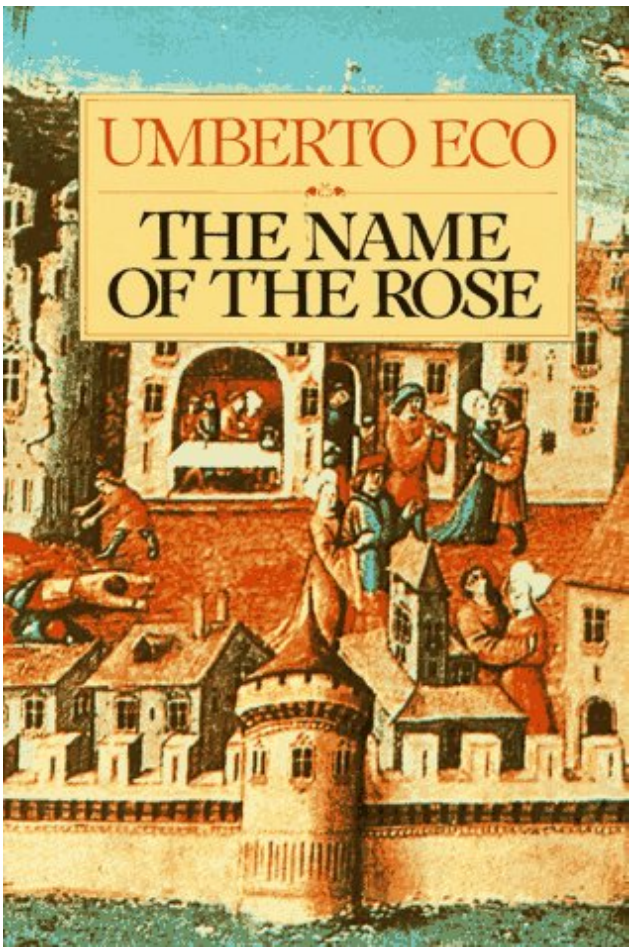

Umberto Eco அ THE NAME OF THE ROSE

THE NAME

OF THE ROSE

UMBERTO ECO

Translated from the Italian by

William Weaver

A Warner Communications Company

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NATURALLY, A MANUSCRIPT

PREFACE

ON AUGUST 16, 1968, I WAS HANDED A BOOK WRITTEN by a certain Abbé Vallet, *Le*

Manuscrit de Dom Adson de Melk, traduit en français d'après l'édition de Dom J. Mabillon (Aux Presses de l'Abbaye de la Source, Paris, 1842). Supplemented by historical information that was actually quite scant, the book claimed to reproduce faithfully a fourteenth-century manuscript that, in its turn, had been found in the monastery of Melk by the great eighteenth-

century man of learning, to whom we owe so much information about the history of the Benedictine order. The scholarly discovery (I mean mine, the third in chronological order) entertained me while I was in Prague, waiting for a dear friend. Six days later Soviet troops invaded that unhappy city. I managed, not without adventure, to reach the Austrian border at Linz, and from there I journeyed to Vienna, where I met my beloved, and together we sailed up the Danube.

In a state of intellectual excitement, I read with fascination the terrible story of Adso of Melk, and I allowed myself to be so absorbed by it that, almost in a single burst of energy, I completed a translation, using some of those large notebooks from the Papeterie Joseph Gibert in which it is so pleasant to write if you use a felt-tip pen. And as I was writing, we reached the vicinity of Melk, where, perched over a bend in the river, the handsome Stift stands to this day, after several restorations during the course of the centuries. As the reader must have guessed, in the monastery library I found no trace of Adso's manuscript.

Before we reached Salzburg, one tragic night in a little hotel on the shores of the Mondsee, my traveling-companionship was abruptly interrupted, and the person with whom I was traveling

disappeared—taking Abbé Vallet's book, not out of spite, but because of the abrupt and untidy way in which our relationship ended. And so I was left with a number of manuscript notebooks in my hand, and a great emptiness in my heart.

A few months later, in Paris, I decided to get to the bottom of my research. Among the few

pieces of information I had derived from the French book, I still had the reference to its source, exceptionally detailed and precise:

Vetera analecta, sive *collectio veterum aliquot operum* & opusculorum omms generis, carminum, epistolarum, diplomaton, epitaphiorum, &, *cum itinere germanico*, adnotationibus & aliquot disquisitionibus R.PD. Joannis Mabillon, Presbiteri ac Monachi Ord. Sancti Benedicti e

Congregatione S. Mauri— *Nova Editio* cui accessere *Mabiloii* vita & aliquot opuscula, scilicet Dissertatio de *Pane Eucharistico, Azymo et Fermentato* ad Eminentiss. Cardinalem *Bona*. Subiungitur opusculum *Eldefonsi* Hispaniensis Episcopi de eodem argumento *Et Eusebii* Romani ad *Theophilum* Gallum epistola, *De cultu sanctorum ignotorum*, Parisiis, apud Levesque, ad Pontem S. Michaelis, MDCCXXI, cum privilegio Regis.

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

unforgettable Étienne Gilson, but it was evident that the only *Vetera analecta* were those I had seen at Sainte Geneviève. A quick trip to the Abbaye de la Source, in the vicinity of Passy, and a

conversation with my friend Dom Arne Lahnestedt further convinced me that no Abbé Vallet had

published books on the abbey's presses (for that matter, nonexistent). French scholars are

notoriously careless about furnishing reliable bibliographical information, but this case went beyond all reasonable pessimism. I began to think I had encountered a forgery. By now the Vallet volume itself could not be recovered (or at least I didn't dare go and ask it back from the person who had taken it from me). I had only my notes left, and I was beginning to have doubts about them.

There are magic moments, involving great physical fatigue and intense motor excitement, that

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

If something new had not occurred, I would still be wondering where the story of Adso of Melk originated; but then, in 1970, in Buenos Aires, as I was browsing among the shelves of a little antiquarian bookseller on Corrientes, not far from the more illustrious Patio del Tango of that great street, I came upon the Castilian version of a little work by Milo Temesvar, *On the Use of Mirrors in the Game of Chess*. It was an Italian translation of the original, which, now impossible to find, was in Georgian (Tbilisi, 1934); and here, to my great surprise, I read copious quotations from Adso's manuscript, though the source was neither Vallet nor Mabillon; it was Father Athanasius Kircher (but which work?). A scholar—whom I prefer not to name—later assured me that (and he quoted

indexes from memory) the great Jesuit never mentioned Adso of Melk. But Temesvar's pages were before my eyes, and the episodes he cited were the same as those of the Vallet manuscript (the description of the labyrinth in particular left no room for doubt).

I concluded that Adso's memoirs appropriately share the nature of the events he narrates:

shrouded in many, shadowy mysteries, beginning with the identity of the author and ending with the abbey's location, about which Adso is stubbornly, scrupulously silent. Conjecture allows us to designate a vague area between Pomposa and Conques, with reasonable likelihood that the community was somewhere along the central ridge of the Apennines, between Piedmont, Liguria, and France. As for the period in which the events described take place, we are at the end of November 1327; the date of the author's writing, on the other hand, is uncertain. Inasmuch as he describes himself as a novice in 1327 and says he is close to death as he

writes his memoirs, we can calculate roughly that the manuscript was written in the last or next-to-last decade of the fourteenth century.

On sober reflection, I find few reasons for publishing my Italian version of an obscure, neo-

Gothic French version of a seventeenth-century Latin edition of a work written in Latin by a

German monk toward the end of the fourteenth century.

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

perplexities and always by hearsay) could have been written, as far as the language and the learned quotations go, in the twelfth or thirteenth century.

On the other hand, there is no doubt that, in translating Adso's Latin into his own neo-Gothic French, Vallet took some liberties, and not only stylistic liberties. For example, the characters speak sometimes of the properties of herbs, clearly referring to the book of secrets attributed to Albertus Magnus, which underwent countless revisions over the centuries. It is certain that Adso knew the work, but the fact remains that passages he quotes from it echo too literally both formulas of 6

Paracelsus and obvious interpolations from an edition of Albertus unquestionably dating from the Tudor period. 1 However, I discovered later

that during the time when Vallet was transcribing (?) the manuscript of Adso, there was circulating in Paris an eighteenth century edition of the *Grand* and the *Petit Albert*, 2 now irreparably corrupt. In any case, how could I be sure that the text known to Adso or the monks whose discussions he recorded did not also contain, among glosses, scholia, and

various appendices, annotations that would go on to enrich subsequent scholarship?

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

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

I transcribe my text with no concern for timeliness. In the years when I discovered the Abbé

Vallet volume, there was a widespread conviction that one should write only out of a commitment to the present, in order to change the world. Now, after ten years or more, the man of letters (restored to his loftiest dignity) can happily write out of pure love of writing. And so I now feel free to tell, for sheer narrative pleasure, the story of Adso of Melk, and I am comforted and consoled in finding it immeasurably remote in time (now that the waking of reason has dispelled all the monsters that its sleep had generated), gloriously lacking in any relevance for our day, atemporally alien to our hopes and our certainties.

