended social order. He also believes, as he tells Willam and preaches in his apocalyptic sermon, that it is a sin to desire to know too much. After Jorge has poisoned it, the book becomes physically as well as intellectually threatening. This is a graphic demonstration of Jorge's conviction that knowledge is dangerous, as attempting to read the forbidden book has quite literally fatal consequences.

WILLIAM'S GLASSES

Adso of Melk describes William of Baskerville as very tall and thin, but perhaps the most striking feature of his physical appearance is that he wears glasses to help his eyesight. Reading glasses were a cutting-edge technology in early fourteenth-century Italy, and Nicholas of Morimondo, the master glazier, is astonished at the craftsmanship that went into William's glasses: "What a wonder!" he exclaims. William's glasses symbolize knowledge in the form of scientific progress and innovation. Although William admits that the innovations of his own age are built on the far greater innovations of earlier ages, he suggests that, when it comes to science, "we sometimes manage to see farther on the horizon" than earlier generations. Indeed, he envisions a world radically transformed by technology, in which people will one day have access to miraculously curative medicines and even "flying machines." At the same time, however, the negative and prejudiced responses to William's glasses also suggest that scientific progress is often met with resistance. Even Nicholas, who is impressed and longs to make a pair of lenses of his own, points out that "many would speak of witchcraft and diabolic machination." William confesses that he avoided using his glasses when he worked for the Inquisition, since he knew that he might be accused of being in league with the devil. And when William and Adso break into the scriptorium to try to decipher the notes left behind by Venantius of Salvemec, the glasses are stolen by Berengar of Arundel, who wants to prevent William from discovering the truth. Nevertheless, the glasses survive the destruction of the

abbey. Having recovered his "precious lenses," William gives them to Adso, who continues to wear them for many years, even using them to write his book. After decades, then, the glasses continue to symbolize knowledge, learning, and progress.

THE FRAGMENTS OF THE LIBRARY

Although William of Baskerville describes the abbey's library as the "greatest in Christendom," its thousands of books are all destroyed in a raging fire at the end of Adso of Melk's narration. Decades later, an older Adso returns the site in northern Italy where the abbey had once stood. He patiently gathers up a few tattered remains of the library: "scraps of parchment," "intact bindings," a few rotten pages where he can sometimes see a "title," or "an image's shadow" or "the ghost of one or more words." These fragments of books symbolize the larger whole of the lost library and its vast body of knowledge. As Adso puts it, this "lesser library" is a "symbol of the greater, vanished one." Over the succeeding years, he collects copies of books that he had seen at the abbey and tries to use these incomplete pages to imaginatively reconstruct the library. This endeavor is related to Umberto Eco's own literary project in *The Name of the Rose*. Like Adso, Eco imagines a book that had once existed (the second book of Aristotle's *Poetics*) but is now lost. Nevertheless, he uses the available evidence to create a plausible reconstruction of what Aristotle *might* have written on comedy. The notion of a fragment that can stand in for a lost whole is thus central to the novel. Adso uses the metaphor of a dismembered body in writing about the library's fragmented and burnt remains, which he describes as "membra" and "amputated stumps of books." By imagining these scattered parts as a symbol of the vanished body, Adso hopes that through these "fragments, quotations, and unfinished sentences…a message might reach [him]". He devotes an entire day to a seemingly fruitless task—collecting pages of books that can no longer be read—because he believes that those fragments have a greater symbolic meaning.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Mariner Books edition of *The Name of the Rose* published in 2014.

"Naturally, A Manuscript" and Prologue Quotes

I concluded that Adso's memoirs appropriately share the nature of the events he narrates: shrouded in many, shadowy mysteries, beginning with the identity of the author and ending with the abbey's location, about which Adso is stubbornly, scrupulously silent.

Related Characters: Unnamed Narrator (speaker), Adso of Melk

Related Themes:

Page Number: 1

Explanation and Analysis

From the beginning of *The Name of the Rose*, Eco casts doubt on the authenticity of Adso's story. The unnamed narrator who writes the preface to Adso's memoirs is not even certain that the events took place at all. Adso declines to name the location of the abbey in northern Italy that he visited with William of Baskerville in the late 1320s, and so the narrator is unable to verify his story by checking other sources. Adso himself is an opaque and "shadowy" memoirist, having left few traces of his existence behind in the historical record. As the narrator notes, the history of Adso's manuscript is nearly as mysterious as the events it describes: he first encountered Adso's story in a nineteenth-century French edition that he later lost, and he can now find no evidence that the book ever existed at all. By framing Adso's story in "many, shadowy mysteries," Eco immediately raises questions that color the rest of the novel, such as whether the narrator's manuscript is authentic, and whether the truth of Adso's story can therefore be trusted. The reader is encouraged to ponder these questions, lending an additional layer of complexity to the search for truth that Adso describes in his memoirs.

On sober reflection, I find few reasons for publishing my Italian version of an obscure, neo-Gothic French version of a seventeenth-century Latin edition of a work written in Latin by a German monk toward the end of the fourteenth century.

Related Characters: Unnamed Narrator (speaker), Adso of Melk

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 4

Explanation and Analysis

The history of Adso's manuscript is long and convoluted. The original fourteenth-century manuscript has been lost. The narrator transcribed Adso's memoirs from a "neo-Gothic French version" by the "Abbé Vallet" at the "Abbaye de la Source," but lost his copy of the book. Perplexingly, the narrator later learns that no Abbé Vallet ever published books in the nineteenth century on the presses of the "Abbaye de la Source." He would have thought it was a forgery had he not also found quotations from Adso's memoirs in a seventeenth-century Latin work by Father Athanasius Kircher. All these details give the impression that the reader is very far removed from Adso's original text (if it ever existed at all). *The Name of the Rose* is an Italian version of a French version of a Latin version of a lost fourteenth-century manuscript, and so the narrator sees "few reasons" for publishing a text that may not even be authentic, because the original text has vanished.

By making it clear that the reader can ever only know Adso's memoirs secondhand, Eco foregrounds the postmodern idea that "books always speak of other books" (as William of Baskerville later puts it). The "Abbaye de la Source" is a pun on the word "source," meaning the original text. Although the source of Adso's memoirs is lost, traces of his manuscript can be found in references in other texts. This is a fitting beginning, since the plot of the novel turns on the search for the lost second book of Aristotle's *Poetics*. This lost book similarly leaves traces behind in other books, although the original source is nowhere to be found.

> Michael of Cesena [...] proclaimed as a matter of faith and doctrine the poverty of Christ. A worth resolution, meant to safeguard the virtue and purity of the order, it highly displeased the Pope, who perhaps discerned in it a principle that would jeopardize the very claims that he, as head of the church, had made, denying the empire the right to elect bishops, and asserting on the contrary that the papal throne had the right to invest the emperor.

Related Characters: Adso of Melk (speaker), Michael of Cesena

Related Themes:

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis

Before the events of Adso's memoirs, Michael of Cesena—who is head of the Franciscans, an influential order of monks—proclaims that he believes in the "poverty of Christ." This means that he believes Jesus and his apostles did not own property and lived in poverty throughout their lives. His views are politically controversial because, if Christ and his apostles were poor, it follows that the successors of the apostles (i.e. the Pope and the medieval Catholic church) should be poor as well, following his example. However, the church at the time of Adso's story was certainly not poor: medieval popes and high-ranking clergymen possessed significant wealth, landholdings, and political power.

Thus, Michael's proclamation puts him on the wrong side of the Pope. In the 1320s, Pope John XXII clashed with the Holy Roman Emperor over the question of who held supreme authority in Europe. The Pope claimed that he had the right to appoint bishops and political leaders, while the Emperor claimed that he had the right to govern his own realm as he saw fit, without bowing to the Pope's authority. This is why Franciscans like Michael have become the Emperor's political allies. Arguments for the poverty of Christ also have the effect of confining the church's influence to spiritual affairs, which pleases the Emperor, whose aim is to reduce the power of the pope.

> [The] divine plan will one day encompass the science of machines, which is natural and healthy magic. [...] Unheard-of machines are possible.
>
> But you must not worry if they do not exist, because that does not mean they will not exist later.

Related Characters: William of Baskerville (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 17

Explanation and Analysis

William is passionate about new technologies. He believes that one day the world will be radically transformed by technology—what he calls "the science of machines"—and that people will have access to miraculously curative medicines, flying machines, and boats that can sail without a captain. To some of his more religious contemporaries, these inventions would have sounded like magic or even witchcraft. William wears reading glasses, a new technology

in medieval Europe, and he acknowledges that people might think that his magnifying lenses are the work of the Devil. (He confesses that he avoided using his glasses when he worked for the Inquisition, since he knew that he might be accused of diabolical magic.) But while some are threatened by what they do not know or understand, assuming that such technologies can only come from the Devil, William believes that science is "natural and healthy." For William, science is not the work of the Devil. On the contrary, it is part of God's "divine plan." He believes that God wants people to harness the power of science to improve human life, and that such inventions will "exist later" even if they do not exist now. William's open-minded attitude toward technology demonstrates his intellectual flexibility and his enthusiasm for knowledge, learning, and progress.

First Day Quotes

"My good Adso," my master said, "during our whole journey I have been teaching you to recognize the evidence through which the world speaks to us like a great book."

Related Characters: William of Baskerville (speaker), Remigio of Varagine, Adso of Melk

Related Themes:

Page Number: 26

Explanation and Analysis

As William and Adso approach the abbey, they encounter Remigio of Varagine, the cellarer, who is searching for the abbot's lost horse. In an astonishing display of his powers of deduction, William is able to accurately deduce the horse's name, appearance, and which way it has gone. On their walk up to the abbey, William explains to Adso how he was able to assess the evidence and come to these conclusions. According to him, the world is full of signs which speak to us "like a great book." The footprints in the snow were small and regular, suggesting that the horse had a steady gait. Some twigs of a blackberry bush on had been broken off at a height of five feet, telling him that the horse turned left. As for the other details, William figured those out by calling on his knowledge of books and of human nature. He was able to accurately describe the horse's appearance (small head, sharp ears, big eyes) because those are the most valued physical traits in horses, which the abbot's favorite horse would naturally be thought to possess. Finally, he knew that the horse was called Brunellus because that is the stock name for a horse in the writings of the famous Paris theologians. Adso is amazed at all this, but in William's view, he is simply interpreting the signs he sees all around him. By comparing the world to a "great book," William uses a metaphor of reading to describe the process of deduction. The world is full of signs, and those signs can "speak" like words on a page, if only one knows how to read them correctly.

"Why," he asked, "do you insist on speaking of criminal acts without referring to their diabolical cause?"

"Because reasoning about causes and effects is a very difficult thing, and I believe the only judge of that can be God. We are already hard put to establish a relationship between such an obvious effect as a charred tree and the lightning bolt that set fire to it, so to trace sometimes endless chains of causes and effects seems to me as foolish as trying to build a tower that will touch the sky."

Related Characters: Abo of Fossonova (speaker), William of Baskerville

Related Themes:

Page Number: 33

Explanation and Analysis

William talks with Abo of Fossanova, the abbot, who asks him about his past working for the Inquisition, the Catholic Church's court for prosecuting "heretics"—people who don't conform to religious orthodoxy. William explains that he stopped working for the Inquisition because he did not believe that he had the right to judge people or sentence them to death based on scant evidence that they had collaborated with the Devil. Abo is astonished at this, and asks how he could believe that someone could commit a crime without a "diabolical cause" behind it. William admits that he was never sure whether he believed that the Devil was working through the defendants. After all, "reasoning about causes and effects is a very difficult thing" at any time, let alone in judging a matter of such importance. William suggests that an effect can have many causes. It is generally safe to assume that a charred tree has been set on fire by a lightning bolt, but the cases that William tried had seemingly "endless chains of causes and effects." He didn't feel comfortable connecting any one event to a "diabolical cause." His solution, then, was to reserve judgment. Many church officials and secular enforcers are all too happy to judge people, but for William, God is the only judge with true authority.

[O]nly the librarian knows, from the collocation of the volume, from its degree of inaccessibility, what secrets, what truths or falsehoods, the volume contains. Only he decides how, when, and whether to give it to the monk who requests it; sometimes he first consults me. Because not all truths are for all ears, not all falsehoods can be recognized as such by a pious soul.

Related Characters: Abo of Fossonova (speaker), Malachi of Hildesheim

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 41

Explanation and Analysis

William agrees to help Abo solve the murder of Adelmo of Otranto, provided that he is given the authority to move freely throughout the abbey and question everyone involved. Abo grants this permission, but insists that the library remain off-limits. He explains that the abbey's library is different than any other, because it has one of the largest collections of books in Christendom. Since the library has thousands of books from many different cultures and traditions, some of the books contain "falsehoods," and thus only the librarian is permitted to enter the library and fetch the books requested—if he believes the request is justified. The more secret and inaccessible the book, the more potentially dangerous it might be. The abbey thus closely supervises and regulates access to the knowledge of the library. This is because "not all truths are for all ears" and "not all falsehoods can be recognized as such." The library is secret and impenetrable, according to Abo, because its knowledge might be harmful to its readers. So although William later describes the abbey's library as "the greatest in Christendom," containing books in Latin, Greek, French, Italian, English, German, Arabic, and many other languages, all that knowledge is kept under lock and key.

Second Day Quotes

"The spirit is serene only when it contemplates the truth and takes delight in good achieved, and truth and good are not to be laughed at. That is why Christ did not laugh. Laughter foments doubt."

"But sometimes it is right to doubt."

"I cannot see any reason. When you are in doubt, you must turn to an authority, to the words of a father or of a doctor; then all reason for doubt ceases."

Related Characters: Jorge of Burgos (speaker), William of Baskerville

Related Themes:

Page Number: 142

Explanation and Analysis

In the scriptorium, William engages Jorge in an argument about laughter. Jorge believes that laughter is synonymous with weakness and corruption, while William thinks laughter can be a force for good. In Jorge's view, all truth is known, and so all laughter is by definition subversive of that truth. For him, to laugh is to laugh at God, and "truth and good are not to be laughed at." This is why Christ did not laugh, Jorge argues: because it "foments doubt." By contrast, William argues that "sometimes it is right to doubt." Jorge replies that there is never any reason for doubt, since one can simply consult the authority of a learned man, like a "father or doctor." This conversation demonstrates Jorge and William's differing attitudes toward authority and the search for truth. Jorge believes that the truth of God is already known, and thus there is never any reason to doubt and never any reason to laugh. But William sees truth as fundamentally unknowable and mysterious: he thinks there is much in the world and in God's word that Christians do not understand. For William, then, doubt is not only inevitable but necessary.

And, Benno added with a smile, how many times had he himself not been stirred by desires of the intellect so violent that to satisfy them he would have consented to complying with others' carnal desires, even against his own inclination.

Related Characters: Benno of Upsala (speaker), Adelmo of Otranto

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 148

Explanation and Analysis

Benno tells William and Adso the whole truth about what he knows. It appears that Adelmo had agreed to sleep with Berengar in exchange for access to the forbidden book located in the "finis Africae," a hidden room in the library.

Benno confesses that he understands Adelmo's willingness to trade sexual favors in exchange for knowledge. His description of his "desires of the intellect" as "violent" suggests that lust for books can be as powerful as more physical forms of desire. Benno's sympathetic attitude suggests that intellectual curiosity and sexual desire are both natural appetites, and that attempting to suppress either impulse can lead to disaster. Desire is natural—but someone is attempting to rein in not only the monks' sexual desires, but their yearning to learn, read, and know more. In Adelmo's case, those forces of repression lead to violence and death.

❝ This place of forbidden knowledge is guarded by many and most cunning devices. Knowledge is used to conceal, rather than to enlighten. I don't like it. A perverse mind presides over the holy defense of the library.

Related Characters: William of Baskerville (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 187-188

Explanation and Analysis

William and Adso break into the library through a secret passageway in the chapel crypt. They arrive in a room with seven walls and a scroll above the archway which reads "Apocalypsis Iesu Christi." They pass through into other rooms with different words on the scroll, and quickly get lost. They can't orient themselves by the scrolls above the archways, because the words repeat themselves. The library is also equipped with other devices that obstruct their progress. In one room, a mirror reflects frightening distorted images. The library's soundscape is also disturbing, since the library's builders placed slits in the walls so that the wind would make ghostly noises. And finally, someone has gone into the library and hidden dangerous herbs that induce visions. William refers to all these tricks—the mirror, the howling winds, the herbs—as "cunning devices" designed to frighten unwanted visitors. The "devices" are clever, but in this case, knowledge is being used to "conceal" rather than "enlighten"—to keep things in the shadows rather than to shed light. William suggests that only a "perverse mind" would guard a library in such a way. The knowledge contained in books is designed to be shared, but this library seems designed to ensure that the knowledge it houses reaches as few people as possible.

Third Day Quotes

❝ There, I said to myself, are the reasons for the silence and the darkness that surround the library: it is the preserve of learning but can maintain this learning unsullied only if it prevents its reaching anyone at all, even the monks themselves. Learning is not like a coin, which remains physically whole even through the most infamous transactions; it is, rather like a very handsome dress, which is worn out through use and ostentation. Is not a book like that, in fact? Its pages crumble, its ink and gold turn dull, if too many hands touch it.

Related Characters: Adso of Melk (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 198

Explanation and Analysis

In the wake of Berengar's mysterious disappearance, Adso reflects on the changes in education and learning that have taken place in medieval Europe in his lifetime. He wonders whether the church will lose its place as the center of literacy in Europe, when universities now produce new and better books. He suspects that this is why the library is so secretive: it is trying to maintain its historic privileges by ensuring that learning remains the preserve of only a select few, excluding even many of the monks themselves. Adso supposes that "learning is not like a coin;" it decreases in value if more people have access to it. This is also the case with physical books, Adso recognizes. The more people use a book, the more it begins to break down: "its pages crumble, its ink and gold turn dull." The abbey's determination to protect the secrecy of its library is thus also an attempt to maintain the church's cultural and intellectual dominance, and to prevent others from usurping the church's place as the world's center of knowledge.

❝ This is the illusion of heresy. The faith a movement proclaims doesn't count: what counts is the hope it offers. Scratch the heresy and you will find the leper. Every battle against heresy wants only to keep the leper as he is.

