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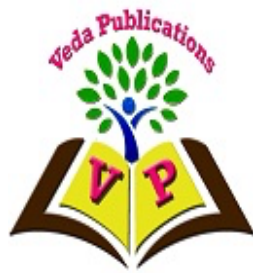
**THE FOLDED TEXT: A DELEUZIAN READING OF THE NEO-BAROQUE LABYRINTH IN UMBERTO ECO'S *THE NAME OF THE ROSE***

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54513/JOELL.2026.13208>**ABSTRACT****Article history:**

Received on : 28-04-2026

Accepted on : 17-05-2026

Available online: 03-06-2026

This paper presents a Deleuzian analysis of Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*. It argues that the labyrinthine library is a classic example of Neo-Baroque architecture, made up of endless folds, irreducible multiplicity, and ontological depth that can't be measured. Mobilizing Gilles Deleuze's conceptual framework from *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, this investigation elucidates the novel's embodiment of Baroque principles—specifically the dynamic interplay of surface and depth, the hermeneutics of secrecy, and the allegorical mode of representation. It posits that the fold (*le pli*) operates concurrently across spatial, epistemological, and literary registers, and that the library's structure and inherent semiotic systems are mere representations of this truth. This configuration immerses the reader in a universe of perpetual interpretative regress and a lavish economy of excess, hallmarks of the Neo-Baroque aesthetic. Through this theoretical lens, the novel is recast as a postmodern fold itself—a labyrinthine textual apparatus that foregrounds the fundamental instability of signification and necessitates active, navigational hermeneutics. This study not only enriches the exegesis of Eco's text but also affirms the enduring pertinence of Deleuzian philosophy to contemporary literary-critical discourse.

Keywords : Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold*, Neo-Baroque, Postmodernism, Labyrinth, Infinity & Multiplicity, Umberto Eco.

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INTRODUCTION

In Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* (1980), the labyrinthine library of a medieval monastery transcends its role as mere setting to constitute a complex architectural and epistemic maze, saturated with semiotic play, hermeneutic peril, and lethal consequence. This structure operates as a potent symbol for the inherent complexity of knowledge and the dangers embedded within the act of interpretation itself. It is this very richness that positions the novel firmly within a Neo-Baroque aesthetic—a postmodern recuperation of Baroque excess, intertextual density, and spatial intricacy.

Gilles Deleuze's philosophical treatise, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (1988), provides a seminal conceptual framework, theorizing the fold (*le pli*) as a dynamic interface mediating between surface and depth, multiplicity and unity, the material and the virtual. For Deleuze, the Baroque is not merely a historical period but a persistent operational function, characterized by infinite regress, concealed interiors, and the perpetual inflection of outside and inside (Deleuze, *The Fold* 3–5). Through this Deleuzian lens, Eco's library-labyrinth emerges as a preeminent figuration of the folded space: stratified, enigmatic, and multiplicitous.

This paper proposes a reading of *The Name of the Rose* through the prism of Deleuze's fold, contending that the library-labyrinth constitutes a primary embodiment of Neo-Baroque dynamics: namely, the logic of the secret, the principle of infinite variation, spatial multiplicity, and allegorical vertigo. The analysis will perform a close reading of key textual passages that delineate the labyrinth's architecture and function, interrogating them through Deleuzian

theory. This will be further contextualized within broader scholarship on the Neo-Baroque, incorporating its aesthetic logics (Calabrese, 1992; Ndalianis) and its manifestations in the post-digital milieu, where the fold becomes a critical model for understanding contemporary narrative and cultural forms (Garland, *Post-Digital Neo-Baroque*). Ultimately, this critical framework resituates Eco's novel as a seminal work within the postmodern Neo-Baroque tradition, revealing it as a multiply folded textual artifact: simultaneously spatial, epistemological, allegorical, and infinitely open to interpretation.