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

January 5, 1980

1 *Liber aggregationis seu liber secretorum Alberti Magni*, Londinium, juxta pontem qui vulgariter dicitur Flete brigge, MCCCC-LXXXV.

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

NOTE

ADSO'S MANUSCRIPT IS DIVIDED INTO SEVEN DAYS, AND each day into periods

corresponding to the liturgical hours. The subtitles, in the third person, were probably added by Vallet. But since they are helpful in orienting the reader, and since this usage is also not unknown to much of the vernacular literature of the period, I did not feel it necessary to eliminate them.

Adso's references to the canonical hours caused me some puzzlement, because their meaning

varied according to the place and the season; moreover, it is entirely probable that in the fourteenth century the instructions given by Saint Benedict in the Rule were not observed with absolute

precision.

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

Matins

(which Adso sometimes refers to by the older expression “Vigiliae”) Between

2:30 and 3:00 in the morning.

Lauds

(which in the most ancient tradition were called “Matutini” or “Matins”) Between

5:00 and 6:00 in the morning, in order to end at dawn.

Prime

Around 7:30, shortly before daybreak. Terce Around 9:00.

Sext

Noon (in a monastery where the monks did not work in the fields, it was also the

hour of the midday meal in winter).

Nones

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

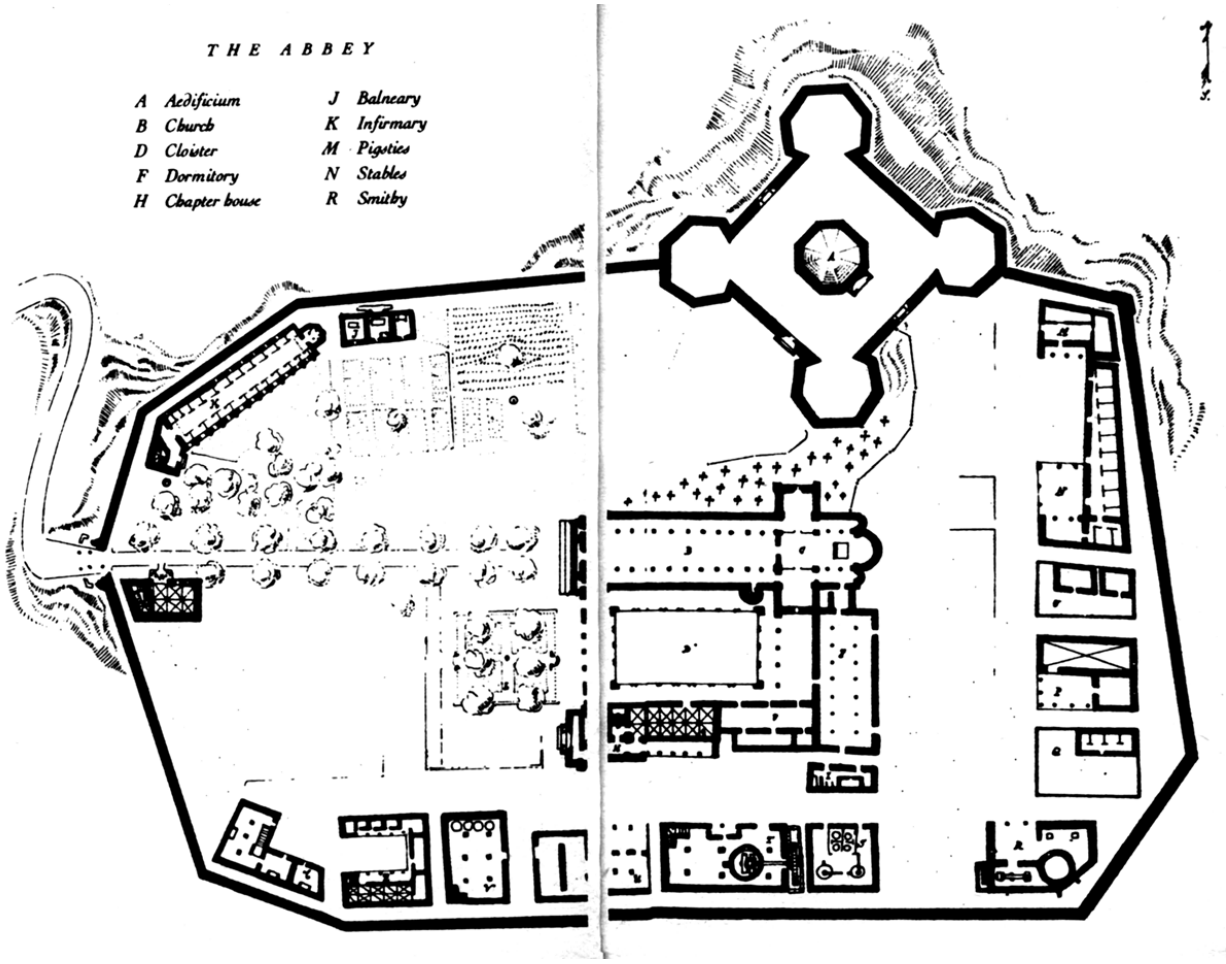
Vespers

Around 4:30, at sunset (the Rule prescribes eating supper before dark).

Compline

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

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



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PROLOGUE

In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. This was

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

Having reached the end of my poor sinner's life, my hair now white, I grow old as the world

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

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

Perhaps, to make more comprehensible the events in which I found myself involved, I should

recall what was happening in those last years of the century, as I understood it then, living through it, and as I remember it now, complemented by other stories I heard afterward—if my memory still proves capable of connecting the threads of happenings so many and confused.

In the early years of that century Pope Clement V had moved the apostolic seat to Avignon,

leaving Rome prey to the ambitions of the local overlords: and gradually the holy city of Christianity had been transformed into a circus, or into a brothel, riven by the struggles among its leaders; though called a republic, it was not one, and it was assailed by armed bands, subjected to violence and looting. Ecclesiastics, eluding secular jurisdiction, commanded groups of malefactors and robed, sword in hand, transgressing and organizing evil commerce. How was it possible to prevent the Caput Mundi from becoming again, and rightly, the goal of the man who wanted to assume the

crown of the Holy Roman Empire and restore the dignity of that temporal dominion that had

belonged to the Caesars?

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

Two years later, in Avignon, the new Pope was elected, Jacques of Cahors, an old man of

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

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

In 1322 Louis the Bavarian defeated his rival Frederick. Fearing a single emperor even more than he had feared two, John excommunicated the victor, who in return denounced the Pope as a heretic.

I must also recall how, that very year, the chapter of the Franciscans was convened in Perugia, and the minister general, Michael of Cesena, accepting the entreaties of the Spirituals (of whom I will have occasion to speak), proclaimed as a matter of faith and doctrine the poverty of Christ, who, if he owned something with his apostles, possessed it only as usus facti. A worthy resolution, meant to safeguard the virtue and purity of the order, it highly displeased the Pope, who perhaps discerned in it a principle that would jeopardize the very claims that he, as head of the church, had made, denying the empire the right to elect bishops, and asserting on the contrary that the papal throne had the right to invest the emperor. Moved by these or other reasons, John condemned the Franciscan

propositions in 1323 with the decretal *Cum inter nonnullos*.

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

This was the situation when I—a young Benedictine novice in the monastery of Melk—was

removed from the peace of the cloister by my father, fighting in Louis's train, not least among his barons. He thought it wise to take me with him so

that I might know the wonders of Italy and be present when the Emperor was crowned in Rome. But the siege of Pisa then absorbed him in

military concerns. Left to myself, I roamed among the cities of Tuscany, partly out of idleness and partly out of a desire to learn. But this undisciplined freedom, my parents thought, was not suitable for an adolescent devoted to a contemplative life. And on the advice of Marsilius, who had taken a liking to me, they decided to place me under the direction of a learned Franciscan, Brother William of Baskerville, about to undertake a mission that would lead him to famous cities and ancient abbeys. Thus I became William's scribe and disciple at the same time, nor did I ever regret it, because with him I was witness to events worthy of being handed down, as I am now doing, to

those who will come after us.

I did not then know what Brother William was seeking, and to tell the truth, I still do not know today, and I presume he himself did not know, moved as he was solely by the desire for truth, and by the suspicion—which I could see he always harbored—that the truth was not what was appearing to him at any given moment. And perhaps during those years he had been distracted from his

beloved studies by secular duties. The mission with which William had been charged remained unknown to me while we were on our journey, or, rather, he never spoke to me about it. It was only by overhearing bits of his conversations with the abbots of the monasteries where we stopped along the way that I formed some idea of the nature of this assignment. But I did not understand it fully until we reached our destination, as I will tell presently. Our destination was to the north, but our journey did not follow a straight line, and we rested at various abbeys. Thus it happened that we turned westward when our final goal was to the east, almost following the line of mountains that from Pisa leads in the direction of the pilgrim's way to Santiago, pausing in a place which the terrible events that took place there dissuade me from identifying more closely now, but whose lords were liege to the empire, and where the abbots of our order, all in agreement, opposed the heretical, corrupt Pope. Our journey lasted two weeks, amid various

vicissitudes, and during that time I had the opportunity to know (never enough, I remain convinced) my new master.