Related Characters: William of Baskerville (speaker), Salvatore of Montferrat, Fra Dolcino

Related Themes:

Page Number: 218

Explanation and Analysis

Adso talks to Salvatore about his days as a follower of various popular religious movements. Salvatore says that he joined these groups after fleeing the poverty and starvation of his native village. Adso then finds William and asks him to explain the "accidental differences" between heretical groups, and between what is heretical and what is orthodox. William tells Adso that he thinks these movements are a symptom of larger social ills: "scratch the heresy and you will find the leper." What he means by this is that the majority of those who follow the reformers are those who are social outcasts in some way (i.e. "lepers"). People like Salvatore—who are poor and uneducated—are more likely to join these movements because they are powerless and feel they have nothing to lose. The specific doctrine of the reformers is not important. Rather, they attract the "lepers" because they offer hope and the possibility of changing the order of society. Fra Dolcino, for instance, preached abolition of private property in the hopes of creating a fairer and more equal world. William suggests that the church is so harsh in its persecution of these groups because it wants "to keep the leper as he is," preventing any social upheaval that would threaten their own power. In this way, Eco seems to be suggesting that the religious persecution of heretics is often a matter of maintaining the political status quo.

❝ I did not understand then why the men of the church and of the secular arm were so violent against people who wanted to live in poverty […]. And I spoke of this with a man standing near me, for I could not keep silent any more. He smiled mockingly and said to me that a monk who practices poverty sets a bad example for the populace, for then they cannot accept monks who do not practice it.

Related Characters: Adso of Melk (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 238

Explanation and Analysis

As he reads about the history of heretical movements, Adso remembers the time that he saw a heretic named Brother Michael burned for professing that Christ had been poor. At the time, he asked another person in the crowd why Brother Michael could not be allowed to live in poverty. The man responded cynically that the church officials could now allow Brother Michael to live because "a monk who practices poverty sets a bad example." Even a single monk who lives in poverty is a bad example for the populace, because people might then wonder why other monks "do not practice it." As Eco has shown, powerful medieval churchmen were far from poor: they had palaces, jewels, large landholdings, and lavish lifestyles that rivaled the nobility. Brother Michael's example would make such wealth look hypocritical and un-Christian. This is why the church must crack down so violently on those who preach the poverty of Christ, then: their example is threatening to the wealth and power of the church establishment.

Fourth Day Quotes

❝ "But then," I said, "what is the use of hiding books, if from the books not hidden you can arrive at the concealed ones?"

"Over the centuries it is no use at all. In a space of years or days it has some use. You see, in fact, how bewildered we are."

"And is a library then, an instrument not for distributing the truth

but for delaying its appearance?" I asked, dumbfounded.

Related Characters: William of Baskerville, Adso of Melk (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 306

Explanation and Analysis

William finally deciphers the cryptic notes left behind by Venantius, but the words have no apparent organization and refer to "cicadas that will sing from the ground" and other seemingly nonsensical phrases. However, William suggests that the notes have meaning "beyond the letter" and must refer to some other book. If they can find the book that Venantius was taking notes on, they will be closer to solving the mystery. William says that books "always speak of other books," and so a book can never be truly hidden. Thus, efforts to suppress knowledge of "no use" over the centuries. William and Adso's conversation implies that the appearance of truth can be *delayed*, but ever entirely prevented, since eventually the truth always comes to light.

"This area called LEONES contains the books that the creators of the library considered books of falsehood. What's over there?"

"They're in Latin, but from the Arabic. Aryub al-Ruhawi, a treatise on canine hydrophobia. And this is a book of treasures. And this is *De aspectibus* of Alhazen..."

"You see, among monsters and falsehoods they have also placed works of science from which Christians have much to learn."

Related Characters: Adso of Melk, William of Baskerville (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 336

Explanation and Analysis

William and Adso make another visit to the library, armed with more knowledge about its organization. They know now that books are distributed across the rooms according to their country of origin. They find "Leones," the south tower, which contains books from Africa and the Middle East. Although William says that the founders of the library believed that these were "books of falsehood," he asks Adso to read the titles aloud. The books in this room include important works on medicine and science. Among the "monsters and falsehoods," then, he also believes that the Leones room contains "works of science from which Christians have much to learn." William's comment demonstrates his intellectual flexibility and open-mindedness. Although the founders of the library were quick to judge books as "false" because they come from a different cultural context, William judges books based on their content rather than the ethnic or religious identity of their author. Indeed, he even suggests that Christians "have much to learn" from these works, which have surpassed the scientific accomplishments of Western European society.

Books are not made to be believed, but to be subjected to inquiry. When we consider a book, we mustn't ask ourselves what it says but

what it means [...]. The unicorn, as these books speak of him, embodies a moral truth, or allegorical, or analogical, but one that remains true, as the idea that chastity is a noble virtue remains true.

Related Characters: William of Baskerville (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 338

Explanation and Analysis

As William and Adso peruse the shelves of the "Leones" room, Adso finds a book on the unicorn. He is initially dismissive, but William explains that there can be something to learn even from a falsehood. The unicorn is an imaginary creature, but it can be a symbol for something else: chastity, for example. For William, the unicorn represents an "allegorical, or analogical" truth, "the idea of chastity [as] a noble virtue." By suggesting that the unicorn can be read "allegorically," William invites Adso to read books in search of higher truths, beyond the literal meanings of words. With the example of the unicorn, William demonstrates that even something as fanciful as a magical creature can be a symbol of another idea, concept, or moral precept.

Fifth Day Quotes

[Jesus] did not want the apostles to have command and dominion, and therefore it seemed a wise thing that the successors of the apostles should be relieved of any worldly or coercive power. If the pope, the bishops, and the priests were not subject to the worldly and coercive power of the prince, the authority of the prince would be challenged, and thus, with it, an order would be challenged that [...] had been decreed by God.

Related Characters: William of Baskerville (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 376-377

Explanation and Analysis

At the disputation between the Pope's envoys and the Emperor's supporters, William is asked to speak on behalf of the Franciscans and their claim that Christ had lived in poverty. William argues that there is no evidence that Christ had wanted his apostles to have "command and dominion" or any "worldly or coercive power." So it follows that the successors of the apostles—the present church leadership, including the Pope—should not have "worldly or coercive power" either, in the form of political influence or authority. The Pope, then, has no right to determine who should be Holy Roman Emperor. Furthermore, the church should be subject to the power of the "prince." In other words, the Pope is under the authority of the Emperor, at

least when it comes to politics. This is because the authority of the prince is "decreed by God," and any threat to it would challenge that divinely-sanctioned order. The logical extension of this argument is that the church should stay out of politics, which is not part of its spiritual purview.

What Bernard wanted was clear. Without the slightest interest in knowing who had killed the other monks, he wanted only to show that Remigio somehow shared the ideas propounded by the Emperor's theologians. And once he had shown the connection between those ideas [...] and had shown that one man in that abbey subscribed to all those heresies and had been the author of many crimes, he would thus have dealt a truly mortal blow to his adversaries.

Related Characters: Adso of Melk (speaker), Fra Dolcino, Bernard Gui , Remigio of Varagine

Related Themes:

Page Number: 407

Explanation and Analysis

Bernard demands that Remigio confess to two crimes: that he is a heretic who followed Fra Dolcino, and that he is guilty of all the murders that have taken place at the abbey. Adso observes that Bernard doesn't have "the slightest interest" in knowing who killed the other monks, but only wants to make a connection between the crimes and those like Fra Dolcino, Ubertino, and Michael, who advocate for the poverty of Christ and deny the authority of the Pope. If he can show that Remigio was both a follower of "the ideas propounded by the Emperor's theologians" and a murderer, that would be a "truly mortal blow" to the credibility of Bernard's enemies. Under threat of torture, Remigio falsely confesses, naming Salvatore as his accomplice. Bernard tells the Emperor's supporters that anyone who shares their heretical ideas will be punished. This threat effectively prevents any chance of reconciliation between the Emperor's supporters and the Pope's envoys. Ubertino flees under cover of darkness, and Michael leaves the abbey dejected. Throughout the trial, Bernard shows little regard for the truth. This is a miscarriage of justice because Bernard doesn't care about finding and punishing the murderer; he only wants to use the trial to attack the Pope's political enemies. In this way, Eco shows that the supposedly moral proceedings of the church were often thinly-veiled displays of political power.

The good of a book lies in its being read. A book is made up of signs that speak of other signs, which in their turn speak of things. Without an eye to read them, a book contains signs that produce no concepts; therefore it is dumb. This library was perhaps born to save the books it houses, but now it lives to bury them.

Related Characters: William of Baskerville (speaker), Benno of Upsala

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 422-423

Explanation and Analysis

Benno admits to William and Adso that he stole the forbidden book from the infirmary and returned it to the library when Malachi chose him for the position of assistant librarian. William observes bitterly that the intellectual greed of the librarians will destroy the library. Now that he has been elevated to a position of authority, Benno has become as secretive as his predecessors, hiding books in the library and preventing outsiders from having access to its collections. William laments the library's attempt to hide its own books, saying that a book only has value if it is read by someone who can interpret the meaning of its signs. An unread book is unable to speak, becoming merely a dead object that signifies nothing. The library may have been created to "to save the books it houses," William observes, but "now it lives to bury them." The library is no longer disseminating knowledge and making books accessible. Instead, it is deliberately preventing people from having access to the knowledge it contains.

Sixth Day Quotes

This crypt is a beautiful epitome of the debates on poverty you have been following these past few days. And now you know why your brothers make mincemeat of one another as they aspire to the position of abbot.

Related Characters: William of Baskerville (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 453

Explanation and Analysis

In his new position as cellarer, Nicholas invites William and

Adso to the abbey's crypt, which contains precious gold, silver, jewels, and relics of saints—for example, a splinter of the cross on which Christ was crucified. The abbey is vastly wealthy, Adso realizes. William remarks that while the relics are probably not authentic, the money and precious metals are all too real. He tells Adso that this crypt "is a beautiful epitome of the debates on poverty" because it demonstrates what is at stake in the arguments over the poverty of Christ. If Jesus had been poor, then the abbey would have to give all this up. The abbey's store of treasures explains why the monks "make mincemeat of one another" as they aspire to the position of abbot. The monks are engaged in a bitter struggle for control of the abbey's wealth and power. This demonstrates the hollowness of the image of piety that the monks present. Jesus preached the virtues of charity, but the abbey is rich and keeps hundreds of servants while, in the surrounding farmland, the peasants are starving. The monks claim to care about religion, but what they really care about is wealth and power.

> The language of gems is multiform: each expresses several truths, according to the sense of the selected interpretation, according to the context in which they appear. And who decides what is the proper context? You know, my boy, for they have taught you: it is authority, the most reliable commentator of all and the most invested with prestige, and therefore with sanctity. Otherwise how to avoid the misunderstandings into which the Devil lures us?

Related Characters: Abo of Fossonova (speaker), Jorge of Burgos

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 479

Explanation and Analysis

William confronts Abo in his apartments, presenting his hypothesis that the crimes were committed by someone who hopes to prevent people from finding a forbidden book in the library. He points out that all the people who might have known about the book are dead except the abbot, insinuating that Abo might be the murderer. But Abo avoids William's pointed question and instead begins telling Adso about his ring. Gems have a language of their own, he says. Each expresses "several truths, according to the sense of the selected interpretation." This ring is not just a jewel, but rather a symbol of his authority as abbot.

This is significant because only such an authority can determine the truth among competing interpretations. It is the most "reliable," the most prestigious, and the most sacred measure of truth in the world. Without authority to tell them what is right and wrong, Abo asks, how can people "interpret the multiple signs the world sets before our sinner's eyes?" This view of the world contrasts with William's theory of the interpretation of signs. For William, it is up to each individual to exercise personal judgment and interpret the signs he or she sees in the world. In Abo's view, however, authoritative judgments are needed to avoid the snares of the Devil. This echoes Jorge's position when he tells William that there is never any reason to doubt, when one can simply look to the authority of a learned churchman for answers. Abo's discussion of the language of gems thus reveals that his conception of the role of authority in matters of interpretation is at odds with William's more open-minded approach.

> "He wants me to leave tomorrow morning, does he? Very well, it's his house; but by tomorrow morning I must know. I must."
>
> "You must? Who obliges you now?"
>
> "No one ever obliges us to know, Adso. We must, that is all, even if we comprehend imperfectly."

Related Characters: William of Baskerville (speaker), Abo of Fossonova

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 482

Explanation and Analysis

William recognizes that they have no choice but to leave the abbey the next morning, as the abbot commands. He declares, however, that they have to break into the library that night and solve the mystery—for "I must know. I must." Adso is puzzled by the imperative, since there is no one now who can "oblige" William to do anything. William responds by saying there is no one who *obliges* them to know, but that nevertheless they must—even if they can never entirely understand. This reveals William's passion for knowledge and determination to search for truth in the world. The mystery is no longer about Adelmo, or Abo, or the abbey. For William, it is personal. He must know what is in the forbidden book for his own intellectual satisfaction, because he believes in pushing the boundaries of human knowledge

and learning all that he can. At the same time, however, he acknowledges that sometimes "we comprehend imperfectly." William's statement of determination therefore demonstrates both his commitment to finding the correct interpretation and his understanding that truth sometimes remains just out of reach.

Seventh Day Quotes

❝ The Devil is the arrogance of the spirit, faith without smile, truth that is never seized by doubt. […]And now I say to you that, in the infinite whirl of possible things, God allows you also to imagine a world where the presumed interpreter of the truth is nothing but a clumsy raven, who repeats words learned long ago.

Related Characters: William of Baskerville (speaker), Jorge of Burgos

Related Themes:

Page Number: 511

Explanation and Analysis

In the library, Jorge explains why he has hidden Aristotle's book on comedy and murdered his fellow monks when they tried to read it. If mockery were made acceptable, he argues, the church would have no weapons to combat blasphemy and atheism. William calls Jorge the Devil, telling him that his zeal for truth has made him monstrously arrogant, since, in his view, the Devil is "faith without smile, truth that is never seized by doubt." Jorge believes that all truth is already known, and he harshly judges any deviations from his perception of the truth. He is unable to tolerate any doubts or challenges to his worldview. Since he thinks all truth can be found in the Bible, he sees no reason for further study in the history of ideas. William condemns this attitude for its inflexibility. For Jorge, William argues, speaking the truth merely means parroting words written long ago, "like a clumsy raven," passing down knowledge from earlier ages. William sees the world as an "infinite whirl of possible things," but for Jorge, there is only one possibility, one truth, and one correct interpretation.

❝ The library had been doomed by its own impenetrability, by the mystery that protected it, by its few entrances. The church, maternally open to all in the hour of prayer, was open to all in the hour of succor. But there was no more water, or at least very little could be found stored, and the wells supplied it with a parsimony that did not correspond to the urgency of the need.

Related Characters: Adso of Melk (speaker), Nicholas of Morimondo

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 524

Explanation and Analysis

As the fire spreads through the library, Nicholas begins directing the monks and servants to look for water. Confused, they don't immediately obey him. Worse, the monks don't how to go up into the scriptorium and access the library. By the time they are given directions and find the entrance to the library, the fire has become so uncontrollable that it is no longer possible to enter the library, and all the books are destroyed. Adso observes that "the library had been doomed by its impenetrability." For centuries, the library had kept people out. Now, in the moment when it needed as many people as possible to get into the library and put out the fire, there were too few entrances. Because the monks were not able to put out the fire in the library, it spreads to the church, barns, and stables, until soon there is no more water to contain it. Eventually, the entire abbey burns to the ground. In this sense, the library's secrecy (and its inaccessibility) proves its undoing—and wreaks havoc on the rest of the abbey as well. The library's vulnerability to the disastrous fire suggests that a library should not be designed to keep people out, since the attempt to suppress knowledge leads to violence, destruction, and death.

❝ "I have never doubted the truth of signs, Adso; they are the only things man has with which to orient himself in the world. What I did not understand was the relation among signs. I arrived at Jorge through an apocalyptic pattern that seemed to underlie all the crimes, and yet it was accidental. […] Where is all my wisdom, then? I behaved stubbornly, pursuing a semblance of order, when I should have known well that there is no order in the universe."

Related Characters: William of Baskerville (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 527

Explanation and Analysis

As Adso and William watch the abbey burn, William is despondent. Adso tries to comfort him, saying that he solved the mystery and exposed Jorge as the murderer. But there was no plot, William says. He may have understood the "truth of signs," but he fundamentally misunderstood the relationships between those signs. His mistake was in trying to connect the crimes to an overarching, grand design. His investigation failed because he was looking for a pattern to the crimes, but the pattern didn't exist and was in fact "accidental." All the murders were committed by a different person or by no one at all. By pursuing "a semblance of order," he behaved stubbornly. He clung to the idea of a determining pattern when he should have known that "there is no order in the universe."

This is a very different conception of the interpretation of signs than William expresses at the beginning of the novel, when he finds the abbot's lost horse Brunellus. William used to think that the world was like a book that could be understood by the person who knew how to read it. Now, although he still believes that signs are "the only things man has with which to orient himself in the world," he is not confident that those signs will cohere into anything meaningful. Because there is no order in the universe, the interpretation of signs is also not an orderly process that produces clear results.

Last Page Quotes

Mine was a poor harvest, but I spent a whole day reaping it, as if from those disiecta membra of the library a message might reach me. [...] At the end of my patient reconstruction, I had before me a kind of lesser library a symbol of the greater, vanished one: a library made up of fragments, quotations, unfinished sentences, amputated stumps of books.

Related Characters: Adso of Melk (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 536-537

Explanation and Analysis

Many years after the events described in his memoirs, an older Adso is sent to Italy by his abbot and returns to the site where the abbey had once stood. Only scattered ruins remain: a few traces of the church door, two outer towers of the Aedificium, a rotted bookcase. Searching through the rubble of the library, Adso finds scraps of parchment, burnt bindings, and bits of pages. He begins to collect these relics of a once-great library, as if trying to piece together the torn pages of a book. For Adso, these fragments of books symbolize the larger whole of the lost library and its vast collection of books from all over the world. He salvages these few remains hoping that the part might stand in for the whole. Adso wants to interpret these signs—"fragments, quotations, unfinished sentences, amputated stumps of books"—as something meaningful. He even hopes that by collecting these "membra" of the library, perhaps "a message might reach [him]." Ultimately, he is not sure whether these fragments mean anything at all, but he spends all day reaping this "poor harvest" nonetheless, because he imagines these fragments as "a kind of lesser library"—a symbol, if nothing more, of the greater collection that was lost.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

"NATURALLY, A MANUSCRIPT" AND PROLOGUE

In 1980, an unnamed narrator explains how he came across the "terrible story" written by Adso of Melk, a fourteenth-century German monk. He first encountered a published version of the manuscript in 1968, translated into French in the nineteenth century by the Abbé Vallet and published by the "Abbaye de la Source." The narrator transcribed Adso's memoirs, but lost the book when it was stolen by his traveling companion (with whom he was romantically involved, and it ended badly—thus, there is no possibility of asking for it back). Perplexingly, he has found no record that the book ever existed, and a medievalist scholar has informed him that no Abbé Vallet ever published books in the nineteenth century on the presses of the "Abbaye de la Source."

