The Architecture of the Infinite Library

Teaching Intertextuality and Bibliography with *The Name of the Rose*

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The description of *The Name of the Rose* that appears on the dust-jacket of its first edition declares that the novel is difficult to define since, among other reasons, "the author asserts, perhaps mendaciously, that not one word is his own" (qtd. in Stephens 1983, 51). Readers conversant with theories of intertextuality and with Eco's own theoretical writings will readily discern a conspicuous mock naivété in this assertion—that not one word is the author's own—and a wink and nudge in its "perhaps mendaciously" qualifier, for in this suitably and perhaps coyly anonymous paratext, we find the first tenet of intertextuality: that words are never one's own, that speakers—and authors—find them, as Mikhail Bakhtin put it, always "already inhabited" (1984, 201). To be sure, this is intertextuality in a radical sense, but *The Name of the Rose* is radically intertextual in an ordinary sense as well. Walter E. Stephens calls it "this most intertextual of novels" (1983, 55), and Teresa de Lauretis describes it as "a novel made up almost entirely of other texts, of tales already told, of names either well known or sounding as if they should be known . . . a medley of famous passages and obscure quotations . . . and characters cut out in strips from a generic World Encyclopedia" (1985, 16–17). As a novel so knowingly and, as its dust-jacket description hints, so playfully pieced together from other texts, *The Name of the Rose* makes a superb novel for exploring intertextuality with students. At the same time, as a detective novel whose plot is driven by a mysterious and desirable book, it also provides an appealing medium for introducing students to a much more "old-fashioned" topic: bibliography, the study of books. After all, and as the frame narrator admits, again with that sly wink, this is "a tale of books, not of everyday worries" (Eco 1994b, 5): a novel that encompasses "the study of books" in its broadest sense and demonstrates that, much to the contrary of the narrator's blithe assertion that it is "gloriously lacking in any relevance for our day" (5), a tale of books may bring into focus the worries of whole eras and civilizations.

Intertextuality and bibliography are the twin topics of study in an advanced undergraduate seminar focused on *The Name of the Rose*, a course I call "The Architecture of the Infinite Library." My goals in the course are twofold: first, to lead students to an experience of intertextuality in the "radical" sense mentioned above, as a condition of all texts; and second, to acquaint them with the multifaceted modern discipline of bibliography, including the study of book production, circulation, citation, paleography, and codicology. A beauty of *The Name of the Rose* for achieving these goals is that it ineluctably intertwines the ostensibly disparate topics of intertextuality and bibliography in the form of a kind of readerly Bildungsroman, in which the "hero" Adso closely models the developmental journey I invite students to undertake in the course. Putting them in terms of this synthesizing Bildungsroman, then, my goals for the course are for students to develop, with Adso, beyond the tendency to regard a text as a repository of fixed meaning deposited there by a single author; cultivating instead an ability both to catch the tenor of conversations that texts carry on, as Adso puts it, "among themselves" (286) and to enjoy their generative play.1 Along the way, I hope students will learn, again with Adso, that the meaning of a text may also be read in its physical dimensions and in its travels in the real world. Milestones on this developmental path are reached with our readings of the

1. In conceptualizing the course’s arc in this way, I draw from Stephens, who views the novel as “a semiotic duel, a ‘showdown’ between medieval theocentric semiosis and a version of Peircean unlimited semiosis” (1983, 51). Theresa Coletti sees Adso undergoing a “semiotic Bildungsroman” as well (1988, 40ff). All quotations from *The Name of the Rose* are from the translation by William Weaver (1994b).
novel’s preface, the opening scenes of “The First Day,” and the final scenes of “The Third Day.”

