The American University in Cairo
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DIALECTIC OF PAST AND PRESENT
IN ECO'S THE NAME OF THE ROSE AND AL-GHITANI'S ZAYNI BARAKAT

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Thesis Abstract

Dialectic of Past and Present

in Eco's The Name of the Rose and Ghitani's Zayni Barakat.

by

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This thesis compares an Italian and an Egyptian novel, Umberto Eco's The Name of the Rose and Gamal al-Ghitani's Zayni Barakat, paying particular attention to the way European and Arabic historiographies influence their composition. Both set at the end of the Middle Ages, the two novels are taken as representatives of the way contemporary European and Arabic literature portray the past in relation to their present.

Starting with a reconstruction of the two historiographic patterns based on Salvation and Progress, and their influencing the notion of literary Medievalism, the two novels are treated separately in order to contextualize them in their literary frame. Eco portrays in The Name of the Rose the contemporary crisis of post-modern
societies, philologically reconstructing late medieval Italy in order to show the challenge between its traditional and modern aspects. In doing so, he succeeds in enacting before the reader the contemporary conflict between modern and medieval conceptions of the world, still rooted in European culture through its two different historiographic patterns.

Being the genre of the novel introduced in Arabic literature since the late nineteenth-century, the medievalist literary fashion has been appropriated by Ghitani in order to portray the social problems of contemporary Egypt. Dealing with late-Mamluk period, Ghitani enacts a parallelism between the Turkish invasion of 1517 and the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, enquiring for both cases the causes of a military defeat. Concerned with the theme of social control during the Nasserist period, with a system of spies keeping constantly in check civil society, Ghitani sets his novel in ancient Cairo. In doing so he is able to escape censorship and enacts a past lived as still present. Representative, as compared with Eco, of a more eclectic conception of time, Ghitani builds his novel on different historiographic patterns, partly European, partly traditionally Arab, partly given by his personal conception of time.
I. Introduction

The present work aims at comparing two contemporary historical novels set at the end of the middle ages: Umberto Eco's *Il Nome della Rosa* (1980), translated into English by William Weaver as *The Name of the Rose* (1983) and Gamal al-Ghitani's *Al-Zayni Barakat* (first appeared in a serialized form in 1970-1971), translated by Farouk Abdel Wahab into English as *Zayni Barakat* (1988). The two novelists portray in a historical perspective some common themes, like millenarianism, torture, class struggle and social control, dialectically entwining past and present of their own societies, Italian Eco and Egyptian Ghitani, referring to two different literary traditions: the Italian-European and the Egyptian-Arabic. The quality of such a comparison, aiming at exploring the medievalism of both novels, requires an interrogation over the historical categories in use, being that of middle ages, and of medievalism itself, concepts developed in the context of European historiography and literary criticism. Although the novel did not exist in the classical heritage of Arabic literature, it started developing in the late nineteenth century in the period of *nahda* or Arabic Renaissance, itself a problematic historiographic term, during which the Arabs "opened their doors to Western civilization, from which many literary forms and genres were introduced" (Khairallah 46).

Since then, and particularly within the last decades, the genre of the historical novel flourished in the Arab world, showing technical and structural sophistication (Ghazoul 48). The notion of medievalism, however, since its first appearances in the nineteenth century, has come to connote a series of values particularly entwined not only with a typically European perception of modernity, but also with a typically European conception of history. With more or less emphasis, this notion of modernity
as opposed to medievalism appears in both novels, and my intent is to show how the
two novelists portray the dialectics of past and present in their societies.

In quoting from the primary sources (*The Name of the Rose* and *Zayni
Barakat*), whose original language is different from English, I will cite first the
page(s) of the English translation followed by the page(s) of the original.

Unless specified, all quotations from my primary sources are based on the
translated editions mentioned in the bibliography. All other passages quoted in
English from Italian and French works are mine.

**Umberto Eco**

Umberto Eco, born in Alessandria (Italy) in 1932, is one of the leading figures
in contemporary Italian culture, famous as an intellectual as well as a writer. His
widely known works on semiotics and medieval culture are the background for *The
Name of the Rose*, which constitutes a sort of narrative summa of his studies in
medieval culture and philosophy.

In his youth he actively participated in the Italian Youth Catholic Action
(GIAC), in which he played a significant role through the pages of *Gioventu' Cattolica*, a magazine lately attacked for its secularist tendencies by the ecclesiastic
hierarchy and which stopped publishing in 1954. This experience determined a
philosophical and religious crisis for the author who eventually kept a distance from
the Church (Psichedda 25-26). Meanwhile he started his course of studies at the
University of Turin, graduating in 1956 with a thesis on medieval aesthetics under the
supervision of Luigi Pareyson. Immediately after graduation Eco entered the then
emerging and still experimental world of RAI, the national Italian television, which
got him accustomed to the mechanisms of cultural production on large scale and which stimulated his interests in mass communication and semiotics. With his colleagues at RAI he participated in founding the artistic and literary avant-garde movement of 'Gruppo 63,' which introduced in Italy the international debate over structuralism and lately of postmodernism. He had his first appointment as lecturer of aesthetics at the University of Turin in 1961. This was the first station of a long international career that took him to teaching in many European and American universities, finally settling at the University of Bologna where he is now president of the Scuola Superiore di Studi Umanistici (Advanced School of Human Studies).

His academic works range from literature and aesthetics to the theory of signs and are read worldwide; all these interests are evident in *The Name of the Rose*, which has been translated since 1980 to forty-four languages and has stimulated many critical interventions and the most disparate approaches. The variegated attention received by this novel is also justified, partly due to the quality of the text itself, and partly due to the author's poetics of leaving the text open to many different interpretations, without providing with his authorial intervention an 'official' reading of the book. This corresponds to Eco's position expressed since 1962 in *Opera Aperta* (translated in English in 1989 as *Open Work*). In the course of his career Umberto Eco has received many honorary awards and prestigious appointments, the last of which is the membership of the Council of Advisors of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina obtained in 2003.
Gamal al-Ghitani

Born in 1945 in a small village in the governorate of Sohag, in Southern Egypt, Gamal al-Ghitani moved with his family to Cairo in his childhood, living in the quarter of Gamaliyya. The life of this historical and popular quarter, rich in medieval architecture and portrayed in the novels of Naguib Mahfouz, has played a significant role in Ghitani’s interest in history and served as a set for many of his works. From 1962 to 1968 Ghitani studied carpet-design, meanwhile starting his career as a writer. Ghitani belongs to the “generation of the sixties,” a generation of writers that grew up with the ideals of freedom and democracy that inspired the 1952 Egyptian revolution, and that were eventually betrayed by the Nasserist regime, which imposed a strict control over the press and intellectual production (Mehrez, Egyptian 99). Looked upon by the previous generation of writers as ignorant and superficial, the generation of the sixties reacted against these charges after the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. As Céza Draz points out:

No doubt that the Arab defeat of 1967 represents a turning point where many illusions of grandeur were shattered. It was a turning point, that was deeply felt in all the Arab World. Egypt went into a period of self examination and disillusionment where achievements were belittled and past forms rejected. The avant-garde artists felt the need to rally together around a forum to crystallize their anxiety, to express their anguish, to manifest their aesthetical quest for a new language and to publish their literary production. This forum was the journal “Gallery 68” in which the new writers, who have become known as "The Young Writers" or "The Writers of the Sixties", voiced their literary views. (137)

"Gallery 68" was the first avant-garde literary review published without state-support (Jacquemond 22) and was a response of young intellectuals toward a regime that systematically repressed dissident voices and put since the beginning of the
Nasserist era many writers in prison. Ghitani himself, due to his political articles, spent six months in prison in 1966. After this experience Ghitani preferred to convey his political and social message through fiction, following a dominant trend in the post-67 Egyptian novel, where the realistic style dominant in the previous period moved toward more ironic and oblique stylistics.

A writer, a journalist and a literary critic, Ghitani served as a reporter at the Egyptian front in 1967 and 1973 wars. Along with his reporting he wrote on contemporary and historical issues, including essays on Old Cairo, its life and architecture, which he collected in *Kahriyyat* (1984). His attention to Arabic history and spiritual heritage, particularly of Sufi traditions, appears in many of his novels and short stories. He is nowadays acclaimed as one of the major literary figures in the Arab world and works as editor-in-chief of the weekly *Akhbar al-Adab*, one of the leading Egyptian literary reviews.
II Medievalism as a Mask

Historical narratives

Narrating the past is perhaps the most important instrument for providing a society or a community with a sense of memory and identity. Through narration the past is envisioned in continuity with the present and provides the basic reasons and justifications for leading the present into the future. Historical novels share with all historical works the reconstruction of a past which is lost, which cannot be re-enacted without an interpretative effort. In so doing, historical novels and histories keep their peculiar ways of re-enacting the past, and although in recent times the division between the two genres has got more and more subtle, Aristotle's distinction between the work of the historian and that of the poet can constitute a good point of departure in dealing with the subject. In the Poetics he pointed to the difference between the historian and the poet as follows:

The distinction between historian and poet is not in the one writing prose and the other verse – you might put the work of Herodotus into verse, and it would still be a species of history; it consists really in this, that the one describes the thing that has been, and the other a kind of thing that might be. (Selden 49-50)

From the historian we expect a real reconstruction of events that occurred in the past on the basis of a truth for which evidence must be provided, or, as Lowenthal puts it, "in terming himself an historian and his work a history, [the historian] chooses to have it judged for accuracy, internal consistency, and congruence with the surviving record. And he dares not to fabricate a character, ascribe unknown traits or incidents to real ones, or ignore incompatible traits as to make his tale more intelligible, because he could neither hide such inventions from others with access to
the public record nor justify them when found out" (229). The novelist adheres instead to poetic verisimilitude; he deals with both the historical and the fictional and shows the historical past in great or small contrast with the reality of his present time. In this way, through the fictional past, the narrator can represent emblematic and universal cases for the moral edification of his public. If history is assigned the role of providing proofs for the truths it discovers in the past, literature and historical novels mainly refer to the reign of fiction, using history mainly as a set for conveying their social message.

As Troubetzkoy maintains, "the past cannot be made as present unless it is felt as living, through the mediation of monuments, of imagination and through the memories of witnesses transmitted by narratives and novels" (266). Without this sense of affinity between past and present the writer would not feel like giving a portrait of a past by no means related to the present. Although the Romantic historical novel, and particularly the work of Walter Scott, still stands as a model, adaptations of history in fictional texts existed much earlier and provide a wide set of cases for the manifold handling of past times in fiction. The narrator can represent the past as a means for escaping the present, as it has been in dreams about an idealized Golden Age of many Arcadian fictions in the seventeenth century. It is also the case with contemporary simplified "medievalist" novels, comics and movie series which represent an image of a past which never existed, proposing some utopian or traditionalist version of a "yesterday" world in which, as Lowenthal points out, "we find what we miss today. And yesterday is a time for which we have no responsibility and when no one can answer back" (Lowenthal 49).¹ The past can serve as well as a standpoint for evaluating how better the contemporary society is, or how worse. The writer can be

¹ On escapism see also Eco, "Dreaming" 61.
serious or ironic in his interpretation of history; he can glorify or belittle the past for serious or jocular purposes. In all these cases, the past remains a flexible space at hand for the poet, who portrays it according to his specific purposes, with more or less attention to the historical truth.