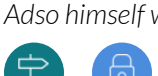
The manuscript of Adso's memoirs is shrouded in as many mysteries as the "terrible story" it contains. The unnamed narrator first encounters Adso's story in a nineteenth-century French edition that he later lost, and he can now find no evidence that the book ever existed—suggesting that it might be a forgery. The "Abbaye de la Source" is a pun on the word "source," meaning the original text. Since the source is nowhere to be found, the reader is invited to question the authenticity of Adso's story.

Because the narrator has no more luck finding the manuscript source of Vallet's book, he wonders if it might be a forgery. But two years later, browsing a bookshop in Buenos Aires, he finds quotations of Adso's story in an Italian translation of a Georgian book from the 1930s. *That* book was quoting a seventeenth-century Latin work by Father Athanasius Kircher, who was quoting Adso. Although the narrator is still many degrees removed from the original text and hasn't seen the book himself, he now has independent confirmation that Adso's manuscript existed—at least at one point—and that people other than Vallet had seen it.

Because he also finds quotations from Adso's memoirs in a seventeenth-century Latin work, the narrator has evidence that the manuscript exists and Abbé Vallet's edition is not a forgery. Although the source is lost, traces and references to Adso's book remain in other texts. The tendency of books to "speak of other books" is an important idea throughout the rest of the novel and is first introduced here.

Although the narrator is "full of doubts" and is still not fully convinced of the text's authenticity, he decides he has enough evidence of its veracity to translate and publish his Italian version. He explains that Adso wrote his memoirs near the year 1400, but that the events described took place around 1327. In describing the editorial conventions he has used, he explains that the manuscript is divided into seven days, and each day into eight sections corresponding to the hours of the day at which the monks prayed (matins, lauds, prime, terce, sext, nones, vespers, and compline). He suggests that Vallet "took some liberties" in his translation and that this is the reason why Adso anachronistically references texts published after the 1300s. The narrator also theorizes that the short summaries that preface each chapter must have been added by Vallet.

The book translated and published by the unnamed narrator is an Italian version of a French version of a Latin version of a lost fourteenth-century manuscript. It is thus several degrees removed from the original text. The narrator has "doubts" about publishing a text that may not even be authentic, and by expressing these doubts, the narrator passes them to the reader. The reader is thus made to question the truth and authenticity of Adso's story, adding another dimension to the questions of truth and interpretation that Adso himself will struggle with throughout the story.



The narrative then switches to Adso's point of view. At the end of the fourteenth century, he writes a prologue to his memoirs and reflects on events that took place in November 1327, when he was a young novice monk, about eighteen years old. At that age, Adso had first joined the Benedictines, an old, prestigious, and wealthy order of monks that emphasizes silent prayer and reflection. He knows that he is now close to death, and hopes to leave behind a record of the strange and terrible events that he saw as a young monk. He will not try to "seek a design" or explain the reasons for these incidents, but will instead leave behind "signs" for the reader to decipher.

Adso's prologue introduces a theme—the difficulty of interpreting signs—that will be central to the novel. Instead of trying to explain exactly what happened, he will leave "signs" that readers must puzzle out on their own. By refusing to offer an overarching explanation of the story's"design," Adso leaves interpretation in the hands of the reader. In this story, many questions of interpretation will be raised, but clear-cut answers will prove to be in short order.

As an aid to the reader, Adso provides some context in order to better explain the political situation in Italy in the 1320s. At that time, he explains, the seat of the papacy was in Avignon, in France, and the popes were traditionally allied with the kings of France. Pope John XXII was in a power struggle with the Holy Roman Emperor, Louis the Bavarian: the Pope claimed the right to appoint the Emperor, and the Emperor claimed the right to appoint his own bishops and maintain sovereignty in his own domain. By the end of the 1320s, relations had deteriorated far enough that the Pope had excommunicated the Emperor, and the Emperor was openly calling the Pope a heretic.

Before and during the events of Adso's memoirs, the Pope is in a power struggle with the Holy Roman Emperor over who will hold political power in medieval Europe. The conflict between the Pope and the Emperor raises the question of whether the church or monarchs should have more power in Europe, and also has implications for the question of whether to separate the powers of church and state—though this is a debate that did not exist prior to the events Adso describes.

The Franciscan order had become the Pope's enemies and the Emperor's allies, because the general of the Franciscans, Michael of Cesena, claimed that the church should renounce its political authority and its officials should return to a state of poverty, following Christ's example. The Emperor applauded this theological proposition, because it seemed to reduce the power and political influence of the Pope. Thus, Franciscans like Michael are on the side of the Emperor and receive his political protection.

Michael's proclamation puts the Franciscans on the wrong side of the Pope and makes him a political ally of the Emperor. Such political allegiances within the church are suboptimal because they create conflicts of interest and raise the question of whether the church exists to line the pockets of its own clergy members, or to preach the glory of God and save the souls of sinners.

Adso's father—a wealthy German nobleman—was fighting on the side of the Emperor. In order to avoid the fighting, he removed Adso from his monastery at Melk and sent him to Italy. Deciding that it was not appropriate for a young man to wander Italy alone and without guidance, Adso's father placed him in the service of William of Baskerville, an English Franciscan. Adso was appointed to work as William's scribe and servant. Together they traveled through northern Italy, a region where the abbeys were generally allied with the Emperor and opposed to the "heretical, corrupt Pope."

Adso is caught in the middle of the political and religious conflicts of the day. His father fights for the Emperor, and so places him in the service of William, who is also on the side of the Franciscans. Although monasteries are often thought of as shelters from the turbulence of worldly affairs, Adso has to leave his monastery to avoid becoming caught in the midst of political strife, underscoring how thoroughly the church is implicated in the political turmoil of the time.

Adso describes William's unusual physical appearance: he is about fifty years old, very tall and thin, and wears **glasses** for reading. After some time traveling with William, Adso has gotten to know the quirks and habits of his new master fairly well. William is passionate about other new technologies, like the clock, the astrolabe, and the magnet. He believes that one day, people will be able to visit the bottom of the sea and fly through the air. He is often very energetic, but can sometimes lie down for hours with a "vacant, absent expression" when he's thinking. In sum, William is the most brilliant and unusual person the young Adso has ever met.

It is unusual that William wears glasses because reading glasses were a new technology in medieval Europe. This demonstrates one of William's most significant character traits: his enthusiasm for learning and excitement about new technologies, which he believes will change the world one day. His reading glasses thus symbolize knowledge, learning, and progress.

FIRST DAY

William and Adso approach an unnamed abbey somewhere in northern Italy, where William plans to attend a summit between the envoys of the Pope and Emperor. Adso admires the abbey's Aedificium, an octagonal building constructed on a hill. The building includes four towers with seven sides each, five of which are visible from the outside. Adso admires the building's proportions because these numbers are not just aesthetically pleasing, but symbolically significant: eight is a "number of perfection," four is the number of Gospels, five is the number of zones in the world, seven is the number of the gifts of the Holy Ghost. Despite the physical beauty of the building, however, Adso also has a sense of "fear" and a "subtle uneasiness."

Adso continues to focus on the difficulty of interpreting signs. As a monk, Adso is used to reading signs for their Biblical references. For him, the construction of the abbey's Aedificium is symbolically significant. This demonstrates his eagerness to read signs as symbols of God's will and glory. However, his fear and sense of foreboding suggest that perhaps not all is right in this abbey.

William and Adso encounter Remigio of Varagine, the cellarer, who is searching for the abbot's lost horse, Brunellus. William amazes both Adso and Remigio when he is able to accurately deduce the horse's name, appearance, and which way it has gone. On their walk up to the abbey, William explains to Adso how he was able to assess the evidence and come to this conclusion. William saw footprints in the snow. Because the prints were small and the gallop was regular, he deduced that the horse had a steady gait. He knew that it took the right path because some twigs of a blackberry bush on that side of the road had been broken off at a height of five feet when the horse had turned in that direction.

This incident is the first demonstration of William's remarkable powers of deduction: he is able to locate the lost horse using only the physical evidence of broken twigs and prints in the snow. From that evidence, he makes the hypotheses that seem most likely to him. William explains that he is simply interpreting the signs he sees in the world. Those signs can "speak" like words on the pages of a book, if one knows how to read them correctly. This skill will prove highly useful as William is thrust into the midst of a mystery with many hard-to-interpret clues.

William was able to accurately describe the horse's appearance (small head, sharp ears, big eyes) because those are the most valued physical traits in horses, which the abbot's favorite horse would naturally possess. And finally, William knew that the horse was called Brunellus because that is the stock name for a horse in the writings of the famous Paris theologians.

William does not only interpret physical evidence like prints in the snow. He also uses his knowledge of human nature—for example, that people value certain traits more in horses—to make intelligent guesses. This shows that he is an astute observer of people.

William and Adso arrive at their destination. As they enter through the courtyard, Adso notices that the Aedificium is much older than the other buildings around it. They are greeted by Abo of Fossanova, the abbot. Abo thanks William for finding his horse, and asks him about his past, when he worked for the Inquisition. William explains that he believed the Devil sometimes worked through the judges as well as the accused, an allegation that seems to make Abo uncomfortable. He also tells Abo that he was reluctant to condemn people because he could never believe that the Devil was working through the defendants. After all, "reasoning about causes and effects is a very difficult thing" at any time, let alone in judging a matter of such importance, and he believes the only true judge is God.

The Inquisition was the medieval Catholic Church's court for prosecuting "heretics"—people who don't conform to religious orthodoxy. William explains that he stopped working for the Inquisition because he did not feel comfortable sentencing people to death based on tenuous evidence that they had collaborated with the Devil. This demonstrates William's skepticism and reluctance to judge or condemn others. Many church officials are all too happy to sentence to death anyone who strays from their vision of righteousness, but William seems to have a less absolute moral compass.

Abo appears somewhat disturbed by William's arguments. Nevertheless, he requests William's expertise as a detective and inquisitor in solving a mystery: a monk named Adelmo of Otranto, who illustrated manuscripts in the scriptorium, recently fell to his death from the Aedificium. The case particularly disturbs Abo because it is not clear whether Adelmo fell or was pushed: the windows were closed, so he might not have thrown himself off the top of the tower. The top floor of the Aedificium, which houses the library, is forbidden to all monks except the librarian. Abo worries that an "evil force, whether natural or supernatural," is at work in the abbey. He doesn't think any of the abbey's one hundred fifty servants could have committed the murder, because they are also forbidden to enter the Aedificium at night, so he fears that one of the monks is the guilty party.

The library is clearly important to the mystery of Adelmo's murder. However, Abo seems to have some reason for wanting to keep people out of the library—even the monks themselves. This demonstrates that the abbot is hiding something, and that the library holds secrets that it doesn't want to come to light. William's murder investigation will thus have to contend with two difficulties: not only solving the murder, but penetrating the layers of secrecy that surround the library.

William agrees to help, provided that he is given the authority to move freely throughout the abbey and question everyone involved. Abo grants this permission, but insists that the library will remain off-limits. He explains that the abbey's library is different than any other, in that it has one of the largest collections of books in Christendom, and monks come from all over the world to study and copy its manuscripts. Because the library has thousands of books from many different cultures and traditions, some of the books contain "falsehoods," and thus only the librarian is permitted to enter the library and fetch the books requested. This is because "not all truths are for all ears" and "not all falsehoods can be recognized as such," Abo explains. The library is secret and impenetrable because the knowledge it contains might be dangerous to its readers.

Abo explains the reasons for the library's secrecy. Since some of the books contain "falsehoods," the abbey strictly regulates who has access to books and when. The more secret and inaccessible the book, the more potentially dangerous it might be. The abbey keeps its books under lock and key, preventing the free circulation of knowledge—but this stands in direct opposition to the purpose libraries supposedly serve. Libraries are usually thought of as places that preserve books in order to circulate them, but this library hides *books, essentially ensuring that no one will ever lay eyes on them.*

Adso contemplates the door of the church, which is decorated with elaborate carvings of Biblical figures. At the center is a figure of God seated on a throne with a Bible in his hands, surrounded by carvings of twenty-four ancient kings dancing in ecstasy. Although Adso is first transported with joy, he then sees that the interwoven figures at the base of the pillars include diabolical figures such as a "voluptuous woman…gnawed by foul toads," a "proud man" with a devil on his shoulders, and creatures from "Satan's bestiary," such as sirens, hippocentaurs, and gorgons." Adso is horrified and fascinated by the images, and comes to feel that "the vision was speaking precisely of what was happening in the abbey." Over the next few days, he returns several times to contemplate the door.

The church door is yet another assemblage of signs that symbolize deeper meanings. At first, the door seems to glorify God—like the abbey itself. But just as Adso felt a sense of "unease" as he approached the Aedificium, he soon notices that the door is more disturbing than he had thought. In addition to the figure of God, it also presents grotesque images of sin, torture, and death. That Adso comes to feel that these horrible images symbolize what is happening at the abbey suggests that even the most supposedly holy of places is not immune to the darkness of human nature.

Adso's reverie is broken by the appearance of Salvatore of Montferrat, a vagabond-looking monk and former Franciscan who speaks an odd combination of several different languages including Latin, Provençale, and the local Italian dialect. William asks him if, as a Franciscan, he knew the "so-called apostles," but Salvatore goes pale and runs away.

This is one of the first references to Salvatore's past as a follower of Fra Dolcino, which will become important later in the novel. The passage suggests that the abbey has been sheltering former "heretics" like Salvatore.

William introduces Adso to Ubertino of Casale, a Franciscan who has taken refuge at the abbey because his views on the poverty of Christ have put him out of favor with the Pope. Adso explains Ubertino's background: he is a Spiritualist, meaning he belongs to a faction of the Franciscans who advocate for a return to absolute poverty and a renunciation of worldly goods. Ubertino tells William that "they were on the point of killing [him]" at the Pope's court in Avignon.

Like Salvatore, Ubertino seems to be in hiding at the abbey, suggesting that the abbey is a friendly place to those whose beliefs may not conform to the orthodoxy of the day. This raises the question of whether perhaps the murder at the abbey had something to do with the persecution of heretics under the Inquisition and the political strife to which it has given rise.

William and Ubertino greet each other warmly and seem to be old friends. Ubertino tells William that he disassociates himself from Spiritualists like the "Pseudo Apostles," who lived in the hills and raided villages for food, preaching free love and abolition of property. William points out that these people were friends of Clare of Montefalco, a nun with whom Ubertino was very close, but Ubertino angrily denies any connection with them. His primary objection to the Pseudo Apostles is their sexual practices (they advocated for free and love and abolition of marriage) which Ubertino considers sinful.

This conversation introduces the problem of distinguishing between different "heretical" groups. Like Ubertino, the Pseudo Apostles advocated for poverty. However, the Pseudo Apostles also advocated a restructuring of society which was too radical for Ubertino, even though he shared some of their views. It seems that nearly every character in the novel has their own vision of what does and does not constitute sinful behavior, and most are quick to judge others for their different views.

Ubertino accuses William of weakness in his prosecution of heretics: he believes that William was overly lenient when he worked as a judge for the Inquisition. Ubertino also has some less-than-kind words for Adelmo, whom he accuses of "pride of the intellect." In his eyes, scholarship has made William "idolize reason" and lose his prophetic capacities. Ubertino, on the other hand, believes that the Last Judgment is at hand. To prepare for the coming of the Antichrist, he advises William to "mortify your intelligence, learn to weep over the wounds of the lord, throw away your books." Before they part, William asks Ubertino about Salvatore and Remigio: Ubertino admits that they were once followers of a "heretical" group as well.

Ubertino's critique of Adelmo implies that he has little time for what he sees as William's worldly concerns and the abbey's over-preoccupation with books and learning. For him, it is sinful and prideful to desire to know more than God intended. Instead of looking for more knowledge, he believes people should prepare themselves for the Last Judgment. This introduces one of the arguments that Adso will come up against repeatedly throughout the book—that the desire for knowledge is antithetical to a life of piety. Importantly, William takes a different view.

William and Adso meet Severinus of Sankt Wendel, the herbalist, who gives them a tour of the abbey. On the tour, they see that the kitchen is on the ground floor of the Aedificium, and that the scriptorium and the library are on the top floors. In the infirmary, Severinus explains how he protects the dangerous herbs that can induce visions. Afterwards, William and Adso visit the scriptorium, where they meet Malachi of Hildesheim, the librarian: he is tall and thin and there is something "upsetting about his appearance." Adso thinks that his face looks as if he had "many passions which his will had disciplined."

Severinus mentions that he keeps dangerous and poisonous herbs in the infirmary, a detail that will become important later. The description of Malachi is also significant: to Adso's eyes, the librarian looks like he is suppressing his "passions." Indeed, it later emerges that Malachi has been keeping many secrets—not just about the contents of the library, but about his personal desires as well.

William and Adso also meet Berengar of Arundel, Malachi's assistant. They also meet Venantius of Salvemec, a translator, and Benno of Uppsala, a rhetorician. Malachi explains that the library is a labyrinth and only the librarian knows its secrets. The catalogue indicates where the books are stored, but only he knows how to retrieve them.

The abbey allows the monks to use the books in its collections, but they are not given freedom to explore the library themselves. Malachi acts as the gatekeeper of the knowledge contained in the library, suggesting that the abbey regards knowledge as potentially dangerous rather than an unequivocal virtue.

