

# DAN BROWN'S ANGELS AND DEMONS: A NARRATIVE OR PROCEDURE TEXT?

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*Abstract: This essay attempts to discuss the fallacies of a genre based classification of texts. It will stress the point that genres are not fixed and pre-given forms by thinking of texts as performances of genre rather than reproductions of a class to which they belong, and by following Austin's perlocutionary act in stressing the fact that the writer's intended locutionary act might not be the same with the reader's perlocutionary act. If, after reading this essay, the reader is willing not to take for granted that such a text as Angels and Demons can be nothing else but a narrative, it will have served its purpose.*

*Key words: perlocutionary act, terroristic situational transfer, defamiliarization*

## INTRODUCTION

### A. Speech Acts and Genre Instability

Austin stressed that every speech act combines three simultaneous acts, a *locutionary act*, an act of representing something that is going on in the world — for example, referring to 'this woman' in a wedding vow of 'I take this woman to be my lawful, wedded wife,'

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## INTRODUCTION

### A. Speech Acts and Genre Instability

Austin stressed that every speech act combines three simultaneous acts, a *locutionary act*, an act of representing something that is going on in the world — for example, referring to 'this woman' in a wedding vow of 'I take this woman to be my lawful, wedded wife,' and predicating of her that she is the speaker's lawful, wedded wife — an *illocutionary act*, that is, the performance of a communicative act such as promising to marry 'this woman,' and a perlocutionary act, the causing of an effect on the hearer (Cited in Traugott & Pratt 1980: 229 – 232). Speech act theory has become widely applied in pragmatics, the study of language in use (see for example, Blum-Kolka 1997), but unfortunately most pragmaticians neglect the *perlocutionary act*. This is a pity because there clearly may be a difference between the intended and the actual effect of a speech act. There is a difference between the 'illocutionary act' — what the speech act is trying to do, for example, to *promise* — and the 'perlocutionary act' — the effect of the speech act, for example, to *convince*. If the addressees know that — say, I am a playboy of some sort — they are not going to be convinced about my marriage vow of 'I take this woman to be my lawful, wedded wife.' This essay will demonstrate how the perlocutionary effect of readers may differ from the intended illocutionary act of such a narrative as *Angels and Demons*. What the writer might have intended is to *entertain*, but the reader might read it as a *procedure*, for instance. Consequently the reader might not see the text in terms of such a narrative structure as – incentive moment, rising action and complication, climax, falling action, and resolution. Instead he or she might read *Angels and Demons* as a procedure with a structure of – goal, tip 1, tip 2, etc.

**B. *Angels and Demons*: 'Hot Tips' For Terrorism**

The illocutionary force of *Angel and Demons* would for many people probably be 'to entertain the viewer, but for others the perlocutionary impact could possibly be 'hot tips' or a 'procedure' for terrorism. This is a perfect illustration of the point that “Texts and genres exist in unstable relation” (Wardoyo 2009: 272).

Movie plots may be fictional, but they nevertheless represent what goes on in the real world. Hence some may read them as fact rather than fiction. Their 'mythical' nature, their remove from contemporary realism, allows them to represent key themes relevant to a wide range of contemporary social practices. In terrorism movies, for instance, the terrorist represents a scenario design very familiar to anybody dreaming of terror attacks to happen against some hegemonic power. Such a latent dream reemerges from time to time. In March 2011, after long silence, Indonesia was shocked again by a spate of parcel bombs sent at first to public figures but then spread to various citizens just to arouse some sort of panic. The fact that we have dreamt of such a destructive event, that everyone without exception has secretly dreamt of it — because no one can avoid dreaming of the destruction of any system that has become all the stronger as it approaches perfection or omnipotence — is actually unacceptable to anybody's moral conscience. Yet it is a fact, and one which can indeed be measured by the emotive violence of all that is shown in such a film as *Angels and Demons*. When the Roman Catholic Church mourned the death of the Pope in Rome. Vatican City prepared for the College of Cardinals' papal conclave to select the next Pope. Camerlengo Patrick McKenna, a papal court official, had the secret ambition of becoming the Pope but the long established tradition made it impossible for him to be a nominee. The Camerlengo in Picture 1 is a perfect illustration of Jean Baudrillard's prediction “...when there is such a formidable condensation of all functions in the technocratic machinery, and when no alternative form of thinking

is allowed, what other way is there but *a terroristic situational transfer?*” (Baudrillard 2002: 8- 9).

