Article
Mirthful faces in *The Name of the Rose*

Louise D'Arcens
Department of English, Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia.

Abstract   This paper explores the 'mirthful face' in Umberto Eco's novel *The Name of the Rose* and Jean-Jacques Annaud's film adaptation. Debates over the political and moral significance of the mirthful face are at the center of both texts' interpretations of laughter and humor in medieval culture; but the novel's withholding of facial description sits in stark contrast to the film's embrace of contemporary perceptions of what 'medieval faces' would have looked like and how they might be read. Comparing Annaud's visual language of 'historical physiognomy' with those of filmmakers Werner Hertzog and Michael Haneke, the essay situates both film and book within a late-twentieth-century use of the Middle Ages to comment on contemporary authoritarian and radical politics.

The turbulent priests of Umberto Eco's 1980 novel *The Name of the Rose* seem so vividly drawn that it is easy to forget that the novel begins with a refusal to depict faces. In the prologue, the Benedictine Adso of Melk frames his narration by declaring that he will not be describing the faces he encountered during his visit to the novel's murder-wracked abbey as a young novice in 1327. This absence of description is not due to any lapse of memory, even though at the time of narration Adso has 'reached the end of [his] poor sinner's life' (11, 11).[1] Rather – and here we see the novel's close engagement with medieval theories of representation – Adso declines to offer physical descriptions because to do so would contradict the Christian Neoplatonism he now favors in his old age:

1 For the most part this essay cites the 1983 English translation of Eco's 1980 Italian novel. The original Italian text is included when it makes relevant allusions to faces or facial expressions. Page references are to these editions.

> In the pages to follow I shall not indulge in descriptions of persons […] because, as Boethius says, nothing is more fleeting than external form ['nulla è più fugace della forma esteriore'] […]; what would be the point of saying today that the abbot Abo had a stern eye and pale cheeks, when by now he and those around him are dust and their bodies have the mortal grayness of dust? (14)

This declaration reprises the Pauline opening of Adso's prologue, in which the only true 'face to face' encounter can be between humanity and God (11), and dovetails it with a heightened *memento mori* sentiment characteristic of the post-plague fourteenth century.

In a playful irony distinctive to the novel, however, Adso immediately breaks his own narratorial rule by offering a lengthy description of his erstwhile mentor, the Franciscan philosopher William of Baskerville. Although this indulgence is excused as an effect of Adso's youthful devotion to William's 'superficial form' (15), his statement that William merits an exception because of his 'singular features' ['singolari fettezze'] (14, 23) seems also to be a witty nod to the nominalist philosophy of William's model, the Franciscan schoolman William of Ockham, and his argument for the existence of individual entities over abstract universals. The description that follows, however, functions to undermine any genuine claim about William's facial 'singularity,' for it describes him in terms that correspond almost verbatim to Arthur Conan Doyle's description of Sherlock Holmes in *A Study in Scarlet*:

> Brother William's physical appearance was at that time such as to attract the attention of the most inattentive observer. His height surpassed that of a normal man and he was so thin that he seemed still taller. His eyes were sharp and penetrating; his thin and slightly beaky nose gave his countenance the expression of a man on the lookout, save in certain moments of sluggishness of which I shall speak. His chin also denoted a firm will […]. (15)

> [Holmes's] very person and appearance were such as to strike the attention of the most casual observer. In height he was rather over six feet, and so excessively lean that he seemed to be considerably taller. His eyes were sharp and piercing, save during those intervals of torpor to which I have alluded; and his thin, hawk-like nose gave his whole expression an air of alertness and decision. His chin, too, had the prominence and squareness which mark the man of determination […]. (Doyle, 2014, 13)

Eco's use of anachronistic pastiche cleverly reinforces the philosophical position of Adso, whose work he claims to be translating. By depicting William as a kind of *Ur*-Sherlock, Eco/Adso renders him no longer singular but, rather, the

Platonic *eidos* of the English detective, wielding abductive logic so finely that it seems like intuition.