In the pages to follow I shall not indulge in descriptions of persons—except when a facial

expression, or a gesture, appears as a sign of a mute but eloquent language—because, as Boethius says, nothing is more fleeting than external form, which withers and alters like the flowers of the 12

field at the appearance of autumn; and what would be the point of saying today that the abbot Abo had a stern eye and pale cheeks, when by now he and those around him are dust and their bodies have the mortal grayness of dust (only their souls, God grant, shining with a light that will never be extinguished)? But I would like to describe William at least once, because his singular features struck me, and it is characteristic of the young to become bound to an older and wiser man not only by the spell of his words and the sharpness of his mind, but also by the superficial form of his body, which proves very dear, like the figure of a father, whose gestures we study and whose frowns, whose smile we observe—without a shadow of lust to pollute this form (perhaps the only that is truly pure) of corporal love.

In the past men were handsome and great (now they are children and dwarfs), but this is merely one of the many facts that demonstrate the disaster of an aging world. The young no longer want to study anything, learning is in decline, the whole world walks on its head, blind men lead others equally blind and cause them to plunge into the abyss, birds leave the nest before they can fly, the jackass plays the lyre, oxen dance. Mary no longer loves the contemplative life and Martha no longer loves the active life, Leah is sterile, Rachel has a carnal eye, Cato visits brothels, Lucretius becomes a woman. Everything is on the wrong path. In those days, thank God, I acquired from my master the desire to learn and a sense of the straight way, which remains even when the path is tortuous.

Brother William’s physical appearance was at that time such as to attract the attention of the most inattentive observer. His height surpassed that of a

normal man and he was so thin that he seemed still taller. His eyes were sharp and penetrating; his thin and slightly beaky nose gave his countenance the expression of a man on the lookout, save in certain moments of sluggishness of which I shall speak. His chin also denoted a firm will, though the long face covered with freckles—such as I often saw among those born between Hibernia and Northumbria—could occasionally express hesitation

and puzzlement. In time I realized that what seemed a lack of confidence was only curiosity, but at the beginning I knew little of this virtue, which I thought, rather, a passion of the covetous spirit. I believed instead that the rational spirit should not indulge such passion, but feed only on the Truth, which (I thought) one knows from the outset.

Boy that I was, I was first, and most deeply, struck by some clumps of yellowish hair that

protruded from his ears, and by his thick blond eyebrows. He had perhaps seen fifty springs and was therefore already very old, but his tireless body moved with an agility I myself often lacked. His energy seemed inexhaustible when a burst of activity overwhelmed him. But from time to time, as if his vital spirit had something of the crayfish, he moved backward in moments of inertia, and I watched him lie for hours on my pallet in my cel , uttering barely a few monosyllables, without contracting a single muscle of his face. On those occasions a vacant, absent expression appeared in his eyes, and I would have suspected he was in the power of some vegetal substance capable of producing visions if the obvious temperance of his life had not led me to reject this thought. I will not deny, however, that in the course of the journey, he sometimes stopped at the edge of a

meadow, at the entrance to a forest, to gather some herb (always the same one, I believe): and he would then chew it with an absorbed look. He kept some of it with him, and ate it in the moments of greatest tension (and we had a number of them at the abbey!). Once, when I asked him what it was, he said laughing that a good Christian can sometimes learn also from the infidels, and when I asked him to let me taste it, he replied that herbs that are good for an old Franciscan are not good for a young Benedictine.

During our time together we did not have occasion to lead a very regular life: even at the abbey we remained up at night and collapsed wearily during the day, nor did we take part regularly in the holy offices. On our journey, however, he seldom stayed awake after compline, and his habits were frugal. Sometimes, also at the abbey, he would spend the whole day walking in the vegetable garden, 13

examining the plants as if they were chrysoprases or emeralds; and I saw him roaming about the treasure crypt, looking at a coffer studded with emeralds and chrysoprases as if it were a clump of thorn apple. At other times he would pass an entire day in the great hal of the library, leafing through manuscripts as if seeking nothing but his own enjoyment (while, around us, the corpses of monks, horribly murdered, were multiplying). One day I found him strolling in the flower garden without any apparent aim, as if he did not have to account to God for his works. In my order they had taught me quite a different way of expending my time, and I said so to him. And he answered that the beauty of the cosmos derives not only from unity in variety, but also from variety in unity.

This seemed to me an answer dictated by crude common sense, but I learned subsequently that the men of his land often define things in ways in which it seems that the enlightening power of reason has scant function.

During our period at the abbey his hands were always covered with the dust of books, the gold of still-fresh illumination, or with yellowish substances he touched in Severinus's infirmary. He seemed unable to think save with his hands, an attribute I considered then worthier of a mechanic: but even when his hands touched the most fragile things, such as certain freshly illuminated codices, or pages worn by time and friable as unleavened bread, he possessed, it seemed to me, an extraordinarily delicate touch, the same that he used in handling his machines. I will tell, in fact, how this strange man carried with him, in his bag, instruments that I had never seen before then, which he called his wondrous machines. Machines, he said, are an effect of art, which is nature's ape, and they

reproduce not its forms but the operation itself. He explained to me thus the wonders of the clock, the astrolabe, and the magnet. But at the beginning I feared it was witchcraft, and I pretended to sleep on certain clear nights when he (with a strange triangle in his hand) stood watching the stars.

The Franciscans I had known in Italy and in my own land were simple men, often illiterate, and I expressed to him my amazement at his learning. But he said to me, smiling, that the Franciscans of his island were cast in another mold: “Roger Bacon, whom I venerate as my master, teaches that the divine plan will one day encompass the science of machines, which is natural and healthy magic.

And one day it will be possible, by exploiting the power of nature, to create instruments of

navigation by which ships will proceed unico homine regente, and far more rapid than those

propelled by sails or oars; and there will be self-propelled wagons ‘and flying apparatuses of such form that a man seated in them, by turning a device, can flap artificial wings, ad modum avis volantis. And tiny instruments will lift huge weights and vehicles will allow travel on the bottom of the sea.”

When I asked him where these machines were, he told me that they had already been made in

ancient times, and some even in our own time: “Except the flying instrument, which I have never seen or known anyone who has seen,. but I know of a learned man who has conceived it. And

bridges can be built across rivers without columns or other support, and other unheard-of machines are possible. But you must not worry if they do not yet exist, because that does not mean they will not exist later. And I say to you that God wishes them to be, and certainly they already are in His mind, even if my friend from Occam denies that ideas exist in such a way; and I do not say this because we can determine the divine nature but precisely because we cannot set any limit to it.” Nor was this the only

contradictory proposition I heard him utter; but even now, when I am old and wiser than I was then, I have not completely understood how he could have such faith in his friend from Occam and at the same time swear by the words of Bacon, as he was accustomed to doing. It is also true that in those dark times a wise man had to believe things that were in contradiction among themselves.

There, of Brother William I have perhaps said things without sense, as if to collect from the very beginning the disjointed impressions of him that I had then. Who he was, and what he was doing, my good reader, you will perhaps deduce better from the actions he performed in the days we spent 14

in the abbey. Nor do I promise you an accomplished design, but, rather, a tale of events (those, yes) wondrous and awful.

And so, after I had come to know my master day by day, and spent the many hours of our

journey in long conversations which, when appropriate, I will relate little by little, we reached the foot of the hill on which the abbey stood. And it is time for my story to approach it, as we did then, and may my hand remain steady as I prepare to tell what happened.

FIRST DAY

PRIME

In which the foot of the abbey is reached, and William demonstrates his grea

t

acumen.

It was a beautiful morning at the end of November. During the night it had snowed, but only a little, and the earth was covered with a cool blanket no more than three fingers high. In the darkness, immediately after lauds, we heard Mass in a village in the valley. Then we set off toward the mountain, as the sun first appeared.

