

Foucault's Pendulum

Umberto Eco , William Weaver (Translator)

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Foucault's Pendulum is divided into ten segments represented by the ten Sefiroth. The novel is full of esoteric references to the Kabbalah. The title of the book refers to an actual pendulum designed by the French physicist Léon Foucault to demonstrate the rotation of the earth, which has symbolic significance within the novel.

Bored with their work, and after reading too many manuscripts about occult conspiracy theories, three vanity publisher employees (Belbo, Diotallevi and Casaubon) invent their own conspiracy for fun. They call this satirical intellectual game "The Plan," a hoax that connects the medieval Knights Templar with other occult groups from ancient to modern times. This produces a map indicating the geographical point from which all the powers of the earth can be controlled—a point located in Paris, France, at Foucault's Pendulum. But in a fateful turn the joke becomes all too real.

The three become increasingly obsessed with The Plan, and sometimes forget that it's just a game. Worse still, other conspiracy theorists learn about The Plan, and take it seriously. Belbo finds himself the target of a real secret society that believes he possesses the key to the lost treasure of the Knights Templar.

Orchestrating these and other diverse characters into his multilayered semiotic adventure, Eco has created a superb cerebral entertainment.

Foucault's Pendulum Details

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Author : Umberto Eco , William Weaver (Translator)

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From Reader Review Foucault's Pendulum for online ebook

Ahmed says

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Luís C. says

Let's be clear: Eco is a titan. This opus embarks the reader in a story with multiple bends, one is carried away by the incredible erudition of the author, by the obvious mastery of his art Rare are the books that really raise the level of the reader. Eco does it every time. A Landmark!

The Pendulum of Foucault is a book that exceeds me. It is full of references, abstruse authors, outdated ideologies, strange rites. Every time I will remember it, I will get out of it. It is a reminder of the Dan Browns of this world, the publications of the Bogdanov brothers and the sociology thesis of Elisabeth Tessier. This is both the ultimate conspiracy and an ode to these little boys who were we and who amused themselves by putting secrets on our boredom to give us importance.

This Is Not The Michael You're Looking For says

This book consists of predominantly two things: (1) Endless dialogue by mentally unbalanced paranoid conspiracy theorists; (2) Endless dialogue by scholars who study mentally unbalanced paranoid conspiracy theorists. This is not a bad book, but its not an easy read, and not really a particularly enjoyable one. My enjoyment, or lack thereof, was tempered by the fact that I was apparently trying to read one story, but the author was trying to tell a different one. Put another way, I was trying to read about plot, but the author was trying to write about person. Conceptually, this book is fascinating, but the execution was wanting; again, this may be because Eco was trying to tell a different story than I wanted to read.

Many others describe this book as "thrilling" or a "roller coaster ride" but it's not. It's supposed to be, I think,

but the tension is lost in the morass of dialogue and background. In the end, rather than being a book about conspiracy theorists (which is what 90% of the text is about), it's almost more a book about self-image. It does show how conspiracy theorists can make any idea self-prophecisizing (sp?), but it could have been done in a much cleaner, approachable fashion.

Biron Pa?a says

Foucault Sarkac? 900 küsur sayfal?k tarif edilmesi imkâns?z, devasa bir roman. Eco'nun uçsuz bucaks?z birikiminden ve zekas?ndan ç?kan müthi? z?rval?klarla dolu, tam anlam?yla bir **roman**.

Çevirmen ?adan Karadeniz'in de de?indi?i ve arka kapakta gördü?ümüz gibi, kitab? nas?l tan?mlayaca??m?z bir muamma, çünkü kitabı her aç?dan bakmak mümkün. 8 y?ll?k, ara?t?r?lan 2000 kitapl?k bir eme?in sonucu. Yine de Karadeniz'in yaptı?? tan?mlama kitapla ilgili yap?labilecek en iyi tan?mlamalardan biri: Foucault Sarkac? 500 y?ll?k irrasyonel dü?ünmenin tarihi. Ama buna ek olarak kar??l?ks?z bir a?k?n, hayat?n karma??kl???n?n ve anlams?zl???n?n, tarihin ve kitaplar?n yapayl???n?n, ç?a??n s?k?c?l???n?n, alg?n?n s?n?r?l?i??n?n ve uçsuz bucaks?zl???n?n yani izafili?inin, 68 ku?a??n?n, ikinci dünya sava??n?n, Tap?nakç?lar?n, Kabala'n?n, tarihsel figürlerin (Shakespeare, H. Sabbah vb.) Joyce'un ve Proust'un, edebi oyunlar?n, edebiyat? konu edinmenin, ?talya'n?n s?radan bir kasabas?nda çocuk olman?n, cesaretin, bir ?eylere inanman?n ve bence güclü bir ?ekilde varolu?un roman?.

Kitap asl?nda çok basit bir kurguya sahip. Bir yay?nevindeki üç arkada? "?eytanc?" ad?n? takt?klar? insanlar?n getirdi?i tap?nakç?larla, gizli örgütlerle, delice kompl? teorileriyle dolu sayfalar? incelerler ve "Plan" ad?n? verdikleri kendi alternatif tarihlerini üretirler. Onlar yava? yava? Plan?n içine çekildikçe, plan?n içinde kayboldukça biz de kayboluruz.

Bu basit kurgunun her a?amas? müthi? derinlikli bir ?ekilde yaz?lm?? Eco taraf?ndan. Müthi? renkli karakterlerin, müthi? renkli dünyalar?n ciddiyetle yaz?lmas?n? okumak çok güzeldi. Belbo'nun kar??l?ks?z a?k?, Brezilya böülümleri, Tap?nak ?övalyelerinin resmi tarihi, Belbo'nun metinleraras?l?kla dolup ta?an File'lar?, 250 sayfal?k göstergebilim ?ovu, karakterlerin de?i?imi... Muhte?em bir yolculuk.

Ben roman?n asl?nda tümünü kaplayan, pek de de?inilmeyen bir ?eye de?inmek istiyorum: Bence Foucault Sarkac? bir varolu? roman?. Modern ç?a?da ak?lc? hayat?n s?radanl???n?, varolu?unun s?radanl???n? ve anlams?zl???n? kald?ramayan bireylerin bir masala, bir büyüye çekilmesini anlat?yor. Rasyonel akl? bir kö?eye b?rak?p hayat? daha anlaml?, daha gizemli k?labilmek ad?na irrasyonelle?erek hayatı kalmaya çal??man?n roman? Foucault Sarkac?.

O kadar büyük, o kadar dolu bir roman ki hakk?nda bir ?eyler yazmak gerçekten zor. Bu büyülü?ü benim için çok anlaml?. Bazen edebiyat?n yapay, sahte bir ?ey oldu?unu, okurlar?n zaten anlamayaca??n?, yazarlar?n büyük k?sm?n?n da bu yüzden bir iki bir y?lda roman yazd???n? dü?ünüyorum. Ama Umberto Eco gibi bir romanc?n?n olmas? bana ümit veriyor. Sanki o sahteli?in içinde, bu i?i olmas? gerekti?i gibi yapan az say?daki insandan biri oldu?unu dü?ündüm. Yani Amerikan edebiyat?n?n onde gelen yazarlar? P. Roth, Paul Auster gibi yazarlarken, dünyan?n bir yerinde Umberto Eco'nun ya?am?? olmas? çok büyük bir ?ey. Sekiz y?l? bir romanla geçirdi?ini dü?ündükçe ve zaten metin bize bu roman?n ancak böyle bir u?ra?la ortaya ç?kabilece?ini gösterdi?inde, ona duydu?um sayg?y? ve hayranl? tarif etmekte zorlan?yorum.

