

**The Crisis of Communication. From Blockage to Excess –
Interpretations of the Word-Sign –
Case Study: Semiotic Fiction in *Foucault's Pendulum* by Umberto Eco**

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Abstract: Within semiotic analysis the role of the reader is of utmost relevance because the very existence of symbols, the idea of significance is intrinsic to the process of perception, and that leads to the concept of the reader's participation in the act of creation. With all the threat of getting lost in significances while trying to solve or even find and deepen mysteries, enchanted by the feeling of discovering some very important secrets, literature will no longer be plausible, unless it resorts to this science of words and significations. The idea can be best referred to by using examples provided by the literary work *Foucault's Pendulum* belonging to the father of semiotics, Umberto Eco, which the current study undertook to accomplish.

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Interpersonal communication between fact and interpretation

Starting from the basic concepts of inter-human communication, which outlines the transformation of the observed, real fact into a materializing interpretation, in order to then refer to it by means of a symbol created to name that reality and becoming by externalization a new reality, a new event, the third element of communication, we can better understand and adopt N. Groeben's opinion, who explained the phenomenon in the context specific to the poetic: "On the language-reality dimension, the goal of the literary language is, in contrast to the scientific one, a minimal isomorphism. The separation, through senses, from the experiential world leads to a 'process of abstracting' in which the sign becomes itself reality, object (see Sartre). The projection of non-communicativeness and construction on the language paradigm does not drive to a separation but to a fusion of the abstract with the concrete within the literary sign."¹

The existence of symbols and the problem of significances are closely connected to the idea of the receiver's participation, to the act of perception, so that there is a justification for the reasoning according to which the role of the reader is determinant when it comes to semiotic analysis. Catherine Belsey explained: "What we do, when reading, no matter how 'natural' it may seem, involves an entire theoretical discourse, even if not formulated, about language and signification, about the relations

¹ Norbert Groeben, *Psihologia literaturii. Știința literaturii între hermeneutică și empirizare* (The Psychology of Literature. The Literary Science between Hermeneutics and Empiricism), trans. Gabriel Liiceanu and Suzana Mihalescu (Bucharest: Univers Publishing House, 1978), 206.

between significance and the world, and finally between people and their place in the world.”¹

Communication at inferential intertextual level – fiction conceived scientifically

Modern literature seems to be subject to a kind of emancipation of language and it also shows a peculiar view upon reality. In what the artistic realization is concerned we can observe the connection with the ‘factual,’ also on the functional and semantic level, approaches that will bring about new theorizations, more complex and more profound. Thus, as Barthes would assert regarding communication and literature, language and literary language or significance, literature is “made of a material already significant, at the moment when literature uses it. Literature needs to crawl into a system that does not belong to it but nevertheless functions with the same finality, namely communication”, hence literature being, somehow, an “object parasitical to language.”² The beginning of a consciousness in these new areas – i.e. of the production of meaning – of the tight relationship between literature and reality, between fiction and fact, will undoubtedly lead to a new perception of the relationship existent between the two fields. In an aphoristic expression, Barthes depicted the essence of this newly discovered relationship, which would, itself, to some extent, change the rapport literature – reality: “See my words, they are language, see my meanings, they are literature.”³

The same direction is followed by Raman Selden, who says that literature is a special usage of language, which reaches particularization, deviating from and distorting the ‘practical’ language, the latter being used for communicational situations, while the literary one has no practical function at all but simply makes us ‘see’ differently.⁴

Roman Jakobson explained the fundamental distinction between the everyday language and the one belonging to a work of art, by the very essential role of the latter, designed to fulfil a poetic function, by rendering a message. The greater importance the language has in the implementation of modern tendencies towards symbolization, openness, polysemy or ambiguity, the bigger relevance this language will receive. These all will be rendered to a large extent by the manner of using the word. For instance, talking about the language in *The Counterfeiters*, Ben Roberts noted that: “Gide’s novel will mark, both as a symptom and as an attesting document, the degradation or fictionalization of the literary language [...] a fight being noticed between the ‘golden’ language of literary realism and the ‘non-convertible’ language of the modern literature [...] an arbitrary, conventional language.”⁵

A ‘new’ language should underlie the new orientations that emphasize signification, and the linguistic material that is used should, consequently, be revised,

¹ Apud Linda Hutcheon, *Poetica postmodernismului* (The Poetics of Postmodernism), trans. Dan Popescu (Bucharest: Univers Publishing House, 2002), 305.