We begin this journey on the first day of class with a group reading of the novel’s preface, each student reading a paragraph aloud. Before we start, I ask students to think during the reading about how the preface represents the text it frames and, beyond that, what it has to say about books and texts in general. Students enjoy the preface immensely and bring forth most of the course’s major issues in the ensuing discussion. They note, for instance, that the text is irrevocably unmoored from its author and from the site of its material production and that it seems to have a life of its own, picking up miscellaneous interpolations—renditions of Albertus Magnus by the early-modern scientist Paracelsus, for instance—and, conversely, dispersing fragments into such unlikely environments as Milo Temesvar’s On the Use of Mirrors in the Game of Chess. Further, they discern that these features of a text are linked with a variety of suggestive motifs, including corruption, loss, mystery, romance, invasion, and world travel.

With so many ideas about books and texts in play, I wrap up the first class session with a short lecture on the discipline of bibliography, in which I describe its main branches, enumerative and analytical, and sub-branches of the latter: descriptive, historical, and textual (or textual criticism). Following this overview, I turn students’ attention to the The Name of the Rose’s preface once again, asking them to locate its evocations of this taxonomy. An instance of enumerative bibliography occupies most of the novel’s first sentence: “On August 16, 1968, I was handed a book written by a certain Abbé Vallet, Le Manuscrit de Dom Adson de Melk, traduit en français d’après l’édition de Dom J. Mabillon (Aux Presses de l’Abbaye de la Source, Paris, 1842)” (1994b, 1). This particular example provides a felicitous segue into discovering allusions to textual bibliography: reading from one of the course’s required texts, The Key to the “Name of the Rose”—partly to demonstrate its immanent usefulness to our studies—I note that Jean Mabillon (1632–1707) is considered the founder of textual scholarship (and was an ardent enumerative bibliographer as well), and then draw a connection between the ironically named “Abbaye de la Source” press and contemporary critiques of the traditional goal of textual scholarship: to trace a text back to its source, usually equated with the author’s intention. Issues that confront a textual critic are further elaborated—placing the ideal of identifying authorial intention further in doubt—in the narrator’s discussion of his approach to his translation at the end of the preface (4–5). The concerns—and delights—of descriptive bibliography make a brief appearance in the narrator’s description of his writing materials, “some of those large notebooks from the Papeterie Joseph Gibert in which it is so pleasant to write if you use a felt-tip pen” (1) while matters of historical bibliography are pervasive, including references to the Abaye de la Source press, the Bibliothèque Sainte Geneviève, the antiquarian book shop in Buenos Aires, and the narrator’s parting rib, now recognizable to the students as such, “[this] is a tale of books, not of everyday worries” (5).

Any study of intertextuality requires a degree of competence with the larger network of texts in which a given text resides; in many of the companion readings I assign for “The First Day”—which range from the Book of Revelation to the introduction to Arthur Conan Doyle’s A Study in Scarlet, and from Hugh of Saint Victor’s instructions for reading allegory in his

2. The course falls under my department’s rubric “topics in critical theories and methods.” The format is a three-hour seminar that meets once a week; we spend almost the entire semester reading The Name of the Rose and a selection of texts that comprise its intertextual network, finishing off with a screening of the film version (I supply a bibliography of companion readings in the appendix). We also work our way through Graham Allen’s Intertextuality (2000), which provides students with a grounding in writings on the theory of intertextuality and its relationship to other theories of the text. Another required text for the class is The Key to “The Name of the Rose,” by Adele J. Haft, Jane G. White, and Robert J. White (1999), an invaluable aid for its translations of Latin passages, biographies of key historical personages, and overview of Eco’s thoughts on semiotics and the Middle Ages. For the bibliography element of the course, I give a series of minilectures on bibliography in general and medieval book production in particular to contextualize the novel’s bookish plot; a field trip to a special collections library late in the course provides students with the chance to examine rare books and manuscripts up close. Over the course of the semester, students also collaborate on the construction of a class Web site, a project I discuss later.