Foucault Sarkac? bütün bu muhte?emli?ine, ak?c?l???na, e?lencelili?ine ra?men zaman zaman okuru zorluyor. Bu sebeple ba?layacak olanlara kitapla ilgili birkaç ön bilgi ve tavsiye vermek istiyorum. Öncelikle

Kabala nedir, ne de?ildir bak?labilir. Bununla birlikte Saint-Martin-des-Champs biraz ara?t?r?labilir. Google sa? olsun, müzeyi gezebiliyoruz. Ben kitaba ba?lad?ktan sonra müzeyi biraz gezdim ve Eco'nun romanda epey yer ay?rd??? müze bölümleri daha keyifli hale geldi. Sarkac?n ne oldu?u, nas?l çal??t???na bak?labilir: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aMxLV...>

Kitap Kabala'n?n 10 sefirah?yla bölümlenmi?. Bu sefirahlar?n her birinin kendi temas? oldu?u için, Eco da bu tema üzerinden roman? kurgulam??. Çevirmen ?adan Karadeniz'in aç?klamalar?yla Eco'nun sefirah aç?klamalar? ço?u zaman uyu?mam??, nedenini bilmiyorum.

Kitab?n ilk bölümü, ilk sefirah Keter, yani Taç, idrak edilemez bir mertebe. Bu yüzden ilk bölüm anlams?, takip etmesi çok zor bir bölüm. Keter'i okuyup "Ben ne okumaya ba?lad?m böyle" diye bir y?lg?nl??a kap?lman?za gerek yok. ?kinci ve üçüncü sefirahlar? Hokmah ve Binah, yani bilgelik ve anlay?? ile her ?eyi anlayacaks?n?z. Tap?nak ?övalyelerinin de ço?u ki?inin bildi?i hikâyesi Eco'nun muazzam yazarl??? ile anlat?lacak.

Ama kitab?n tek zor bölümü ilk bölüm de?il, alt?nc? sefirah Tiferet, ki Karadeniz bunu Güzellik sefirah? oldu?unu yazm?? sözlükte ama Eco bunun sab?r sefirah? oldu?unu söylüyor. Bu bölüm gerçekten de sab?r isteyen bir bölüm, ama güzel bir bölüm. Burada kahramanlar?m?z irrasyonel dü?ünmenin içine dü?üyorlar 220 sayfa boyunca ve burada takip etmenizin bence pek mümkün olmayan tarihsel olaylara göstergelimsel ba?lar kuruluyor.

Eco, t?pk? ondan çok etkilendi?ini gördü?ümüz Orhan Pamuk gibi, roman?n içinde defalarca bu roman?n nas?l bir roman oldu?unu anlat?yor. Roman? nas?l okumam?z gerekti?inden, roman?n maksad?n?n, amac?n?n, kulland??? yöntemlerin ne oldu?unu okura bildiriyor. Bu yüzden zorlansan?z dahi, kitap bitti?inde okurunu hiçbir ?ey anlamam?? biçimde ortada b?rakm?yor.

Bir Kara Kitap hayran? olarak bu kitaptan etkilenmemem olanaks?zm?? zaten. Kara Kitap'? okuyup sevenlere bu kitab? hiç durmadan hemen okumalar?n? tavsiye ediyorum.

Çeviriye de k?saca de?inmek istiyorum. Önsözde Karadeniz'in çevirisisi "tutkulu" olarak niteleniyor ve buna kat?l?yorum. Arkadaki sözlük gerçekten çok i?e yar?yor. Ama Öztürkçe'nin çeviride i?i oldu?unu dü?ünmüyorum. Bir çevirmenin buna hakk? oldu?unu da dü?ünmüyorum. Karadeniz e?er bunu tercih ediyorsa özgür oldu?u kendi eserlerinde yapabilir. Ama biz Eco okumak istiyoruz ve çevirmen bir sanat? de?il, parayla tutulan bir çal??an. Bu yüzden de okurun taleplerine göre i? yapmak zorunda. Hayat?mda Öztürkçe kullanan bir tane insan görmedim, neden romanda bir karakterin y?ld?zbak???m, kat???m, erginleme, yengi vs. dedi?ini okuyay?m ki? Okurken s?k s?k sinirlendim. Kitab?n kendisini sürekli ara?t?rarak okurken bir de arada Tdk'da dahi olmayan uydurma kelimelerin anımlar?n? ara?t?rmak çok gereksiz. Y?ld?zbak???m diye Google'da aratt???n?zda bu roman ç?k?yor sonuç olarak. Usunuz bats?n.

Bununla birlikte 106. bölümün son paragraf?n?n Karadeniz taraf?ndan nedensizce kesildi?ini de bildirmem gerekiyor. Benim elimde 17. bask? vard?, sonraki bask?lar? bilemiyorum. Önemli de bir paragraft?.

Romanla ilgili yaz?lacak çok ?ey var, bu yaz? özetin özeti dahi olamaz; Belbo'nun bir dosyas?n? bile bunun be? kat? uzunlu?unda de?erlendirmek mümkün. ?imdilik akl?ma gelenler bunlar, hayat?m?n sonuna kadar defalarca okuyaca??m? biliyorum bu roman?.

Nikos Tsentemeidis says

?να βιβλ?ο που θα το σταματ?σεις πριν τις 100 σελ?δες ? θα το απολα?σεις αργ? μ?χρι τ?λους. Το γιατ? το απ?λαυσα ε?ναι εντελ?ς υποκειμενικ?, καθ?ς θεωρ? πως ε?ναι αρκετ? δ?σκολο και βαρετ? για τους πιο πολλο?ς. Στην αρχ? σκ?φτηκα πως ε?ναι καλ?τερο απ? το «?νομα του Ρ?δου», αλλ? συμπ?ρανα ?τι ε?ναι δ?ο μεγ?λα ?ργα, πολ? διαφορετικ? μεταξ? τους.

Στις 900 σελ?δες ο Eco αποδεικν?ει ?τι ε?ναι απ? τους ελ?χιστους μεγ?λους γν?στες της ιστορ?ας. ?πειρες πληροφορ?ες καθαρ? ιστορικ?, αλλ? και στα ?ρια του μ?θου περ? μυστικ?ν οργαν?σεων, κλασικ?ν συνομωσι?ν και τ?γματα ιπποτ?v. Το βιβλ?ο αυτ? αποτελε? μ?α κατηγορ?α μ?νο του. Τ?σο πολυσ?νθετο.

Τ?λος, κ?τι που δεν αφορ? το βιβλ?ο. Κατ?ληξα στο ?τι ο Dan Brown ε?ναι ?νας μ?τριος μιμητ?ς του τερ?στιου Umberto Eco.

Ian "Marvin" Graye says

PLAYFUL:

An Opening Gambol

While I first read this novel in 2009, I bought a second-hand copy in May, 2013 for \$7, which I thought was a bargain price for the degree of pleasure it's given me.

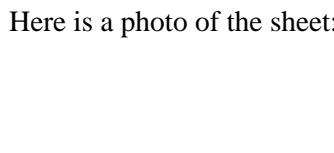
Only when I was half way through did I notice a sheet of white paper slipped into the last pages.

It shows four hand-drawn circles, each of which contains the name of a city and a number.

If the numbers represent years, they cover 21 years. If you add 2 and 1, you get the number 3. If you examine the gaps between the years, you get the numbers 11, 4 and 6. If you add these numbers, you get 21, which when added together, comes to 3. If you add 1, 1, 4 and 6, you get 12, which when added, comes to 3.

If the numbers are not years and you add them together, you get 8,015. If you add these numbers, you get 14, and if you add 1 and 4, you get 5. If you add 3 and 5, you get 8, which is exactly twice the number of circles on the sheet.

Here is a photo of the sheet:



I've been back to the bookshop where I bought my copy, but the owner wasn't able to remember who she had bought the book from.

I'm not sure how many of these cities get mentioned in the novel [all but Madrid, as it turns out, unless I'm mistaken]. However, I've since discovered the following facts with the assistance of Professor Googlewiki.

Manchester is the home of the Manchester Unity of Odd Fellows in England, from which some Rosicrucian Orders derive their charter.

Madrid is the home of Gran Logia AMORC, Jurisdicción de Lengua Española para Europa, Africa y Australasia.

The Rosicrucian Order, Christian Order of the Hermetic Gold & Rose+Cross is based in Los Angeles.

