

Umberto Eco between postmodernism and narrative: *Il nome della rosa*, *Il pendolo di Foucault*, and *La misteriosa fiamma della regina Loana*

Erik Schilling

Ludwig Maximilians University of Munich, Germany;
Jesus College, University of Oxford, UK

Forum Italicum
2015, Vol. 49(3) 800–811

© The Author(s) 2015

Reprints and permissions:

sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav

DOI: 10.1177/0014585815595350

foi.sagepub.com



Abstract

In this article, Umberto Eco's novels will be analyzed as postmodern and neo-realist narration. From *Il nome della rosa* onwards, Eco does not only deal with questions of (literary) theory – such as semiotics, interpretation, and deconstruction – but also with ontological issues. Although striking examples of 'theory-aware' texts, *Il nome della rosa* and *Il pendolo di Foucault* consider the idea of a non-arbitrary perspective on the world. Putting further emphasis on this, *La misteriosa fiamma della regina Loana* stands in contrast to a postmodern play with theory and history. It can be described as a historical novel that highlights chances and limits of historiography. At the same time, it illustrates a return of narrative that goes hand in hand with a re-installation of author and narrator, the literary instances that had been put into question by Eco's earlier novels.

Keywords

contemporary literature, historical novel, literary theory

After Umberto Eco had entered the literary scene with *Il nome della rosa*, there was hardly a review of the novel that did not use the term 'postmodern' to describe Eco's way of narration.¹ The various aspects that have been called postmodern will not be revised in detail. Instead, I will focus on one of them, crucial also for *Il pendolo di Foucault* and *L'isola del giorno prima*: the 'theory-awareness' of the novels.² Adso in *Il nome della rosa* is less a first-person-narrator who tells his

Corresponding author:

Erik Schilling, Institut für Deutsche Philologie, LMU München, Schellingstr. 3, 80799 München, Germany.
Email: erik.schilling@lmu.de

individual story than a ‘writer’ (in terms of Barthes, 1994: 492) who combines intertextual fragments. Belbo, an author-character in *Il pendolo di Foucault*, is killed during the plot – a very vivid way of illustrating Barthes’ idea of ‘the death of the author’ (Barthes, 1994). *L’isola del giorno prima* is closely associated with the ‘tre tipi di intenzioni’ (Eco, 1990: 22–25),³ the theoretical concepts of the author’s, reader’s and text’s intentions that Eco introduces in *I limiti dell’interpretazione*.

In contrast, Eco’s later novels *Baudolino*, *La misteriosa fiamma della regina Loana* and *Il cimitero di Praga* can be considered a return of narrative. This goes hand in hand with a re-installation of author and narrator. Yambo, the protagonist of *La misteriosa fiamma della regina Loana*, has lost his memory and tries to rebuild his identity in an existential approach to the problem of remembering and forgetting. Whenever he does not remember, he starts constructing a new identity. This is told as a process that not only refers to 20th century history in Italy, but also – and especially – to autobiographical elements of the author Eco. Thus, *La misteriosa fiamma della regina Loana* is a historical narrative that makes use of a micro-historical perspective to explore the possibilities and limits of historiography in the 21st century.

How this is shaped in detail and to what extent the novel can be considered a narrative that is different from Eco’s postmodernist attitude towards the past in his earlier novels will be addressed in this article. My thesis is that in *La misteriosa fiamma della regina Loana* Eco explores a new approach to theoretical and historiographical concepts integrated into novels, an approach, however, that had already popped up in certain passages of his earlier novels.

