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Langdon in the Langdon Series

In Dan Brown’s newest novel, *Origin[[1]](#endnote-1)*, the protagonist, Robert Langdon, searches for clues hidden throughout Spain to discover the mystery of “where we came from” and “where we are going”. Not only does Langdon have a beautiful woman, Ambra Vidal, by his side throughout his journey, but he also relies on a computer named Winston to assist him. The trio’s knowledge complements one another as they try to decipher codes and clues that will lead them to discovering the truth behind the origin of life, as presented by Langdon’s student from Harvard, Edmond Kirsch. In Langdon’s journey, he becomes entangled in a new web of codes, symbols, and knowledge.

Throughout the Robert Langdon novels, Langdon played the role of the all-knowing. When a code needed to be deciphered, or a question required an answer, Langdon was almost always the one who solved it. Brown, more often than not, made Langdon the most knowledgeable character in the novel. Throughout *Origin*, however, Winston adds new depth to Langdon’s journey. Artificial intelligence plays a key role in this novel. With the discovery of the new kingdom Technium, as well as Winston, Langdon is no longer the all-knowing. Yet, the Winston’s knowledge paired with Langdon’s reasoning process makes an unstoppable pairing. This complementary relationship between the two characters assists them greatly along the journey.

New information on Langdon is presented in Brown’s newest novel. *Origin* is the first book that labels Langdon as an eidetic, meaning he has an ability to picture images in his head in great detail. He has a new female counterpart in his adventure throughout *Origin*. Though Ambra Vidal is similar to the women who preceded her, there is no love connection between her and Langdon. The lack of attraction between the two characters makes Ambra a different asset to the novel than some of Langdon’s previous love interests. She is a new addition to Langdon’s life, but he sticks to his love for bachelorhood in this novel. These new additions to Langdon make him an even more dynamic protagonist.

A common thread throughout the Robert Langdon novels is Langdon’s relationship with women. In every plotline, he has an attractive, brilliant female by his side. Following Vittoria Vetra, Sophie Neveu and Sienna Brooks, a key player in the novel *Inferno*. Langdon finds himself attracted to Brooks, as in *Inferno[[2]](#endnote-2)*, he says “Tall and lissome, Dr. Brooks moved with the assertive gait of an athlete. Even in shapeless scrubs, she had a willowy elegance about her” (I, I, 11). The difference between Brooks and the other female characters is that Langdon does not pursue Brooks as anything more than a sidekick. His bachelorhood is referenced multiple times throughout the novel, as Brown explains “He [Langdon] had always enjoyed the solitude and independence provided him by his chosen life of bachelorhood” (I, I, 12). In other novels, the women he loved were contradictions to his love for bachelorhood and freedom from commitment. *Inferno*, on the other hand, places Langdon with a woman that he does not overtly fall for. Not only is this true for Langdon in *Inferno*, but also *The Lost Symbol[[3]](#endnote-3)*. Katherine is another female character that takes the role of a beloved friend, rather than a lover. Even as “Robert Langdon’s eyes filled with relief as she rushed through the doorway. . . directly into his arms” (TLS, LVI, 219) there was no connection there other than friendship. The same reigns true in not only *Inferno*, but also *Origin*.

*Origin* places the same emphasis on bachelorhood as *Inferno*. In addition to being single and uninterested in Ambra Vidal, Edmond Kirsch adds depth to the idea of bachelorhood. Though Langdon is a bachelor himself, he finds Kirsch’s stance on bachelorhood comical. In *Origin*, Brown writes “the playful jab at Langdon’s marital status was particularly ironic coming from a fellow bachelor who denounced monogamy as ‘an affront to evolution’ and had been photographed with a wide range of supermodels over the years” (O, I, 14). On a similar note, Kirsch shared the same taste in women, along with their bachelorhood status. In *Origin*, Ambra stated that “[Kirsch] told me it was his way of being welcomed home every night by a radiant beauty. . . Langdon chuckled. Bachelors.” (O, LI, 232). The two men are both proud of their bachelorhood and can relate to one another greatly. This was not always the case for Langdon, though. In previous novels, Langdon found attraction, love, and a future in Neveu and Vetra.