In Paris, the Temple was a medieval fortress, located in what is now the 3rd arrondissement. The Knights Templar originally constructed it as their European headquarters.

If you have any ideas about the significance of this sheet of paper, please message me or post them in the comments below, with a spoiler warning. Alternatively, please send them with a stamped, addressed envelope containing US\$20 processing fee [plus any gratuity you are happy with] to my home address.

If you're the first to work out some sort of solution that convinces me of its authenticity, I'll post a photo of something that might absolutely amaze you.

P.S. Brian's hypothesis has convinced me.

How Foucault's Pendulum Works (Maybe)

1. Imagine the Earth is a perfectly spherical hollow ball (it is, you know, or is it?).
2. Imagine that a steel cable 6,371 kilometers long is attached to the bottom side of the North Pole. This is more or less the radius of the Earth.
3. Imagine that a really bloody heavy lead bob is attached to the end of the cable.
4. Let's imagine that the Earth isn't tilted off its axis.
5. Let's say we're sitting underground on a couch somewhere north of the Equator, and we drag the cable and bob over to the inside of the sphere, then we let it go, so that it starts swinging through the centre of the Earth and over to the other side.
6. Let's assume that the bob swings in the one plane, a constant relative to the space outside the sphere of the Earth, e.g., as measured relative to the stars.
6. Let's try to do this very carefully, just in case it swings back to exactly where we're sitting on the couch.
7. But it doesn't! (See steps 10 and 11.)
8. Let's assume that the bob swings so quickly that it takes an hour to swing back to the side it started (i.e., a complete cycle).
9. Let's assume that the Earth is rotating once every 24 hours (it is, you know, or is it?).
10. Every hour, the earth moves 15 degrees around its own 360 cycle ($360 \text{ degrees}/24 \text{ hours} = 15 \text{ degrees}$).

11. By the time the bob returns to our side of the Earth, it touches the inside of the sphere 15 degrees away from our couch.
12. Repeat another 23 times, and the bob comes full circle and smashes our couch.
13. Fortunately it doesn't smash us as well, because by now we understand how Foucault's Pendulum works, and we got off the couch just in time.
14. If we map the path of the bob, it will look something like this (except that there would be 24 repetitions instead of eight):

15. If we mapped 24 repetitions, the map would look more like a rose. Hence, in mathematics, this type of map is referred to as a "rose" or "rhodonea curve", and each half of a repetition (from the circumference to the centre) is called a "petal".
16. Hence, in "Foucault's Pendulum", Umberto Eco takes us from "The Name of the Rose" to "The Shape of the Rose".
17. It is possible that everything I've said to you so far is false.

SERIOUS:

The Quest for Happiness

"Foucault's Pendulum" is at once a Post-Modernist and an Existentialist novel.

Umberto Eco's focus is not just Religion. It's any form of ideology: Fascism, the Resistance, God, Socialism.

For Eco, these ideologies or belief systems are "Fixed Points" that determine our relationship with the cosmos.

While individual lives might be relatively chaotic, in constant motion, the belief systems are supposed to fix and secure our relationship with the universe. They create order.

The vehicles through which the novel explores these issues are the Word, the Book, the Manifesto, the Strategy, the Plan, even the Five Year Plan.

All of these things exist, because we don't quite know what we need or want. We're not yet happy, nor do we really know how to get happy. Each one is an apparatus which is offered to us to help in our quest for happiness.

The Credulity of the Non-Believer

Eco loosely quotes G.K. Chesterton as follows:

"When men stop believing in God, it isn't that they then believe in nothing: they believe in everything."

There is some uncertainty about the actual origin and wording of this quotation. I wondered whether it had simply been translated from English to Italian and then back to English, without checking the original. However, the more accurate version of it is:

"When people stop believing in God, they don't believe in nothing — they believe in anything."

Filling the Void

Religion maintains that God exists everywhere for us and that "the void does not exist". However, its opponents acknowledge that there is a void, but argue that it should not exist:

"A void had been created, and it has to be filled!"

What is to be done?

Somehow, the Book (whether or not it contains the "Holy Word") has become the vehicle with which to fill the void, create meaning, document beliefs and practices, and address the need to be happy.

Esoterica

Major Religions have their own Holy Book. However, side by side with them are heretical, esoteric and occult works that cater to the same need.

Many fraternities and orders have grown up around these books. [I wonder what proportion of the members are female?] Their members derive order from their order. In the case of the more military orders, the members also get their orders from their order.

To the extent that these books and beliefs have been perceived as heretical or threatening by mainstream religious institutions, a culture of secrecy has grown up around them, hence the term "secret societies".

The Mystery Dance

There is often a sense in which some level of mystery and imprecision needs to be preserved:

"The Templars' mental confusion makes them indecipherable."

Because heretical beliefs are erroneous in the eyes of the Church, Eco implies that error is almost a secondary issue within esoterica:

"An error can be the unrecognised bearer of truth. True esotericism does not fear contradiction."

What's more important is the question and the mystery, as opposed to the answer and the certainty.

A secret remains enchanting until it has been revealed, at which point it has been emptied of enchantment.

Eco even speculates that the secret might be that there is no secret, as long as those outside the order believe those inside know something they don't know.

Secrecy is more important than the substance of the secret. Perhaps what is most valuable is the bond between the members of the order.

The secret might simply be the framework or glue that initially connects them. Once the order is in place, it can survive of its own accord.

A Post-Modernist Prank

The Post-Modern aspects of the novel derive from the narrative in which its three protagonists (Casaubon, Belbo and Diotallevi) resolve to fabricate a work of esoterica, so that a specialist publisher for which they work can capitalize on a credulous market ("the Plan").

"Foucault's Pendulum" becomes a novel about the invention and construction of a work of non-fiction that is actually fictitious, perhaps one that even seeks to *"arrive at the truth through the painstaking reconstruction of a false text."*

The work needs to have words and facts and connections.

Like the bond of a secret society, the power of words emerges from their connection:

"Any fact becomes important when it's connected to another. The connection changes the perspective; it leads you to think that every detail of the world, every voice, every word written or spoken has more than its literal meaning, that it tells us of a Secret. The rule is simple: Suspect, only suspect. You can read subtexts even in a traffic sign that says 'No littering.' "

"Invent, Invent Wildly"

The protagonists discover that their creative process follows certain apparently spontaneous rules.

The foundation stone is:

"Concepts are connected by analogy. There is no way to decide at once whether an analogy is good or bad, because to some degree everything is connected to everything else."

That said, readers are more comfortable with the conventional, with what they have heard before, with facts with which they are already familiar:

"The connections must not be original. They must have been made before, and the more often the better, by others. Only then do the crossings seem true, because they are obvious."

The connections can be crazy, as long as the facts are recognised.

The protagonists are urged to:

"Invent, invent wildly, paying no attention to connections, till it becomes impossible to summarize."

"Tout se tient" in the end. If "tout se tient" in the end, the connection works. So it's right. It's right because it works.

This concept and phrase is usually attributed to the semiotician Saussure. In language, every element connects to, supports and is supported by every other element.

You can also see Eco's theories about how we read influencing not just his own novel, but the Book, the Plan that his protagonists are authoring.

Protagonists and Spectators

The characters' level of participation and commitment to the project varies:

"[Belbo] would never be a protagonist, he decided to become, instead, an intelligent spectator."

He can't write fiction, but he can fabricate non-fiction. He also maintains a diary in which he fictionalizes his past and present.

Ironically, despite his lack of creative self-confidence, Belbo remains a major protagonist in Eco's novel:

"Fear forced him to be brave. Inventing, he had created the principle of reality."

Existentialism, Doubt and Confidence

Belbo's realism results from courage, which in turn strengthens Casaubon's resolve.

Casaubon learns the real source of Belbo's lack of confidence, an event in his childhood when he had to fill in for a trumpeter in an impromptu public performance.

Casaubon concludes that there are for all of us certain decisive moments when we have to confront the essence of our character and fate. How we deal with these moments determines the happiness in the rest of our lives.