Malachi shows them Adelmo's now empty desk. Adelmo's marginal illustrations are very creative and unusual, including one drawing of two baboons kissing, Adso thinks that these drawings "naturally inspired merriment, though they were commenting on holy pages." The other monks gather around and begin laughing at Adelmo's drawings. They are interrupted by Jorge of Burgos, an aged and blind monk. Jorge thinks that Adelmo's illustrations are "nonsense," and that they turn the "masterpiece of creation" into the subject of laughter. William argues that marginal images provoke laughter for useful purposes, keeping people interested and engaged in the religious content.

This is the first of many debates between Jorge and William on the subject of laughter. Adelmo's drawings demonstrate that the murder victim had a witty and irreverent sense of humor, even when illustrating the Bible. Jorge is opposed to any mixing of comedy and religion. William, on the other hand, believes that comedy has the potential to work as a teaching tool by providing entertainment along with education, suggesting he has a less solemn and narrow view of the forms that a person's faith may take.

Jorge accuses Adelmo of taking pleasure in the "monsters he painted," and of following the "path of monstrosity" himself. Venantius speaks up and defends Adelmo, revealing that Jorge had debated with Adelmo on the topic of laughter just before his mysterious death. Adelmo argued that it is better to use corporeal things to convey the truth of God, because corporeal things are more easily understood than images of the divine. According to Venantius, Adelmo had said he remembered reading something in the works of Aristotle on this point. Jorge sharply cuts Venantius off when he mentions Aristotle, saying that he does not remember this conversation.

Jorge's accusation that Adelmo followed "the path of monstrosity" implies that there was something in Adelmo's personal life of which Jorge disapproved. By coming to Adelmo's defense, Venantius demonstrates that he too is intellectually curious and believes that laughter can convey higher truths. Jorge is angered by the reference to Aristotle's work on laughter, and seems to want to stop the conversation from continuing on that front.

Venantius persists, however, insisting that Berengar had also participated in the conversation. Berengar also denies remembering; Venantius suggests that he should remember a conversation involving his "dear" friend, alluding to a particular closeness between Berengar and Adelmo. Jorge warns William and Adso that the Apocalypse is at hand, and that they should not squander the last seven days by laughing.

Venantius implies a particular closeness between Berengar and Adelmo, perhaps even romantic or sexual intimacy. Jorge's apparent eagerness to end the conversation by saying that the Apocalypse is at hand suggests that he is hiding something.

Before they leave the scriptorium, Malachi tells William and Adso that there are no doors between the kitchen and the scriptorium: thus it would have been possible for someone to enter the scriptorium at night, despite the abbey's prohibition. William and Adso explore the rest of the abbey and talk with Nicholas of Morimondo, the master glazier. Nicholas is very impressed with **William's glasses**, and William praises the capacity of science to improve human life. Although he admits that people of his own age are dwarves on the shoulders of giants, at least when it comes to science, "we sometimes manage to see farther on the horizon than they." Nicholas points out that "many would speak of witchcraft and diabolic machination" when faced with new technologies, and William confesses that he avoided using his glasses when he worked for the Inquisition, since he knew that he might be accused of being in league with the devil himself. William expresses concern that technology might fall into the wrong hands, and that people might use technology for ill ends such as waging war.

William imagines a world transformed by technology, in which people will one day have access to more miraculous machines like his glasses. At the same time, however, the negative and judgmental responses to William's glasses—by those who might suggest he was conspiring with the Devil, for instance— demonstrates that people tend to fear what they don't understand. William also raises another problem: who should have access to this new knowledge? After all, some people might misuse the power of technology. In this way, William grapples with the same problem of knowledge and secrecy that animates the discussions of whether the library should make its books freely accessible.

Afterwards, William hypothesizes that Adelmo's death had something to do with his intimate relationship with Berengar. He also believes that many people have tried to enter the library at night, and that Adelmo may have killed himself. This is because it is the simplest explanation, as it would have been far easier for Adelmo to throw himself from the top of the tower than for someone to have killed him and hoisted his lifeless body out the window.

William hypothesizes that Adelmo killed himself because it is the simplest explanation. This is a principle of interpretation known as Occam's razor, named after the medieval philosopher William of Occam. Occam's razor holds that, among competing explanations, the one that requires the least explanation is probably true.

At dinner that night, William and Jorge argue again about laughter. Jorge asserts that Christ never laughed, so neither should anyone else. William points out that, actually, the Scriptures are silent on the subject of whether Christ laughed or not (they just don't mention it)—and in fact there is no reason why he shouldn't have laughed, since "laughter is proper to man." William also gives several examples of jokes in the Christian tradition: for instance, Saint Lawrence told his executioners to "eat, for it is well done," as they roasted him on a spit. Jorge replies that this merely proves that laughter is "something very close to death."

Jorge argues that Christ never laughed, but William retorts that this isn't exactly true—the Bible just doesn't mention *that Christ laughed. It's up to the reader to decide whether he laughed or not. William's interest in the unresolved ambiguities of the Bible demonstrates that he acknowledges the limitations of people's ability to fully comprehend the truth. By contrast, Jorge believes that all truth is already known.*

Abo says that the librarian locks all the doors to the Aedificium at night. William asks him how the librarian gets out, but Abo "glares at him" and says stiffly that the librarian obviously does not sleep in the kitchen. William deduces from this evidence that there must be a secret entrance to the Aedificium. And indeed, that night, William and Adso see Malachi emerging from the chapel, suggesting the entrance must be in the crypt. Adso asks William whether he plans to break into the library, and William says that he is only trying to evaluate as many possibilities as he can.

Before he can interpret the signs he sees in the world, William needs to gather as much evidence as possible. He deduces that there is another entrance to the Aedificium—so someone could have broken in without the librarian's knowledge—but he is not ready to make any interpretations or suggest any hypotheses yet. William's desire to make careful and evidence-based judgements helps to explain why he disliked working with the Inquisition, where many of the judgements made were hasty and founded on fear and rumor rather than fact.

SECOND DAY

After morning prayers, Venantius's dead body is found in a barrel of pig's blood. Severinus determines that the cause of death was not drowning, since Venantius's face isn't swollen, and therefore he must have been dead before someone threw his body in the barrel. Looking at the footprints in the snow, William deduces that the body was dragged from the Aedificium, so he suspects that Venantius died in the library. Severinus admits that he has poisons in his infirmary that could have killed someone.

That the final resting place of Venantius's body is a vat of pig's blood is not just gruesome but highly unusual, suggesting that perhaps Venantius's killer may be trying to convey a message through symbolism. What that message may be—or what the blood may represent—is unclear, but this new development provides Adso and William with yet another piece of confounding evidence.

Meanwhile, William questions Benno, who recounts a strange interaction that occurred in the scriptorium a few days earlier. During the argument about laughter, Venantius mentioned that Aristotle had dedicated the second book of his *Poetics* to comedy, but that the book was now lost. Benno then added that in his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle mentions the excellence and usefulness of riddles, particularly the African riddle of the fish. Jorge said that he did not think it wise to take the Africans as models. Berengar laughed and told Jorge that if he were to "seek among the Africans," he might find a very different answer. Malachi became furious and sent Berengar back to his tasks. But this cryptic statement prompted both Venantius and Adelmo to approach Berengar separately and ask for a **forbidden book** labeled "**finis Africae**" in the catalogue.

Benno's recollection of this conversation on laughter presents several questions. Why did Jorge and Malachi become so angry when Benno mentioned Aristotle and when Berengar made the joke about "seeking among the Africans?" Why did Venantius and Adelmo approach Berengar and ask for a book labeled "finis Africae"—"the end of Africa"—in the library catalogue? William and Adso do not yet know the answers to these questions, but this passage makes it clear that Jorge and Malachi are trying to prevent people from seeing the book with the designation "finis Africae."

William then interrogates a distressed and guilty Berengar, who claims that he saw the ghost of Adelmo in the abbey's graveyard. Berengar claims that Adelmo called him my "beautiful master" and told him he was suffering the pains of hell for his sins—for "believing my body a place of pleasures" and "having thought to know more than others." Berengar says that Adelmo's sweat burned his hand when they touched. Afterwards, William theorizes that what Berengar saw was not the ghost of Adelmo, but Adelmo himself, and that Adelmo had emerged from the chapel after confession carrying a candle, which was the wax that burnt Berengar's hand. William suggests that someone must have said something to Adelmo in confession that had caused him to become guilty and despondent.

Here, again, William is able to correctly interpret some confusing and misleading signs. William learns that Adelmo and Berengar both felt very guilty about something—something that burdened Adelmo enough that he might have been led to kill himself. The further into the history of the abbey William and Adso dig, the more they find themselves ensnared in a complex web of scandal, lies, and emotions. This is perhaps not what readers would have expected them to find at an abbey, but William seems to understand already that things are never simply what they seem.

William and Adso witness an argument between Salvatore and Remigio, who call each other heretics, prompting Adso to reflect on the difficulty of distinguishing between what is orthodox and what is heretical. They then talk with Aymaro of Alessandria, a gossipy monk who suggests that Berengar and Adelmo had a sexual relationship. He complains that the abbey has been taken over by foreigners, when it's the Italians who should be in charge.

Salvatore and Remigio's argument confirms that they were once followers of a "heretical" movement, and have found shelter at the abbey. Aymaro's comments confirm one of William's other suspicions: that Berengar and Adelmo had a sexual relationship, which was why they both felt so guilty. The revelation of this fact adds a new set of possible suspects and motives in the murders.

Back in the scriptorium, William engages Jorge in another argument about laughter in order to try to learn more about the conversation in which Berengar had told him to "seek among the Africans." He asks why Jorge is so opposed to the idea that Jesus ever laughed, since the Scriptures are silent on the subject—and in such cases "God demands that we apply our reason to many obscure things about which Scripture has left us free to decide." William believes that laughter can be a weapon against liars and those who deny the truth of God by showing the absurdity of their propositions.

William's statement that "God demands that we apply our reason" in cases of scriptural ambiguity demonstrates his emphasis on rational thought as an essential property of what it means to be human. William's hunger for knowledge, which some of the monks characterize as intellectual vanity, sets him apart from Jorge, who believes that knowledge should be controlled and contained.

Jorge, however, argues that to laugh at evil means "not preparing oneself to combat it." Christ didn't laugh, he argues, because "laughter foments doubt." William suggests that "sometimes it is right to doubt," but Jorge replies that there is never any reason for doubt, since one can simply consult the authority of a learned man. William tries to prove again that Christ might have laughed, but Jorge becomes angry and accuses William of telling ridiculous stories. William points out that to call something ridiculous is to tacitly laugh at it, saying "you are laughing at laughter, but you are laughing." At this, Jorge becomes angry.

This conversation demonstrates Jorge and William's opposing attitudes to truth, authority, and judgment. Jorge believes that the truth of God is already known, and thus there is never any reason to doubt—one can always turn to "authority" in any ambiguous cases. For William, however, it is morally and intellectually "right" to doubt. He is always skeptical of making judgments, and sees doubt as a necessary part of faith.

William tries to examine Venantius's desk for evidence, but is warded off by Benno, who asks to speak with him. Benno finally tells the whole truth of what he knows. It appears that Adelmo had agreed to sleep with Berengar in exchange for access to the forbidden book located in the "**finis Africae**." From this information, William hypothesizes that a distressed and guilty Adelmo went to Jorge to confess and ask for absolution, which Jorge probably refused. Adelmo then went to the chapel, where he encountered Venantius and told him the secret of the **forbidden book**, before wandering into the cemetery, encountering Berengar, and eventually killing himself. Venantius must have then continued the search for the book on his own until someone murdered him. William suspects Berengar, Malachi, Jorge, or Benno himself. He tells Adso that they have to break into the library to try to find out more about this secret book.

Benno's story confirms many of William's hypotheses. The book labeled "finis Africae" is indeed supposed to be kept secret, and Adelmo had sex with Berengar in exchange for access to that forbidden book. Adelmo then confessed his sin to Jorge—who was judgmental and unforgiving—which was why he was so distressed and suicidal when Berengar encountered him in the cemetery and took him for a ghost. Venantius was also in pursuit of the book when he was murdered. However, the work of interpretation continues. Even as William pieces together more and more clues, the answer to what connects all these deaths remains elusive.

In the church, Abo shows off the vast wealth of the abbey—gold, silver, and jewels—which he believes brings the monks closer to God. William seems to disagree, but introduces a new topic of discussion: the upcoming debate on poverty. Adso wonders why Abo supports the Franciscan Spiritualists and their vow of poverty, when his abbey is so obviously wealthy, but comes to the conclusion that the Benedictines must want to limit the power of the Pope and maintain their own influence.

Adso begins to see a fuller picture of the reasons for the abbey's views on poverty when Abo reveals the treasure the abbey has accumulated over the years. Like seemingly every other matter of religious debate in the book, this one has been overshadowed by money and politics, and is less a matter of right and wrong than it is about power and control.

Abo and William discuss the political situation. Michael of Cesena, a Franciscan leader, has been summoned to Avignon to see the Pope but fears he is walking into a trap. Thus, Abo and William have agreed to broker a summit between the Franciscans and the Pope's envoys, in order to come to some preliminary agreements and guarantee Michael's safety. However, the situation is very sensitive, and Abo fears that the Pope's envoys (who are accompanied by armed French troops) will connect the crimes that have occurred at the abbey to the Franciscans. There are two options: either William solves the mystery before the papal envoys arrive, or they must confess everything and allow the abbey to be placed under military surveillance.

The Pope's envoys are bringing an army to the summit, suggesting that they are providing for military defense, if it comes to that. This demonstrates the political contentiousness of the debates on poverty. At first, this seemed like a mere theological disagreement, but now it looks like a far more dangerous political gambit. Because religion and politics are so deeply intertwined, a theological debate could quickly turn violent.

William says that he can't see how the actions of a single "madman" could disrupt the negotiations. Abo, however, confesses that the abbey is harboring some former Franciscan monks—including Remigio, the cellarer—who may have associated with Fra Dolcino, a leader of a popular religious movement, and his followers, the "Pseudo Apostles." If the Pope's men get wind of this, Abo fears that they might accuse someone like Remigio of the murders and associate the legitimate doctrine of the Franciscans with these dangerous heresies. William accuses Abo of conflating very different religious movements, but Abo maintains that there is no difference among heretics, because "heretics are those who endanger the order that sustains the people of God." Adso is confused by all these shifting allegiances and accusations of heresy. He wishes that his father hadn't sent him out into the world, because now he is "learning too many things."

By asserting that there is no difference between heretics, Abo makes an uncompromising blanket judgment. Unlike William, he is happy to paint with a broad brush, lumping together a broad array of popular religious movements. This is because, for him, heresy is a political phenomenon. In his view, a "heretic" is anyone who threatens to upset the prevailing social order and religious orthodoxy. Heresy is not a doctrine so much as a general ideology of disruption. This suggests that heretics are persecuted because they represent a threat to the power of the church and the order of society.

Alinardo of Grottaferrata, the oldest monk at the abbey, tells William and Adso that they can enter the library—which he calls a "labyrinth"—via a secret entrance in the chapel crypt. He predicts that the Apocalypse is at hand, and that the deaths of Adelmo and Venantius were "sounding the trumpets" before the Last Judgment. William and Adso pass through the chapel crypt and into the Aedificium, following Alinardo's instructions (fourth skull on the right, press the eyes). They hear sounds suggesting that someone is already inside. In the scriptorium, they find notes on Venantius's desk written in Greek and in a zodiacal language that only reveals itself under the heat of a flame: William thinks that he can break the code, given time, because he has some knowledge gleaned from Arabic books on code-breaking. While they are distracted, someone steals a book from Venantius's desk, along with **William's glasses**. Adso pursues the thief, but he escapes.

William's glasses have been previously associated with knowledge, learning, and progress. But when someone steals his glasses, William is robbed of a critical tool that aids him in learning and understanding the world. Without his glasses, he can't read Venantius's notes. The theft thus demonstrates the determination of some of the monks to obstruct William's investigation and prevent people from having access to the books in the library. A library is usually thought of as a place that celebrates knowledge, but in this case, someone is going out of his way to ensure that knowledge remains inaccessible.

William and Adso decide to continue upwards into the library. They arrive in a room with seven walls and bookcases labeled with catalog information. Above the archway is a scroll reading "Apocalypsis Iesu Christi." They pass through into other rooms with different words on the scroll, but similar except for their size: they are rectangular, whereas the first room was heptagonal. So each tower of the library seems to consist of five quadrangular rooms with one window each, surrounding a single heptagonal room with no windows. However, William and Adso quickly get lost: they can't orient themselves by the scrolls above the archways, because the words repeat themselves. For example, there is yet another room labeled "Apocalypsis Iesu Christi."

William and Adso quickly get lost because they don't understand the library's layout. The signs in the library make sense individually. The words on the scrolls above each archway are phrases from the Apocalypse of John, a text with which both William and Adso are familiar. However, they make little sense in context. Although they know the source of the phrases, it is not clear what logic is behind their arrangement. This demonstrates the need for context to interpret any given set of signs.

William and Adso's progress is further obstructed by a room with a mirror that reflects distorted images. Adso is initially frightened of his own reflection. The scroll above this room reads "Super thronos viginti quatuor" ("The twenty-four elders on their seats"). Upon closer inspection, William and Adso see that the books in the room are Arabic. William guesses that they are in another tower, but they can't find the heptagonal room at the center.

The mirror in the room with Arabic books reflects frightening images, suggesting that it is there to startle intruders. The fact that this room does not lead to a heptagonal room in the center implies that there may be a hidden or blocked-off room. William and Adso don't understand the significance of these details yet, but the library is presenting many clues and confusing signs that they will have to interpret.

They see the glow of a candle in another room, and Adso goes to investigate, but is interrupted when he has a vision of Berengar and the Apocalypse and collapses. William finds him and concludes that someone has placed dangerous, vision-inducing herbs in the library to ward off intruders. He suspects that the library's builders also placed slits in the walls so that the wind would make ghostly noises, further frightening unwanted visitors. William and Adso decide to leave the library for the night, and they spend hours trying to retrace their steps before they find their way out again. Back downstairs, Abo has been looking for them. He tells William that a new calamity has struck the abbey: Berengar has disappeared.

