



Detection, Deception, and Interpretation: Umberto Eco's *Numero Zero*

Rhys William Tyers

Abstract. In *Numero Zero*, Umberto Eco employs the tropes of the postmodernist detective novel to investigate interpretation, textual disorientation, and the problematic influence of the news industry. The message seems to be that we need to all become better detectives regarding language interpretation and manipulation.

“There is nothing more deceptive than an obvious fact.”
—Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Boscombe Valley Mystery” 88

Umberto Eco's creative engagement with the detective story is the reason for his world-wide popularity. His first novel, *The Name of the Rose*, has sold over 50 million copies and become an international bestseller. The novel has been celebrated by the literary establishment, winning the Strega Prize in 1981 and Prix Medicis Étranger in 1982, and ranking 14th on *Le Monde's* 100 Books of the Century list (“The Name of the Rose”). The novel is also revered by fans of detective fiction and was responsible for an increased interest in the genre in Italy: “the appearance of *The Name of the Rose* in 1980, the astounding critical and commercial success of which all over the world may be taken to mark the coming of age of the Italian detective story as a legitimate literary genre” (Bondanella 91).

The Name of the Rose established the Italian medievalist, philosopher, journalist, and linguist as a new voice on the literary scene. Although Eco's first novel stands on its own as a murder mystery, it is more accurately seen as a questioning of the meaning of “truth” from theological, philosophical, scholarly, and historical perspectives. In fact, *The Name of the Rose* popularized the metaphysical detective tale, inviting readers to experience murder

Rhys William Tyers is a teacher, lecturer, and curriculum designer from Melbourne, Australia. His research interests include detective fiction, metaphysical detective fiction, and the modern novel. He has published papers on the role of the detective in the work of Paul Auster, Roberto Bolaño, Don DeLillo, Michael Houellebecq, Patrick Modiano, and Haruki Murakami.