² Silviu Iosifescu, *Construcție și lectură* (Construction and Reading) (Bucharest: Editura Univers, 1970), 76.

³ Roland Barthes, *Essais critiques* (Paris: Edition de Seuil, 1964), 26.

⁴ See Raman Selden, *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*, 2nd edition (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), 9–10.

⁵ Ben Roberts, *Counterfeit language: the 'authenticity game' in Gide and Goux*, <http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/ptb/flfc/flfc1/roberts%20paper.pdf>, 3.

somewhat emancipated, to comply with the requirements of its new function. Thus, a sign-language characterizes the modern writings: “In the field of signification, the real value of the language will become a crucial preoccupation. The language will no longer be perceived as a means, as an instrument, relatively autonomous, by which it is only possible to represent reality with a smaller or bigger preciseness.”¹



Șerban Savu, *Labyrinth*, 2010, 146 x 195 cm, oil on canvas

The concreteness of the text, the sign, the word will constructively participate in the production of the modern work, the material being more attentively selected and manufactured in order to produce new directions for the significance, according to the modern tendency or ‘demand.’ “As any work of art, the literary work is not a purely spiritual phenomenon, intuition introduced into expression, as in Croce’s view, but a spiritual – material phenomenon, in which signification is nuanced, altered by the material means of communication.”²

A dynamism of the discourse is needed, the language becomes insufficient to denote a philosophy of life given by opinions such as Bergson’s, as emphasized by researchers in the field: “there are no ready made things, only things in process of being made, there are no states that remain, only states under change.”³ Consequently, “the

¹ Ibid.

² Iosifescu, *Construcție și lectură...*, 104.

³ Liviu Petrescu, *Poetica postmodernismului* (The Poetics of Postmodernism), (Pitești: Editura Paralela 45, 1998), 66.

aspect of life's progressiveness" carries the language crisis to the inability of communication or ambiguity, both features of the non-format, non-clarified or openness, as long as "in order to fully accomplish its role, the notional type language has to give way to a symbolic type one, the only one capable of communicating the generality,"¹ but which, in its turn, puts forward a new problem, that any symbolization implies a bigger or smaller series of interpretations.

To outline these changes in the way the modern writers approach language, Roland Barthes noted how the literary techniques "all strive to *keep away* what-can-be-named, though they are in fact doomed to repeat it. These techniques are, among others: the rhetoric, or the art of varying banality resorting to substitutions and sense shifting; the chaining, providing a unique message with an infinite range of ventures (for instance, in the novel); irony, as a form the author gives to his/her own detachment; the fragment, or better, the reluctance that facilitates the withholding of the meaning only to release it later in a more powerful burst towards other open directions. All these techniques, emerging from the author's need to start from a world and a self, that the world and the self have already burdened with a name, aim at the build up of an indirect language, i.e. at the same time stubborn (having a goal) and deviated (endlessly permitting varied attitudes)."²

With Mircea Eliade, the literary works are invaded by a new terminological breeze, the author building his novels and short stories on the basis of an original lexis and lending his characters expressions and notions from the language belonging to the historian of religions. The use of elements of philosophic, occult or mystical language in literary works appears as innovative, but becoming as natural as possible. The reader will now get used to finding in the prose several notions familiar to the orientalist researcher, such as: *atman*, *maya*, *brahman*, *nirvana*, *vede*, but also a vocabulary deriving from European myths: *Parsifal*, *Graal*, etc.

At the same time, the specific expressions and concepts, such as *redemption*, *cosmic time*, *exit from time*, *metaphysical revelations*, *island of the happy*, *country of the kind*, *initiation*, *mystery*, *opening of skies*, provide authenticity and a special frame for the message transmitted by Eliade's works.