There are many traps guarding the library, including the mirror that reflects distorted images, the howling winds that come in through slits in the walls, and the vision-inducing herbs. This is a library that seems to be trying to keep people out by frightening and confusing them. People record knowledge in books so that their knowledge can be shared, and build libraries to help circulate that knowledge further, but this *library seems to want to keep its knowledge secret.*

THIRD DAY

The next morning, Berengar is not in his cell. It appears he is gone, leaving only a bloodstained cloth behind. Adso reflects on the "intellectual pride" that led to the recent tragic events: monks are no longer "content with the holy work of copying," but instead want to produce new books themselves. He wonders whether the church will lose its place as the seat of learning in Europe, when universities now produce new and better books. In fact, he suspects that this is why the library is so secretive: it is trying to maintain its historic privileges by ensuring that learning remains the preserve of only a select few. He asks himself whether the answer is to "stop reading, and only preserve," or open the library and subject people to the "risk of knowledge."

Adso realizes that the abbey's determination to keep its books secret is an attempt to maintain the church's dominance in medieval European intellectual life. The church uses its power as a moral authority to protect its political power and wealth. It also uses violent and aggressive tactics—persecution, torture, and execution, for instance—in order to maintain its privileges. This demonstrates the hypocrisy of the church, which claims the moral high ground even when its motives are less than pure.

Adso goes to the kitchen to eat and encounters Salvatore, who recounts his days as a follower of various popular religious movements. He explains how he fled the poverty and starvation of his native village and wandered through Europe as a beggar and vagabond. He joined various heretical groups, "doing for the Lord what he had done till then for his belly." He joined a group in Tuscany that persecuted Jews, saying by way of explanation that "when your true enemies are too strong, you have to choose weaker enemies." Eventually, he met Remigio and took refuge at the abbey. Adso asks him whether he ever knew Fra Dolcino, but Salvatore refuses to answer.

Salvatore's backstory demonstrates why people from poor villages are drawn to the "heretical" movements of people like Fra Dolcino. He joined heretical groups because he was already a homeless beggar, and so had little to lose. He felt powerless, so he preyed on what he saw as a "weaker" enemy, the Jews. People like Salvatore are more likely to join popular religious movements because they are excluded from mainstream society.

Adso finds William at the forge, where Nicholas is making him another pair of glasses. Adso confesses that he no longer understands the "accidental differences" between heretical groups, and between what is heretical and what is orthodox. William explains that he thinks these movements are a symptom of larger social ills, because the majority of those who follow the reformers are the simple: "first comes the condition of being simple, then the heresy." People like Salvatore—who are poor, outcast, and uneducated, like "lepers"—are easy prey for these movements because they are powerless and feel they have nothing to lose.

When William says that the condition of being "simple" comes before heresy, he means that the majority of those who follow the "heretics" are normal people of "common folk" who are downtrodden in some way. Thus, they fall into "heresy" because of larger social ills. People like Salvatore are more likely to join these movements because they are powerless and feel they have nothing to lose. Those who are excluded from mainstream society are more likely to rebel.

William argues that it doesn't matter what the reformers preach; all that matters is that they offer hope and the possibility of changing the order of society. He suggests that perhaps it is not the church that will change the world, but rather science that will transform society and allow "an assembly of the people" to govern themselves.

Many "heretics" are not interested in the subtleties of theological doctrine. Rather, they are attracted to the reformers because they offer the possibility of changing society. This demonstrates the interrelation of religion and politics. People frequently join religious movements for politically-motivated causes.

After this conversation, William manages to decipher Venantius's code, which reads "The hand over the idol works on the first and the seventh of the four." He still, however, has no idea what it means. The abbot brings grim news: the Pope's envoys are accompanied by a notorious Inquisitor, Bernard Gui, who hates heretics and is very quick to tamp down any unorthodox behavior. If William doesn't solve the murders by tomorrow, Abo will have to turn the abbey over to Bernard's control.

Venantius's notes are clearly a sign related to the forbidden book, but William has no idea how to interpret them, since he has no idea what the "hand" or the "idol" is. This problem suggests that language does not always have clear referents or offer obvious interpretations. Like the physical evidence that William interprets, language too requires careful analysis to tease out its deeper meanings.

William comes up with a new idea: by constructing a compass, they could orient themselves in the labyrinth and know which direction they're going. He soon dismisses this idea as too impractical in the short time that remains, but in his brief enthusiasm for the compass, he reminds himself that the builders of the library "thought in a mathematical fashion." By observing the towers of the Aedificium from the outside, William begins to draw up a rough map of the labyrinth. There are fifty-six rooms, four of them heptagonal and the rest square. They can now move through the library without getting lost by always turning right, until they've arrived from the north to the west tower.

William finds a way out of the labyrinth of signs by simply thinking logically and "mathematically." By deciphering the library's physical layout, William gets closer to penetrating its mysteries. This demonstrates that seemingly inexplicable signs sometimes make sense in a broader context, as it's only when he sees the bigger picture that William is able to begin to understand the mysteries contained within the library.

However, yet another problem remains: William and Adso still don't understand the rules governing the distribution of the books among the rooms, or the meaning of the words written on the scrolls above each archway. But then William has a revelation. There are twenty-six phrases total, one for each letter of the alphabet. It's not the text of the verse that matters, but the initial letters, which together form secret words. Some of the scrolls are in red, and those must be the first letters of the words. The next time they visit the library, Adso can mark down the beginning letter of each word. After this, they break for a meal, and Adso goes and talks to Salvatore, who claims that he can make the third horse ("tertius equi") run faster by casting a spell on it. He then offers to make Adso and William cheese in batter.

After breaking the code, William and Adso are now armed to make sense of what seemed like a random and confusing pattern. Eco shows here that even unintelligible signs can sometimes have meaning when interpreted in the right context. When read as a code, the apocalyptic phrases suddenly make sense. Meanwhile, Salvatore refers to a horse as "tertius equi," a detail that will become important later. Like the scrolls, "tertius equi" is a seemingly nonsensical phrase that will turn out to have a deeper significance.

Adso finds Ubertino praying, and asks him to tell him the story of the Franciscan heretic Fra Dolcino. Ubertino tells him that the story begins with a popular religious leader named Gherardo Segarelli, who wandered the streets shouting "penitenziagite!" (a vernacular translation of the Latin for "do penance"). Adso has heard Salvatore say this exact phrase. Gherardo came into conflict with the church for his preaching, which encouraged people to reject money and abolish private poverty by stealing from their neighbors. He and his "Pseudo Apostles" were accused of being beggars and vagabonds. After Gherardo was burned for heresy, Fra Dolcino continued preaching the same principles of absolute poverty, free love, and renunciation of property. Although Adso points out that Dolcino was preaching "the same things that the Franciscans had preached" on Christ's poverty, Ubertino vigorously denies any connection. Eventually, Ubertino says, Dolcino was burned at the stake along with his lover, the beautiful Margaret of Trent.

Ubertino disapproves of the "heretical" movements of Gherardo Segarelli and Fra Dolcino, although he shares some of their views on the poverty of Christ. This is because the popular movements were much more socially radical than the doctrine of the church. Ubertino believes that churchmen should live in poverty, but Dolcino preached something even more radical: the abolition of all private property. This was much more potentially disruptive to the social order and the power of the church. So although Ubertino and Dolcino would seem to share many of the same principles, Ubertino strenuously denies any connection. However, Adso's difficulty in distinguishing between "heresies" suggests how closely aligned they truly are.

Ubertino warns Adso to beware the snares of women like Margaret. He brings his attention to the beauty of a statue of the Virgin Mary, in order to "distinguish the fire of supernatural love from the raving of the senses," but this makes Adso confused and restless. After his conversation with Ubertino, he feels rebellious and decides to visit the labyrinth alone, without William's help.

Adso is confused by Ubertino's attempt to distinguish between sensual and "supernatural" love. Problems associated with interpretation have only multiplied since Adso and William arrived at the abbey.

In the scriptorium, Adso reads a history of heretical movements and learns about the torture and execution of Fra Dolcino and Margaret. He remembers the time that he saw a heretic named Brother Michael burned for professing that Christ had been poor, and that the Pope was a heretic for denying it. At the time, he asked another person in the crowd why Brother Michael could not be allowed to live in poverty, and the man told him that "a monk who practices poverty sets a bad example."

In contrast to Brother Michael's poverty, the wealthy lifestyles of the churchmen would look hypocritical and un-Christian. The church must violently persecute those who preach the poverty of Christ because their example implies that the church establishment should also give up their treasured wealth and power.

Adso's remembrance of Brother Michael becomes confused with the images of Dolcino and Margaret. Upstairs in the labyrinth, he enters the rooms with vision-inducing herbs. He reads the Book of Revelation and sees the images of the Virgin Mary and the Whore of Babylon, feeling that he can no longer understand what distinguishes them, or what makes them different from Margaret.

The interpretative work of distinguishing between good and evil is often surprisingly difficult for Adso. It is significant that the Virgin Mary and the Whore of Babylon look strikingly similar, because this demonstrates that signs can look the same but mean very different things.

Adso flees to the kitchen, where he realizes that someone else is already inside, a girl from the village. An older Adso intervenes in the narration, saying that perhaps he should just say that something evil took place and not elaborate any further, but he feels obligated to tell the truth, as a caution to others. The girl is about Adso's age and speaks only the local dialect, so cannot communicate with him. He can tell, however, that she says he is handsome. Adso thinks of the words of the Song of Songs, forgetting that those words were meant to express "quite different, more radiant realities" and instead applies them to her beauty. They have a sexual encounter, but when Adso wakes up the next morning, she is gone, leaving only an ox heart behind.

Adso's sense of the difference between the spiritual and the physical is lost in his sexual encounter with the girl from the village. He loses the ability to accurately interpret signs because of his physical attraction to the girl. Adso has never had sex before, and he is breaking his vow of celibacy as a monk. She leaves behind an ox heart, which perhaps symbolizes Adso's own sense of heartache in the aftermath of his transgression.

Adso faints at the sight, and wakes up when William finds him on the floor of the kitchen. He tearfully confesses his sin to William, who absolves him. Although Adso sinned by breaking his vow of celibacy and must not do it again, William comforts him by saying that "it is not so monstrous that you were tempted to do it." After all, William remarks, God shows favor to Eve and her daughters, so it is normal that Adso feels attraction to women. Furthermore, William says, there is a benefit to this experience of sin: he hopes that Adso will one day be able to be forgiving of those who come to him to confess their sins. William has a hypothesis that explains the girl's presence. He suspects that Remigio trades food from the kitchens in exchange for sex with the peasant girls. On their way to the baths, Adso and William meet Alinardo, who again predicts the Apocalypse. In one of the tubs, they find Berengar's dead body.

Adso is racked with guilt, but William comforts and forgives him. He hopes that Adso will take this as a learning experience and be more compassionate with other sinners in the future. Rather than punishing Adso for his "sin," William asks him to be more understanding with others, demonstrating his preference for compassion rather than judgment. This is a stark contrast with Jorge's harsh and unforgiving attitude when Adelmo came to him and confessed his sexual affair with Berengar.

FOURTH DAY

Examining the corpse, Severinus confirms that Berengar died of drowning. He also suggests that Berengar and Venantius might have touched the same poisonous substance, since both their fingers are black and Berengar's tongue is black as well. Berengar might have been poisoned, gotten into the bath to try to calm his spirits, fallen unconscious, and then died. Severinus mentions that years ago he had a dangerous poison in the infirmary that causes fatigue, paralysis, and then death. Someone had broken into the infirmary, and when he had cleaned up the wreckage, he found the bottle missing. Since this theft took place years ago, William thinks it suggests "a malignant mind brooding for a long time in darkness over a murderous plan." Someone stole the poison years ago, and has been waiting for some time to use it.

Unlike Venantius, Berengar seems to have actually *died of drowning. However, he might have ingested the same poison as Venantius, since they both share the telltale signs of blackened fingers and tongues. Possibly he was poisoned and then fell unconscious as a result. Severinus mentions that he did once have such a poison in his infirmary, but it was stolen years ago. This suggests that whoever is behind the crimes may have been plotting the murders for years—a disturbing thought that suggests a "malignant mind."*

Malachi comes in to speak with Severinus, but quickly leaves when he sees William and Adso there. Salvatore accounts for the presence of the girl in the kitchen, confirming William's theory that he procures women from the village for Remigio, who offers them food in exchange for sex. William then confronts Remigio, who admits to this behavior as well as admitting that he used to be a follower of Dolcino. He confesses that the night that Venantius died, he came into the kitchen for his assignation with one of the village girls and found the corpse, with no sign of a struggle and a broken cup of water on the ground. He decided to leave the corpse where it was, since to raise the alarm would have incriminated him. William suggests that Malachi might have moved the corpse, but Remigio denies it, saying that he owes Malachi a debt. Meanwhile, Adso longs to see the girl again.

Malachi's presence in the kitchen, along with Remigio's statement that he owes Malachi a debt, suggests that there is some connection or understanding between them. Meanwhile, Remigio confirms William's theory that he gives food to the peasant girls in exchange for sex, demonstrating the extent of the poverty and hunger in the village adjoining the wealthy abbey. The church hypocritically keeps vast stores of wealth and food and employs many servants, while in the village below people are so desperate that young women have turned to prostitution.

Severinus finds the stolen glasses in the dead Berengar's pocket and returns them to William, just as Nicholas arrives with his new lenses. With his two pairs of glasses, William deciphers the Greek portion of Venantius's manuscript, but the words make no sense and seem "the ravings of a madman." However, William suggests that the notes have meaning beyond the letter and must refer to some other book. William says that books "always speak of other books," and so a book can never be truly hidden, since traces of it will remain in other texts. However, the library's attempt to suppress some books has "delayed" the appearance of the truth.

Although the library's attempt to and hide the forbidden book has "delayed" the appearance of the truth, the secret knowledge will come out eventually. This suggests that all attempts to suppress knowledge are ultimately futile. This is because books are "intertextual"—they reference other books. A book can't be silenced as long as its voice still speaks in other texts, like Venantius's notes.

William goes back to his room to think while Adso goes hunting for truffles, and reflects on the oddness of the way the word "truffle" sounds like the German word for the devil. The Franciscan delegation and the Pope's envoys begin to arrive. Adso joins a conference between William, Michael, Ubertino, and Jerome of Kaffa, a foolish bishop who hates the Pope. They accuse the Pope of heresy, since he wants to declare that the righteous will not enjoy heaven until after the Last Judgment. They reflect gloomily that the meeting with the Pope's envoys will probably lead to nothing.

Adso's reflections on the word "truffle" suggest that the same words can have different meanings to different people. For Adso, a truffle grows in the countryside, but to the German lord it means "der Teufel"—the devil. This is a major issue in Eco's field of semiotics (the study of language and meaning) as well as in William and Adso's attempts to interpret the evidence at play in the mystery of the murders.

William has a tense interaction with Bernard, whose path he clearly has crossed before. Bernard thinks William was lax in prosecuting heretics. He wastes no time in opening his own investigation into the murders, focusing on peasants rather than the monks. Adso and William talk with Alinardo, who continues to suggest that the pattern of the murders is following the Apocalypse of St. John. He also complains that he has been passed over and should have been made librarian, instead of the foreigners. Salvatore tells Adso that he plans to cast a spell to make the village girls fall in love with him: he will kill a black cat, dig out its eyes, place the eyes in two eggs of a black hen, and get a girl to spit on them.

Bernard and William have stark differences in the way they see the world. Bernard is a notoriously harsh judge, while William quit his job because he didn't feel comfortable sentencing people to death based only on his judgments. Meanwhile, Alinardo's comments continue to suggest that there is an underlying pattern to the murders—that they aren't random acts of violence, but rather are proceeding according to some grand plan. This encourages William and Adso to come up with further theories to try to understand that overarching pattern.

William and Adso visit the labyrinth again and discover more about its layout. The group of rooms whose labels spell out the word "Hibernia" contains books from Ireland, "Yspania" contains books from Spain, "Gallia" contains books from France, and "Roma" contains books in classical Latin. The organization of the library is a map of the world: "Hibernia," for example, is the western tower.

By breaking the code of the words of the Apocalypse on the scrolls, William and Adso finally understand how the library is organized. This emphasizes that it is often necessary to have broader context in order to understand the meaning of signs. The words seemed like random phrases from the Apocalypse of John until William and Adso realized that there was a pattern connecting them—a code spelled out by the first letter of each word.

William and Adso find "Leones," the south tower, which contains books from Africa and the Middle East. Although William says that these books contain "monsters and falsehoods," he also believes that they contain "works of science from which Christians have much to learn." He explains that there can be something to learn even from a falsehood: the unicorn is an imaginary creature, but it "embodies a moral truth," the idea of chastity as a noble virtue.

William's comment demonstrates his open-mindedness and lack of judgment. Although the founders of the library judged certain books as "false" because they were written by African and Middle Eastern authors, William suggests that Christians "have much to learn" from these works.

William and Adso realize that the "Leones" tower is missing its central heptagonal room—and yet, logically, the room must exist, so William hypothesizes that it has been walled up. This room must be the "**finis Africae**"—the end of Africa. Venantius's notes referred to the "idolum," which William realizes means the image in the mirror. The finis Africae is concealed behind the mirror that reflects distorted images. Despite this discovery, however, William and Adso can find no way into the secret room. They proceed through the rest of the library, reading books along the way: Adso reads several learned treatises on the malady of love, coming to the conclusion that he will be saved if he never sees the object of his affection again.

William and Adso finally discover the secret of the designation "finis Africae" in the library catalogue. However, they are no closer to entering the room, which is concealed behind the vision-distorting mirror. This suggests that the founders of the library did not want people to be able to enter this room and have access to the forbidden knowledge contained within its walls. The library has preserved certain books, even dangerous ones, but has locked them away so that no one can lay eyes on them.

When William and Adso return from the library, however, they do see the girl from the village. Bernard has arrested her and Salvatore, since Salvatore had been using a ritual involving a black cat to try to cast a love spell on her. Bernard reminds William that he has seen such devilish rituals before, but William stays silent—out of cowardice, Adso believes. The girl is accused of witchcraft and sentenced to be burned at the stake, and because no one speaks her local dialect to translate for her, she is not able to defend herself. Adso tries to help her, but William prevents it, telling him that there is nothing he can do. Ubertino tells Adso that the girl's provocation of his desire proves that she is a witch.