While we toiled up the steep path that wound around the mountain, I saw the abbey. I was

amazed, not by the walls that girded it on every side, similar to others to be seen in all the Christian world, but by the bulk of what I later learned was the Aedificium. This was an octagonal

construction that from a distance seemed a tetragon (a perfect form, which expresses the sturdiness and impregnability of the City of God), whose southern sides stood on the plateau of the abbey, while the northern ones seemed to grow from the steep side of the mountain, a sheer drop, to which they were bound. I might say that from below, at certain points, the cliff seemed to extend, reaching up toward the heavens, with the rock's same colors and material, which at a certain point became keep and tower (work of giants who had great familiarity with earth and sky). Three rows of

windows proclaimed the triune rhythm of its elevation, so that what was physically squared on the earth was spiritually triangular in the sky. As we came closer, we realized that the quadrangular form included, at each of its corners, a heptagonal tower, five sides of which were visible on the outside —

four of the eight sides, then, of the greater octagon producing four minor heptagons, which from the outside appeared as pentagons. And thus anyone can see the admirable concord of so many holy numbers, each revealing a subtle spiritual significance. Eight, the number of perfection for every tetragon; 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. In its bulk and in its form, the Aedificium resembled Castel Ursino or Castel del Monte, which I was to see later in the south of the Italian peninsula, but its inaccessible position made it more awesome than those, and capable of inspiring fear in the traveler who approached it gradually. And it was

fortunate that, since it was a very clear winter morning, I did not first see the building as it appears on stormy days.

I will not say, in any case, that it prompted feelings of jollity. I felt fear, and a subtle uneasiness.

God knows these were not phantoms of my immature spirit, and I was rightly interpreting

indubitable omens inscribed in the stone the day that the giants began their work, and before the deluded determination of the monks dared consecrate the building to the preservation of the divine word.

As our little mules strove up the last curve of the mountain, where the main path divided into three, producing two side paths, my master stopped for a while, to look around: at the sides of the road, at the road itself, and above the road, where, for a brief stretch, a series of evergreen pines formed a natural roof, white with snow.

“A rich abbey,” he said. “The abbot likes a great display on public occasions.”

Accustomed as I was to hear him make the most unusual declarations, I did not question him.

This was also because, after another bit of road, we heard some noises, and at the next turn an agitated band of monks and servants appeared. One of them, seeing us, came toward us with great cordiality. “Welcome, sir,” he said, “and do not be surprised if I can guess who you are, because we have been advised of your visit. I am Remigio of Varagine, the cellarer of the monastery. And if you, as I believe, are Brother William of Baskerville, the abbot must be informed. You”—he commanded one of his party—“go up and tell them that our visitor is about to come inside the walls.”

“I thank you, Brother Cellarer,” my master replied politely, “and I appreciate your courtesy all the more since, in order to greet me, you have interrupted your search. But don’t worry. The horse came this way and took the path to the right. He will not get far, because he will have to stop when he reaches the dungheap. He is too intelligent to plunge down that precipitous slope. …”

“When did you see him?” the cellarer asked.

“We haven’t seen him at all, have we, Adso?” William said, turning toward me with an amused

look. “But if you are hunting for Brunellus, the horse can only be where I have said.”

The cellarer hesitated. He looked at William, then at the path, and finally asked, “Brunellus? How did you know?”

“Come, come,” William said, “it is obvious you are hunting for Brunellus, the abbot’s favorite horse, fifteen hands, the fastest in your stables, with a dark coat, a full tail, small round hoofs, but a very steady gait; small head, sharp ears, big eyes. He went to the right, as I said, but you should hurry, in any case.”

The cellarer hesitated for a moment longer, then gestured to his men and rushed off along the path to the right, while our mules resumed their climb. My curiosity aroused, I was about to question William, but he motioned me to wait: in fact, a few minutes later we heard cries of rejoicing, and at the turn of the path, monks and servants reappeared, leading the horse by its halter. They passed by us, all glancing at us with some amazement, then preceded us toward the abbey. I believe William also slowed the pace of his mount to give them time to tell what had happened. I had already

realized that my master, in every respect a man of the highest virtue, succumbed to the vice of vanity when it was a matter of demonstrating his acumen; and having learned to appreciate his gifts as a subtle diplomatist, I understood that he wanted to reach his destination preceded by a firm

reputation as a man of knowledge.

“And now tell me”—in the end I could not restrain myself—“how did you manage to know?”

“My good Adso,” my master said, “during our whole journey I have been teaching you to

recognize the evidence through which the world speaks to us like a great book. Alanus de Insulis said that

omnis mundi creatura

quasi liber et pictura

nobis est in speculum

and he was thinking of the endless array of symbols with which God, through His creatures, speaks to us of the eternal life. But the universe is even more talkative than Alanus thought, and it speaks not only of the ultimate things (which it does always in an obscure fashion) but also of closer things, and then it speaks quite clearly. I am almost embarrassed to repeat to you what you should know. At the crossroads, on the still-fresh snow, a horse’s hoofprints stood out very neatly, heading for the path to our left. Neatly spaced, those marks said that the hoof was small and round, and the gallop quite regular—and so I deduced the nature of the horse, and the fact that it was not running wildly like a crazed animal. At the point where the pines formed a natural roof, some twigs had been freshly broken off at a height of five feet. One of the blackberry bushes where the animal must have

turned to take the path to his right, proudly switching his handsome tail, still held some long black horsehairs in its brambles. ... You will not say, finally, that you do not know that path leads to the dungheap, because as we passed the lower curve we saw the spill of waste down the sheer cliff below the great east tower, staining the snow; and from the situation of the crossroads, the path could only lead in that direction.”

“Yes,” I said, “but what about the small head, the sharp ears, the big eyes ...?”

“I am not sure he has those features, but no doubt the monks firmly believe he does. As Isidore of Seville said, the beauty of a horse requires ‘that the head be small, siccum prope pelle ossibus adhaerente, short and pointed ears, big eyes, flaring nostrils, erect neck, thick mane and tail, round and solid hoofs.’ If the horse whose passing I inferred had not really been the finest of the stables, stableboys would have been out chasing him, but instead, the cellarer in person had undertaken the search. And a monk who considers a horse excellent, whatever his natural forms, can only see him as the auctoritates have described him, especially if”—and here he smiled slyly in my direction—

“the describer is a learned Benedictine.”

“All right,” I said, “but why Brunellus?”

“May the Holy Ghost sharpen your mind, son!” my master exclaimed. “What other name could

he possibly have? Why, even the great Buridan, who is about to become rector in Paris, when he wants to use a horse in one of his logical examples, always calls it Brunellus.”

This was my master’s way. He not only knew how to read the great book of nature, but also

knew the way monks read the books of Scripture, and how they thought through them. A gift that, as we shall see, was to prove useful to him in the days to follow. His explanation, moreover, seemed to me at that point so obvious that my humiliation at not having discovered it by myself was

surpassed only by my pride at now being a sharer in it, and I was almost congratulating myself on my insight. Such is the power of the truth that, like good, it is its own propagator. And praised be the holy name of our Lord Jesus Christ for this splendid revelation I was granted.

But resume your course, O my story, for this aging monk is lingering too long over marginalia.

Tell, rather, how we arrived at the great gate of the abbey, and on the threshold stood the abbot, beside whom two novices held a golden basin filled with water. When we had dismounted, he

washed William's hands, then embraced him, kissing him on the mouth and giving him a holy

welcome.

"Thank you, Abo," William said. "It is a great joy for me to set foot in Your Magnificence's

monastery, whose fame has traveled beyond these mountains. I come as a pilgrim in the name of our Lord, and as such you have honored me. But I come also in the name of our lord on this earth, as the letter I now give you will tell you, and in his name also I thank you for your welcome."

The abbot accepted the letter with the imperial seals and replied that William's arrival had in any event been preceded by other missives from his brothers (it is difficult, I said to myself with a certain pride, to take a Benedictine abbot by surprise); then he asked the cellarer to take us to our lodgings, as the grooms led our mules away. The abbot was looking forward to visiting us later, when we were refreshed, and we entered the great courtyard where the abbey buildings extended all about the gentle plain that blunted in a soft bowl—or alp—the peak of the mountain.

I shall have occasion to discuss the layout of the abbey more than once, and in greater detail. After the gate (which was the only opening in the outer walls) a tree-lined avenue led to the abbatial church. To the left of the avenue there stretched a vast area of vegetable gardens and, as I later learned, the botanical garden, around the two buildings of the balneary and the infirmary and herbarium, following the curve of the walls. Behind, to the left of the church, rose the Aedificium, separated from the church by a yard scattered with graves. The north door of the church faced the south tower of

the Aedificium, which offered, frontally, its west tower to the arriving visitor's eyes; 18

then, to the left, the building joined the walls and seemed to plunge, from its towers, toward the abyss, over which the north tower, seen obliquely, projected. To the right of the church there were some buildings, sheltering in its lee, and others around the cloister: the dormitory, no doubt, the abbot's house, and the pilgrims' hospice, where we were heading. We reached it after crossing a handsome flower garden. On the right side, beyond a broad lawn, along the south walls and

continuing eastward behind the church, a series of peasants' quarters, stables, mills, oil presses, granaries, and cellars, and what seemed to me to be the novices' house. The regular terrain, only slightly rolling, had allowed the ancient builders of that holy place to respect the rules of orientation, better than Honorius Augustoduniensis or Guillaume Durant could have demanded. From the

position of the sun at that hour of the day, I noticed that the main church door opened perfectly westward, so choir and altar were facing east; and the good morning sun, in rising, could directly wake the monks in the dormitory and the animals in the stables. I never saw an abbey more beautiful or better oriented, even though subsequently I saw St. Gall, and Cluny, and Fontenay, and others still, perhaps larger but less well proportioned. Unlike the others, this one was remarkable for the exceptional size of the Aedificium. I did not possess the experience of a master builder, but I immediately realized it was much older than the buildings surrounding it. Perhaps it had originated for some other purposes, and the abbey's compound had been laid out around it at a later time, but in such a way that the orientation of the huge building should conform with that of the church, and the church's with its. For architecture, among all the arts, is the one that most boldly tries to reproduce in its rhythm the order of the universe, which the ancients called "kosmos," that is to say ornate, since it is like a great animal on whom there shine the perfection and the proportion of all its members. And praised be our Creator, who has decreed all things, in their number, weight, and measure.