In portraying the past, however, historians and novelists not only interpret its nature and quality as "past" and describe with much or less correctness what occurred in the previous ages, they also decide what is relevant, worthy to be analyzed according to an inevitable process of selection. In so doing they also project on history their conceptions of society and of time itself, putting into the text a more or less explicit interpretation of the present. The historiographic perspective of a writer plays an important role in the construction of a historical narrative; and in comparing Eco and Ghitani's novels I would like to focus on their own conception of time. The Name of the Rose is set in the year 1327, while Zayni Barakat is set around 1516, date of the Ottoman conquest of Egypt.

To say that these two novels belong to the literary category of 'medievalism,' the representation of the Middle Ages in historical narratives, means above all referring to a fictional and historiographical tradition. The concept of Middle Ages developed in Europe by virtue of a label, put since the Renaissance, on the period that starts from 456, date of the fall of the Western Roman Empire, and ends in 1453, in which the Oriental Roman Empire fell, or in 1492, year in which ended the "Reconquista" of Spain and Columbus discovered the American continent. Although according to this subdivision Zayni Barakat is set a little later, in early modern times, this is only an artificial categorization of historical periods. It is, thus, worthy to analyze its genealogy in order to extrapolate the contents and the "atmosphere" of medieval settings.
The Concept of Middle Ages

About the time in which *The Name of the Rose* is set, Italian humanists started a slow process of rediscovery and philological enquiry over the Greek and Roman classical past and culture. With ups and downs, this process led within a few centuries to the Renaissance and spread all over Europe, opening the path of modernity. The development of Italian Humanism is due to many reasons, among which the peculiar anarchism of the northern part of the peninsula – privileged setting of the struggle for power between papacy and empire since the High Middle Ages – with the development in this area of city-states each with its own intellectual and bureaucratic apparatus. Another important element of this renewed spirit of enquiry has been the contact with the more advanced Arabic culture in the Mediterranean, especially through the Sicily of Fredrick II and Spain. Italy had also much more Roman antiquities than the rest of Europe to interrogate, not to count the indispensable contributions of Greek intellectuals — that since the fall of Byzantium came to the peninsula— bringing along not only their philological competency with ancient Greek but also an immense treasure of books. Italian scholars felt, through inquiry into the culture of the ancients, a sense of reviving and revitalizing the cultural heritage of the classical period.

In late Middle Ages historiography was based on Salvation and its capital event was the coming of the Messiah. The general conception of history was that after the arrival of Christ mankind was inevitably waiting for the end of the world and the Last Judgment, the last event in a tripartite scheme of time based on theology.² An

²Although generalized, the tripartite scheme of history was commonly accepted in Medieval Europe since St. Augustine: 1) between the Fall of Man and Moses, 2) between Moses and Christ, 3) between Christ and the Last Judgement. See Breisach 84.
important notion in medieval historiographical tradition is that of *translatio imperii*,
the idea that since Constantine and the Christianization of the Roman Empire in 315
the empire passed hand to hand after its fall until the institution of the Holy Roman
Empire, the legitimate inheritor of the temporal power of the Caesars and defender of
Christendom. In rediscovering the classical culture, Italian humanists on one hand
rejected the 'medieval' world, on the other reinstalled in history the agency of
mankind:

When the humanists labeled the period between the end of the ancient
period and the beginning of their own time as one of intellectual and artistic
darkness, they arrived at a tripartite division between Western history: (1) the
Ancient Period, (2) the Dark Ages, and (3) the Renaissance, which was seen as
the rebirth of the Ancient Period. They rejected any kinship with the medieval
world and preserved continuity only between the ancient and their own period.
[...] all of them were at least nominal Christians and accepted fully the
framework of Christian historiography: the Creation, Christ's central role, and
the Last Judgment. Renaissance historians, inspired by the ancients, simply
granted mankind a greater measure of "home rule," which in turn made them
stress the importance of human deeds and motives in history. (Breisach 159-
160)

Seen as an "interruption" in the continuity of human agency over history, the
Renaissance historians put the centrality of man and his reason as shaper of human
destiny. The utopian pattern of a society made better by its laws substituted the fear
for the end of the world in the perspective of history; and Middle Ages became
synonymous with barbarism, darkness and a sort of infancy as compared to reinstalled
maturity of man as responsible for his own destiny. This perspective of history was
reinforced in the late eighteenth century by the theory of progress, or, in Turgot's
words, the idea that "the whole human race, through alternate periods of rest and
unrest, of weal and woe, goes on advancing, although at a slow pace, towards greater
perfection" (Breisach 205). This progress, lead by rationality, is perhaps the most
important contribution of Enlightenment to the theory of history and was a reflection
of the intellectual confidence in the scientific and technical discoveries and improvements in the field of natural sciences. The world appeared, although still imperfectly known, as governed by a rational will accessible to human understanding, and the pre-rational stages of World history appeared, especially to French philosophers, as dominated by disorder and despotism, ruthless aristocratic hegemony and gross ignorance among the masses prompted by the dominance of Christian religion.

Although simplified and by no means universally accepted, this reading of history was nonetheless expression of a general optimism in European culture toward a factual improvement of life conditions. Scientific discoveries were there to prove the newly found role as protagonist of history for a confident mankind. With the French Revolution and the Napoleonic imperial project, however, in northern Europe — and especially in England — the Romantics started a new reevaluation of the Middle Ages. The rediscovery of Ossian, Beowulf and Nordic sagas, the publication of Scott's novels in England, the works of Chateaubriand in France, reawakened in the public of the Restoration a certain interest in the Middle Ages, starting that fashion of medievalism of which recent times inherit. "The historical novel," Troubetzkoy says, "issued from Walter Scott's preoccupation before what in the changing of Scotland — economic modernization, poverty, corruption of customs and loss of traditional values — was chaotic and worrying, for the present and for the future" (265). Tightly bound with the ideals of national states running along the whole nineteenth century, the Middle Ages became a period to which one refers to in order to trace back the ideal origins of a nation, and in all European countries "a strong desire grew to rescue the remains of the nation's past by collecting, editing, and publishing source materials" (Breisach 264).
The Middle Ages progressively became the mirror at which Western conscience looks back in order to interrogate its own changing since the first Industrial revolution. Although the study of the Middle Ages seems, in Ganim's words, "mercifully free of the conflictual issues that haunt the study of contemporary culture," and this would represent either the reductionist or traditionalist current of medievalism, it is on the contrary a "continually contested terrain, often problematizing." since the nineteenth century, "the political implications its proponents wish to draw." (4-5)

The Middle Ages as a Repository of Ideas

In an article devoted to explaining the presence of the Middle Ages in contemporary culture, Eco himself tries to enumerate with encyclopedic impulse the different types of Middle Ages existing nowadays. In his taxonomic effort he defines ten types of Middle Ages which I will try here to summarize. The singular mixture of stratified notions informing the concept of Middle Ages since its invention in Renaissance appears emblematically as source of different enthusiasms and cultural tendencies. We find then the Middle Ages as a pretext, as in novels where the real interest is not for the reconstruction of the historical background. In them history does not help the reader in understanding the past through the characters but vice versa. Another category is that of the Middle Ages as a barbaric age, "a land of elementary and outlaw feelings." (Eco, "Dreaming" 69) This type of representation, which is the one made up by the progressive historiographic tradition, can nonetheless be useful for celebrating the virile, brute force of barbarism and has been particularly exploited by nationalist, racist and aggressive policies in the last century. The Middle Ages can
also be used to celebrate past grandeurs, and in this way it has been used by ancient and recent nationalist movements since the nineteenth century. This notion of Middle Ages as past grandeur and "time of origin" is also associated with occult philosophies, ranging from Masonic rites to the myth of the Holy Grail. These tendencies find in the past the mysterious source for thinking as if in a "permanent Arthurian Land, continually revisited for enjoying intemporal ecstasies" (Eco, "Dreaming" 70).

Another type of Middle Ages is that of millenarian expectations; the medieval waiting for the imminent coming of the Antichrist, "source of many insanities." This is exemplified in the case of enthusiastic sects and remains as a permanent warning about the end of time.

Besides these different uses, many of which relate to the notion of past as a "dark" period, Eco finds two positive and somehow "illuminating" ways in which this epoch can affect our time. The first of these aspects Eco points out is how medieval philosophy, and in particular the theory of signs, influenced contemporary thought. As a semiotician, Eco is particularly attentive to this kind of influence and points out the continuity within Western tradition between Medieval and contemporary thought. In the second, which he calls the Middle Ages of "philological reconstruction," Eco describes the sort of reconstruction which helps to criticize all the other Middle Ages that at one time or another arouse our enthusiasm: "These Middle Ages lack sublimity, thank God, and thus look more "human"" (Eco, "Dreaming" 71). This mode is identified with the serious historical enquiry and is that of scholars like Muratori, Mabillon, the school of Annales, which goes from the great historical event to the reconstruction of everyday life.
Approaches to History

In order to define how the past has been reconstructed during the Romantic period in England, Elizabeth Fay distinguishes between two main tendencies of approaching the past defining two opposed movements:

The conflict between anachronism — the disruption of temporal sequence— and antiquarianism — its preservation— can be seen in the difference between Horace Walpole's antiquarianism, which leads to the creation of the Gothic, and Walter Scott's antiquarianism, which leads to the creation of the historical novel. The Gothic is an Enlightenment revision of medieval superstition and fantasy; the historical novel is a Romantic revision of antiquarian collection that makes use of history to create a temporal identity rather than fabricating it for mere escapism. (13)

Anachronism consists in tracing a direct continuity between the medieval and the present, making the past as present or projecting present practices unto the past. The anachronistic approach presents the past as present, dismissing the idea of historical process so important for the historiographers supporting linear progress. Or, better, this linearity is reoriented in its contents so as to offer to the present age a continuity of values often made without much attention to what Eco calls "responsible philological examination" (Eco, "Dreaming" 63). In the anachronistic reconstruction of the Middle Ages the past inspires the present and leads to creative adaptations of past themes in new appealing way, as is the case with the revival of Gothic. For nineteenth-century "anachronists," Fay argues, "the past was not an otherness or alterity, not an antiquarian fossil, but a not-here or a not-now, a fantasy space with real lines of connection to the human spirit and imagination" (12).

In contrast with the anachronistic reconstruction of the Middle Ages, the antiquarian tendency consciously reproduces the past in recollecting its elements. The
antiquarians reinstate the Middle Ages but in so doing they also distort it, making of it a mirror for the present in all its alterity: "Scott's antiquarian mirror suggests that mirroring – viewing the past as an idealized other to the present moment – is a component of the desire to structure an anatomic past as authorizing" (Fay 13). It seems that no matter how deep historical research looks into the past, every ambition of reporting a "true" past is to be put aside. Reconstruction is always partial, fruit of an interpretation. As Lukács reports, the same Scott was well aware of it when he remarked, in the preface to *Ivanohe*, that it was impossible to give a pure historical account of the past, and that a modern revision of it was both desirable and necessary:

> It is true that I neither can nor do pretend to the observation of complete accuracy, even in matters of outward costume, much less in the more important points of language and manners. But the same motive which prevents my writing the dialogue of the piece in Anglo-Saxon or in Norman French, and which prohibits my sending forth to the public this essay printed with the types of Caxton and Wynken de Worde, prevents my attempting to confine myself within the limits of the period in which my history is laid. It is necessary for exciting interest of any kind that the subject assumed should be, as it were, translated into the manners, as well as the language, of the age we live in. (Qtd. by Luckács 62)

Distinguishing the historical truth from the fictional disguise appears impossible in historical novels. The nature of the fictional text itself seems to prevent any clear distinction from the philological past and the fictional apparatus coexisting in a novel. The fictional and the historical coexist in historical novels without allowing the critical enquiry to distinguish what is specifically pertaining to past time and what instead is the creative manipulation of the writer, the real revisionist and inventor of the tradition.