3. This lecture is drawn entirely from material at the Bibliographical Society of America Web site: http://www.bibsocamer.org/.
Didascalicon to “The dog and the horse” from Voltaire’s Zadig—my aim is to provide students with just that and, along with it, the experience of that pleasurable shock that comes with recognizing an author’s seemingly brazen borrowings from other works. Indeed, the sheer obviousness in The Name of the Rose of this basic fact of intertextuality—that authors sometimes borrow, even word for word, from other texts—makes way for an equally basic and fruitful question: how is this not copying or, worse, plagiarism? Our study of intertextuality thus finds a proper beginning in an interrogation of our notions both of the author as solitary genius toiling in the workshop of his own unique imagination and of the text as the hermetically sealed vessel of that precious commodity. Two moments in “The First Day”—the Brunellus episode and Adso’s first sighting of the Aedificium—provide auspicious starting points for that interrogation.

Questions about authorial borrowing arise most urgently for students—and the recognition that prompts them most delightfully—from the Brunellus episode (1994b, 22-25), for which Eco borrows unabashedly from Voltaire’s Zadig. The Name of the Rose lends itself especially well to a discussion of authors’ citations of other texts since, according to its fiction at least, Adso’s narrative was written in the Middle Ages, a time when authorial borrowing was the norm and, indeed, a mark of an author’s competence with the “library” of texts to which he was contributing. Copying, translating, piecing texts together from other texts: the work of a medieval author also finds an analogue in Roland Barthes’ description of authorial practice in his influential essay “The Death of the Author,” which students will have encountered in the companion reading in Graham Allen’s Intertextuality for this class session. Quoting Allen’s paraphrase of Barthes:

The author is placed in the role of a compiler or arranger of pre-existent possibilities within the language system. Each word the author employs, each sentence, paragraph or whole text s/he produces takes its origins from, and thus has its meaning in terms of, the language system out of which it was produced. (2000, 14)

4. The intertextual practices of medieval and postmodern authors have quite different motivations, however, on which see Farronato 2003, 109.

Having opened up the question of authorial practice and given it some cultural relativity, our examination of the Brunellus episode can continue by addressing a question implicit in the passage quoted above: What is the meaning of the Brunellus episode “in terms of” the corresponding episode in Zadig? Moreover, given William’s and Adso’s affiliations with Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson, what is the meaning of this incident in terms of the description of that relationship in our reading for the day from A Study in Scarlet?

In answer to these questions, students volunteer that William’s physiognomic resemblance to Holmes together with his feat of inductive reasoning lifted from Zadig but worthy of Holmes as well forecasts that he will function as a detective in the novel and, further, that Adso will act as his naïve and admiring sidekick. More importantly, they see that Eco’s use of these texts plants a range of questions that we are invited to consider as we proceed: are there similarities between fourteenth-century Franciscan thought and the empiricism of Zadig and Holmes? Or is this way of thinking an anachronism? And, given that Zadig is taken for a sorcerer when he performs a similar feat of inductive reasoning, might we expect that William will eventually be associated with sorcery as well? In making these observations and generating these questions, students demonstrate two crucial effects of intertextuality, which they are now ready to theorize. First, as students have put it in more than one class, intertextuality effectively imports a set of values, methods of interpretation, or a world view from one text into another and in the process restructures the world of the “importing” text. In the Brunellus episode an approbation of reasoning from observable facts—presumably a postmedieval phenomenon—subtly alters the fabric of a culture in which the empirical world is understood to reveal the workings of God. Second, intertextuality aids readers in formulating hypotheses about developments in an unfolding story through the process of taking

5. In this formulation, students are not far from Julia Kristeva’s definition of intertextuality, which Allen discusses in a chapter we read for “The Third Day”: “this transposition of one (or several) sign system(s) into another.” Kristeva goes on, however, to reject the term intertextuality in favor of the term transposition because the former “has often been understood in the banal sense of ‘study of sources’”—an issue I take up later (Kristeva 1984, 59-60).
what Eco elsewhere terms “inferential walks”; as he puts it, by resorting to an intertextual “frame,” a reader is able “to ‘walk’... outside the text, in order to gather intertextual support” (1984, 32). Here a reader infers that William’s cleverness will get him into trouble at some later point in the novel by taking a “walk,” through a corridor The Name of the Rose provides, into the world of Zadig, in which William’s analogue, Zadig, is punished for the same skills William possesses.