Semiotics and the death of the author in *Il nome della rosa*

Il nome della rosa transforms the historical novel into ‘metahistoriographic fiction’⁴ by critically reflecting established patterns of the genre. The manuscript fiction with which the story opens seems to endow the text with an atmosphere of authenticity by reconstructing its historical tradition – which, however, turns out to be fictitious. Afterwards, the novel gives an example of the self-assured manner in which the monk Adso places his life in the semiotic system of the universe. Here, the protagonist’s faith in God can be discerned, a faith that expresses itself in the knowledge of truth. Even though at times it may be hidden, it can be uncovered in the end:

[L]a verità, prima che faccia a faccia, si manifesta a tratti (ahi, quanto illeggibili) nell’errore del mondo, così che dobbiamo compitarne i fedeli segnacoli, anche là dove ci appaiono oscuri e quasi intessuti di una volontà del tutto intesa al male. (Eco, 1980: 19)

Truth is uncovered by employing the teleological semiotic process Eco, drawing upon the works of Peirce, devised in his theoretical writings (Eco, 1975, 1979, 1984). In doing so, a potentially infinite process of interpretation is started; in practice, the process is terminated as soon as the recipient has sufficiently decoded

the sign for his understanding. The interpretation is performed through a series of abductions in a process of semiosis. Interpretation and cultural signification form a mutual relation: Interpretation requires a cultural frame where meaning is generated through a process of communication (Fröhlich, 2009; Schalk, 2000: 116–125).

After the events in the abbey, however, Adso distances himself from this notion. The following lack of significance is reinforced by the epilogue of the novel where historical tradition is put into question by poststructuralist techniques. Many years after the events have taken place, Adso returns to the burnt-down library and collects some of the remaining book pages. By putting them together he not only tells the story of the abbey's library, but also his personal story. In the end, he is no longer sure which of the stories prevails. Every attempt at truth is lost:

Più rileggo questo elenco più mi convinco che esso è effetto del caso e non contiene alcun messaggio. Ma queste pagine incomplete mi hanno accompagnato per tutta la vita che da allora mi è rimasta da vivere, le ho spesso consultate come un oracolo, e ho quasi l'impressione che quanto ho scritto su questi fogli, che tu ora leggerai, ignoto lettore, altro non sia che un centone che non dice e non ripete altro che ciò che quei frammenti mi hanno suggerito, né so più se io abbia sinora parlato di essi o essi abbiano parlato per bocca mia. (Eco, 1980: 502–503)

Adso's manuscript is revealed to be made of fragments and there is no individual authorship. Signs refer to other signs, texts refer to other texts, but no final meaning can be decoded. The total loss of orientation Adso experiences in the course of both the narrative and his writing is symbolized in the scraps of parchment that he recovers from the burnt-down library: in the end, he is no longer sure whether the story has been constructed from his own memory or as a result of the recombination of intertextual fragments. Adso thus suffers from a loss of reality and falls back on the arbitrary denotations, the *nomina nuda*. This illustrates the change from author to 'writer' whose 'seul pouvoir est de mêler les écritures, de les contrarier les unes par les autres, de façon à ne jamais prendre appui sur l'une d'elles' (Barthes, 1994: 494). Just as the fragments form a pastiche for Adso, the novel confronts the reader with a literary pastiche. The narrative structure of the chronicle turns out to be a rhizomatic labyrinth (in terms of Deleuze and Guattari, 1980: 9–37) without center or periphery. The multitude of scraps of discourse that is presented in a consecutive fashion without any discernible structure or pattern results in a suspension of meaning, allowing different readings. Eco therefore incorporates a central concept of postmodern philosophy: 'grand metanarratives' as defined by Lyotard⁵ are no longer credible. Closely connected with this is the phenomenon of plurality. Not only can the tradition of the text be described as pluralistic, the narrative voice, too, operates in a multiperspective fashion. Unlike in *Il pendolo di Foucault*, however, this process only takes place in the last couple of pages, as a result of which the textual coherence of the novel is not challenged as a whole.

Limits of interpretation and the production of presence in *Il pendolo di Foucault*

In *Il nome della rosa* the difference between a teleological semiosis and a loss of signification was merely hinted at in the epilogue. In contrast to that, *Il pendolo di Foucault* foregrounds this tension right from the beginning. The novel retraces the history of the Knights Templar, Rosicrucianism, and other secret societies from the Middle Ages to the 20th century. The three protagonists rewrite history, in which they succeed so well that their fictions are believed by multiple other characters in the novel and in the end even by themselves. Hence, the approach to texts that *Il pendolo di Foucault* presents constitutes a sketch of the possibilities of interpretation.