The girl from the village is a victim of Bernard's harsh judgments and zeal for punishment. He does not care that she cannot defend herself because no one speaks her language. Instead, he is quick to punish what he sees as "heresy," witchcraft, and challenges to religious authority, using Salvatore and the girl as scapegoats. Ubertino also expresses these superstitious and unfounded judgments when he tells Adso that the girl's beauty must mean she is a witch.

FIFTH DAY

The next morning, Adso sees Bernard conferring with Malachi about some papers. He then enters the chapter house through a doorway carved with statues depicting the spread of Christianity throughout the world, and thinks this is a good omen (unlike the frightening images on the church doorway, which seemed to predict some horror), since it suggests that the words of the Gospel spread peace to all people. He decides that he is weak to think so much of the girl, when an important event in the history of Christianity is taking place.

Adso is now trying to read signs for their positive meanings rather than the frightening implications of the statues carved on the church door. However, there are still many signs that not all is right. Bernard and Malachi confer together before the disputation, suggesting that there is some plot between them, highlighting the ways in which human greed and violence still attend even a supposedly holy theological disputation.

At the disputation, the Pope's envoys and the Emperor's supporters argue about whether Christ had been poor, and whether the church should follow his example by renouncing property and political influence and returning to a state of poverty. Abo summarizes recent events, explaining that in 1322 Michael of Cesena proclaimed that Christ and his apostles had never owned any property, a claim that was supported by the Emperor. The Pope then summoned Michael to Avignon to answer for what he had said, but he claimed to be ill.

The Emperor supported Michael's claim that Christ had been poor because it implies that the present Pope should give up his wealth and surrender political power to the Emperor. The Pope's angry response attests to the politicization of this particular theological debate. What is at stake is nothing less than the balance of power in medieval Europe.

Michael asks Ubertino to sum up the position of the Franciscans on Apostolic poverty. Ubertino argues that Christ never owned property other than necessities of life such as clothing and food. One of the Pope's envoys, by contrast, asserts that Christ was the owner of all earthly goods—his rightful property was simply taken from him by the Jews. Jerome of Kaffa then makes what Adso describes as a "fairly confused" argument that the "Orientals and Greeks" believe in the poverty of Christ, and they are heretics, so to deny the poverty of Christ makes the present assembly more heretical than the heretics. As the debate continues, William explains the stakes of the argument to Adso, saying that the word "'poor' does not so much mean owning a palace or not; it means, rather, keeping or renouncing the right to legislate on earthly matters." This, Adso says, "is why the Emperor is so interested" in what the Franciscans say about poverty.

The debates on poverty pose a direct threat to the wealth and land holdings of the church. If Christ never owned property other than necessities—such as clothing and food—it will be hard to justify the abbey keeping 150 servants and owning much of the surrounding agricultural property, for instance. But as William explains to Adso, "poverty" is not just about wealth. It also implies the right to be involved in politics. This is why Franciscans like Michael and Ubertino are allied with the Emperor and persecuted by the Pope. Arguments for the poverty of Christ imply that the church (and by extension, the Pope) should stay out of politics.

The disputation descends into personal insults and physical brawling, and Bernard's archers have to intervene to separate the opposing parties. Meanwhile, Severinus enters the chapter house and asks to speak to William privately. Apparently Berengar was in the infirmary before he died in the bath. He tells William that there is a "strange book" that he must come and examine in the infirmary. William orders Severinus to go back to the infirmary and lock himself in, making sure that the book is kept safe. Jorge, Remigio, and Aymaro seem to overhear, and follow Severinus out. On William's orders, Adso follows them, but Jorge goes to the Aedificium, Aymaro disappears, and Remigio goes back to the kitchens. Severinus seems to make it back to the infirmary safely.

Severinus's reference to a "strange book" is a confusing and mysterious sign that William and Adso will have to decipher, as it raises many questions, including the question of what makes this book so strange. Just moments ago, William and Adso seemed to be getting closer to solving the mystery, but every day generates yet more puzzles and mysteries. Just when they think they've reached a conclusion, a new clue sends them in different interpretative directions.

William is asked to speak for the Franciscans. He makes a radical proposition that the church should withdraw from political life and leave governing to an "elected assembly of the people." He suggests that this assembly should be empowered to make and interpret laws, arguing that while one man can do harm from ignorance or malice, a group of elected leaders would do better.

These are radical arguments for medieval Europe. William suggests that political power should reside with a representative assembly of the people (i.e., elected leaders). This would be a much more egalitarian form of government than the authoritarian regimes of either the Pope or the Emperor.

William argues that if Christ had not wanted his apostles to have any "worldly or coercive power," so it follows that the successors of the apostles—the present church—should not have governing power either. The Pope, then, has no right to determine who should be Emperor, since "the servant of the servants of God is on this earth to serve and not be served." While it cannot be definitively proven that Christ was poor, there is no evidence that he ever sought governing power, and so the Pope should withdraw from politics. The audience appears shocked by these propositions. Bernard suggests that William should come to Avignon to make these arguments to the Pope in person, but William pleads illness.

In other words, William is arguing that the Pope should have no political power and should submit to the Emperor's authority, since that is the order "decreed by God." The church should stop trying to influence politics, which is not part of its spiritual mandate. This is a theological position that has significant political implications. Bernard's invitation to the Pope's court is a clear threat, since William's views would probably get him killed. This demonstrates just how dangerous and politicized this debate has become.

After the debate, William and Adso go to check on Severinus. When they get to the infirmary, it is too late: they find Severinus murdered. He is wearing leather gloves, his head is bashed in, and his shelves are in great disorder, as if someone had been looking for something in the infirmary. Bernard has already arrived and arrested Remigio, who was found in the infirmary rummaging through the shelves, but the cellarer protests his innocence. As Remigio is dragged away, he shouts at Malachi, who responds "I will do nothing to harm you." Benno whispers to William and Adso that he saw Malachi hiding in the infirmary before Remigio arrived.

As always, Bernard is quick to leap to judgment and is particularly eager to punish the poor. Thus, he immediately comes to the conclusion that Remigio murdered Severinus. This demonstrates the harshness of his prejudices and condemnations. Benno's whispered confidence that he saw Malachi in the infirmary before Remigio arrived suggests that Malachi might have committed the murder.

Left alone in the infirmary, William, Adso, and Benno search for the "strange book" that Severinus had mentioned. William thinks they are looking for a Greek book, since everyone who has died thus far knew Greek, so they quickly discard an Arabic manuscript as a possibility. William hypothesizes that the murders are following a plan according to the Book of the Apocalypse: hail (Adelmo fell from the tower of the Aedificium), blood (Venantius died of poison), water (Berengar died of drowning), and now the stars (Severinus was killed with a metal model of the heavens). After leaving the infirmary, William and Adso realize their mistake: the "strange" book *was* the Arabic manuscript, which actually contains several volumes, one of which is in Greek. They run back to the infirmary, but it is too late. The book has been stolen again.

William is busy looking for patterns to interpret the recent mysterious events. For instance, he is intrigued by the idea that the murders are following an apocalyptic plan. He also decides that the forbidden book must be in Greek, since there is another pattern there: everyone who has died knew Greek. In searching for these patterns, however, he doesn't realize until too late that the "strange book" was an Arabic manuscript that also contained a Greek text. This shows how, in looking for an overarching design that will interpret and explain everything, one can sometimes miss the smaller details.

Bernard puts Remigio on trial, accusing him of murder and of having known Fra Dolcino. Salvatore is brought into the court, having clearly been tortured. He tells Bernard that he met Remigio among the heretics, and that Fra Dolcino himself had entrusted Remigio with "certain letters," which Remigio gave to Malachi for safekeeping. Bernard then calls Malachi for interrogation. Malachi admits that he kept the letters for Remigio, but did not know what they were. Malachi is dismissed without punishment, but as he leaves the court, someone shouts: "You hid his letters and he showed you the novices' asses in the kitchen!"

Salvatore confirms that that the abbey has been sheltering "heretics" who once followed Fra Dolcino. Malachi's explanation for hiding the heretical letters seems to satisfy Bernard. However, the malicious shout from the audience—which is probably Aymaro, given his propensity for gossip—suggests that Malachi, like Remigio, has also hypocritically made trades for sexual favors.

Bernard tells Remigio that he must confess to two crimes: that he is a heretic who followed Fra Dolcino, and that he is guilty of all the murders that have taken place at the abbey. Adso observes that Bernard doesn't have "the slightest interest" in knowing who killed the other monks, but only wants to make a connection between the crimes and those who advocate for the poverty of Christ and deny the authority of the Pope. Remigio confesses to his past as a follower of Dolcino with increasing fervor, "feeling again the emotions that had once exalted him." Still, however, he denies the murders. But when Bernard threatens him with torture, Remigio falsely confesses to the murders, naming Salvatore as his accomplice—an act of revenge for Salvatore's betrayal. Bernard sentences Salvatore and Remigio to death. He then tells the Emperor's supporters that anyone who shares these heretical ideas will be punished—preventing any chance of reconciliation between Ubertino and Michael and the Pope's envoys.

Bernard doesn't have "the slightest interest" in knowing who killed the other monks because his aim is not to bring justice to the abbey, but to make a connection between the crimes and the followers of Fra Dolcino. By showing that Remigio believed in the poverty of Christ and is a murderer, Bernard is able to severely weaken Michael and Ubertino's position by associating their views with the disreputable activities of Dolcino's followers. Bernard even uses physical violence to accomplish this goal, torturing Salvatore and threatening Remigio with the same to elicit a confession. This shows that Bernard will stop at nothing to attack and discredit the Pope's enemies. He doesn't care about justice, but about his own political ends.

After the disastrous trial, William convenes with Ubertino and Michael. Michael says that despite the threat to his life, he is determined to go to Avignon and face the Pope, prepared to compromise on "everything except the principle of poverty." William advises Ubertino to ask Abo for provisions and escape the abbey under cover of darkness, since Bernard seems to have directed his hostility towards him in particular. Ubertino takes his advice and flees that night. After supper, Benno admits that he stole the **forbidden book** from the infirmary and returned it to the library when Malachi chose him for the position of assistant librarian, replacing Berengar. William fears that the library's secrecy and the intellectual greed of its custodians will destroy it. Because he has been elevated to a position of authority, Benno now hides the knowledge he once tried to discover.

William laments the intellectual greed and hypocrisy of the librarians. Benno once sought the forbidden book, but now that he's become assistant librarian, he participates in the suppression of that book. William fears that the library is no longer disseminating knowledge and making books accessible, but is deliberately hiding the knowledge contained in its vast store of books. Worse, that agenda of secrecy is self-perpetuating. Benno's hypocrisy demonstrates that the library strategically shares it secrets with a few people. Those people then greedily hoard that knowledge and prevent others from having access to it, in order to protect their own privileges.

That evening, Jorge preaches a sermon reproaching the scholar-monks for their "sin of pride" in seeking to know more than God intended. He argues that all truth has been known from the beginning: "there is no progress," only "recapitulation." The role of the library should not be to produce new knowledge, but to gloss and preserve the knowledge passed down from earlier ages. William whispers to Adso that Jorge's sermon is a warning that if the monks continue being overly intellectually curious, the terrible events will continue. Jorge predicts that the Apocalypse is at hand. After the sermon, William sends Adso to bed. Adso remarks on the unfairness of the "simple folk" (like Remigio, Salvatore, and the girl) suffering for the sins of the powerful.

For Jorge, all truth is written in the Bible, and so there is no need for any new production of knowledge. Instead, he believes the role of a monk is to preserve the words of the Bible and of the Church Fathers. For Jorge, there is only one correct interpretation, and speaking the truth means passing down knowledge from earlier ages. Jorge's speech demonstrates the stark contrast between his uncompromising system of belief and William's more flexible and skeptical attitude to the truth. William believes that there is always room for doubt, and that some truths can never be entirely known.

SIXTH DAY

At morning prayers, the monks chant the "Sederunt," which gives Adso comfort. But then Malachi collapses in church and dies, saying "He told me…truly…It had the power of a thousand scorpions." William sees that the fingers of his hands are also blackened. Jorge weeps and says "it will never end." Nicholas is appointed cellarer to replace Remigio, but the post of librarian remains vacant. Benno is told to ensure that the scriptorium continues to function. Alinardo, Aymaro, and a group of other Italian monks appear pleased that "the German" librarian is dead. They say that the new librarian should know Greek and Arabic. William observes to Adso that everyone who has died with blackened fingers—Venantius, Berengar, and Malachi—knew Greek, so the next victim will probably know it as well. He suggests that they warn the abbot, who is one of the few remaining people who knows the secret of the **finis Africae**.

"A thousand scorpions" is one of the apocalyptic punishments in the Book of John, so Malachi's dying words seem to provide further confirmation of William's theory that the murders are following an apocalyptic pattern. Meanwhile, the complaints against "foreign" librarians suggest that there is a history of animosity at the abbey based on nationality. Alinardo and Aymaro imply that Malachi didn't know Arabic, and thus that he was not qualified for the position of librarian. All these clues suggest that the secrets of the library somehow relate to the history of factions, alliances, and grudges at the abbey. By understanding more about this history of rivalry, William and Adso might be able to learn more about the forbidden book.

In his new position as cellarer, Nicholas invites William and Adso to the abbey's crypt, where he tells them some secrets of the abbey's history. The abbey is vastly wealthy, as Adso realizes from the precious gold, silver, and jewels stored in the crypt. By tradition, Nicholas explains, the librarian eventually becomes abbot. This was why some of the Italian monks—like Aymaro and Alinardo—grumbled against the appointment of foreigners to the role. It is possible that Malachi and Berengar were killed, he suggests, because someone didn't want them to become abbot. Nicholas then shows them the rest of the treasures of the crypt, including relics of saints—for example, a splinter of the cross on which Christ was crucified. William observes wryly that the relics are probably not authentic, but the gold and jewels are. "This crypt is a beautiful epitome of the debates on poverty," he tells Adso. The abbey's vast wealth explains why the monks "make mincemeat of one another" as they aspire to the position of abbot.

The crypt demonstrates why the monks are arguing so vehemently about the poverty of Christ. If Jesus had been poor, then the abbey can't justify keeping such a store of treasure in the crypt without looking hypocritical (not to mention their 150 servants, vast landholdings, and fine meals at the dinner table). The position of abbot is a spiritual one, but the conflict between the Italians and "foreigners" over who should become librarian and then abbot demonstrates that it is also a political appointment. The monks "make mincemeat of one another" in aspiring to the role because they each want control over the abbey's wealth and power. Eco thus shows that religious power and political power are so deeply intertwined that it might be impossible to separate them.

Listening to the "Dies irae," Adso has a vision. He sees Abo, Jorge, Bernard, other monks, and various Biblical figures arrayed for a feast. But the feast soon descends into drunkenness and violence, and people begin to attack the girl from the village, torturing her and turning her flesh into a "deaf and blind ruin." Ubertino tells Adso that this is the price of sin. Suddenly, Salvatore enters, and Adso imagines that he is inside a great flame, but is no longer afraid, for "now I knew all about the mortal human body, its sufferings and its corruption." The figures return to the feast, restored to normality, and Adso sees the girl, "whole and most beautiful," who tells him that they will meet again in heaven. The Pseudo Apostles come in and crown the Emperor with the approval of the people. Pope John appears, shouting in confusion, but everyone ignores him and goes outside to hunt truffles in the forest.

Adso's dream provides a series of symbols for him to interpret. He dreams of a world in which traditional power hierarchies are reversed, suggesting that events at the abbey have upset his understanding of the order of society. Truffles, for Adso, are a symbol of the way language can take on different meanings for different people. This suggests that the potential meanings of the dream are manifold. It is up to Adso to choose the correct interpretation from a wide range of possible readings.

Adso is about to follow them, but then sees William emerging from the labyrinth, holding a compass and heading northwards. Adso shouts after him, saying he wants to see what is in the **finis Africae** as well, but William tells him "You have already seen it!"

William tells Adso that he has already seen the secret of the finis Africae. This implies that something in this dream vision has revealed the truth of what is hidden in the library, if Adso can only understand what the dream means. The world always provides signs, even if isn't always obvious how to interpret them.

Adso wakes and leaves the chapel, finding William saying goodbye to the Franciscans. He hears that the prisoners (Salvatore, Remigio, and the girl) have already left. He decides that it's better this way, since he wasn't sure he could bear the sight of the condemned. He tells William about his distressing dream. William points out that he has dreamed of the *Coena Cypriani* (the "Feast of Cyprian"). The work is considered irreverent and sacrilegious, but some of the monks read it anyway. William suggests that this dream might provide useful insights and that it can be read "like an allegory, or an analogy."

William's statement that Adso's dream can be read like "an allegory" suggests that the things he dreamed about are symbols for something else. He points out that Adso has dreamed of a Latin carnival comedy in which Biblical figures are depicted doing indecorous things and the world is described "upside down." The Coena's depiction of a topsy-turvy world is somehow relevant to the forbidden book. Perhaps Adso's dream implies that the book challenges conventional power structures and social hierarchies.

Adso's dream reminds William to check the library catalogue. Back in the scriptorium, he sees a catalogue entry for a **mysterious book** labeled "**finis Africae**" containing four titles bound together, including a copy of the *Coena*. William then makes some calculations. Robert of Bobbio was librarian by the year 1290, and after he died, Malachi succeeded him. Before Robert, there was another librarian, Paul of Rimini—he was appointed about sixty years ago, or around 1270. Alinardo complained that, about fifty years ago (around 1280), he should have been made librarian instead of someone else. Was he referring to Paul, or Robert? There are three sets of handwriting in the catalogue: Malachi, and before him Robert (whose hand is shaky, because he was ill), and then another hand, "straight and confident." This cannot be Paul, who had "a strange defect…which made him unable to write." If William's hypothesis is true, "between Paul and Robert we would have another librarian, chosen about fifty years ago, who was the mysterious rival of Alinardo, who was hoping, as an older man, to succeed Paul"—but, mysteriously Robert was appointed instead. William is not sure that he can draw any conclusions from this. He now has "only some premises."

The library catalogue poses many questions that William and Adso will have to interpret. All the evidence seems to point to another, mysterious librarian whose name is lost in the historical record. However, William is still cautious about making any hypotheses. He now simply has more evidence, which he will use to try to understand the history of the library and the identity of the unknown librarian who wrote the forbidden book's catalogue entry. This demonstrates that gathering signs and evidence is not sufficient. William still has to interpret the signs before they will add up to anything meaningful.