Adso's resolve soon wavers again, when he offers full descriptions of the gargoyle-like physiognomy of the vagabond monk Salvatore and the austere countenance of the abbey librarian, Malachi of Hildesheim, which is, tellingly, also described as 'singular' (73). These exceptions aside, Adso adheres to his promise, either withholding facial description altogether or offering the sketchiest of portraits made up of only a pale blue eye here, a hairy nostril there. The only significant qualification he makes to his Neoplatonist dismissal of representation is when he says he will dutifully report 'when a facial expression, or a gesture, appears as a sign of a mute but eloquent language' (14). Within the Neoplatonist frame Adso has established for his narrative, such emotional expressions are, far more than physical features, the ephemeral 'fragments' ['a tratti'] of a greater truth (11, 19), which offer fleeting but vital clues not just of the monks' involvement in the abbey's violent crimes but of their very minds and souls. The description of Malachi, despite being lengthy, is essentially a portrait of facial expression. We are not told until much later the shape or size of his nose, or the color of his eyes, but glimpse instead the strictly tamed turmoil of his soul:

> In his physiognomy there were what seemed traces of many passions which his will had disciplined but which had frozen those features they had ceased to animate. Sadness and severity predominated in the lines of his face, and his eyes were so intense that with one glance they could penetrate the heart of the person speaking to him[.] (73)

The communicative force of facial expression as an index of one's spiritual state is reinforced in William's friend Ubertino of Casale's advice that in order to uncover the abbey's murderer William should 'question faces, do not listen to tongues' ['interroga i volti, non ascoltare le lingue'] (60, 68). Adso's/Eco's emphasis on 'eloquent' facial expression is vital for portraying to modern readers a medieval religious environment where emotional truths signify more potently than empirical facts. Despite Eco's detailed depiction of the exegetical and sectarian disputes of the late Middle Ages, ultimately his story is driven by its medieval characters' experience of, and disposition toward, powerful emotions.

Of the many facial expressions recorded by Adso, arguably the most significant are those at the mirthful end of the spectrum. The novel is full of people smiling and laughing, from the lubricious smiles of the hunchbacked Salvatore through to the Franciscans' jovial gusts. This can seem surprising given the novel's dark narrative premise, in which a succession of monks fall victim to macabre, symbolically charged murders; but it accords with the importance of mirth within Eco's novel. Eco uses his murder mystery plot, in which the monks' deaths are caused by handling a poisoned manuscript containing the forbidden

'lost' second book on comedy from Aristotle's *Poetics*, to portray a society riven by zealous opposition over the nature of laughter and the purpose and value of humor. Eco's account offers a fictive medievalist engagement with the history of emotions in that it nominates this conflicted emotional regime as one of the defining features of late medieval European culture. The division over the value of laughter is not simply between clergy and laity, but, more viciously, between clergy who hold permissive views of laughter and those wary of its its potential moral and political threats. Yet although the centrality of laughter to Eco's depiction of the Middle Ages is widely recognized (Capozzi, 1989; Fasolini, 2006), there has been no exploration of how faces, as the primary bearers of emotion in the novel, disclose the intricate relationship between attitudes to laughter, comic registers, and social control.

Censorious patristic culture is epitomized by the ancient Benedictine Jorge of Burgos, who is repeatedly portrayed fulminating against laughter. Adso's first encounter with him comes when, as a booming disembodied voice, Jorge admonishes some young monks for laughing at a manuscript. His opening words, quoted from the Benedictine Rule, '[v]erba vana aut risui apta non loqui' ['do not speak empty words or those which provoke laughter'] (78), establishes the position to which he clings right up to his fiery death. After witnessing the older monk's continual condemnations of smiles and laughter, Adso learns at the novel's climax that Jorge has poisoned the sole surviving copy of Aristotle's book on laughter, killing all who read it and making it unavailable for posterity. This destructive act reflects not only Jorge's hatred of Aristotelian empiricism – he says '[b]efore, we used to look to Heaven, … now … we believe in the heavens because of earthly testimony' (473) – but also his belief in the deep spiritual danger presented by laughter, especially if it comes to be seen as 'an operation of the brain' rather than a debased 'operation of the belly' (474). Although Jorge inveighs against the vulgar laughter of the layman, calling it 'weakness, corruption, the foolishness of our flesh' (474), his greater fear is that if the clergy were to discover the Philosopher's praise of laughter, 'the art of mockery' would become an 'ascesis of the learned' (477), which, by replacing conviction with relativistic irreverence, would ultimately cancel fear of the divine and of damnation, leaving Christians defenseless against the devil.

Although the aged Jorge is blind, the mirthful face figures in his invective as an index of laughter's inherent corporeality. Laughter renders humans bestial and distances them from their nature as a reflection of the divine: it 'distorts the features of the face, makes man similar to the monkey' ['deforma i lineamente del viso, rende l'uomo simile alla scimmia'] (131,138). It is hardly surprising that Jorge's own face is a mask of blank severity. When describing him, Adso adheres closely to his promised avoidance of depiction, reporting instead on the modulations of the venerable monk's powerful and expressive voice. Jorge's few reported mirthful expressions are sneers, disclosing a sour mirth and an abiding derision of human folly. In his first appearance, Adso reports, he speaks

'mockingly, but without smiling' ['motteggiò … ma senza sorridere'] (79, 87). It is a shock, then, that he chooses to die laughing:

> He laughed, he, Jorge. For the first time I heard him laugh. […] He laughed with his throat, though his lips did not assume the shape of gaiety, and he seemed almost to be weeping. (481)

> [Rise, proprio lui, Jorge. Per la prima volta lo udii ridere. […] Rise con la gola, senza che le labbra si atteggiassero a letizia, e quasi sembrava che piangesse.] (483)

As with his smiling, it is a joyless laughter, born of the power to kill mirth in others.