In the novel, an important aspect of the cabbalistic and hermetic doctrines consists in the conclusion that the signified must never be revealed, so as not to rob it of the fascination of the secret: the ‘drift’ – *la différance* as defined by Derrida (2013) – has to be an infinite one. What Eco states in his theoretical writings, for example in *I limiti dell’interpretazione*,⁶ is illustrated in a fictional context: there is a direct link between hermetic tradition and deconstruction, and the deconstructive process exceeds the normal semiotic dispersion within the boundaries of competing cultural codes. By demonstrating the destructive potential of a deconstructive reading, the novel sets limits to interpretation. The protagonists devise a plan that produces connections between their biography and history where they do not exist. They create an ‘autobiographic historiography’ which is declared to be true, so that the protagonists gain control over the ‘grand metanarrative’ of the world.

This yearning for a structure is shown to be fatal already in the first chapter: The protagonist understands the experiment demonstrating the earth’s rotation by means of the Foucault Pendulum as an expression of divine will. The arbitrary center that the pendulum’s suspension point constitutes is seen as ‘il Punto Fermo,’ ‘l’unico punto fisso dell’universo,’ where ‘il mistero dell’immobilità assoluta’ (Eco, 1988: 10) takes place. With this – clearly ironic – mystification of a banality, the text seems to advocate the renunciation of a center, similar to what Derrida has repeatedly postulated in his writings. However, reading *Il pendolo di Foucault* as a plea for deconstruction would not do the text justice, even if the protagonists can be said to act in a ‘deconstructionist’ manner in large parts of the novel. Limits of deconstruction – which are *Limits of Interpretation* – are installed very subtly, only to bring them out all the more drastically.

The following example of the relation between author, reader, and text may help to clarify how limits of interpretation are established. The fact that Casaubon and Belbo can be seen as model reader and model author, respectively, with Casaubon reading Belbo’s computer files, shows that this relation is a constitutive element of the text even on the level of diegesis. Moreover, in Casaubon’s imagination, the model author falls prey to Roland Barthes’ proclaimed death of the author.

Belbo's death by being tied to the pendulum is radically staged – and at the same time ironized:

[I]l corpo di Belbo era divenuto immobile, e il filo con la sfera si muovevano a pendolo soltanto dal suo corpo verso terra, il resto – che collegava Belbo con la volta – rimanendo ormai a piombo. Così Belbo, sfuggito all'errore del mondo e dei suoi moti, era divenuto lui, ora, il punto di sospensione, il Perno Fisso, il Luogo a cui si sostiene la volta del mondo (Eco, 1988: 473)

Other main characters take on the role of model authors, too. Diotallevi, for example, devises the plan for a new universal history:

‘Stiamo gradatamente ricostruendo la storia del mondo’, disse Diotallevi. ‘Stiamo riscrivendo il Libro. Mi piace, mi piace’ (Eco, 1988: 321)

The fact that this is taken at face value by other characters poses the question of limits of interpretation. The novel critically deals with concepts of historiography, especially with the question that had been posed by Hayden White: whether any form of historical truth can be achieved or whether every reconstruction of historical events is first of all a narration organized according to fictional practices (White, 1973, 1978). The protagonists in *Il pendolo di Foucault* clearly opt for the latter.

By having the narrative scheme slip from the hands of its creators and assume an existence of its own, Eco illustrates some thoughts formulated in his *Postille a 'Il nome della rosa'*. After its publication, a text is separated from its author, which makes it accessible to any kind of interpretation: ‘Il testo è lì, e produce i propri effetti’ (Eco, 1994b: 509). The reader of Eco's novel runs the same risk of losing her/himself in fiction as the ‘readers’ of the plan. Thus, every reader must either be aware of her/his relative perspective or take a turn towards the irrational. Placing the interpretation in a relevant context with clearly defined limits overcomes the deconstructive drift.