LITERATURE REVIEW & THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

The theoretical underpinnings of the Neo-Baroque find a foundational articulation in Omar Calabrese's seminal work, *Neo-Baroque: A Sign of the Times* (1992), which identifies a pervasive cultural shift toward an aesthetic paradigm defined by virtuosic execution, ontological instability, poly-dimensionality, and the logic of serial repetition. This aesthetic sensibility constitutes a decisive rejection of modernist minimalism and restraint, championing a poetics of exuberant excess, dense intertextuality, and spectacular display instead. Corroborating and expanding upon this analysis, the MIT essay on Baroque and Neo-Baroque delineates a constellation of formal traits—including fragmented, labyrinthine structures, sensory and semiotic saturation, radical genre hybridity, and persistent reflexivity—as emblematic of the Neo-Baroque's operational logic within contemporary cultural production.

Within the specific domain of literary studies, Sarah Garland's research elucidates how these broader aesthetic principles manifest through



recurrent thematic and structural preoccupations: the labyrinth as both motif and narrative architecture, the thematization of chaos and order, ontological doubleness, and a propensity for endless textual proliferation and reproduction. Her findings provide a critical vocabulary for analyzing Eco's own labyrinthine narrative strategy, framing it not as an anomaly but as a deliberate engagement with this dominant postmodern mode. Further extending the concept's applicability, scholarship on the "Post-Digital Neo-Baroque" emphasizes the movement's preoccupation with complex, folded geometries that actively obscure and destabilize conventional boundaries. This visual and spatial paradigm is posited as a direct analog to the conceptual folds theorized by Gilles Deleuze, thereby creating a critical bridge between aesthetic form and philosophical concept.

This theoretical assemblage is powerfully synthesized by Davide Messina's conceptualization of the "Neo-Baroque festino" (or feast), which reframes the Neo-Baroque beyond mere stylistic categorization, elevating it to the status of a comprehensive cultural logic. This logic operates as a sensorial and intellectual feast that engages in a profound critique of traditional metaphysics through its strategic deployment of irony, a celebration of the artificial, and an economy of lavish excess. Messina's framework is particularly germane to a reading of *The Name of the Rose*, as it provides a lens through which to understand the novel's sensate, multi-layered textuality not as decadence for its own sake, but as a sophisticated meta-critical apparatus. It is this capacity for simultaneous engagement and critique—this feasting upon and questioning of

meaning itself—that ultimately affirms the critical aptness of the Neo-Baroque as an interpretive framework for Eco's magnum opus.

1. THE SPATIAL FOLD: THE LABYRINTH AS BAROQUE

MIND:

The most immediate and potent manifestation of the Baroque fold in Eco's novel is the spatial one: the library-labyrinth of the Aedificium. This is not a classical, unicursal labyrinth, which offers a single, winding but ultimately linear path to a central secret. Instead, Eco constructs a distinctly Baroque maze, a multicursal labyrinth defined by its infinite forking paths and deliberate deceptions. As the abbot explains to William, the library was "laid out on a plan which has remained obscure to all over the centuries," a secret passed down only from librarian to assistant librarian (Eco 53). Its structure is a mental puzzle, a folded secret "based on the letter of the countries of which it collects the books... and on the word of the books it contains" (Eco 105). It is a space designed not to guide one to truth but to proliferate possibilities and obscure certainty.

Deleuze describes the Baroque labyrinth as a structure that "twists and turns its folds, pushing them to infinity, fold over fold, one upon the other" (Deleuze 6). Eco's library is precisely this: a series of rooms folded upon themselves. To navigate it is to engage in a process of perpetual unfolding. Each corridor opened, each book retrieved, does not reveal a final truth but instead exposes another layer of complexity. The library, therefore, does not merely contain knowledge; it performs it. It is a dynamic system, a monad that expresses the entire universe of human thought—its profound wisdom, its dangerous heresies, its inherent contradictions—all



contained within its intricate, folded arrangement. As Adso realizes upon first entering the scriptorium, the very light and structure of the Aedificium embody a spiritual principle: "three things concur in creating beauty: first of all integrity or perfection... then proper proportion or consonance; and finally clarity and light" (Eco 101). The library is this perfect, proportioned, and luminous expression of a folded world.

