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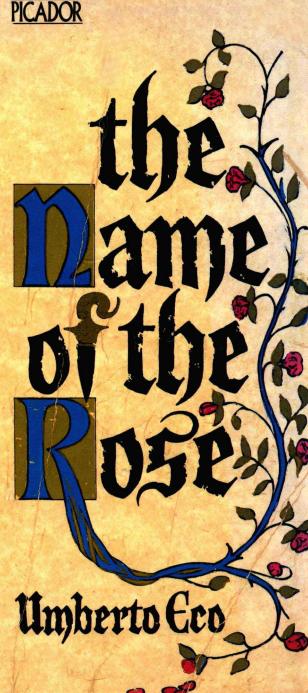
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Umberto Eco

The Name Of The Rose

Originally published in Italy under the title Il nome della rosa © Gruppo Editoriale Fabbri-Bompiani, Sonzogno, Etas S.p.A. 1980

First published in Great Britain 1983 by Martin Secker & Warburg Limited
This Picador edition published 1984 by Pan Books Ltd,
Cavaye Place, London sw10 9PG
in association with Martin Secker & Warburg Limited
9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
Translation © Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Inc. and Martin
Secker & Warburg Limited 1983
ISBN 0 330 28414 2
Printed and bound in Great Britain by

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Cox & Wyman Limited, Reading

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On August 16, 1968, I was handed a book written by a certain Abbé Vallet, Le Manuscrit de Dom Adson de Melk, traduit en français d'après l'édition de Dom J. Mabillon (Aux Presses de l'Abbaye de la Source, Paris, 1842). Supplemented by historical information that was actually quite scant, the book claimed to reproduce faithfully a fourteenth-century manuscript that, in its turn, had been found in the monastery of Melk by the great eighteenth-century man of learning, to whom we owe so much information about the history of the Benedictine order. The scholarly discovery (I mean mine, the third in chronological order) entertained me while I was in Prague, waiting for a dear friend. Six days later Soviet troops invaded that unhappy city. I managed, not without adventure, to reach the Austrian border at Linz, and from there I journeyed to Vienna, where I met my beloved, and together we sailed up the Danube.

In a state of intellectual excitement, I read with fascination the terrible story of Adso of Melk, and I allowed myself to be so absorbed by it that, almost in a single burst of energy, I completed a translation, using some of those large notebooks from the Papeterie Joseph Gibert in which it is so pleasant to write if you use a felt-tip pen. And as I was writing, we reached the vicinity of Melk, where, perched over a bend in the river, the handsome Stift stands to this day, after several restorations during the course of the centuries. As the reader must

have guessed, in the monastery library I found no trace of Adso's manuscript.

Before we reached Salzburg, one tragic night in a little hotel on the shores of the Mondsee, my traveling-companionship was abruptly interrupted, and the person with whom I was traveling disappeared—taking Abbé Vallet's book, not out of spite, but because of the abrupt and untidy way in which our relationship ended. And so I was left with a number of manuscript notebooks in my hand, and a great emptiness in my heart.

A few months later, in Paris, I decided to get to the bottom of my research. Among the few pieces of information I had derived from the French book, I still had the reference to its source, exceptionally detailed and precise:

Vetera analecta, sive collectio veterum aliquot opera & opusculorum omnis generis, carminum, epistolarum, diplomaton, epitaphiorum, &, cum itinere germanico, adaptationibus & aliquot disquisitionibus R.P.D. Joannis Mabillon, Presbiteri ac Monachi Ord. Sancti Benedicti e Congregatione S. Mauri—Nova Editio cui accessere Mabilonii vita & aliquot opuscula, scilicet Dissertatio de Pane Eucharistico, Azymo et Fermentatio ad Eminentiss. Cardinalem Bona. Subiungitur opusculum Eldefonsi Hispaniensis Episcopi de eodem argumentum Et Eusebii Romani ad Theophilum Gallum epistola, De cultu sanctorum ignotorum, Parisiis, apud Levesque, ad Pontem S. Michaelis, MDCCXXI, cum privilegio Regis.

I quickly found the Vetera analecta at the Bibliothèque Sainte Geneviève, but to my great surprise the edition I came upon differed from the description in two details: first, the publisher, who was given here as "Montalant, ad Ripam P.P. Augustinianorum (prope Pontem S. Michaelis)," and also the date, which was two years later. I needn't add that these analecta did not comprehend any manuscript of Adso or Adson of Melk; on the contrary, as anyone interested can check, they are a collection of brief or medium-length texts, whereas the story transcribed by Vallet ran to several hundred pages. At the same time, I consulted illustrious medievalists such as the dear and unforgettable Étienne Gilson, but it was evident that the only Vetera analecta were those I had seen at Sainte Geneviève. A quick trip to the

Abbaye de la Source, in the vicinity of Passy, and a conversation with my friend Dom Arne Lahnestedt further convinced me that no Abbé Vallet had published books on the abbey's presses (for that matter, nonexistent). French scholars are notoriously careless about furnishing reliable bibliographical information, but this case went beyond all reasonable pessimism. I began to think I had encountered a forgery. By now the Vallet volume itself could not be recovered (or at least I didn't dare go and ask it back from the person who had taken it from me). I had only my notes left, and I was beginning to have doubts about them.