However, the text does not end with this statement against deconstruction and for limits of interpretation. All of a sudden, an ontological aspect becomes important. The last scene has Casaubon take refuge in Belbo's country house. He anxiously awaits the arrival of some members of a secret society who apparently have been pursuing him. He finds some of Belbo's notes that make for a surprising turn of events: Belbo writes he had had a ‘true’ experience of the moment while playing the trumpet at a funeral when he tried to sustain the last note as long as possible. Following this episode, Belbo opens up a distinction between truth and lies that is connected to the experience of presence (in terms of Gumbrecht, 2004). As a result, Casaubon understands that a metaphysical experience can be rooted only in the singularity of the moment.

With this reference to an aesthetic, pre-semiotic experience, the emphasis is once again shifted. While the bulk of the novel creates a distinction between good and bad

interpretation of signs, the last couple of pages open up a wholly different kind of distinction, namely that between a world of signs (and consequently interpretation) and a signless universe of presence. In Eco's theoretical writings a similar shift can be identified, but not until 1997, when *Kant e l'ornitorinco* is published. In this text, Eco resumes what he had already stated in *Il pendolo di Foucault*:⁷ in a postmodern world there are infinite 'prospettive sull'essere' (Eco, 1997: 31). Thus, being is a process of continuous deconstruction, a mere effect of language – and the world therefore the result of a series of interpretations. According to Eco, a rational postmodern human being cannot ignore this. Nonetheless, a 'zoccolo duro dell'essere' (Eco, 1997: 36), a hard resistance of being, remains. One can consider a certain resistance to language despite being constituted by language. In the final pages of *Il pendolo di Foucault* this resistance against interpretation is established for the very first time. Thus, within Eco's writings not only literature is influenced by theory, but also theory by literature.

The return of subject and narration in *La misteriosa fiamma della regina Loana*

The resistance of being against interpretation forms a central motive of *La misteriosa fiamma della regina Loana* as well. As I will show, it goes along with a new emphasis on the subject and its identity. The novel is divided into three parts, each of which corresponds to a certain type of historical narrative. The first part – the awakening of the protagonist Yambo from a coma – is interspersed with intertextual references that serve as an additional layer to Yambo's quest for identity.⁸ The second part – Yambo's search for his past in the attic of his childhood home – combines historical facts with images to form a 'multimedia hypertextuality'. In the third part, a blurring of the lines between autobiography, history, and reality takes place and leads to a narrative that Rocco Capozzi calls 'a neorealist type of fiction' (Capozzi, 2006: 466).

While Capozzi, whose remarks on the structure of the text I am following, mainly deals with the second part of the novel in order to illustrate the text's 'hypertextuality',⁹ I will add some points regarding the (re)construction of the protagonist's identity. Therefore, I will provide a detailed analysis of the first part. The protagonist comes out of a coma and central aspects of his identity are lost. They are replaced by textual fragments, which not only suggest places and events, but also his own name: 'Mi chiamo Arthur Gordon Pym' (Eco, 2004: 7). What in *Il nome della rosa* was a carefree play with quotations and historical events (Schilling, 2012a: 73–103) now takes on a different quality: the novel is not about the creation of a historical world out of fragments of texts, but about the representation of a tangible (albeit literary) subject whose dilemma is just as tangible: the loss of the self.

Although the protagonist's identification with one of Edgar Allan Poe's fictional characters undeniably evokes comic potential, this changes quickly as the reader learns that the protagonist's personality is almost entirely made up of fictional elements. With this in mind, the title of the chapter takes on a different meaning

as well (Giordano, 2004: 173): it can be recognized as a reference to 'The Burial of the Dead,' the first poem in TS Eliot's *The Waste Land*, whose first verse reads 'April is the cruellest month' and goes on to say that it mixes 'memory and desire' (Eliot, 1952: 17). In addition to this blending of memory fragments and desire, the seasonal imagery that is developed in the poem's subsequent lines can be transferred to the protagonist's situation in *La misteriosa fiamma della regina Loana*: 'Winter kept us warm, covering/Earth in forgetful snow [. . .]. Summer surprised us' (Eliot, 1952: 17).

Although there is no manuscript fiction as in *Il nome della rosa*, the novel makes fundamental statements regarding the 'textuality of reality.' However, the allusions to palimpsests, textual fragments, and quotations stem from a different motivation than in Eco's earlier novels. Unlike *Il pendolo di Foucault*, *La misteriosa fiamma della regina Loana* does not see history and literature as a repository for an arbitrary manipulation of fact and fiction, but uses it – similar to *Baudolino* – as a way for the protagonist to remedy an existential deficit: the loss of his identity.

