Eco’s Semiotic Narrative of  

*The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana*

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Umberto Eco (1932 – 2016), a well-known scholarly writer in Western academic circles, known as philosopher, historian and aesthetician, is the world’s celebrated Semiotics authority. Mainly engaged in the study of law and history in his early years, he is not only proficient in medieval history and literature, but also embarked deeply on popular culture, noted as one of the world’s most learned men and prestigious public intellectuals. Apart from a large number of semiotics works, he published a lot of novels and essays. *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana* (2005, Translated from Italia version *La Misteriosa Fiammadella Regina Loana*, 2004) is his fifth of six remarkable novels, in which Eco carried on his frequently employed semiotic narrative strategy, making it one of his encyclopedic works which combines with creation and theory in his novel series.

I. Overview of *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana*

Unlike his previous novels, Eco sets the background of this novel in Italian eventful period around the Second World War. The novel title, *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana*, stems from a very famous American comic book—*Tim Taylor’s Lucky*, which recalls the memory of protagonist of the novel. The comic book mainly tells the adventurous stories of the orphan Tim Taylor and his friends’ traveling around the world, and *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana* is part of it. Loana is the queen
of a mysterious Heart-Africa kingdom, and possesses a mysterious flame which can make people immortal. So with this magic power, she, though more than two thousand years old, still stays young and beautiful, and keeps the old kingdom under her regime. Besides, with the power of the mysterious flame she brings her lover, killed and petrified by her, back to life from death. The naming of the novel is also owing to Eco’s deep affection for comic book when he was a kid. The same feelings are endowed with protagonist Yambo, who, in the face of childhood, “when feeling the strange sensation of recognizing something of his past, thinks of that sensation as a sort of flame” [1]. Flame holds a position as a narrative element to make the protagonist recollect his teenage memories, and also acts as another theme which pervades through the whole story of the protagonist’s pursuit of his loved girl.

The novel mainly tells the story of protagonist Yambo Bodoni, a nearly 60-years old Italy ancient books bookseller who suffers a sudden coma, which causes amnesia in 1991, and from then on, he has lost the memory of everything related to his personal experience. “Though having encyclopedic memory to the outside world, he has little memory about his own life and experiences.” [2] With the suggestion of his wife Paola and friends, he returns to his hometown Solara in the hope of awakening his memories through familiar life scenes and objects once-used of his childhood. So, he starts an arduous journey of seeking memories and remolding himself. In his hometown, exposed to his familiar life scenes, after reading all collected books and materials, related to his past in his grandfather’s study room and attic, he gradually restores the memory of his childhood, adolescence, and eventually all the memories. He successfully rediscovers and reconstructs his self.

The novel text gradually unfolds from such three levels as the protagonist’s loss, seeking and restoring of memories, which indirectly reveals the Italian people’s cultural life and anti-fascist movement in 1930s–40s, and is also interspersed with Yambo’s love life in his youth. With the going-on of the memory-seeking, the novel also depicts Yambo’s early love and growing experience, and meanwhile represents the historical, cultural and political conditions of Italy around the Second World War. Similar to Eco’s previous novels, The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana adopted both traditional narratives and the innovative discourse expressions, with the knowledge of history, literature, culture etc. involved in his bizarre mysterious narration.

As a scholarly writer, Eco used to switching freely between his double identities: scholar and writer, and pushes the novel creation and theory research
forward together, with the theory providing guidance and reference for novel creation, and the novel creation being in the position of verification for theory studies. Therefore, in a sense, Eco's novels "can be wholly viewed as the popular version of his profound theories, they themselves are the carriers which convey the author's concepts and theories, acting as the semiotic systems of semiotic system, and hermeneutics of hermeneutics". "Eco's move from semiotic theory to fiction represents a step forward, not a betrayal of 'pure' theory but, rather, a fascinating experiment combining theory with practice that could have been successfully achieved by very few academic thinkers of his generation." "The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana" is another case in point that Eco puts his semiotics theory into practice after his other novels, such as "Il nome della rosa" (1980; English translation: The Name of the Rose, 1983) and "Il pendolo di Foucault" (1988; English translation: Foucault’s Pendulum, 1989), with rich semiotic information, which interpret Eco's heavy and complicated semiotics theory to its potential.

II. Semiotic System in the Novel's Semiotic Narrative

To decode the complicated combination of theory and practice, firstly the sign system of the novel's semiotic narrative needs to be examined. In "The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana", Eco has implanted various types of signs, such as images, popular culture, knowledge codes and so on, which make the text full of the signifier and the signified, mixed true with false.