There are magic moments, involving great physical fatigue and intense motor excitement, that produce visions of people known in the past ("en me retraçant ces détails, j'en suis à me demander s'ils sont réels, ou bien si je les ai rêvés"). As I learned later from the delightful little book of the Abbé de Bucquoy, there are also visions of books as yet unwritten.

If something new had not occurred, I would still be wondering where the story of Adso of Melk originated; but then, in 1970, in Buenos Aires, as I was browsing among the shelves of a little antiquarian bookseller on Corrientes, not far from the more illustrious Patio del Tango of that great street, I came upon the Castilian version of a little work by Milo Temesvar, On the Use of Mirrors in the Game of Chess. It was an Italian translation of the original, which, now impossible to find, was in Georgian (Tbilisi, 1934); and here, to my great surprise, I read copious quotations from Adso's manuscript, though the source was neither Vallet nor Mabillon; it was Father Athanasius Kircher (but which work?). A scholar—whom I prefer not to name—later assured me that (and he quoted indexes from memory) the great Jesuit never mentioned Adso of Melk. But Temesvar's pages were before my eyes, and the episodes he cited were the same as those of the Vallet manuscript (the description of the labyrinth in particular left no room for doubt).

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. Conjecture allows us to designate a vague area between Pomposa and Conques, with reasonable likelihood that the community was somewhere along the central ridge of the Apennines, between Piedmont,

Liguria, and France. As for the period in which the events described take place, we are at the end of November 1327; the date of the author's writing, on the other hand, is uncertain. Inasmuch as he describes himself as a novice in 1327 and says he is close to death as he writes his memoirs, we can calculate roughly that the manuscript was written in the last or next-to-last decade of the fourteenth century.

On sober reflection, I find few reasons for publishing my İtalian 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.

First of all, what style should I employ? The temptation to follow Italian models of the period had to be rejected as totally unjustified: not only does Adso write in Latin, but it is also clear from the whole development of the text that his culture (or the culture of the abbey, which clearly influences him) dates back even further; it is manifestly a summation, over several centuries, of learning and stylistic quirks that can be linked with the late-medieval Latin tradition. Adso thinks and writes like a monk who has remained impervious to the revolution of the vernacular, still bound to the pages housed in the library he tells about, educated on patristic-scholastic texts; and his story (apart from the fourteenth-century references and events, which Adso reports with countless perplexities and always by hearsay) could have been written, as far as the language and the learned quotations go, in the twelfth or thirteenth century.

On the other hand, there is no doubt that, in translating Adso's Latin into his own neo-Gothic French, Vallet took some liberties, and not only stylistic liberties. For example, the characters speak sometimes of the properties of herbs, clearly referring to the book of secrets attributed to Albertus Magnus, which underwent countless revisions over the centuries. It is certain that Adso knew the work, but the fact remains that passages he quotes from it echo too literally both formulas of Paracelsus and obvious interpolations from an edition of Albertus unquestionably dating from the Tudor period.¹ However, I discovered later that during the time when Vallet was transcribing (?) the manuscript of Adso, there was circulating in Paris an

¹Liber aggregationis seu liber secretorum Alberti Magni, Londinium, juxta pontem qui vulgariter dicitur Flete brigge, MCCCCLXXXV.

eighteenth-century edition of the *Grand* and the *Petit Albert*, ² now irreparably corrupt. In any case, how could I be sure that the text known to Adso or the monks whose discussions he recorded did not also contain, among glosses, scholia, and various appendices, annotations that would go on to enrich subsequent scholarship?

Finally, was I to retain in Latin the passages that Abbé Vallet himself did not feel it opportune to translate, perhaps to preserve the ambience of the period? There were no particular reasons to do so, except a perhaps misplaced sense of fidelity to my source. . . . I have eliminated excesses, but I have retained a certain amount. And I fear that I have imitated those bad novelists who, introducing a French character, make him exclaim "Parbleu!" and "La femme, ah! la femme!"

In short, I am full of doubts. I really don't know why I have decided to pluck up my courage and present, as if it were authentic, the manuscript of Adso of Melk. Let us say it is an act of love. Or, if you like, a way of ridding myself of numerous, persistent obsessions.

