



Misreadings

Umberto Eco

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This is a collection of parodies by the author of *The Name of the Rose* and *Foucault's Pendulum*. Professor Anouk Ooma of Prince Joseph's Land University addresses his colleagues on recent archaeological findings that shed light on the poetry of Italy before the Explosion, Columbus' landing in the New World is covered by TV reporters and structural analysis of the art of striptease as performed by Lilly Niagara of the Crazy Horse.

Misreadings Details

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Eleonora says

Terminato. A pensarci bene, me lo sono un po' trascinato ma tant'è...

Alcuni riferimenti non li ho afferrati (vuoi l'età, vuoi l'ignoranza), ma la lettura di questo libro mi ha divertita. Mi ha divertita Eco.

I miei pezzi preferiti: Fenomenologia di Mike Buongiorno, Lettera a mio figlio, La scoperta dell'America.

Ho letto parole 'nuove', e credo proprio che io inizierò ad usarle; eccole:

senonché,

talché,

dappoiché.

Simona says

"Diario minimo" è una raccolta di saggi, di articoli di Umberto Eco. Una raccolta che evidenzia il suo lato ironico, sarcastico, acuto. Una raccolta che si legge in poco tempo, ma che ha un grande spessore risaltando le doti di uno scrittore, di un uomo di cultura che ci ha lasciato troppo presto.

In "Nonita", una parodia letteraria, Eco rivisita il capolavoro di Nabokov, "Lolita", regalando al saggio anche momenti di grande ironia, in "Fenomenologia di Mike Bongiorno", a mio avviso, il testo migliore, si scaglia, prendendo ad esempio la figura di Mike Bongiorno, contro l'italiano medio avvezzo dalla televisione che finirà per inghiottirlo.

"L'uomo circuito dai mass media è in fondo, fra tutti i suoi simili, il più rispettato: non gli si chiede mai di diventare che ciò che egli è già. In altre parole gli vengono provocati desideri studiati sulla falsariga delle sue tendenze".

Un percorso, una raccolta ironica, intelligente, acuta, sagace per conoscere gli infiniti aspetti di un grande uomo di cultura.

Éad says

Some of these 'Misreadings' were highly enjoyable, with my favourites being 'Fragments', 'Regretfully, We Are Returning Your...' and 'The Discovery of America'. I found these in particular to be witty and to raise some interesting points: for example, in 'Fragments' the misinterpretation of the significance by Prof. Anouk Ooma of the so-called *Quaternulus Pompeianus* (a booklet of song lyrics from a greatest hits album) as 'an exquisite anthology [...] of the most worthy poetic compositions of the period' made me think about how some of our knowledge of the past must ultimately be based on (albeit sensible) guesswork.

Despite my enjoyment of these sections, I found some of the other 'Misreadings' required more knowledge about the subject than I possessed (which I was expecting given the nature of the book) and as a result were dense and difficult to understand. The low-point for me was 'Industry and Sexual Repression in a Po Valley Society' and I found myself glossing over parts of this just to get through it.

In sum, I couldn't bring myself to give this book four stars because, although the good bits were truly five-star material, there just weren't enough of them. I would recommend parts of this book to someone unfamiliar with Umberto Eco's work as a good introduction to his humour and sheer interestingness.

Georgia says

Yeah these essays were a) boring b) made no sense whatsoever it's like he was bored and wrote this book or had a contract and HAD to write down some shit. Also some respect on the Odyssey goes a long way but the worst thing I read here was this: (about odyssey) "there's even a Lolita aspect, with the teenager Nausicaa, where the author doesn't spell things out, but it's a turn on anyway." ..uhh what??

AvvαΦ says

Nonita - la parodia di Lolita, uno screanzato russo-americano che chiama il suo riprovevole eroe Humbert Humbert ha qui il suo contrappasso.

La Fenomenologia di Mike Bongiorno, mitica.

Lettera al figlio Stefano bambino, un inneggiare al gioco delle armi, da bambini, per poter lottare dalla parte giusta, da grandi.

Queste sono, secondo me, le migliori. Con un finale col botto, che sono le Recensioni a famose opere, con un recensore, che non legge il libro da recensire, lo pilucca qua e là, lo travisa, lo sbataccia via ritenendolo un libro adatto a collane Filosofiche, un libro per Laterza (si tratta di *Justine*). E in crescendo, di chicca in chicca. Sublime.