It remains nonetheless possible to distinguish what in a historical novel is openly anachronistic or aiming at portraying the past in an antiquarianist fashion from
what is seemingly historically correct. While none of these reconstructions is "innocent," tracking which is dominant or where in the narration it appears, can help in discovering the writer's principle adopted in reconstructing the past age.
III The Name of the Rose

A multilayered novel, *The Name of the Rose* has prompted since its appearance many different readings because of the diverse themes entwined in its plot. Its main structure is that of a detective story with an erudite Franciscan monk, William of Baskerville, and his assistant, the Benedictine novice Adso of Melk, enquiring over a series of murders related to a mysterious book in an Italian abbey. In the course of the novel various disputes concerning theology and the theory of signs, social issues as poverty and revolt, heresies and millenarianism, together with reflections over power and scientific development, all spread out from the main narrative, reconstructing a portrayal of the autumn of the Middle Ages.

In November 1327 William arrives with Adso to the prestigious abbey as ambassador of the emperor Louis IV of Bavaria. He is charged with the delicate mission of reconciling the theological positions of the Franciscan spiritualists, who wanted the poverty of Christ recognized as truth of faith, and that of the Avignon Pope John XXII who was hostile to them. William and Adso arrive at the abbey before the Franciscans and the Pope's representatives, and are asked by Abo, the abbot, to inquire over the mysterious death of a monk that occurred the previous night. William has been an inquisitor in the past, and renounced his post as he found it more and more difficult to distinguish between good and evil, heresy and orthodoxy. He lacked "the courage to investigate the weaknesses of the wicked, because [he] discovered they are the same as the weaknesses of the saintly" (*Rose* 60; 56). Nonetheless, Abo appoints him to the investigation: he would like to reduce the chances for Bernardo Gui, the inquisitor leading the papal delegation, of using the murder as a pretext for making the whole reconciliation fail.
The novel develops in seven days and seven nights, with a series of ghastly murders among the monks, which make the old Alinardo announce the imminent incoming of the Apocalypse. Vaguely corresponding with the seven seals of the Apocalypse of St. John, William associates the murders with a diabolical mind acting according to an apocalyptic scheme, while in fact in the process of the events he realizes how his getting closer to the mystery's solution is due to a fortuitous series of coincidences. The motive behind the murders seems to be connected since the beginning to events related to the library, "the biggest of all Christendom" (Rose 35; 32). Since the death of the first monk, in fact, the connection between the murders and a mysterious book hidden in the highest floor of the library progressively appears clear to the investigator. The access to this section of the library is allowed only to the librarian and William cannot enter it. Strictly applying the method of rational inquiry, which he came to appreciate in England by his fellow countryman and master Roger Bacon, William astonishes his assistant Adso for the subtlety of his deductions and his ability in reading the "signs of the world" (Rose 23; 21), so different from the ways of the monks surrounding him.

After a series of adventures and many philosophical digressions where William instructs his disciple while facing political problems, enigmas about the labyrinth in the library, obscure conspiracies and enmities among the monks, William gets close to the truth. Having failed in his embassy — concluded with a process for heresy and a scuffle among the delegates— William discovers the book related to the murders, jealously kept for forty years by the sinister blind monk Jorge of Burgos. It was kept safe from curious people and free thinkers, hidden in the remotest section of the labyrinth. The last copy of the second book of Aristotle's Poetics is finally set before the Franciscan's eyes. Treating of the genre of comedy and devoted to the
legitimacy of laughter, Jorge has been hiding the book to keep mankind in the yoke of fear for the afterlife and for the law of past and present authorities. Jorge hides the book assuming that it will weaken the faith by promoting in the reader the faculty of doubt, as laughter promotes freedom of thought by ridiculizing the truth. Jorge stands for the dogmatic and authoritative culture of which William is the opponent. Only for a few moments William will enjoy the success of his investigation, as Jorge will be able to destroy the book, dying as he eats its poisoned pages. In trying to save the book, the whole library will be burnt by a fire which broke out by a lamp, and the destruction of the library will stand as the realized Apocalypse for the world represented by the abbey.

After many years, in reconstructing with pious tone the events of those days, the old Adso serves at the same time as a narrator and protagonist of the story. He sets before the reader a text open to many interpretations by virtue of its concomitant themes, all related to the intellectual character of William of Baskerville and the troubled world at the autumn of the Middle Ages.

Anachronisms and Philological reconstruction

*The Name of the Rose* has been acclaimed by many for its intertextuality. "Books always speak of other books, and every story tells a story that has already been told," (Eco, *Reflections* 20) declares the author in commenting on the writing of his novel. In its pages a vast series of quotations from the most disparate sources find place through the debates occurring among the characters. From the fathers of the Church down to Wittgenstein, the writer's intention has been typically postmodern:
The postmodern reply to the modern consists of recognizing that the past, since it cannot really be destroyed, because its destruction leads to silence, must be revisited: but with irony, not innocently. I think the postmodern attitude as that of a man who loves a very cultivated woman and knows that he cannot say to her, "I love you madly," because he knows that she knows (and that she knows that he knows) that these words have already been written by Barbara Cartland. [...] Neither of the two speakers will feel innocent, both will have accepted the challenge of the past, of the already said, which cannot be eliminated; both will consciously and with pleasure play the game of irony... But both will have succeeded, once again, in speaking of love. (Eco, Reflections 67-68)

The novel appears in this way full of anachronisms and at the same time written as if in the Middle Ages, with the real characters as Michele of Cesena, Bernardo Gui and others all in line with the historical past. The political context is also philologically reconstructed in detail, showing many aspects of the struggle between the papacy and the empire, the theological disputes over heresies and the ideals of poverty supported by the Minorite friars. The reconstruction of the "intellectual" past is one of the most fascinating qualities of the novel which often assumes the tones of a conte philosophique, especially because of the most anachronistic aspects of its central character William of Baskerville.

As the diligent reconstruction of Costantino Marmo points out, with William of Baskerville Eco puts in the Middle Ages a protagonist who uses "exactly the way of reasoning prevailing after the modern scientific revolution" (xxii). William is a hybrid construct, neither completely medieval nor completely modern. In his "medieval" positions, in fact, he assumes the most progressive assumptions of Marsilio of Padua concerning the "democratic" election of the political ruler associated with the marginal role of religion in worldly affairs. He shares Occam's nominalistic refusal of Platonic realism limiting men's understanding to the

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3 Eco remarked he wanted "not only to narrate about the Middle Ages," but "in the Middle Ages, and through the mouth of a chronicler of the period" (Reflections 19).
knowledge of the particular, and Roger Bacon's fascination for a future development of technological devices and science at the service of mankind. For all these political and philosophical views Eco carefully selects the words of his character, showing through William the most modern, or illuminated, possible version of the Middle Ages:

There is one matter that has amused me greatly: every now and then a critic or a reader writes to say that some character of mine declares things that are too modern, and in every one of these instances, and only in these instances, I was actually quoting fourteenth-century texts. (*Reflections* 76)

Purely anachronistic is instead William's quoting Wittgenstein, or quoting books published much later, assuming views of contemporary scholars or, more evidently, expressing Bakhtin's theory of popular laughter in the Middle Ages (Marmo xxiii). In considering the quality of these anachronisms, Eco commented that he put in his medieval men those "medieval" aspects of contemporary theory that "would have been recognized by the Middle Ages as their own" (*Reflections* 76). With the exception of William, the novel's set is meticulously constructed and coherent on the historical point of view: "every character incarnates the thought of a school or of a university, the interest of a political party, the expectations of a heretical sect, the aspiration of a social class" (Zecchini 324).William is the means which Eco uses for comparing the novel's "medieval" characters with a contemporary type of man which Philip Renard identifies with "the classic contemporary leftist intellectual, lay, enemy of totalitarian regimes, democratic, skeptical and contradictory" (212).

In a world dominated by the fear of the Antichrist, particularly prompted by the character of Jorge of Burgos, William stands as a sort of spearhead of that modern
conception of time that will impose itself after the Enlightenment. In a dialogue between William and Ubertino of Casale, a historically authentic mystic who shared with Jorge the fear of approaching Apocalypse, William discusses this issue:

"But you, William, speak like this because you do not really believe in the advent of the Antichrist, and your masters at Oxford have taught you to idolize reason, drying up the prophetic capacities of your heart!"

"You are mistaken, Ubertino," William answered very seriously. "You know that among my masters I venerate Roger Bacon more than any other…"

"Who raved of flying machines," Ubertino muttered bitterly.

"Who spoke clearly and calmly of the Antichrist, and was aware of the import of the corruption of the world and the decline of learning. He taught, however, that there is only one way to prepare against his coming: study the secrets of nature, use knowledge to better the human race. We can prepare to fight the Antichrist by studying the curative properties of herbs, the nature of stones, and even by planning those flying machines that make you smile."

"Your Bacon's Antichrist was a pretext for cultivating intellectual pride."

"A holy pretext."

"Nothing pretextual is holy. William, you know I love you. You know I have great faith in you. Mortify your intelligence, learn to weep over the wounds of the Lord, throw away your books."

"I will devote myself only to yours." William smiled. (Rose 63; 59)

This passage is interesting for showing the tenor of The Name of the Rose's dialogues. The choice of an abbey with more or less educated monks allows Eco to enter in depth into philosophical discussions over the nature of the world and its interpretation. William's dreaming with Bacon of flying machines, believing in the progress of natural science and opposing this belief to the fear of the millennium, anachronistically reflects the typically modern conception of progress over the Middle Ages' dominant teleology. The superposition of these two different patterns of history in modern Western culture is what Eco wants to represent in the novel, and he achieves his goal through the confrontation of "typically medieval" characters philosophically debating with William of Baskerville.
William's own conception of the world is arguably medieval, and singularly anachronistic. Assuming since the beginning of the novel the role of instructing Adso on how to "recognize the evidence through which the world speaks to us like a great book" (Rose 23; 21), the semiotician William of Baskerville shares with the "medieval" William of Ockham the refusal of an existing order in the universe. For Ockham the absence of universal rules governing the cosmos coincides with God's absolute freedom from them, distinguishing the theoretical domains of faith and reason "to all advantage of the first" (Zecchini 341). For the "modern" William, on the other hand, the absence of a universal order is cause of a philosophical and existential crisis:

"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. [...] 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." (Rose 492; 449)

Through William's anachronistic character, modern inquietudes meet with an archeologically reconstructed version of the Middle Ages, enacting before the modern reader a verisimilar philosophical debate with the Middle Ages. William stands as both the representative of a progressive Middle Ages that leads into modernity and of a modernity that questions itself in questioning the "barbaric" aspects of its past.

