

Foucault's Pendulum Study Guide

Foucault's Pendulum by Umberto Eco

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Plot Summary

Foucault's Pendulum is a novel that follows the adventures of three book editors in Milan as they attempt to unravel the great mystery of the Knights Templar. They eventually get sucked into an underground occult world of secrets and magic where the Plan they have developed becomes more powerful than they could have ever imagined.

The novel begins with the main character and narrator, Casaubon, hiding in the Conservatoire des Arts et Metiers in Paris to try to find his kidnapped friend Belbo. Years ago when Casaubon is still a graduate student in Milan, Belbo and Casaubon talk to a Colonel Ardeni, an ex-fascist and Templar fanatic, who claims to have a secret Templar message. Casaubon, at the time, is working on a dissertation about the Templars so Belbo consults him about Ardeni's document. Initially taking the colonel to be a lunatic the two men are intrigued once they learn that Ardeni has, apparently been murdered.

Years go by and Casaubon, now with his degree and teaching in Brazil, meets a mysterious man named Aglie who claims to be the immortal Comte de Saint-Germain. Casaubon strike up a friendship with Aglie and reintroduces himself to the mysterious gentleman once he relocates to Milan. Back in Milan, Casaubon runs into Belbo again who tells him about strange coincidences related to the Templar message of Ardeni's. Intrigued, Casaubon and Belbo start looking into the Templars and the occult once again. Casaubon is hired on to work with Belbo at Garamond press as a researcher.

Belbo and Casaubon devise an ingenious way to spend their spare time at Garamond that involves feeding bits and pieces of manuscripts submitted to the Press on occult subjects into Belbo's computer, Abulafia, and trying to interpret the results. This game leads to the creation of the Plan, what Belbo and Casaubon call their explanation of the text that comes out of Abulafia. The Plan eventually grows into a complete occult history of the world that claims the Templars, in their more modern guises, are plotting to take over the world by harnessing the power of underground telluric currents. In the meantime, Aglie has been hired on as a consultant to Garamond Press for a series of books they are doing on the occult.

Belbo becomes engrossed by the Plan, devoting all of his time to it. In a fit of jealousy because he believes Aglie to be a romantic rival, Belbo tells the entire plan to Aglie and claims to have the secret Templar map that will allow its holder to gain control of the telluric currents. Aglie, apparently the leader of a secret society of his own, frames Belbo as a terrorist and forces him to travel to Paris where Aglie kidnaps him. Casaubon, witnesses Belbo's murder in the museum where Belbo is hanged from the Pendulum because he refuse to give up the location of the nonexistent map. Casaubon escapes from the museum and returns to Italy. He goes to Belbo's childhood home where he believes he will be killed by Aglie's secret society.



Chapters 1-12 (Keter 1-2, Hokhmah 3-6, Binah 7-12)

Chapters 1-12 (Keter 1-2, Hokhmah 3-6, Binah 7-12) Summary

The novel begins with the main character, Casaubon, in the Conservatoire des Arts et Metiers staring at the titular pendulum. He looks at the pendulum thinking about eternity, geometry, and a variety of other related subjects in a kind of stream of consciousness. The museum is about to close and he needs to find a hiding place so he can avoid detection by the night watch. His friend, Jacopo Belbo has apparently been taken hostage by an unknown group of people and Casaubon is supposed to meet Belbo and his captors in the museum at midnight. He rushes through the museum looking for a suitable place to hide, taking notice and reflecting on the other exhibits as he goes. Finding a periscope, Casaubon decides to take cover there and hope he can keep awake and avoid detection.

Casaubon is notified of Belbo's danger by a phone call two days earlier in which Belbo claims to be in Paris and claims that the Knights Templar are chasing him. The Templars are chasing him, he claims, because of The Plan, a conspiracy game Belbo, Casaubon, and their friend Diotallevi dream up to pass the time. Belbo tells Casaubon to find his floppy disks in his apartment and to read his files on The Plan on his computer, Abulafia, to find out what is going on and who is after him. Before Belbo can give Casaubon the password, however, his call cuts out, presumably because the Templars grab him before he can give away the password.

Casaubon, confused by the call but realizing that something bad is happening to Belbo, goes to Belbo's apartment to try to see what information he can get out of Abulafia. When he gets to the computer and tries to open a file, however, the computer asks if he has a password and he realizes that he has no idea what Belbo's password is. Casaubon tries several different combinations of YHWH and IAVEH, the letters of the Hebrew name of God. Eventually, frustrated with his lack of success, when Abulafia asks if he has the password, Casaubon types "no" which unlocks the computer. Casaubon proceeds to print out all of Belbo's files and to spend the rest of the night reading about The Plan.

The next several chapters involve flashbacks telling the story of Casaubon and Belbo's friendship. At the time of their meeting, Casaubon is a graduate student at the University of Milan in the 1960s studying Philology, though writing a dissertation on the Knights Templar. One night at Pilade's, a local Milanese bar that both Casaubon and Belbo frequent, the two strike up a conversation where Belbo claims that the world is made up of four types of people: morons, lunatics, cretins, and fools. Belbo, as he gets drunker and drunker, explains this theory to Casaubon. After their conversation, Belbo invites Casaubon to come visit him at his office. Belbo works for Garamond Press, a small



vanity and academic book publisher, where he is an editor. Casaubon visits Garamond Press the next day where he meets Belbo's associate Diotallevi and their secretary, Gudrun. When Casaubon arrives, Belbo and Diotallevi are discussing different academic disciplines that they will use in their School of Comparative Irrelevance, a university that only teaches pointless and impossible disciplines. Casaubon joins in their game and Belbo and Diotallevi take an instant liking to Casaubon. Belbo shows Casaubon a manuscript about the Templars and they promise to meet later that night at Pilade's.

Chapters 1-12 (Keter 1-2, Hokhmah 3-6, Binah 7-12) Analysis

The first couple chapters of the novel start off in the present with Casaubon hiding in the Parisian museum. The rest of this section of the novel is spent in several different flashbacks. The flashbacks take place in several different time-periods. The first flashback episode takes place on Thursday, June 21, two days before Casaubon hides in the museum. These concern his attempt to break into Belbo's computer. During this episode, we learn about Belbo by reading some of the files from his computer that Eco prints in the novel. They mostly concern his frustration with his inability to create genuinely original work. Rather, Belbo seems to only be able to rearrange and other people's work. Not surprisingly, this is also what he does at Garamond Press in his role as editor. In the character of Belbo, Eco is introducing us to the type of person and the modes of thought that will concern us in the rest of the novel.

Belbo, with the help of Abulafia, reorganize and reinterpret vast amounts of other people's work and information. The final product of this enterprise is interesting and absorbing but is still, in some sense, sterile. The recombination and rearrangement of other work and decontextualized information lacks the force of real understanding. Diotallevi makes this point when, in a conversation about using Abulafia to try to find the true name of God by doing endless permutations on the Torah, Diotallevi argues that finding the name of God is not important, it is the understanding and truth that one finds in the search for the name of God. The name of God is being used here as a metaphor for true knowledge. All three of the characters, along with the secret societies they will encounter, seek knowledge of the truth. Belbo and his compatriots will use Abulafia to decipher centuries of esoteric lore but will miss the real point, which is the honest search for knowledge. By bypassing the painstaking discipline and time that is needed to really search for truth, Belbo and his friends will gain knowledge that lacks true understanding. This is a common theme that we will see throughout the novel.



Chapters 13-24 (Binah 12-22, Hese 23-24)

Chapters 13-24 (Binah 12-22, Hese 23-24) Summary

Chapters 12-24 continue the flashback episode from the previous section. It is still early in Casaubon and Belbo's relationship, but Belbo and his associate Diotallevi have taken a liking to Casaubon and both men are eager to hear more about Casaubon's dissertation topics, the Templars. Belbo has noticed that many of the manuscripts that "lunatics" deliver to Garamond Press are related to the Knights Templar in some way and Belbo is eager to learn more about the group. The three men meet at Pilade's to have a drink and to talk.

Casaubon begins to tell a long tale covering the history of the Knights Templar. The knights began during the First Crusade. They were originally set up as a cross between a monastic order and a warrior society, monks that also fought to defend the holy land against Muslims and to protect Christian pilgrims. Saint Bernard's support helps the Knights Templar get power from the pope to collect tithes and basically to rule themselves autonomously. They become an elite fighting force that is also a religious order and almost a sort of state unto itself. Since the Templars were exempt from paying tithes or taxes and because they could collect their own tithes and keep whatever loot they captured in battle, over time the Templars became extremely rich. Eventually people began to speculate about the secret order and rumors circulated that the Templars engaged in homosexual acts and secretly worshiped the devil.

King Phillip of France encouraged these rumors. The king realized the power of the Templars and thought it was necessary to destroy the order to retain control of his kingdom. He openly accused the Templars of blasphemy, sodomy, and corruption and on October 13, 1307, the King arrested the Templars in France. Many of the Templars, presumably after torture, admitted to the crimes that the king accused them of. Some later recanted those confessions, including the leader of the order Jacques De Molay. De Molay was eventually burned in Paris, as were many of his brethren in the Templars. After the dissolution of the order, no one is really sure what happens to the Templars and the fate of their traditions became a mystery. Some claim the Freemasons took on their rituals others claim that the Templars went underground. Casaubon is convinced, though, that after the death of De Molay, the history of the Templars changes into speculation and mythology.

After Casaubon's story, the group leaves Pilade's and Casaubon does not see Belbo for a long time. By chance, some time later, both men run into each other and Belbo invites Casaubon up to his office to drink bourbon. While they are drinking, a Colonel Ardeni enters the office. He is trying to get Garamond to publish his book on the Templars and he is at the office to discuss the matter with Belbo. Ardeni describes his book to Casaubon and Belbo. After finding a cryptic parchment in the house of a man named



Ingolf, who found the parchment originally in a tunnel under Provins, Ardeni begins to unravel, what he believes, is the mystery of the Templars. Ardeni claims that the parchment contains coded instructions telling the reader to meet at a certain place in twenty years. These instructions, according to Ardeni, have been passed down for centuries to culminate in some grand Templar plan involving underground telluric energy that will give whoever controls it unlimited powers. Ardeni argues that this plot also concerns control of the Holy Grail, which may be code for a radioactive meteorite of some kind. Ardeni leaves after explaining the information in his book and claims he has to meet with a man named Rakosky.