These moments don't necessarily have anything to do with God, Fate or the supernatural. Nor do they depend on the execution of Plans. They do have to deal with self-doubt and our inner reserves, both of energy and of insight.

These discoveries force Casaubon to question his adherence to the principles of the Enlightenment (including Cartesian Doubt).

"I had always thought that doubting was a scientific duty, but now I came to distrust the very masters who had taught me to doubt..."

"I devoted myself to Renaissance philosophers and I discovered that the men of secular modernity, once they had emerged from the darkness of the Middle Ages, had found nothing better to do than devote themselves to cabala and magic."

Eat a Peach

Casaubon has his own existential "trumpet moment" at the end of the novel, when he must learn to play with the cards that Fate has dealt him:

"...yet, like Belbo when he played the trumpet, when I bit into the peach, I understood the Kingdom and was one with it."

Ultimately, it's a moment that only the individual can handle. We have to figure it out for ourselves. There is no Plan, there is no Map.

"Kill me, then, but I won't tell you there's no Map. If you can't figure it out for yourself, tough shit."

"Foucault's Pendulum" takes us on this journey with consummate intelligence, traditional, esoteric and pop cultural allusiveness, literary skill and humour.

The Hollow Obelisk

AFFECTIONATE:

Casaubon's Last Letter to His Wife, Lia

*Animula vagula blandula, Hospes comesque corporis **

It hurts me to think I might not see you again.

It was all my fault. I was seduced away from you, not by another woman, but by another Other, something I thought was beautiful, because I was helping to construct it.

"People are hungry for plans, for cosmic solutions," you said. "If you create one, they'll descend on it like wolves. If you make one, they'll believe it. It's just make believe, Pow, it's wrong."

You always knew the book was superficial, that it was a fake, that there was no truth contained between its covers. But I made them all believe it had both truth and depth. Deep down, I knew they desired what this book had to offer: mystery, secrecy, answers, certainty. Even though once they had read it, the mystery would dissipate and they would be left satisfied, but empty, with nothing left, nothing new to strive for. Neither grail nor quest.

My audience was weak, unlike you, who are strong. You don't need answers from outside. You've found them within. In your own body.

"Oh, I almost forgot," you said. "I'm pregnant."

I remember looking at you just before you told me. You were caressing your belly, your breasts, even your ear lobes. I was oblivious. I couldn't understand these moves you were making. I had always thought of you as so slim and supple. Now I picture you as buxom, rosy-cheeked and healthy – I should have realised that you were pregnant.

You were trying to solve my problem. I was single-minded about that. You spoke confidently. You radiated a serene wisdom. You were luminous. You illuminated both of us. I realise now it might have been your

maternal instinct, a fledgling matriarchal authority, that there were three of us present - you, me and Giulio – and that you were speaking for all three.

I know you will take good care of Giulio. Please let him know I will always love him.

** Little soul, you charming little wanderer, my body's guest and partner - Hadrian*

A Letter from Lia to Giulio on the Occasion of His Thirteenth Birthday

My dearest son, Giulio, your father wasn't born a wise man, but he died a wise man. He didn't plan to be wise or to die when he did, but in many ways it was the result of a Plan, even if it wasn't only his Plan.

Your father died when he was ready. He died at peace. He died as soon as he had attained peace. He attained his peace when finally he understood his place in the world. He died when there was nothing left to learn and nothing left to understand.

By the time he died, he had learned his place in the cosmos, on this earth, on this rock that is our home.

Your father, Casaubon, was a philosophical man. In the end, the wisdom that he had finally learned gave him great certainty and comfort. You were a big part of it. You gave him certainty and comfort, he called you his philosopher's stone, that's how much you meant to him, but equally he hoped and knew that the wisdom he had gained would pass on to you.

This is what he learned and what he wanted me to tell you on his behalf. Having learned, he wanted to teach you.

There is no map. There is no plan. There is only life. There is only us. Your father has gone already. And one day, when I am gone, there will only be you left. But you will have your wife and your children, and each of them will be your philosophers' stone. Life will pass through your father and me to you and then from you and your wife to your children. These are the connections between us.

What your father learned is no secret, yet few get to know it in their lives. Too many people look without success for secrets, for profundity, for inspiration. Life is only as complicated as you make it. Happiness is an open secret, it's within you, it's in your soul, and all you have to do is open it.

I know how happy you have become, how happy you are. I am so proud of you, and I know your father would be too. We are grateful to you, our son, for the happiness you have given us and those who surround you.

SOUNDTRACK:

Beth Orton - "Sweetest Decline"

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SjF6ak...>

*"She weaves secrets in her hair
The whispers are not hers to share.*

*She's deep as a well.
She's deep as a well.*

*What's the use in regrets
They're just things we haven't done yet
What are regrets?
They're just lessons we haven't learned yet."*

Beth Orton & M. Ward - "Buckets of Rain" (Bob Dylan cover)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DlJ2hc...>

John Cale - "I Keep A Close Watch"

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7UX_Py...

This video is an hilarious juxtaposition of lyrics and imagery, just like the novel.

dEUS - "Nothing Really Ends"

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MbmBUU...>

*"The plan it wasn't much of a plan
I just started walking
I had enough of this old town
And nothing else to do
It was one of those nights
You wonder how nobody died
We started talking
You didn't come here to have fun
You said: "well I just came for you""*

dEUS - "Nothing Really Ends" [Live]

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lO_SwO...

READING NOTES:

I transferred my reading notes and updates to My Writings here:

<https://www.goodreads.com/story/show/...>

Jaidee says

3 "the last of the pentalogy of puzzlement and perseverance" stars

A very difficult book to both rate and review. As I read this book I reflected on four other books that have been considered great by so many of my friends and in particular, my darling partner.

These five books to me were seeds and shadows of greatness but I felt were so heavily flawed that they became only fair to average good reads for me.

These books are:

1. 1Q84 (2.5 stars)
2. Cloud Atlas (3 stars)
3. A Fine Balance (3 stars)
4. The Goldfinch (3 stars)
5. Foucault's Pendulum (3 stars)

They were all extremely long books that perplexed me and I had to push push push to get through.

I have no regrets reading any of them but I doubt I will return to any of them as they frustrated me to no end and I was not left with a feeling of awe or wonder or sense that I had read anything close to a masterpiece but rather more like half finished paintings or half formed statues , tepid tea, cold pizza.

These books often had me question myself on my level of intelligence, my sense of esthetics or if I was truly a worthwhile reader as these books were raved about by many people I admire and a few I even love.

In the end, however, I am entitled to feel ambivalent about what I read, like what I like and see these books as struggles that helped me grow as a reader and further define my tastes in literature.

This book in particular, challenged me throughout as at most I understood a third of the context. I admired the fine line between truth and delusion and references to history, religion, science and magic. I could have spent much longer on this novel and could have done much research to deepen my understanding but would throughout the book consciously choose not to.

I will leave you with a quote from the book that sums up the main gist of the book to my very limited understanding of what this novel is about:

"There are no bigger secrets because the moment a secret is revealed, it seems little. There is only an empty secret. A secret that keeps slipping through your fingers. The secret of the orchid is that it signifies and affects the testicles. But the testicles signify a sign of the zodiac, which in turn signifies an angelic hierarchy, which then signifies a musical scale, and the scale signifies a relationship among the humors. And so on...."

And so my reading adventures will continue.

Nathan says

The best book I have ever read. It is the creepiest, deepest, and most brilliantly executed piece of literature. Umberto Eco is a genius, and if I could have a conversation with anyone, it would be him.

The book, however, is very difficult to read. The language is dense, and in the first 200 pages, it beats you

over the head with history of the Knights Templar and the Rosicrucians. All of this history is necessary to make the second half cause you to shit your pants. It's basically about these guys trying to write a fictional book about the plan for the universe by tieing together all of the secret societies and cults. While they weave together all of this to create fiction, it all begins to work as fact. Then, really creepy shit starts going down.

I recommend this book to EVERYONE. Just be patient, it will pay off.

Dolors says

“ “Us two? All three of us are in this. If we don’t come out honorably, we’ll all look silly.”

“Silly to whom?”