Against this we have a Middle Ages embodied by William, in which humor endures as a tolerated substratum of clerical culture. Though prevented until the end from reading the poisoned text, William infers from his wide reading on laughter and comedy that the *Poetics* urges the illuminating value of laughter. This accords with his own endorsement of instructive mirth as a state which 'actually obliges us to examine [things] more closely, and it makes us say: Ah, this is just how things are, and I didn't know it' (472). William embodies, for Adso and for Eco, 'the tradition of … the ioca monachorum' (437), a long ecclesiastical subculture that permitted parody and satire as forms that could foster virtue and reveal truth.

This culture is epitomized in the novel by the *Feast of Cyprian* (*Cena Cypriani*), an early Christian biblical parody popular throughout the Middle Ages, which Adso says was officially frowned on but in practice 'smiled or laughed over' in innumerable religious houses for its inversive blend of scripture and ribaldry (437). Adso attributes its survival not just to its comic content but to hermeneutic and mnemonic practices which held that its 'veil of mirth […] concealed secret moral lessons […] through its jesting, the young could more easily commit to memory certain episodes of sacred history' (437; see also Bayless, 1997, 21–24). William's participation in jocular clerical tradition is also due to his membership of the order founded by the 'holy fool' Saint Francis. William describes Francis's use of buffoonish spectacle as a reformist tactic; it was 'how Francis taught people to look at things from another direction' (478). Clowning and the solicitation of laughter were, meanwhile, central to the order's agenda of holy simplicity and social justice. For this, Jorge calls William 'a clown [*giullare*], like the saint who gave birth to you all' (478, 481). This responds to William's negative facialization of Jorge's piety, which he calls 'faith without smile ['la fede senza sorriso'], truth that is never seized by doubt' (477, 481).

William himself is frequently depicted as smiling and laughing, but, despite his Franciscan allegiances, his is not the humor of broad jests. Rather his primary register is irony, which he uses as a sophisticated tool to express his views while

negotiating the volatile climate of the monastery. His ironic mode, however, only partly corresponds to medieval ideas of irony. On the one hand, his tendency to say the opposite of what he means conforms to the definitions of irony inherited from Donatus and his followers as 'a trope showing what is intended through its contrary' (*Ars Grammatica*, in Danes, 2011, 64): speaking of a forthcoming conflict, for instance, William says 'we will have some amusement' (61). But contrary to medieval stipulations that the rhetor's ironic intent be revealed via spoken expression, William, Adso says, never uses a pronunciation that works as '[irony's] signal and its justification' (145). William's deadpan delivery, which is seen as typical of Britons (his fellow Franciscan Ubertino says 'I can never tell when you Englishmen are speaking seriously' [61]), not only frustrates his interlocutors' expectations of ironic pronunciation, but also, significantly, confounds Adso's belief in the indexical nature of facial expression. Relating an episode when William teases him gently but 'with a grave face' ['con viso serio'], the Teutonic Adso confesses with a bemusement undimmed by the years:

> I never understood when he was jesting. In my country, when you joke you say something and then you laugh very noisily, so everyone shares in the joke. But William laughed only when he said serious things, and remained very serious when he was presumably joking. (425)

Although Eco signals, via Adso, his familiarity with *ironia*'s place within medieval rhetorical practice, William's use of irony is, like his use of abductive reason, proto-modern; its disjunction between face, voice, and sense appeal to twentieth-century ideas of irony as polyvalent destabilizing meaning. At one level, William's ironic dryness appears to trouble modern (mis)perceptions that irony is a peculiarly modern comic mode (see Weeks, 2005). Ultimately, however, this perception is exploited by Eco to enable his readers, especially those familiar with the detective genre, to identify with the character whose irony and use of cool reason afford him a modernizing sense of detachment from his contemporaries' credulous and un-ironic emotionalism. This emotionalism – whether it be Jorge's hatred, Ubertino's fear, or Malachi's jealousy – is thus coded for Eco's modern readers as the dominant 'medieval' disposition. While Eco's meticulous, though sometimes disputed, world-building fosters our immersion in this overwrought setting (Eco, 1984), this is mitigated by the emotional and historical distantiation provided by William.