The next day, while Casaubon and Belbo are discussing the mysterious colonel, Belbo gets a call from the police notifying them that the colonel has been murdered and asking the two of them to come down to the scene to answer a few questions. The mystery of the Colonel's death remains for several years and in the meantime Casaubon earns his degree and takes a teaching job in Brazil to live with his girlfriend, Amparo. He receives a letter from Belbo telling him that, while attending a magical ritual in Milan, Belbo ran into the police officer who questioned them about the Colonel's murder and Belbo is apparently now under suspicion by the police. Belbo notifies Casaubon that the police officer, De Angelis, may also try to contact him about the murder.

Chapters 13-24 (Binah 12-22, Hesed 23-24) Analysis

In this section we start to see the initial roots of what will become The Plan. Belbo, as we see from the childhood stories that he tells Casaubon and from the files on Abulafia, has thought of himself as a coward. This causes him to try to act in such a way that is not cowardly: attending demonstrations, showing bravado, and ultimately getting deep into The Plan. Casaubon is more interested in girls than politics and seems to, ideologically, blow in the wind. Above all he, like Belbo but for different reasons, seeks truth, something firm and foundational to believe.

In the story of the Templars, Casaubon and Belbo find an intriguing mix of fact and speculation. Ardeni in his fanciful story also mixes facts and fancy. Logical leaps come in a somewhat reasonable fashion that look more suspect upon closer examination. Although they are not convinced when talking to Ardeni, his story has the mix of speculation and certainty that both Casaubon and Belbo crave. His murder, a mystery piled on another mystery, will only catalyze their search for answers that will eventually become The Plan. Casaubon, in Brazil, begins to wonder what he actually believes and Belbo, still in Milan, begins to attend magic rituals. Their search for knowledge, esoteric knowledge, which is only a hobby at first, starts to coalesce into something more.



Chapters 25-37 (Hesed 25-33, Gevurah 34-37)

Chapters 25-37 (Hesed 25-33, Gevurah 34-37) Summary

Casaubon, while in Brazil with Amparo, decides to visit Salvador. There, while meeting with a friend and local artist, Casaubon is introduced to Signor Aglie. Aglie, older but not elderly, is a refined and interesting gentleman that immediately ingratiates himself with Casaubon and Amparo. It is not clear where Aglie is originally from, though he claims to keep a home and a library in Milan. The group discusses many of the aspects of the different religious traditions in Brazil. Christian, African, Egyptian, and Greek elements combine into a hodgepodge of religious rituals and ceremonies. Each of the group is fascinated in a different way. Aglie hints that he is much older than he seems and Casaubon compares him to Cagliostro, the supposedly ageless magicians who roamed Europe in the 17th century. Aglie, offended by the comparison, alludes to the fact that he is the mysterious Comte de Saint-Germain. He implies that he is ageless and has seen many things. Casaubon and Amparo are intrigued and Aglie invites them both to join him at a religious ceremony in the slums.

Intrigued by the ceremony and even more so by the new mysterious acquaintance, Casaubon begins to do more research on secret societies and esoteric lore, specifically the Rosicrucians. It is a twisted history similar to the stories surrounding the Templars where both fact and fiction intertwine. The lore of the Rosicrucians is confusing because while everyone believes the group exists, no one will admit that they are, in fact, Rosicrucians. Aglie, in conversation about the society of the Rosy Cross, suggests that certain men, ageless and enlightened, are the true members of the society and he suggests that he is just such a man.

Aglie invites Amparo and Casaubon to another religious ritual, this one involving possession by demons or forces. At one point during the ceremony, Amparo starts to feel ill and goes outside. She returns a little later apparently in the throes of a possession, dancing wildly. After the possession she gets very upset, believing that the ritual is evidence of her national background being more powerful than her rationality. After the two return to their home, Amparo leaves to go stay with friends and never returns to Casaubon. He remains in Brazil for another year before returning to Milan.

Having been gone from Italy for several years, Casaubon barely recognizes his home. Political radicals turned violent and then migrated into psychology, Transcendental Meditation, and away from politics. Casaubon gets back in touch with Belbo who has recently fallen in love with a young woman named Lorenza. Not having a job, Casaubon decides to invent one for himself. Realizing that he has collected a vast amount of information over the last several years over a wide variety of topics, he decides to hire himself out as a kind of Sam Spade of hard-to-find knowledge. If someone wants to



know something they can call Casaubon and for a price he will find it out for them. In the process of doing research he meets a woman, Lia, with whom he falls in love and marries. Belbo also decides that he wants to hire Casaubon to work for Garamond Press and to find pictures for a book they are putting together on metals. First, though, Casaubon must meet Mr. Garamond.

Chapters 25-37 (Hesed 25-33, Gevurah 34-37) Analysis

In this section we see a continuation of Casaubon's search for knowledge. Agile, an initiate of some kind, speaks to Casaubon about the difference between initiates and Mystics. Mystics, Agile claims, experience the effects of certain forces, though they don't understand the forces themselves. Initiates seek to control the forces but do not directly experience them. Agile claims that both he and Casaubon are more of the initiate type while those involved in the possession ritual, including Amparo, are mystics. Casaubon seeks to possess knowledge, to control facts. His job as a kind of private investigator for knowledge exemplifies this aspect of his character. He is similar to Diotallevi, the cabbalist who sees meaning in every little bit of information from the Torah.

Diotallevi looks for meaning in numerical patterns and, naturally, finds many of the patterns that he is looking for. Are the patterns really there or is he projecting order onto random collections of numbers? How would we know the difference? This question is one of the key themes of the book and is symbolized by the pendulum. The pendulum seems to be moving in a circle as it swings, but it is actually the pendulum itself that is fixed while the world below it is moving, despite appearances to the contrary. Belbo and Casaubon are looking for certainty, for the fixed place that they can stand, but all the time it is unclear whether the ground they are standing on is fixed or moving.

It is an epistemological problem, the problem of foundations for knowledge. They believe they have foundations for their knowledge until they meet people, like Agile, who claim that everything they know is basically wrong. Much of the novel will be a search to try to find some point of certainty to anchor knowledge in the sea of conflicting claims.



Chapters 38-49 (Gevurah 38-49)

Chapters 38-49 (Gevurah 38-49) Summary

This section begins with Belbo introducing Casaubon to Mr. Garamond. Garamond must approve Casaubon and determine the conditions of the contract if Casaubon is to be hired to work on the book about metals for Garamond Press. Mr. Garamond is situated in an office that is connected to the Garamond Press offices by a secret passageway. To the outside world, Mr. Garamond runs another publishing house, Manutius; he publishes only SFA or self-financing authors. Manutius presents itself to the world as a reputable publisher and lures writers with more money than talent to finance their own works through a series of minor subterfuges by Mr. Garamond. Unlike Garamond Press, Manutius rakes in the money. Vanity publishing is almost all profit.

Garamond immediately takes to Casaubon and hires him to search through the libraries and museums of the world for good pictures to put into the Garamond book on metals. Several days later, Garamond summons Belbo and Casaubon into his office again to be present in a meeting with a potential Manutius author who happens to be Professor Bramanti, a Rosicrucian Casaubon saw give a lecture in Brazil. Bramanti, not realizing Manutius is a vanity press, is trying to sell Garamond on a series of books on esoteric topics with Bramanti as editor. Once Garamond realizes that Bramanti is not interested in financing the venture himself, Garamond tells Bramanti that they will look at his proposal, but it is clear that Garamond has no interest in the project. Despite Garamond's lack of interest in funding Bramanti's project, the encounter does give him an idea. He has noticed how well books on the occult are selling and he decides to start two new series of books, one for Garamond Press and one for Manutius.

Garamond names this "project Hermes" with Manutius producing high profit books under the "Isis Unveiled" series title while Garamond Press publishes a series of scholarly books under the title "Hermetica" to drum up interest in the Manutius books. Casaubon suggests that his acquaintance, Aglie, might be the perfect consultant for the series. While discussing this possibility, Belbo's sometimes girlfriend Lorenza walks in and tells the group about her encounters with the occult through the group Picatrix and offers to distribute some Project Hermes fliers. The group begins calling SFA who come in with occult projects, "Diabolicals." The group meets with several authors and reads many of their manuscripts discussing the strange information about lost continents of MU, hollow earths, telluric energies, and pyramids. Finally, they decide to meet with Aglie who has agreed to see them at his home in Milan.

When the three men meet at Aglie's home, he asks them to wait in his study while he finishes up a meeting with some other people. While waiting, the group overhears Aglie's other meeting because the participants are shouting. It seems to be a meeting of Bramanti, an unknown Frenchman, and Aglie. The Frenchman is accusing Bramanti of summoning a demon to oppress him at his house, while Bramanti is vehemently denying the accusation. Aglie, acting as the peacemaker, tells both parties not to



interfere with the other and to behave. He then dismisses the group and joins Casaubon and company. During the previous argument, the two men referred to Aglie as "Comte" presumably a reference to Aglie's claim to be the Comte de Saint-Germain. Aglie shows himself to be an expert in occult topics and agrees to act as a consultant without a fee so long as the manuscripts they send him are not boring. He asks if the group has received any manuscripts mentioning telluric currents and, Belbo and Casaubon not mentioning Ardenti, they claim they have not. Aglie seems disappointed and then claims he needs to go because a "sweet friend" will be visiting. When they are leaving, the group sees Lorenza who is apparently the "sweet friend" Aglie was referring to. She claims Aglie is giving her an elixir and tells Belbo she will meet them at the bar later.

Chapters 38-49 (Gevurah 38-49) Analysis

The publishing project, Project Hermes, that begins in this section will eventually set events in motion that will lead Belbo and Casaubon to Paris and to the Pendulum. In one of the chapters here, Casaubon comments that for his whole life he has been living off of the credit of other people and once he begins to research occult projects for Project Hermes, someone will be collecting the bill. There is a literal sense in which this claim is true. There is also a less literal, more metaphorical sense in which his claim will be borne out. Casaubon, and to a certain extent Belbo, spend their lives collecting information, largely without any effect. To the cabbalist like Diotallevi and to the occultist like Aglie, knowledge and even words and numbers have special properties.

We see this in the debate between Bramanti and the Frenchman. The Frenchman accuses Bramanti of uttering a magical spell that summons a demon and Bramanti claims to have either not summoned the demon or to have done it inadvertently. In either case, the example shows how powerful words and knowledge can be to the occult mind. So powerful that to even utter them accidentally can summon dark forces. Casaubon does not take the knowledge he has gained seriously; he sees it as a kind of game. To Aglie and his ilk, however, the kind of knowledge that Belbo and Casaubon are playing with is extremely important. As Belbo and Casaubon will learn, these occultists are deadly serious about the power of their knowledge.