The first type to note is the image signs, distributed in the plots of the novel, which are the most important semiotic concept in the semiotic narrative of Eco's novel; each of Eco's novels has a leading image sign, such as "Rose" in "The Name of the Rose", "Fire" in "Baudolino" (2000). Eco employs two impressive image signs in "The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana", one of which is "Fog". Every time the protagonist's memory suffers a blind spot, he will find himself lost in the fog with numerous verses and quoted passages of "Fog" in his mind. What’s more, from the beginning large sections of "Fog" are cited, and as the plot goes on, the protagonist wakes up, reflects upon his life in the fog and restores his memory at the end of the novel. "Fog" image is exerted incisively and vividly throughout the whole novel. And Eco refers to the fog: "I was born in the fog, my memory is full of foggy visions, and I adore fog (to such an extent that I collected an anthology of literary pages about fog, from Homer to our time); fog is an inevitable metaphor for the loss of memory." As to the novel, born in a foggy zone, Yambo is also fascinated by fog
and collects every piece of writings about "Fog" from poems, essays and novels. The other important image sign is "mysterious flame", another theme image corresponding to "Fog". When a familiar scene or subject touches Yambo's nerve, it appears in a form of a sensation, serving as the catalytic to awaken Yambo's original memory. The Image of "mysterious flame" appears repeatedly, from the first time, when he inadvertently sings a love song and meanwhile feels the sensation of heart, to the occasion when he hears the crowing of owl or sets foot in his parent's bedroom, to the occasion when Yambo thoroughly realizes the meaning of the flame in another coma. Flame becomes another quite important image sign throughout the novel. There are also some other image signs in this novel, such as "Rose", which appear in Chapter 14, with three roses respectively signifying Lila, Paola, Sibila and symbolizing women and love. These image signs, implicitly or explicitly, advance the novel's semiotic narrative forward.

The second type is the popular culture sign, which run through the journey to Yambo's seeking memory. In Yambo's journey of seeking memory, Eco employs a series of signs, such as series of books, newspaper and magazines, painting and stamp, caricatures and photo albums, radio, gramophone, music records etc., which can be found in his homeland especially in his grandfather's study room and attic, manifest popular culture of Italian Mussolini period in the 1930s-40s and its characteristics. These popular culture signs constitute a transverse-combination of text semiotic system which motivates the plot development. In addition, there are also some signs associated with individual life and emotional imprint, each with its particular signifying function and an unusual story behind, associated with a patch of extraordinary memories, such as cigarette case, rouge box, tin frog, teddy bear, castor oil bottle and cards etc. Eco scatters these fragments in the text, associated with each other, and reveals their particular significance for the whole era and meanwhile for Yambo's recollection of memories.

The third type is knowledge code sign, which run through the passage in Yambo's recovery of memories. Diversified knowledge is the indispensable element in Eco's novel and knowledge composes a huge sign coding system. Knowledge, as the conceptualized existence based on social conventions and used for signs communication, in a certain context, will be converted to a system of signified codes when it signifies other things through the recipient's feeling. In Eco's "Code Theory", codes, as a kind of semiotics signified system, have their own compound rules, which "forecast the communication environment corresponding to a variety of
interpretations” [6]. In the novel, the code signs consist of literature, history, geography, science, and other kinds of knowledge. In particular, popular knowledge code signs of Italian Mussolini period played a vital role, for they constitute the cultural overview of that era and created an effective environmental system for the recovery of Yambo’s memories.

Eco has embarked on semiotics at a young age and published a series of pioneering semiotics works. In his most famous book *A Theory of Semiotics* (1975), he comprehensively expounded his basic theory of semiotics. In his view, “A sign is everything which can be taken as significantly substituting for something else. This something else does not necessarily have to exist or to actually be somewhere at the moment in which a sign stands in for it” [7]. In other words, he emphasizes neither the overt nor covert of a sign and it can be an entity or an imagined figment. On condition that a sign can generate effect or achieve some particular purpose after being received, it is meaningful. This is the reason why the above mentioned signs crisscross and coexist with each other. Based on this, Eco suggested that semiotics should adventure in practice, and his semiotic theory “model”—encyclopedic labyrinth should be established, which breeds the blueprint of his novel creation.