Taking another look at the Brunellus episode with the idea of an “inferential walk” in mind, students can recognize that in guessing that the monks’ stray horse is named Brunellus, William has taken an inferential walk himself. Most of his knowledge of the horse—his height, gait, color, direction, even his proud bearing—comes from the clues he gathers from the physical path he and Adso are walking, a process William figures as reading from the Book of Nature. In order to divine the horse’s name, however, William takes a mental “walk” along an intertextual path leading outside of the text before him and into books of logic with which monks would be familiar, books in which a prized horse is always named Brunellus. In this way, a comprehensive knowledge of a broad range of texts together with a sharp eye for pathways connecting them are vital components of William’s specifically intertextual strategy as a detective. Adso puts it well much later in the novel in the form of a question, “To know what one book says you must read others?” (1994b, 286).

During “The First Day,” however, Adso is a long way from being able to formulate such a question; indeed, in his response to his first sighting of the Aedificium (21–22), Adso exemplifies a reader working with a theory of texts that is antithetical to the theory of intertextuality. In order to clarify and strengthen students’ first articulations of the tenets of intertextuality with a look at a contrasting case, I follow our discussion of the Brunellus episode with an examination of Adso’s “reading” of the Aedificium, which we consider alongside Hugh of Saint Victor’s chapter “Concerning Allegory” in his Didascalicon. In this chapter Hugh compares divine scripture to a building, one founded in history and with a superstructure of allegory. In accordance with this architectural conceit, Hugh figures the study of scripture and theology as a process of constructing one’s own spiritual building, or, as the Latin has it, one’s edificium. As Hugh takes pains to emphasize, the foundation of that structure must be a student’s faith; moreover, the purpose of all study is to elaborate on that foundation. A student must know, as Hugh puts it, “how to bend all Scriptural passages whatever into fitting interpretations”—interpretations that “fit,” like stones in a rising masonry—onto the courses that come before, all of which are ultimately grounded in and supported by a student’s faith (1961, 143). Reading Adso’s numerological decoding of the Aedificium in the context of Hugh’s teachings, students can see that unlike William, Adso reads less to find anything out than to find attestations of his faith: “four, the number of the Gospels; five, the number of the zones of the world; seven, the number of the gifts of the Holy Ghost” and so on (1994b, 22).

At this point in Adso’s readerly career, then, all texts refer to one text, the “edifice” of scripture, which is, in turn, the uniquely and unchangingly true expression of its divine author. Thus the role of the reader coincides perfectly with the role of the devout monk as Adso describes it in his prologue: “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... and the duty of every faithful monk would be to repeat every day with chanting humility the one never-changing event whose incontrovertible truth can be asserted” (10). From their reading in Allen’s Intertextuality for the day, students may recognize Adso’s concept of textuality in Roland Barthes’ rendering of the conventional idea of the author as “theological”; helpfully enough, in the process of describing Barthes’ use of this term, Allen quotes, as if after Adso, these same opening lines from the Gospel of John (Allen 2000, 14). At the same time, students may recognize in Adso’s “theological” notion of authorship their own tendency to locate the source of a text’s meaning in its author’s mind even as they are intrigued by William’s intertextual agility, especially having discerned its interpretive power.