I transcribe my text with no concern for timeliness. In the years when I discovered the Abbé Vallet volume, there was a widespread conviction that one should write only out of a commitment to the present, in order to change the world. Now, after ten years or more, the man of letters (restored to his loftiest dignity) can happily write out of pure love of writing. And so I now feel free to tell, for sheer narrative pleasure, the story of Adso of Melk, and I am comforted and consoled in finding it immeasurably remote in time (now that the waking of reason has dispelled all the monsters that its sleep had generated), gloriously lacking in any relevance for our day, atemporally alien to our hopes and our certainties.

For it is a tale of books, not of everyday worries, and reading it can lead us to recite, with à Kempis, the great imitator: "In omnibus requiem quaesivi, et nusquam inveni nisi in angulo cum libro."

January 5, 1980

²Les Admirables Secrets d'Albert le Grand, A Lyon, Chez les Héritiers Beringos, Fratres, à l'Enseigne d'Agrippa, MDCCLXXV; Secrets merveilleux de la magie naturelle et cabalistique du Petit Albert, A Lyon, Chez les Héritiers Beringos, Fratres, à l'Enseigne d'Agrippa, MDCCXXIX.

Adso's manuscript is divided into seven days, and each day into periods corresponding to the liturgical hours. The subtitles, in the third person, were probably added by Vallet. But since they are helpful in orienting the reader, and since this usage is also not unknown to much of the vernacular literature of the period, I did not feel it necessary to eliminate them.

Adso's references to the canonical hours caused me some puzzlement, because their meaning varied according to the place and the season; moreover, it is entirely probable that in the fourteenth century the instructions given by Saint Benedict in the Rule were not observed with absolute precision.

Nevertheless, as a guide to the reader, the following schedule is, I believe, credible. It is partly deduced from the text and partly based on a comparison of the original Rule with the description of monastic life given by Édouard Schneider in *Les Heures bénédictines* (Paris, Grasset, 1925).

Matins (which Adso sometimes refers to by the older expression "Vigiliae") Between 2:30 and 3:00 in the morning.

Lauds (which in the most ancient tradition were called "Matutini" or "Matins") Between 5:00 and 6:00 in the morning, in order to end at dawn.

Prime Around 7:30, shortly before daybreak.

Terce Around 9:00.

Sext Noon (in a monastery where the monks did not

work in the fields, it was also the hour of the

midday meal in winter).

Nones Between 2:00 and 3:00 in the afternoon.

Vespers Around 4:30, at sunset (the Rule prescribes eating

supper before dark).

Compline Around 6:00 (before 7:00, the monks go to bed).

The calculation is based on the fact that in northern Italy at the end of November, the sun rises around 7:30 A.M. and sets around 4:40 P.M.

PROLOGUE



In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. This was beginning with God and the duty of every faithful monk would be to repeat every day with chanting humility the one never-changing event whose incontrovertible truth can be asserted. But we see now through a glass darkly, and the truth, before it is revealed to all, face to face, we see in fragments (alas, how illegible) in the error of the world, so we must spell out its faithful signals even when they seem obscure to us and as if amalgamated with a will wholly bent on evil.

Having reached the end of my poor sinner's life, my hair now white, I grow old as the world does, waiting to be lost in the bottom-less pit of silent and deserted divinity, sharing in the light of angelic intelligences; confined now with my heavy, ailing body in this cell in the dear monastery of Melk, I prepare to leave on this parchment my testimony as to the wondrous and terrible events that I happened to observe in my youth, now repeating verbatim all I saw and heard, without venturing to seek a design, as if to leave to those who will come after (if the Antichrist has not come first) signs of signs, so that the prayer of deciphering may be exercised on them.

May the Lord grant me the grace to be the transparent witness of the happenings that took place in the abbey whose name it is only right and pious now to omit, toward the end of the year of our Lord 1327, when the Emperor Louis came down into Italy to restore the dignity of the Holy Roman Empire, in keeping with the designs of the Almighty and to the confusion of the wicked usurper, simoniac, and heresiarch who in Avignon brought shame on the holy name of the apostle (I refer to the sinful soul of Jacques of Cahors, whom the impious revered as John XXII).

the apostic (Frefer to the sintul soul of Jacques of Canors, whom the impious revered as John XXII).

Perhaps, to make more comprehensible the events in which I found myself involved, I should recall what was happening in those last years of the century, as I understood it then, living through it, and as I remember it now, complemented by other stories I heard afterward—if my memory still proves capable of connecting the threads of happenings so many and confused.

In the early years of that century Pope Clement V had moved the apostolic seat to Avignon, leaving Rome prey to the ambitions of the local overlords: and gradually the holy city of Christianity had been transformed into a circus, or into a brothel, riven by the struggles among its leaders; though called a republic, it was not one, and it was assailed by armed bands, subjected to violence and looting. Ecclesiastics, eluding secular jurisdiction, commanded groups of malefactors and robbed, sword in hand, transgressing and organizing evil commerce. How was it possible to prevent the Caput Mundi from becoming again, and rightly, the goal of the man who wanted to assume the crown of the Holy Roman Empire and restore the dignity of that temporal dominion that had belonged to the Caesars?