The second and third parts of the novel contain a multitude of illustrations. They serve to emphasize the purported authenticity of the fictional narrative in a different medium (Capozzi, 2006: 463). *La misteriosa fiamma della regina Loana* has often been described as a novel about Eco's generation.¹⁰ Such an interpretation becomes especially plausible when seen in connection with Eco's theoretical writings such as *Opera aperta*, *Lector in fabula*, or *I limiti dell'interpretazione* where he develops the concept of a model reader who produces a context-dependent interpretation based on 'economical criteria.'¹¹ Model readers who could appreciate *La misteriosa fiamma della regina Loana* as an 'open work of art' might be contemporaries of the author; for them, the illustrations regarding Yambo's activity could serve as an incentive for a (re)construction of their own youth based on collective memories. However, this could also work for readers of a younger generation. Guided by the protagonist, readers may be able to unite history and fiction, truth and invention, the individual and the collective while developing a critical awareness of what oscillating between the opposite positions actually means.

And yet, Eco does not furnish a seemingly objective foundation on which the individual reconstruction of one's biography or history in general could be based. Since Yambo has lost his memory, the illustrations of comic books, textbooks, and magazines actually do not emphasize the postulated authenticity of a fictional story by making it more plausible via the medium of the image. Instead, they foreground the fictional nature of the text. By the example of its protagonist, the text demonstrates that biography as well as historiography is essentially fictional in nature (White, 1973, 1978).¹² The collective memory, suggested by the illustrations, is nothing but the material basis for a necessarily individual fiction. Consequently, an interpretation that describes Yambo as a 'detective,' a 'historian,' or an 'archeologist' (something the second part of the novel indeed does suggest)¹³ is questioned by the third part of the novel. There, something happens that may be considered a narrative (re)construction of the subject, narrowing the broad, collective gaze of the earlier parts down onto the single person. It is not about

constructing an entertaining plot that plays with historical elements from the safe distance of the narrator but about asking the existential question of one's own identity: 'The protagonist's goal . . . is not to discover "whodunnit" but "who am I?"' (Cannon, 2007: 408).

It is only there that the encyclopedia of collective memory, developed during the second part of the novel, becomes a personal story. Yambo's sudden ability to tell his story coincides with his temporary recovery: he regains his autobiographical memory. Although he falls into a comatose state, he is wide awake, which leads to a radically new perception of time:

[P]osso spostarmi da un ricordo all'altro e vivo ciascuno come un hic et nunc.
(Eco, 2004: 313)

[I]l vantaggio è che ora posso rivivere tutto, senza che ci sia più un avanti e un indietro, in un circolo che potrebbe durare per ere geologiche e in questo cerchio, o spirale, Lila mi è sempre e di nuovo accanto (Eco, 2004: 412)

Narrativity turns out to be essential for the subject's mental health (Cannon, 2007: 412). And just like the protagonist, the author, too, reconstructs fundamental aspects of his biography (Cannon, 2007: 406–407). Rightfully therefore, *La misteriosa fiamma della regina Loana* has been called Eco's most autobiographical novel (Capozzi, 2006: 479). Not only does the novel represent Eco's 'way of thinking' in quite some detail by piecing together a multitude of textual and visual fragments to form a life that, in many respects, resembles that of its author, it also outlines Eco's poetics: What *Opera aperta* describes as the reader's task, is put into execution in the second part. What *Il nome della rosa* suggests as the principle of construction and exemplifies in the book's epilogue, is indicated in the first part and motivated by Yambo's amnesia.