Umberto Eco will also resort to a specialized language, often ciphered or cryptic, using – for reasons of semiology programmed upon the text, but also of the semiotician's familiarity –, besides whole passages in archaic, Latin, Hebrew and other languages (and calligraphy), esoteric and technical terminology, which creates a strange atmosphere, increasing the monumental impression provided by the novels – that encyclopaedic touch – and externalizing it even with respect to the language. In the pages of his novels, we are welcomed, at the shadow of the ten branches of the sefirotic tree, by *Templars*, *Rosicrucians*, *Popelicans*, *Cathars*, *Sefirahs*, *omnivorous Freudians*, *Cabalists*, *knights of the Tetragrammatons*, or *Gymnosophists*, losing themselves in the "fatal and inopportune lines," among "chains of apothegms, strings of hypallages, rosters of zeugmas, dances of hysteron proteron, apophantic logoi, hierarchic stoichea,"

¹ Ibid., 69.

² Roland Barthes, *Eseuri critice*, in *Romanul scriiturii, antologie* (*Critical Essays in The Novel of Writing, Anthology*), selection of texts and translation by Adriana Babeți and Delia Șepețean-Vasilu, preface by Adriana Babeți (Bucharest: Univers Publishing House, 1987), 120.

in a “*pleasure of conjecture*.”¹ There, “the letters bubble indolently to the surface, they emerge from nothingness and obediently return to nothingness.”²

The linguistic experience is frequently driven to extreme in the semiotician’s work. For instance, he replaces a letter with a group of letters and then those with an even longer one:

Abu, do another thing now: Belbo orders Abu to change all words, make each “a” become “akka” and each “o” become “ulla,” for a paragraph to look almost Finnish.

Akkabu, dulla akkanullather thing nullaw: Belbulla ullarders Ak-kabu tulla chakkange akkall wullards, makkake eakkach “akka” be-cullame “akkakkakka” akkand eakkach “ulla” becullame “ullakka,” fullar akka pakkarakkagrakkaph tulla lullaullak akkalmullast Finnish.³

Umberto Eco was preoccupied by the study of linguistics, especially that of Saussure and Pierce, these being the pioneers of semiology (semiotics). Being a really encyclopaedic spirit and a scholar, truly a culture addict, he seemingly includes in his spirituality all that was thought and written before him, not only in literature but also in the technical-scientific field, using in his works, all the information.

Eco considers that the ‘cultural foundation’ cannot be ignored and in the analysis of the work of a writer, one cannot neglect the theoretic baggage of the latter, his formation, which has consequences felt more or less in the literary work, not necessarily consciously, if not like an intrinsic, given constitutive part: “It is about structures of a diffused theoretic consciousness (not of a determined theory but of an assimilated cultural persuasion): they represent a repercussion in the formative activity (in the sense of creating artistic structures) of acquisitions determined by the contemporary scientific methodology.”⁴

The things are quite clear regarding Umberto Eco, whose ideas upon the theory of significations overwhelmed the literary writings, even in the literary way, one could say, by often explicit references: “The semiologic writer proves another kind of impact with reality; he behaves as a Martian that cannot represent reality else but as a sign reality.”⁵ Such explicit self-disclosures come to strengthen and complete the dry methodological analyses, which explain how the man of letters Umberto Eco presents a unique way to produce his novels, applying the intertextual method, intermingling in the construction of his novel every intertextual text available. The reader will be under the impression that all that has been written along centuries can be found in a concise form in Eco’s novels. Originality as seen before, i.e. novelty of the ‘text’ proper, is no longer an issue in postmodernism. Instead, what now counts is the metatext, the inclusion and the interweaving of a multitude of texts previously produced and taken from distinct

¹ See Umberto Eco, *Foucault’s Pendulum*, trans. William Weaver (London: Secker and Warburg Publishing House, 1989), 15.

² *Ibid.*, 16.

³ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁴ Iosifescu, *Construcție și lectură...*, 308.

⁵ Marin Mincu, *Postscript to Foucault’s Pendulum*, by Umberto Eco, trans. Ștefania Mincu and Marin Mincu, vol. II. (Constanța: Pontica Publishing House, 1991), 318.

sources. The very concept of novelty shifts forth to mean new strategies in the construction of fiction, among which, paradoxically, we can distinguish the very lack of text originality as it was formerly perceived.