Chapters 50-62 (Gevurah 50-62)

Chapters 50-62 (Gevurah 50-62) Summary

After their meeting with Aglie, the group heads over to Pilade's where they expect to meet Lorenza. Belbo is 4 martinis deep when Lorenza comes in and asks everyone to join her at an art gallery party of her friend, Riccardo. Riccardo is a rival of Belbo's for Lorenza so he is wary about going to the party, but everyone eventually ends up going. At the party, Lorenza and Belbo get drunk and Belbo confronts her about Agile. Lorenza claims that Agile believes she is really Sophia, a character in Gnostic mythology. She begins to dance with Riccardo which angers Belbo, who eventually storms out before Lorenza declares that she is beyond good and evil and embraces him at the door.

Days after the party, Casaubon is wandering around in a German mine, doing research for his book, when he runs into a neighbor of his in Milan, Mr. Salon. Salon tells Casaubon about the importance of the network of underground passageways all over the world and suggests that there is something mysterious with the Parisian sewers. He mentions Ardeni, Agartha, and the masters of the world. Before Casaubon can find out more, though, Salon leaves. Upon his return to Milan, Casaubon asks Aglie what he knows about Agartha. Aglie claims it is the fabled home of the masters of the world, deep underground in the Himalayas. He also mentions an idea popularly associated with Agartha known as Synarchy, a political philosophy that is the opposite of anarchy in that it emphasizes harmony over individuality. Casaubon goes to the library to check out the book on Agartha that Salon mentions only to find it checked out and unavailable. Behind him, though, is inspector De Angelis with the book in question. The inspector asks Casaubon to coffee where they talk about Synarchy. The inspector claims that several subversive groups have surfaced that seem to be associated with Synarchy but will not let on any more than that about his unusual interest.

The next day, Casaubon is informed that the entire group, Belbo, Casaubon, Mr. Garamond, and Diotallevi, are invited to join Aglie in an occult rite outside of Turin. Lorenza is also invited and goes along with the group. On the way up to the rite, the group spends the night in a family home of Belbo's. Belbo entertains the group with stories of his childhood over drinks. Belbo has a dispute with Lorenza and in the middle of the evening, Casaubon hears Lorenza scratching at his door but he does not let her in the room despite his desire.

The next day, Lorenza, evidently fed up with Belbo, returns to Milan. The remaining group drives to the site of the rite and meets up with Aglie. They arrive at an extravagant villa decorated with exquisite gardens. On their way to the ceremony, Casaubon observes many of the very "Diabolicals" that have been trying to sell manuscripts to the two presses. Casaubon drinks some of the punch provided and sits down to wait for the ceremony to begin. The ceremony begins in a hallucinatory swirl, presumably the effect of the mysterious drink. After the ceremony, Aglie takes the group to see the Homunculi that the owner of the house is said to have. Aglie also allows the group to witness part



of an initiation to the order of the Rosy Cross. On the way back to town, he also shows them part of a druidic initiation ceremony. When asked why he involves himself with all of these occultists, Aglie claims that the best way to find a true initiate is to hang around those who do not understand. In the same way that the best way to find a criminal is to hang around in questionable parts of town or to find a terrorist is to hang around organizations of fellow travelers. Aglie then leaves the group to allow them to continue alone back to Milan.

Chapters 50-62 (Gevurah 50-62) Analysis

At one point in this section, Casaubon is discussing Synarchy with Lia and she suggests that Synarchy is God. She claims that it is impossible for people to live if they believe that everything happens by chance. They seek to believe that there is always someone or something pulling the strings behind the scenes. Whether it be the masters of the world or Synarchy or the Knights Templar or God or Science, men and women are always looking for some unified explanation to make sense of the world they live in day to day. As we have seen, Casaubon, Belbo, and Diotallevi are also looking for an explanation; they are all looking for some kind of certain knowledge that will explain the world to them.

Diotallevi finds his certainty and explanations in numerology. Belbo and Casaubon are also seeking truth, but they do not completely realize it. The ceremony in Turin spurs something in both of the men, impelling them to continue their quest in a more organized way. As the story suggests in the previous section, however, there is always a price that must be paid for forbidden knowledge. Many of the "Diabolicals" that the group meets in the publishing house and the ceremony seem to have sacrificed good sense and their sanity for the knowledge they claim to possess. It is not clear yet what Casaubon and Belbo will have to sacrifice.



Chapters 63-72 (Gevurah 63, Tiferet 64-72)

Chapters 63-72 (Gevurah 63, Tiferet 64-72) Summary

This section begins with the group returning to Milan after the ceremony in Piedmont. Casaubon is starting to slip further and further into the realm of the "Diabolicals." Lia tries to pull him back from the brink, explaining the mundane explanations for many occult beliefs. Her explanation is mundane but not uninteresting. Her pleadings and explanation seem to restrain Casaubon, at least a little bit. In the Garamond Press office, however, interest in the occult is also growing. Both Diotallevi and Belbo constantly discuss occult topics, half ironically but with some seriousness. Belbo shows the group what he composed on Abulafia by having the machine randomly combine lines that he entered separately.

Diotallevi asks if the machine could recombine the Torah, which gives Casaubon an idea. Why not use Abulafia to combine bits of information from different "Diabolical" manuscripts and see what output it produces? According to Hermetic and occult beliefs, all information is connected to the hidden truth so it should not matter what information is inputted. The group begins by entering the first lines of randomly picked manuscripts into Abulafia. Casaubon insists, however, that they also enter uncontroversial facts such as "Mickey is married to Minnie Mouse" and facts about the calendar. If all information really is connected, it should not matter what information the machine combines.

They enter random lines into the computer and get an output that they interpret as an important occult conclusion. The output, according to the group, suggests that Jesus was not crucified on the cross but instead left Palestine with his wife Mary Magdalene, whom he married in Cana, to travel to France and start the Merovingian line of kings. The group, encouraged by the result of this experiment, believe they could sell books with the stories that Abulafia creates from random occult input. Belbo even reads occult facts out of a car manual.

Casaubon takes a trip to a Templar temple in Portugal with some of his friends and believes he has solved the mystery of the original manuscript and parchment of Ardeni. Ardeni presented a parchment that he took to be a secret Templar code laying out a plan whereby hidden templar groups scattered throughout the world would relay a message between six Templar groups over a period of more than six hundred years, culminating in a master plan of revenge. The parchment mentions a castle and the group originally believed that the castle in question was allegorical, but, after Casaubon's trip to Portugal, he now believes the castle is in fact the Portuguese castle. He reinterprets the message on the parchment to be instructions to meet first in Portugal in 1344, England in 1464, France in 1584, Germany in 1704, Bulgaria in 1824, and Jerusalem in 1944. Each node in the relay only knows the time and place to meet



the next node and it will take the culmination of the entire plan for any group to receive the entire message.

The group realizes, however, that something must have gone wrong in the Templar plan causing the relay to become interrupted. First Casaubon speculates that it may have been discrepancies in the English and French Calendars that caused problems. John Dee, the man the group believes to be the head of the English Templars and head astrologer to the Queen, would not have made such a simple mistake. They conclude instead that Dee must have desired to, with the aid of magic and science, to reconstruct the entire message himself and to take control of the secrets. In the confusion that the disruption of the relay caused, each group is now trying to contact other groups. The Rosicrucians of Germany during the 17th century are openly trying to make contact with the English and French group to reconstruct the missing message. The group, excited by their progress with Abulafia become more and more involved with deciphering The Plan, the Templar conspiracy.

Chapters 63-72 (Gevurah 63, Tiferet 64-72) Analysis

In this section, the group begins to use Abulafia to try to decipher Templar and occult meaning by processing random snippets of manuscripts from the "Diabolicals," the occult fanatics that come into the Garamond offices. The deciphering of this Plan that starts as a game will soon launch all of the characters into something bigger than they could have imagined. Aside from that development, though related to it, this section also brings out two important themes of the novel.

The first is brought out by Lia, who is trying to convince Casaubon that there is nothing mysterious behind all of these esoteric beliefs of the occult he is dealing with. She claims, in several interesting paragraphs, that all of the numerology and symbolism is related to facts about the human body and more importantly, facts about human reproduction. All of the rituals and symbolism are just attempts to make sense of the miracle of human life and reproduction. One of the key attractions at the ceremony in Piedmont was the four homunculi that the owner of the villa had supposedly created with his magic powers. The irony of the occult obsession with the homunculus, so Lia claims, is that humans already possess the power to create new human life. She then tells Casaubon that she is pregnant.

The Irony here is that Casaubon is focusing on occult investigations while ignoring the legitimate miracles of love and new birth that he has in his relationship with Lia. It is Casaubon's desire for knowledge, or rather his intemperate lust for knowledge that will lead him into the arms of The Plan. This lust is played out allegorically in the previous section in his desire for Lorenza. Sophia, the Greek name for wisdom or certain types of knowledge, is the name that Aglie gives Lorenza. Casaubon's lust for Lorenza in Piedmont mirrors his lust after Sophia or wisdom. In both cases his wife Lia is the counterpoint to his lust for wisdom and Lorenza.



In the part of this section we also see another key theme of the novel, the contextual basis of meaning and knowledge. By feeding snippets of manuscripts into Abulafia, the group is decontextualizing the information from the manuscripts; this allows a new context to emerge from the words themselves. This becomes clear when Belbo is telling Casaubon how he read Cabbala principles out of a car engine manual. The mind creates contexts; words and signs themselves do not have any context without the order and meaning that the mind gives them. This allows Belbo to read meaning into car manuals and occultists to read meaning into everything. This theme of the importance of context for meaning is one of the key themes of the novel.



Chapters 73-87 (Tiferet 73-87)

Chapters 73-87 (Tiferet 73-87) Summary

This section begins with Casaubon, still looking through Belbo's papers on Abulafia, discovering that Belbo has created a much richer version of the plan in his files. In fact, he has taken to turning the facts that the group has discovered and the connections they have found into a fictionalized account of the events. Casaubon finds a long story written from the point of view of Kelly, an associate of the mysterious John Dee. John Dee, the court astrologer for Queen Elizabeth and renowned initiate of esoteric knowledge, roams through Europe in Belbo's story meeting with mystics in Prague and is eventually overtaken by a youthful and very powerful Francis Bacon.