Based on the novel creation blueprint of his semiotics theory, Eco makes *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana* a characteristic sign labyrinth composed of crisscrossed signs with setting of the types of signs mentioned above. In Eco’s semiotic theory system, there are three types of sign labyrinth: Greek Minotaur Labyrinth, Baroque Maze Irgarden and Modern Rootstock-style Labyrinth. Greek Minotaur Labyrinth is linear, but get complex on parts of exit and center; Irgarden resembles arborescence, full of fork and dead end, but through repeated trial and error, an exit can be approached; Modern Labyrinth is like a network, crisscrosses combined by different nodes and forming a network, a structure which inside and outside are thoroughly intangible. Modern Labyrinth is of multiple interpretations with regulation but no ends, with truth and illusion intermingled. Eco conceives the construction process of Modern Labyrinth as the production process of signs, and renamed it “Encyclopedic Labyrinth”, and he assumes that human culture also shows the same labyrinth structure.

In *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana*, numerous signs are associated and crisscrossed with each other, forming a mutually interpretative labyrinth network without ends, which is the Modern Labyrinth (Like Rootstock-Style Labyrinth). And the attic and study of Yambo’s grandfather are the striking examples of this
rootstock labyrinth in the novel. Thus various signs promise the clues for the protagonist to cognize, to think and eventually find the way out of the labyrinth.

III. Interpretation System in the Novel’s Semiotic Narrative

Eco is skillful in setting signs and weaving signs labyrinth in the novel. However, the most striking feature of the signs labyrinth is that although every sign has its signified respectively, the target it signifies is not so obvious that other signs related to it have to be resorted to in order to interpret it. This characteristic manifested the basic principles of sign vacancy in the semiotics. Eco skillfully set the sign vacancy in the sign labyrinths of the novel. “Sign is a vacancy up for people to fill in by conjecture and presupposition.” Eco believes, “[O]ne thing can replace another, can be designated a sign. During the process of replacement, ‘meaning’ plays an important role, the essence of which is ‘interpretation’. In other words, interpretation makes what the signs to be and also contributes to the concepts’ becoming of sings.” That is to say, the signs Eco sets in his novel cannot replace facts, but possess the function to indicate, which justifies the interpretation.

Therefore, to have a full understanding of the signs labyrinth of The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana, we have to interpret its signs system, and to achieve this we need further construct an interpretation system centered on the text and plot of the novel, and the coexistence of the two sets of systems will jointly enhance the production of text signification.

In order to figure out the sign vacancies successfully interpret the signified of the signs in the text, Eco endows other signs with the function of “Interpretant”, which “undertake various function for signs, such as carrier, index, definition, affective association and denotation etc., and also in accordance with the denotation and connotation of other sign carriers, namely used for the interpretation of arbitrary signs” [10]. The concept “Interpretant”, originating from C. S. Peirce, is brought into the signs hermeneutic theory by Eco, and Eco further elaborates its functional process. “In order to establish what the interpretant of a sign is, it is necessary to name it by means of another sign which in turn has another interpretant to be named by another sign and so on.” Therefore, the interpreting process of a sign will trigger meaning construction of more signs. Eco designates this process of interpretation as “encyclopedic interpretation model”. The process of unlimited semiosis, a derivate from the Interpretant, not only offers reasonable interpretation for sign signification, but itself adequately. In this way, the signified signification of
various signs can be successively interpreted, following the unfolding of novel plot.

So, how does Eco properly realize the operation of the system of signs interpretation? Firstly, Eco tactfully molds a sign-interpretation subject, the protagonist Yambo—an amnesic patient, who is of rich knowledge and inferential capability, to decipher the signs labyrinth. At the opening of the novel, Yambo gets amnesia after a coma. When he wakes up, the doctor informs him that he has lost the Episodic Memory, which indicates that his ability of expression on episodic or scenarios declines or even vanishes, which lays him on the verge of aphasia. This kind of memory involves human's closely related events most familiar to him. However, the Implicit Memory, a kind of unconscious memories, is kept well, which can help people conduct a normal life such as shaved, brushing teeth, driving and so on. And more important, his Semantic Memory stays intact, and is even strengthened because of the loss of the Episodic Memory. So Yambo can remember everything he learned and all the books he read, which makes the knowledge in his brain yield unusual brilliance. In two medical tests, his talent, displayed in reciting poem and dictating Napoleon’s history at an alarming rate, surprises the doctors, who name him an encyclopedia. Moreover, Yambo is capable of writing lyrical prose with in-depth philosophy and making an appraisal of precious paintings. Since then knowledge becomes himself. The above characters shape Eco’s protagonist as another Sherlock Holmes who possesses rich knowledge and acute inferential capability.

