

THE PRIMAL APOCALYPTIC SILENCE(S)!

THE SEARCH FOR THE PERFECT LANGUAGE

by UMBERTO ECO

translated by James Fentress

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“The Imperishable AUM is ALL this. The Past Present Future are elucidations of this AUM. If there exists anything other than these three states of perception even that is AUM.”

Mandukyopanishad

“The Lord (Isa) Pervades ALL this.”

Ishavasyopanishad

“Verily the INFINITE PURUSHA is ALL this.”

Purusha Sooktam

“In the Beginning was the WORD and the WORD was with GOD and the WORD was GOD.”

John –1.1– The Bible

“But Lysis arguments like men are often pretenders.”

Lysis – Socrates

Umberto Eco is a superhuman scholar. The following passage from this book (The search for the Perfect Language) bears eloquent testimony to the great genius of this pundit pedant.

“Let us neglect for the sake of brevity the *Système de langus universelle* of Grosselin (1836), the *langue universelle et analytique* of Vidal (1844), the *Cours complet de langue universelle* by Letellier (1832–55), the *Blaia Zimandal* of Meriggi (1884), the projects of so distinguished a philosopher as Renouvier (1885), the *Lingualumina* of Dyer (1875), the *Langue internationale étymologique* of Riemann (1877), the *Langue naturelle* of Maldant (1887), the *Spokil* of Dr.Nicolas (1900), the *Zahlensprache* of Hilbe (1901), the *Völkerverkehrsprache* of Dietrich (1902), and the *Perio* of Talundberg (1904). We will content ourselves with a brief account of the *Project d’une langue universelle* of Sotos Ochando (1855).” (p.307)

The first chapter ‘From Adam to *Confusio Linguarum*’ begins ceremoniously “Our story has an advantage over many others it can begin at the Beginning.” After a brief reference to Genesis 2,10 (The spreading of nations after the Flood) and 11 (Babel– the confusion of language and the scattering of people over the earth) the repercussions of the ‘Myth of Babel’ in European History of the last 2000 years are apparently traced in this book. This great myth provoked and motivated many people (lunatics, mystics, geniuses and scientific men alike) to attempt to create the Perfect Language and/or Universal Language by permutating and combining the alphabetical signs of language(s) and other artificial signs.

We read about the The Kabbalist Pansemioticism (the Torah, Cosmic Permutability, Abulafia) {“the language of creation was perfect not because it merely happened to reflect the structure of the universe in some exemplary fashion; it created the universe.” (p.31–32)}, Dante’s attempt to create the Perfect Language from the illustrious vernacular, The *Ars Magna* of Raymond Lull – “The aims and methods of Lull

and Bacon were different; yet both were inspired by ideals of *Universality* and of a new universal *crusade* based on *peaceful* dialogue rather than on arms.” (p.54) Then we come to The Monogenetic Hypothesis (the return to Hebrew), Postel’s universal utopia, the pre-Hebraic Language and the various Nationalistic Hypothesis (Celtic, Dutch, Finnish, German etc.). {Andreas Kempe’s *Die Sprachen des Paradieses* “included a scene in which God and Adam conversed with one another, God speaking in Swedish while Adam spoke in Danish; while they were talking, however, Eve was busy being seduced by a French speaking serpent.” (p.97)} In the Indo-European Hypothesis which follows we hear the great linguist, Adolphe Pictet singing this hymn to Aryan culture “. . . Is it not perhaps curious to see the Aryas of Europe after a separation of four or five thousand years, close the circle once again, reach their unknown brothers of India, DOMINATE them, bring to them the elements of a SUPERIOR civilization, and then to find ancient evidence of a common origin?” (p.106) [*my capitalization*]. The prospects for the dream (The Monogenetic Hypothesis) that refuses to die are outlined.

Then we trace Kabbalism and Lullism in modern culture (Bruno: *Ars Combinatoria* and *Infinite Worlds*) and move on to the perfect language of images (Kircher, the Egyptian Hieroglyphs, the Chinese Script). After a cursory survey of Magic Languages (Rosicrucians, John Dee and his monad) and Polygraphies we come to fairly elaborate elucidations of a priori philosophical languages – Bacon, Descartes, Mersenne, George Dalgarno, John Wilkins, Francis Lodwick, Leibniz, problem of primitives, the *I ching* and the binary calculus etc. From those whose “search for a perfect language arose from profound tensions of a religious nature”, we come to

those who wanted to conceptualize “a philosophical language which could eliminate the *idola* responsible for clouding the minds of men and keeping them after from the progress of science.” (p.209) “Once it had been perceived that the process of linguistic change is continuous, [-] it became obvious that any thought of reviving the idea of a philosophical language was destined to fail.” (p.292) “The study of the deeds of our ancestors is thus more than an antiquarian pastime, it is an immunological precaution” (p.316) to prevent us from repeating the same futile projects. Yet, it surprises me as to why great geniuses like Descartes, Leibniz etc. did not foresee the futility of their grandiose semiotic systems.