For Eco, who has always been opposed to a 'naïve' representation of reality,¹⁴ it is quite plausible to not write a 'real' autobiography but a literary one which, nonetheless, deals with his personal memory, his life, and his identity. This autobiographical element is emphasized by the photograph Eco uses in connection with his protagonist. In it, one can see Eco and his sister as little children (Capozzi, 2006: 472), a fact that stresses the interdependence of remembering, forgetting, and the (re)construction of the self in *La misteriosa fiamma della regina Loana*. A new, non-postmodern form of historiography takes place. Metahistoriographic fiction, which in *Il nome della rosa* had taken the place of the realistic historical novel, is itself substituted by a neo-realistic novel about history. This is mainly accomplished by the reconstitution of the subject on the basis of an individual narrative.

However, the novel does not say whether this reconstitution of the subject is sustainable in the long run. An ambiguity is initiated by a direct reference to Eco's third novel, *L'isola del giorno prima*: 'L'Isola Non-Trovata invece rimane, in quanto inattinibile, sempre mia' (Eco, 2004: 401). In *L'isola del giorno prima* the island near which the protagonist's ship is stranded serves as a utopia for his

desires and fantasies, which are impossible to reach. The novel ends when the protagonist steps into the water and lets himself be carried away by the waves into a nothingness between time and space (Eco, 1994a: 465). The reader does not learn whether his journey into the unknown is successful (Schilling, 2012b: 194–213). Ultimate failure and self-fulfillment are presented as equally plausible options in a very similar manner to the reconstruction of the self in *La misteriosa fiamma della regina Loana*.

A second passage harks back to *Il nome della rosa*:

Non so se sia la misteriosa fiamma della regina Loana che sta ardendo nei miei lobi incartapecoriti, se un qualche elisir stia tentando di lavare i fogli bruniti della mia memoria di carta, ancora affetti da molte gore che rendono illeggibile quella parte del testo che ancora mi sfugge, o se sia io che cerco di spingere i miei nervi a uno sforzo insopportabile. [N]el mio cervello i corpi cavernosi si riempiono di sangue, qualcosa sta per esplodere – o per sbocciare. (Eco, 2004: 444)

In regard to syntax as well as content, these final sentences correspond to the end of Eco's first novel: 'Fa freddo nello scriptorium, il pollice mi duole. Lascio questa scrittura, non so per chi, non so più intorno a che cosa: stat rosa pristina nomine, nomina nuda tenemus' (Eco, 1980: 503). The double reference to Eco's earlier novels at the end of *La misteriosa fiamma della regina Loana* emphasizes both the autobiographical element and the ambiguity that comes with it. While the novel does in fact accomplish a reconstruction of the self by resorting to a return of narrative, it is not clear whether this narration has any relevance for (the protagonist's) reality. The final decision about that – and many other aspects – remains with the reader.

The analysis of *La misteriosa fiamma della regina Loana* therefore reveals multiple shifts of paradigm regarding the manner of historical narrative. At first, the text seems to emphasize the intertextual play with quotations, explicitly calling attention to historical conditionality. Its second part discusses various forms of cultural memory and options for a reconstruction of history. The third part creates identity by resorting to historical narrative. The story is told from the perspective of a first-person narrator who recounts the events of his life in an autodiegetic fashion and whose aim it is to deal with his past in order to learn for the present. This preoccupation with one's identity takes the place of a pluralistic and multiperspective approach chosen by Eco's postmodernist historical novels and referred to in the first two parts of *La misteriosa fiamma della regina Loana*. While it is certainly not unimportant to know that there are innumerable ways to confront the past, the effect of identity construction motivates the protagonist requires a subjective stance towards history. By constructing a close relation between micro- and macro-history, Yambo builds a foundation for his present that is based on narrative. The novel does not tell whether this is reliable or only an illusion. Thus, the third part can be interpreted as a salvation as well as a catastrophe – which provides the novel with a similarly ambiguous end as the

epilogue does in *Il nome della rosa* and the trumpet scene in *Il pendolo di Foucault*.