Lu says

In questa raccolta di scritti brevi, pubblicata inizialmente nel 1963 e rivista poi nel 1975, Umberto Eco gioca con la lingua italiana in modo superbo. Con arguta ironia danza sulle onde di autori e titoli conosciuti rivoltandoli, reimpastandoli, e svelandone così il lato ludico, Un vero maestro della parola.

Özgür says

Foucault Sarkac'n'dan sonra Eco art?k beni korkutmaz dedim ama san?r?m yan?ld?m. Kitap, örtük bir mizah diliyle, uçlarda gezinen ele?tiri ve inceleme tad?nda. Eco' klasik, neo klasik demeden ciddi eserleri harcam??, oynam?? diline dolam??. Dergi ve donem yaz?lar? da mevcut. Bilemedim.

Moloch says

Per Goodreads devo fare a meno dei mezzi voti, ma sono 3,5 stelletto convinte (io che do i voti a Eco!).

Umberto Eco si diverte, in questa raccolta di articoli risalenti agli anni '60-'70, soprattutto a fare il verso e

parodiare vari vezzi, pose e parole d'ordine dell'*intelligentsia* del periodo, ma certe stoccate colpiscono anche oggi. Anche se alcuni riferimenti saranno di certo solo per veri intenditori, in generale i pezzi sono più che godibili (e stimolo di riflessione) anche per il lettore meno esperto. Particolarmente pungente è "Dove andremo a finire?", in cui vengono prese in giro certe denunce in toni apocalittici della decadenza e volgarità della "società di massa"... ma trasferite e adattate al contesto dell'Atene di Pericle, cioè al periodo convenzionalmente ritenuto un'epoca d'oro della civiltà occidentale, a significare che, talvolta, certi eccessi di indignazione e catastrofismo lasciano il tempo che trovano (e inoltre potrebbero contenere dei sottintesi insostenibili).

Divertentissimi anche lo scherzo sulla dotta analisi dei *Promessi sposi* come pseudo-opera di Joyce e le finte critiche dei lettori "beta" di una casa editrice a grandi classici della letteratura mondiale, visti come possibili "novità editoriali". Sono invece dei mini-saggi veri e propri i due pezzi più famosi della raccolta, "Fenomenologia di Mike Bongiorno" ed "Elogio di Franti" (mi può confermare qualcuno che in quest'ultimo si trova in nuce una delle idee portanti del *Nome della rosa*?). Ovviamente il maestro Eco adatta il suo linguaggio a tutti questi pseudo-ricerche etnografiche, pseudo-comunicazioni scientifiche, pseudo-reportage, pseudo-pamphlet.

Il mio personale Oscar non può non andare a "Nonita", esilarante parodia di *Lolita*, che, letta *subito dopo* l'originale, fa veramente morire dal ridere.

Una lettura divertente, accessibile e stimolante.

Randolph says

Wonderful collection of parodies, satires, and pastiches. If you have ever read *Lolita*, the short opening parody "Granita" may be the funniest thing you'll have ever read.

Jonfaith says

Culled from Eco's work for a literary magazine in the late 50s and early 60s, *Misreadings* is largely a series of lampoons and satire, exploiting the trends of the time. Much appears dated. The mass man of the Mad Men is approached by structuralist means. Kinsey meets Ho Chi Minh.

That said, there are a few jewels, notably *Letter to My Son* penned in 1964 for his infant son Stefano, such is a meditation on military toys and a need for nurturing a sense of history. *Make Your Own Movie* is a digression on semiotics and cinema, one so rich as to give notice to those trawlers of Derrida and DFW.

Pao says

Comprato in offerta e letto grazie al gruppo di lettura dedicato ai saggi di Umberto Eco *Secretum Finis Africae*: i saggi di Umberto d'Alessandria.

L'agile volumetto (meno di 200 pagine) raccoglie vari saggi per lo più pubblicati su periodici di nicchia negli anni '60 e '70 dedicati principalmente alla letteratura (parodie, false recensioni, riflessioni) ma non solo (c'è spazio anche per i film e la televisione).

L'autore sembra essersi divertito molto durante la stesura dei testi e riesce ad allietare anche il lettore però leggendo la maggior parte dei saggi si è sopraffatti dalla propria ignoranza: se da un lato non servono particolari conoscenze, a parte aver visto la televisione italiana negli ultimi 60 anni, per comprendere la

critica feroce nei confronti di Mike Bongiorno (*Fenomenologia di Mike Bongiorno*) dall'altro lato se ignoro l'esistenza del nouveau roman come posso apprezzarne la parodia?