Belbo never completely reveals the fact that he is writing this fictionalized account, nor does he reveal all of the details of the story, though he does introduce some of the conclusion into the Plan. One of the conclusions that Casaubon finds important is that Francis Bacon is also the Viscount St. Albans. Through a series of odd connections, Casaubon realizes that the priory of St. Albans, Bacon property, is now the Conservatoire des Arts et Metiers, the same museum that houses Foucault's Pendulum. As a result of this revelation, the group decides that the museum must be the meeting site in Paris, the Refuge mentioned in Ardeni's mysterious parchment. Believing that the connection to Bacon suggests a link to British Freemasons, Casaubon sets off to reconstruct a history of freemasonry at the library.

Casaubon's Freemason time line includes a bewildering number of different secret societies cross-referenced and linked. The group decides to see what Aglie knows about all of the groups on the time line and to make sure that Aglie really knows what he is talking about, the group includes a spurious secret society, one that Casaubon overhears something about during the ceremony in Piedmont, named Tres. Aglie explains to the group the history of Freemasonry explaining all the squabbles, splinters, and excommunications. There are basically three kinds of groups associated with Freemasonry, each identified with a specific way of approaching occult information. Aglie has, as expected, never heard of a group named Tres and wants to know more, but the group feigns ignorance and Aglie leaves.

Meanwhile, Lia, still pregnant, is preparing for her delivery. She has decided to forgo any painkillers during the delivery and has also declined to find out the sex of the baby. Casaubon tries to convince himself that the true magic, the true meaning of all the occult symbols is in Lia's womb. Despite his best efforts, the lure of occult knowledge, of gnosis, keeps drawing him back into the Plan. Feeling an urge to stay home, a presentiment, Casaubon nevertheless goes to the office. On his way, he meets Salon who invites him into his taxidermy workshop. Once inside, he tells Casaubon about the power of underground places and the Jewish plot to harness underground energy. Leaving Salon and returning home, he discovers that his wife is already in labor and he



paces to the hospital to meet her. Lia has a son and Casaubon goes off to meet with Belbo and Diotalleivi.

Casaubon tells the group about Salon's theory of underground energy and they are both convinced that this is the secret of the Templars. By inputting information into Abulafia they discover that telluric energy, the currents that run from pole to pole through the crust of the earth, is real and they surmise that many of the megaliths of Easter island, the Pyramids, Stonehenge, and the Eiffel tower are all tools to capture and transmit telluric energy. The Templars know how to control the energy but now the secret location of the control room, the center, of the energy has been lost. The group surmises that the pendulum in the museum is used to show the exact location of the control room of the energy. At dawn on the 24th of June, the feast of St. John, a light will shine into an area of the museum and the pendulum will point to the location, all provided that the correct map is placed under the pendulum. The group begins to look for the map and to lose their grip on reality. At the end of the section, they have decided that another group, the Jesuits, is also involved in the conspiracy.

Chapters 73-87 (Tiferet 73-87) Analysis

This section continues the theme of the last section, showing the allure and dangers of hidden, occult knowledge. This theme becomes more and more literal as the group learns about telluric currents. In the case of telluric currents, the power that everyone is seeking to control is literally underground and hidden. Furthermore, the idea of having information but needing a map to make sense of it is also a key idea. The information the group feeds into Abulafia is full of facts, most true, but without a map or a context of some kind, the group has no way of making sense of the facts and the connection between facts that come out of the computer. Without a map to make sense of their information, though the group is intoxicated by the certainty they think they are getting from their esoteric investigations, the ground is really shifting around them and their quest for knowledge and certainty is leading them into deeper confusion.

Again, Lia is trying to lead Casaubon out of his obsession with occult knowledge to realize that the true miracle is the miracle of childbirth that she is about to perform. Although Casaubon seems to realize this on some level, he is still attracted to his magic Sophia, the lure of underground, forbidden knowledge. Ironically, this quest, which has already begun to consume Diotalleivi and Belbo, is leading Casaubon to be distracted and not to notice his wife and new child. The search for enlightenment is leading him to ignore the true knowledge and value he has available in his own home. It is no surprise then that the Templars and occultists, according to the Plan, are seeking the Navel of the world to control telluric currents. The metaphor here is that occultists, in their search for knowledge, are really just staring into their own navels, ignoring the reality around them.



Chapters 88-100 (Tiferet 88-100)

Chapters 88-100 (Tiferet 88-100) Summary

In this section, the group tries to piece together the Jesuit connection in the Templar conspiracy. They speculate that a Mr. Postel, who has come up in their studies several times before, was a Templar initiate before Loyola initiated him into the Society of Jesus also. Postel divulged all he knew about the Templar plot and the secret they sought. The Jesuits, of course, could not allow occultist to take over the world and decide to engage in secret warfare with the Templar groups. Realizing that it would be difficult or impossible to find the missing map, the Jesuits start working through all the possible permutations of maps.

They in effect, create factor analysis and maybe, the group speculates, even invent early computers to work through all the possible version of the map. In the meantime, the Jesuits use a tried and true strategy that they perfect to deal with the Templar groups: they set up fake secret societies to expose and confuse the actual secret societies. For instance, the group believes that the Jesuits set up Scottish Rite Freemasonry to confuse and to attack Bacon-inspired Freemasonry in England. They also set up the Rosicrucians as a ploy to expose the true Templar groups that remain in hiding in Germany.

Napoleon is also involved in this conspiracy and after being initiated in Egypt, he attempts to seek out the Bulgarian Templar group in Russia. He realigns himself with the Jesuits and the Jews eventually, though to counter attack this assault, the Slavic Templar group begin an anti-Semitic campaign to try to neutralize and draw out the Jewish Templar group still in hiding. A Russian adept and Tsarist agent, Rakosky, is central in creating the notorious Protocols of the Elders of Zion in an attempt to stir up anti-Semitic controversy. The Comte de Saint-Germain is involved in this arm of the conspiracy and the group believes that the mysterious Rakosky is none other than the Comte. The group weaves an intricate and bizarre tapestry of a conspiracy involving various plots and counter-plots between the Jesuits, the Rosicrucians, the Russian, the Jews, and many other groups.

The story that the group is telling about world history is becoming increasingly bizarre. Belbo believes that this is a virtue of the theory, however, not a vice. He thinks that real life is more like dime store thrillers than it is like great works of art. He thinks that real people are more like characters in trashy fiction than they are like characters in literature. Therefore, if the story of the Plan is like a cheap novel, so much the better. Belbo in his spare time is writing what amounts to, at least parts of, a cheap novel about the Comte on Abulafia that Casaubon discovers while reading through Belbo's files.

To make the Plan even more bizarre, the group also believes that the Nazis are a Teutonic branch of neo-Templarism that attempts to find the secret of the Templars by fighting a war and eliminating the Jewish branch of the Templars. This suggestion



insults Diotallevi and he leaves claiming that he has gastritis, though Belbo and Casaubon notice that he has looked sickly for a while and they both hope that there is nothing seriously wrong with their friend.

Chapters 88-100 (Tiferet 88-100) Analysis

In chapter 88, Diotallevi introduces the idea that the Jesuits are using a computer to produce all the possible permutations of the Templar map. He also claims that this method of permutation and recombination is the essence of Cabala. What the characters do over the next several chapters after this claim is an illustration of the belief that permutations and recombination of information can lead to truth. The new parts of the Plan, involving the Jesuits and Russian anti-Semites, become so complicated and convoluted that it almost seems as if permutations are being put forward by the group as an end in themselves. Clearly the author is illustrating a point in this section about the dangers of engaging in an enterprise like the Plan. With only a few facts removed from their contexts, the characters move into bizarre realms of conspiracy speculations involving Napoleon and the Jesuits.

They theorize that Jesuits start up occult groups to discover and neutralize real occultists. How to tell the real groups from the front groups then? The principle the group seems to be using is, on its face and by Belbo's original definition, moronic. That is, the group is finding a need for a secret society to be acting so that the Plan makes sense and then they are postulating that a secret society, therefore, must exist. This type of reasoning is backwards and it can lead to any conclusion being justified by any permutation of evidence. The author is showing us again in this section that knowledge without understanding will only lead to error.



Chapters 101-110

Chapters 101-110 Summary

In this section the author finally moves the narrative to the point where it starts, explaining how Belbo ends up in Paris pursued by Diabolicals. At the beginning of the section, Diotallevi's condition is getting worse. He asks for a leave of absence and it is clear that he has some form of cancer. He starts a treatment regimen, but before he goes he tells Belbo and Casaubon to forget about the Plan. He tells them that it is bad for their health to keep investigating into the Plan, implying that Diotallevi believes the Plan is somewhat responsible for his own condition.

The next day, Casaubon meets Salon by chance in the street. They begin talking and move to Pilade's for a drink. Salon tells Casaubon that the Nazis are allied with the Turks and suggests that the Jews have nothing to do with underground tunnels after all. Salon mentions in passing the Old Man of the Mountain, which Casaubon knows is a reference to Hassan-I-Sabbah, the leader of the Assassins. Casaubon leaves and rushes to tell Belbo about the connection with the mystical Shia group the Assassins. The Jews it seems are just a red herring; the Templars, who hate the Jews, are really associated with the Assassins. The Assassins are the final Templar group in Palestine. This information is the final piece of the Plan and Belbo is overjoyed that the whole plot is complete.

At this time, Belbo begins to lose his moorings completely and allows himself to be completely seduced by the Plan. He writes the entire Plan into Abulafia and privately wonders if it is true. He decides, ultimately, that in some sense it does not matter whether the Plan is ultimately true and, in lieu of anything better, he will believe that the Plan is the truth.

Meanwhile, Casaubon and Lia decide to go on a vacation and while on the vacation, Casaubon tells Lia about the Plan. She is not amused and asks Casaubon to see the original parchment from Ardenti that created the idea for the Plan in the first place. After studying it for two days she explains to Casaubon that she believes it is a shopping list, not a secret message to fellow Templars. She explains all of this to Casaubon and tries again to warn him about the dangers of dabbling in occult insanity. He wants to believe her, but cannot completely divorce himself from the Plan.

Belbo and Lorenza decide to drive to the beach so she can perform some errands and so they can have lunch together. When they arrive at the restaurant, they discover that Aglie has a reservation at a table near theirs. Not wanting to be seen by Aglie, Lorenza makes Belbo leave and has him drive into the mountains. While driving through a small town along the way, Belbo runs into a small dog. There is no doctor in the village so Belbo offers to go to another town to get a doctor. Once he leaves the town, he does not look back and drives to a hotel in another town where he and Lorenza can stay for the night. While Belbo is at the bar getting a Martini, Lorenza slips off and finds a train back



to Milan, leaving Belbo alone. Belbo is so depressed because of this that he decides to take his anger out on Aglie.