Secondly, Eco skillfully employs Abduction, traditional inferential approach, means of predictive inference for an event or phenomenon. As a theoretic term formally put forward by Peirce, it is absorbed and applied to the system of sign hermeneutics by Eco. He maintains that “inferential processes (mainly under the form of Peircean abduction) stand at the basis of every semiotic phenomenon” [12]. Sign itself contains the nature of inference, which is the basic principle of Abduction. In Eco’s viewpoint, the advantage of Abduction relies on the assumption of inference and targeted inspection to construct such a circuitously reciprocating process as prediction, test and reexamination to make the association between things ascertained, the sign vacancies simultaneously filled in, the signs interpreted and the meanings generated. Abduction bears close resemblance to the Sherlock Holmes’ inferential approach. American semioticians Thomas A. Sebeok and Jean Umiker-Sebeok have exquisitely analyzed the relationship between the detective approach of Sherlock Holmes and the semiotic theory of modern semiotician, Peirce, after which they point out, “The approach Holmes used is not a deductive approach in the strict
logic sense, but a special inferential approach that Peirce called Abduction. " [13] As is known to all, the observation and examination of unnoticeable details are basis of Holmes’ inferential approach. According to Peircean logic system, Holmes’ approach of observation and examination itself is a form of Abduction. Based on the results of his observation and examination, Holmes carries on his speculation, assumption and inference, the essence of which is the employment of signs. The process of solving a criminal case is just as sign interpretation. In order to make sense of signs, one has to resort to inference and conjecture, with the help of intuition and meanwhile association with various signs.

Eco thinks highly of Peirce, whose theory of Abduction applied in the criminal case detection impresses him a lot. Abduction, the traces of which can be found in Eco’s numerous novels, is a universal approach used by Eco’s protagonists inclusive of William in The Name of the Rose, who performs the abduction skillfully. Like The Name of the Rose and Foucault’s Pendulum, the core of The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana rests on detective stories of Sherlock Holmes’ Style. The process of the protagonist seeking memory is actually a process of cyclic inference continued by prediction, inspection, reprediction, finally to the memory labyrinth exit. Thus, Yambo’s memory journey to search truth and remold self is performed to an intricate detective case dramas. In the novel, many memory fragments flashing in Yambo’s mind and the objects relevant to his memories (signs) are clues for him to carry on the Abduction. Yambo’s exploration for the connection between signs and memories, signs and human, his retrospection for life scenes in homeland and his application of diachronic examination and comparative approaches to establish the association of cultural codes with the process of his growing up reveal the trace of his employment of Abduction. In the novel, Yambo’s personal life and Italian history during The Second World War fused with the detective story of aged Yambo’s memory-searching journey, to piece together a person’s youth period in a special historical context. The process of Yambo’s continuous interpretation of signs, seeking memory and the eventual self-remolding adequately proves what kind of talent Eco has and how he, as a semiotic novelist, consummately fulfills the sign-hermeneutics experiment with the help of extensive knowledge background and complicated signs inference.

IV. Theme and Significance of the Novel’s Semiotic Narrative

The interpretation of signs is also a continuous process of meaning production. With the symbiotic system signs and the related interpretation, Eco constructs the
sign labyrinth in the novel to reveal themes and convey the meanings, which reflects his unique view of history and life.

4.1 Rereading of History in Self-remolding and History-writing

Through the arrangement and interpretation of signs, Eco tells an old man’s self remolding story through a long journey of memory recovery, with hesitations and sorrow. In retrospect, the protagonist reexperiences the childhood dream and remorse, the sweet and bitter of first love, the depression and sadness of losing his mentor and the hope and melancholy after war, after which he eventually awakens the memory and remolds himself. The novel can be considered as a memoir for the twentieth century intellectuals and a personal soul history about memory, amnesia and rediscovery. And simultaneously, it is also an Italian history recorded The Second World War, which explores the reactions of a country, a society, a nation or the public. In this limited historical period, Eco restores a past world through the encoding and interpretation of various signs, and reexamines the Italian history during The Second World War.