TERCE

In which Wi lliam has an instructive conversation with the abbot.

The cellarer was a stout man, vulgar in appearance but jolly, white-haired but still strong, small but quick. He led us to our cells in the pilgrims' hospice. Or, rather, he led us to the cell assigned to my master, promising me that by the next day he would have cleared one for me also, since, though a novice, I was their guest and therefore to be treated with all honor. For that night I could sleep in a long and wide niche in the wall of the cell, in which he had had some nice fresh straw prepared.

Then the monks brought us wine, cheese, olives, bread, and excellent raisins, and left us to our refreshment. We ate and drank heartily. My master did not share the austere habits of the

Benedictines and did not like to eat in silence. For that matter, he spoke always of things so good and wise that it was as if a monk were reading to us the lives of the saints.

That day I could not refrain from questioning him further about the matter of the horse.

"All the same," I said, "when you read the prints in the snow and the evidence of the branches, you did not yet know Brunellus. In a certain sense those prints spoke of all horses, or at least all horses of that breed. Mustn't we say, then, that the book of nature speaks to us only of essences, as many distinguished theologians teach?"

"Not entirely, dear Adso," my master replied. "True, that kind of print expressed to me, if you like, the idea of 'horse,' the verbum mentis, and would have expressed the same to me wherever I might have found it. But the print in that place and at that hour of the day told me that at least one of all possible horses had passed that way. So I found myself halfway between the perception of the concept 'horse' and the knowledge of an individual

horse. And in any case, what I knew of the universal horse had been given me by those traces, which were singular. I could say I was caught at that moment between the singularity of the traces and my ignorance, which assumed the quite

diaphanous form of a universal idea. If you see something from a distance, and you do not

understand what it is, you will be content with defining it as a body of some dimension. When you come closer, you will then define it as an animal, even if you do not yet know whether it is a horse or an ass. And finally, when it is still closer, you will be able to say it is a horse even if you do not yet know whether it is Brunellus or Niger. And only when you are at the proper distance will you see that it is Brunellus (or, rather, that horse and not another, however you decide to call it). And that will be full knowledge, the learning of the singular. So an hour ago I could expect all horses, but not because of the vastness of my intellect, but because of the paucity of my deduction. And my

intellect's hunger was sated only when I saw the single horse that the monks were leading by the halter. Only then did I truly know that my previous reasoning, had brought me close to the truth.

And so the ideas, which I was using earlier to imagine a horse I had not yet seen, were pure signs, as the hoofprints in the snow were signs of the idea of 'horse'; and sins and the signs of signs are used only when we are lacing things."

On other occasions I had heard him speak with great skepticism about universal ideas and with great respect about individual things; and afterward, too, I thought this tendency came to him from his being both a Briton and a Franciscan. But that day he did not have the strength to face

theological disputes, so I curled up in the space allotted me, wrapped myself in a blanket, and fell sound asleep.

Anyone coming in could have mistaken me for a bundle. And this is surely what the abbot did

when he paid William a visit toward the third hour. So it was that I could listen, unnoticed, to their first conversation.

And so Abo arrived. He apologized for the intrusion, repeated his welcome, and said that he had to speak with William privately, about a very serious matter.

He began by congratulating his guest on the skill demonstrated in the business of the horse, and asked how he had been able to give such confident information about an animal he had never seen.

William explained to him briefly and with detachment the path he had followed, and the abbot

complimented him highly on his acumen. He said he would have expected nothing less from a man preceded by a reputation for great wisdom. He said he had received a letter from the abbot of Farfa that not only spoke of William's mission for the Emperor (which they would discuss in the coming days) but also added that in England and in Italy my master had acted as inquisitor in some trials, where he had distinguished himself by his perspicacity, along with a great humility.

"I was very pleased to learn," the abbot continued, "that in numerous cases you decided the

accused was innocent. I believe, and never more than during these sad days, in the constant presence of the Evil One in human affairs"—and he looked around, imperceptibly, as if the enemy were

lurking within those walls—"but I believe also that often the Evil One works through second

causes. And I know that he can impel his victims to do evil in such a way that the blame fal s on a righteous man, and the Evil One rejoices then as the righteous man is burned in the place of his succubus. Inquisitors often, to

demonstrate their zeal, wrest a confession from the accused at all costs, thinking that the only good inquisitor is one who concludes the trial by finding a scapegoat.

…" "An inquisitor, too, can be impelled by the Devil," William said.

"That is possible," the abbot admitted with great circumspection, "because the designs of the Almighty are inscrutable, and far be it from me to cast any shadow of suspicion on such worthy men. Indeed, it is as one of them that I need you today. In this abbey something has happened that requires the attention and counsel of an acute and prudent man such as you are. Acute in

uncovering, and prudent (if necessary) in covering. If a shepherd errs, he must be isolated from other shepherds, but woe unto us if the sheep begin to distrust shepherds."

"I see your point," William said. I had already had occasion to observe that when he expressed himself so promptly and politely he was usually concealing, in an honest way, his dissent or

puzzlement.

"For this reason," the abbot continued, "I consider that any case involving the error of a

shepherd can be entrusted only to men like you, who can distinguish not only good from evil, but also what is expedient from what is not. I like to think you pronounced a sentence of guilty only when ..."

"... the accused were guilty of criminal acts, of poisoning, of the corruption of innocent youths, or other abominations my mouth dares not utter …"

"… that you pronounced sentence only when," the abbot continued, not heeding the

interruption, "the presence of the Devil was so evident to all eyes that it was impossible to act otherwise without the clemency's being more scandalous than the crime itself."

“When I found someone guilty,” William explained, “he had really committed crimes of such

gravity that in all conscience I could hand him over to the secular arm.”

The abbot was bewildered for a moment. “Why,” he asked, “do you insist on speaking of

criminal acts without referring to their diabolical cause?”

“Because reasoning about causes and effects is a very difficult thing, and I believe the only judge of that can be God. We are already hard put to establish a relationship between such an obvious effect as a charred tree and the lightning bolt that set fire to it, so to trace sometimes endless chains of causes and effects seems to me as foolish as trying to build a tower that will touch the sky.

“Let us suppose a man has been killed by poisoning. This is a given fact. It is possible for me to imagine, in the face of certain undeniable signs, that the poisoner is a second man. On such simple chains of causes my mind can act with a certain confidence in its power. But how can I complicate the chain, imagining that, to cause the evil deed, there was yet another intervention, not human this time, but diabolical? I do not say it is impossible: the Devil, like your horse Brunellus, also indicates his passage through clear signs. But why must I hunt for these proofs? Is it not already enough for me to know that the guilty party is that man and for me to turn him over to the secular arm? In any case his punishment will be death, God forgive him.”

“But I have heard that in a trial held at Kilkenny three years ago, in which certain persons were accused of having committed loathsome crimes, you did not deny diabolical intervention, once the guilty parties had been identified.”

“Nor did I affirm it openly, in so many words. I did not deny it, true. Who am I to express

judgments on the plots of the Evil One, especially," he added, and seemed to want to insist on this reason, "in cases where those who had initiated the inquisition, the bishop, the city magistrates, and the whole populace, perhaps the. accused themselves, truly wanted to feel the presence of the Devil?

There, perhaps the only real proof of the presence of the Devil was the intensity with which

everyone at that moment desired to know he was at work. …"

"Are you telling me, then," the abbot said in a worried tone, "that in many trials the Devil does not act only within the guilty one but perhaps and above all in the judges?"

"Could I make such a statement?" William asked, and I noticed that the question was formulated in such a way that the abbot was unable to affirm that he could; so William took advantage of his silence to change the direction of their dialogue. "But these, after all, are remote things. I have abandoned that noble activity and if I did so, it was because the Lord wished it ..."

"No doubt," the abbot admitted.

"... and now," William continued, "I concern myself with other delicate questions. And I would like to deal with the one that distresses you, if you will speak to me about it."