This knowledge machine semantically consumes the victims of the murder mystery; their bodies become grim signifiers within the library's textual play. Venantius is found "thrust head down into the vessel of blood" (Eco 141), and Berengar is drowned in a bathhouse. These are not merely corpses but hermeneutic clues, folds within the larger narrative that must be unfolded and interpreted. They are lost within the labyrinth, both physically and semiotically, becoming part of the very texture of the Baroque complication. The Aedificium thus transcends its role as a setting to become an active, enigmatic character—an embodiment of the folded nature of reality itself, a place where, as the abbot warns, "you might enter, and you might not emerge" (Eco 54). In *The Fold*, Deleuze undertakes a radical reinterpretation of Baroque aesthetics through the metaphysical schema of Leibnizian philosophy, positing the monad as a folded universe. This infinite, self-similar structure encapsulates depth within its surfaces. Within this framework, the fold emerges as a fundamental model for reconceptualizing subjectivity, spatial organization, and the very constitution of knowledge. For Deleuze, the Baroque is characterized not by a stable architecture of being, but by processes of continuous folding and

unfolding—a world devoid of a fixed foundation, where surfaces perpetually mask profound depths while simultaneously revealing the infinite.

Deleuze's formulation of the fold actively subverts Cartesian dualism, displacing its clear-cut distinctions between inside and outside with a dynamic, aporetic relationship in which depth and surface ceaselessly interact and permeate one another. This conceptual move has proven profoundly generative, illuminating discourses across diverse fields including design, architectural theory—where folding challenges conventional structural logic—and theories of subjectivity, which reconceive the mind as an origami-like entity of continuous creases and inflections. Ultimately, Deleuze proffers an ontology of infinite complexity, one articulated through the ceaseless interplay of textual, spatial, and temporal folds.

II. THE METHODOLOGICAL FOLD: ABDUCTION AS A PROCESS OF UNFOLDING

In the face of this spatially folded world, the detective William of Baskerville emerges as a quintessential Neo-Baroque thinker whose investigative methodology embodies the intellectual process of folding and unfolding. His approach stands in stark opposition to the classical deductive logic of Sherlock Holmes. Instead, William practices abduction, a form of reasoning that Eco himself extensively theorized. Abduction is the art of the fold: it involves making an intuitive leap, creating a plausible hypothesis (a fold of possibility), and then testing it against the available evidence by unfolding its implications. It is inherently probabilistic, iterative, and creative.



William's entire investigation is a series of folds and refolds. His brilliant deduction about the abbot's lost horse, Brunellus, is a masterclass in abductive folding: he reads the "great book of nature" (Eco 34), folding together hoofprints, broken twigs, and horsehairs into a coherent narrative. However, this is only the first fold. His larger investigation into the murders involves constructing elegant theories—folding the disparate clues of a forbidden book, apocalyptic fears, and monastic rivalries into a coherent narrative—only to have new evidence force him to unfold that theory, discard it, and create a new, more complex fold. This process mirrors the essential Baroque musical form of the concerto, which Deleuze identifies with the fold: a continuous play between soloist and orchestra, between an emerging principle (the hypothesis) and its development and response (the evidence), without ever achieving a final, definitive resolution.

This is not a failure of logic but an acceptance of a folded reality, as William himself confesses to a frustrated Adso, his doubt never concerned the truth of signs themselves, but rather "the relation among signs" (Eco 340). This admission underscores the Neo-Baroque condition: the signs are all true in themselves, but their relations—their folds and connections—are infinitely complex and shifting. William's genius lies not in finding a singular Ariadne's thread but in understanding that the maze itself is the truth.

This methodological fold stands in direct opposition to the rigid, totalizing dogma of the blind monk Jorge, who represents the desire for a closed, unicursal world: one truth, one interpretation, one authoritative book. Jorge fears the infinite fold of

interpretation, the "laughter" that Aristotle's lost book on comedy could unleash—a laughter that would unfold from the text, creating a plurality of meanings and thus dismantling monolithic authority. "Laughter is weakness, corruption, the foolishness of our flesh," Jorge declares. "It is the peasant's entertainment, the drunkard's license..." (Eco 132). His act of poisoning the book is the ultimate attempt to seal the fold, to stop the endless process of semiosis. William's investigation, by contrast, is the celebration of that very process.

III. THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOLD: FROM THE ARBORESCENT TO THE RHIZOMATIC

The ultimate expression of the novel's Neo-Baroque ethos is its philosophical conclusion, which rejects a centered, hierarchical, and tree-like (arborescent) model of the universe in favor of a rhizomatic one. This aligns with the concept Deleuze and Guattari develop in *A Thousand Plateaus*, where the rhizome is defined as an acentered, non-hierarchical, and endlessly connective network (Deleuze and Guattari 7). Eco's own model of the encyclopedia, which he posits as the structure of cultural knowledge, is precisely such a rhizome: a vast, non-linear web in which any sign can connect to any other.

The novel's famous and melancholic final line, "stat rosa pristina nomine, nomina nuda tenemus" (the primitive rose remains by its name, we hold only naked names), is frequently misread as a statement of nihilistic despair (Eco 502). Within a Neo-Baroque framework, however, it is a profoundly Baroque affirmation. The rose—the truth, the referent, the thing-in-itself—is absent, receded into the past. All we are left with are "naked names," signs that are endlessly folded into other signs in an infinite chain



of semiosis. The quest for the singular, original meaning is revealed to be a theological, not a philosophical, pursuit. Meaning does not reside in an origin point but is generated through the relational folds between signs within the limitless rhizome of culture and language.

This worldview is the cornerstone of the Neo-Baroque. It accepts that reality is a "regulated chaos," where truth is always perspectival, contextual, and contingent. The monastery microcosm exemplifies this: a seemingly closed and ordered space that, upon investigation, reveals itself to be infinitely complex and open-ended. The solution to the mystery does not restore a comforting order but confirms the inherent complexity of the system. The murders were not the result of a grand satanic plot but of a desperate, human attempt to suppress the chaotic, unfolding power of laughter and interpretation. As William concludes, "there was no plot... and I discovered it by mistake" (Eco 491). The real villain is not the devil, but the fear of the fold itself.

ALLEGORY, MULTIPLICITY, AND THE DEFERRAL OF MEANING

Eco's library is not merely architectural but profoundly semiotic: each tome, scroll, and manuscript functions as a signifier that folds into an endless chain of others, activating a complex web of intertextual echoes. The novel's pervasive use of *mise-en-abyme*—narratives nested within narratives, quotations embedded within hermeneutic arguments—functions as a direct textual analog to the Deleuzian fold's logic of infinite regress and nested interiors.

This architectural-textual strategy resonates profoundly with Garland's theorization of the labyrinth and the hermeneutic loop as central dispositifs of Neo-Baroque literature. Eco's immense intertextual labor—a citational tapestry weaving together Aristotle, Scholastic commentators, and apocryphal sources—serves to stratify meaning while simultaneously postponing its ultimate apprehension. Sense is not revealed but perpetually woven into a structure where every layer of signification folds into another, enacting a semiotics of infinite deferral. This deliberate construction creates what might be termed a hermeneutic vertigo—a state where the pursuit of meaning becomes an endless process of traversal rather than arrival. The library's organization mirrors the structure of modern hypertext, where each signifier points simultaneously backward to tradition and forward to new interpretations, ensuring that final meaning remains in perpetual motion. This deferral is not a failure but rather the very condition of the text's postmodern richness, positioning interpretation as an infinite task rather than a finite solution, thereby fundamentally aligning with both Baroque exuberance and contemporary theories of textual openness.

THE READER AS NAVIGATOR OF FOLDS

Conceptualized through a Deleuzian lens, the reader is reconstituted as a navigator tasked with traversing these textual folds. This active agent engages with surfaces while striving to apprehend the concealed depths they imply. Eco's protagonist, William of Baskerville, embodies this very pursuit, his detective work constituting an attempt to penetrate successive layers of semiotic and allegorical encryption.



However, he remains perpetually subjected to the labyrinth's inherent folding logic, wherein every provisional answer simply unfolds into a further, more complex question.