Cristina Farronato notes that Eco’s use of “explicit and recognizable quotations” in his novels force[s] the reader to open other books and commence a kind of quest, leading to intellectual ‘epiphany’” (2003, 111). As students finish “The First Day” of The Name of the Rose, they have taken up this quest with great excitement especially since the “epiphany” to which it leads would seem so clearly to be the solution to the mystery of Adelmo’s death. As we go forward, then, students’ approach to the novel and the
assigned companion texts becomes partly a game of spot-the-quotation; in this way, they veer perilously close to exchanging their quest for the epiphanic intertextual grail for the pedestrian rewards of source study. As Rocco Capozzi has observed, a source-sighting approach to *The Name of the Rose* bypasses its true pleasures: "Eco's Bakhtinian echoes of a text as a re-writing and re-reading of other texts; or as an inter-relationship of different discourses and meanings" (1989, 414). An especially opportune moment for reorienting students to those pleasures comes with "The Third Day" in the form of Adso’s account of his fateful night in the textual labyrinths both of the library and of his own mind. Before turning my discussion to that section of the novel, however, I pick up the bibliographic thread of this course, for *The Name of the Rose* beckons readers toward a journey not only to other texts but also to other real physical books: specifically, to the wonders and delights of medieval books, which abound in "The First Day."

One could base an entire lecture on medieval book production—not to mention medieval aesthetics and cognitive psychology—on Adso’s description of the abbey’s scriptorium and Adelmo’s artistry (1994b, 71–78): from its portrait of Benedictine communal scribal labor, to its description of the library catalogue, to its detailed inventory of book-making tools and materials, to its portrayal of the fabulous creatures and lush vegetation Adelmo had been creating in the margins of a Psalter, this is an exhaustive representation of the circumstances of monastic book production.6 To complement this portrayal, I screen the equally engaging twenty-four-minute film *A World Inscribed* (McDonough 1998), which offers a visual counterpart to almost every point in Adso’s description, right down to manuscripts decorated with baboons (1994b, 78). I also bring a variety of books to class to pass around the room—Janet Backhouse’s books on the Luttrell Psalter (1989) and the Sherborne Missal (1999) and J. J. G. Alexander’s *The Decorated Letter* (1978) provide especially lush examples of medieval book art—and I supplement these with online images of the Sherborne Missal and the Lindisfarne Gospels available at the British Library’s *Turning the Pages* exhibit.

If the scriptorium scene offers an occasion for a rich introduction to medieval illuminated manuscripts (descriptive and historical bibliography), such bibliographic matters also introduce a crucial thread in the novel’s plot and with it, a set-up for a brief mention of textual criticism in our discussion of “The Second Day.” As the scriptorium scene draws to a conclusion, we meet the dour Jorge of Burgos, and, by way of his critique of Adelmo’s art, we encounter his constitutional aversion to humor and laughter. Discussing Jorge’s diatribe in “The Second Day” William and Benno touch on Aristotle’s *Poetics*, and specifically its second book. Though “perhaps lost forever,” the book purportedly teaches, *contra* Jorge, that laughter is “something good and an instrument of truth” (1994b, 112). As a companion reading for this conversation I assign Richard Janko’s reconstruction of the second book of the *Poetics* (1984, 92–98) and bring it up in class as a kind of epilogue to William and Benno’s discussion and as a quintessential example of textual criticism. While this moment in class seems a bit digressive to students—a mere “tale of books”—given the accumulating and pressing worries of “The Second Day,” they recall it with an amused flash of recognition when the role of the *Poetics* becomes clear at the novel’s cataclysmic conclusion.

By the time we arrive at the “After Compline” chapter at the end of “The Third Day,” students have discussed examples of all the branches of bibliography and have worked with several key features of the theory of intertextuality: the concept of an author as compiler, the idea of a text’s importation of systems of meaning by way of its citations of other texts, the hermeneutic power of a work’s intertextual frame, and the primary importance of readerly competence in the activation of that frame. In the process, they will also have read a selection of some of the most influential texts of the Middle Ages: from the Book of Revelation, the Song of Songs, and the Benedictine Rule to parts of Matthew of Vendôme’s *Ars Versificatoria*, Augustine’s *On Christian Doctrine*, Thomas of Celano’s *First Life of St. Francis*, and Beroul’s *Romance of Tristan*, not to mention Hugh of Saint Victor’s *Didascalicon*. As I suggested above, students’ explorations of these aspects of intertextuality tend to be accompanied by a kind of forensic preoccupation with spotting sources, a mode of reading for which William serves as a model. Though exciting and worthwhile in itself—indeed, the very bread and butter of