A Semiotic Education

Parallel to the development of the plot, the relationship between Adso and William is the fulcrum on which medieval and modern ways of thinking confront each other closely and produce divergent outcomes. The narration develops in seven
days during late 1327 and the narrator is Adso himself. Arrived at the end of his life, around the year 1400, the now old Benedictine relates of the "wondrous and terrible events" that occurred in those years of his youth "without venturing to seek a design, as if to leave to those who will come after (if the Antichrist has not come first) sign of signs, so that the prayer of deciphering may be exercised on them" (*Rose* 11; 9). The main philosophical theme of the novel, namely, how to interpret the world and its signs, is set since the first page through the words of Adso, a disciple who, as Eco remarked in his *Reflections to the Name of The Rose*, "will not understand [these events] even as an old man, since he then chooses a flight into the divine nothingness, which was not what his master had taught him" (34). In a world portrayed as a "book of signs," William's rational and nominalistic enquiry is finally assimilated by Adso as a "prayer of deciphering," marking Adso's refusal of his master's scientific training, and opting instead for the negative theology of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite with its mysticism and indefinable divinity.

Adso's flight into the divine nothingness is the existential outcome of the life of a Benedictine novice seeking an "absolute truth" through the divine order, and encountering a master like William whose main focus is instead for natural, if not immanent, explanations for even the most extraordinary phenomena. If William fails in transmitting to Adso the fascination for scientific inquiry, with its consoling idea of discovering in the universe "if not an order, at least a series of connections in small areas of the world's affairs" (*Rose* 394; 362), yet he succeeds in implanting in his disciple the Occamian assumption of a perhaps non-ordinate cosmos. But more than that, he teaches his pupil his method, which appears to Adso very different from the philosophical reasoning he has been taught:
I understood at that moment my master's method of reasoning, and it seemed to me quite alien to that of the philosopher, who reasons by first principles, so that his intellect almost assumes the ways of the divine intellect. I understood that, when he didn't have an answer, William proposed many to himself, very different one from another. (Rose 305; 282)

Contrary to Platonic realism, and the philosophers' interpretation of natural phenomena according to first principles existing in God, William's nominalist method proceeds from the subject and moves toward a set of provisional relations between sign and sign, imagining circumstantial possibilities according to natural laws. In this sense, when William agrees that "simple folk always pay for all" (Rose 406; 373) and suggests that one day, by the dispute between the pope and the emperor, again the simple will pay the highest price, Adso comments: "Now I know that William was prophesying — or, rather, syllogizing — on the basis of principles of natural philosophy" (Rose 407; 373). If William is unable to provide Adso with a satisfying theological view it is because his thought is all absorbed in the exploration of natural causes, almost refusing to recognize, as it comes natural to other characters, the agency of the divine in world affairs. He nonetheless provides Adso with logical principles on how to infer the causal relation among signs, implanting on Occam's nominalism Eco's modern semiotic conception of creative abduction (Psichedda 43). William explains his method to Adso more than once in the novel:

In the face of some inexplicable facts you must try to imagine many general laws, whose connection with your facts escapes you. Then suddenly, in the unexpected connection of a result, a specific situation, and one of those laws, you perceive a line of reasoning that seems more convincing than the others. You try applying it to all similar cases, to use it for making predictions, and you discover that your intuition was right. But until you reach the end you will never know which predicates to introduce into your reasoning and which to omit. (Rose 305; 282)
In William's method knowledge arrives as a result of rational enquiry and not from a preordained system of thought. The quality of this knowledge leads necessarily to doubt, because the system of possible relations among signs does not lead to any fixed conclusion and leaves the path open to an always revisable truth: "The order that our mind imagines is like a net, or like a ladder, built to attain something. But afterwards you must throw the ladder away, because you discover that, even if it was useful, it was meaningless" (Rose 492; 449). William's crisis in judging as an inquisitor over other's faults and Devil's plots (Rose 31; 29) strictly entwines his conception of knowledge and his restraining from moral judgments and upon divine agency in the world.

The character of William is not that of a nineteenth-century Positivist; he does not substitute in his mind the Christian, medieval conception of time in favor of a scientifically illuminated progress as it was, for instance, in Comte (White 277). William's assumptions, proceeding from Occam, are that if an order existed, God would be entrapped in natural laws, and this "would offend the free will of God and His omnipotence." "The freedom of God," William remarks in one of his lessons to Adso, is "our condemnation, or at least the condemnation of our pride" (Rose 492; 449). Although proud of the "speed and accuracy of his deductions," (Rose 209; 194) he remains perfectly conscious of the limitedness of his knowledge, never daring to take conclusions beyond the rational enquiry over the empirical data. William's attention is all given to the relation of cause-effect among signs, and resembles more postmodern skepticism and disillusionment towards the "grand narratives" than the positive belief in an ever-growing progress. William is always cautious in his statements, and has a tendency of escaping simplified relations of cause-effect between the natural and the divine. This tendency is motivated by the character's past
and caused his leaving his post as inquisitor, many years before the narrated events. "Who am I to express judgments on the plots of the Evil One" (Rose 31; 29), William asks the abbot, who feels he is living in very dark times like all the monks of the abbey. Expressing judgments on the "Evil One's plot" would be too irrational and perhaps too conceited for William's solid belief in a limited but grounded rational enquiry. He then suggests to the abbot, with the sociological theories in force during the twentieth century, that perhaps the presence of the Devil is not purely supernatural; for how could he judge the Devil "in cases where those who had initiated the inquisition, the bishop, the city magistrates, and the whole populace, perhaps the accused themselves, truly wanted to feel the presence of the Devil? There, perhaps the only real proof of the presence of the Devil was the intensity with which everyone at that moment desired to know he was at work…" (Rose 31; 29)

William's continually inquiring attitude prevents him from being able to attract the enthusiasms of the crowd, as when presenting his political views to the opposite factions meeting at the abbey: "William had spoken in such a meek tone, he had expressed his certainties in such a hesitant way, that none of those present was able to stand up and rebut" (Rose 356; 330). This dubitative nature is initially rejected by Adso, who looks for an absolutely valid truth, particularly on how to judge the Dolcinian heresy, the main heretic theme in the novel. Adso does not want to share William's abstention from moral judgments and urges his master toward a clear answer on where to take side:

"And you," I cried, in an access almost of rebellion, "why don't you take a position, why won't you tell me where the truth is?"

William remained silent for a while, holding the lens he was working on up to the light. Then he lowered it to the table and showed me, through the lens, a tool. "Look," he said to me: "What do you see?"

"The tool, a bit larger."
"There: the most we can do is look more closely." (Rose 205; 190)

As in this case, William shifts the moral judgment into the further exploration of world's signs, leaving simple solutions aside and encouraging his pupil to a continual research for the causes of society's diseases. In a world dominated by disputes over the "true" interpretation of the divine order, what in William was hope for an advancement of men's ability to get truths through the scientific exploration becomes in Adso, in his old age, the refusal of believing in an assertive theology:

The more I repeat to myself the story [...], the less I manage to understand whether in it there is a design that goes beyond the natural sequence of the events and the times that connect them. And it is a hard thing for this old monk, on the threshold of death, not to know whether the letter he has written contains some hidden meaning, or more than one, or many, or none at all. [...] Soon I shall be joined with my beginning, and I no longer believe that it is the God of glory of whom the abbots of my order spoke to me, or of joy, as the Minorites believed on those days, perhaps not even of piety. [...] I shall soon enter this broad desert, perfectly level and boundless, where the truly pious heart succumbs in bliss. I shall sink into the divine shadow, in a dumb silence and an ineffable union, and in this sinking all equality and all inequality shall be lost. [...] I shall fall into the silent and uninhabited divinity where there is no work and no image. (Rose 501; 456-457)

The illuminated teaching of William of Barkerville, with its lack of assertiveness and prudent deductions, is completely assimilated by Adso, although the latter does not have as his master a positive belief in the future progress of mankind. He finally interrogates history, at the end of his life, without finding the necessary bases for grounding the truth he was seeking. If this internal development of the novel portrays, as Psichedda maintains, the image of a "defeated modernity and not of a winning one. A modernity, moreover, dented by the woodworm of anguish, of disorientation, of impotence" (81), it is also true that what Adso becomes at the end of his life is the realistic mixed result of William and more current fourteenth-century
conceptions of the world. In fact, Adso tells of a very short period of his life, although crucial for his whole education, and the narrated events are an emblem of the modern condition itself, to be dissociated from Adso's educational outcome. If Adso's opting for mysticism rather than Enlightenment is a sign of a defeated modernity, it should also be remembered that Adso assimilates Williams's method. Additionally, the "medieval" alternatives presented by the character of Jorge of Burgos and the inquisitor Bernardo Gui are by no means preferable, and in this sense Adso represents a great success for his former educator and master William.

**Which Middle Ages. An Open Debate Over the Pride of Reason**

Jorge of Burgos, a blind, old, creepy Spanish monk, is representative of the medieval conception of time and simultaneously of an authoritarian conception of world's order. He demonstrates clearly his opposition to William's approach to knowledge in his sermon to the monks, while the whole abbey is stormed by the series of inexplicable and apocalyptical murders. In this passage he explains his view on the Benedictine order and its mission:

"this ruination was, if not desired, at least permitted by God for the humbling of our pride! [...] the work of our order and in particular the work of this monastery, a part — indeed, the substance — is study, and the preservation of knowledge. Preservation of, I say, and not search, because it is a property of knowledge, as a human thing, that it has been defined and completed over the course of the centuries, from the preaching of the prophets to the interpretation of the fathers of the church. There is no progress, no revolution of ages, in the history of knowledge, but at most a continuous and sublime recapitulation. Human history proceeds with a motion that cannot be arrested, from the creation through the redemption, toward the return of Christ triumphant." (Rose 399; 366)
Jorge of Burgos represents the pure medieval conception of history, while on the opposite side William stands as a forerunner of that progress-informed conception of history in force in Western historiography since the Enlightenment. While William's difference with Bernard Gui, a historically authentic fourteenth-century inquisitor, is clearly defined in William's own words: "Bernard is interested, not in discovering the guilty, but in burning the accused" (*Rose* 394; 362), the opposition between the enlightened Franciscan and the severe Benedictine Jorge has more profound implications. To Jorge, and to a certain extent also to Adso, William's insistence on rationality appears as an act of pride. According to Jorge, the spirit of research inspired by Roger Bacon enters as a promethean, devilish attempt of understanding the world as if after the scriptures mankind had other goals in view than waiting for the Last Judgment and the end of time.

According to his theoretical frame, Jorge's own pedagogy towards younger monks is that of reminding them of the incoming Apocalypse, with scary, detailed information on the incoming arrival of the Antichrist and of the punishments awaiting mankind. Like the abbot, like all the other monks in the abbey, the world of the Middle Ages appears dark as dark appears the *episteme* of that society. William's nominalist reading of this interpretation of man's condition makes of it a world that is dark because people want it to be so. As in the above quoted passage about the presence of the devil, mankind creates its own evils:

In those few years, as never before, to stimulate piety and terror and fervor in the populace, and obedience to human and divine law, preachers have used distressing words, macabre threats. Never before, as in our days, amid processions of flagellants, were sacred lauds heard inspired by the sorrows of Christ and of the Virgin, never has there been such insistence as there is today on strengthening the faith of the simple through the depiction of infernal torments. (*Rose* 118; 110)
William tries to go beyond the inquisitive and dogmatic approach toward the various sores of society. On the one hand he avoids absolute and unquestionable moral judgments; on the other he deepens the process of enquiry over their natural causes. "The most we can do is to look more closely" becomes an essential principle in Adso's educational process disrupting the model based on fear and authority set by Jorge. William's educational principle corrects and amends Adso's initial inquisitory attitudes, as is the case with the girl with whom he falls in love; William explains the social dynamics underlying the actual evidence of her prostitution, widening and making Adso' moral frame more complex:

"Because the girl didn't go with him for love, but for a pack of scraps. Certainly she is a girl from the village who, perhaps not for the first time, grants her favors to some lustful monk out of hunger, and receives as recompense something for her and her family to eat."
"A harlot!" I said, horrified.
"A poor peasant girl, Adso. Probably with smaller brothers to feed."

