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The good of a book lies in its being read. A book is made up of signs that speak of other signs, which in their turn speak of things. Without an eye to read them, a book contains signs that produce no concepts; therefore it is dumb.

— Umberto Eco (1932–2016), *The Name of the Rose* (1983)

The 1985 English translation of late semiotician Umberto Eco's novel *The Name of the Rose* turned it into an overnight international bestseller. In 1986, a film based on the novel and directed by Jean-Jacques Annaud became a box office hit. The reason for the unexpected success of the novel was, in part, the fact that it tapped into a late twentieth-century reurgence of interest in religious legend, mystery, and symbolism. The story takes place in a cloistered medieval monastery where monks are being murdered by a serial killer living among them. The hero who investigates the crimes is a learned Franciscan monk named William of Baskerville — a name that is transparently allusive of the fictional detective Sherlock Holmes and the dark and ominous detective tale in which Holmes is the protagonist, *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902). The monk solves the crimes in the same manner and style as Sherlock Holmes, interpreting the “signs” left by the killer at each crime scene.

In 2003, *The Da Vinci Code*, written by Dan Brown, became a bestseller and pop culture phenomenon, including a blockbuster movie in 2006.