I felt the abbot was pleased to be able to conclude that discussion and return to his problem. He then began telling, with very careful choice of words and with long paraphrases, about an unusual event that had taken place a few days before and had left in its wake great distress among the monks.

He was speaking of the matter with William, he said, because, since William had great knowledge both of the human spirit and of the wiles of the Evil One, Abo hoped his guest would be able to devote a part of his valuable time to shedding light on a painful enigma. What had happened, then, was this: Adelmo of Otranto, a monk still young though already famous as a master illuminator, who had been decorating the manuscripts of the library with the most beautiful images, had been found one morning by a goatherd at the

bottom of the cliff below the Aedificium. Since he had been seen by other monks in choir during compline but had not reappeared at matins, he had probably fallen there during the darkest hours of the night. The night of a great snowstorm, in which flakes as sharp as blades fell, almost like hail, driven by a furious south wind. Soaked by that snow, which had first melted and then frozen into shards of ice, the body had been discovered at the foot of the sheer drop, torn by the rocks it had struck on the way down. Poor, fragile, mortal thing, God have mercy on him. Thanks to the battering the body had suffered in its broken fall, determining from which precise spot it had fallen was not easy: certainly from one of the windows that opened in rows on the three stories on the three sides of the tower exposed to the abyss.

“Where have you buried the poor body?” William asked.

“In the cemetery, naturally,” the abbot replied. “Perhaps you noticed it: it lies between the north side of the church, the Aedificium, and the vegetable garden.”

“I see,” William said, “and I see that your problem is the following. If that unhappy youth, God forbid, committed suicide, the next day you would have found one of those windows open, whereas you found them all closed, and with no sign of water at the foot of any of them.”

The abbot, as I have said, was a man of great and diplomatic composure, but this time he made a movement of surprise that robbed him totally of that decorum suited to a grave and magnanimous person, as Aristotle has it. “Who told you?”

“You told me,” William said. “If the window had been open, you would immediately have

thought he had thrown himself out of it. From what I could tell from the outside, they are large windows of opaque glass, and windows of that sort

are not usually placed, in buildings of this size, at a man's height. So even if a window had been open, it would have been impossible for the

unfortunate man to lean out and lose his balance; thus suicide would have been the only conceivable explanation. In which case you would not have allowed him to be buried in consecrated ground. But since you gave him Christian burial, the windows must have been closed. And if they were closed—

for I have never encountered, not even in witchcraft trials, a dead man whom God or the Devil allowed to climb up from the abyss to erase the evidence of his misdeed—then obviously the

presumed suicide was, on the contrary, pushed, either by human hand or by diabolical force. And you are wondering who was capable, I will not say of pushing him into the abyss, but of hoisting him to the sill; and you are distressed because an evil force, whether natural or supernatural, is at work in the abbey."

"That is it ..." the abbot said, and it was not clear whether he was confirming William's words or accepting the reasons William had so admirably and reasonably expounded. "But how can you know there was no water at the foot of any window?"

"Because you told me a south wind was blowing, and the water could not be driven against

windows that open to the east."

"They had not told me enough about your talents," the abbot said. "And you are right, there was no water, and now I know why. It was all as you say. And now you understand my anxiety. It would already be serious enough if one of my monks had stained his soul with the hateful sin of suicide.

But I have reason to think that another of them has stained himself with an equally terrible sin. And if that were all ..."

"In the first place, why one of the monks? In the abbey there are many other persons, grooms, goatherds, servants. ..."

“To be sure, the abbey is small but rich, the abbot agreed smugly. “One hundred fifty servants for sixty monks. But everything happened in the Aedificium. There, as perhaps you already know, although, on the ground floor are the kitchen and the refectory, on the two upper floors are the scriptorium and the library. After the evening meal the Aedifïcium is locked, and a very strict rule forbids anyone to enter.” He guessed William’s next question and added at once, though clearly with reluctance, “Including, naturally, the monks, but …”

“But?”

“But I reject absolutely—absolutely, you understand—the possibility that a servant would have had the courage to enter there at night.” There was a kind of defiant smile in his eyes, albeit brief as a flash, or a falling star. “Let us say they would have been afraid, you know ... sometimes orders given to the simpleminded have to be reinforced with a threat, a suggestion that something terrible will happen to the disobedient, perforce something supernatural. A monk, on the contrary ...”

“I understand.”

“Furthermore, a monk could have other reasons for venturing into a forbidden place. I mean

reasons that are ... reasonable, even if contrary to the rule. …”

William noticed the abbot’s uneasiness and asked a question perhaps intended to change the

subject, though it produced an even greater uneasiness.

“Speaking of a possible murder, you said, ‘And if that were all.’ What did you mean?”

“Did I say that? Well, no one commits murder without a reason, however perverse. And I

tremble to think of the perversity of the reasons that could have driven a monk to kill a brother monk. There. That is it.”

“Nothing else?”

“Nothing else that I can say to you.”

“You mean that there is nothing else you have the power to say?”

“Please, Brother William, Brother William,” and the abbot underlined “Brother” both times.

William blushed violently and remarked, “Eris sacerdos in aeternum.”

“Thank you,” the abbot said.

O Lord God, what a terrible mystery my imprudent superiors were broaching at that moment,

the one driven by anxiety and the other by curiosity. Because, a novice approaching the mysteries of the holy priesthood of God, humble youth that I was, I, too, understood that the abbot knew

something but had learned it under the seal of confession. He must have heard from someone’s lips a sinful detail that could have a bearing on the tragic end of Adelmo. Perhaps for this reason he was begging Brother William to uncover a secret he himself suspected, though he was unable to reveal to anyone—and he hoped that my master, with the powers of his intellect, would cast light on—what he, the abbot, had to shroud in shadows because of the sublime law of charity.

“Very well,” William said then, “may I question the monks?”

“You may.”

“May I move freely about the abbey?”

“I grant you that power.”

“Will you assign me this mission coram monachis?”

“This very evening.”

“I shall begin, however, today, before the monks know what you have charged me to do. Besides, I already had a great desire—not the least reason for my sojourn here—to visit your library, which is spoken of with admiration in all the abbeys of Christendom.”

The abbot rose, almost starting, with a very tense face. “You can move freely through the whole abbey, as I have said. But not, to be sure, on the top floor of the Aedificium, the library.”

“Why not?”

“I would have explained to you before, but I thought you knew. You see, our library is not like others. …”

“I know it has more books than any other Christian library. I know that in comparison with your cases, those of Bobbio or Pomposa, of Cluny or Fleury, seem the room of a boy barely being

introduced to the abacus. I know that the six thousand codices that were the boast of Novalesa a hundred or more years ago are few compared to yours, and perhaps many of those are now here. I know your abbey is the only light that Christianity can oppose to the thirty-six libraries of Baghdad, to the ten thousand codices of the Vizir Ibn al-Alkami, that the number of your Bibles equals the two thousand four hundred Korans that are the pride of Cairo, and that the reality of your cases is luminous evidence against the proud legend of the infidels who years ago claimed (intimates as they are of the Prince of Falsehood) the library of Tripoli was rich in six million volumes and inhabited by eighty thousand commentators and two hundred scribes.”

“You are right, heaven be praised.”

“I know that many of the monks living in your midst come from other abbeys scattered all over the world. Some stay here a short time, to copy

manuscripts to be found nowhere else and to carry them back then to their own house, not without having brought you in exchange some other

unavailable manuscript that you will copy and add to your treasure; and others stay for a very long time, occasionally remaining here till death, because only here can they find the works that enlighten 24

their research. And so you have among you Germans, Dacians, Spaniards, Frenchmen, Greeks. I

know that the Emperor Frederick, many and many years ago, asked you to compile for him a book of the prophecies of Merlin and then to translate it into Arabic, to be sent as a gift to the Sultan of Egypt. I know, finally, that such a glorious abbey as Murbach in these very sad times no longer has a single scribe, that at St. Gall only a few monks are left who know how to write, that now in the cities corporations and guilds arise, made up of laymen who work for the universities, and only your abbey day after day renews, or —what am I saying?—it exalts to ever greater heights the glories of your order. …"

"Monasterium sine libris," the abbot recited, pensively, "est sicut civitas sine opibus, castrum sine numeris, coquina sine suppellectili, mensa sine cibis, hortus sine herbis, pratum sine floribus, arbor sine fouis. … And our order, growing up under the double command of work and prayer, was light to the whole known world, depository of knowledge, salvation of an ancient learning that threatened to disappear in fires, sacks, earthquakes, forge of new writing and increase of the ancient. ... Oh, as you well know, we live now in very dark times, and I blush to tell you that not many years ago the Council of Vienne had to reaffirm that every monk is under obligation to take orders. ... How many of our abbeys, which two hundred years ago were resplendent with grandeur and sanctity, are now the refuge of the slothful? The order is still powerful, but the stink of the cities is encroaching upon our holy places, the people of God are now inclined to commerce and wars of faction; down below in the great settlements, where the spirit of sanctity can find no lodging, not only do they speak (of laymen, nothing else could be expected) in the vulgar tongue, but they are already writing in it, though

none of these volumes will ever come within our walls—fomenter of heresies as those

volumes inevitably become! Because of mankind's sins the world is teetering on the brink of the abyss, permeated by the very abyss that the abyss invokes. And tomorrow, as Honorius would have it, men's bodies will be smaller than ours, just as ours are smaller than those of the ancients. Mundus senescit. If God has now given our order a mission, it is to oppose this race to the abyss, by preserving, repeating, and defending the treasure of wisdom our fathers entrusted to us. Divine Providence has ordered that the universal government, which at the beginning of the world was in the East, should gradually, as the time was nearing fulfillment, move westward to warn us that the end of the world is approaching, because the course of events has already reached the confines of the universe. But until the millennium occurs definitively, until the triumph, however brief, of the foul beast that is the Antichrist, it is up to us to defend the treasure of the Christian world, and the very word of God, as he dictated it to the prophets and to the apostles, as the fathers repeated it without changing a syllable, as the schools have tried to gloss it, even if today in the schools themselves the serpent of pride, envy, folly is nesting. In this sunset we are still torches and light, high on the horizon. And as long as these walls stand, we shall be the custodians of the divine Word."