(Rose 253; 235)

A similar attitude is to be found concerning the Koran. While after many adventures Adso and William enter the "Leones" section of the "Finis Africæ," the most secret part of the library, Adso finds a copy of the Koran, and displays the typically medieval hostility toward the Muslim world. It is William, who admires the scientific accomplishments of the Arabs, who again amends Adso's views on the subject, without imposing his view by means of his authority, while articulating the judgment and widening the focus over the subject itself:

"And there are more," I said, rummaging in the cases. "Canon of Avicenna, and this codex with the beautiful calligraphy I don't recognize…"
"From the decorations I would say it is the Koran, but unfortunately I have no Arabic."
"The Koran, the Bible of the infidels, a perverse book…"
"A book containing a wisdom different from ours. But you understand why they put it here, where the lions, the monsters, are. This is why we saw that book on the monstrous animals, where you also found the unicorn. This area called LEONES contains the books that the creators of the library considered books of falsehood." (Rose 315; 292)

William's attitudes toward knowledge and methods appear as contrasting with the "dark medieval" ones represented by Jorge of Burgos. The positive attitude William keeps toward the future of mankind is antithetic to Jorge's mixture of authoritarian power and expectation for an imminent end of the world. More widely this contrast is contextualized within the social sphere as an opposition between Franciscans and Benedictine ideals, which the infuriated William summarizes when the abbot dismisses him from his investigation. He got too close to the truth, which is why he cannot proceed in his enquiry: "kill his monks, but do not touch the honor of his abbey. [...] Have a Franciscan, a plebeian Minorite, discover the rat's nest of this holy house? Ah, no, this is something Abo cannot allow at any price." (Rose 450; 414)

Belonging to a lower social class than that of the Benedectines surrounding him, William has also radically different approach to knowledge, not only in matters of methodology. If he shows a positive openness to non-canonical views of the world, as is the case with the Koran or when he instructs Adso "that a good Christian can sometimes learn also from the infidels" (Rose 16; 14), this is not yet what differentiates him from the Benedictine approach represented by the abbot and by Jorge. In fact, even Abo does not have a radical refusal of cultural and epistemological difference:

"Monsters exist because they are part of the divine plan, and in the horrible features of those same monsters the power of the Creator is revealed. And by divine plan, too, there exist also books by wizards, the cabalas of the Jews, the fables of the pagan poets, the lies of the infidels. It was a firm and
holy conviction of those who founded the abbey and sustained it over the centuries that even in books of falsehood, to the eyes of the sage reader, a pale reflection of the divine wisdom can shine." (Rose 37-38; 34)

Jorge seems to agree with the abbot when he affirms that the library is witness of the truth but also of errors: "what contradicts [the Scripture] must not be destroyed, because only if we preserve it can it be contradicted in its turn by those who can do so" (Rose 400; 367). But while for William mankind's future depends on the progress of knowledge and represents a continual investigation for the truth, as "books are not made to be believed, but to be subjected to enquiry. When we consider a book, we mustn't ask ourselves what it says but what it means" (Rose 316; 293), the Benedictines have a different approach. The books in the library are kept concealed as they could drive away the masses or unauthorized people from the "truth." That's why Jorge, with the complicity of the abbot, rigidly controls the access to the higher floor of the library, contrary to the will of the Italian party of monks who would like instead a more liberal circulation of books. For Jorge and Abbo knowledge can be dangerous, and they consider their role in society as preservers of order and protectors of the truth. This theme is central in the novel and it is portrayed by Jorge's hiding the second book of Aristotle's *Poetics*, at the point of sacrificing his life in order to prevent the book from being known outside. He himself gives the reason to the puzzled William for this choice. First of all it is due to the way Aristotle has influenced Christian thought:

"Every book by that man has destroyed a part of the learning that Christianity had accumulated over the centuries. The fathers had said everything that needed to be known about the power of the World, but then Boethius had only to gloss the Philosopher and the divine mystery of the Word was transformed into a human parody of categories and syllogism. [...] And so the cosmos, which for the Aeropagite revealed itself to those who knew how to look up at the luminous cascade of the exemplary first cause, has
become a preserve of terrestrial evidence for which they refer to an abstract agent. Before, we used to look at heaven, deigning only a frowning glance at the mire of matter; now we look at the earth, and we believe in the heavens because of earthly testimony." (Rose 473; 433)

In Jorge's opinion Aristotle has turned upside down the teaching of the Fathers of the church introducing logical thought and the quest for interpretation, producing a renewed attention for worldly phenomena. Aristotle is seen as responsible for having corrupted the pure original message of Christianity and the second book of Poetics, devoted to comedy and mime, would break the last barrier. In dealing with laughter as a medicine and justifying laughing at human weaknesses, the authoritative word of Aristotle would promote the emancipation for the fear of punishment: "this book could teach that freeing oneself of the fear of the Devil is wisdom" (Rose 474; 434). Jorge expresses on one hand the fear for the incoming Apocalypse, and on the other the conscience of the man of power who knows very well the effects of fear for the final judgment on the "villein." He considers fear of punishment as "perhaps the most foresighted, the most loving of the divine gifts" for human sinful creatures, and Jorge, defender of God's law, cannot allow Aristotle's book freeing the villein from the yoke of fear. In the course of the debate occurring among William and Jorge, William reverses Jorge's equation according to which rational enquiry coincides with the pride of intellect, and accuses Jorge of being the Devil, "arrogance of the spirit, faith without smile, truth that is never seized by doubt" (Rose 477; 437).

To the reader of The Name of the Rose is given this double and opposed representation over the nature of intellectual pride: is it William's with his rational enquiry but limited knowledge or Jorge's confident teachings on humility in waiting for the last judgment? The two patterns represented by William and Jorge cannot be attributed exclusively only to a medieval or to a modern world while in fact they enact
an intellectual confrontation between two approaches toward the world of signs, two
different epistemological conceptions of man's condition on earth. Reservoir of
medieval "barbarism," Jorge is also representative of a medieval teleology and
conception of history on which William cannot counteract. His method, based on
rationality and natural evidences, does not allow him to infer authoritatively upon the
divine, and leaves to Adso both the crisis of living in a disorderly world and the hope
in a perhaps better future enlightened by knowledge of natural phenomena. Adso
accepts the first and, medieval enough, refuses the second.
IV Zayni Barakat

In *Zayni Barakat* Gamal al-Ghitani portrays Egypt during the last years of reign of the Mamluk Sultan al-Gawri, immediately before the Ottoman invasion of Egypt in 1517. The protagonist of the novel, Barakat ibn Musa, is the supervisor of trade and prices appointed by the Sultan. Coming from an unknown background, Barakat becomes an important figure for the life of the Sultanate and assumes the honorary title of *Zayni*. His post requires him to be directly in touch with people's affairs and "upholding what is right and forbidding what is wrong" (*Zayni* 23; 29) among them, invested as he is with both secular, and to some extent, religious authority.

Barakat is never portrayed directly in the novel, but always through the filter of other characters, all reporting their particular relation with the protagonist. This way of representing the main character leads to the impression that Zayni Barakat is omnipresent in the life Egyptian people, from the poor to the powerful, strictly controlling everyone's movements. The book opens with the account of a Venetian traveler, Visconte Gianti, who describes the country as living a time of turmoil, profoundly insecure about its future. This first excerpt of Visconte is chronologically the last of a series that intermittently brings into the text the Venitian traveler's impressions in his various visits to Egypt. The book consequently begins with its chronological end, in 1517, proceeding in the following section with the events occurring in 1506.

The Venetian traveler brings the only external point of view on the Egyptian events of those days, while all the other characters represent different perspectives of their nation. Zayni Barakat is portrayed at the beginning of the novel as a devout
person charged, almost against his will, to undertake the important position of *muhtasib*, supervisor of trade and prices. This image of Zayni comes mainly from the young Said al-Juhaini, a student at the University of al-Azhar, and his spiritual master the respected Shaykh Abu al-Su’ud. A more disillusioned version of Zayni’s appointment is that of Zakariyya ibn Radi, Chief spy of the Sultanate, according to whom Zayni paid a substantial sum in various offices for obtaining the post. In fact, all along the novel a contrasting set of descriptions is built around the enigmatic figure of Zayni Barakat, making of him almost a model of social cleverness and opportunism, as well as an emblem of modesty and honesty.

Portrayed by people as devout, having at first refused the post of *muhtasib* for fear of being unjust, crying before the Sultan and finally accepting the appointment after the blessing of Shaykh Abu al-Su’ud, Barakat ibn Musa becomes immediately popular for his simple methods and his sympathetic attitudes towards the people. His presence makes the population more confident in justice and many see in him a portent and a proof of the imminent end of the world. In a country tormented by oppression and fear Zayni stands almost as the light of hope. One of his most affectionate supporters is the young Said, a disciple of Shaykh Abu al-Su’ud as was formerly Zayni himself. Said is enflamed by ideals of social justice, and defends Zayni’s politics among his colleagues in al-Azhar. He knows that supporting Zayni can be risky, as the spies of the powerful Zakariyya are always among al-Azhar’s students. Amr is one of them: a poor student coming from the countryside, he is charged to discover and report everything going on in the university and around Cairo, finding out and providing information about dissenters.

At first Zayni Barakat meets Zakariyya's hostility, as Zayni seems to act independently and wants to institute his own system of informers, without
subservience to the strategic role of Zakariyya's spies within the Sultanate's system of power. The competition between Zakariyya and Zayni increases, each trying to discover the other's weak side, until Zayni succeeds in keeping Zakariyya in check by discovering his kidnapping and killing of Sh'aban, the Sultan's favorite boy. This change in their struggle for power leads to Zayni's final recognition within the circles of power and to a mutual support and admiration between him and Zakariyya. While Zayni works together with the chief spy for controlling the people by populism and apparent justice instead of by fear, as it was formerly, Said's and Shaykh Abu al-Su'ud's discontent increase.

Said still supports Zayni as he thinks he will bring justice to Egypt and despises Zakariyya who incarnates the ideal of a control system based on terror, espionage and torture. He is not aware of the deal already ongoing between the two, and his frustration increases when he discovers that Zayni will not stop Burhan al-Din's attempt of getting the monopoly over the selling of fava beans. Said will revolt openly denouncing Zayni as being a liar in al-Azhar, and his life will be destroyed. Zayni himself will help in marrying Said's beloved, Samah, to a young official, and in Said's imprisonment and torture by Zakariyya's men. To Said's revolt follows Shaykh Abu al-Su'ud's revolt: the respected Shaykh will put Zayni in disgrace in front of the people and provide evidence of his corruption, but Zakariyya himself will save Zayni from capital punishment and rehabilitate him before the Sultan.

Meanwhile, in the tormented country of Egypt the war with the Ottomans approaches, and while Zayni and Zakariyya organize a sinister planetary convention of spies for discussing new methods of espionage and torture, the Sultanate is invaded and independence is lost. Said's life will be destroyed by two years of detention and torture, while Shaykh Abu al-Su'ud leaves the city and organizes the resistance in the
countryside. The Ottoman invasion brings ruin neither to Zakariyya nor to Zayni, who ends the book with the people exulting for his nomination, once again, as mutashib of Cairo.