A parallel can be drawn between semiotics and the theory of the open work as seen in table 1.

Table 1. Eco's semiotics and his theory of the open work.

Semiotics	→ Mystery, fascination, enigmatic, hidden significances, cryptic, myths, signs, symbols
The theory of open work	→ Vastness, encyclopaedia, amalgam, confusion of plans – melting of events, actions – thematic agglomeration, decentralization by multi-polarity

The intertext is achieved through unexpected insertions that may have no connection to, nothing to do with literature, introducing notions from various domains, adding to and including in the fictional text, distinct texts, from different areas of human creations, thoughts and feelings, transforming the literary work into a complex one, combined, structured on more plans, more zones and levels just as life itself, in a true mirror of the latter and of all that belong to it.

The modern writers, bombarded by the avalanche of information and knowledge of their age, sometimes use this environment exterior to the literary, bringing into their works fragments borrowed from diverse fields of human activity.

For instance, with Umberto Eco there are plenty of such insertions from history, informatics, physics, esoteric sciences, etc. In *Foucault's Pendulum*, besides the mottos at the beginning of each chapter, one can distinguish, in the very text of the narration, a series of such exemplifications, taking up pages after pages:

10 REM anagrams
20 INPUT L\$(1), L\$(2), L\$(3), L\$(4)
30 PRINT
40 FOR I1 = 1 TO 4
50 FOR I2 = 1 TO 4
60 IF I2 = I1 THEN 130 [...]¹.
1645 London: Ashmole founds Invisible College, Rosicrucian in inspiration.
1660 From the Invisible College is born the Royal Society; and from the
Royal Society, as everyone knows, the Masons.
1666 Paris: founding of Academic Royal des Sciences.
1707 Birth of Claude-Louis de Saint-Germain, if he was really born.
1717 Creation of the Great Lodge in London [...]².

By the presence of the footnotes in *The Last Night of Love, the First Night of War*, Camil Petrescu tried to abolish the barriers between imaginary and reality,

¹ Umberto Eco, *Foucault's Pendulum*, 20–21.

² Ibid., 264.

combining the two levels. In the case of these insertions, the greatest danger would be the reader's lack of interest, as he would not want to break the epic thread of the main narration; not when these notes enrich the writing, complete it, without disturbing its unity. The originality of the notes offers authenticity to the novel, disregarding the fact that it represents a new epic procedure that could have been classified as mere caprice.

Thus, one can notice that "the text cannot be conceived as independent and immobile, ruptured from the 'infinite ensemble' comprised by the 'history of human society', but as a plurality of texts, as a reflex, echo, revision and variation of this history. It represents thus a 'permutation' of texts, 'an intertextuality.'"¹

"Nothing new under the sky", the Ecclesiast reminds us, and Umberto Eco, writing about his novel *The Name of the Rose*, asserts: "I have discovered what the writers always knew (and told us): the books always talk about other books and any story tells about another story, previously told."²

Adso, the narrating character of the novel, will reveal this system of intertextual connections. Moreover, he will reach to the conclusion that the relation the books have with other books is as important as their link to reality: "by then I had thought that any book talked about the things, human or godlike, that developed around the books. Now I saw that often the books talk about books or it is as if they talked one to another."³

The text becomes independent from the author that produces it, and people become simple instruments in the process of the discourse which is building itself. The libraries are birthplaces for the discourse and seem to be living objects that feed on human minds: "it was the place of a long and secular mumble, an undiscerned dialogue between parchments, a living thing, a receptacle of powers untameable by the human mind, treasury of mysteries issued by so many minds or surviving the death of those who produced them or mitigated their emergence."⁴

This relation with the books of the past also implies a constructive re-editing, a revalorization of these, at a time when the work of art does no longer meet the writers' needs of expression, and becomes redundant for the readers: "A work of art is perceived in the context of the other works of art and on the way to associate with these. The form of the work of art is defined by the rapport with other forms preceding it... Not the parody, but generally any work of art is created as a parallel and an opposition to a certain model. A new form occurs not so as to express a new content but in order to replace the old form, as the latter had exhausted its possibilities."⁵

¹ Cristina Hăulică, *Textul ca intertextualitate. Pornind de la Borges* (The Text as Intertextuality. Beginning from Borges) (Bucharest: Editura Eminescu, 1981), 8.