When he returns to town he tells Aglie that he is in possession of a secret, the Plan, and that he has memorized the secret Templar map. Aglie asks for the map, but Belbo tells him that he does not want to divulge the information. The next day as Belbo is leaving for Bologna, Aglie asks him if he will take a suitcase full of books for his friend in Florence. All he needs to do is to put it on the seat next to him on the train and let it go on to Florence after he gets off the train. After Belbo returns from his trip, he reads in the news that the suitcase had a bomb on it and the police suspect Belbo of being a terrorist. He also begins to get mysterious calls telling him to come to the museum in Paris for the summer solstice so he can divulge the secret map. Aglie has disappeared and the inspector De Angelis is transferring because he fears for his life. Belbo goes to see Diotallevi who is dying. His friend tells Belbo that he has made a huge mistake devising the Plan. The section ends with Casaubon leaving to follow Belbo to Paris and, hopefully, to save him.

Chapters 101-110 Analysis

In this section we begin to move away from the flashbacks that have characterized almost all of the previous chapters. The author is finally moving the narrative up to the point where it begins in the museum. The reader now realizes that the Plan, far from just being an amusing diversion, has become a deadly obsession. Belbo, because of his jealousy of Aglie, teases Aglie by claiming that he, Belbo, is in possession of the most secret, important knowledge that Aglie seeks, the map. Of course, Belbo does not have the map; Aglie does not know that Belbo is bluffing however. Furthermore, the Plan that Belbo describes to Aglie seems to match up with whatever information Aglie has about the conspiracy. Aglie believes it to be true and traps Belbo by framing him with the bomb on the train.

After Belbo returns, he finds Aglie gone. His house is being paid for by a French company whose agent is a man named Rakosky, the same name that Ardeni mentions. Furthermore, Garamond seems to also be in on the plot. It does not matter at this point whether or not the Plan is literally true. Aglie and his associates believe it to be true and are acting as if it is true. In this way, Belbo has, by telling Aglie about the Plan, made the Plan true. As Casaubon rushes to Paris to try to save Belbo, it remains to be seen whether either one of them will make it out of the maze they have created for themselves alive. The prophesy by the author makes it seem as if they will not, but this is ambiguous as the narrator is supposed to be Casaubon, who does not completely know the future.



Chapters 111-120

Chapters 111-120 Summary

This section begins with Casaubon still in Belbo's apartment, deciding whether or not to leave Milan and follow Belbo to Paris. Realizing there is no one else in Milan to help him and feeling the pulls of friendship and loyalty, Casaubon heads off to Paris.

Remembering an address once in Paris, Casaubon takes a taxi to a small occult bookstore in a dark alley. Without thinking, Casaubon asks the proprietor if he knows where to find Aglie. The man looks startled and Casaubon leaves. He makes his way to the Museum and hides in the Periscope. At this point, the narrative picks up where the novel began, with Casaubon waiting in the Periscope.

After waiting for hours in the Periscope and going back through all of his memories about Belbo and the history of the Plan, Casaubon decides it is time to make his way to the Pendulum. Along the way, he notices all of the machines on display in the museum, suspecting a dark, occult purpose for each one. In the darkness he sees that cloaked men and women have already arrived at the Pendulum and are setting up ritual materials. Casaubon finds a hiding place near the group and watches the events unfold.

People in cloaks and hoods have come out and attached a larger pendulum, presumably the one originally used by the Templars. Bramanti is apparently leading the ceremony and he asks someone to come before him and kneel. The man kneeling is Riccardo the artist. Bramanti asks if Riccardo has brought the woman and he answers that he has. Bramanti then orders the 36 highest-ranking members to come into the room. Casaubon recognizes many of them, including Salon and Mr. Garamond. Aglie also enters from another direction with an, apparently, sedated Lorenza. Aglie welcomes the group and claims that he has someone who can explain the purpose of their gathering. He then calls for Ardent. Ardent, not dead after all, comes forward and kneels before Aglie. Ardent claims that he knows nothing of the map and that Belbo is lying about having gotten the information about the map from Ardent.

Aglie forgives Ardent and asks him to leave. Aglie brings out Belbo tied up and asks him to give the location of the map. Belbo claims there is no map. This only makes the group want it more and a Frenchman yells that Belbo should be sacrificed. Salon tries to quell the crowd and Aglie says that he will talk to Belbo privately and try to get the information from him. Madame Olcott with a collection of circus freaks accuses Aglie of duplicity and attempts to use magic to attack Aglie. Eventually she hits him in the head and he falls down bloody. The Frenchman has his way and they decide to sacrifice Belbo. Aglie, now back on his feet, asks Belbo one more time to give him the secret and Belbo insults Aglie in a colloquial Piedmonts insult. This causes a melee and in the process, Lorenza's throat is slit and Belbo, with a noose around his neck tied to the Pendulum, is hanged. The pendulum swinging with him attached to it creates a double pendulum.



Casaubon, horrified, escapes into the sewers of Paris and eventually finds his way into the Parisian streets. He sees threats everywhere and he wanders the streets for hours before eventually making it back to his hotel. The next day he goes back to the museum to see if there are any remnants of the previous night's murders. There is no evidence of the ceremony in the museum and Casaubon, still very scared and confused, rushes to the airport. On the way he calls Gudrun and finds out the Diotallevi has just died. Casaubon does not know what to do. When he lands in Milan he decides to go to Belbo's boyhood home in the Piedmont country. While there he reads all of Belbo's childhood writing, the ones he said should be read after his death. Casaubon reads a story about a trumpet from Belbo's boyhood that helps him understand the dead man. Casaubon spends the night reminiscing on what has happened, the causes and consequences. He feels he has finally reached true wisdom. Despite this peace that he feels, he knows that he left too many clues in Paris and he fully expects the occultists to track him down and kill him. He sits in the house, waiting for them to come.

Chapters 111-120 Analysis

These final chapters are some of the densest and action packed in the entire novel. Up until this point, the whole novel is composed of flashbacks and much of those flashbacks deal with the construction of the Plan, that is, they involve confused, seemingly random connections of esoteric information. In this section, the narrative shifts to first person action and then, in the final two chapters, to reflection. We see that the Plan has ultimately led to the death of two people (three if we believe that Diotallevi's cancer is caused by the Plan) and to the probable death of a fourth, Casaubon.

The irony, as Casaubon makes clear in the final chapter, is that the all of these people are killed in search of a map that does not exist. As the group does with Abulafia, the occultists take the Plan, originally an inside joke, and have given it a life of its own. In fact, their group Tres, is an invention of the plan. Reading the Plan, they believe that Belbo understands their secret rites better than they do and adopt the truth of the Plan completely. The Plan, created as a joke, has become a deadly reality.

At the end of the novel, Casaubon meditates on the events of the novel and tries to understand the pathological rationality that has led to the death of Belbo. The whole problem, he believes, is a misguided search for meaning. The great truth, the great mystery is that there is no mystery. Lia had been right all along. Life is a miracle, but there is no deeper explanation, there is no occult mystery that explains it. If there were, occultists would look for another mystery, dissatisfied with the one they had found. Casaubon feels at peace at the end knowing that the answer to the riddle was in front of him all the time. He believes that death is coming, but takes consolation in the fact that he has finally achieved wisdom.



Characters

Casaubon

Casaubon is a graduate student in Philosophy at the University when he writes a dissertation on the Knights Templar. While a student, he meets Belbo and Diotallevi. He writes his dissertation on the Knights Templar and, after he earns his degree, takes a job teaching in Brazil to be closer to his girlfriend, Amparo. Amparo leaves him after an experience at a religious ceremony in Brazil where she is, seemingly, possessed by a demon. Casaubon stays on in Brazil for another year before returning to Milan.

When he returns, he sets himself up as a kind of Sam Spade for obscure knowledge. He will track down any piece of knowledge, no matter how obscure, for a fee. After running into Belbo again by chance, Mr. Garamond hires Casaubon to find pictures for a book they are putting together on metals for Garamond Press. He introduces Aglie to Belbo, Diotallevi, and Mr. Garamond after Garamond decides it will be profitable to start a series of books on occult topics. Casaubon marries Lia and has a son with her.

After Belbo puts forward the idea for the Plan, Casaubon becomes intoxicated with the quest for complete knowledge. It is his knowledge of obscure facts and connections that makes the Plan possible. He is consumed by the plan and, despite Lia's warnings, he allows himself to become too entangled.

After Belbo is presumably kidnapped in Paris, Casaubon feels the need to at least try to rescue him and heads to Paris himself. He spends several hours hiding in a periscope in the Parisian museum and eventually witnesses the death of Belbo before fleeing to Milan and then to Piedmont. The novel ends with Casaubon expecting to be killed by Tres.

Jacopo Belbo

Belbo is an editor at Garamond Press with Diotallevi. Older than Casaubon, Belbo has an ironic temperament that he uses to deflate the egos of the arrogant. He, like Casaubon, drinks at Pilade's, claiming that he drinks Martinis in the afternoon because they are invigorating and Scotch at night. At the bar he meets Lorenza, who is playing pinball at the time.

Belbo is obsessed with the idea that he is a coward. He was too young to take part in the Italian resistance against the fascists in his youth, though he is afraid that he would have joined the fascists. His files in Abulafia are full of stories about his youth in Piedmont during the war. These stories are an apology of sort, an explanation of his character that only Casaubon really understands at the end of the novel. Belbo is in love with the younger Lorenza, though he is constantly angered because of her liaisons with Aglie and Riccardo.



He is the owner of Abulafia and the first one of the group to understand the ability of the machine to recombine information. He is the one who really develops the Plan and he then records a novelized version of the Plan in his files on Abulafia. He is frustrated that he does not have the talent to be a writer and latches onto the Plan as a possible outlet for his creativity. It is his jealousy of Aglie regarding Lorenza that causes Belbo to claim to Aglie that he is in possession of the secret Templar map. Aglie and the Tres frame Belbo for a terrorist attack and then convince him to travel to Paris where they kidnap him. The Tres hang Belbo from Foucault's Pendulum in the Museum.

