
CONSTANTIA FRAKTUR

REVIEWS GARAMOND SANSSERIF'S NEW NOVEL

THE NAME OF THE NAME

This exciting murder-mystery will appeal to post-structuralist post-modernist meta-theorists (and possibly no-one else).

A group of theoretical meta-semioticians is attending a week-long conference on theoretical meta-semiotics in an isolated conference centre in the mountains of northern Iceland, which has been cut off from the world by a cloud of ash from a volcanic eruption.

Semioticians will love the plethora of signs and symbols: what is the significance of the model troll hanging in the entrance hall? Phoneticians will love the narrow transcriptions of Icelandic place names: do their variant pronunciations provide a clue to the murderer? Scholars of exotic languages will love the untranslated quotes from the Icelandic sagas: were the semioticians just too clever for their own good? Typographers will love the meanings coded in the fonts: why is the conference programme printed in **gothic**?

The action opens on the first day of the conference. The opening plenary speaker has finished his talk with the sentence: "So, if *rose* is the name of the ROSE, what is the name of the name of the ROSE?". Some time later, he is found dead at the foot of the cliff outside the conference centre, partly covered in volcanic ash. An accident? Suicide? Murder?

It begins to look like murder, because, in the course of the following six days, six more speakers die. A second speaker chokes on a piece of blood pudding. A third is found drowned with his head in a bowl of alphabet soup. A fourth has been hit on the head with a 500-page best-selling Italian novel. A fifth dies clutching a piece of paper containing the words *Σκοπιός* and *sporðdreki*. A sixth suffocates in a nearby factory for drying fermented shark meat. On the seventh day the final speaker tries to answer the meta-logical question posed in the opening plenary.

He has begun to set up a new logical formalism:

Let *rose* be the name of the **ROSE**
[where **ROSE** is a placeholder category term for all roses]
then let <*rose*> be the name of *rose*
[that is, the name of the name of the **ROSE**].
then let <<*rose*>> be the name of the name of the name of the **ROSE**.

He has just posed the question

But what then is the meaning of <<<*rose*>>>?

when he is interrupted by an Italian colleague who claims to have seen a crucial logical error in his typography. He stumbles out of the lecture room, and shortly afterwards is found dead: he has apparently been trying to eat his own lecture notes. A cynical British colleague – quoting Francis Bacon – comments:

“Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested.”

Surely this must be suicide? Was he humiliated by his meta-logical error? Had he been driven mad by the reflexivity of his own thinking?

But wait! A forensic linguist called Arial Baskerville discovers important clues. Is it a coincidence that all the speakers have parodied intertextual references in the work of a famous professor of semiotics? The deaths all seem to follow predictions in his well-known novel about a bunch of Italian monks.

But wait! Who is Arial? Is she really a theoretical meta-semiotician? She does not know how to pronounce (or spell) the name *Karl Saunders Pierce*. She is not on the list of invited participants. And why is her name tag printed in two different fonts: **Arial** and **Baskerville**?

Does the whole plot rest on the most awful pun in the history of post-structuralist post-modernist meta-theoretical novels? Perhaps **Arial** is not a **CHARACTER** in the discourse of the novel, but only a string of **[[characters]]** in the text of the novel?

To reveal more would spoil the book for readers. Read it for yourself and see if the mystery is solved before the approaching lava stream destroys the conference centre – and all the evidence – for ever.

Arial looks for clues in
the shark meat factory ...