² Umberto Eco, "Marginalii și glosse la *Numele rozei*" (Marginalia and Glosses to *The Name of the Rose*), trans. Mara Pașca Chirișescu, in *Secolul 20* 8–10 (1983): 91.

³ Umberto Eco, *Numele trandafirului* (The Name of the Rose), translation and postscripts by Florin Chirișescu (Chișinău: Hyperion Publishing House, 1992), 274.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Victor Șklovski, *Poetica* (Poetics) (Petrograd, 1919), 120; Henryk Markiewicz, *Conceptele științei literaturii* (Concepts of the Science of Literature), translation, notes and indices by Constantin Geambașu, preface by Mihai Pop (Bucharest: Univers Publishing House, 1988), 310.

Umberto Eco, in his novel *The Name of the Rose*, through modern means, recreates the atmosphere of the medieval era, bringing it closer to the readers, thus revaluing this universe that no longer seems unfamiliar. Integrating it, perceiving it with irony, transposing in that plan attitudes or conflicts intrinsic to the human nature, the author drives the current reader towards an era past but impossible to neglect, thus solving the dilemma of a “revisiting of the past,” of an approach, otherwise shy, or, on the contrary, dry, bound to fail as well.

Semiotics and communication – the pact with fiction

The power of the word, the exhilaration of significances can reach unconceivable levels, the modern literature being quite productive in this respect. The handiest example is that of the novels written by the father of semiotics, Umberto Eco.¹ The critic Marin Mincu, warns us nevertheless: “*Foucault’s Pendulum* is a mega-novel, elaborated with engineering ingenuity, by programmatic adjunction at various semantic and stylistic levels; it is a kind of novelistic Babel in whose huge belly get, like in Noah’s Arch, all objects of real and imaginary, acknowledged by now by canonization of the scriptural sign.”²

Consequently, the heroes get involved in finding mysteries and in the attempt to denounce a plan, an alleged plot. Following this attempt, they find themselves swallowed by a ‘whirl of semiosis,’ in the midst of a tornado of signs and significances, signs that they would like to understand, to decipher in order to fill in the blanks of significance, the informational gaps in the scenario presumed, construed by themselves. This whirl, though, gets bigger and bigger, as stirred by their unrest, by the tumultuous activity arising from its very self and cannot, eventually, be submitted or controlled as signs will revenge against those that disturb and abuse them and they will rise against those who manipulate them, changing investigation into a purpose in itself and taking to the extreme the ‘combinatory game.’ More terrifying than any factual possibility, than reality itself, is the very process of ‘devouring things by signs,’ so that the substitution of the world by signs will constitute a clear failure, and semiology will obviously become a risky approach.³ We are warned of the danger of losing the compasses and drifting in this universe of significances, in the impossibility to reach the goal – a circumstance again controversial.

And still, unless it resorts to this science of words and significations, literature will no longer be plausible, veridical, as other researchers consider: “Art is not inspiration, ardour, mystery, divine gift et similia, but infinite combinatory patience, propensity for risk and profession.”⁴

Marin Mincu analyzes in the light of semiotics Eco’s approach in *Foucault’s*

¹ Umberto Eco, *Tratat de semiotică generală* (Treatise of General Semiotics), trans. Anca Giurescu and Cezar Radu, afterword and notes by Cezar Radu (Bucharest: Ed. Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1982.)

² Marin Mincu, *Postfață...*, 317–318.

³ See *ibid.*, 320.

⁴ D’Arco Silvio Avalle, *Modele semiologice în Comedia lui Dante* (Semiologic Models in Dante’s Comedy) (Bucharest: Univers Publishing House, 1979), trans. Ștefania and Marin Mincu, preface by Marin Mincu; Maria Carpov, *Captarea sensurilor. Coordonate analitice* (Capturing Meanings. Analytical Coordinates) (Bucharest: Eminescu Publishing House, 1987), 104.