Finally, we encounter a Middle Ages in which laughter exists as a keystone of a larger folk resistance which is nevertheless in constant danger of being institutionally suppressed. During his lengthiest tirade against laughter, Jorge is dismissive of the villein's mirth, assuming that the secular mockery of Church rituals is but a base and temporary respite from powerlessness and from the fear of damnation that 'the liturgy again imposes' once carnival has passed (475). As becomes apparent in the novel's harrowing inquisition scenes, however, the

people's laughter is not so readily dismissed when it links them to the sects that have emerged in the wake of Francis; rather, this merriment attracts the deep antagonism of Church authorities. Blurring the distinction between clerical and secular culture, it is on a heretical continuum ending in anarchy. Given the absence of secular people from the novel, this culture of mirth is embodied in Salvatore, the erstwhile homeless peasant and later Dolcinite heretic harbored within the abbey walls. Salvatore is distinguished by receiving the most detailed physical description in the novel. The physical features of his grotesque face, which seems 'put together with pieces from other people's faces' ['messa insieme con pezzi di facce altrui'] (47, 55), are related in detail. His first act is to smile, and the older Adso retrospectively recognizes him as a benign, 'humorous' man (47). When he exits the novel, however, he is an ashen wreck, facing death by fire at the hands of the inquisition. In light of Jorge's earlier pronouncement about the simian appearance of the laughing face, in Adso's narration of the inquisition it is in fact terror, not laughter, that has dehumanized Salvatore, reducing him 'to the state of a baboon' (372).

The rare descriptions of physical faces serve a layered purpose in the novel. When Eco includes them, he discloses the tension between the monastery's transcendent anti-corporeal aims and the detective genre's fascination with faciality as a clue to characters' moral and emotional interiority. But since they are refracted through the Neoplatonist glass of Adso's narration, any sense that these faces are the locus of singularity is ultimately undermined. William has, as mentioned before, the archetypal detective's face; and even the unforgettable face of Salvatore is not his own, but is a composite, albeit gendered, of all humanity. Later into the novel, the face ultimately becomes radically depersonalized, to the point where, stripped of all expression, it is mere flesh. When the physical features of Malachi's face are finally described, he has already become a corpse, so that 'the sharp nose, the hollow eyes, the sunken temples, the white, wrinkled ears with lobes turned outward' are not offered as individuating features: rather, his face is 'the very image of death' (414). Finally, when Adso returns to the frame of his narrative, at the end of his tale, the time for faces is past. Contemplating death, a place 'where diversity is never seen' and 'where there is no work and no image' (501), Adso/Eco anachronistically quotes Angelus Silesius's description of God as 'ein lauter Nichts,' a resounding Nothing, formless, impenetrable, and utterly, ineffably faceless.

The novel's adaptation to the medium of film brings with it a radical shift in the representation and expressive purpose of human faces. Adso's narratorial withholding of facial features is displaced by director Jean-Jacques Annaud's homage to the human face as an expressive site not just of individual emotion but of historical epoch. In adapting Eco's novel, the director has clearly understood the indexical value of facial expression. Eco relates that during Annaud's 'amazingly painstaking […] search for faces,' he rejected many actors because 'he rarely liked their eyes, the expression in their eyes' (Bachmann,

Figure 1: Berengar of Arundel. Still from *The Name of the Rose* (Annaud, 1986).

1986, 130). Despite this sensitivity to expression, the visual medium of film presented him with a genuine obstacle to translating Adso's Neoplatonic reservations about representing faces. Indeed, in its portrayal of faces, Annaud's film seems to employ an inverse logic to Eco's novel: its faces are both more completely physical than the fragmented, expressive faces of the novel, and markedly less mirthful. One of the most immediately arresting things about the film, from the moment William (Sean Connery) and Adso (Christian Slater) encounter two wordless, wall-eyed monks at the monastery gate, is its array of truly extreme faces, which one commentator described as 'un vrai "casting de gueules"' ['a real "cast of mugs"'] (Annaud, n.d.).[2] This is especially true of Annaud's 'spine-monks' – so called because they are the 'backbone' of the monastery (Annaud, n.d.) – who, having no dialogue, speak only through their grim physicality. In Eco's novel, in a recurring image replete with menace, these background monks are faceless, their cowls obscuring all visibility. In the film, menace is generated conversely through the exposure of their bizarre, impassive visages.