Diotallevi

Diotallevi is an editor with Belbo at Garamond Press. A cabalist, he claims he is a Jew, though there is no evidence of this fact. He also claims to be a descendant of one of the founders of Milan. He is involved with everyone else in developing the Plan, though he does have reservations about the enterprise. Towards the end of the novel he is diagnosed with cancer. In his last conversation with Belbo before he dies, he tells Belbo that he believes it is the impious playing with words and meaning of the Plan that causes his cancer. He dies the same day as Belbo.

Mr. Garamond

The owner of Garamond Press and Manutius, not much is known about Mr. Garamond. He is an older; more upper class Milanese gentleman who keeps his cards close to his chest and is a good salesman. He is present at the murder of Belbo, having joined Tres at some point during the novel.

Gudrun

Gudrun is the secretary at Garamond Press. Unmarried, her real name is not Gudrun, though Belbo and Diotallevi have named her this because she looks and talks in a slightly German manner. She is good friends with Diotallevi and is the one to tell Casaubon that Diotallevi has died.

Professor Bramanti

A member of Tres and friend of Aglie, Casaubon first meets him at a Rosicrucian lecture in Brazil. Later, Bramanti is present in Milan and eventually presides over the magic ceremony that culminates in the murder of Belbo.

Amparo

Lover of Casaubon towards the end of his time in grad school. After his graduation he follows her to her native Brazil and Casaubon takes a teaching job in Rio. She is a



dedicated Marxist and has a firmly held materialistic view of the world. During a Brazilian magic ceremony, she becomes possessed and is so ashamed that she leaves Casaubon.

Lia

Casaubon meets Lia in a library after he returns to Milan from Brazil. They quickly fall in love and get married. Lia is very intelligent and strong willed in a way that helps to bring Casaubon down to earth. She disapproves of the Plan from the beginning and tries to get Casaubon to give it up. She is also the mother of Casaubon's son.

Lorenza

A younger free spirit Belbo meets one night while she is playing pinball in Pilade's. She has affairs with Riccardo, Aglie, Belbo, and tries to begin one with Casaubon. Aglie calls her Sophia and tells her that she is part of a Gnostic mythology. She is murdered by Tres in Paris at the same time that Belbo dies.

Aglie

A strange, older gentleman, always dressed well, who Casaubon originally meets in Brazil. An expert on occult knowledge of all kinds, Garamond eventually hires him as a consultant. He is Belbo's rival for Lorenza and once Belbo tells him that he knows the location of the secret Templar map, Aglie frames Belbo with a bomb and then kidnaps him. He is in charge of Tres and is present during the murder of Belbo. He claims to be immortal and to be the Comte de Saint-Germain.

Comte de Saint-Germain

An 18th century adventurer said to have magical powers and to be immortal. A central character in many occult theories.

Jacques de Molay

23rd and Final grand master of the Knights Templar. He is burned for heresy by King Phillip of France on March 18, 1314.

Salon

A taxidermist who works next to Garamond Press. Obsessed with underground passages, he tells Casaubon about telluric currents and gives Casaubon several other



ideas that end up in the Plan. An associate of Aglie, he is present at the murder of Belbo.

John Dee

Dee is the court astrologer for Elizabeth the 1st and an avid devotee of the occult. Claims to have been able to summon angels and to translate their language, Enochian, into English. In the Plan, he is the head of the English branch of the Templars.

Old Man of the Mountain

A reference to the head of the Hashshashin or Assassins, but usually used to refer to one specific leader, Hassan-i-Sabbah. Said to use occult powers to train assassins and to have been in contact with the Templars, in the Plan he and his followers are the Palestine branch of the Templars.

Riccardo

A Milanese painter who has a relationship with Lorenza. He is present at the murder of Belbo and responsible for bringing Lorenza to Paris.



Objects/Places

Knights Templar

Religious order of knights founded by Hugues de Payens in 1119. Technically a monastic order, the Templars obeyed strict religious discipline but also amassed great wealth during the Crusades, wealth that made them unpopular with monarchs in Europe. In 1312, the group was officially disbanded and in 1314 Jacques de Molay was burned in Paris. There were rumors that the Templars worshiped the devil and engaged in sodomy and many people, including Scottish Rite Masons, claim to be decedents of the Templars.

Cabbala

A mystical branch of Judaism that believes detailed study of the Torah will reveal divine mysteries.

Sefirot

In Cabbala, the Sefirot are the ten manifestations of God. Each stage has its own meaning and scriptural significance.

Rosicrucians

Collection of German secret societies in the 17th century that claim to follow the teachings of Christian Rosenkreuz. Instrumental in the development of enlightenment thought in Germany and the rest of Europe.

Foucault's Pendulum

A device invented by Leon Foucault in 1851. First located in the Pantheon in Paris, the Pendulum demonstrated and proved that the earth rotated around its axis.

Milan

City in Northern Italy, specifically Lombardi, renowned for fashion.



Hermes

Originally the great god of crossroads and messengers, Hermes became identified with the occult because of his ability to travel into the underworld and the belief that he was the god of transformation.

Hermetic

Set of beliefs supposedly derived from Hermes Trismegistus, the focus on alchemical transformation and hidden, occult knowledge.

Kundalini

In eastern mythology, the spiritual snake of life force inside the body. An important concept in many western occult systems.

Telluric

Supposed underground electrical currents that travel through the crust of the earth from each of the poles. Some claim that telluric currents are responsible for weather and many underground geological events.

Homunculus

Literally, "little man," homunculus in alchemy is an artificial man created by the alchemist that will do the bidding of its creator. Similar to a Golem in Jewish mythology.

Demiurge

In Gnosticism, the evil deity responsible for the creation of matter and the universe.

Synarchy

A political philosophy similar to fascism created by Alexandre Saint-Yves d'Alveydre in the 19th century. Focuses on the importance of harmony in political systems achieved through the possession of eternal truth, which experts will use to rule efficiently.

Agartha

In occult systems, the secret underground lair of the Masters of the World, located somewhere in Nepal.



Alamut

The home and castle of the Assassins. Located in modern day Iran, the fortress was located on a cliff and was virtually impossible to conquer.

Assasins

Mystical branch of Shia Islam that trained skilled killers to eliminate threats to the order.

Piedmont

North western part of Italy. Known for its regional dialect and its proximity to France and Germany.

Jesuits

Also known as the Society of Jesus, the Jesuits are a religious order started by Ignatius Loyola in 1534. Known for their mystical discipline and emphasis on education and dialectical skill, the Jesuits are responsible for founding universities and were the shock troops of the Pope during the counter-reformation.

Tres

A secret society that originally entered into the Plan as a joke, eventually adopted by real occultists who believe the Plan is true.

Pilade's

A bar in Milan where Casaubon and his friends drink. An important meeting place during the 60s and 70s for radicals and professionals.

Conservatoire des Arts et Metiers

Museum dedicated to displaying technological advances of mankind. Houses Foucault's Pendulum and is claimed, in the novel, to be the ancestral property of Francis Bacon and the headquarters of the French branch of Templars.

Social Concerns And Themes

Foucault's Pendulum is, like *The Name of The Rose* (1981), an intellectual thriller laden with an incredible variety of references, ranging from African mythology to medieval history, from Walt Disney to the KGB. And like its fictional predecessor, Foucault's Pendulum examines the nature of and need for faith. The novel chronicles two decades in which the narrator Casaubon investigates secret societies beginning with the medieval Knights Templar and the possible existence of "a Plan, a Universal Plot" for control over the enormous powers of the earth. What begins as a detached scholarly study at the University of Milan in the late 1960s becomes an obsession that some twenty years later not only dominates Casaubon's life but threatens his very existence and claims the lives of two of his friends and colleagues.

While a student, Casaubon happens to meet an editor at Garamond Press, Jacopo Belbo, in a bar. Learning of Casaubon's study of the Knights Templar, Belbo asks for his evaluation of a book on the Templars. For several years, Casaubon is loosely affiliated with Garamond Press and comes to know Belbo and another editor, Diotallevi, socially as well as professionally.

Garamond Press' publication of books concerning hermetics attracts someone calling himself Colonel Ardenti, who offers a document, the Ordination of Provins, that he presents as an encoded part of the master plan of secret societies. The night after his meeting with the editors, Colonel Ardenti disappears from his hotel room and is presumed murdered. The popularity of occultism and mysticism puzzles but fascinates Casaubon and Belbo. Books on the subjects are reported to fill the racks in railway stations and the gullibility of the public seems boundless. Implicit in this interest, of course, is an underlying crisis of faith that is by no means confined to the modern age. As the novel amply demonstrates, secret societies have flourished throughout history by promising to unlock the powers of the earth. In portraying the continuing vogue of such secret societies, Eco strikes an image of the contemporary world that underscores its similarities to rather than its differences from the twelfth century.

Soon after Ardenti's disappearance, Casaubon leaves Italy to follow his "beautiful, Marxist, Brazilian, enthusiastic, disenchanted," girlfriend, Arnparo, to Brazil, where he finds a job lecturing in Italian at the University of Rio. There he thinks he will escape the Templars and perhaps outgrow his fascination with secret societies. But once in Brazil, Casaubon continues to make connections among what seem to be isolated and disparate sources. He describes himself as "a walking blender" and, as he pursues his interest in the Brazilian sects that echo the Templars, Casaubon feels "lulled by feelings of resemblance: the notion that everything might be mysteriously related to everything else." So vast is Casaubon's learning and interests that he continually finds analogies and parallels between the Brazilian voodoo beliefs and European traditions. Indeed, in Brazil, Casaubon not only discovers occult rites but encounters the mysterious Signor Aglie, attends a lecture by Professor Bramanti on the Rosicrucians and Brazilian voodoo rituals, and learns of the Great White Fraternity. Rather than losing interest in



hermetic societies, Casaubon finds evidence of the existence of a Universal Plot everywhere he turns.

When Casaubon returns to Italy in the late 1970s his association with Garamond Press is solidified. He will serve as an editor for a series on mystic secret societies called "Isis Unveiled" and as author of a book on the story of metals. The "Isis Unveiled" series attracts all manner of occultists, some of whom Casaubon has chanced to meet before: Signor Aglie agrees to serve as a senior consultant; Professor Bramanti appears with a manuscript. Weary and skeptical of the bizarre theories and crank interpretations to come across their desks, Casaubon, Belbo, and Diotallevi together decide to program the computer, nicknamed Abulafia, to generate a definitive, syncretic meshing of events. Their scheme begins almost as a prank, a game to draw together associations no matter how unlikely the linkage may seem. So much of the work they edit is infused with paranoia, secrecy, and conspiracy theories that no connection seems too improbable. Soon, however, their game strays too close to what many people — in fact virtually everyone in the novel — see as the mystery of the universe, and the three are caught up in a deadly struggle for ultimate power. Their "coincidentology" goes so far that Aglie believes Belbo's fantastic story about possessing a secret map and lures Belbo into leaving a suitcase with a bomb planted in it on a train bound for Florence.

