



Confessions of a Young Novelist (The Richard Ellmann Lectures in Modern Literature)

Umberto Eco

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Umberto Eco published his first novel, *The Name of the Rose*, in 1980, when he was nearly fifty. In these “confessions,” the author, now in his late seventies, looks back on his long career as a theorist and his more recent work as a novelist, and explores their fruitful conjunction.

He begins by exploring the boundary between fiction and nonfiction—playfully, seriously, brilliantly roaming across this frontier. Good nonfiction, he believes, is crafted like a whodunnit, and a skilled novelist builds precisely detailed worlds through observation and research. Taking us on a tour of his own creative method, Eco recalls how he designed his fictional realms. He began with specific images, made choices of period, location, and voice, composed stories that would appeal to both sophisticated and popular readers. The blending of the real and the fictive extends to the inhabitants of such invented worlds. Why are we moved to tears by a character’s plight? In what sense do Anna Karenina, Gregor Samsa, and Leopold Bloom “exist”?

At once a medievalist, philosopher, and scholar of modern literature, Eco astonishes above all when he considers the pleasures of enumeration. He shows that the humble list, the potentially endless series, enables us to glimpse the infinite and approach the ineffable. This “young novelist” is a master who has wise things to impart about the art of fiction and the power of words.

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