"Amen," William said in a devout tone. "But what does this have to do with the fact that the

library may not be visited?"

"You see, Brother William," the abbot said, "to achieve the immense and holy task that enriches those walls"—and he nodded toward the bulk of the Aedificium; which could be glimpsed from the cell's windows, towering above the abbatial church itself—"devout men have toiled for centuries, observing iron rules. The library was laid out on a plan which has remained obscure to all over the centuries, and which none of the monks is called upon to know. Only the librarian has received the secret, from the librarian who preceded him, and he communicates it, while still alive, to the assistant librarian, so that death will not take him by surprise and rob the community of that knowledge. And the secret seals the lips of both men. Only the

librarian has, in addition to that knowledge, the right to move through the labyrinth of the books, he alone knows where to find them and where to replace them, he alone is responsible for their safekeeping. The other monks

work in the scriptorium and may know the list of the volumes that the library houses. But a list of titles often tells very little; only the librarian knows, from the collocation of the volume, from its degree of inaccessibility, what secrets, what truths or falsehoods, the volume contains. Only he decides how, when, and whether to give it to the monk who requests it; sometimes he first consults me. Because not all truths are for all ears, not all falsehoods can be recognized as such by a pious soul; and the monks, finally, are in the scriptorium to carry out a precise task, which requires them to read certain volumes and not others, and not to pursue every foolish curiosity that seizes them, whether through weakness of intellect or through pride or through diabolical prompting."

"So in the library there are also books containing falsehoods. ..."

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

And therefore the library is a vessel of these, too. But for this very reason, you understand, it cannot be visited by just anyone. And furthermore," the abbot added, as if to apologize for the weakness of this last argument, "a book is a fragile creature, it suffers the wear of time, it fears rodents, the elements, clumsy hands. If for a hundred and a hundred years everyone had been able freely to handle our codices, the majority of them would no longer exist. So the librarian protects them not only against mankind but also against nature, and devotes his life to this war with the forces of oblivion, the enemy of truth."

“And so no one, except for two people, enters the top floor of the Aedificium. ...”

The abbot smiled. “No one should. No one can. No one, even if he wished, would succeed. The

library defends itself, immeasurable as the truth it houses, deceitful as the falsehood it preserves. A spiritual labyrinth, it is also a terrestrial labyrinth. You might enter and you might not emerge. And having said this, I would like you to conform to the rules of the abbey.”

“But you have not dismissed the possibility that Adelmo fell from one of the windows of the

library. And how can I study his death if I do not see the place where the story of his death may have begun?”

“Brother William,” the abbot said, in a conciliatory tone; “a man who described my horse

Brunellus without seeing him, and the death of Adelmo though knowing virtually nothing of it, will have no difficulty studying places to which he does not have access.”

William bowed. “You are wise also when you are severe. It shall be as you wish.”

“If ever I were wise, it would be because I know how to be severe,” the abbot answered.

“One last thing,” William asked. “Ubertino?”

“He is here. He is expecting you. You will find him in church.”

“When?”

“Always,” the abbot said, and smiled. “You must know that, although very learned, he is not a man to appreciate the library. He considers it a secular lure. ... For the most part he stays in church, meditating, praying. …”

“Is he old?” William asked, hesitating.

“How long has it been since you saw him?”

“Many years.”

“He is weary. Very detached from the things of this world. He is sixty-eight. But I believe he still possesses the spirit of his youth.”

“I will seek him out at once. Thank you.”

The abbot asked him whether he wanted to join the community for the midday refection, after

sext. William said he had only just eaten—very well, too—and he would prefer to see Ubertino at once. The abbot took his leave.

He was going out of the cell when from the courtyard a heartrending cry arose, like that of

someone mortally wounded, followed by other, equally horrible cries. “What is that?” William asked, disconcerted. “Nothing,” the abbot answered, smiling. “At this time of year they slaughter the pigs.

A job for the swineherds. This is not the blood that should concern you.”

He went out, and he did a disservice to his reputation as a clever man. Because the next morning

... But curb your impatience, garrulous tongue of mine. For on the day of which I am telling, and before its night, many more things happened that it would be best to narrate.

SEXT

In which Adso admires the door of th

e church, and William mee

ts Ubertino of

Casale again.

The church was not majestic like others I saw later at Strasbourg, Chartres, Bamberg, and Paris. It resembled, rather, those I had already seen in Italy, with scant inclination to soar dizzyingly toward the heavens, indeed firmly set on the earth, often broader than they were high; but at the first level this one was surmounted, like a fortress, by a sequence of square battlements, and above this story another construction rose, not so much a tower as a solid, second church, capped by a pitched roof and pierced by severe windows. A robust abbatial church such as our forefathers built in Provence and Languedoc, far from the audacity and the excessive tracery characteristic of the modern style, which only in more recent times has been enriched, I believe, above the choir, with a pinnacle boldly pointed toward the roof of the heavens.

Two straight and unadorned columns stood on either side of the entrance, which opened, at first sight, like a single great arch; but from the columns began two embrasures that, surmounted by other, multiple arches, led the gaze, as if into the heart of an abyss, toward the doorway itself, crowned by a great tympanum, supported on the sides by two imposts and in the center by a carved pillar, which divided the entrance into two apertures protected by oak doors reinforced in metal. At that hour of the day the weak sun was beating almost straight down on the roof and the light fell obliquely on the façade without illuminating the tympanum; so after passing the two columns, we found ourselves abruptly under the almost sylvan vault of the arches that sprang from the series of lesser columns that proportionally reinforced the embrasures. When our eyes had finally grown accustomed to the gloom, the silent speech of the carved stone, accessible as it immediately

was to the gaze and the imagination of anyone (for images are the literature of the layman), dazzled my eyes and plunged me into a vision that even today my tongue can hardly describe.

I saw a throne set in the sky and a figure seated on the throne. The face of the Seated One was stern and impassive, the eyes wide and glaring over a terrestrial humankind that had reached the end of its story; majestic hair and beard flowed around the face and over the chest like the waters of a river, in streams all equal, symmetrically divided in two. The crown on his head was rich in enamels and jewels, the purple imperial tunic was arranged in broad folds over the knees, woven with

embroideries and laces of gold and silver thread. The left hand, resting on one knee, held a sealed book, the right was uplifted in an attitude of blessing or—I could not tell—of admonition. The face was illuminated by the tremendous beauty of a halo, containing a cross and bedecked with flowers, while around the throne and above the face of the Seated One I saw an emerald rainbow glittering Before the throne, beneath the feet of the Seated One, a sea of crystal flowed, and around the Seated One, beside and above the throne, I saw four awful creatures—awful for me, as I looked at them, transported, but docile and dear for the Seated One, whose praises they sang without cease.

Or, rather, not all could be called awful, because one seemed to me handsome and kindly, the

man to my left (and to the right of the Seated One), who held out a book. But on the other side there was an eagle I found horrifying, its beak agape, its thick feathers arranged like a cuirass, powerful talons, great wings outstretched. And at the feet of the Seated One, under the first two figures, there were the other two, a bull and a lion, each monster clutching a book between talons or hoofs, the body turned away from the throne, but the head toward the throne, as if shoulders and neck twisted in a fierce impulse, flanks tensed, the limbs those of a dying animal, maw open, 28

serpentlike tails coiled and writhing, culminating, at the top, in tongues of flame. Both monsters were winged, both crowned by haloes; despite their formidable appearance, they were creatures not of hell, but of heaven, and if they seemed fearsome it was because they were roaring in adoration of One Who Is to Come and who would judge the quick and the dead.