“Why, to history. Before the tribunal of Truth.”

“***Quid est veritas?***” Belbo asked.

“Us,” I said.” ” (p.435)

Truth? What is truth? Truth is relative. Or isn’t it?

The fact that Umberto Eco portrays one of his characters quoting *Pontius Pilate*’s assertion that truth is hard to ascertain with some sort of consistent resonance of a Nietzschean Superman who has passed “beyond good and evil” is no coincidence.

There is nothing superfluous or redundant in Eco’s challenging and maybe even misinformative novel, which results to be an erudite map of connections throughout the history of humankind in a quest to find meaning to the mystery of existence.

Or so believe the three protagonists of this complicated historical fugue, Casaubon, Belbo and Diotallevi, when they decide to embark on a mission they call “*The Plan*” to decipher the encrypted message inscribed in an ancient parchment brought to Garamond Press in Milan, a firm where Belbo and Diotallevi work as editors, by a suspicious Knight Templar fanatic called Ardent, who claims the document to be proof of the existence of a master plan of secret societies which has been passed down for centuries involving telluric energy that will give unlimited powers to whoever capable of unraveling its encoded enigma.

Casaubon, acting as an omniscient narrator and a Doctor whose thesis is focused in the Knights Templar and the collection of German secret societies in the 17th century called Rosicrucians, goes forward and backward in time to display the creation of “*The Plan*”, which starts as a harmless game involving random computing processes and the analysis of symbols and semiotics through historical facts only to develop into a full-scale obsession blending speculation with the most shocking conclusions about some historical personalities ranging from *Francis Bacon* and *Shakespeare* to *Elizabeth I* or *Hitler*.

Even the characters of the novel, the quotations at the beginning of each chapter and the division of the story following the Kabbalah esoteric tradition carry extra meaning to reinforce Eco’s trial of the Western arcane tradition.

Casaubon is presented as the epitome of logic and sense, the skeptic type as a counterpoint to ascetic Diotallevi, who is in turn convinced by his passion for Kabbalah that he comes from Jewish ancestry without any real evidence.

Belbo arises as the anti-heroic protagonist whose biggest frustration relays in his inability to become a writer after an alienated childhood that shaped him with insecurities and a low self-esteem. “*The Plan*” represents Belbo’s triumph over his past failures and he clings to it until it becomes a life consuming mania that transcends into fatal consequences.

Eco's idea of femininity is presented in the dichotomy between the characters of Lorenza and Lia, the first conveying the reincarnated Gnostic muse Sophia, the forbidden fruit and the volcanic passion of love; the second depicting the idea of fertility, matriarchal authority and nourishing balance.

On Lia:

"You live on the surface. You sometimes seem profound, but it's only because you piece a lot of surfaces together to create impression of depth, solidity. That solidity would collapse if you tried to stand it up" (p. 365)

On Lorenza:

"For I am the first and the last. I am the honored and the hated. I am the saint and the prostitute." —
Fragment of Nag Hammadi 6.2. (p. 41)

Eco's intellectual display of historical facts commingles with his deep knowledge of ancient traditions and ancestral esoteric beliefs while playing with the reader, who finds himself in a true terra incognita, lacking the necessary background to be able to discriminate factual truth from fiction, mesmerizing him with obscure spirituality and metaphysical philosophy concluding with the controversial *Conspiracy Theory* in the form of the quintessential battle among the forces of darkness.

What is the message behind this deliberate scholarly obfuscation?

Is there a hidden lesson to be learnt amidst this subtle intellectual and emotional manipulation?

Is Reason or Faith the conduit to find the meaning of existence, the truth of the making of History?

Is life the biggest joke we've been submitted to?

Eco laughs unashamedly at having pulled the reader's leg and demonstrated his point with dexterous subterfuges and his disguised critic tone on spirituality.

But beware my fellow reader. Eco's position, which has been delivered with much ambiguity, biplay and paradoxical meandering, might be a hard blow to take hitting the soul where it hurts the most because it proves the insignificance and the meaningless purpose of existence. And that is something I am not ready to accept as the fallible and imperfect human being I am.

"Where have I read that at the end, when life, surface upon surface, has become completely encrusted with experience, you know everything, the secret, the power, and the glory, why you were born, why you are dying, and how it all could have been different? You are wise. But the greatest wisdom, at that moment, is knowing that your wisdom is too late. You understand everything when there is no longer anything to understand." (p. 640)

Will says

Imagine three sarcastic, over-educated editors who work at a vanity publisher. Owing to their occupation, they naturally end up reading an abundance of books about ridiculously grand conspiracy theories and occult societies - the Freemasons, the Templars, the Rosicrucians, the Illuminati (Bavarian and otherwise), and so on. So they start to play a sort of free-association game: Let's connect all these things, using the same half-mad logic as the authors of these books, into one grand design. Thus The Plan is born.

But they're too good at it. The Plan starts to get away from them. After so long immersed in the dream-logic of conspiracy theories you can form seemingly-natural (and *ominous*) connections between any pair of

things. So when strange and ominous things *do* happen, when the pieces seem to start falling into place, is it just coincidence? Are the things they thought they were making up *real*?

Yes, as others have said, you'll get more out of this book if you know multiple languages, have a dictionary handy, have some background in the occult, etc. Considering that the author and the protagonists are all polyglot intellectuals with doctorates in literature and/or medieval history, it'll naturally help you if you are similarly educated. But I don't think that's necessary to enjoy the book overall. It is wry and intellectual but at its heart it's a detective thriller: A friend goes missing and Our Hero needs to find out why. And he finds a lot more than he bargained for.

Some notes for readers: this book follows the pattern "Our Hero, just before the Final Confrontation, takes a moment to flash back to all the circumstances leading him to this moment." So you start out right near the end. You will be confused and overwhelmed. *Press on, dear reader.* All the important things will be explained. Don't worry too much if you don't know everything about Kabbalah or Socialism in Italy in the 1960s - they are not vital to the story. But reading about them does add to the enjoyment.

In fact, I think that might be one of my favorite things about this book: the sheer breadth of the references and allusions - medieval history to James Joyce to the Beatles. I could probably spend a couple of months plugging everything I didn't understand from my first reading into Wikipedia and seeing what I find out.

Which I plan to do. On my second reading.

Manuel Antão says

If you're into stuff like this, you can read the full review.

The Revelation of the Identical:"Foucault's Pendulum" by Umberto Eco

"You cannot escape one infinite, I told myself, by fleeing to another; you cannot escape the revelation of the identical by taking refuge in the illusion of the multiple."

In "Foucault's Pendulum" by Umberto Eco

I've always been a keen follower of Prof. Eco's books, both literary and academic. If there's one question I would like to ask him is this:

"What about the question of being, as the Greeks first raised it? Do you think Professor that this question is no longer a question, perhaps entirely dissolved by the sign and/or the 'language game'? Ontology dissolved by epistemology (in the modern era) and which is in turn also dissolved by the signs humans come up (post-modern era). William of Ockham, Nietzsche, Wittgenstein rule supreme -- matter closed. No question of being. Is that it, Professor?"

There's more on the other side of the rainbow.

Traveller says

Descartes said: Cogito, ergo sum.

Eco says: I seek meaning, therefore I am human.

It's very hard to succinctly describe exactly what this novel is. From looking at the plot description, you may be forgiven for assuming that it is a book like *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*, by Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh and Henry Lincoln, or Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*. There is an overlap in the fact that all three books deal with conspiracies that revolve around the mystical and mythical order of the Knight's Templar, (view spoiler)

as well as the mystical and mythical quest for the Holy Grail, and mystical aspects revolving around the Torah, the Bible, and various cults that have existed around all of the aforementioned cultural phenomena. However, that is more or less where the similarity ends. The Baigent book presents itself as non-fiction; as a serious thesis presenting an alternate history of Christ, Christianity and phenomena such as that of the myth of the Holy Grail and the true origin of the Knight's Templar. *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* was first published in 1982, and its authors apparently built most of their theory on the testimony of Pierre Plantard for the argument in their book.