What happens next in the movie is an unraveling of the Camerlengo's demonstration of 'a procedure' for a well-planned terrorist attack against the Church. The generic structure would run like the following.



Picture 1:

Camerlengo Patrick McKenna

([http://images.allmoviephoto.com/2009\\_Angels\\_and\\_Demons/2009\\_angels\\_and\\_demons\\_015.jpg](http://images.allmoviephoto.com/2009_Angels_and_Demons/2009_angels_and_demons_015.jpg))

**Goal:** How to conduct a *terroristic situational transfer*

**Tip 1:** Come up with a historically solid organization.

The Camerlengo signals the threat of the Illuminati, a 400-year old, underground secret society, which was persecuted by the Church in the past. This first step helps the credibility of the threat as it has a long historical record behind it.

**Tip 2:** Choose an organization with global associations.

Just like Indonesia's main jihadist group, Jemaah Islamiya and its splinter group Tanzim Quaedat al-Jihad, which have a well-established global network, the choice of the Illuminati by the Camerlengo as cover organization is very smart since this

organization has global associations. Historically, it refers specifically to the Bavarian Illuminati, an Enlightenment-era secret society founded on May 1, 1776. In modern times it is also used to refer to a purported conspiratorial organization which acts as a shadowy "power behind the throne", allegedly controlling world affairs through present day governments and corporations, usually as a modern incarnation or continuation of the Bavarian Illuminati. Freemasonry, for example, is a secret society into which the Illuminati supposedly merged (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Illuminati>).

Theorists have claimed that many notable people were or are members of the Illuminati, including "Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the Duke of Kent, Peter Sellers, Irving Berlin, Price Philip, Louis Armstrong, as well as a pantheon of well known modern-day industrialists and banking magnates" (Brown 2006: 41). It is believed that Henry A. Wallace, former U.S. Vice President and alleged "upper echelon Mason" suggested to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, another "well known Mason," to put the Illuminati symbol on the U.S. 1 Dollar Bill. It consists of a pyramid which "is an occult symbol representing a convergence upward, toward the source of Illumination" and above which is "An eye inside a triangle ... The eye signifies the Illuminati's ability to infiltrate and watch all things. The shining triangle represents enlightenment" (Brown 2006: 111 - 112). See Picture 2 below :