Pendulum, explaining the entire construction, starting from the title (that brings about the ambiguous or double reference, to both engineer Leon, the inventor of the fixed point pendulum, and Michel, the philosopher concerned with naming things, with the word that precedes the denoted object) and up to the most hidden textual depths, to the narration in its development, in its flow, more or less chaotic, more or less narcissistic or abyssal: “The narrative process implies especially the use of linguistic signs (*les mots*) and semiologist Eco has often dug into the matter of the sign pre-existing the real. Hence the question: to what extent do words ‘invent’ and order things?”¹

The word, double communicational sign – fruit and seed to reality as well

While in *The Name of the Rose* Umberto Eco sees in the names of things a creative force, the names themselves being able to give birth to things, to reality itself, in *Foucault’s Pendulum* the semiologist moves on to imply that the very combinations and interrelations of words represent the essence of processes. Like pieces of a puzzle, words trigger various threads of events, depending on and according to how they are arranged. Each rearrangement will develop a distinct reality. It is the order of these signs that underlies factual constructions. The way words are disposed and linked, the interconnection they enter into have the power to produce a certain consequence in the real world. Practically, the writer puts forward this idea, along the ‘narration,’ through the characters’ various ‘epiphanies’ or analytical thoughts, charging the former with the essence of his theories of semiology (for instance, Casaubon’s reflections):

Finally, what Lia told me in the mountains is true. Her interpretation is completely convincing: the Provins message is a laundry list. There were never any Templars’ meetings at the Grange-aux-Dimes. There was no Plan and there was no message.

The laundry list, for us, had been a crossword puzzle with the squares empty and no definitions. The squares had to be filled in such a way that everything would fit. But perhaps that metaphor isn’t precise. In a crossword puzzle the words, intersecting, have to have letters in common. In our game we crossed not words but concepts, events, so the rules were different. Basically there were three rules.

Rule One: Concepts are connected by analogy. There is no way to decide at once whether an analogy is good or bad, because to some degree everything is connected to everything else. For example, potato crosses with apple, because both are vegetable and round in shape. From apple to snake, by Biblical association. From snake to doughnut, by formal likeness. From doughnut to life preserver, and from life preserver to bathing suit, then bathing to sea, sea to ship, ship to shit, shit to toilet paper, toilet to cologne, cologne to alcohol, alcohol to drugs, drugs to syringe, syringe to hole, hole to ground, ground to potato.

Rule Two says that if *tout se tient* in the end, the connecting works. From potato to potato, *tout se tient*. So it’s right.

Rule Three: The connections must not be original. They must have been made before, and the more often the better, by others. Only then do the crossings

¹ Marin Mincu, *Postfata...*, 319.

seem true, because they are obvious.

This, after all, was Signor Garamond's idea. The books of the Diabolicals must not innovate; they must repeat what has already been said. Otherwise what becomes of the authority of Tradition?

And this is what we did. We didn't invent anything; we only arranged the pieces. Colonel Ardeni hadn't invented anything either, but his arrangement of the pieces was clumsy. Furthermore, he was much less educated than we, so he had fewer pieces.

They had all the pieces, but They didn't know the design of the crossword. We—once again—were smarter.

I remembered something Lia said to me in the mountains, when she was scolding me for having played the nasty game that was our Plan: "People are starved for plans. If you offer them one, they fall on it like a pack of wolves. You invent, and they'll believe. It's wrong to add to the inventions that already exist."¹

The play with words is neither facile nor gratuitous and consequence-free, the overwhelming semiosis induces the danger of losing the self in searches that escape control, by different analogies and by the fact that leadership is overtaken by a new reality formed of meanings that had become autonomous and prolific, surrendering the concrete, the material, under a veil of labyrinths of a world where the borderline between imaginary and real, between veridical, plausible and searched ideal on the one hand and material, tangible, authentically mundane, on the other, had been erased for long.