**Anachronisms and Philological Reconstruction**

In *Zayni Barakat* Gamal al-Ghitani reconstructs Mamluk Cairo at the eve of the Ottoman conquest. Differently from Eco, whose sources are various and different in chronological order, Ghitani takes as main source the sixteenth-century chronicler Muhammad Ibn Iyas, who related in *Bada'i al-Zuhur fi Waqa'i al-Duhur* (translated by Gaston Wiet as *Journal d'un Bourgeois du Caire*) the chronicle of late Mamluk Egypt. From Ibn Iyas Ghitani takes not only the historical information about that period, the feelings of the people during the invasion and the historical character of Zayni Barakat. He also assumes medieval stylistic traits and language in order to make his narrative more credible. Together with the reproduction of the past, Ghitani also puts in the narration some important anachronisms that are revealing of his reasons for representing medieval Egypt.

Rather than composed by the continuity of narration made by a single character, *Zayni Barakat* appears as a collection of different images in fragmented texts and documents. The first type of document is that of announcements from the authorities to the people: edicts from the Sultan, proclamations by Zayni Barakat himself, and reports from spies to Zakariyya. These texts are made up by Ghitani himself in a medievalized fashion and constitute an important element for the whole narrative, as they give an idea about the agency of the authorities in the public and private sphere. There are then various records of the outsider Visconte Gianti, whose
look is superficial but somehow objective. In addition, there are many interior monologues by characters like Shaykh Abu al-Su'ud, Said and Zakariyya, each reporting from his personal perspective over the ongoing events. All of them are interspersed as in a collage; the reader is meant to reconstruct and interpret the whole age through these documents without the authoritative intervention of a single narrator, and they are sometimes in contradiction with each other, making it hard to extrapolate a single truth. As Samia Mehrez points out, Ghitani also recurs to Ibn Iyas and to the tradition of Islamic chroniclers in introducing the related events with formulas such as "it is rumored that," "what is believed is that," or "among the anecdotes is that." These formulas represent the dominant feeling of uncertainty among the Egyptians, but on another level they also reconstruct "a continuous process of oral transmission of events, real or fictitious. […] They are devices used by the historian to demonstrate his detachment and objectivity. At the same time they are means behind which the historian can hide when voicing a personal opinion" (Mehrez, "Bricolage" 70).

In Zayni Barakat the author appears only indirectly, as he selects the texts in the narrative, but he never clearly gives personal opinions or interpretations about the narrative itself. Ghitani resorts to a series of historical pastiches, philologically reconstructing the past when reporting the facts presented by Ibn Iyas, but falsifying them when reconstructing the narrative with the freedom of the artist. Ghitani reproduces Ibn Iyas' cadences and turns of phrase, and takes from his chronicle four historically authentic characters, but in doing so he also recreates their stories, as is the case with the two most important among them: Zayni Barakat and Shaykh Abu al-Su'ud. Farouk Abdel Wahab reconstructed the parallelisms between Ghitani's novel and Ibn Iyas' chronicle (Abdel Wahab xviii), reporting how both in the novel and in
the chronicle Shaykh Abu al-Su'ud puts Zayni Barakat in disgrace before the people (Zayni 208; 245). In both narratives Zayni eventually succeeds in escaping death, but the context in which the novelist constructs this whole episode does not match entirely with the historical past, although in its richness of details Ghitani almost copies Ibn Iyas. In Zayni Barakat Ghitani copies at least three long passages from Ibn Iyas's chronicle disguising them in the narrative, as when the Venitian traveler reports on the departure of Sultan al-Ghawri for the military expedition against the Ottomans saying he will copy the description from his friend Ibn Iyas (Zayni 185; 219).

Besides the partly loyal, partly fictional reconstruction of sixteenth-century Cairo, in Zayni Barakat Ghitani enacts an important anachronism through the portrayal of Zakariyya's system of spies. The author himself recalls it in an interview:

In my own experience with al-Zayni Barakat (Zayni Barakat), I was recreating an entire period. The subject matter in itself is a familiar one throughout history, i.e. issues of oppression and the politics of surveillance. Here I wish to explain that the spy apparatus I depicted in al-Zayni Barakat did not exist during the sixteenth century, the timeframe of the novel. It belongs to our time. And because I was reconstructing a whole period I had to recreate some of its minutest details: language, style, kinds of food, costumes, street-names in Cairo, and neighborhoods. (Ghitani, "Intertextual" 22)

Detachment from the narrated events and disappearance of the author are not casual aesthetic choices. The theme of social control is fundamental in Zayni Barakat, and it is hard not to notice in the novel the influence of Orwell's 1984. But the importance of torture is also due to the author's personal experience in prison in 1966-67 (Nkrumah 4) and perhaps to Ibn Iyas's ability in recording "the most horrific incidents with the same composure he recorded the most mundane ones" (Ghitani, "Intertextual" 23), which might have prompted in Ghitani the coldness of his detailed descriptions. It is important to note, however, that Ghitani's novel radically differs
from Eco's *The Name of the Rose*. Zayni Barakat is not the enactment of a historicist debate over modern and medieval teleologies. Rather, Ghitani's intent is more politically focused.

As one of the most significant writers of the so-called "generation of the sixties," with *Zayni Barakat* Ghitani participates in the shift "from the mimetic approach of modern social realism to an ironical metafictional approach in the writing of narrative" (Draz 137) occurring in Arabic literature since the early sixties. In that decade most of the Arab countries succeeded in being independent from the former colonial powers. Different revolutionary régimes started the transition from resistance to the organization of the newly independent states. But from the revolutionary ideals of independence and freedom rapidly emerged police states which a strictly controlled civil society. The press, which played a significant role in the process that led to independence, was put under censorship and often those works that opposed the authorities or criticized the system were banned (Mehrez, *Egyptian* 99). Criticizing the régime became risky and many journalists were put in prison and tortured. The spies Ghitani puts in the sixteenth-century Mamluk Egypt are a dramatic testimony of the events he lived and witnessed. The "copious use of symbolism" and indirect ways of representing the present, as Roger Allen remarked, "was not merely an artistic phenomenon but a matter of strict practicality. The more explicit writers could be handled with considerable severity" (51).

In this context, the 1967 Arab-Israeli war exploded and strengthened the writers' opposition to the systems of power in the Arab world. Presented by the media with triumphant tones but ending with a clamorous defeat, the war brought a period of deep interrogation among Arab intellectuals:
What made the impact even worse and the anger more intense was that the Arab world was being told by its leaders until the very last moment that it was on its way to a glorious victory. [...] What ensued has been characterized by Abdallah Laroui as a "moral crisis" which "culminated in a period of anguished self-criticism, a searching reappraisal of postwar Arab culture and political practice." (Allen 51-52)

The 1967 war had played a fundamental role in Ghitani developing parallelism between Mamluk and Nasserian Egypt presented in Zayni Barakat; as he put it: "After the 1967 defeat I discovered Ibn Iyas, who had lived a similar historical moment when the Ottomans crushed the Egyptian army in the battle of Marj Dabiq. The historian depicted the defeat with national fervor and genuine grief comparable to my own feelings during that bleak period of 1967" (Ghitani, "Intertextual" 20). Feelings of angry patriotism mixed with passion for the Arabic literary heritage made Ghitani resort to history in representing contemporary Egyptian society through an ironic revisiting of medieval Egypt.

Many have noticed how the destiny of the historical and fictional Zayni Barakat closely resembles that of president Abdel Nasser, to the point of concluding that the character of Barakat ibn Musa is no other than a metaphor for Nasser himself. A man of the people climbing to the apex of power, adored by his nation and surviving his own defeat, these are the common qualities between the two that cannot pass unobserved. Edward Said commented in his foreword to the novel's English translation:

Zayni corresponds with Gamal Abel Nasser, also a popular figure, genuine reformer, ambitious patriot, whose pan-Arab plans for Egypt collapsed ignominiously in 1967. Al-Ghitani's disenchanted reflections upon the past directly associate Zayni's rule with the murky atmosphere of intrigue, conspiracy and multiple schemes that characterized Abdel Nasser's rule during the 1960s, a time, according to Ghitani, spent on futile efforts to control and improve the moral standard of Egyptian life, even as Israel (the Ottomans) prepared for invasion and regional dominance. An even more damning
indictment of Zayni and the nationalism he represents is that he is able to survive the Ottomans' victory and to re-emerge as ruler under their wing. (Said, viii)

Although Ghitani eventually indicated that Zayni Barakat is not Nasser (Nkrumah 4), the similarity of their destinies certainly appealed to the writer seeking the adequate setting for his social message. The medievalism of Ghitani appears as partly due to a wish to revive a past age felt as similar to the present, and partly to the necessity of presenting the present in disguise through an adequate theme. In the Ottoman conquest of Egypt Gamal al-Ghitani found the equivalent for the 1967 war and in Zayni Barakat a figure not too dissimilar from that of Gamal Abd el-Nasser. Both cases prompted in him the idea of enacting a historical parallelism which led to the composition of Zayni Barakat.

A Fatherless Generation

Although the relation between power and its subjects appears among other themes in The Name of the Rose, the issue of irreconcilability between state and people is central in Zayni Barakat. Through the theme of sectarian divisions among heretics and the coercive power exercised over them by authorities like Bernardo Gui and Jorge of Burgos, Eco portrays an authoritarian control over dissent in relation with a millenarian teleology and in contrast with the inquiring spirit of William of Baskerville. On the contrary, in Zayni Barakat the focus is on the radical division between the needs of the people and those of the state. But while for Adso, no matter how critical, the fatherly figure of a master is there for introducing him to the complex world of signs, Said al-Juhaini is eventually deprived of such a figure and his life is destroyed by the former generation. In this, Said is similar to the writers of the
generation of the sixties, who defined themselves as a "fatherless generation" (Draz 137). Like Said, they also have been betrayed by the discrepancy between the state-propaganda and the actual exertion of power. Like him, they have been punished for their dissent and deprived of a positive support by the previous generation.

In Zayni Barakat the two polarities of the people and the state are expressed respectively by the characters of Said al-Juhaini and Zakariyya ibn Radi. Said, a spokesman for the people, complains about the corruption in Egypt and for the conditions of its vexed population; while as a representative of the state Zakariyya's priority is that of social order. Between these two clearly defined characters stands the transitory figure of Zayni Barakat himself, who shifts from the "people's party" of Said and Shaykh Abu al-Su'ud to that of Zakariyya's. This development in the novel, accomplished by the main character from one pole to the other, represents their intimate irreconcilability, as Barakat final opting for the State is made at the expenses of both Said and Shaykh Abu al-Su'ud.

The first description of Barakat is given by the Venitian traveler at the very beginning of the novel. Visconte Gianti describes Barakat as having a penetrating look, inspiring at the same time contrasting feelings of fear and kindness:

His features radiate with a brilliant intelligence, while a momentary closing of his eyes shows a kindness, a tenderness that makes one want to be close to him even while one is still in awe of him. (Zayni 4; 10)

Since his appointment as muhtasib, Zayni Barakat shows aversion to injustice. He declares at al-Ahzar that he "he fears nobody but God" and that he would not have accepted the post had it not been for Shaykh Abu al-Su'ud, "learned in the foundations and the various branches of knowledge, the ascetic hermit, the friend of God." He also declares that should an act of injustice be committed against anyone, "poor or rich,
near or far, he should immediately go to his deputy and he would surely right the wrong and punish the transgressor, after the case was heard and the truth established" (Zayni 52-53; 63). After his speech he leaves the mosque "atop a high mule, with a modest saddle and plain saddle-cloth," and the student-spy Amr reports to the head spy of Cairo how the people rejoiced by this display of humility and said: "Look, that is how justice and just rulers should be!" (Zayni 53; 64). Soon Zayni is viewed by the people as a savior from oppression and they love him. He deals directly with them in the markets, becoming extremely popular by being a constant presence in the minutest aspects of their life.