The various plots of the novel, such as the little Yambo’s unexpectedly writing a composition to praise fascism and the desire to join the army to devote himself to Fascism, Yambo’s grandfather’s drinking diarrhea-causing castor oil under the persecution of fascism, Yambo’s good friend Gragnola’s suicide after killing German soldiers, etc., along with hundreds of comic books, stamps, music records, magazines and book covers, represent Eco’s unique experience and his understanding of the subtle relationship between self and history as well as memory and books by interweaving the Italian fascist history with the impressive memories of the protagonist’s childhood, teenage and youth. “It is a retrospect to the 20th-century Italy, and even Eco’s dissimulated autobiography.” [14] Eco referred to his childhood when interview by The Guardian. “Before 10 years old, the education I received at school was fascist. They infused me with a lot of conspiracy theories, such as the British, Jews and capitalist’s conspiring to make Italian poverty-stricken. It is a Hitler’s mark.” [15] Thus, The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana, a novel mostly recognized as closest to Eco’s life story and embodying Eco’s elderly-time thoughts, can be called a semi-autobiographical novel. Through tracing and exploring the protagonist’s life experience in the past, Eco actually represents his own growing experience and inner world and recalls his sweet-bitter youth time.

Eco constructs a spiritual biography relating not only to himself but also to a generation in Italy through the protagonist’s searching and remolding himself along
with his remorse feeling and melancholy memory. In the novel, Eco once more penetrates into the core of history to rethink it from a personally-experienced angle and human’s reactions in the ups and downs of history, which can actually be viewed as a new understanding and evaluation of history.

4.2 The Ideology in Popular Culture and History Field

The novel, when telling about the protagonist’s memory-recovery journey and impressive rethinking of history, is also accommodated with Italian popular culture carnivals in the 1930s - 1940s. The process of the protagonist’s searching for the self, mainly unfolds around the introductions of parcels of books, description of sets of paintings, narrations of pieces of songs and the retracing and studying of textbooks, notebooks of each period, which historically form the Italian cultural panorama of that era and portray an Italian popular culture history during the period of The Second World War.

As is well known, Eco’s semiotics taking in ideas from many other semiotics schools, includes a wide range of studies, both semiotic theories, a history of philosophical thoughts, and the close analysis on cultural phenomenon such as films, music, paintings and so on. Moreover, Eco also points out that: “Signs are associated with specific culture-ideology, and each art form of the sign-structure of a particular time reveals the approaches of ‘reality observation’ in the science or culture at that time.” [16] Thus, Eco lays emphasis on the “Dimension of History” in the process of sign interpretation by mainly basing his theory on culture interpretation and regarding semiotics as a logic theory of culture study, and maintains: “(i) the whole of culture must be studied as a semiotic phenomenon; (ii) all aspects of a culture can be studied as the contents of a semiotic activity.” [17] So Eco’s semiotic theory is entitled “Culture Logics” or “Historic Semiotics”. The signs of culture and history in the semiotic narrative of The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana are undoubtedly a specific evidence of Eco’s “Culture Logics” or “Historic Semiotics”.

M. M. Baxtnh (1895 - 1975) once pointed out that “signs not only exist as a part of reality, but also reflect and refract another reality” [18]. That is to say, a fictitious real-space exists, which integrates society, history, culture, politics, etc. together and exerts an overwhelming advantage over the signs inside space. Eco assumes that the meaning production of signs is confined to various conventions of history and society, namely cultural field confinement. In The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana, Italy during The Second World War is the culture field; Eco inspects
the society and popular culture in that particular time from the dual perspectives of a semiotician and novelist. Various cultural signs, such as textbooks, comics, etc., are endowed with the ideological characteristic of that special time, and regarded as the malformed and distorted media of reality in that particular ideology. The being of these signs reflects the duality of historic narrative and embodies original purpose of displaying the realistic issues of Italy by resorting to the mass history. The remolding of historic events and figures is attributed to Eco’s public intellectual romanticism affection for history; there exist a variety of ways to interpret history, but its authenticity is always worth suspecting and reflecting on, which essentially illustrates that _The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana_ remains to be an effort to constantly explore the maze with the involvement of history, truths and narrative possibilities, since his first novel, _The Name of the Rose._

4.3 The Signification Inspection of Ultimate Meaning and Uncertainty

_The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana_ may be seemingly a simple story of self-remolding, but in essence it is Eco’s continuous exercise of the semiotic theory in the hope of calling on people to face up to those fracture and otherness in history closely related to their lives. In addition, the uncertainty of meaning has been his deep concern for many years.

Uncertainty is a hot topic in the contemporary Western academics and regards as the pursued objectives and direct target of literature or art creation of the postmodern times. Eco once said that the ambiguity of human survival conditions caused by uncertainty, “has become a clear target of works, as well as a value which has to be realized in preference to others values” [19].