Thus in 1314 five German princes in Frankfurt elected Louis the Bavarian supreme ruler of the empire. But that same day, on the opposite shore of the Main, the Count Palatine of the Rhine and the Archbishop of Cologne elected Frederick of Austria to the same high rank. Two emperors for a single throne and a single pope for two: a situation that, truly, fomented great disorder. . . .

two: a situation that, truly, fomented great disorder. . . .

Two years later, in Avignon, the new Pope was elected, Jacques of Cahors, an old man of seventy-two who took, as I have said, the name of John XXII, and heaven grant that no pontiff take again a name now so distasteful to the righteous. A Frenchman, devoted to the King of France (the men of that corrupt land are always inclined to foster the interests of their own people, and are unable to look upon the whole world as their spiritual home), he had supported Philip the Fair against the Knights Templars, whom the King accused (I believe

unjustly) of the most shameful crimes so that he could seize their possessions with the complicity of that renegade ecclesiastic.

In 1322 Louis the Bavarian defeated his rival Frederick. Fearing a single emperor even more than he had feared two, John excommunicated the victor, who in return denounced the Pope as a heretic. I must also recall how, that very year, the chapter of the Franciscans was convened in Perugia, and the minister general, Michael of Cesena, accepting the entreaties of the Spirituals (of whom I will have occasion to speak), proclaimed as a matter of faith and doctrine the poverty of Christ, who, if he owned something with his apostles, possessed it only as usus facti. A worthy 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. Moved by these or other reasons, John condemned the Franciscan propositions in 1323 with the decretal Cum inter nonnullos.

It was at this point, I imagine, that Louis saw the Franciscans, now the Pope's enemies, as his potential allies. By affirming the poverty of Christ, they were somehow strengthening the ideas of the imperial theologians, namely Marsilius of Padua and John of Jandun. And finally, not many months before the events I am narrating, Louis came to an agreement with the defeated Frederick, descended into Italy, and was crowned in Milan.

This was the situation when I—a young Benedictine novice in the monastery of Melk—was removed from the peace of the cloister by my father, fighting in Louis's train, not least among his barons. He thought it wise to take me with him so that I might know the wonders of Italy and be present when the Emperor was crowned in Rome. But the siege of Pisa then absorbed him in military concerns. Left to myself, I roamed among the cities of Tuscany, partly out of idleness and partly out of a desire to learn. But this undisciplined freedom, my parents thought, was not suitable for an adolescent devoted to a contemplative life. And on the advice of Marsilius, who had taken a liking to me, they decided to place me under the direction of a learned Franciscan, Brother William of Baskerville, about to undertake a mission that would lead him to famous cities and ancient

abbeys. Thus I became William's scribe and disciple at the same time, nor did I ever regret it, because with him I was witness to events worthy of being handed down, as I am now doing, to those who will come after us.

I did not then know what Brother William was seeking, and to tell the truth, I still do not know today, and I presume he himself did not know, moved as he was solely by the desire for truth, and by the suspicion—which I could see he always harbored—that the truth was not what was appearing to him at any given moment. And perhaps during those years he had been distracted from his beloved studies by secular duties. The mission with which William had been charged remained unknown to me while we were on our journey, or, rather, he never spoke to me about it. It was only by overhearing bits of his conversations with the abbots of the monasteries where we stopped along the way that I formed some idea of the nature of this assignment. But I did not understand it fully until we reached our destination, as I will tell presently. Our destination was to the north, but our journey did not follow a straight line, and we rested at various abbeys. Thus it happened that we turned westward when our final goal was to the east, almost following the line of mountains that from Pisa leads in the direction of the pilgrim's way to Santiago, pausing in a place which the terrible events that took place there dissuade me from identifying more closely now, but whose lords were liege to the empire, and where the abbots of our order, all in agreement, opposed the heretical, corrupt Pope. Our journey lasted two weeks, amid various vicissitudes, and during that time I had the opportunity to know (never enough, I remain convinced) my new master.

In the pages to follow I shall not indulge in descriptions of persons—except when a facial expression, or a gesture, appears as a sign of a mute but eloquent language—because, as Boethius says, nothing is more fleeting than external form, which withers and alters like the flowers of the field at the appearance of autumn; and what would be the point of saying today that the abbot Abo had a stern eye and pale cheeks, when by now he and those around him are dust and their bodies have the mortal grayness of dust (only their souls, God grant, shining with a light that will never be extinguished)? But I would like to describe William at least once, because his singular