**Picture 2:**  
The U.S. \$1

**Tip 3:** Choose a bomb site easily accessible to the media.

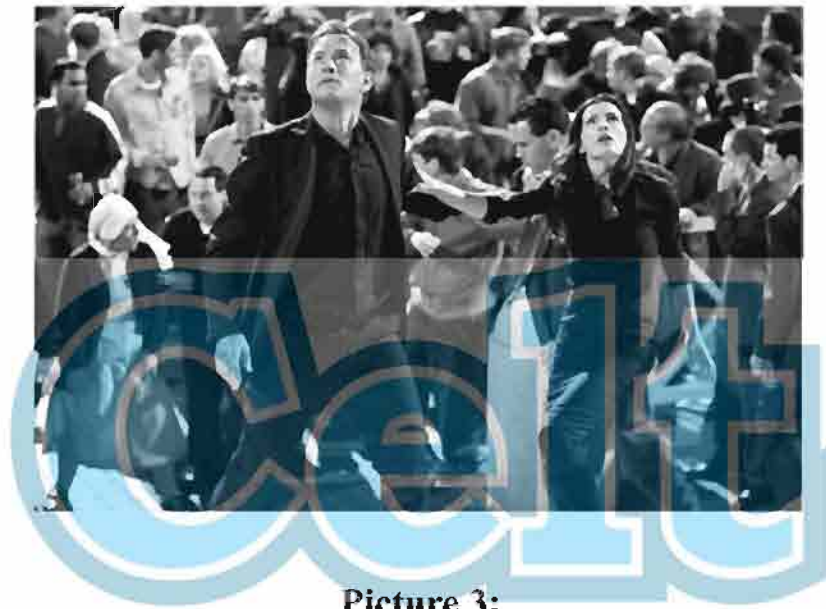
The site chosen by the Camerlengo was Saint Peter's Square where reporters, nuns, priests, and other faithful members of the Church crowd, who were waiting for the white smoke from the conclave, to signal a successful vote for a new pope. Baudrillard points out that “Among the other weapons of the system which they turned round against it, the terrorists exploited the 'real time' of images, their instantaneous worldwide transmission, just as they exploited stock-market speculation, electronic information and air traffic. The role of images is highly ambiguous. For, at the same time as they exalt the event, they also take it hostage. They serve to multiply it to infinity and, at the same time, they are a diversion and a neutralization ... The image consumes the event, in the sense that it absorbs it and offers it for consumption. Admittedly, it gives it unprecedented impact, but impact as image-event” (Baudrillard 2002: 27).

Such an impact also took place in the mail bomb scare in Jakarta last March 2011, when the media had quick access to the places in question and TV viewers witnessed the wounded police officer writhing in pain.

**Tip 4:** Choose an iconic site for target bombing or killing.

Such a target is the essence of asymmetric terror because, as Baudrillard puts it, the system in power “cannot operate on the terrain of the symbolic challenge and death – a thing of which it no longer has any idea, since it has erased it from its own culture” (Baudrillard 2002:15). The site of choice in *Angels and Demons* (see Picture 3) are all highly iconic – St. Peter's Basilica for the anti-matter explosion, and respectively the cherub fresco underneath the Obelisk at Saint Peter's Square, the *Ecstasy of St Theresa* at the church of Santa Maria della Vittoria, the famous *Fountain of Four Rivers* at Piazza Navona, and *Habakkuk and the Angel* in Chigi Chapel of Santa Maria del Popolo for the killings of the kidnapped cardinals.

During Jakarta's mail bomb in March 2011, this step of terror scare was somewhat modified but it was still true to procedure. Instead of targeting iconic sites, the terrorist aimed at such iconic figures as a moderate Islamic politician-activist, a former counterterrorism commander, and two suspected Jewish descendants.



Picture 3:

Panic at St. Peter's Square

([http://www.collider.com/uploads/imageGallery/Angels\\_and\\_Demons/angels\\_and\\_demons\\_movie\\_image\\_tom\\_hanks\\_and\\_ayelet\\_zurer.jpg](http://www.collider.com/uploads/imageGallery/Angels_and_Demons/angels_and_demons_movie_image_tom_hanks_and_ayelet_zurer.jpg))

**Tip 5:** Recruit a field operator.

In the movie version of *Angels and Demons* the recruitment is not too complicated since the Assassin is willing to do anything for money. He belongs to the category of the classical hired killer. The novel version has a more complicated and interesting assassin, who bears a lifelong grudge against the Church and he is fueled by the same zeal and animus towards the Church as his ancestors during the Crusades. He is a good illustration of Nalini Muhdi's "... young people that are deliberately marginalized because of poverty, backwardness, or alienation due to historical trauma ... Will they