Summary

Surprising at first, *La misteriosa fiamma della regina Loana* provokes interest in the subject's existential conditionality. In contrast to a postmodern questioning of grand metanarratives and historiography, the novel constructs history as well as a personal story. In the tension between reality and fiction the text settles for the latter. It turns its back on postmodern theories and returns to narrative instead. However, the validity of both story and history is limited to a personal context. In that respect, the novel refers to aspects of Eco's former novels, for example the ontologically questioning end of *Il nome della rosa* and the experience of presence with which *Il pendolo di Foucault* concludes. Thus, even for Eco's 'theory-aware' novels a tendency towards the narrative can be identified that becomes stronger in his later works especially *La misteriosa fiamma della regina Loana*.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Notes

1. See Parker (1988), and Bondanella (1997: 93) who speaks of 'postmodern theory and practice in *The Name of the Rose*.'
2. By 'theory', I refer to literary theory, especially French theory. See Ryan (2012) for a concise description of the phenomenon of 'theory-awareness' in contemporary literature.
3. The concept is already important for *Lector in fabula*. See also Schilling (2012b).
4. As a terminological approach, I propose to follow Nünning's typology that classifies historical novels into a wide range between 'fictionalized history' and 'metahistoriographic fiction.' Nünning (1995, 1999, 2002) distinguishes five forms of historical narrative with fluid boundaries in between: a historical narrative may be termed *documentary* if historical events and characters are at its center. It may be called *realistic* if a fictional plot is integrated into a precise historical setting that most of the time goes hand in hand with a chronological representation and a teleological implication. A historical narrative is *revisionist* if it manifests a critical stance towards the past, i.e. if it makes use of fictional and innovative forms of historical representation for critical purposes. The term *metahistorical* is used for a narrative that reflects on problems of historiography by employing literary techniques: cultural memory, retrospective establishment of meaning and construction of a collective identity play an important role in this context. Finally, the term *metahistoriographic* denotes fiction in which problems of historiography are addressed directly. An argumentative discourse about the conditions of historical insight and an explicit representation of the distance between the actual historical event and its fictionalization are core aspects of this kind of narrative. Didactic and cognitive features, as

- well as poetological, epistemological, and metahistoriographic self-reflection, are essential to the text.
5. See Lyotard (1979: 7): 'En simplifiant à l'extrême, on tient pour 'postmoderne' l'incrédulité à l'égard des métarécits.'
 6. See Eco (1990: 51): 'Io ritengo che oggi molte teorie e pratiche "reader-oriented" siano in qualche modo debitrice della tradizione ermetica.'
 7. And, with slight differences, in *L'isola del giorno prima* (Eco, 1994a) as well.
 8. Cannon (2007: 404) therefore considers Yambo 'the paradigmatic postmodern character. [H]e is all surface, suspended in the present with no beginning or end.'
 9. According to Capozzi (2006: 468), 'hypertextuality is meant primarily as non-linear reading, as an intricate web of possibilities of reading, and above all as a cognitive process of making associations among words and images as well as of connecting links, nodes, fragments, lexias, texts, etc. selected by the reader who may choose to follow a variety of paths in his search, depending on his curiosity, knowledge and experience.'
 10. Capozzi (2006: 465) names 'double coded hypertextual strategies that make the novel less about the personal story of Yambo's quest for identity, and more about the story/history of a generation that Yambo defines as "schizophrenic."'
 11. Eco (1962) considers art a phenomenon of communication. Every act of reception means an interpretative dialogue between art and recipient. 'Open works of art' are completed only in the moment of their reception. Eco (1979, 1990), however, discusses limits of interpretation. He argues that neither considering only the author's intention (*intentio auctoris*) nor granting the reader absolute interpretative freedom by following her/his intention (*intentio lectoris*) can do justice to literature. Therefore he proposes to follow the *intentio operis* which means an interpretative cooperation between text and reader during which the perspective of the interpretation is guided by textual structures.
 12. The academic discussion of White's proposals is covered in Schilling (2012a: 25–32).
 13. See Capozzi (2006: 471): 'This is Eco's way of underlining Yambo's objectivity, or better yet his ability to maintain aesthetic and critical distance while recovering innumerable archived items from the past.'
 14. According to Eco (1994b: 529), in times of postmodernism one has to cite a declaration of love when declaring one's love to avoid a 'wrong innocence' when trying to say something serious.