From the world of the crazy a priori languages we enter the slightly less crazy world of a posteriori languages (the International Auxiliary Languages), which are derived from existing languages and their polylingual hybridizations, rather than arbitrarily contrived a priori in random idiosyncrasy. Esperanto (proposed by Dr. Ledger Ludwik Zamenhof in 1887) receives special attention. We read about the existences of the ‘Universala Esperanto-Asocio’ in all the principal cities of the world, that there are over one hundred periodicals currently published in this language and that many classics have been translated into it too. The political possibilities of an IAL are briefly discussed. Umberto Eco closes this erudite book with this fantastic hope. “Thus the legacy that he (Adam) has left to all his sons and daughters is the task of winning for themselves the full and reconciled mastery of the Tower of Babel.”

Now, I may assert like a reactionary¹ that this “full and reconciled mastery of the Tower of Babel” is beyond the domains of all constructive possibilities (including

¹One who believes that the primal languages are revelations.

the possibilities of all the rational sciences after ALL finite historical times), because it involves the knowledge of the Totality of the Infinite set of ALL Sounds and Silences. So we come once again back to mysticism, religion (*religāre*) and the vast primordial tradition that asserts in no uncertain terms the inevitability of the Divine Apocalyptic Consummation when the Messiah the Final Avatar of the Primal Word (The Maiterya Buddha or Kalki or Mehdi) would once again establish the Divine Kingdoms of Infinite Perfection. Then perhaps we would all become meta-polyglots² like the sages and apostles of antiquity and hear the sacred elucidations of Dakshinamoorthy's Divine Silence.

Talking about Silence I must hasten to add that this book is about the signs of the written languages and not the spoken ones. There is a strange omission here. I may insinuate on the possibilities of semiotically notating the Silences for more possible data and written debates.

To neophytes and masters of the semiotic Faith and Temple this book is a labyrinth mine of data leading to other data-banks via. the bibliography so on ad absurdum ad infinitum! They would acquire this treasure of information at all costs. Recommended to amateur sesquipedalians too! The ordinary(!) reader may enjoy the wicked pleasure of having read many books which they would never ever see! If you would like to drop the names of books without dropping the books themselves you surely know that Umberto Eco is the man for you.

Now may I, a mere pidgin-scholar dare to make some scholarly comments. The neo-platonists surely had a connection with the Vedic-lore. Zero and the decimal system and their profound influence on all combinatorial tactics of these scholars

²It is reported that Himalayan Yogis speak a meta-language the "Sandhya Bhasha".

deserved at least a passing reference. Perhaps Euclid should have been acknowledged for the primitive “primitive” used profusely in the book.

I mention these things because Umberto Eco talks about “academic fairness” (ie., who published before whom?) in the introduction. May I also venture to ask for a positivist reason for this neo-taboo. Again, we have Eco showing academic fairness to Derrida another icon of the semiotic Temple “the Tower of Babel (· · ·) exhibits an incompleteness even an impossibility of completing (· · ·). (Derrida 1980: 203).” (p.342). Pardon me erudite ones: this is trivial and obvious to commonsense and I am not going to acknowledge anybody for repeating this new(!) idea.

Umberto Eco uses the words ‘myth’ and ‘counter-myth’ as if they are positive and negative numbers to reveal his neutral positivist stand (stance) on all matters!

Before I close if I don’t glorify Umberto Eco the great novelist I may be misunderstood. His “Foucault’s Pendulum” (perhaps one of the most brilliant novels ever written) ends with the narrator Casaubon ruminating thus.

“It makes no difference whether I write or not. They will look for other meanings even in my silence. That’s how they are. Blind to revelation. Malkhut is Malkhut, and that’s that.

But try telling Them. They of little faith.

So I might as well stay here, wait, and look at the hill.

It’s so beautiful.”

Now, I cannot fathom how Casaubon can spend all his time rummaging Eco’s personal ‘Bibliotheca Semiologica Curiosa, Lunatica, Magica et Pneumatica’ to create this book. What about the beautiful hill going waste without being looked

at.

I hope that I have not desecrated the resplendent icon of the semiotic Temple attired in robes of tenacious erudition. I may be declared 'non malus sed amens' not guilty but insane like Postal was at the Inquisition. Laus Deo! Altum Silentium! Om Shanthi Shanthi Shanthi!³

³Source: Ancient hearsay and not T.S.Eliot.