Said is portrayed as the closest disciple of the highly respected Shaykh Abu al-Su'ud, and he is deeply concerned by the state of oppression enforced by the former muhtasib, by the private armies of Mamluks riding mercilessly the streets of Cairo, and by the system of spies reporting to Zakariyya. His main concern is the condition of the Egyptians, and he echoes Ghitani's expectations for a future development of Egypt on the path of freedom and justice:

Said memorized the names of everyone who had been unjustly hanged: the peasant who had been impaled because he had stolen a cucumber; the woman who was cut into two halves because she cursed a profligate Mamluk who had abducted her virgin daughter. On the same day Said would come to his master, name the victim and ask in a broken voice how all of that was going on. (Zayni 39; 46)

Said is also enflamed by an idealized love for Samah, the daughter of his family friend Shaykh Rihan, and he dreams of marrying her in a better Egypt: "He doesn't see her as a body, two breasts, a neck or a nape. She is closer to being pure spirit, a vision, an intangible whisper, a lily not for picking" (Zayni 63; 75).
Opposite to Said's standpoint is Zakariyya ibn Radi, who is immediately alarmed by Zayni's increasing popularity, by his informal populist methods and particularly by his proclaimed intention of having a system of spies referring to him alone. As the chief spy of the Sultanate, Zakariyya has records of every person continually updated. He is an éminence grise behind the sultan and informs him about important security issues. In his report about Zayni's emerging power, he points out not only that the spies should be uniquely referring to him, but also about the people's reactions to Zayni's populist methods:

. . . . the reports indicate that the populace is beginning to open its eyes, is beginning to look at the emirs. Every man is now saying, 'Why don't they come down and talk to us? Are they greater than the good man Zayni Barakat?' I am asking nothing of you except to see the way things are, otherwise they would go against our desires and lead to confusion, loss of law and order, security and peace. . . .

God, who uncovers the unknown, is my witness that I am telling the truth. (Zayni 59-60; 70)

While keeping a formal subservience to the sultan, Zakariyya does not hesitate to kidnap, torture, violate and kill the sultan's favorite boy, Sha'ban, in order to extrapolate the secrets of their relationship. Zakariyya is a man of no scruples, and his ultimate goal is the knowledge of everyone's life and weak points for the keeping of social order. He dreams of a society made up of spies, each one reporting to him about the other, and while the Sultan is going to be defeated by the Ottomans he holds in Cairo, with Zayni Barakat, a sinister summit of all the spies of the Sultanate around the world. On that occasion, as the country is unstable and power is easily accessible for a man in his position, he almost surprises the reader in affirming his and spies' function in the state system:
The great lesson learned from all the different histories is that in the case of internal, civil strife the spy must be neutral. The spy works for justice alone and the symbol of justice is the very throne itself.

Should members of the elite or groups among the populace conspire against the throne, the matter should be reported to the person sitting on it. This is a must. But, let's suppose that certain conspiring members of the elite or the populace (this latter hypothesis is rare) were able to seize the power. What should the spy do? To that we say that so long as someone has been able to seize power from that person sitting on the throne and to sit on that very throne, that could only indicate weakness on the part of the former. How could he establish justice if he couldn't protect himself? (Zayni 193; 225-226)

Zakkariyya is not in competition with the sultan, rather he represents the state itself and particularly its coercive power. Zakariyya's enemies are the subverters of social order, and Zayni appears as such at the beginning of the novel in dealing closely with the people, treating them with some familiarity and giving the impression of subverting the conventional relations of power. But between Zayni and Zakariyya slowly grows a coalition based on common interests when Zayni discovers the truth about Sh'aban's death, keeping Zakariyya in check. The nature of their collaboration is based on mutual respect, and Zakaryyyia recognizes Zayni's "genial" idea of governing the people not through torture and fear but through giving them an illusion of justice, showing benevolent attitudes and making an appropriate use of religion. Eventually, Zayni introduces Zakariyya to the people as his deputy and Zakariyya starts to give sermons in mosques following Zayni's model. Meanwhile Said and Shaykh Abu al-Su'ud have understood the kind of teamwork ongoing among them, and Said publicly accused Zayni of being a liar. In expressing his dissent, as the "generation of the sixties" did, he becomes a dissenter, and both Zayni and Zakariyya use their powers for neutralizing him:

Zayni bent forwards and rested his chin on his hand. 'Send a lot of men after him, not so much to monitor his movements, but to make him feel that somebody is monitoring them.'
Zakariyya said, 'We did even more than that. I ordered my men to follow him, then loudly call out Samah's name. He almost went mad.'
Zayni laughed, 'Good! Good! And the prayers?'
Zakariyya smiled. 'Everybody is kissing my hands now.'
Zayni's laughter grew louder. 'Listen, Zakariyya, you've got to win their hearts even more. Tomorrow, ride your horse, have one of your men dress as a peasant and another as a Mamluk. Get the second to give the first a sound beating. Naturally, your procession will happen to be passing there at the time. Get off your horse to come to the aid of the peasant and justice and arrest the Mamluk. Once you've done that several times, the people will love you. (Zayni 163-164; 193-194)

Zayni enters the State apparatus following the positive principles of Shaykh Abu al-Su'ud. Once in power he makes coalition with Zakariyya who, besides allowing himself every sort of despotism over his victims, acts according to a Machiavellian principle of justice based on a social order of which he and his spies are responsible before the throne. Now on Zakariyya's level, Barakat assimilates the techniques for keeping control and security in the Sultanate. Said dreams, as a young outsider from the dialectics of power, of a better and more just country, and initially trusts Zayni Barakat to restore equity among the Egyptians. He does not understand the change occurring to Zayni Barakat, his acting as if the nature of his post required from him malice and cleverness associated with those coercive instruments his position allows him to use. Zayni's portrayal, in his passing from the instances of the people to those of the state, remains nonetheless ambiguous all along the novel. Shaykh Abu al-Su'ud puts an end to this ambiguity depriving Zayni of his authority right before his followers, as Zayni previously imposed a tricky taxation in Upper Egypt saying he was acting according to Shaykh Abu al-Su'ud's will. The Shaykh then summons him, and accuses him of stealing money in his name:

'You, dog, why do you oppress the Muslims? Why do you steal their money? Why do you say things that you attribute to me?' (Zayni 208; 245)
Shaykh Abu al-Su'ud represents in the novel the figure that covers for Said the fatherly role William represents for Adso. All along the novel Said communicates with him his perplexities and anxieties for himself and for the poor. Like William, Shaykh Abu al-Su'ud has traveled and is learned, but contrary to William he is not a representation of rational enquiry. Abu al-Su'ud is a Sufi ascetic, a mystic, and represents the purity of the intimate relation with God as opposed to the utilitarian use of religiosity for worldly affairs represented by Zayni and Zakariyya. Once the country is invaded by the Ottomans and Zayni and Zakariyya, according to the policies expressed at the summit, already collaborate with the invader, Shaykh Abu al-Su'ud retires in the fields and organizes there the national resistance. The Venitian traveler, through the report of a discussion with an al-Azhar Shaykh, describes at the very end of the book the symbolic role represented by the saint Abu al-Su'ud:

He also told me that that saint had a mighty banner called 'The Prophet's Banner' and that as soon as he unfurled it the whole Egyptian nation from one end to the other would rise and fight the invaders until it finished them off. (Zayni 240; 282)

Source of pure approach to the divine — but also of a certain true nationalism disentangled from the reasons of state— Shaykh Abu al-Su'ud is chased at the end of the novel by the new installed regime. Said cannot follow his master, as he had spent two years in prison, getting tortured and brainwashed. His beloved Samah has been given by Zayni to another man, and the "fatherless" young man is eager to reach Abu al-Su'ud as he has no other positive references in the world. But after the experience in prison he comes out destroyed in his soul and Zayni and Zakariyya try, through him, to put their hands over Shaykh Abu al-Su'ud, enrolling Said as a spy at their service. But by now Said looks only for death and the end of pain, tragically
commenting on his condition: "OH! They ruined me and destroyed my fortresses!"

(Zayni 235; 279)

Said's condition remains hopeless after having dared to express his dissent toward state policies. He represents the condition of a generation who, hoping for a renewed Egypt after the newly acquired independence, has been oppressed by the same regime it believed in. The two sides of the people and the state are portrayed as irreconcilable, as two different worlds each one having its own necessities and rules, each equally legitimate but with the former tragically subjected to the latter. While Zayni comes into power with the positive ideals represented by Shaykh Abu al-Su'ud, he loses his coherence on the way and foils Said's attempt to remain loyal to them.

**Which Middle Ages: The Weight of Continuity**

Ghitani's portrayal of Mamluk Egypt, with its parallelism with the modern Nasserist regime, enacts a representation of the contemporary as past, without the historicist reflection presented by Eco in *The Name of the Rose*. However, this does not mean that Ghitani is not concerned as Eco is about the continuity or rupture with the traditional teleology. This theme appears in at least a couple of episodes although not with the same strength as in Eco. Rather, in writing *Zayni Barakat*, Ghitani's intention seems to have been, as Richard van Leeuwen points out:

Not to reconstruct a bygone era, or to offer a reinterpretation of past events, but to use the representation of a past era to illuminate a theme [...], the Mamluk era is represented as a paramount example of the way in which the mechanisms of power functioned; it serves to depict these mechanisms and the psychology of the oppressor and its victims in their essence. However, it is not oppression in history which interests al-Ghitani, but oppression as a meta-historical phenomenon, occurring in all ages. (Leeuwen 104)
Ghitani's attention to the relation of power between the state and its subjects is certainly the main theme in the novel, and in transferring the novel's setting in a past age Ghitani succeeds in covering the real focus of his narrative from the censorship. The portrayal of medieval Egypt does not constitute however only a pretext, neither does Ibn Iyas' nationalism or Abu al-Su'ud's spiritual authority wholly explain the author's affinity with the Mamluk period. The difference between Eco and Ghitani's conception of history is that Eco's approach is more oriented to the academic distinction between medieval and modern historiographies, while Ghitani has a personal, more eclectic perhaps, approach to history. Partly related to a cyclical conception of time modeled on "the iron rule of the raise, decline and fall" of the State as expressed in the Islamic tradition by Ibn Khaldun (Khalidi 230), Ghitani seems more interested in tracing the repetition of similar facts that occurred in history in two different historical moments. In an interview released after the publication of *Zayni Barakat*, Ghitani explained how central a role the conception of time has had in his formation:

The question of time is one that has long preoccupied me. It was one of the important reasons for my interest in the different stages of history. For me, history is time, colossal, overpowering, reviving, deadly in its awesome process. It is that which diverts us endlessly to the past, that which brings forth memory and forgetfulness. For long I have contemplated and reflected on hours, starting with the simple mechanical movement of seconds, minutes, and hours, and proceeding to the movement of galaxies, the succession of night and day, the passage of years, life and death. For me, history is over and done with: there is no difference between a moment that terminated a second ago and another, which occurred thousands or millions of years ago. Neither can be recaptured. This is why I do not agree with those who say that "you are writing a historical novel." Everything proceeds to the past, a past that is impossible to repossess. (Ghitani, "Intertextual" 23)

For Ghitani history is part of the wider and mysterious phenomenon of time, as if in time everything was moving towards becoming past, i.e. history, irremediably
ungraspable after its having being present. Ghitani only partially sets his narrative, as Eco, in a "human" time, that of history and its human models. Rather, time has for him an enigmatic nature; it stands as an overpowering and unknown force acting over human life. This perhaps justifies, besides the medievalist portrayal of modern Egypt, the feeling of oppression and uncertainty felt by many characters. This anxious attitude is also expressed within the frame of the traditional Islamic teleology and closely resembles Eco's portrayal of millenarianism in *The Name of the Rose*. All these different elements and sources coexist in *Zayni Barakat* without a specific insistence on any of them, making the novel particularly rich in speculations and interrogations upon the "nature of the age."