Nor is this confined to the monks in the background. To take one example, the character Berengar of Arundel, the assistant librarian, is completely stripped of the dialogue Eco has given him so that all expression is condensed into his mute, ghoulish face. So important is physiognomy to Berengar's characterization in the film that, having cast the stocky German actor Michael Habeck, Annaud jettisons the novel's description of him. Whereas Adso/Eco describes Berengar as a 'pale-faced young man' (82), in the film William calls him 'the moon-faced librarian,' a description reinforced in repeated images of his chalk-white face and perfectly round, bald head (Figure 1).

Another reason faces become especially important in the film is that, with the exception of one self-flagellation scene and one sex scene, bodies are completely concealed by long robes. Annaud expressly mentions this when, discussing the rationale behind his casting, he says '[s]ince all these monks look identical because of their costumes, one needs to be able to differentiate them: this was why they had to have exceptional heads' ['Puisque tous ces moines à cause de

2 Translations of Annaud are by the author.

leurs costumes semblent identiques, il fallait qu'on puisse les différencier: c'est à cela que servent les têtes exceptionnelles'] (Annaud, n.d.).

Any film will be compelled to physicalize its source text, and any medievalist film will need to portray the Middle Ages in material terms. But I suggest that Annaud's film is under even greater pressure to do so because, having compressed or excised so many of the novel's lengthy informative digressions on medieval history and culture and so much learned dialogue, it must proceed as a historical film by evocation rather than explanation. And it is in this evocative role that faces assume another kind of special importance, functioning as the film's principal visual shorthand. The fact that, in interview, Annaud compares the spine monks' faces to works by Breughel and Bosch (Annaud, n.d.) – that is, to scene paintings rather than to portraits – suggests the extent to which, unlike in Eco's novel, the purpose of these hyperphysicalized faces is to facialize an epoch rather than to project individual interiority via expression. Reprising the novel's tension between nominalist individuality and idealist universality, the faces included in the film are at the same time highly singular and yet also the *eidos* of 'the medieval.'

By falling back on generalized post-medieval ideas of the Middle Ages, Annaud's freer designation of the pre-photographic 'facial past' necessarily differs from the methods of Austrian director Michael Haneke for his 2009 film *The White Ribbon* (*Das Weiße Bande*), whose exhaustive search for actors with faces that captured pre-WWI Germany was guided by the visual archive created by photographer August Sander in the first decades of the twentieth century. Although the famous 1929 book featuring a selection of Sander's images was called *Face of Our Time* (*Antlitz der Zeit*), for Haneke these faces have lost their contemporaneity and become the faces of a past Germany still shaped by feudal relations, religious belief, and the cycle of the seasons. But for all this historical exactitude, down to the postproduction removal of color from the film, Haneke's faces also express *Heimat*, the chthonic connection of folk to land and culture. Ironically, Haneke recounts that the actors whose faces he chose to epitomize these historical and ahistorical qualities of 'Germanness' were not German but Romanians whose weather-beaten visages connoted the tough and elemental pastness he sought to convey (Smith, 2010).

Although Annaud cannot draw on photographic evidence, in his own account of the casting process he is careful to emphasize the historicist urge underlying his selection of 'des faciès extraordinaires' (Annaud, n.d.) to represent the tortured *agon* of grim repression and comic resistance in the medieval monastic world, rather than confining his casting to either the demands of cinematic-literary adaptation or the technicalities of costume and makeup. His boast that 'the film's star is authenticity' is, however, mitigated by his less historicist claim that people in the Middle Ages had 'Gothic faces' ['visages gothiques'] (Annaud, n.d.). It is striking that in choosing his 'Gothic faces' Annaud appears to have replicated some of the casting decisions of that master of extreme historical film,

Figure 2: Malachi of Gandersheim. Still from *The Name of the Rose* (Annaud, 1986).

Werner Herzog. To take one example, in casting the intense and cagey Malachi, he chose the German actor Volker Prechtel, whose compellingly grotesque visage has graced Herzog's films *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser* and *Heart of Glass* (Herzog, 1974, 1976). Herzog's films are set in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but Prechtel's rough-hewn face is used to connote a folk culture reaching back to a deeper, premodern past. Although, as discussed earlier, Eco describes Malachi's living face almost totally in terms of its expression, focusing especially on how the strict mastery of passion has etched itself into his countenance, Annaud's film has economically translated this repressed turmoil into physical terms, accentuating the actor's stark, furrowed features by crowning them with a jutting tonsure that literally stands his hair on end (Figure 2).