The limits being so fragile, they are so easily manipulated, a red thread, no matter how banal and mundane, being enough to trigger an imaginary show and produce a fictional-encyclopaedic work that reaches beyond any frontier of literary or theoretic norms, in an extreme meta-text, as "once the mechanism of mystery production is switched on (by the gratuitous play of permutations), the semiologist Eco feels at home, reaching unbelievable performances. The ingenuity consists in knowing the appropriate starting point, i.e. the most plausible scenario of the narrative flow."²

But the writer warns that this free play of juxtaposition and self-indulged interpretation should not be allowed to everyone, even the initiates encountering problems, being devoured by sacrifices and by their own demons unleashed. The play with meanings and with the truth is a play with the fire, it can turn any time against the one that initiated it, shutting down his mind and weakening him, abducting him and transforming him if not into a game for those driven into this whirl, the many willing to believe – united in a general hysteria, ready for any crime in order to choke from the start or, on the contrary, to reveal what their overexcited minds have construed to be a big mysterious truth or a secret of a gorgeous relevance –, then at least into a victim of one's own vanity that revolted, of the lost self – the 'I' with an upset value scale, incapable of recognizing the way or following the usual path proper for a non-perverted existence.

Eventually, Diotallevi pays off through a fatal disease, Belbo through supreme sacrifice and Casaubon understands the huge implications of his and his friends' plots:

¹ Eco, *Foucault's Pendulum*, 381–382.

² Marin Mincu, *Postfata...*, 320.

I have understood. And the certainty that there is nothing to understand should be my peace, my triumph. But I am here, and They are looking for me, thinking I possess the revelation They sordidly desire. It isn't enough to have understood, if others refuse and continue to interrogate. They are looking for me [...] And when I tell Them that there is no Map, They will want it all the more. [...] It's impossible, They would say; he can't only have been making fun of us. No. Perhaps, without his realizing it, Being was sending us a message through its oblivion. [...] They will look for other meanings, even in my silence. That's how They are. Blind to revelation. Malkhut is Malkhut, and that's that. But try telling Them. They of little faith.¹

The major threat consists in the imprisonment of symbols and of one's own illusions sprung from forced interpretations or governed by preconceptions and by the intrinsic bug of the mystery enthusiastically sought for, deliberately found; this is where too much freedom given to a tenebrous mind can lead – as such a mind feeds its possessor with that urge to find a “something” above the everyday life, a secret, a plot, to save humanity, to “act” grandly, to find, to find oneself, to be involved in a supreme search, whose lack of utility is understood too late:

Lia was right. We should have talked about it earlier. But I wouldn't have believed her, all the same. I had experienced the creation of the Plan like the movement of Tiferet, the heart of the sefirotic body, the harmony of Rule and Freedom. Diotallevi had told me that Moses Cordovero warned: “He who because of his Torah becomes proud over the ignorant, that is, over the whole people of Yahweh, leads Tiferet to grow proud over Mal-khut.” But what Malkhut is, the kingdom of this earth, in its dazzling simplicity, is something I understand only now—in time to grasp the truth; perhaps too late to survive the truth.²

The natural, authentic link, between form and content, between name and thing named, without artifices or digression will prove essential: “The subject does not self-constitute except by accepting the natural impact between sign (word) and object. Thus, the ontological secret should not be revealed, as the extreme semiosis drives to grotesque rather than to true knowledge. The world cannot be searched in its most intimate depths. Semiotics and semiosis must have a limit (that Eco himself suggests in his later book *The Limits of Interpretation*...), has to stop at a certain point in order not to turn to textual perversions of the most dangerous type, by initiating irreparable acts.”³

The warning given by the semiologist writer through one of the characters is clear, the logical reasoning and the avoidance of sophisticated interpretations represent the only certainty, the sole shelter in a complex world, this discomfort and presentiment that Lia felt about her husband and his friends' whole action proving, in the end of the novel, well-justified:

¹ Eco, *Foucault's Pendulum*, 395.

² *Ibid.*, 338.

³ Marin Mincu, *Postfata*..., 320–321.

