



DUALITY OF RELIGIOUS SYMBOLS IN DAN BROWN'S ANGELS AND DEMONS

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Mankind has always looked deeper into the inner meanings in existing things. The intuitiveness of human beings has always led to reading into things and some have become symbols alluding to deeper things. Some of these in turn became universal due to their influence on daily life. Analyzing or comprehending the meaning behind the symbols is symbolism. "Symbolism in the full sense provides us with a transcendent embodiment of meaning." (Kumar 349). But the meaning derived and the meaning embodied may not be similar. Just as 'beauty is in the eyes of the beholder', symbols too are largely reliant on the understanding of the beholder. The color red means love to a teenager, blood to a soldier, a sign of emergency to a driver and have religious connotation to a student of religion. At the same time the same symbol may have different implications based on the context too.

Symbols find their major association with religion mainly because man substituted symbols to elucidate the mystics of religion. These religious symbols have been heavily borrowed by others but in essence they retain their religious shades. For instance, the Symbol, 'Caduceus' used by the US army medical corps, is a staff with two snakes entwined on it. It was the specter of the Greek god Hermes. The 'swastika' of the Nazi which is borrowed from the Asian creed, was a symbol of fullness of life and of creation. Though the religion that initially used the symbols ceased to exist, they are vividly seen in the present world too.

Daniel Gerhard Brown, known as Dan Brown, is the American novelist, the writer of enthralling thrillers, most notably the Robert Langdon stories *Angels and demons* (2000), the *Magnum Opus Da Vinci code* (2003), *The Lost Symbol* (2009), *Inferno* (2013) and *Origin* (2017). His fast paced novels, involving a conspiracy, scientific advancement, cryptography, keys, arts and symbols which are all set into twenty four hour time frame, is a gripping experience. He studied art history at the University of Servile and incorporated much of what he has studied in his works. As a child, Brown was introduced into the world of secret messages, riddles and treasure hunts which is reflected in his work, especially in *Da Vinci code*. "His novels are based on real artwork and real history but twisted into fiction to create a great story rooted in enough facts to keep it credible." (Web Penn). Three of these books contain a page detailing the real facts used in the book. This combination of facts and fiction give the book a kind of intensity that has led to a lot of controversies. "The reader is therefore led to believe that the novels, although works of fiction, have been so thoroughly researched that one should take every bit as truth, however surprising or unheard-of it may be" (Web Guessoum). Brown's works have been translated to 56 languages and three of his books *Angels and demons*, *Da Vinci code* and *Inferno* have been adapted into films.

Angels and Demons is set in a day as all of Brown's novels are. The first in the series of five books, *Angels and Demons* introduces the protagonist, Harvard professor of symbology and religious iconography, Robert Langdon. The plot opens as a molecular physicist and catholic priest, Leonard Vetra who is branded with the ancient Illuminati symbol. He is murdered before his research, antimatter, is stolen from the secured vaults of CERN (The European Organization for Nuclear Research). It is placed within the walls of Vatican on the day of the 'conclave' (assembly of cardinals for the election of Pope) and the four 'Preferiti' (the cardinals with the possibility of becoming the Pope), are kidnapped. Langdon along with Vittoria Vetra and the Swiss guard are on the trail of the ancient path of illumination that are marked by four churches in Vatican called 'the altars of science' where the four cardinals are branded and murdered one after the other. Brown adds in a lot of science versus faith argument which forms the central theme of the novel. Langdon plays an important role in saving the Vatican City from the explosion of antimatter which was a ploy setup by the Camerlegno, the late Pope's Chamberlain to turn the world away from science to faith, using the long dead Illuminati as the front face of the scam.

Dan Brown uses Langdon to explain the religious symbolism behind the art and architecture of Vatican. The religious symbols in the Vatican as depicted in the *Angels and Demons*, has multiple indications. The root of these



symbolisms exists in the fact that religious symbols are never truly formed from beginning. They are mostly adapted from existing religions and modified to fit. “Very little in any organized faith is truly original. Religions are not born from scratch. They grow from one another. Modern religion is a collage ...an assimilated historical record of man’s quest to understand divine” (AD 167). The book gives a lot of examples for such adaptation and the way in which it is perceived by each faith.