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generations of literary scholars—this endeavor loses sight of the true extent of the theory of intertextuality, which supplants the implicit hierarchy of origin and belated citation with a networked play of texts as the condition of all texts, a system in which *jouissance*, rather than vigilance, is the byword. While the abbey’s labyrinthine library at first evokes this aspect of intertextuality, its single entrance, dead end, and booby-trapped rooms and corridors ultimately uphold the paternalistic doctrine contained in Hugh of Saint Victor’s *Didascalicon*, that the “world” of texts is a dangerous realm, for which readers need a guide or, in terms of *The Name of the Rose*, a monkish detective. This structure is thus a faux representation of intertextuality; in its stead, as students find in our discussions of the chapter “After Compline” in “The Third Day,” it is Adso, lost in love in the kitchen, not William and the library above, who offers a guide for understanding the full implications of the theory of intertextuality.

Along with the Brunellus episode, this chapter, and in particular, Adso’s tryst with the peasant girl in the abbey kitchen, is one of students’ favorites. Theresa Coletti characterizes the kitchen scene as “the culminating moment in a tightly constructed sequence of episodes,” over the course of which Adso “faces the difficulty of interpreting his experience in light of the official teaching and language of monastic life and learning” (1988, 40). To help students appreciate all of the implications for the theory of intertextuality in that culminating moment, it is useful to review the series of events that precedes it, in which Adso is presented with a dizzying array of contradictory representations of spirituality, women, and love. I frame this review in terms of Hugh of Saint Victor’s teaching on allegory, suggesting that as the sequence of scenes progresses, Adso finds it increasingly difficult to “bend” the texts, teachings, and images he encounters so that they “fit” into the hierarchical edifice that, as a monk, he is supposed to be building. Instead, words of Hildegard of Bingen on the flame of mystic rapture seem to blend seamlessly with Ubertino’s description of the flame of devotional “good love” (1994b, 230–31) on the one hand and, on the other, with the account of the fire that devours the heretic Fraticello Michael. Similarly, as he is browsing among illustrated books of the Apocalypse in the library, Adso fears for his soul as he finds that images of the “woman clothed with the sun” (of Revelation 12) and the Whore of Babylon are blending confusingly together with images in his mind both of the Virgin Mary and the beautiful heretic Margaret (241).

If a review of these scenes demonstrates the inadequacies of the edifice as a model for making sense of the kinds of textual interactions Adso is experiencing, the companion texts students will have read for the day present elements of the theory of intertextuality that do. One of these is the definition of the “inter-text” that appears in the course of Roland Barthes’ musing on his rapport with Proust’s writing:

> Proust is what comes to me, not what I summon up; not an “authority,” simply a *circular memory*. Which is what the inter-text is: the impossibility of living outside the infinite text—whether this text be Proust or the daily newspaper or the television screen: the book creates the meaning, the meaning creates life. (1975, 36)

Taking a look back at the specificities of Adso’s account of his having recalled Hildegard of Bingen’s text on mystic rapture upon reading the narrative of Fraticello Michael’s execution by fire, students see that just as Barthes lives with Proust, Hildegard’s text is a function of Adso’s mind. For here it is clear that Adso does not summon Hildegard as an “authority” with which to bend the history of Michael to fit his faith; quite the contrary, as he puts it, the *Historia* “made some words rise spontaneously to my lips, about ecstatic rapture; I had read them in the books of Saint Hildegard” (1994b, 239). Spontaneous yet already read, Adso’s experience of Hildegard’s text also exemplifies the paradoxical anonymity and familiarity of citations in Barthes’ theory of intertextuality: “The citations which go to make up a text are anonymous, untraceable, and yet already read” (1977, 160).