Eco fornisce delle stringatissime indicazioni nell'introduzione ma sono troppo sintetiche e scarse per essere sufficienti inoltre l'edizione kindle della Bompiani lascia molto a desiderare: non c'è l'indice, non funzionano i link delle note al saggio *Dove andremo a finire?* e mancano le traduzioni delle numerose espressioni in altre lingue.

Nonostante i miei limiti culturali la lettura è stata molto piacevole e sono rimasta colpita dall'originalità dei contenuti (si può recensire una banconota?) e anche dalla loro attualità. Nonostante non sia facile scegliere, i miei preferiti sono *Dove andremo a finire?* che irride storia e letteratura in modo così moderno che sembra scritto oggi e non decenni fa, *Lettera a mio figlio* che mi ha quasi commosso e *Dolenti declinare (rapporti di lettura all'editore)* che ho trovato esilarante.

Conclusa la lettura si è soddisfatti e si ha quasi voglia di colmare le proprie lacune letterarie.

Bought on sale and read thanks to the reading group about Umberto Eco's essays *Secretum Finis Africae*: i saggi di Umberto d'Alessandria.

The short book (less than 200 pages) contains various essays written in the sixties and in the seventies that deal with letterature (parodies, fake reviews, thoughts) mostly but not just that (there's room also for movies and television).

It seems that the author had enjoyed himself during the writing and he succeeds in enjoying the reader too. Unfortunately during the reading you understand how ignorant you are because there are a lots of quotes about things maybe you don't know, for example I find difficult to read the parody about the nouveau roman because I don't know what nouveau roman is in the first place.

Eco gives some hints in the short introduction but they aren't enough moreover the kindle edition by Bompiani is not up to standards: the table of contents is missing, the cross references don't work and there is no translation of the expressions in other languages.

Despite my ignorance and the sloppy edition I liked the book and I was impressed by the originality (can you imagine the review of a bill?) and the modernity of the essays.

My favourite are *Dove andremo a finire?* that mocks History and Literature in a way so modern that it seems to be written today and not in the previous century, *Lettera a mio figlio* that almost touched me and *Dolenti declinare (rapporti di lettura all'editore)* fake rejections of the masterpieces of Literature that made me cackle.

When the book is over you are satisfied and you nearly want to begin filling your literary gaps.

Damla says

Birkaç denemesinde ?talyan kültürüne dair bilgi eksikli?imden dolayı? okumak zorlansa bile Eco denemelerine ad?m için uygun oldu?unu dü?ündü?üm bir kitap. Eco espritüelli?ini yo?un olarak hissedeceksiniz.

Banushka says

çok e?lendim bu kitab? okurken. Eco'nun müthi? bir mizah duygusuyla yazd??? denemeler... hele editör notuyla geri çevrilen kitaplar bölümündeki ?ncil yorumu müthi?ti :) "okurun istedi?i seks, cinayet, ensest... her ?ey kitab?n?zda mevcut." ayr?ca odyssea'da kime telif ödenece?inin belli olmamas? yüzünden yay?nevini hukuki olarak uyarmas? gibi muhte?em ayr?nt?larla dolu :)

bunlar?n d???nda italyan lolita's? ve uygarl?klara farklı? bir biçimde bakt??? napoli antropolojisi de unutulmaz.

baz? denemeleri italyan kültürüne ve edebiyat?na çok vak?f olmad???m için anlamakta zorland?m

diyebilirim, sanırım bunlar için editör ya da çevirmen açıklaması olsa iyi olurmu?
ve son olarak oyuncak silahlarla büyüyen biri olarak o'luna yazdığım mektubu çok beğendim, en samimi ve kişisel deneme oydu sanırım.

Ben says

When will Goodreads finally allow for half star ratings? I give this work 3.5 stars. Collections of stories and essays are difficult to review, especially if (as was the case for me when reading this book) there are pieces that speak to you and that delight you and then others that you find grating or just ho-hum. And there are undoubtedly added difficulties in reviewing works of parody, many with culturally specific references (in this case dealing with the author's familiarity with Italian literature and pop culture), translated nonetheless from Italian into English. There were passages in some of these works in which I felt Umberto Eco was misinterpreting certain theorists' views -- as in his essay on the "culture industry" in Ancient Greece, which, although very funny, perverts the ideas of critical theorist Theodor Adorno. Of course, I couldn't tell if this misreading of Adorno was intentional or not, given the title of the book (*Misreadings*) and the fact that Eco's essay was not so much poking fun at Adorno himself but at the wave of Italian authors who were prone to "Adornizing" (as Eco puts it) at the time.