Now bear with me on this: One of the theses I'd like to pose in my review, is that Eco's novel, *Foucault's Pendulum*, (which was first published in 1988), is to some extent reactionary to this whole pallaver, which caused a big stink toward the end of the twentieth century, especially since many readers had taken the *Holy Blood* and the *Holy Grail* pretty seriously:

"The Prieuré de Sion, translated from French as Priory of Sion, is a name given to multiple groups, both real and fictitious. The most controversial is a fringe fraternal organisation, founded and dissolved in France in 1956 (abiding by the 1901 French Law of Associations) by Pierre Plantard.

*In the 1960s, Plantard created a fictitious history for that organization, describing it as a secret society founded by Godfrey of Bouillon on Mount Zion in the Kingdom of Jerusalem in 1099, conflating it with a genuine historical monastic order, the Abbey of Our Lady of Mount Zion. In Plantard's version, the priory was devoted to installing a secret bloodline of the Merovingian dynasty on the thrones of France and the rest of Europe. This myth was expanded upon and popularised by the 1982 pseudohistorical book *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail* and later claimed to be factual in the preface of the 2003 novel *The Da Vinci Code*.*

After becoming a cause célèbre from the late 1960s to the 1980s, the mythical Priory of Sion was exposed as a ludibrium created by Plantard as a framework for his claim of being the Great Monarch prophesied by Nostradamus. Evidence presented in support of its historical existence and activities before 1956 was discovered to have been forged and then planted in various locations around France by Plantard and his

accomplices. Nevertheless, many conspiracy theorists still persist in believing that the Priory of Sion is an age-old cabal that conceals a subversive secret.

The Priory of Sion myth has been exhaustively debunked by journalists and scholars as one of the great hoaxes of the 20th century. Some skeptics have expressed concern that the proliferation and popularity of books, websites and films inspired by this hoax have contributed to the problem of conspiracy theories, pseudohistory and other confusions becoming more mainstream. Others are troubled by the romantic reactionary ideology unwittingly promoted in these works. (See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Priory_of_Sion)

In the novel under review, Eco has written an elaborate critique of hoaxes such as that of Plantard and of others like him who have made an appearance through the course of history. (Plantard seems to make an appearance in the novel as well, (view spoiler)). Eco's novel exposes the perfidious at worst and delusive at best nature of conspiracy beliefs and scams such as these, and while doing so, he shows the history of many theories and myths that have existed around secret societies and occult schools of thought through the centuries. Eco displays a delicious sense of humor, poking fun with many of the ideas and personages. (For instance, Eco even manages to work in, in a very humorous way, the controversy around the 'real identity' of Shakespeare and similar controversies that don't usually have anything to do with the Knights Templar or secret societies as such.)

However, the novel is more than just that. It also extensively delves into the fields of semiotics (the examination of meaning and how it is interpreted) and epistemology, and even ontology.

This brings me to make a confession: silly little me, not knowing my history of science well enough, had, until I researched Foucault's pendulum, (-the actual scientific discovery/mechanism, not the novel), not realized that Léon Foucault is not the same person at all as Michel Foucault , the poststructuralist sociologist/ philosopher/psychologist, the latter whom I would immediately associate with Eco, via the link of being associated with linguistics and semiotics, since both published work in these areas in more or less the sixties to the eighties, so I'd be much more likely to associate Michel Foucault with Eco rather than I would associate Leon Foucault, a physicist living in the nineteenth century, with Eco.

Perhaps I can be excused for having fallen foul of the psychological phenomenon of tending to want 'closure'. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Closure>...

This psychological phenomenon can be illustrated more clearly by a similar phenomenon that we find with our brain's cognitive function in regard to perception; and most strikingly so when it comes to visual perception. (See emergence and reification here: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gestalt>)
Reification: In the image, a triangle is perceived in picture A, though no triangle is there. In pictures B and D the eye recognizes disparate shapes as "belonging" to a single shape, in C a complete three-dimensional shape is seen, where in actuality no such thing is drawn.

A bit further down on the linked page, we see that :"The fundamental principle of gestalt perception is the law of *prägnanz* , (pithiness), which says that we tend to order our experience in a manner that is regular, orderly, symmetric, and simple. [And meaningful]. "

In fact, my error with the "wrong" Foucault, perfectly illustrates the law of closure which states that individuals perceive objects such as shapes, letters, pictures, etc., as being whole when they are not complete. Even if you literally 'don't have the full picture' your mind will fill it in for you, because doing this tends to make our daily functioning more fluid and efficient, except on the off-chance that our brain filled the picture in **WRONG**.

Most often though, the filling in it does, is quite adequate; since it bases its assumptions on previous experience. Our minds file all of our experience in a sort of subliminal database which is often the source for a 'sixth sense' feeling about something.

I also fell foul of the law of similarity, which states that elements within an assortment of objects are perceptually grouped together if they are similar to each other. In my mind, Michel Foucault and Umberto Eco often get grouped together in regard to structuralist/poststructuralist theory, so I automatically grouped them together. But, as regard to the Foucault referred to in the novels' title, I was **WRONG!**

Why am I embroidering on my little mistake for so long, you may ask? Well, because it so eloquently describes exactly the kind of thing Eco is talking about in this book. Psychologically speaking, humans simply don't like things that don't make sense.

We tend to group things together based on various associations, through likeness, symbolism, or a variety of other associations.

We also need to see the 'sense' of things, we need to know the 'why' of things, which is why, perhaps, it was necessary for so many religions to put the emphasis on belief as opposed to knowledge, on faith as opposed to proof, and why Jesus exhorts his followers to become as the little children [who believe blindly and innocently]. The relevant religion then becomes the 'reason' for everything unexplained in life: "Your child died because God willed it so; He wanted your child to be with the angels, where he/she belongs better than on earth." or, "War and pestilence and sorrow and tsunamis and tornados and earthquakes happen because of original sin; because humans have, through their sins, caused that the world, God's perfect creation, has become an imperfect place, and we have brought all of these sorrows upon ourselves, just by dint of our being.

Also, if something does not make sense to us, we'll fill in the missing bits out of what seems most reasonable to us, rather than to leave things unexplained. For instance, seeing strange flying things in the night, would 200 years ago most probably have been explained as having seen ghosts, whereas many modern people would prefer to believe that they saw UFO's.

But in addition, humans are intensely social creatures, and we can conceptualise social phenomena as constructs which can regulate our behaviour in emotional ways; for instance, we have a need to belong, we have a capacity to feel guilt, and we believe in cause and result. Many humans also have a desire for spiritual meaning - a need to believe that life has a "higher purpose".

These and other characteristics cause us to often seek solace and 'meaning' with cults and religions.

Eco dissects the results of these tendencies, he shows us how myths are created, often through humans' need for closure-so if there is something missing in our 'picture' of something, we tend to make up the missing bits to best fit in with our currently held needs and beliefs.

Eco eloquently demonstrates this when the central group of characters in the novel, three editors at a publishing firm, work out an elaborate esoteric explanation for some of the missing text on a partly destroyed piece of paper that they have been told holds a great secret concerning the Knight's Templar; only to be shown up by the narrator's wife, who deftly demonstrates that the partly obliterated text actually represents a shopkeeper's goods delivery list, and nothing close to the two or three different interpretations that had been made by people who had assumed that it holds a tantalizing secret.

Fun of a similar manner ensues in various places in the novel, for instance when one of the editors aptly applies the shape and the meaning of the Mystical Kabbalah to the body and inner workings of a motor vehicle.

Eco shows us how easily connections are formed in the human mind, and how easily such a chain of associations can lead through the most unlikely chain of associations, right back to the origin again, if necessary.

Drawn in by the "game" of applying mystical symbolism to "everything", our three editors devise a story which they call "The Plan". The Plan works very much like a regular game of "Word Association" :

"In our game we crossed not words but concepts, events, so the rules were different. Basically there were three rules.

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

Rule Two says that if tout se tient [the connections prove valid] in the end, the connecting works. From potato to potato, tout se tient [therefore it holds true]. So it's right.