In their reading in Allen’s *Intertextuality* for the day, students will also have learned about Julia Kristeva’s vision of intertextuality as a matter of transpositions, which proves useful for discussing the dynamics of the interactions among texts that Adso experiences in this scene. To explain this theory, Allen quotes from Kristeva’s *Revolution in Poetic Language*: “We shall call *transposition* the signifying process’ ability to pass from one sign system to another, to exchange and permutate them” (Allen 2000, 54). Again from Kristeva, transposition entails “an altering of the thetic position—the
As Theresa Coletti argues, jouissance (as a theory that, quoting Allen, "foregrounds, celebrates and plays with the dissolution or abandonment of the single subject") (2000, 56). The Name of the Rose’s “sex scene” is arguably the ideal passage to that realization, for given that in the parlance of contemporary literary criticism, jouissance connotes a nexus of textual and sexual bliss—"a textasy," as Robert Young has put it—this scene dramatizes that union (Young 1981, 32). As Theresa Coletti argues, "The scene literalizes the link between writing, sexuality, and textual play" (1988, 70). Having participated in the discussion just described, students easily trace Adso’s progressive conflation of his own story with citations from texts that come to mind as he sutures together the narrative of his encounter with the peasant girl. They also note the coincidence of that development with Adso’s growing pleasure and with his sense that his words, though increasingly treated by him as though they are anonymous and untraceable, are nevertheless “already inhabited”: for instance, in the midst of an ecstatic declaration of the transport of his soul to where “blissful life is drunk at its source,” he asks, parenthetically, “has this not been said?” (1994b, 246).

Students also note instances of Kristeva’s transpositions contributing to Adso’s bliss: he recalls words springing to mind “heard in another time and in other places, spoken certainly for other ends, but which seemed wondrously in keeping with my joy in that moment, as if they had been born consubstantially to express it” (244). And while he goes on to admit that he “forgot that they had served in Scripture or in the pages of the saints to express quite different, more radiant realities,” the scriptural “thetic position” is already dissolving as Adso asks himself if there is “truly a difference” (244) between those radiant realities and his own present delight, in which he feels his “watchful sense of difference . . . annihilated” (245). Adso’s narrative proceeds by way of numerous repetitions of such transpositions, drawing from the Song of Songs, the Book of Revelation, and Hildegard of Bingen, among others, and reaches its climax in his quotation of the same text that, as students readily recall, Adso had already used to describe the heretic Michael’s pyre, though he now seems to have forgotten its “origin” in the books of Hildegard: “That flame consists of a splendid clarity, an unusual vigor, and an igneous ardor, but it possesses the splendid clarity so that it may illuminate and the igneous ardor that it may burn” (247). As the aging Adso recognizes this repetition, he adds a kind of scribal colophon to the text of his bliss—its finishing touch as a true text of jouissance—for he effectively frames it as a piece of automatic writing, the product, as he puts it, of “my hand, passive agent of the soul” (247).

As the finishing touch on our discussion of this chapter, albeit an anti-climactic one, I revert to the topic of bibliography, showing students images of the several kinds of books Adso recalls himself looking through in his sojourn in the library on this fateful evening. I focus in particular on images of two kinds of books: first, illustrated copies of the Commentary on the Apocalypse by the Spanish monk Beato di Liébana (c. 730–c. 800). Dwelling

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7. The OED defines “thetic” as “that bears the thesis; stressed.”
on these manuscripts in some detail helps students solve the “mystery of the missing librarian” later on in the novel. I also present examples of books that feature what Adso describes as “a pattern of interlocking labyrinths” (241), which now may also evoke the architecture of the infinite library of intertextuality, “so constructed that every path can be connected with every other one.”

In her discussion of The Name of the Rose’s “After Compline” chapter, Theresa Coletti observes that Adso quickly “contains the semiotic resonances of his experience within institutionally sanctioned modes of speech and interpretation”: first through the sacrament of confession and then by seeing his beloved in the Book of Nature (1988, 55). Similarly, as students continue with their reading of the novel, they tend, in the interest of solving its murder mystery plot, to revert to a more disciplined and differentiating understanding of intertextuality. Still, in “The Last Page,” they see in Adso’s “lesser library”—a “library made up of fragments, quotations, unfinished sentences, amputated stumps of books” (1994b, 500)—a somber image of intertextuality’s radical jouissance and recognize its generativity in the form of the very book they hold in their hands.