receive enlightenment or rip open historical wounds?” (Muhdi 2009, trans. Wardoyo). To make matters worse, in the relationship between the Assassin and the Camerlengo, the latter assumes the role of a mentor, who, as Erich Fromm puts it, “misleadingly builds up a distortion and delusion in the mind of the assassin terrorist while the mentor himself is reluctant to do the killing” (Cited in Limas Susanto 2009, trans. Wardoyo). Furthermore as the Assassin must eventually come to die, the one in the novel better fits Baudrillard's criteria of “the irruption of a death which is far more than real: a death which is symbolic and sacrificial — that is to say, the absolute, irrevocable event” (Baudrillard 2002 :17). In his mission to kill the four cardinals, the Assassin illustrates Terry Eagleton's observation that “In a social order that seems progressively more depthless, transparent, rationalized and instantly communicable, the brutal slaughter of the innocent, like some Dadaist happening, warps the mind as well as on the flesh – an ultimate act of defamiliarization, which transform the everyday into monstrously unrecognizable” (Eagleton 2005). Like the TV image of the squirming police officer with his hand blown up during the Jakarta mail bomb, the gruesome assassination of the cardinals in *Angels and Demons* are defamiliarized into an artistic Picasso-like painting of a massacre.



**Picture 4:**

The Assassin

([http://1.bp.blogspot.com/\\_-](http://1.bp.blogspot.com/_-TmWcCkYErY/Sg8h1MhLg8I/AAAAAAAAAEh0/OxAlpm2FZxM/s400/Mr+Gray.jpg)

[TmWcCkYErY/Sg8h1MhLg8I/AAAAAAAAAEh0/OxAlpm2FZxM/s400/Mr+Gray.jpg](http://1.bp.blogspot.com/_-TmWcCkYErY/Sg8h1MhLg8I/AAAAAAAAAEh0/OxAlpm2FZxM/s400/Mr+Gray.jpg))



**Tip 6: Gain the people's sympathy.**

Since his ambition is to gain papal sovereign power, the Camerlengo must win the sympathy of the people and make himself a hero. He tries to make people believe he is what Erich Fromm would classify as “the altruistic terrorist, whose intention is to fight for human values” (Cited in Limas Susanto 2009, trans. Wardoyo). This seeming altruism is demonstrated when he took the anti-matter up into the sky in a helicopter and let it explode high above to save innocent bystanders falling victim from this disaster.

Such a sympathy-gaining step can also be traced in the Jakarta mail bombs of March 2011. The bombers seemed to have turned away from high explosive bombing with a big number of victims like the October 2002 attack in Bali which killed 202 people, the August 2003 attack at the Jakarta Marriot killing 12, and the suicide bombings in 2005 claiming the lives of 26 at resorts in Bali in addition to the Jakarta Ritz Carlton and the Marriot hotel attacks in 2009. The March 2011 bombers changed to a modus of low explosive mail bombs which targeted only certain figures and spared innocent bystanders. The motive of this change of strategy might be the intention to get more sympathy of the masses for their movement.

**CONCLUSION: THE PERLOCUTIONARY FORCE AND THE READER**

All in all the film's perlocutionary force on the reader could be more relevant than its illocutionary act of 'entertaining' viewers. Here again though the reader might not want to become a terrorist, the fantasy of terrorism is upon him/ her and Baudrillard warns that “The countless disaster movies bear witness to this fantasy, which they clearly attempt to exorcize with images, drowning out the whole thing with special effects. But the universal attraction they exert, which is

on a par with pornography, shows that acting-out is never very far away, the impulse to reject any system growing all the stronger as it approaches perfection or omnipotence” (Baudrillard 2002: 7).

Furthermore as far as the reader's perlocutionary act is concerned, he/ she is naturally inclined to be more open-minded towards genres. Perhaps the most forceful statement of what is entailed in this shift of genre approach— and a forceful putting into question of the category of genre itself — is the statement made by the post-structuralist philosopher Jacques Derrida in 'The Law of Genre'. His hypothesis in its simplest and starkest form is as follows.

... a text would not belong to any genre. Every text participates in one or several genres, there is no genreless text, there is always a genre and genres, yet such participation never amounts to belonging.

(Derrida 1980: 230)

Along those lines I wish to wrap up by reiterating that *Angels and Demons* does not belong to the genre of narrative only, it participates in several others as well.

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