William asks Benno whether anyone mentioned the *Coena* in the discussion about riddles. Benno confirms that Venantius did, and Jorge became furious, reminding everyone that the book had been forbidden by the abbot. Benno asks to speak with them in private. He confesses that he is afraid that since someone killed Malachi, he might be next, especially since the Italians don't want another foreign librarian. Apparently the Italians "often spoke of Malachi as a straw man…put here by someone else." William asks Benno whether he read the book before he returned it to Malachi, and Benno says that he did not; he confirms that the book begins with an Arabic text, followed by texts in Syriac, Latin, and Greek. This book, then, is indeed the **forbidden book** they saw in the infirmary and identified in the catalogue. Benno describes the pages of the Greek text as "damp" and "strange," and William realizes that it is written on linen paper.

The Coena *is a forbidden book because it is an irreverent, comedic take on Scripture. This explains why Jorge hates is so much, with his well-known bias against laughter. Benno provides some more useful clues and signs, including that the* Coena *is written on linen paper. This is significant because paper is a less common writing technology than parchment, and so the book is distinctive and will be easier to recognize. All these signs are bringing William and Adso closer to being able to recognize and find the forbidden book. It is still unclear how the unnamed librarian figures into all this, but William's hunch seems to be that finding the forbidden book will require understanding the shadowy history of the library.*

William asks to speak with the abbot in his apartments. Abo reflects on the beauty of the abbey's Aedificium and its perfect symbolic proportions, having three stories, which is the number of the Trinity, of the days Jesus and Lazarus passed in the sepulcher, and of the times Christ appeared to his disciples after the Resurrection. William politely asks him to get to the point.

Abo sees the proportions of the Aedificium as symbolically meaningful in the context of the Bible. William, by contrast, is no longer impressed by this mode of interpretation. Instead, he wants to solve the more pressing problem of the murders. This suggests that Abo is satisfied with interpreting signs in a way that confirms his existing view of the world, while William is trying to push the boundaries of human knowledge.

Abo tells William that he is disappointed with his inability to solve the mystery. William admits that he has not lived up to expectations, but tells the abbot that he now believes these crimes stem not from a vendetta among the monks, but "from deeds that, in their turn, originate in the remote history of the abbey." The key wasn't Remigio's heretical past, or the illicit relations between Berengar and Adelmo. Rather, everything turns on the theft of a book from the **finis Africae**. Abo demands to know whether William has contravened his orders and entered the finis Africae, but William lies and says he knows this only through his powers of deduction. He presents Abo with his hypothesis that the crimes have been committed by someone who hopes to prevent people from discovering a secret in the library. All the people who might have known it are dead, except the abbot.

William has been looking for a pattern to explain the murders. But Remigio's involvement with Fra Dolcino and the sexual relationship between Berengar and Adelmo turned out to be false leads. This demonstrates that the search for an overarching pattern can actually obstruct the search for truth, in some cases. It turned out that the key to solving the mystery was the forbidden book. William was not able to recognize this for so long because he was caught up in trying to come up with a theory that would explain all *the events at the abbey.*

Abo is offended at the insinuation that he might be the murderer. He begins telling Adso about his ring, explaining that it is a symbol of his authority as abbot. Gems have a language of their own, he says. Each expresses "several truths, according to the sense of the selected interpretation." Only authority can determine the truth among competing interpretations, for how else can people "interpret the multiple signs the world sets before our sinner's eyes?"

Abo believes that authority alone can determine the truth. For Abo, authority is necessary to tell people what is right and wrong. Without authority, people are unable to understand signs. Abo's belief that only authority can distinguish between correct and false interpretations suggests that he has a hierarchical, inflexible view of truth in which there is a single "correct" answer.

William interrupts and demands to know why Abo has changed the subject instead of naming the murderer and explaining the nature of the forbidden book. Abo tells William that he doesn't expect a Franciscan to understand the sacred ways of the Benedictine order. From now on, he says, he will investigate the murders himself, under his own authority as abbot. He thanks William for his work and asks him to leave the abbey the next morning.

Abo seems to think that William has gotten too close to uncovering a secret in the abbey, so he plans to close ranks and investigate the murders himself. This is not just a dismissal but an expulsion, Adso recognizes. He and William have no choice but to leave the abbey, as the abbot commands. Abo's stern response to William's questions suggests that he is trying to hide something—perhaps something that compromises the reputation of the abbey.

After leaving the abbot's apartments, Adso suggests that Abo might either have already known everything, or he might not have not known until now, and wants William out of the way while he resolves the matter himself. Either way, his concern is with the reputation of the abbey. William is enraged, complaining that the Benedictine order are "worse than princes, more baronial than barons," happy to hand over a poor peasant to the authorities but scrupulous to protect their own. Adso is hurt by William's harsh words against his order and its abbots. They agree that they must leave the next morning, as Abo demanded, but William is determined to uncover the secret that night. Adso asks why he has to know, and William responds that "we must [know]…even if we comprehend imperfectly."

William's statement that they must "know" demonstrates his personal determination to satisfy his intellectual curiosity and know as much as he can. William believes that the human capacity for rational thought is what separates people from other creatures. He thinks that people should strive to push the boundaries of knowledge, because that's what it means to be human. However, he also acknowledges that full comprehension remains out of reach. This demonstrates his intellectual humility and understanding that there is a limit to the human ability to interpret the signs of the world, which are sometimes mysterious and inexplicable.


Adso suggests a third hypothesis: perhaps Abo wants to solve the murder on his own in order to prevent the faction of Italian monks from revolting against "foreign" librarians. William determines that they must enter the **finis Africae**, since "the final answer must be there," and in doing so save someone's life. Meanwhile, there is a commotion outside the Aedificium. The Italian monks are clustered together, whispering, and Jorge heads toward the chapter house with Nicholas. Benno tells them that the scriptorium is in chaos and no one is working. William suggests that with Malachi and Berengar dead, everyone is looking for a scapegoat. He goes to lie down for a few hours, which Adso finds perplexing, but observes that William thinks best when he's had more rest.

If William and Adso can break into the finis Africae, they will understand why someone has been murdering his fellow monks. They might even save a life, since the murderer will no doubt strike at anyone who tries to read the forbidden book. This demonstrates that the library's zeal for secrecy has been the motivating force behind all the calamities that have befallen the abbey. Understanding the mysteries of the library will thus also reveal the motivation for the murders.

That night, Jorge is absent from vespers. Benno is also absent (he is closing the scriptorium), along with Nicholas (who is making dinner) and Alinardo (who is not well). When these facts are pointed out to Abo, he becomes visibly irritated. One of the Italian monks mutinously mutters that Abo behaves like "the whore of Avignon." Several hours later, Jorge is still missing. William asks Nicholas where Jorge had gone earlier that day, and Nicholas says he accompanied him to a long meeting with the abbot. At compline, Abo asks the monks to pray for Jorge's health, and orders that no one should walk outside the dormitory that night. After everyone has gone to bed, William and Adso observe Abo entering the Aedificium alone.

Abo's anxiety about the missing monks is in keeping with the atmosphere of paranoia and tension that has overtaken the abbey. Mutiny seems to be brewing in the ranks when one of the Italian monks insults Abo for being too close to the Pope. In short, the struggle to keep the forbidden book secret has brought the community to a breaking point.

After an hour, Abo still hasn't returned, so he hadn't gone inside simply to close the Aedificium: Adso suggests that he's gone into the **finis Africae**. William agrees that this may be the case, but they still don't know how to get in. They visit the stables, where Adso idly remarks on a comment that Salvatore had made about a horse, calling it "tertius equi"—in his bad Latin, he said "the third of the horse" instead of "the third horse." Upon hearing this, William has a sudden revelation and tells Adso that they must run to the library. "Primum et septium de quatuor" does not mean the first and seventh of four, but of *the* four, the word four. They now understand Venantius's riddle and the secret of entering the finis Africae: one must press the fourth and seventh letters of the word "quatuor," or "four."

Salvatore unwittingly provides the key to entering the finis Africae. With his mangled Latin, he said "tertius equi" ("the third of the horse"). This means something entirely different than "the third horse." When Adso recounts this story, William has a new hypothesis. He realizes that Venantius's code refers to the fourth and seventh letters of the word "quatuor." This suggests that even seemingly inexplicable signs can have meaningful interpretations in the right context.

In the kitchen, William and Adso hear a muffled noise. William surmises that Abo tried to enter the **finis Africae** through a secret passageway and has been trapped inside. William tells Adso that they must hurry in order to save the life of "someone who does not deserve it." William and Adso go upstairs to the scriptorium, then the library, and finally, the mirror room in the south tower. Adso sets down a lamp on the floor and the flame begins to lick the binding of a book, prompting William to tell Adso to pick the lamp up, asking "you want to set fire to the library?" They open the door to the **finis Africae** by pressing the "q" and "r" in the word "quatuor," as Venantius wrote in his notes. The frame of the mirror shudders and the glass surface snaps back, revealing that the mirror is in fact a door. Around midnight, William and Adso enter the finis Africae.

Since Abo has been trapped in the secret passageway, he cannot be the murderer. The murderer must be the person inside the finis Africae, who is also the person who knows the secret of the forbidden book and has been trying to prevent his fellow monks from reading it—proving once again that the mystery revolves around the finis Africae and the forbidden book. When William and Adso enter the finis Africae and uncover the library's secrets, they will also discover the identity of the murderer.

SEVENTH DAY

The **finis Africae** is similar in shape to the other three heptagonal rooms inside the towers. Jorge is waiting for them in the room, sitting at a table covered with papers. He asks "is that you, William of Baskerville?" and says he has been waiting for them to arrive. William asks him to open the entrance in the secret passageway and save the abbot, but Jorge says that he has cut the rope that opens the passage, and Abo has probably suffocated by now.

Jorge is the murderer and the person who has been trying to keep the secret of the finis Africae. The fact that he knows it is William who has gotten into the room—despite being blind—shows that Jorge sees William as a worthy intellectual opponent. It also shows his keen intelligence and powers of perception. Jorge has managed to keep this secret for years, even in the face of many attempts by the other monks to bring that forbidden knowledge to light.

Jorge explains that he killed the abbot because Abo had asked him (spurred on by the Italian faction) to open the **finis Africae** and reveal the **forbidden book**. Jorge pretended to agree and said that he would kill himself in the secret room, so as not to compromise the reputation of the abbey. He then invited Abo to come to the finis Africae that night by the secret passageway to check. Instead, he trapped Abo in the passage and killed him.

Abo was undone by his zeal for protecting the reputation of the abbey. He knew that Jorge committed the murders, but wanted to deal with the matter quietly, so as not to cause a scandal. This allowed Jorge to trick and murder him. Rather than open the finis Africae, Jorge is prepared to kill any number of people, implying that there is something very dangerous in the forbidden book indeed.

William presents his hypothesis that it is Jorge, not the librarian, who has been the real power in the library for the past forty years. He directed Robert of Bobbio, and Robert's successor, Malachi, was also under Jorge's control. Since Malachi didn't read Greek and Arabic, he was entirely reliant on Jorge, who alone could read all the books and understood the workings of the library. Alinardo knew this and tried to accuse "foreigners" of running the abbey (Jorge is Spanish), but no one paid him any heed.

The mysterious handwriting in the library catalogue belongs to Jorge. Although he has not officially been librarian, he has exerted control through the last few librarians. Since Malachi couldn't read many of the books, he couldn't take any action without Jorge. Alinardo was the only one who knew the truth, but people dismissed his rants against "foreigners" because he was so old. This demonstrates that the signs pointing to Jorge had been there all along, but William was unable to interpret them at first.

"How could you be sure I would arrive?" William asks. Jorge explains that he always knew William would discover the mystery, from his thirst for knowledge, from "the way you drew me to debate on a subject I did not want mentioned." He knew William was on his trail when he figured out that he had been visiting the library by night, and when Severinus spoke to him about a "strange" book.

Jorge respects William because he is so persistent. He kept engaging Jorge in debates about laughter, which was a topic Jorge clearly did not want to discuss. He knew that William was the man who would finally be able to discover his deception and open the finis Africae. Jorge's statement suggests that tenacity is a key skill in any intellectual endeavor, particularly when trying to learn something that people want to keep hidden.

Jorge explains how he orchestrated the murders. He stole the deadly poison from the infirmary and poisoned the pages of the book which killed Venantius, Berengar, and Malachi (explaining their blackened fingers and tongues). He convinced Malachi to murder Severinus by claiming that Berengar had been sexually intimate with him in exchange for the **forbidden book** from the **finis Africae**, prompting Malachi, who was in love with Berengar, to kill Severinus out of jealousy. Malachi had not known anything about the finis Africae. He brought the vision-inducing herbs from the infirmary every day, on Abo's orders, which was why he was there in the first place. Jorge had ordered Malachi to bring back the book at all costs, telling him "it had the power of a thousand scorpions." Malachi disobeyed his orders for the first time and tried to read the book, dying of poison as a result.

Jorge never directly murdered anyone, so the murders were the result of a chain of effects rather than a deliberate program of violence. The murders were not following an apocalyptic pattern, as William thought. Rather, everything Jorge did was designed to protect the secrecy of the forbidden book. William was looking for a grand design that would explain everything, but the murders were much more haphazard and even unplanned. Jorge set events in motion, but other factors intervened as well. This demonstrates the truth of William's conviction that it is nearly impossible to establish a clear relationship between causes and effects.


Jorge asks William what he wants as a reward for his persistence and intelligence. William demands to see the volume containing the *Coena Cypriani*—and what William has guessed is the sole surviving copy of the lost second book of Aristotle's *Poetics*, which deals with comedy. William surmises that Jorge found and brought this book on a mission back to Leon and Castile, because the Greek manuscript is written on linen paper—a rare technology manufactured near Silos, in Burgos, where Jorge was born. Jorge read the book and brought it back to the abbey to hide it, because "a man like you does not destroy a book, but simply guards it and makes sure no one touches it." Jorge admits that all this is true, and gives William the book as his "prize."

William knows that a librarian like Jorge would want to hide a book rather than simply throw it on the fire. This is because despite his hatred of laughter and Aristotle, Jorge recognizes the book's importance. This function of libraries is, after all, to preserve and protect books. Thus, Jorge could not go so far outside his duty as a librarian as to physically destroy a book. However, Eco has repeatedly suggested throughout the novel that a book is useful only if it can be read, so a book without readers might as well not exist at all.

William puts on gloves before opening the book. It contains several texts on the subject of comedy: an Arabic manuscript "on the sayings of some fool," a Syriac manuscript on alchemy, and a Latin summary of the *Coena*. Jorge is dismissive of all three texts, saying that "no one would lend an ear to the ravings of an African alchemist."

Jorge's comment on these three texts demonstrates his judgmental attitude to non-Western cultures. He believes that no one in Christian Europe would bother giving credence to works by Muslim and African authors. This contrasts with William's more tolerant attitude to the books in the "Leones" section of the library, which contain important works of science.

It is the final and fourth text that Jorge finds most dangerous: as William predicted, it is a Greek copy of the lost second book of Aristotle's *Poetics*, which deals with comedy and the useful purposes of laughter. The text begins by asserting that "alone among the animals…man is capable of laughter" and that, in "inspiring the pleasure of the ridiculous," laughter produces catharsis.

Aristotle's book on comedy is now lost, but Eco imagines what Aristotle might have written. In the book, Aristotle argues that laughter is cathartic, and a sign of humanity's capacity for reason. These are arguments drawn from elsewhere in Aristotle's Poetics. In this way, Eco demonstrates that books can be plausibly reconstructed by reading other books.

As William leafs through the text, he sees that some of the pages are stuck together and would thus require moistening his fingers with his tongue in order to detach one page from the next. This was how Venantius died, then: he broke into the **finis Africae**, and found the **forbidden book**. When he read it, he ingested the poison. He went downstairs into the kitchen for a glass of water to quench his burning tongue, where he died.

Venantius died of poison, but he poisoned himself. Once again, then, Jorge caused a death to occur without acting directly. The murder mystery has proven to be much less clear-cut than William and Adso predicted when they first arrived at the abbey. In a case like this, the relationship between cause and effect is not straightforward.

Berengar found Venantius's body but didn't know what to do, fearing there would be an inquiry, since after all, Venantius had only gotten into the **finis Africae** after he showed the book to Adelmo. He flung the body into the vat of pig's blood, hoping everyone would be convinced Venantius had drowned, wiping his bloody hands on the cloth that he left behind in his cell the next night. He went to the infirmary to read the book himself, but died shortly afterwards from the same poison. Malachi killed Severinus, and then died after trying to read the book that Jorge seemed so intent on suppressing.

Jorge's poison is ingenious because it enabled him to kill anyone who tried reading the book without having to murder them himself. Instead, people simply poisoned themselves when they tried to read the forbidden book. Jorge's tactic of displaced responsibility is also demonstrated in the way that other people became unwitting collaborators. Malachi killed Severinus and Berengar hid Venantius's body, but neither knew that what they were doing was in line with Jorge's plan. In this sense, Jorge made other people share responsibility for his murders.

William now has an explanation for all the deaths, and he says he is a "fool" for thinking the murders were following the sequence of the "seven trumpets" in the Book of the Apocalypse. Jorge explains that he told Malachi that the book had the power of "a thousand scorpions"—one of the seven trumpets of the Apocalypse—because he heard that William found the theory persuasive, and he began to feel as well that "a divine plan was directing these deaths, for which I was not responsible." By conceiving a "false pattern," William observes wryly, even the guilty man began to believe the theory.

Because Jorge never actually killed anyone with his own hands, he thinks that the murders were following a "divine plan" and that he was not morally culpable, which speaks to the hypocrisy of his views. William points out that Jorge chose to believe this theory. There was no divine plan: the simple fact is that Jorge is a murderer who killed several of his fellow monks. That Jorge was able to convince himself of another reality attests to the depth of his hypocrisy and capacity for self-delusion.

Even though the apocalyptic pattern was a false one, it still helped William find the truth. One day, Alinardo was raving about an "enemy" who had been sent to seek books in Silos and who had returned prematurely "into the realm of darkness," and William realized that Alinardo was referring to Jorge, who went back to Spain to acquire books for the library and who went blind at a young age. Jorge's acquisitions included several Books of the Apocalypse along with the Greek book on linen paper (which turned out to contain the copy of Aristotle's *Poetics*). By considering Jorge's connection with the Apocalypse, William thought more about his hatred of laughter, the frequent references to Aristotle during the debates in the scriptorium, and the nature of the mysterious book on linen paper.