Rule Three: The connections must not be original. They must have been made before, and the more often the better, by others. Only then do the crossings seem true, because they are obvious. "

Throughout the book, Eco basically shows us that one can justify any theory, any line of thought if there is a psychological or practical need to make the argument 'work', and that any theory, if you formulate it according to certain 'rules', can become accepted by a large group of people.

Hubris: One of the themes of the novel is that our three protagonists become the victims of their own hubris. As one of the three editors, Diotallevi, points out, that after their 'game' had drawn them in, it started consuming them with its addictive power and it started spilling over into reality in alarming ways, like a Frankenstein's monster run wild: *" You're the prisoner of what you created. But your story in the outside world is still unfolding."*

Eco points out that when we create a story, whether meant to be fictional or not, that story takes on a life of its own, and it has consequences. ...but even more so than when the story is presented as fiction, is when the story is presented as truth. When we meddle with how history is presented, we create consequences. Certainly, history is written by the victors and is therefore almost always a subjective account of events, so we must be very very careful when presenting versions of events. Versions of events are often skewed for personal gain, but, as Diotallevi points out, when we do it as a game, just for fun, that is particularly unforgivable, because whatever version of events that we'd put out there, it still has consequences.

Interestingly, each person in the novel experiences the consequences of their deception in a different way. All of them experience guilt in various ways, ...but let me stop there lest I put out too many spoilers.

The best part of the novel for me, was the poignant character sketch of Jacopo Belbo, the introvert who

struggles to engage, who can never put himself in the midst of things, who is always on the periphery, except for one two glorious moments in his life, when Eco brilliantly makes him become the center of the universe.

IS ECO A PART OF WHAT HE SCORNS? Ironically, to some extent yes. In the novel, Eco himself is prone to showing off and legerdemain, almost as much as his characters who become a part of the conspiracies they have scorned.

BOTTOM LINE: Five stars for the astonishing range and depth of Eco's erudition, for his mischievous and clever sense of humor and his amazing accomplishment of drawing so many threads together in a remarkable tapestry of history, epistemology, semiotics and characterization; but minus a half star for the many superfluous bits of knowledge that are repeatedly offered, in what seems to be more showing-off sessions than being really functional with regard to the novel's plot or theses.

Steven Godin says

When it comes to novels the size of bricks I have to admit to being a bit of a lightweight, only reading a handful of books over 600 pages long, and always enter with some trepidation. Eco's *Foucault's Pendulum* is not quite brick big, but then it doesn't look like it's been on a diet either.

In terms of sheer scope and passionate ambition this really is something, but it felt more like a history lesson than a novel, and that for me was an issue.

This is a complex piece of writing that does require hard work from the reader, in basic terms what starts out as a literary joke for three Milan based book editors soon sees them enter a world of deadly peril. The narrator, Casaubon, an expert on the medieval Knights Templars, and two editors working in a branch of a vanity press publishing house in Milan, are told about a purported coded message revealing a secret plan set in motion by the Knights Templars centuries ago when the society was forced underground. As a lark, the three decide to invent a history of the occult tying a variety of phenomena to the mysterious machinations of the Order. Feeding their inspirations into a computer, they become obsessed with their story, dreaming up links between the Templars and just about every occult manifestation throughout history, even Mickey Mouse gets a mention.

But things start to turn very real for them, and are targeted by an unknown enemy. Just how much do they really know?

To say this is a densely packed novel would be an understatement, way more than half of it's content is Eco having fun as a history Professor cramming in physics, philosophy, historical survey, mathematical puzzles, religious and cultural mythology, rituals, Rosicrucians, Jesuits, Freemasons, Druids, on so on.....Hitler and his cronies come into the plot as well with a quite outrageous reason for slaughtering the Jews.

I would best describe *Foucault's Pendulum* as a metaphysical meditation, but also part detective story, it doesn't always work, there are moments of brilliance within, just not enough of the time, the narrative eventually becomes bogged with so much accumulated data and supposition that had me going into meltdown.

It was no doubt intriguing throughout, but after 641 gruelling pages the finale was not really a finale, I felt cheated after all the effort, and wished for another 50 pages, as to reach some sort of closure. But to Eco's credit at least he made Dan Brown's *Da Vinci Code* look like it was written by a 12 year old.

Andy says

This book is a conundrum to me. I liked the story of three book editors accidentally enmeshing themselves in the world of conspiracy theory. I liked the philosophical discussion of why we believe in things like Great Global Conspiracies. I even thought some of the history was interesting.

But LORD, did Eco need an editor. In parts of this book, the signal-to-noise ratio is distressingly low as Eco's talking heads sit and discuss the intricacies of Templar and Rosicrucian history for page after page after page. My patience wore thinner and thinner as Eco name-checked his way across all of European history and added absolutely nothing to the story. You could easily shave a full hundred pages out of this book and have a much better and less infuriating book.

Ahmad Sharabiani says

Il pendolo di Foucault = Foucault's pendulum, Umberto Eco

Foucault's Pendulum (original title: *Il pendolo di Foucault*) is a novel by Italian writer and philosopher Umberto Eco. It was first published in 1988, and an English translation by William Weaver appeared a year later. *Foucault's Pendulum* is divided into ten segments represented by the ten Sefiroth. The satirical novel is full of esoteric references to Kabbalah, alchemy and conspiracy theory—so many, that critic and novelist Anthony Burgess suggested that it needed an index. The pendulum of the title refers to an actual pendulum designed by the French physicist Léon Foucault to demonstrate Earth's rotation, and has symbolic significance within the novel. Some believe it refers to the philosopher Michel Foucault, noting Eco's friendship with the French philosopher, but the author "specifically rejects any intentional reference to Michel Foucault" —this is regarded as one of his subtle literary jokes.

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Gerard says

One of those books where the author tediously says next to nothing, and all the semi-litterati can't figure out what he's trying to say, so they conclude he must be brilliant. A wasted effort by an otherwise talented (so I hear) author, and that portion of the gullible public that assumes that something profound is being said so long as they can't understand it.

Jan-Maat says

This is a novel that contrasts the acceptance, and delight, in the world as it is with the consequences of the desire to read in meanings to everything that we see about us.

In Eco's earlier book, *The Name of the Rose*, the detective mystery was parodied and this is taken one step further in this novel. The Detective mystery assumes that there is a mystery that can be solved. It invites investigation. In this novel the constant working deeper into mysteries produces only more obscurity ("the penis is just a phallic symbol") which is undercut, or rather has the cork removed, by the surface of events. The childhood memories of one character, the love and impending fatherhood of another. The desire to find out why Professor Plum is dead in the library with a lead pipe next to him is shown to be a self-destructive one that can only end in a never ending kaleidoscope of ambiguity.

Eco's next step, naturally enough, in *Baudolino* is to show extraordinarily commonplace and political origins for some of the myths and legends that so obsess the legion of diabolicals in this novel.

At the centre of the story are an unlikely trio; Belbo, Causabon and Diotallevi. They work for a curious publisher, Garamond. The curiosity lies partly in the everyday with the one armed warehouseman who deals with all the deliveries and dispatches and partly in the esoteric transmutation of ordinary mortals into authors. The publishing house has two parts. One a respectable business the other a theatrical lure to entice and catch self-financing authors. It is a vanity press and a very profitable business the production of authors turns out to be.

Spotting a gap in the market they become involved in producing a series of books on magic, mysticism and hermetic 'learning' to feed the credulity of the reading public. The publishing house here is not a beacon of enlightenment but rather a smoky fire that seeks to deepen a smog of obscurantism over readers. As we read we are drawn through a world of varied, contradictory but passionately held beliefs. As the publishing house offers the untalented the opportunity to become authors. So too the cults and sects the trio deal with offer meaning and a grand significance to people's lives.

In short both sides of the operation, the publishing and the cults, are a con. The kind of con in which you get exactly what you wanted, but it simply costs more than you expected.