Around the throne, beside the four creatures and under the feet of the Seated One, as if seen through the transparent waters of the crystal sea, as if to fill the whole space of the vision, arranged according to the triangular frame of the tympanum, rising from a base of seven plus seven, then to three plus three and then to two plus two, at either side of the great throne, on twenty-four little thrones, there were twenty-four ancients, wearing white garments and crowned to gold. Some held lutes in their hands, one a vase of perfumes, and only one was playing an instrument, all the others were in ecstasy, faces turned to the Seated One, whose praises they were singing, their limbs also twisted like the creatures', so that all could see the Seated One, not in wild fashion, however, but with movements of ecstatic dance—as David must have danced before the Ark—so that wherever

their pupils were, against the law governing the stature of bodies, they converged on the same radiant spot. Oh, what a harmony of abandonment and impulse, of unnatural and yet graceful

postures, in that mystical language of limbs miraculously freed from the weight of corporeal matter, marked quantity infused with new substantial form, as if the holy band were struck by an impetuous wind, breath of life, frenzy of delight, rejoicing song of praise miraculously transformed, from the sound that it was, into image.

Bodies inhabited in every part by the Spirit, illuminated by revelation, faces overcome with

amazement, eyes shining with enthusiasm, cheeks flushed with love, pupils dilated with joy: this one thunderstruck by a pleasurable consternation, that one pierced by a consternated pleasure, some transfigured by wonder, some rejuvenated by bliss, there they all were, singing with the expression of their faces, the drapery of their tunics, the position and tension of their limbs, singing a new song, lips parted in a smile of perennial praise. And beneath

the feet of the ancients, and arched over them and over the throne and over the tetramorphic group, arranged in symmetrical bands, barely

distinguishable one from another because the artist's skill had made them all so mutually

proportionate, united in their variety and varied to their unity, unique in their diversity and diverse in their apt assembly, in wondrous congruency of the parts with the delightful sweetness of hues, miracle of consonance and concord of voices among themselves dissimilar, a company arrayed like the strings of the zither, consentient and conspiring continued cognition through deep and interior force suited to perform univocally in the same alternating play of the equivocal, decoration and collage of creatures beyond reduction to vicissitudes and to vicissitudes reduced, work of amorous connecting sustained by a law at once heavenly and worldly (bond and stable nexus of peace, love, virtue, regimen, power, order, origin, life, light, splendor, species, and figure), numerous and resplendent equality through the shining of the form over the proportionate parts of the material—

there, all the flowers and leaves and vines and bushes and corymbs were entwined, of all the grasses that adorn the gardens of earth and heaven, violet, cystus, thyme, lily, privet, narcissus, taro, acanthus, mallow, myrrh, and Mecca balsam.

But as my soul was carried away by that concert of terrestrial beauty and majestic supernatural signals, and was about to burst forth in a psalm of joy, my eye, accompanying the proportioned rhythm of the rose windows that bloomed at the ancients' feet, lighted on the interwoven figures of the central pillar, which supported the tympanum. What were they and what symbolic message did they communicate, those three crisscrossed pairs of lions rampant, like arches, each with hind paws planted on the ground, forepaws on the back of his companion, mane in serpentine curls, mouth taut in a threatening snarl, bound to the very body of the pillar by a paste, or a nest, of tendrils? To calm my spirit, as they had perhaps been meant also to tame the diabolical nature of the lion and to transform it into a symbolic allusion to higher things, on the sides of the pillar there were two 29

human figures, unnaturally tall as the column itself and twins to two others facing them on either side from the decorated imposts, where each of the oak doors had its jamb. These figures, then, were four old men, from whose paraphernalia I recognized Peter and Paul, Jeremiah and Isaiah, also twisted as if in a dance step, their long bony hands raised, the fingers splayed like wings, and like wings were their beards and hair stirred by a prophetic wind, the folds of the very long garments stirred by the long legs giving life to waves and scrolls, opposed to the lions but of the same stuff as the lions. And as I withdrew my fascinated eye from that enigmatic polyphony of sainted limbs and infernal sinews, I saw beside the door, under the deep arches, sometimes depicted on the

embrasures in the space between the slender columns that supported and adorned them, and again on the thick foliage of the capital of each column, and from there ramifying toward the sylvan vault of the multiple arches, other visions horrible to contemplate, and justified in that place only by their parabolic and allegorical power or by the moral lesson that they conveyed. I saw a voluptuous woman, naked and fleshless, gnawed by foul toads, sucked by serpents, coupled with a fat-bellied satyr whose gryphon legs were covered with wiry hairs, howling its own damnation from an obscene throat; and I saw a miser, stiff in the stiffness of death on his sumptuously columned bed, now helpless prey of a cohort of demons, one of whom tore from the dying man's mouth his soul in the form of an infant (alas, never to be again born to eternal life); and I saw a proud man with a devil clinging to his shoulders and thrusting his claws into the man's eyes, while two gluttons tore each other apart in a repulsive hand-to-hand struggle, and other creatures as well, goat head and lion fur, panther's jaws, all prisoners to a forest of flames whose searing breath I could almost feel. And around them, mingled with them, above their heads and below their feet, more faces and more

limbs: a man and a woman clutching each other by the hair, two asps sucking the eyes of one of the damned, a grinning man whose hooked hands parted the maw of a hydra, and all the animals of

Satan's bestiary, assembled in a consistory and set as guard and crown of the throne that faced them, singing its glory in their defeat, fauns, beings of double sex, brutes with six-fingered hands, sirens, hippocentaurs, gorgons,

harpies, incubi, dragopods, minotaurs, lynxes, pards, chimeras, cynophales who darted fire from their nostrils, crocodiles, polycaudate, hairy serpents, salamanders, horned vipers, tortoises, snakes, two-headed creatures whose backs were armed with teeth, hyenas, otters, crows, hydrophora with saw-tooth horns, frogs, gryphons, monkeys, dog-heads, leucrota,

manticores, vultures, paranders, weasels, dragons, hoopoes, owls, basilisks, hypnales, presters, spectafici, scorpions, saurians, whales, scitales, amphisbenae, iaculi, dipsases, green lizards, pilot fish, octopi, morays, and sea turtles. The whole population of the nether world seemed to have gathered to act as vestibule, dark forest, desperate wasteland of exclusion, at the apparition of the Seated One in the tympanum, at his face promising and threatening, they, the defeated of Armageddon, facing Him who will come at last to separate the quick from the dead. And stunned (almost) by that sight, uncertain at this point whether I was in a friendly place or in the valley of the last judgment, I was terrified and could hardly restrain my tears, and I seemed to hear (or did I really hear?) that voice and I saw those visions that had accompanied my youth as a novice, my first reading of the sacred books, and my nights of meditation in the choir of Melk, and in the delirium of my weak and

weakened senses I heard a voice mighty as a trumpet that said, “Write in a book what you now see”

(and this is what I am doing), and I saw seven golden candlesticks and in the midst of the

candlesticks One like unto the son of man, his breast girt with a golden girdle, his head and hair white as purest wool, his eyes as a flame of fire, his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace, his voice as the sound of many waters, and he had in his right hand seven stars and out of his mouth went a two-edged sword. And I saw a door open in heaven and He who was seated

appeared to me like a jasper and a sardonyx, and there was a rainbow round about the throne and out of the throne proceeded thunder and lightning. And the Seated One took in His hands a sharp sickle and cried: “Thrust in thy sickle and reap, for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest 30

of the earth is ripe"; and He that sat on the cloud thrust His sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped.

It was at this point that I realized the vision was speaking precisely of what was happening in the abbey, of what we had learned from the abbot's reticent lips—and how many times in the following days did I return to contemplate the doorway, convinced I was experiencing the very events that it narrated. And I knew we had made our way up there in order to witness a great and celestial

massacre.

I trembled, as if I were drenched by the icy winter rain. And I heard yet another voice, but this time it came from behind me and was a different voice, because it came from the earth and not from the blinding core of my vision; and indeed it shattered the vision, because William (I became aware again of his presence), also lost until then in contemplation, turned as I did.

The creature behind us was apparently a monk, though his torn and dirty habit made him look like a vagabond, and his face bore a resemblance to those of the monsters I had just seen on the capitals.

Unlike many of my brothers, I have never in my whole life been visited by the Devil; but I believe that if he were to appear to me one day, prevented by divine decree from concealing completely his nature even though he chose to resemble a man, he would have the very features our interlocutor presented to me at this moment. His head was hairless, not shaved in penance but as the result of the past action of some viscid eczema; the brow was so low that if he had had hair on his head it would have mingled with his eyebrows (which were thick and shaggy); the eyes were round, with tiny mobile pupils, and whether the gaze was innocent or malign I could not tell: perhaps it was both, in different moods, in flashes. The nose could not be called a nose, for it was only a bone that began between the eyes, but as it rose from the face it immediately sank again, transforming itself only into two dark holes, broad nostrils thick with hair. The mouth, joined to the nose