The recurring monument in the Vatican is the obelisk. An obelisk is a huge pillar with tapering end which has a blunt pyramid on the top. Brown uses the obelisks within Vatican as markers for the church that was believed to be the altars of science in which the Illuminati will execute the cardinals. In pagan religion which gives much more importance to fertility and growth of life, the obelisk is the ultimate symbol of creation.

Legend has it that Osiris; the god king of ancient

Egyptians was married to his sister, Isis, the god of fertility. Set, their brother, was jealous and wanted the kingdom for him so he murdered his brother and dismembered him throwing his body parts all over the underworld. Isis looked for her husband's 14 body parts and managed to collect all of them except his penis that was eaten by fish in the river Nile. Isis by the use of magic placed the body parts together and replaced the penis with a golden one. The origin of designing such a phallic architecture was that Isis ordered these obelisk monuments to be erected in temples to be worshiped in honor of her husband's lost penis. Of course if this obelisk is erected inside a circle which stands for a woman's vagina it refers to the very act of copulation. (Web Jacob).

The Obelisk in St.Peter’s square is an Egyptian obelisk erected in the middle of a circular structure. The pyramid is usually associated with the Egyptian symbolism, “triangle that represents the pagan trinity Osiris, Isis and Horus; the mother, father and holy son” (Web Jacob). The sides of the pyramid are taken as the reference point and hence it symbolizes the Egyptian holy trinity. The same idea of holy trinity is seen in Christianity as the Father, Son and the Holy Ghost. On the other hand the Illuminati take the structure of the pyramid as the reference point. The perfectly symmetrical sides converge in a single summit, pointing upward, becoming a symbol of enlightenment to the Illuminati. Langdon during his flight to Rome explains to Vetra, how the pyramid was seen as an Illuminati symbol, “The pyramid is an occult symbol representing a convergence upward, toward the ultimate source of illumination” (AD 76). The pyramid became both a religious as well as an illuminati symbol and was later used by many societies including the ‘Free Masons’.

The cross is one of the most widely known and used symbol of Christianity. The cross symbolizes the sufferings that Jesus underwent. He had to carry the patibulum of the cross which weighed over 110 pounds, after he was mercilessly whipped with a nine pronged flagrum tipped with glass, starved and dehydrated. He was crucified by driving nails in the wrists and legs where he died six hours later. The cross symbolizes not just his pain and blood spilt for mankind but also his forgiveness of sins. It is the ultimate symbol of his love for mankind. But the cross was a part of religious symbology long before Christianity began. The two intersecting lines that formed the cross was a part of pagan worship, more specifically pagan worship that gave importance to the four basic elements of nature. It also symbolized the opposing forces. When asked about the Illuminati’s reason for branding the cardinals, Langdon explains that the Vatican used to brand the scientists with a cross as a form of torture; remanding them that the ultimate salvation comes from cross but in fact it also represented the basic science and pagan symbolism. “The early cross, Langdon knew, was the most common symbol of four elements, the arms representing Earth, Air, Fire and Water” (AD 125) . The placement of the arms had symbolic meaning too. The adjacent arms of the water are earth and air indicating their chance at co-existence; on the other hand fire is placed opposite to water indicating their opposing nature that refuses to co-exist. The same is true of the other arms of the cross too.

There are other minor symbols that religions have multiple symbolisms like the halo drawn behind the heads of saints in paintings that claimed their exalted state in heaven, which were in fact the modified form of sundials that were symbols of tribute to the primary Egyptian God, Ra who is considered as the Sun God.



The multifaceted religious symbolism is a little complicated owing to the fact that pagan gods were numerous and drawing from the existing religion cannot be traced all the way to the parent religion as that too would have drawn from other sources as well. Dan Brown has attempted to paint a canvas to show that religion is not exactly individualized. It is an amalgamation and is still absorbing from its growing society and expanding its symbols just as civilization does.

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