Uncertainty is manifested in _The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana_ in many ways. Firstly, it is embodied in the identity of the unreliable narrator Yambo. In the novel, Yambo recovered all his memories in another coma, before which he can hardly make sense whether he is living or dead, awake or sleep; but his recovered memories are of ambiguity, for even he himself could barely figure out whether he is dreaming or recalling, and he is not certain what he can recollect is his past or just his illusion. He still asked himself, “If anything exists outside of me it is a parallel universe in which who knows what is happening or has happened.” [20] Secondly, it leaves trace in the process of Yambo’s self remolding. Yambo deconstructed his original self and rebuilds the new identity through memory seeking, but this new self is obviously not what he initially intends to find. The uncertainty of this reconstruction sufficiently demonstrates the helplessness, which repeatedly appears in
postmodern context in which the meanings are deconstructed, spirit occupied by nothing and certainty impossible to be reconstructed. Thirdly, it comes to the end of the novel. For not seeing the face of his first-love girl Lila, he is trapped in the continuous searching and questioning of her authenticity, which essentially deconstructs his previous self-construction. So the ending and signification of the novel is suspended, and Yambo’s previously detective-type self-remolding is also deconstructed, making the novel characterized as the “Deconstructive Anti-Detective Novel”, which frustrates the readers’ vision of expectation and represents the feature of intangibility and uncertainty in the postmodern world.

As regard to the uncertainty, Eco has a reflection on it from the perspective of his semiotics. “The chaotic nature of the world is a cross point between the Middle Ages and the postmodern, and also the essence of the world, so he called for an open, connective and comprehensive way of thinking in response to the irrational world.” In the novel, the suspension of ultimate meaning in terms of Yambo’s memory seeking and self-remolding can be viewed as an embodiment of his so-called open, associative and comprehensive way of thinking and the display of the features of Eco’s “Open Work”. On the other hand, the suspension of meaning is also the beginning of another wonderful signs inferential process, and new correlative signs will be found, with the previous established connections improved or corrected. Thus, Yambo’s world will be full of infinite possibilities once more owing to the new reconstruction of values and significance.

In this way, through the semiotic narrative of the novel, Eco equals the meaning construction of history as the interpretation of signs. The process is full of abundant uncertainties, which indicates his questioning on the issues of history presentation. The critical returning to history and politics parallels with world view embodied in the themes of his novel. It seems to Eco that there is no sense in discussing the historical authenticity, and what matters is that history can endow the past events with sense, which explains Eco’s efforts in making a balance between history and literary writings by the employment of his semiotic narrative.

V. Conclusion

*The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana* typically characterizes Eco’s postmodernism style of novel creation by the combination of theory and literature practice, which once again highlights Eco’s skillful technique of his semiotic narrative exercised in his novel. The title itself is of infinite semiotic characteristics, implying
the openness text as well as rich sign connotations of the relationship between signifier and signified in a special cultural context. Structurally, the protagonist’s narration of his or others’ experience with specific signs continuously fill up the sign vacancies, which embodies the basic theories of Eco’s semiotics; and the arrangement of plots conforms to the principles of Eco’s sign hermeneutics, where the success of final self-remolding is actually an establishment process of memory integrity through correlative interpretations of memory fragments; the themes of the novel further specify Eco’s historic semiotic theory, through which Eco intends to represent, interpret and reconstruct history in semiotic narratives. Furthermore, all the signs throughout the novel, including symbolic image signs and code signs of interpretation, are the implied practices of his semiotic theory, which greatly enriches Eco’s semiotic narrative. Therefore, The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana, as another masterpiece of Eco’s novels combining semiotics theory with novel creation, conveys various cultural elements and ideological connotation both in content and forms. This novel is such a perfect work that Eco, as a scholar novelist, interlaces literature, culture, history and many other areas, to sufficiently display the distinct characteristics of his novels and his unique academic writing-style. It once again confirms Eco’s worship and pursuit for the Italo Calvino’s “Open Encyclopedia”.

Notes:
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[4] Peter Bondanella. Umberto Eco and the Open Text: Semiotics, Fiction, Popular Culture. London: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 14.
[5] Li Youzheng. Introduction to Theoretical Semiotics. Beijing: China Renmin University Press, 2006, p. 581.
[7] [11] [17] Umberto Eco. A Theory of Semiotics. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976, p. 7, p. 68, p. 22.
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