William admits that he sought a pattern to explain the murders, and that the pattern he identified turned out to be false. Still, it put him on the right trail, as he began to connect the dots between Alinardo's comments, Jorge's visit back to Spain, and the debates on laughter. Thus, even seemingly false or misleading patterns can prompt useful insights. Even if the relationship among signs is not always clear, there is a meaningful order to them. Eventually, after much misdirection, William arrived at the correct interpretation.

Jorge continues to insist that the apocalyptic pattern is true: "the Lord was sounding the seven trumpets. And you, even in your error, heard a confused echo of that sound." William retorts that Jorge has convinced himself that this whole story proceeded according to a divine plan in order to "conceal from yourself the fact that you are a murderer." Jorge claims that he hasn't killed anyone, and that he was only the instrument of God. He hasn't decided whether or not to kill William yet, he says.

Jorge is so convinced of the righteousness of his cause that he is unable to see that he is a "murderer," as William tells him. He hypocritically murders people in the name of a faith that prohibits murder. By seeing himself as the instrument of God in a divine plan beyond his control, Jorge is able to avoid the guilt of what he's done.

Jorge asks how William guessed that the **forbidden book** contained the second book of the *Poetics*. William explains that he recognized some of the seemingly nonsensical phrases in Venantius's notes—"cicadas that will sing from the ground," for example—as phrases from the first book of the *Poetics*. Eventually, by tracing Venantius's reading, he "reconstructed" this lost book "by reading other books." He is thus able to guess at Aristotle's argument with great accuracy—that comedy is a "joyous celebration" that tells not of the famous and powerful, but the "simple" and "base." Laughter is a "force for good" because it has an instructional value—that is, by showing an exaggerated and ridiculous view of the world, comedy suggests some truths that people might not have noticed before.

The idea that one can find a lost or hidden book by "reading other books" is repeated throughout the novel. Jorge tried to suppress this book of Aristotle's Poetics, but traces of the book remained in other writings of Aristotle, in Venantius's notes, and in references in other texts. By following those clues, William is able to guess what Aristotle has written about the merits of laughter without even having read the book. In this way, Eco suggests that perhaps a book can never truly be hidden. The lost text can always be found, if one follows the trail in other books.


William admires Jorge's ingenuity in spreading the poison on the **forbidden book** while blind, and in coming up with such a subtle and untraceable way of killing people. The victims poisoned themselves only when they were alone, and only if they tried to read the book. Adso is somewhat disturbed by the mutual admiration between Jorge and William, calling it a "seduction," as if each had acted to impress the other.

Jorge's device is clever because people died only when they tried to read the book and ended up poisoning themselves. Thus, he saw the deaths as a punishment for seeking to know too much and trying to find out the secrets of the library. This is another demonstration of an oft-repeated idea in the novel (one that William refutes): that it is a sin to desire to know and read too much. The victims of Jorge's poison paid the ultimate price for this "sin."

William asks why Jorge chose to suppress this book in particular, when there are "many other books that speak of comedy, many others that praise laughter." Jorge explains that he believes the *Poetics* is dangerous because Aristotle is respected by learned men, who have accepted what Jorge sees as the philosopher's godless preoccupation with science and earthly matters, instead of heavenly things. Although the Book of Genesis says everything that needs to be known about the organization of the cosmos, Aristotle reconceived the universe in terms of "dull and slimy matter," with his theory of atoms.

Jorge is afraid that people might give credence to what Aristotle has to say about laughter. Jorge hates Aristotle's materialist philosophy (i.e. science) because it seems to put science in the rightful place of religion. This demonstrates his rigidity and propensity for judgment. Jorge cannot tolerate any threat to his worldview, so Aristotle's philosophy is threatening to him. He reacts with violence to any theories that could undermine the church's authority.


William points out that one cannot eliminate laughter by eliminating this single book. Jorge concedes the point, but argues that laughter in its present form—the sort of entertainment that people enjoy now at carnivals or after feasts—is considered "base" amusement for peasants and simple people. In Aristotle's book, however, laughter is "elevated to art" and would become not just low entertainment but a subject of academic inquiry. The "simple" are already easily seduced by heresies, Jorge points out, but those revolts against "the laws of God and the laws of nature"—like Fra Dolcino's Pseudo Apostles—come to an end quickly, like a carnival, and are easily suppressed by the church. This book is far more destructive than those momentary upheavals, however, because it could teach that "freeing oneself of the fear of the Devil is wisdom."

For Jorge, the laughter of the learned is much more threatening than the laughter of the "simple," because it has the potential to permanently alter the order of society. Everyone knows that revolts like Dolcino's are short-lived, but if intellectuals embraced comedy as an art form, the consequences could be more long-lasting. This demonstrates that Jorge thinks laughter is dangerous for its subversive social effects. He believes that it is fear that keeps people in their proper place, but laughter encourages people to mock the authority that keeps them in their prescribed social position.

Laughter distracts one from fear, and fear of God is the only true law there is, Jorge asserts. "What would we be without fear?" he asks. The result would be nothing less than anarchy—a world in which "the rhetoric of conviction" is replaced by the "rhetoric of mockery," in which "every holy and venerable image" was turned upside down. Jorge makes a final appeal, arguing that in such an unthinkable world, even William, with all his learning, would be swept away. William suggests that this would be a better world in which people could exchange ideas more freely. Jorge argues the opposite: if "the art of mockery were to be made acceptable," someone could say "I laugh at the Incarnation," and the church would have no weapons to combat blasphemy and atheism.

Jorge sees laughter as a subversive force that would destroy every "holy and venerable image" and transform society beyond recognition. Laughter undercuts the fear of God, and it is fear that maintains the stability of the social and religious order. For William, by contrast, a radically transformed world would be a good thing. Where Jorge sees an anarchic world in which the church would have no power over the people, William sees the potential for a more open and liberated society.

William calls Jorge the Devil, telling him that his zeal for truth has made him monstrous, since, in his view, the Devil is "faith without smile, truth that is never seized by doubt." For Jorge, William argues, speaking the truth merely means parroting words written long ago. Jorge retorts that it's William who is the Devil, because he comes from an order—the Franciscans—with a lax attitude about morality and a too-close relationship with peasants and the poor. Aristotle's *Poetics* would teach that the voice of the "simple" is a vehicle of wisdom, when in reality "the simple must be kept from speaking," Jorge asserts. William counters that God created everything, even lies and monsters, and "He wants everything to be spoken of." But then why, Jorge asks, did God preserve only a single copy of this book, which he allowed to fall into the hands of someone who didn't speak Greek, and which now lies abandoned in the secrecy of an ancient monastic library? For Jorge, this is proof that the will of God was at work: God does not want this book to be read.

William is sympathetic to the poor and "simple," but Jorge believes that the simple should not be allowed to speak because it is not God's will. Jorge is convinced that his point of view is the correct one, and that God is on his side. He believes that God orchestrated these murders and the suppression of the book, and that God does not want the lost book of Aristotle's Poetics to come to light. By contrast, William points out that Jorge is hypocritical and arrogant to think that he knows what God intends or didn't intend. Far from doing God's work, William alleges that Jorge is the Devil. He is so certain that all truth is already known that he is unable to tolerate any doubts or challenges to his worldview. In his zeal for truth, he has become a monster.

William tells Jorge that it is over: he has found out the secret. But Jorge announces that another death will be of no consequence and begins to eat the poisoned pages of the **forbidden book**. He quotes the Book of the Apocalypse: "take it and devour it, it will make bitter your belly but to your lips it will be sweet as honey." For the first time, Jorge laughs. William lunges at Jorge, but trips on his habit. Jorge turns out the lights, saying "now I am the one who sees best." Jorge escapes the **finis Africae** in the dark, and William and Adso quickly realize that he is shutting the mirror door closed, and that once he shuts them in they will never escape, because they won't be able to find the mechanism to open the door in the darkness. They escape the room just in time, but still can't see in the darkness. Adso remembers that he has a flint, which he uses to light a lamp.

Jorge is uncompromising to the end. Rather than allow William to take the book and share it with others, Jorge would prefer to eat the poisoned pages himself. Jorge quotes the Apocalypse of John and taunts William that he, a blind man, is better able to see in the dark. His laughter demonstrates his hypocrisy by showing that laughter is human.


William and Adso pursue Jorge, hoping to catch him before he devours all of Aristotle's book. They eventually find him in the Yspania room. In the ensuing struggle, Jorge knocks over a lamp, which falls onto a pile of books on the ground and immediately sets them aflame. The gusts of wind designed to frighten intruders make the flame worse. Adso tries to use his habit to put out the fire, but the flames consume the garment and simply get more ferocious. Jorge casts the Aristotle into the flames, burning up what remains of the only copy of the lost second book of the *Poetics*. William pushes Jorge into a bookcase, knocking him unconscious, then turns his attention to putting out the fire by throwing some books on the flames. But it does little good. The fire begins burning in several places, catching on to the rolls of parchment Malachi had left in the room.

In his desperate struggle to prevent Aristotle's book from coming to light, Jorge accidentally starts a fire that destroys other books in the Yspania room. William is reduced to ineffectually throwing books on the fire, burning books to try to save other books. This demonstrates the truth of his prediction that the secrecy of the library will lead to its undoing and to the burial and destruction of books. The library catches fire so easily because of the devices the builders had used to try to prevent people from entering (such as the frightening gusts of wind designed to ward off intruders). Thus, secrecy is the downfall of the library.

William and Adso decide the room is lost and go down to the kitchen to raise the alarm and ask for water. Adso runs to the bell tower and rings the alarm until his hands bleed. The other monks begin to come outside, and Adso points wordlessly to the Aedificium, where the fire has spread to several other rooms. At first, the monks don't understand what is happening. They were so used to "considering the library a sacred and inaccessible place" that it doesn't occur to them that it could be subjected to the same dangers—a fire—that could afflict a "peasant hut."

The monks are slow to realize what is happening, even when Adso raises the alarm. They are used to the idea of the library as a secret and impenetrable place, and so they can't understand how it could be on fire. The library has cultivated an air of mystery, but it is just a building like any other—even a "peasant hut." Again, the library's secrecy sabotages it in its hour of need.

Nicholas begins directing the monks and servants to look for water and vessels of any kind. Confused, they don't immediately obey him. Instead, they look to the abbot for orders, but he is dying or is already dead in the Aedificium. William emerges from the kitchen carrying a small pot of water, looking "pathetic." "It is impossible," William says. "The library is lost." He begins to cry. The monks are able to carry larger amounts of water, but they don't how to go up into the scriptorium. By the time they are given directions, it is no longer possible to enter the library. Benno cries out in despair and plunges into the smoke. Adso never sees Benno again, so assumes that he probably burned to death in the library.

Without the authority of the abbot, the abbey falls into chaos and is unable to organize an effective fire relief effort. Thus, over-emphasizing authority prevents people from being able to think for themselves. The library has kept its secrets too well, as the monks don't even know how to enter the scriptorium to try to put out the fire. The library's secrecy thus destroys not only itself, but other lives as well.

Since the library has so few entrances, the monks are unable to bring in enough water to contain it and the fire spreads rapidly. The fire then spreads to the church, barns, and stables, until soon there is no more water to try to put out the fire. Alinardo is trampled by Brunellus, one of the horses that have caught fire. The terrified horses spread the fire to the remaining buildings of the compound. The monks flee in confusion, Adso finds William near the cloister, where he has saved both of their traveling knapsacks

The library has tried for centuries to keep people out, but now it needs as many people as possible to come in and put out the fire. However, there are too few entrances to the library for effective fire-fighting. The fire spreads and burns down the rest of the abbey. The library's secrecy destroys not only all its books but the entire abbey. This demonstrates that the library's attempt to suppress the knowledge contained in its collections could only have led to destruction and violence.

Having given up any chance of saving the abbey, Adso and William watch the abbey burn. A despondent William tells Adso that "it was the greatest library in Christendom." They have seen the face of the Antichrist tonight, he says, in Jorge's uncompromising zeal for truth. He warns Adso to "fear prophets…and those prepared to die for the truth." Jorge destroyed everything he held dear because he was too inflexible to consider alternative ways of viewing the world, and in this sense, "the only truth lies in learning to free ourselves from insane passion for the truth." Adso tries to comfort William, saying that he found the truth in the end and exposed Jorge's plot. But there was no plot, William says, and goes on to explain that his investigation failed because he was looking for a pattern that didn't exist. All the murders were committed by a different person, or by no one at all. He pursued "a semblance of order," when he should have known that there is no order in the universe.

William's mistake was that he tried to connect the signs he saw into a grand design that would explain all the murders. However, such a pattern didn't exist. There was no apocalyptic design. Many of the deaths had different causes, and even different perpetrators. William's statement that "there is no order in the universe" suggests that the world is not necessarily like a book of signs that can be interpreted by the adept reader, as William suggested at the beginning of the novel. There are signs in the world, yes, but interpretation does not always produce clear and coherent results. Sometimes things happen for seemingly no reason, with no comprehensible explanation.

Adso tries again to help, saying that even by looking for a false order, William did find some truth. William compares the search for truth to a ladder that must be thrown away when we realize it is useless. Adso asks: what is the difference between chaos and the will of God? If God allows these terrible, senseless things to happen, doesn't that prove God does not exist? William says that a learned man could not go on communicating, if God did not exist. Adso asks why: is it because the very notion of truth would not exist anymore, or because no one would accept what the man was saying, if he denied the existence of God? William declines to answer, saying that "there is too much confusion here."

William is no longer convinced that the interpretation of signs offers a useful or valid way of understanding the world. Adso points out that to say there is no order to the signs of the universe is tantamount to denying the existence of God. William responds that such a premise is unthinkable. If there is no God, then there is no such thing as truth. This conversation suggests that the interpretation of signs has not yielded the results that William and Adso were hoping for, such that the whole endeavor of interpretation now appears hopeless.

LAST PAGE

The abbey burns for three days and three nights, until the monks give up and begin to abandon the site. William and Adso find two horses in the woods and head east, to Bobbio. They hear that the political situation is bad, as the Emperor is now so estranged from the Pope that he has chosen another Pope of his own, Nicholas V. Supporters of Pope John are being persecuted and tortured. Rome rebels against the Emperor, and Michael of Cesena flees Avignon, fearing for his life. William and Adso decide to leave Italy, seeing that the tide is turning against the Emperor and his supporters. They travel to Munich, in Germany, where they separate.

William and Adso flee the abbey, since there is nothing left for them there. The Pope re-takes power in Rome, and the political situation in Italy becomes increasingly difficult for them, as supporters of the Emperor. The cycle of religious and political violence continues, with both sides suffering losses. As at the abbey's disputation, it seems that all hope of reconciliation between the Pope and the Emperor is lost. This suggests that religion will continue to be a cause of political conflict in Europe for many years to come.

William gives Adso the **glasses** that Nicholas had made him, telling him that they might come in handy someday. Indeed, the older Adso notes, "I am wearing them on my nose now, as I write these lines." William returns home to England, and Adso learns later that he died of the Black Death, a massive plague that swept Europe in the fourteenth century. He still prays for William's soul, and that God forgives him for the sins his "intellectual vanity" made him commit.

Adso continues to use William's glasses years after their separation and William's death. Even decades later, then, the glasses symbolize William's passion for knowledge and enthusiasm for new technologies. William may have been "vain," but Adso's use of the glasses shows his continuing affection for him.

Adso returns home to Melk. Many years later, he is sent to Italy by his abbot and returns to the site where the abbey had once stood. Only scattered ruins remain. There are a few traces of the church door that Adso so admired: the left eye of the enthroned Christ, and a piece of the lion's face. The two outer towers of the Aedificium are miraculously still standing. Piecing through the rubble, Adso finds scraps of parchment and begins to collect them, as if trying to piece together the torn pages of a book. He climbs the towers to what remains of the library, where along one stretch of wall he finds a bookcase, largely rotted by termites but containing a few pages. He salvages these few **fragments of the library**, hoping to reconstruct what had once been the greatest collection of books in Christendom. These scraps of parchment and bindings are a "lesser library," a symbol of the greater, lost collection.

For Adso, these fragments of books symbolize the larger whole of the lost library. He spends all day in a seemingly pointless task of salvaging fragments of burnt books, but he does this because he hopes that the parts of a few books might stand in for the whole collection. Just as William reconstructed the lost book of Aristotle's Poetics by finding traces of it in other books, Adso attempts to reconstruct a lost library from a few remaining fragments. This final passage provides another demonstration of the idea that lost books can be found again, which is a central motif in the novel. Adso calls his fragments a "lesser library" out of a recognition that all books are fragments, to a greater or lesser extent.

Over the years, he writes, he has read and re-read these **fragments**, as if a message from the library might reach him. He is increasingly convinced that there is in fact no meaning, but can't shake the impression that what he is writing now is "an immense acrostic" that speaks of these fragments. He isn't sure if he is speaking of the fragments or if they are speaking through him. And yet, on the threshold of his own death, he cannot say if what he has written contains "some hidden meaning, or more than one, or many, or none at all." All he can do now is be silent. It is cold now in the scriptorium, and his thumb aches. He ends his memoirs with the Latin tag "stat rosa pristina nomine, nomina nuda tenemus" ("the rose of old remains only in its name; we possess naked names").

Adso wants to interpret these fragments of the library as a meaningful text. He calls his memoirs an "acrostic"—a sequence of letters that means something else. But as always in the novel, the interpretation of signs remains a difficult task. He is not sure whether the fragments add up to anything meaningful. In any case, he is now close to death and will soon have nothing more to say. He ends by saying that we have only the "naked name" of the "rose of old"— suggesting that the names and signs of things from the past remain, but their meanings often escapes us.

HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Houghton, Eve. "*The Name of the Rose.*" *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 15 Feb 2018. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Houghton, Eve. "*The Name of the Rose.*" LitCharts LLC, February 15, 2018. Retrieved April 21, 2020. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-name-of-the-rose.

To cite any of the quotes from *The Name of the Rose* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Eco, Umberto. The Name of the Rose. Mariner Books. 2014.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Eco, Umberto. The Name of the Rose. New York: Mariner Books. 2014.