The dominant perception of time, expressed by almost every character, is that of living in a time of turmoil and uncertainty. From the external point of view of the Venitiane traveler to Said and Zakariyya, everyone is dramatically conscious of living in an age where things are changing. Most of the people of Cairo, together with Said, express deep millenarian concerns about the imminent coming of the Apocalypse, and Ghitani portrays many secondary characters commenting on the arrival of the Antichrist (*Zayni* 138; 162). Surprised by the appointment of Zayni Barakat as *muhtasib* of Cairo, the first thing Zakariyya asks himself is about his true identity: "What mettle is this Barakat made of? Has the Antichrist come, in disguise?" (*Zayni* 34; 40) But all along the novel the people of Cairo are shown as waiting for the world's end, interpreting every alarming accident as one of the signs that according to the Islamic tradition precede the Apocalypse. The millenarian mood among the people, described in Ibn Iyas' chronicle as having prevailed only in the period immediately preceding the actual invasion of the Ottomans, is extended by Ghitani to the whole ten years span of *Zayni Barakat* and dramatically expresses the people's
feelings of impotence before the occurring events. This perception of time is related to
Islamic teleology, and it is not so different from the Christian teleology expressed in
*The Name of the Rose*. Both are based on the arrival of the end of the world, and are
used in both novels accordingly to their "medieval" setting with similar purposes.

On another level Zakariyya, expression of the modern system of social
control, ironically dreams of living with Zayni in a future time where devices like
modern identity cards will exist (*Zayni* 126; 148). Shaykh Abu al-Su'ud, on the other
hand, manifests Ghitani's interrogation over the undefined nature of time while
blaming himself for not having understood the spirit of his age:

> After such a long life, comes a man who uses him. If the Prophet Ilyas,
> who has lived in all epochs, were to come to him he would tell him, "It is your
> fault; you have not known your era; you haven't delved into it to learn its
> secrets." (*Zayni* 205; 242)

Shaykh Abu al-Su'ud's crisis consists in not giving the correct reading of his
age and thus failing in counteracting Zayni's and Zakariyya's projects, but contrary to
the common people who passively accept what history has in store for them, he reacts
against the Ottoman invaders as if having finally understood the proper answer to his
former anxieties. He is the only exception in an epoch portrayed as tormented and
pessimist. In opposing his adversaries' strategies he does not have a solution based on
rational enquiry as William of Baskerville, but a religiously inspired nationalism.

These characteristic features of Ghitani's personal reflections on time coexist
in the novel with the more properly historical thought dominant in Eco. In at least a
couple of cases, Ghitani enacts an interrogation over the difference between
"medieval" and "modern" values. It is the case with the representation of torture as
opposed to the Enlightenment refusal of violence and death punishment for carrying
out justice, and with the singular events that occurred when Zayni decides to put lamps all over Cairo for the better security of the population.

In the first case, Zayni declares to the people pursuing an enlightened concept of justice. As former *nuhtasib* of Cairo, Ali ibn Abi al-Jud falls in disgrace before the sultan, having committed many atrocities and stolen public money. Consequently, he is assigned to Zayni Barakat in order for him to recover the stolen goods al-Jud hid in a secret place. After having kept al-Jud in prison for a long time, criticized by many for the length of his investigation, finally Zayni declares to have recovered al-Jud's treasure without any torture:

> We do not permit any human being, no matter who, to be burned anywhere on his body or to be shod like a horse. This explains the lapse between our receiving Ali in Abi al-Jud and the uncovering of the affair. We have discovered such monies that nobody could believe, all sucked from the blood of the Muslims. (*Zayni* 111; 131)

On the following pages, however, the chief spy of Cairo reports to Zakariyya how Zayni kept al-Jud for ninety-three days in a private prison without harming him and provided him with all the comforts. As time went on and Zayni was urged to recover the sum, however, he personally went to al-Jud asking him to confess. Al-Jud did not confess, and thus Zayni used torture. The chief spy of Cairo reports in detail the cruel torture Zayni inflicted on al-Jud, including menacing al-Jud's first son in order to know where the money was hidden. The ambiguous nature of Zayni appears in this episode in having really tried to get from al-Jud the information he required without using violent methods, an act completely unnecessary for someone like Zakariyya. What Ghitani portrays through Barakat's behavior is a contradictory attitude towards an ideal of justice in which Zayni initially believes but which is ready to give up as soon as it shows to be ineffective. Zayni's return to brutal methods
stands as an unsuccessful attempt to improve the methods of justice in Egypt, and it
fictionally coincides with both the regime's betrayal of revolutionary ideals and with
its incoherent propaganda before the people.

A similar attitude toward modern innovations is portrayed when Zayni Barakat
decides to put lamps in the streets of Cairo, without any cost for the population and in
order to make the city safer at nighttime. This episode, inexistent in Ibn Iyas'
chronicle, stands as a critique of traditionalist Egyptians' attitudes towards innovation
in general and particularly to the changes introduced by modern technologies. In this
case, Eco's and Ghitani's portrayal of medievalist views coincide, and are strikingly
similar in both the reasons for rejecting innovation and methods for counteracting it.
The following passage is extracted from the sermon that all the imams of Cairo made
on the occasion of the of the lamps' appearance in Cairo:

They say that in many a nation in the past, rulers have hung lamps in
the streets. Would they mention one specific example? Did our Messenger
walk in the light of lamps? [...] People of Egypt! Go to the house of Zayni
Barakat ibn Musa, individually and in groups, by yourself or with others! Go
to him! Go to his house! Demand that the ban of the lamps, which pierce the
veil of modesty, which encourage women to go out after the evening prayers.
Go to him in supplication and with resolve, begging firmly! Let not his slick
talk dissuade you from that which you have decided. Do not stray from your
goal. The lamps are a sign of the end of time. They are indications of a world
deviating from God's design. Demand that our Sultan cut in two halves
whomever has suggested this idea to Zayni, burn him, stone him. (Zayni 96-
97; 114-115)

After the reaction of the most conservative circles the Sultan decides to
withdraw the lamps. The nocturnal fight occurring in the streets of Cairo between two
opposite Mamluk factions, interrupted by the presence of the lamps, is free to start
again. In addition, the Hanafi judge, which supported the lamps' initiative, is expelled
from his school for having expressed a dissenting view. Ghitani portrays through this
episode a conflict between medievalist and modern attitudes toward technological progress and innovation. In his novel, the failure of a project aimed at modernizing Egyptian life in a society dominated — as in Eco— by traditionalist and oppressive forces, leads to a more pessimistic conclusion. In both novels, the modernist attitudes are defeated, although in different modalities: if William partially succeeds through Adso's education, Shaykh Abu al-Su'ud's disciple is neutralized by those same forces that on one hand keep in check the civil society and on the other fight with more conservative parties.

The hanging of lamps and their eventual removal, seen as a metaphor for technological progress, appears in Zayni Barakat as a secondary problem in comparison with the issue of social control and oppression, but is portrayed in a similar fashion as Eco's description of William's and Jorge's conflict. Banning the lamps from Cairo's streets, the religious authorities metaphorically impose a conception of the world and of history based on traditional views. As during the prophet Muhammad's time, i.e., eight hundred years before the narrated events, lamps did not exist, there is then no need for them to exist now. Their view closely resembles Jorge's conception of knowledge as "sublime recapitulation" instead of being research of innovative views. In both novels, the most traditionalist characters succeed in imposing their religious, or medieval teleology, but while in Eco this issue appears at the core of the narration, in Ghitani it is soon liquidated though with a similar outcome. Ghitani focuses more on the social oppression and in his novel the attempt towards a more "enlightened" conception of justice and of technological innovation fails, making of contemporary Egypt a prolongation of that medieval Egypt Ghitani chose for the setting of his novel.
V Conclusion

Always in balance between "philological reconstruction" and selected anachronisms, in both *The Name of the Rose* and *Zayni Barakat* the reader finds a reconstruction of the middle ages not so dissimilar from the present times. Medievalism appears as a mask for portraying contemporary issues and reflecting upon the past while qualifying its historical difference from the modern spirit as represented respectively by William of Baskerville, Shaykh Abu al-Su'ud, Said al-Juhaini and partially by Zayni Barakat himself. The modern spirit portrayed through these characters, as opposed to the medieval "barbarism," could be qualified as openness toward a society free from obtuse authoritarianism, open to the new and to more horizontal relations of power, and it is clearly oppositional to characters like those of Bernard Gui and Zakariyya Ibn Radi.

Working in two different cultural contexts and traditions, both Umberto Eco and Gamal al-Ghitani show their concern for the agency of authoritarian powers in society, and describe their cultural standings as deeply bound with traditionalist values and concerned with social control. Their styles contribute to the "dark" atmosphere dominating in both novels and typical of medievalism as a genre. In both novels these obscure forces will win over the positive ones, but with different outcomes. In Eco their victory will be partially counteracted by William of Baskerville's partial success in Adso's education. In *Zayni Barakat* Said al-Juhaini will be destroyed instead in his attempt to be loyal to the principles of justice promoted by Shaykh Abu al-Su'ud.

Despite their similarities between the plots of these two novels, there are nonetheless differences in the way Eco and Ghitani, from their cultural standpoints,
enact their reconstructions of the past. In Eco the rupture with the traditional teleology produced by the progress-informed conception of time is portrayed as problematic. Eco's critical source of interrogation coincides with an open questioning over the "pride of reason," the right of the authorities of imposing a divinely-legitimated social view of the world is portrayed as opposed to the scientific and limited knowledge over the secrets of nature. Eco does not provide any answers to the cultural problem of post-modern Italy except for the "intermediate" position of Adso of Melk.

Rather than a historicist reconstruction of the past, Ghitani portrays in Zayni Barakat a parallelism between two different ages and military defeats in Egyptian history. The cyclical pattern of a history that repeats itself is accompanied with men's feeling of powerlessness toward the ongoing historical process. At the same time, separated by the historiographic problem presented in Eco, Ghitani portrays a timeless conflict between the State and its subjects. He enacts in the sixteenth century that conflict between individuals and secret agents of the State as a lived experience of his in the twentieth century. But the conflict between modern and traditional values is presented also in Zayni Barakat, through the hanging of lamps and the effort of not using torture as means of interrogation. Both attempts emblematically fail, creating a correspondance between Mamluk and Nasserist Egypt, thus constituting repetition but also continuity of issues and themes. Through the destruction of Said medieval time is portrayed as still present despite the modernizing attempts of some, and emblematically portray the condition of the post-revolutionary generation inheritor of noble principles but challenged by the most conservative members of their society.
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