When the class has finished reading The Name of the Rose, we make a pilgrimage to a special collections library: sometimes to my own university’s special collections department, other times to Columbia University’s Rare Books and Manuscripts Library. In either case, the following manuscript description is always part of the exhibit, a text that unites intertextuality and bibliography, even as it generates laughter and jouissance.

108 ARISTOTLE. Small fragment of text from the second book of the Poetics in which Aristotle argues that the tendency to laughter is a force for the good which can have an instructive value; in Greek, on a charta lintea (or cloth-parchment) of Silos or Burgos manufacture, written in brown ink in an archaistic square minuscule by an Arab or Spanish scribe; approx. 55 x 116 mm, one outer edge coated with a yellowish pigment, perhaps a size or similar strengthening agent, other edges charred and now very fragile; preserved within a bifolium from a 14th-century monk’s personal notebook of miscellanea containing abecedarian sentences, several quotations from Albertus Magnus, and a curious 6 ll. verse warning or anathema beginning “Pangina . . . / Quam si quis tanget, morietur morte suprema / . . .”

Spain, mid-12th century/Germany, mid-14th century. $950

One of a handful of fugitive membra disiecta from a Piedmont monastic library destroyed by fire in the winter of 1327. Shortly thereafter the surviving fragments reached Melk where they were apparently seen and identified by Mabillon in the late 17th century. See Abbe Vallet, Le Manuscrit de Dom Adson de Melk, traduit en francais d’apres l’édition de Dom J. Mabillon (Paris, Aux Presses de l’Abbaye de la Source, 1842) and Professor U. Eco’s introduction to the recent English edition, trans. William Weaver (London, Secker & Warburg, 1983).

The only evidence of recent provenance is an accompanying letter from a Buenos Aires antiquarian bookseller or librarian in the early 1970s discussing the rarity of the Castilian version of a treatise by Milo Temesvar, and referring his correspondent to Silas Haslam’s History of the Land called Uqbar and A General History of Labyrinths. (Bernard Quaritch 1984, 183)

To read The Name of the Rose with an eye trained on its intertextual play is to begin to suspect that its author may after all be speaking quite truthfully in claiming that “not one word is his own” and that many an “inferential walk” from the novel to other texts remains unexplored. A major project students work on over the course of our study of The Name of the Rose is designed to give them a chance to experience some of those textual domains and to give them an opportunity to think about intertextuality in an alternative mode. This assignment asks students to collaborate on a Web site that demonstrates features of the theory of intertextuality while presenting material on texts—or “texts,” including textual traditions and works of
visual art and architecture—that are not on the syllabus but are nevertheless part of the novel’s “library” of textual affiliations. Each student identifies one such text and constructs a Web page for it—students have written on the medieval bestiary and lapidary, medieval number symbolism and demonology, travel writing and the medieval mappa mundi, and the writings of William of Occam, Roger Bacon, Abbot Suger of Saint Denis, and Humbert of Romans—and together they design a symbolic “architecture” for connecting them.

The opening page for one class’s project arrayed links to every student’s page by way of an unlabeled “clickable” map of the library in the novel; in other words, it invited users to enter the site “blindly,” not knowing where a click on any given area of the map might lead them. Once “inside” the library/site, users would find themselves in a kind of open labyrinth—an alternative to the closed one in the novel—with links at each page to other student pages as well as to the World Wide Web beyond. On the last day of class when we tour and discuss the class Web site together—I usually contribute a page, too—the mood is usually triumphant and happy, accompanied as it is by the now quite audible conversations of so many texts speaking “among themselves.”

11. I teach students basic HTML; we work together on the site in a computer lab for three to four hour-long sessions over the course of the semester. Students also write a more conventional term paper for the course.