The book itself, conceived as a folded textual object, thereby invites the reader to perform the act of folding and unfolding: to retrace its conceptual corridors, to unpack its layered arguments, and to peer into its bottomless depths. This reading experience models a desire for epistemological mastery while simultaneously demonstrating the ultimate impossibility of its fulfillment, presenting truth not as a stable terminus but as a perpetually deferred and re-folded construct. In this way, the reader becomes a co-creator of meaning, engaging in a hermeneutic labor that mirrors William's own investigative struggles. The narrative resists passive consumption, demanding instead an intellectual agility—a willingness to dwell in uncertainty and navigate the infinite recesses of the textual labyrinth. This process underscores the Neo-Baroque preoccupation with subjectivity in motion: the reader's consciousness itself becomes a folded entity, continuously shaped and reshaped by its engagement with the text's sprawling, aporetic structure.

NEO-BAROQUE EXCESS AND THE LOGIC OF THE FESTINO

Messina's conception of the Neo-Baroque festino—characterized by its carnivalesque atmosphere, its economy of waste and expenditure, and its wholesale artificialization of culture—provides an exceptionally apt framework for understanding Eco's novel. The sheer abundance of textual references, the radical generic hybridity (synthesizing detective

fiction, theological disputation, and semiotic theory), and the dense allegorical and ideological commentary collectively constitute a veritable carnival of intellect and language. Eco's exuberance is thus both aesthetic and conceptual—a true festino of signs that performs and articulates the core logic of the Neo-Baroque. This intellectual feasting does not merely entertain but deliberately overwhelms, immersing the reader in a surplus of signification where any single, stable interpretation becomes impossible. The novel's lavishness—its digressions, erudite displays, and narrative excess—functions as a critique of totalizing systems, celebrating instead a postmodern plurality where meaning is experienced as a boundless, and at times disorienting, epistemological feast.

NEO-BAROQUE ALLEGORY AND POSTMODERNISM

Eco's text occupies a definitive position within a Neo-Baroque postmodernism, synthesizing a medieval setting with postmodern reflexivity, allegorical density, and profoundly ironized narrative modes. This synthesis vividly illustrates Calabrese's central notion of a refusal of hierarchical distinction—the provocative equivalence of "Donald Duck and Dante." Eco accomplishes this by seamlessly mixing high theological discourse with the conventions of the detective genre, interlarding comedic digressions within moments of rigorous scholarly exposition.

The MIT essay's assertion that the Neo-Baroque embraces formal fragmentation, open-ended structures, radical genre blending, and labyrinthine architectures finds its precise correlative in Eco's novel. The text oscillates fluidly between genres—functioning simultaneously as a whodunit, a philosophical treatise, a detective story, and a deep



semiotic meditation. This structural mutability is fundamental to its project.

The allegorical labyrinth, in its very conception, resists hermeneutic closure; its meaning is intrinsically multi-layered, ironic, and perpetually open—a manifestation of postmodern excess that is nonetheless deeply rooted in a Baroque sensibility. It is here that the Deleuzian concept of the fold provides a critical accounting: Eco's text operates as a folded space-time of allegory, where signification is liberated from linearity and proliferates through a rhizomatic, endlessly interconnected web of meaning.

CONCLUSION: THE NOVEL AS MONAD

In the final analysis, *The Name of the Rose* is a Neo-Baroque masterpiece because it is architecturally and philosophically structured as a monad. As a literary work, it is a beautifully folded unit that contains and expresses a vast universe of philosophical, theological, and semiotic thought. From its labyrinthine setting—a spatial fold that is both a building and a brain—to its investigative method—a continuous process of intellectual folding and unfolding—and its ultimate philosophical revelation—the acceptance of the rhizomatic nature of truth—the novel operates relentlessly on the principle of the fold.

By reading it through a Deleuzian Neo-Baroque lens, we move beyond the now-routine classification of it as merely intertextual or postmodern. We instead see it for what it is: a profound and urgent meditation on how we construct meaning in a world without a stable center or guaranteed transcendent truth. The novel does not simply represent the

Baroque; it becomes Baroque. It invites the reader to participate in the endless, joyful, and daunting process of unfolding. In our contemporary digital age—an era of hyperlinks, networked databases, and infinite data streams—Eco's Baroque labyrinth offers more than a historical allegory. It provides a brilliant, timely, and enduring analogy for the very experience of navigating knowledge itself. We are all, like William and Adso, detectives in the library of the world, tasked with the perpetual and Neo-Baroque challenge of learning to think in folds, holding onto nothing but the endless, productive play of naked names.

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