References

- Barthes R (1994) La mort de l'auteur. In: Barthes R (ed.) *Œuvres complètes. Tome II: 1966–1973. Édition établie et présentée par Éric Marty*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, pp. 491–495.
- Bondanella P (1997) *Umberto Eco and the Open Text: Semiotics, Fiction, Popular Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cannon J (2007) Lost in the fictional woods with Umberto Eco: 'La misteriosa fiamma della Regina Loana' in the Context of Eco's Oeuvre. *Forum Italicum* 41(2): 403–416.
- Capozzi R (2006) *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana: A postmodern historiographic illustrated novel of a generation*. *Forum Italicum* 40(2): 462–486.
- Deleuze G and Guattari F (1980) *Capitalisme e schizofrénie 2: Mille plateaux*. Paris: Les éditions de Minuit.
- Derrida J (2013) La différence. In: Derrida J (ed.) *Marges de la philosophie*. Paris: Les éditions de Minuit, pp. 1–30.
- Eco U (1962) *Opera aperta*. Milan: Bompiani.

- Eco U (1975) *Trattato di semiotica generale*. Milan: Bompiani.
- Eco U (1979) *Lector in fabula: La cooperazione interpretativa nei testi narrativi*. Milan: Bompiani.
- Eco U (1980) *Il nome della rosa*. Milan: Bompiani.
- Eco U (1984) *Semiotica e filosofia del linguaggio*. Turin: Einaudi.
- Eco U (1988) *Il pendolo di Foucault*. Milan: Bompiani.
- Eco U (1990) *I limiti dell'interpretazione*. Milan: Bompiani.
- Eco U (1994a) *L'isola del giorno prima*. Milan: Bompiani.
- Eco U (1994b) Postille a 'Il nome della rosa.' In: Eco U (ed.) *Il nome della rosa*. Milan: Bompiani, pp. 505–533.
- Eco U (1997) *Kant e l'ornitorinco*. Milan: Bompiani.
- Eco U (2004) *La misteriosa fiamma della regina Loana: Romanzo illustrato*. Milan: Bompiani.
- Eliot TS (1952) *The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company.
- Fröhlich G (2009) Umberto Eco: *Philosophie – Ästhetik – Semiotik*. Munich: Fink.
- Giordano E (2004) Una memoria di carta: Alla ricerca della Regina Loana. *Rivista di Studi Italiani* 22: 173–183.
- Gumbrecht HU (2004) *Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Lyotard J-F (1979) *La condition postmoderne: Rapport sur le savoir*. Paris: Les éditions de Minuit.
- Nünning A (1995) *Von historischer Fiktion zu historiographischer Metafiktion: Theorie, Typologie und Poetik des historischen Romans*. Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag.
- Nünning A (1999) 'Beyond the great story': Der postmoderne historische Roman als Medium revisionistischer Geschichtsdarstellung, kultureller Erinnerung und metahistoriographischer Reflexion. *Anglia* 117: 15–48.
- Nünning A (2002) Von der fikionalisierten Historie zur metahistoriographischen Fiktion: Bausteine für eine narratologische und funktionsgeschichtliche Theorie, Typologie und Geschichte des postmodernen historischen Romans. In: Fulda D and Tschopp SS (eds) *Literatur und Geschichte. Ein Kompendium zu ihrem Verhältnis von der Aufklärung bis zur Gegenwart*. Berlin; New York: de Gruyter, pp. 541–569.
- Parker M (1988) 'The Name of the Rose' as a postmodern novel. In: Inge MT (ed.) *Naming the Rose: Essays on Eco's "The Name of the Rose"*. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, pp. 48–61.
- Ryan J (2012) *The Novel after Theory*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Schalk H (2000) *Umberto Eco und das Problem der Interpretation: Ästhetik, Semiotik, Textpragmatik*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann.
- Schilling E (2012a) *Der historische Roman seit der Postmoderne: Umberto Eco und die deutsche Literatur*. Heidelberg: Winter.
- Schilling E (2012b) Umberto Eco zwischen Literatur und Theorie. In: Birnstiel K and Schilling E (eds) *Literatur und Theorie seit der Postmoderne*. Stuttgart: Hirzel, pp. 67–80.
- White H (1973) *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- White H (1978) *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.