Under the threat of blackmail Belbo travels to Paris where he is directed to the Conservatoire des Arts et Metiers and is arraigned in a secret ceremony of "the One Order, the Unknown Order." Even under the imminent threat of his own death, as Casaubon states, "Belbo recovered his most genuine gift: his sense of the ridiculous." In a bizarre spectacle, made even more grotesque by petty squabbles and fisticuffs, Aglie demands that Belbo reveal the great secret. Garroted by the cable which suspends the pendulum of the novel's title, Belbo refuses Aglie's invitation to join the "masters of the World" and simply tells them: "Ma gavte la nata" a favorite expression that literally means "take the cork out" and figuratively reminds people not to take themselves so seriously.

The novel offers multiple perspectives on history as events from the Middle Ages are counterpointed by and juxtaposed with those from the late 1960s through the late 1980s. Casaubon, for instance, comments on the political and social radicals of the 1960s: what they offered, what they did (and did not) effect, what they became. Belbo, who is older than Casaubon, is distinctly bitter about a younger, revolutionary generation that appeared filled with "enthusiasm, courage, selfcriticism," but actually offered little more than violence, cowardice, and self-indulgence. Those complaints, however, are Belbo's own. In the larger historical context, the 1960s revolutionaries appear to have searched for the same transcendence, mystery, and understanding that the Templars and their kin sought. The novel deals with the creation process of narrative explanations, especially those of belief — the formulation for cults, rituals, religious faith — and of fiction, the blending together of elements from a vast array of sources and inspirations. Foucault's Pendulum raises fundamental epistemological questions about the way in which people organize, interpret, and finally understand experience. Like Casaubon, the reader is asked to impose meaning on the text encountered. Just as Casaubon examines the vast history of hermetic thinking and, through Abulafia,



previous commentators, and his own ingenuity, imposes meaning and makes sense of that panoply of speculation, so the reader of Eco's novel must impose meaning on the novel. The very acts of determining meaning and of establishing fixed points around which an interpretation can be structured are focal concerns of the novel.

Techniques

Foucault's *Pendulum* is narrated in the first person, albeit with occasional omniscience (thanks to Abulafia's files), by Casaubon. He is like the old sailor in Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (1798) at once a guide and a survivor. The novel begins at 4 p.m. on June 23, the eve of the summer solstice, as Casaubon hides in a periscope at the Conservatoire des Arts et Metiers in Paris. The image of Casaubon observing through the narrow field of vision afforded by a periscope is emblematic of the perspective that he has (and the reader has) throughout the novel: An individual person's vision is not all-encompassing, but necessarily restricted. Despite the fact that the hunger for vision and for faith is sometimes insatiable, human knowledge remains innately limited. Encyclopedic as Casaubon's (or any-one's) knowledge may seem, there are still gaps, shortcomings, and blind spots. One precondition for obtaining knowledge seems to lie in admitting one's own fallibility and limitations. When, for instance, Casaubon attempts to enter the computer, Abulafia asks him "Do you know the password?" Only when Casaubon out of exasperation finally answers, "No" does he gain access to the files.

Eco manages to layer narrative upon narrative in Foucault's *Pendulum*. The "thriller" narrative deals primarily with the involvement of Casaubon, Belbo, and Diotallevi in trying to unravel mysteries of "the Plot, the Universal Plan." That universal plot is believed to seek control over the earth's telluric currents. Like the modern physicist in search of a grand unification theory, hermetic societies have long sought the key that would synthesize all knowledge and unlock the earth's ultimate power.

Few people question the existence of these telluric currents and even fewer seem to resist the attraction of some secret hermetic society that offers the promise of unlimited power and knowledge. Moreover, the very secrecy and suspicion that surrounds these hermetic societies leads naturally to myriad instances of doubling, disguise, and deceit in the novel. Aglie, for instance, is presumed at least by himself to be immortal. He has had more than a dozen identities or incarnations over the past two thousand years. Garamond Press, too, has its double in Manutius Publishing, a vanity press. What links the humble Garamond offices with the far more luxurious accommodations of Manutius Press is a tunnel. Such underground connections, both literal and figurative, run throughout the novel.



Themes

Need for Meaning

A key theme in the novel is the human need for meaning in life and for certainty. All of the characters are searching for meaning in their lives in one way or another. Diotallevi has devoted himself to study the Torah and looking for meaning in the text of that ancient work. Belbo looks in several places for meaning and eventually finds it in the Plan. Casaubon looks for meaning throughout the novel and eventually finds it with Lia and his son, but gives all of that up to look for a supposedly deeper meaning in the Plan.

After the murder of Belbo, Casaubon realizes that it is the search for meaning that has led everyone astray. It has led them to look for meaning where there is none and to ignore meaning where it is right in front of them.

The Pendulum symbolizes certainty and meaning in the novel. The Pendulum looks as if it is moving but in fact the Pendulum is the only thing on earth that is not moving. It sways back and forth, but the point it is attached to is fixed while the world rotates around it. This is a key idea in the novel. The characters are looking for a fixed point, a point that can ground meaning. In so looking, however, they eventually realize that what seems solid, the Plan, is in fact what is moving, is shifting beneath them. The secret of the Pendulum is simple, so simple that people do not take it seriously. Casaubon realizes that the secret of the meaning of life is also simple, so simple that people look elsewhere, preferring to have a fantasy, even a fantasy they know to be untrue, rather than face life in the uncertain mysterious world. Part of the point of the novel is that the quest for meaning and certainty, if done properly can result in wisdom; but, if done improperly, it can only lead to bad things.

Contextual Knowledge

This is fundamentally a novel about meaning. Eco uses the entire novel as a demonstration of his belief that knowledge is fundamentally contextual. That is, knowledge divorced from its context will either become meaningless or develop a new context. This is illustrated in one part of the novel when the characters start feeding the first line of manuscripts from their clients into Abulafia and then randomizing the sentences. The resulting paragraphs seem to be nonsensical, however, because the characters are so enthralled by the occult, they project meaning onto the seemingly disconnected sentences. They give the sentences a new context; the Plan itself is just a context invented by the main characters to make sense of random groupings of sentences.

This phenomenon of meaning projection is just the epistemological version of the search for meaning in life. One assumes life must have a certain kind of meaning and



hence, looks for meaning everywhere. The same is true of the texts that the group uses for the Plan. They assume that everything must be related in a hermetic way so instead of deciding whether or not certain facts or claims are related, the group works the opposite way and searches for more and more obscure and ingenious ways to relate facts.

The mind, according to Eco, is looking for meaning everywhere. If a person assumes a given fact or event is meaningful it will rearrange its other beliefs to accommodate the meaningful fact. This process takes over with the Plan and almost all of history and common understanding of how the world works is jettisoned so that the facts of the Plan make sense. The members of Tres are the ultimate example of this. Their entire group is taken from the Plan. They assume the plan is correct and hence they assume that they are the secret group the plan mentions. As Casaubon realizes, all too late, this hermetic way of reasoning is entirely backwards. A key theme of the novel is then the importance of proper reasoning and recognition of the importance of context for knowledge.

The Importance of Signs

This theme is related to the other two themes in that they all deal with different aspects of meaning. To Eco, words are just signs, that is they are nothing more than the physical marks on a piece of paper or the sounds that emanate from a mouth. The importance of signs is in their ability to convey meaning and meaning is ultimately located in the mind of the individual rather than in the signs themselves.

The occult is also obsessed with signs. This can be seen in the focus on runes, pentagram and other mystical symbols. Diotallevi's desire to understand the Torah by rearranging the Hebrew signs is also an example of looking for meaning in symbols. In the novel, the characters confuse signs, words and sentences, for what the sign signifies. They confuse the map with the territory. The symbols and sentences that they feed into Abulafia are meaningless to the computer. They are only strings of ones and zeros.

The characters, however, believe that the sentences and the words themselves are the bearers of meaning and do not realize that they are projecting meaning onto a collection of unrelated sentences. Diotallevi makes this point when he, wary of Abulafia, tells Belbo that it is not important for the Cabbalist to find the name of God because it is the name of God, rather it is the search for the name of God that gives the true Cabbalist actual wisdom. Knowledge disconnected from a context that can only be achieved through true study and understanding lacks any meaning.



Style

Point of View

The story is told from the point of view of the main character, Casaubon. The novel begins with Casaubon in a museum in Paris, attempting to find his friend Belbo. Most of the novel is composed of flashbacks from the point of view of Casaubon while he waits for a meeting with Belbo's kidnappers in the Parisian museum. Much of the novel involves Casaubon reading from Belbo's computer files and then reminiscing about the events related to the files. This leads to flashbacks within flashbacks that tell the story of Casaubon's life and the details of the events that culminate in Casaubon's search for Belbo in the museum.

Since most of the novel is either flashback or Casaubon thinking about an event in the past, the narrator has some knowledge of the future, but only the future he directly experiences. He is reliable up to an extent, but it is important for the reader to always remember that Casaubon is never in possession of all the relevant facts and his views about the psychology and motivations of others are really only speculations. There is a great deal of foreshadowing in the narration because the narrator knows that certain events will ultimately lead to the unhappy fate of having to track down a kidnapped friend after hours in a Parisian museum. Once the narration picks up with Casaubon in the museum, the narrator becomes more tentative and provisional, presumably because he does not know what is going to happen. After the murder of Belbo, the point of view becomes almost totally reflective and focuses on Casaubon's thought and reflections about the events of the novel and their meaning.

Setting

The novel primarily takes place in the northern Italian city of Milan. Milan is the home of Garamond Press, the offices where Casaubon, Belbo, and Diotallevi work and invent the Plan. Much of the novel consists in these three discussing aspects of the Plan in the Garamond Offices. Milan is also home to Pilade's, the nighttime haunt of the group where they drink whiskey and discuss more personal topics. During one important episode, the group travels from Milan to Piedmont to visit the boyhood home of Belbo and eventually to attend a magical ceremony. The novel also ends with Casaubon in Belbo's childhood home in Piedmont.