The grim Middle Ages facialized in Malachi is also evident in the cinematic portrayal of the main enemies of laughter, such as Jorge (Feodor Chaliapin Jr.), whose grimacing face is dominated by the glaucous orbs of his blind eyes, as well as the inquisitor Bernardo Gui, whose pitiless determination to control subversive mirth is captured in the coolly saturnine mask of F. Murray Abraham. Meanwhile, the apocalyptic inclinations of the ancient Franciscan Ubertino is conveyed in William Hickey's gaunt, wizened visage and blazing eyes.

The actors cast to play William of Baskerville and Salvatore unsurprisingly facialize an alternative, mirthful Middle Ages and in so doing solicit sympathetic amusement from the film's viewers. In his casting of the film's central and most good-humored character, William of Baskerville, we encounter what has been regarded as Annaud's most controversial decision. Annaud, already conscious of the presence of Sherlock Holmes in the character of William, was himself initially skeptical, saying, 'Sherlock Holmes plus James Bond, there's one too many characters in the abbey' (Annaud, n.d.). According to film theorist Stanley
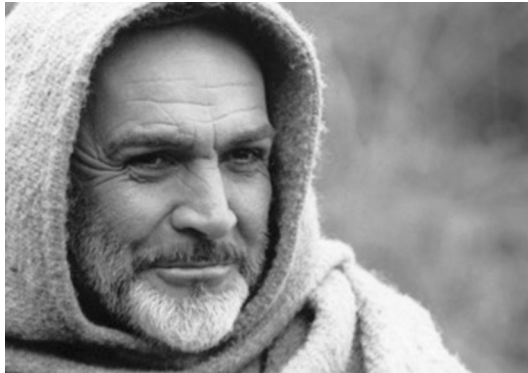
postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies

Figure 3: William of Baskerville. Still from *The Name of the Rose* (Annaud, 1986).

Cavell, the subordination of character to an actor's screen presence, which in turn is inflected by his or her oeuvre, is a particular feature of cinematic performance (Cavell, 1979). This is even more acute, according to Jean-Louis Comolli, in the case of historical film, where the combination of star actor and historical figure creates onscreen a 'body too much' (Comolli, 1978), a phrase uncannily echoed in Annaud's concern about having a detective too many in the room. Apart from his star factor, there is no doubt that Connery's black-browed, handsome face is starkly different from the fair, hawkish face described by Eco; but in addition to Annaud's insistence that Connery 'has a very British capacity for humor' ['avait une capacité d'humour toute brittanique'] (Annaud, n.d.), the casting is apt in two ways. First, Annaud is in one respect calling Eco's bluff; for by invoking and then denying the nominalist particularity of William's face, the novel in fact licenses the imagining of William's appearance in a way totally other from how he is described, which is exactly what the film does. Second, Connery is an actor known not just for his chiseled features but for the distinctive ironic expression made famous during his tenure as 007, in which his eyes twinkle conspiratorially under slightly raised brows, his lips lightly pressed shut with contained mirth (Figure 3).

In Eco's novel, William is, as mentioned earlier, repeatedly attributed with an ironic humor that is linked directly to his rationality, which is in turn a symptom of his English empiricism. But while in the novel this ironic disposition is not overtly signaled either facially or vocally, in Annaud's film version Connery's distinctive twinkle and dry delivery combine to bring William's ironic disposition up to the surface of the text, appealing to viewers to share in his wry detachment from the volatile scene around him. Rather than creating, to paraphrase Comolli, 'a face too much,' then, Connery's ironic face reflects both William's comic Franciscan disposition and the ironic coolness of the transhistorical English detective tradition to which William belongs.

Figure 4: Salvatore. Still from *The Name of the Rose* (Annaud, 1986).

Arguably the most unforgettable face of Annaud's film is that of the former heretic Salvatore, played by Ron Perlman. Perlman's face, with the help of prosthetics, is grotesque yet touchingly human, encapsulating Salvatore's status as a liminal figure linked to the secular carnivalesque world beyond the abbey. This world is evoked in a single brief scene, in which the peasants are shown gathered in hovels, laughing in defiance of their grim conditions. Salvatore's winning humor is evident in his first scene, when, poking out his tongue and emitting the film's first laugh, he draws a visual parallel between his own face and the gruesome masks on the apocalypse carving in the abbey church (Figure 4).

Annaud had already used Perlman's remarkable visage in the 1981 film *Quest for Fire* (*La guerre du feu*), casting him, significantly, as a prehistoric man who introduces his people to the infectious, deflationary power of laughter. Within Annaud's filmography Perlman's broad nose, heavy brow, and generous mandible come to signify 'the face of premodernity,' not just in the more restricted sense of a 'Gothic' Middle Ages but in the sense of a deeper 'pre' reaching from the Middle Ages back to the Paleolithic era. In this respect Perlman's face, for all its apparent monstrosity, stands in for humanity at its biopolitical barest – as is most pointedly evident when we see it contorted with pain as he is consumed by flames at his execution.