This allows Eco to give a good kicking in passing to *Holy Blood Holy Grail* but also shows how bizarre beliefs in the hollow earth, the Druidical training of the Aryan Jesus and the fantasies of the Alchemists in a divinely meaningful universe spill over to affect our cultural and political lives. Perhaps is a novelist's response to Religion and the Decline of Magic.

The heroes attempt to out do the irrational beliefs of a world of faith, clinging only to the involvement of the Templars with everything, is sure to end badly when their inventiveness is taken terribly, terribly seriously.

Remember, *The Templars have something to do with everything.*

At the same time this is also a book about the stories that we create and recreate about ourselves while growing up and how one can become trapped within them and as it turns out, few things are as fatal as being trapped within a story of one's own construction.

(An earlier version of this review was eaten by the Templar internet.)

Ben Babcock says

I read a lot, and the people around me are used to seeing a new book in my hand every day or couple of days. Naturally, they ask me what I'm reading, usually in a way that implies I should divulge more than just the title and the author, which are plainly visible on the cover. How do I respond when I'm reading something so sublime and transcendental as *Foucault's Pendulum*? It defies ordinary description of plot, because Umberto Eco has again unified his narrative with his themes and characters to create a complex masterpiece. Even the hook on the back of my paperback edition doesn't do it justice.

At its core, *Foucault's Pendulum* is a fable about conspiracies. It is a cautionary tale that demonstrates what happens when people begin to believe in conspiracy theories; lending credence lends life, which can have unfortunate consequences for everyone involved. The main characters begin as sceptics, working for a publishing house that's allied with a vanity press, who begin constructing a fictitious Plan by connecting seemingly-disparate historical facts. When organizations and individuals begin showing up seeming to be acting in accordance with this Plan, however, our protagonists realize that if you make up a Plan, even a false one, someone might try to execute it.

This book is not *about* conspiracy theories though. It has been compared to *The Da Vinci Code*, and of course there are similarities; both books deal with Templar mythology, for instance. *Foucault's Pendulum* is so much more though. It isn't a mystery about a conspiracy theory; it's a mystery that looks into the effects of conspiracy theories on otherwise rational, scholarly people. The narrative parallels the characters' journey in its own structure, beginning with a strong foundation in logical principles and eventually transforming into a very spiritual, emotional text.

We have so many books based on the premise that such and such conspiracy theory is actually valid. Here, the theories are all fictitious; it begins as a harmless game among three people determined to mock conspiracy theories and the obsession with finding hidden meaning through occultism. The theory only becomes real because people begin believing in it; they begin seeing meaning where before there was nothing, no relationship. Characters emerge, ones we're familiar with from prior in the book, who appear to have a part in this Plan and think it has been in operation for centuries. These characters are in some ways created by their fellow characters (our protagonists); *Foucault's Pendulum* is very meta-authorial in that respect, much like *Sophie's World*.

Eco gives us an unreliable narrator so that we're forced to think critically about the story we're given and wonder how much is true and how much may be the feverish imaginings of an unbalanced, misguided mind. The narrator is named Casaubon, and I'm very glad I read *Middlemarch* before reading this book. Casaubon is sort of like his namesake from *Middlemarch*, who devotes his life to the syncretic task of unifying human myths. In *Foucault's Pendulum*, Casaubon and his friends Belbo and Diotallevi sift through the slush of conspiracy lunatics ("Diabolicals") to compile a master theory, a Plan, spun around the framework of the dissolution of the Knights Templar. As they come to believe in the reality of their own Plan, the world around them changes, becomes darker and more sinister. *All* conflicts in this book, even the external ones, are ultimately internal, created from our characters' own imaginations. The fact that some of these internal conflicts manifest externally, through the antagonism of rivals like Colonel Ardent or Agliè, gives the story plenty of variety.

In between, we get glimpses of Belbo's childhood in rural Italy, and Eco mentions both historical and contemporary Italian politics. As an outsider, I found this part of the book fascinating, since I'm totally unfamiliar with Italian history or even how its citizens were affected by the rise of fascism and their time under Mussolini. That's what I like so much about Eco: he reminds me that I'm steeped in my own ignorance, but he doesn't condescend me for it. Instead, he forces me to meet him on his intellectual level.

One thing that makes *Foucault's Pendulum* so transcendental is the fact that it's rife with allusions to medieval and Enlightenment history and philosophy, arcane rituals and religions, and other esoteric and occult phenomena. You'd practically need a degree in these areas (like Eco has) to understand it all without a reference book; I don't, and I admit I got lost at times. Almost every page is filled with this historical references, particularly when Casaubon, Belbo, and Diotallevi are thick in their discussions of the Plan. Consider that for a moment: I got lost in the historical detail of the book, yet I'm *still* giving it five stars. That's how good it is; even its flaws are strengths.

Still, the tendency of this text toward tones academic will turn some people off the book. It may not be for everyone. If you find yourself reading my review and thinking, "Hmm, this sounds like it is right for me," however, don't wait. Go out and get this book now. Read it, and then read it again--I will, some day, because *Foucault's Pendulum* is one of those books where you need to read it through several times to grasp its complexity. And every reading will be its own reward, as reading should be.

Ismini says

Το εκκρεμ?ς του Φουκ? ε?ναι το αγαπημ?νο μου βιβλ?ο. Το δι?βασα για πρ?τη φορ? στα 15 μου και αποφ?σισα φ?τος να το ξαναδιαβ?σω και πλ?ον το λ?ω με κ?θε σιγουρι?: ε?ναι ασ?γκριτο, μοναδικ? και για μ?να ελ?χιστα ?λλα βιβλ?α και με μεγ?λη δυσκολ?α μπορο?ν να το συναγωνιστο?v, αλλ? καν?να δεν μπορε? να το φ?σει.

Βαθ?,

Παν?ξυπνο,

Απολαυστικ?,

Πολ?πλοκο και πολυεπ?πεδο,

Σαρκαστικ?,

Ενθυ?ς,

Μακροσκελ?ς αλλ? και τ?σο πυκνογραμ?νο,

Ατμοσφαιρικ?,

με μια λ?ξη ΑΡΙΣΤΟΥΡΓΗΜΑ!

Κανε?ς δεν χειρ?ζεται τον λ?γο ?πως ο ?κο. Κ?θε λ?ξη ?χει ν?ημα, ?χει σκοπ? και λ?γο ?παρξης στο κε?μενο. Η πλοκ? του βιβλ?ου ε?ναι συναρπαστικ?, η μεγ?λη του ?κταση ?χι μ?νο δεν δημιουργε? πρ?βλημα (καθ?ς δεν πρ?κειται για ?να βιβλ?ο που θ?λεις να το τελει?σεις, αντιθ?τως ε?χεσαι να μην τελει?σει) αλλ? δικαιολογε?ται απ?λυτα απ? το περιεχ?μεν? του. Ο συγγραφ?ας δεν γεμ?ζει σελ?δες απ?λ? για να το κ?νει. Κ?θε του πρ?ταση εξυπηρετε? μ?α τελεολογ?α και παρ?ληλα μ?α τελετουργ?α μ?ησης του αναγν?στη στον αριστοτεχνικ? δομημ?νο κ?σμο του.

Ε?χα διαβ?σει κ?που πως ο ?κο ?ταν ρωτ?θηκε για τον Νταν Μπρ?ουν απ?ντησε πως ε?ναι ?νας απ? τους χαρακτ?ρες του "Εκκρεμ?ς του Φουκ?", και γ?λασα πολ? γιατ? το ?διο ε?χα σκεφτε? ?ταν δι?βασα το "Κ?δικας Ντα Β?ντσι".

Συμπερασματικ?, το προτε?νω και το συνιστ? σε ?λους ε?τε ε?στε λ?τρεις ιστορικ?v μυθιστορημ?των, ε?τε συνωμοσιολογικ?v, ε?τε φιλοσοφικ?v, ε?τε βιβλ?ων περιπ?τειας. Απ?θανο να μην σας συνεπ?ρει.

Mohammed Arabey says

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(2) Hokmah ?????????? ?????? - ?????? - ??????

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for an amazing tour of Musée des Arts et Métiers de Paris by in this awesome photographer's blog
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