Your plan isn't poetic; it's grotesque. People don't get the idea of going back to burn Troy just because they read Homer. With Homer, the burning of Troy became something that it never was and never will be, and yet the *Iliad* endures, full of meaning, because it's all clear, limpid. Your Rosicrucian manifestoes are neither clear nor limpid; they're mud, hot air, and promises. This is why so many people have tried to make them come true, each finding in them what he wants to find. In Homer there's no secret, but your plan is full of secrets, full of contradictions. For that reason you could find thousands of insecure people ready to identify with it. [...] you three have been faking. Beware of faking: people will believe you. [...] they've been told that God is mysterious, unfathomable, so to them incoherence is the closest thing to God. The farfetched is the closest thing to a miracle [...] I don't like it. It's a nasty joke.¹

The unknown, the enigma, would always stir human mind. Any secret is an incentive urging for humans to search, to unveil, to find it out and understand it. It is in the nature of our species to attempt to uncover all that is cryptic, to break through. Instinctively, mysteries, hidden things drive us to seek, to scan, to dig. It was the very first sin of humanity and ever since we have been aware of the risks. Despite the danger, or maybe somewhat stimulated by its challenge, we consciously or unconsciously proceed toward the revealing of the secrets we meet. Philosophies have been developed to explain the process, also promoting restraint, proclaiming the wisdom and the benefits of refraining from unveiling the world's secrets. Crushing the corolla of wonders, killing the mysteries encountered, destroying with our mind – with cognition – the secrets of this world are tagged as selfish impulses. Only wilful and conscious efforts can make us restrain, as by nature we are attracted to enigmas. Endowed with certain knowledge, people naturally react to riddles by trying to solve them, and to 'closed books' by trying to 'open' them.

Conclusions

The more intelligence, cognitive processes and deductive skills have to be put at work, the more attractive the play will get. So wit helps so much that it gets to harm. Paradoxically, people can prove rather ignorant exactly while practising to the extreme their capacity of reasoning. A brilliant brain is a blessing but can be a curse as well, when not accompanied by wisdom or self-control. The mysteries disturbed from their peaceful existence, the secrets scanned intrusively will revolt and turn against the rudely inquisitive mind that indiscreetly aggressed them.

A secret is by definition – and seemingly intends to stay – cryptic. The process of bringing it to light involves background knowledge, interpretative skills, inductive and deductive abilities and very careful steps into the forest of significances. Attempts are not for the 'profane,' for the inexperienced. The adventure can turn terrifying, the bushes of interpretations displacing the fictional and throwing it into reality, and vice-versa, as in a perfidious play of the signs, reminding of *Jumanji*. In the novel discussed, the dimensions of search assume, based on a set of rules, the confrontation of new series of danger, driven by certain motivations, as seen in table 2.

¹ Eco, *Foucault's Pendulum*, 337–338.

Table 2. Search of significances in *Foucault's Pendulum*.

Umberto Eco: <i>Foucault's Pendulum</i> – characters in search of significances		
Dimensions of the search		
Motivations	Rules	Dangers
Propensity for plans, thirst to reveal	Concepts are linked by analogy – coherence, cohesion	Extreme semiosis leads to grotesque, it dehumanizes
The impulse to discover new hidden meanings, to fill in the gaps	If in the end all makes sense, the play is valuable – harmony, concord	Vast and subjective interpretability of the uncertain, unknown, cryptic
The need to find, to know, to reveal enigmas, mysteries	Connexions must have already been made by others – guarantee for experience, tradition, historical imitation	Loss of compasses, drifting and impossibility to reach final destination: limitation

Instinctive and also learned, acquired by birth and societal development, this itch to apprehend and encompass everything is intrinsic to humans and inexhaustible. It is symbiotic, natural and helpful, up to the point when too much attention is given to it, i.e. when pushed beyond certain limits. Then it transforms into a parasite that dries up the resources of the host, takes control and often becomes indestructible. The pathology is that it needs to be fed continuously; the codes deciphered, the secrets found never quench the thirst but, on the contrary, make this 'alien' manifestation of the human spirit even stronger and more demanding, destroying the human that dared too much.

It can be concluded that the thrilled search, though having a smaller or a greater justification, is not only difficult but also risky. An enigma should not be stirred even more as the words could revolt when they feel obstinately exploited or denatured. The semiosis is not at everyone's disposal, not even at the initiates' disposal, and the interpretative excess will not only fail to assure an effective communication but even impede it.