It would seem, then, that despite emphasizing their 'Gothic' distinctness from modern faces, Annaud also uses the key faces in his film collectively to posit a

long, continuous emotional history in which affective values remain relatively constant across the temporal span from prehistory to modernity. Within this long history, moreover, Annaud sees laughter as a behavior that transcends not just the Middle Ages but human history *in toto*. This does not mean, however, that the medieval setting of *The Name of the Rose* is merely incidental to his portrayal of subversive mirth. The production team assembled by Annaud to build the film's medieval world in fact links him closely to a broader Italian leftist-autonomist defense of humor which had a strong medievalist inflection. To recreate his medieval *mise-en-scène*, Annaud engaged the services of Tonino Delli Colli as director of photography, and as his production designer Dante Ferretti, who had been responsible for creating the Middle Ages of Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Decameron* (1971) and *Canterbury Tales* (1972), which both depicted inversive worlds of riotous folk humor surviving under ecclesiastical authority. The use of striking and irregular faces in Pasolini's medieval films is another clear influence on Annaud. Pasolini had also, in *The Hawks and the Sparrows*, aligned modern folk humor with the buffoonery of medieval Franciscan culture. In 1969, rubbery-faced playwright Dario Fo created his *Mistero Buffo*, a subversive interpretation of the medieval mystery cycles that, in using farce to ridicule the powerful, pays tribute to the buffonic 'theater' developed by St Francis and his guerrilla successors such as Gherardo Segarelli (Fo, [1969] 1992; D'Arcens, 2012). Even if Annaud's adaptation is deemed to have rendered Eco's deep medieval world somewhat shallow, recognizing the film's recourse to a vibrant legacy of comic medievalism enables an enriched understanding of what Annaud aimed to achieve in his intensely facialized exploration of medieval laughter.

The link between Eco's novel and his compatriots' leftist comic medievalism is also unmistakable, although his novel is written around a decade after Fo's and Pasolini's works. The fact that Eco, as the novel's outer-frame narrator, states that Adso's manuscript came into his hands just six days before the Prague Spring got underway (1), locates his recovery of the fictional medieval document in a famous moment of popular resistance analogous to the Italian 'hot Autumn' protests of 1969–70 that motivated Pasolini's and Fo's reanimations of medieval precedents for popular protest. There are strong grounds for reading Pasolini's, Fo's, and Eco's texts as medievalist bookends to the period known as Italy's Years of Lead, that is, the years between 1969 and 1980, which were characterized by repeated acts of far left- and right-wing terrorism and a general state of exception. There are important distinctions, though, between Eco's perspective and Pasolini's/Fo's. First, Eco's account is less partisan (Klopp, 2005, 36). Writing at a time when the late '60s enthusiasm for Communism had been critiqued in Italy, and in the wake of prolonged violence from the leftist Red Brigade as well as from fascist groups, he alludes in his novel to the violence committed by dissident post-Franciscan sects as well to the institutional sadism of the Inquisition. Second, his account is more pessimistic: while the earlier texts

depict folk laughter as resilient, Eco's novel retrospectively muses on its fragility. It is true that, via William, the novel explores the potential power of laughter to expose corruption – to make us say 'ah that's how things are and I just didn't see it' (472). But in 1980s Italy, when the government has just detained leftist activists indiscriminately, the novel's depiction of a medieval Church that seeks to destroy a Franciscan ironist, an illiterate radical, and a book about laughter, does not offer a heartening historical parallel.

The last laugh in the book, and the last face, is that of Jorge as he devours Aristotle's offending book; and his face as he laughs, William says, is 'the portrait of the Antichrist ['il ritratto dell'Anticristo'] … born from piety itself' (491, 493). While William concedes that perhaps Aristotle's book could indeed teach how 'to distort the face of every truth' ['deformare il volto di ogni verità'], he argues that, through this questioning of verities, 'we would not become slaves of our ghosts' (491, 493). But even as he says this, the book is being destroyed. And then, to paraphrase Robert Browning, all laughs, all smiles stop together, as the abbey's library burns down, taking with it a vast and ancient repository of knowledge. Adso the narrator then retreats to his dream of a faceless God that annihilates all. Annaud's adaptation alters this radically. Its coda includes a close-up of, and Adso's meditation on, the face of the young peasant woman who, in a stark departure from Eco's novel, has been spared the purifying flames of the Inquisition. It is, without doubt, a highly sentimentalized happy ending; but it is intriguing in its displacement of what has come before it. Rather than being male, ecclesiastical, ugly, and frowning, the final facialization of the Middle Ages is female, secular, beautiful – and gently smiling. If Annaud is indeed using the woman's face, and his altered ending, to portray an alternative long emotional history that enfolds the Middle Ages into the present, then this is a history in which condemnation, wrath, and fear are balanced, and sometimes even outweighed, by the countervailing forces of redemption, serenity, and hope.