After Casaubon graduates, he moves to Brazil and several episodes take place in Rio and the surrounding areas. Casaubon first meets Aglie in Brazil and Aglie introduces Casaubon to several pagan ceremonies in the favalas of Brazil. The central location of the novel is the Conservatoire des Arts et Metiers. Casaubon hides in a periscope in the museum for most of the novel, remembering the development of the Plan that brings him to the museum. The climax also occurs in the museum, where Casaubon witnesses the murder of Belbo and Lorenza under the Pendulum. In some sense, the entire novel



rotates under the pendulum in the same way that the world rotates under the swinging pendulum. The settings though, are both essential and seemingly unimportant to the novel. Good portions of the novel are either Casaubon reading about secret societies or Casaubon and Belbo or Casaubon and Aglie talking about secret societies.

Language and Meaning

In an important sense the entire novel is a meditation on language and meaning. Eco is trying to show the reader the importance of context for meaning and to show how knowledge can take on meaning depending on the contexts that the reader brings. The author seduces the reader into the same underground world of the Plan that Casaubon and Belbo are also drawn into. To do this, Eco uses a vast onslaught of facts that are connected together by the main characters to convince the reader, if only for a little while that the Plan is plausible. The Plan is built in spurts and several times the main characters revise key aspects of the Plan. This makes some part of the Plan that the reader initially found plausible seem ridiculous, confirming the sense that the Plan is progressing closer to the truth.

The novel was originally written in Italian and then translated so it is not entirely clear how the author's original language in Italian differs from the English translation. In any case, Eco is obsessed with putting huge amounts of historical and esoteric detail in the novel. The point of this is to submerge the reader into the world of the Plan, to make it seem real.

The first person narration allows Eco to mix commentary, in the voice of Casaubon, into the main thread of the novel. This is especially true in the final chapters. This is ultimately a novel with a philosophical point and the entire novel pursues this philosophical theme relentlessly. The characters and the Plan are, to a large extent, just devices to explore themes about meaning and context. This makes some of the characters and the plot feel a little thin at times, but also makes the novel compelling and interesting because the novel is a commentary on itself.

Structure

The novel is divided into ten sections, each corresponding to one of the manifestations of God and history described by cabbalists as Sefirot. These sections are: Keter, Hokhmah, Binah, Hesed, Gevurah, Tipheret, Hod, Yesod, and Malkuth. In the final chapter of each section, Casaubon uses the Sefirot of the section to explain how that particular Sefirot symbolizes the action of the novel in that section. Each of these sections varies in length, with some being only a chapter or two long.

At the beginning of each chapter, Eco uses an epigram that is somehow related to the chapter from the original sources that the group is using for the Plan. These are often obscure and in several cases are in foreign languages including: Latin, French, German, and Italian. The first chapter has a long epigram written in Hebrew. This is a

clue, at the beginning of the novel, that we are entering a novel full of mysteries and focused on the occult powers of language.

Large sections of the novel are made up of files from Abulafia. Some of these are novelizations of recent events between Belbo and Lorenza. Some are just the musings and reflections of Belbo, while others are a fictionalized version of the Plan. Some also involve a story that reoccurs throughout the novel, dealing with Belbo's childhood in Piedmont. The story is sprinkled throughout the novel. Sometimes it is told directly by Belbo to the group when they are at Pilade's. Casaubon reads other parts of the story on Abulafia and, at the end of the novel, hidden away at Belbo's childhood home. Casaubon ends up being the only person besides Belbo who knows the entire story.



Quotes

"You cannot escape one infinite, I told myself, by fleeing to another; you cannot escape the revelation of the identical by taking refuge in the illusion of the multiple." (6)

"Saint Anselm's ontological argument is moronic, for example. God must exist because I can conceive Him as being perfect in all ways, including existence. The saint confuses existence in thought with existence in reality."(56)

"Listen, Jacopo, I thought of a good one: Urban Planning for Gypsies.'

'Great,' Belbo said admiringly. 'I have one, too: Aztec Equitation.'

'Excellent. But would that go with Potio-section or the Anynata?'

'We'll have to see.' Belbo said. He rummaged in his drawer and took out some sheets of paper. 'Potio-section...' He looked at me, saw my bewilderment. 'Potio-section, as everybody knows, is the art of slicing soup. No, no,' he said to Diotallevi. 'It's not a department, it's a subject, like Mechanical Avunculo-gratulation or Pylocatabasis. They all fall under the heading of Tetrapyloctomy.'

'What's tetra...?'

'The art of splitting a hair four ways. Mechanical Avunculo-gratulation, for example, is how to build machines for greeting uncles.'" (64)

"The Great White Fraternity—whether you call them Rosicrucians or the Spiritual knighthood of which the Templars are a temporary incarnation—is a cohort of a few, very few, elect wise men who journey through human history in order to preserve a core of eternal knowledge. History does not happen randomly. It is the work of the Masters of the World, whom nothing escapes. Naturally, the Masters of the World protect themselves through secrecy. And that is why anyone says he is a master, a Rosicrucian, a Templar is lying." (174)

"From the birth of Project Hermes until that day, I [Casaubon] had enjoyed myself heedlessly at the expense of other people. Now they were preparing to present the bill. I was as much of a bee as the ones who wanted to attract; and, like them, I was quickly being lured to a flower, though I didn't yet know what that flower was." (231)

"See here: if you look at the world in a certain way, everything is connected to everything else." (263)

"Mankind can't endure the thought that the world was born by chance, by mistake, just because four brainless atoms bumped into one and other on a slippery highway. So a cosmic plot has to be found—God, angels, devils. Synarchy performs the same function on a lesser scale." (266)

"The sun is good because it does the body good, and because it has the sense to reappear everyday; therefore, whatever returns is good, not what passes and is done with." (302)



"Any fact becomes important when it is connected with another. The connection changes the perspective; it leads you to think that every detail of the world, every voice, every word written or spoken has more than its literal meaning, that it tells us of a Secret." (314)

"We've sinned against the Word, against that which created and sustains the world. Now you [Belbo] are punished for it, as I [Diotalleivi] am punished for it. There's no difference between you and me." (465)

"Someone—Rubenstein, maybe—once said, when asked if he believed in God: "Oh, no, I believe...in something much bigger." And someone else—was it Chesterton?—said that when men stop believing in God, it isn't that they then believe in nothing: they believe in everything." (514)

"...he [Belbo] refused to bow to nonmeaning. He somehow knew that, fragile as our existence may be, however ineffectual our interrogation of the world, there is nevertheless something that has more meaning than the rest." (516)



Key Questions

In his fiction, Eco always runs the risk of exhausting his readers' patience with the labyrinthine complexity of his narrative, the sheer weight of his erudition, and the open-endedness at which he aims. These issues become especially problematic with Foucault's Pendulum, at once the most challenging and the least obviously satisfying of Eco's novels. Thus, discussion will naturally focus on his success in persuading readers to make the required effort and to accept the unconventional characteristics of the novel.

1. Casaubon devotes his considerable talents for many years to the study of what he considers to be nonsense; so do a number of other bright people. Does this investment of time and intellectual energy somehow lend dignity to the subject? Has Casaubon squandered his life?
2. The characters are continually finding that what they think they have invented is true, after a fashion; at the same time, their everyday world sometimes seems impermanent and insubstantial. Are readers in a better position than the characters to distinguish between truth and delusion?
3. Why does Eco give Casaubon a personal life? Do Amparo and Lia have more than a peripheral role in the novel?
4. Why does Eco choose to begin the novel at the crucial moment in the Conservatoire des Arts et Metiers? What symbolic connections do you see between what he experiences there and the story as a whole?
5. Do Casaubon, Belbo, and Diotallevi deserve what happens to them?
6. Eco knows that he could be criticized for his digressions, as Melville was for the whaling chapters in *Moby Dick* (1851). Since the gathering of information is the main action of the novel, Eco has at least a plausible excuse for the long passages on secret societies and other arcane subjects. Could the novel be cut without essential damage? If so, how?
7. The novel seems to imply that the Big Secret is that there is no secret at all. The secret everyone is pursuing turns out to be an illusion. Is there another that they fail to perceive?
8. The pendulum of the title makes only brief and enigmatic appearances in the text. What clues, if any, does it provide for interpretation?
9. If it were not for Belbo's death, the antics of the secret society that kills him would be amusing. Why does Eco make it so absurd?



Topics for Discussion

Explain the significance of the Pendulum in the plot and as a symbol.

Explain the purpose of Belbo's stories about his childhood in the novel.

Explain the hermetic method of reasoning by analogy used in the novel.

What is the role of Diotallevi in the novel?

Does the fate of Belbo confirm or deny the truth of the Plan?

What is the truth that Casaubon realizes at the end of the novel? Explain your answer in detail.

Discuss the importance of meaning in the novel. Give specific examples of how different views on meaning impact the plot.

Literary Precedents

Eco's novel draws broadly on a now well-established tradition of thrillers that are rooted in meticulous detail and extensive research. Similarities with the works of writers like John le Carre, Frederick Forsyth, and Len Deighton abound, although Eco's subject is more cosmic than global. It seems clear that Eco wrote another novel in a style very similar to that of *The Name of The Rose*. Eco's sources, as distinct from his literary precedents, are limited not just to the Judeo-Christian traditions of Western civilization, but extend to Oriental and African wisdom. The scope of the epigraphs for the 120 chapters in Foucault's *Pendulum* range from Shakespeare and Dante to Woody Allen and a Professor of Engineering at Columbia University. One of the convincing, if frivolous, literary precedents for Eco's second voluminous novel is Dashiell Hammett's novel (and its three film versions, especially John Houston's 1941 movie) *The Maltese Falcon* (1930). Not only does Casaubon fancy himself a Sam Spade of esoteric knowledge, but at least one of his partners is murdered. And like the Maltese falcon itself, the Universal Plot that so many people have died for is a worthless illusion.



Related Titles

Like *The Name of The Rose*, Foucault's *Pendulum* provides a formidable display of Eco's erudition couched in the terms of a mystery thriller. Perhaps less thrilling than its predecessor, Foucault's *Pendulum* also offers whole chapters of fairly straightforward history on subjects as diverse as the Jesuits, calendar reform, numerology, and cartography. Medieval history is perhaps no less important in Foucault's *Pendulum* than it was in *The Name of The Rose*.

Eco's own works on literature, especially his 1989 study *The Open Work*, are probably the best guides to understanding the logic of Foucault's *Pendulum*. Foucault's *Pendulum* is in many ways the quintessential "open work."



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