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### Holy Trinity or Divine Liturgy

*I saw a throne set in the sky and a figure seated on the throne...The face was illuminated by the tremendous beauty of a halo...Around the throne...were [the] ancients...so that wherever their pupils were...they converged on the same radiant spot...Bodies inhabited in every part by the Spirit, illuminated by revelation, faces overcome with amazement, eyes shining with enthusiasm...there they all were...singing a new song, lips parted in a smile of perennial praise.*

Umberto Eco, The Name of the Rose (pp. 41-42)

Adso's impression of the abbey door in The Name of the Rose corresponds almost exactly to the painting. Painted in the latter half of the seventeenth century, Holy Trinity is immediately eye-catching for its centric quality. The painting focuses the viewer's gaze to the Trinity in the center before the eye can expand outward to the choirs of angels surrounding the images of God, singing praises and giving adoration to the Creator.

Intriguingly, this painting is startlingly reminiscent of Italian Proto-Renaissance painting. The artist, whose name is not known but who was probably from Crete, used techniques and styles similar to those of Giotto some four hundred years before. The gold filigree used in the halos and the background, for example, are a staple of the works of many contemporaries of Giotto. Also, this particular artist seems to show a strange lack of awareness for perspective, which was developed in the early fifteenth century. This makes his figures seem two-dimensional, which, while not necessarily a flaw, is not expected of a post-Renaissance Italian painter. However, he pays immense attention to detail – one can see every single hair on God's beard – which confers to the work a sense of passion combined with dignity.

Perhaps the artist even used an antiquated style with the purpose of better conveying the divine mystery. By not using perspective and by not humanizing the characters, he creates the effect that the subjects of the painting are not of this world but are instead supernatural. The sublimity of his subject is also suggested by the way he uses the clouds to contain the Divine Liturgy, and in the poses of healing that he gives to the Father and the Son.

Outdated style notwithstanding, Holy Trinity is a beautiful work, and in fact its homage to antiquity makes it more useful for understanding The Name of the Rose, and, incidentally, Dante's Inferno. Eco's novel treats art in terms of reverence and divine mystery. These themes are realized most eloquently in Adso's trancelike vision at the door to the church. Adso is confronted with a work of art that seems so mystical, so divine, that his soul "was carried away by that concert of terrestrial beauty and majestic supernatural signals" (Eco, 43). In fact, this particular painting much resembles the door to the church—or half of it does, for the church door also gives a depiction of hell not seen in this work. Instead, Holy Trinity portrays two devout humans below all the splendor and majesty of the divine, kneeling in prayer. This is another parallel to Adso, who is wrapped up throughout the novel in the wonder and awe of God.

Another way in which Holy Trinity and The Name of the Rose are connected, more subtly, is through the symbolism of the books of scripture held by the angels. If one looks closely, it becomes apparent that the books held by this divine assembly are written not in English or in Latin, but in Greek. The monks in Eco's abbey are often assigned to translate or transcribe Greek works, and of course, the text that was the cause of all the trouble in the abbey,

Aristotle's book of comedy, is written in Greek. In the painting, the Greek can be taken as a symbol of how even the pagans' works praise God; but of course, in the novel, the antagonist Jorge comes to the opposite conclusion.

This painting also refers to Dante's Inferno. While the heavenly host surrounding the Trinity has a stronger parallel perhaps to the Paradiso, it can also be connected to Dante's first work. We see all the smaller, disembodied faces in the clouds; these represent the souls of the righteous departed, in heavenly communion with God. Then there are the heavenly host, singing praises, reading adorations, and performing rituals in the service of the Lord. And finally, the Trinity itself resides in the center: the dove representing the Holy Spirit, and the Father to the right with Jesus at his right hand. In a way, this can be seen as the opposite of the hell Dante portrays in his Inferno. In it, there are different levels of hell, each corresponding to worse sins and more torturous punishments as Dante journeys down the infernal hierarchy. At the very center and the very bottom, we see Lucifer in all his twisted glory, chained and cursed forever as a monument to the evil that caused his fall. In the painting, of course, we see the opposite. A heavenly hierarchy is shown, with the righteous dead given less stature than the angels, all of course worshipping the Trinity that abides in the center. A connection can be drawn between these two works, in that they represent the two sides of the coin of eternal life with much the same structure.

All in all, Holy Trinity or Divine Liturgy, as a work that mimics a style that had long passed, connects especially well with works such as The Name of the Rose and Inferno that are either from or engage that period. It also provides a later historical perspective on the divine mystery, re-told in the vein of a Giotto or a Cimabue. But perhaps the most striking aspect of this painting does not depend on any connections to history or literature. This painting is a masterpiece in its own right, on its own artistic merit. The colors and the attention to detail given the figures by the artist are breathtaking. It is a shame that the painter is unknown, because Holy Trinity is a truly inspired work, one for which its creator should be remembered.

#### Works Cited

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