Acknowledgements

About the Author

Louise D'Arcens is author of *Comic Medievalism*: *Laughing at the Middle Ages* (Boydell and Brewer, 2014) and *Old Songs in the Timeless Land*: *Medievalism in Australian Literature*, *1840–1910* (Brepols/UWAP, 2011/12). She edited *The*

Cambridge Companion to Medievalism (2016) and co-edited *International Medievalism and Popular Culture* (Cambria, 2014) and *Maistresse of My Wit*: *Medieval Women, Modern Scholars* (Brepols, 2004). She is an Australian Research Council Future Fellow, and teaches in the Department of English, Macquarie University (E-mail: louise.darcens@mq.edu.au).

References

Annaud, J.-J., dir. 1981. *Quest for Fire* (*La guerre du feu*). International Cinema Corporation.

Annaud, J.-J., dir. 1986. *The Name of the Rose*. Neue Constantin Film.

Annaud, J.-J. n.d. Le nom de la rose (1986). *Jean-Jacques Annaud*, http://jjannaud.com/les-films/le-nom-de-la-rose-1986/.

Bachmann, G. 1986. *The Name of the Rose*: Interview with Umberto Eco. *Sight and Sound* 55(2): 129–131.

Bayless, M. 1997. *Parody in the Middle Ages: The Latin Tradition*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Capozzi, R. 1989. Palimpsests and Laughter: The Dialogical Pleasure of Unlimited Intertextuality in *The Name of the Rose*. *Italica* 66: 412–428.

Cavell, S. 1979. *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, enlarged ed. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Comolli, J.-L. 1978. Historical Fiction: A Body Too Much, trans. Ben Brewster. *Screen* 19(2): 41–53.

Danes, J.A. 2011. *The Critical Mythology of Irony*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press.

D'Arcens, L. 2012. Dario Fo's *Mistero Buffo* and the Left-Modernist Reclamation of Medieval Popular Culture. In *Medieval Afterlives in Popular Culture*, ed. G. Ashton and D. T. Kline, 57–70. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Doyle, A.C. 2014. *A Study in Scarlet. A Sherlock Holmes Adventure*. London: HarperCollins.

Eco, U. 1980. *Il Nome della Rosa*. Milan, Italy: Bompiani.

Eco, U. 1983. *The Name of the Rose*, trans. W. Weaver. London: Vintage Books.

Eco, U. 1984. *Reflections on The Name of the Rose*, trans. W. Weaver. London: Seeker & Warburg.

Fasolini, D. 2006. The Intrusion of Laughter into the Abbey of Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*: The Christian Paradox of Joy Mingling with Sorrow. *Romance Notes* 46: 119–129.

Fo, D. [1969] 1992. *Mistero Buffo*. In *Plays: 1*, trans. E. Emery, intro. S. Hood. London: Methuen.

Haneke, M., dir. 2009. *The White Ribbon* (*Das Weiße Bande*). X-filme Creative Pool, Wega Film, Les Films du Losange.

Herzog, W., dir. 1974. *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser* (*Jeder für sich und Gott gegen alle*). Filmverlag der Autoren, Werner Herzog Filmproduktion.

Herzog, W., dir. 1976. *Heart of Glass* (*Herz aus Glas*). Werner Herzog Filmproduktion.

Klopp, C. 2005. Literature in Italy Since the Years of Lead. *World Literature Today* 79(3/4): 35–38.

Pasolini, P.P., dir. 1971. *The Decameron* (*Il Decameron*). Produzione Europee Associati, Les Productions Artistes Associés, Artemis Film.

Pasolini, P.P. 1972., dir. *The Canterbury Tales* (*I Racconti di Canterbury*). Les Productions Artistes Associés, Produzione Europee Associati.

Sanders, A. [1929] 2008. *Face of Our Time* (*Antlitz der Zeit*). Schirmer Visual Library.

Smith, D. 2010. Quality Control: An Interview with Michael Haneke. *Reverse Shot*, 10 January, http://reverseshot.org/interviews/entry/18/interview_michael_haneke.

Weeks, M.C. 2005. Milan Kundera: A Modern History of Humor amid the Comedy of History. *Journal of Modern Literature* 28(3): 131–148.