Similarly, while Eco here is using humor to criticize those who are "overintellectual" and "elitist," there are certain works contained in the collection ("The Phenomenology of Mike Bongiorno" for example) that make Eco seem as much an elitist as those he is criticizing. In some cases parody and other forms of humor come across clearly on the written page, in other cases (and this may be owed in part to culture as well as to translation) the efforts fall flat.

An added problem with a work such as this is that it requires reader and author to have a fairly equivalent level of cultural capital, having read or at least be well-acquainted with the same works of fiction, pop culture, philosophy and criticism. But knowledge is, of course, historically relative as much as it is culturally relative. In some pieces contained in this work, "Fragments" for instance, Eco (in the original) seasoned the work with references to Italian pop songs from the 1950s (and earlier). Of course, these references would not be well understood by an American reader, so in the translation many of the lyrics from the original were changed to lyrics from well-known American pop standards (just as in a work of fiction like *Don Quixote* translators may convert popular proverbs that were well-known at a particular time and place to modern equivalents in the language into which they are translating). If they were not to do this, then footnotes or end notes would likely be required and this doesn't work very well for a work of humor; when one has to explain a joke, it's not really so funny anymore. The problem with many of the pieces contained in this collection is that they may have required more footnotes making certain passages more accessible to the modern English reader.

So then, given these criticisms, why do I give this book 4 stars instead of 3 (or even two), given this heavy load of uncertainty? Well, as I stated at the very beginning, in a work of short stories or essays there are undoubtedly going to be works that one finds enjoyable and others that are perhaps only moderately amusing at best. The first few works in this collection had me laughing uncontrollably, perhaps because here Eco was dealing largely with works with which I was already very familiar.

In the first of these, "Granita," Eco parodies Nabokov's *Lolita*, telling the story of the young Umberto Umberto, who is given to gerontophilia. The work, written very much in the style of Nabokov's controversial novel (though Eco says it is more a parody of the Italian translation than of Nabokov's work itself) is written from the perspective of an unreliable narrator and peppered with parenthetical passages in French, and with passing allusions to writers such as Proust and Baudelaire. How can one not laugh at the following,

especially having read *Lolita*: “From the deepest labyrinth of my beardless being, I desired those creatures already marked by stern, implacable age, bent by the fatal rhythm of their eighty years, horribly undermined by the shadow of senescence.”

The second, “Fragments”, is a futuristic piece, written millennia after nuclear warfare destroyed life on Earth (in the year 1980 – amid the uncertainties brought on by the Cold War). The style reminded me of Woody Allen’s *Sleeper*, though this piece was written almost 15 years before Allen’s film was made and released. In this story, professors of the future fawn over the brilliance and complexity of newly discovered poetry from this ancient civilization. Of course, as noted earlier, many of the popular song lyrics referenced in the original have been changed to American equivalents and those that remain from popular Italian songs are understood in context easily enough, as these popular lyrics, often thought of as banal by the highbrow, can be distinguished well enough from what one might call poetry of a higher worth (but again, although very funny, I think this piece helps support my claim that Eco is – perhaps to a lesser extent (I don’t know) – an elitist, just as those he criticizes throughout).

In the third piece Eco gives a social structural and very scholarly analysis of the art of stripping. And in the fourth – one of the funniest and most accessible, though not the best written (perhaps because he’s writing in the voice of reviewers of popular fiction) – titled “Regretfully, We Are Returning Your . . .” Eco writes rejection letters from modern publishing houses that specialize in popular fiction to famous authors, such as Homer, Dante, Kant, Kafka, Proust, Joyce and Cervantes, more often than not reviewing their works unfavorably. *The Bible* is praised in the first paragraph as: “Action-packed, they have everything today’s reader wants in a good story. Sex (lots of it, including adultery, sodomy, incest), also murder, war, massacres, and so on.” Then it is concluded that “The end result is a massive omnibus. It seems to have something for everybody, but ends up appealing to nobody. . . . I’d suggest trying to get the rights to only the first five chapters. We’re on sure ground there. . . .” In his review of *Don Quixote* Eco (as the fictitious reviewer) writes that it would interfere with the publishing house’s popular titles and he goes on to list such hits with readers as *Amadis of Gaul* – chivalric romances that Cervantes takes aim at in his classic. *A la recherche du temps perdu* is criticized for its horrible punctuation and lengthy paragraphs. And the author concludes that “the book is too – what’s the word? – asthmatic.” Kafka’s *The Trial* is praised for its Hitchcockian elements but derided for its lack of details: “These young writers believe they can be ‘poetic’ by saying ‘a man’ instead of ‘Mr. So-and-so in such-and-such a city.’” And, my favorite, Joyce’s *Finnegan’s Wake* is returned with the following very short reply: “Please, tell the office manager to be more careful when he sends books out to be read. I’m the English-language reader, and you’ve sent me a book written in some other, godforsaken language. I’m returning it under separate cover.”

As can be deemed from some of the fictional reviews cited above, Eco is deliberately anachronistic throughout this work, mentioning Hitchcock in a review of Kafka’s *The Trial* and using the critical theory of Theodor Adorno to condemn writers from Ancient Greece for their lowbrow appeal, and including an entire piece that reads as a television transcript of reporters and commentators’ play-by-play discussion of Columbus’ “discovery” of the New World. Many of these pieces, reliant upon anachronism as their basis, I found a bit difficult to digest; while I appreciated what Eco was trying to do, I felt he failed in his delivery.

From that fourth piece on things became a bit less funny and enjoyable, though there were some pieces here and there that sparked my interest. “The Thing” was a fascinating little short story on the discovery of the first weapons (made of rocks) in ancient civilization. “Industry and Sexual Repression in a Po Valley Society” analyzes Milanese culture, written as though it were an ethnographic study by Mead, Boas or Malinowski – or some other classic early anthropologist – but in reading like an ethnography, it reads very dry, even though meant as humor, perhaps partly because it was one of the longest pieces in this collection. “Three Eccentric Reviews” was written in the style of “Regretfully, We Are Returning Your . . .”, but as critical reviews of certain works – including a Fifty Thousand Lire and a One Hundred Thousand Lire(!), a draft of the *Ladies Home Journal* and D.H. Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* – and was nearly as hilarious. And “Make Your Own Movie” provides readers with plot patterns that they can follow to make

films in the style of famous directors like Luchino Visconti, Jean-Luc Godard and Michelangelo Antonioni (e.g., Antonioni: A foggy oil field. He looks at the camera without any expression as he touches her scarf). Of course, here, as elsewhere, Eco expects that readers will be familiar with the works of the filmmakers he is referencing and those without a knowledge of the works of such directors may appreciate some of the humor, but much will likely go over their heads.

What works in this collection works incredibly well – there are some sections that are laugh out loud funny, and in which Eco succeeds in making us see the ridiculousness of the overthinking and pedantic writer and critic while also raising important social and cultural questions along the way. But there are also many instances where Eco seems to fall into his own trap – in criticizing the pedant he shows that he is a pedant; his humor sometimes fails to transcend cultural and historical barriers, and his applications of certain theories seem either misinformed, meandering or the intended humor in the application is not entirely clear and we have to ask ourselves, ‘Is he trying to be funny or ironic here or not?’

Anthony Burgess suggested that Eco’s novel *Foucault’s Pendulum* needed an index, for it was packed so full of abstruse references. And others have pointed out that many of Eco’s little jokes in that and other works are obscure and go over the heads of many readers (and critics). As with readers of Thomas Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow*, apparently readers of Eco’s novels might also benefit by buying a reader’s guide to make sense of the many references throughout, where Eco (like Pynchon) seems to be screaming, “Hey, look at me! Look at all I know!”

At his best, when reading these early pieces, Eco reminded me pleasantly of Edgar Allan Poe, and also of Woody Allen comedies and of Thomas Pynchon. At his worst, Eco also reminded me of Pynchon and he seemed so dreadfully similar to some of those he was knocking down – Eco seems in some pieces to (unintentionally) echo the stuffy elite whom he elsewhere ridicules (pardon the awful pun). I guess in all that the good outweighs the bad, but only marginally.

Adriano Pugno says

Una serie di esercizi di stile molto interessanti e arguti ma che possono stancare alla lunga. Certo è che un brano come "L'elogio di Franti" andrebbe letto e studiato in ogni scuola superiore.