In *Origin*, the basis of who Langdon is as a character is still extremely similar to the other Robert Langdon novels. His claustrophobia is described just as it was in *Angels and Demons[[4]](#endnote-4), The Da Vinci Code[[5]](#endnote-5), Inferno,* and *The Lost Symbol*. Brown never ceases to describe Langdon’s claustrophobia; it is one of the most prominent features of the protagonist. Claustrophobia, an aspect of Robert Langdon’s life, comes up repeatedly. His fear of being trapped in small spaces, due to an incident from his childhood, humanizes his seemingly indestructible character. The claustrophobia is one of Langdon’s few weaknesses, making him more relatable to the reader. As in *The Da Vinci Code*, the reader is consistently reminded of this claustrophobia in *Origin*. Whenever Langdon found himself in tight spaces, he became struck with fear, as described in *Angels and Demons*: “. . . the darkness forcing him back. . . back to the five hours of crushing that haunted him still.” (A&D, XV, 56). His claustrophobia in *The Da Vinci Code*, as well as *Origin*, is one of Langdon’s biggest flaws. In *Origin*, Brown writes, “With each clockwise revolution, the passage grew tighter, and Langdon’s broad shoulders were now nearly brushing the walls. Breathe, Robert. The slanting metal sheets felt as if they might collapse inward at any moment and crush him beneath tons of steel” (O, VIII, 49). Though this makes him imperfect, it also humanizes him. The humanization of Langdon makes the reader root for the protagonist in his efforts, creating a more gripping storyline in all of the Robert Langdon novels.

Langdon is not wearing his classic Harris Tweed Jacket in *Origin*, similar to *Inferno*. Instead of wearing the jacket, Langdon is wearing a tuxedo, because he was dressed up for Kirsch’s gala. Yet he is wearing his Harris Tweed Jacket in the video presented during Kirsch’s presentation at the gala. Like *Origin*, a change in Langdon’s physical appearance also occurs in *Inferno*. For *Angels and Demons* and *The Da Vinci Code*, Langdon sported the same look: a Harris Tweed jacket, Somerset loafers, a turtleneck, khaki pants, and a Mickey Mouse watch. Instead of Langdon wearing a Harris Tweed, he dons a neighbor’s Brioni suit and Italian loafers: “He was wearing the neighbor’s Brioni suit, which fit remarkably well. Even the loafers were comfortable, and Langdon made a mental note to switch to Italian footwear when he got home” (I, X, 44).

By changing Langdon’s attire, Brown paints a completely new picture of the protagonist. He has Italian flare and shows a taste for finer things, rather than a simple Harris Tweed. With these differences in appearance, Langdon loses the simplicity of his original outfit. The original outfit, as described in *The Lost Symbol*, was his “usual charcoal turtleneck, Harris Tweed jacket, Khakis, and collegiate loafers” (TLS, I, 8). In *Origin*, Brown presents Langdon in a tuxedo coat, in which Langdon could barely recognize himself, as he “advanced stiffly in his white bow tie, tails, and white waistcoat” (O, I, 11). Langdon looks dapper in an elegant tuxedo.

Though Langdon is not wearing hit usual attire, he still dons the Mickey Mouse watch: “Startled, Langdon glanced down, pulling back the sleeve of his suit jacket to reveal the antique timepiece he had worn since he had received it as a boy. . . Langdon recalled telling Edmond recently about wearing it as a reminder to stay young at heart” (O, LXXXVIII, 376). The loss of Langdon’s Mickey Mouse in *Inferno* watch adds to his change in appearance. Langdon’s watch had “served as his daily reminder to smile more often and take life a little less seriously. . . without it, he felt suddenly incomplete” (I, VI, 31). But in *Origin, The Da Vinci Code, Angels and Demons,* and *The Lost Symbol*, the Mickey Mouse watch is present. As Brown describes in *The Lost Symbol*, “The Collector’s edition Mickey Mouse watch had been a gift from his parents on his ninth birthday. ‘I wear it to remind me to slow down and take life less seriously’” (TLS, VI, 26).

Since *Origin* is set in the Guggenheim museum and in other buildings throughout Spain, Langdon’s appreciation for art is extremely prevalent. Langdon is astonished at the structure of the Guggenheim, as he “paused a moment to marvel at the effect [colossal structure appeared to be quite literally floating on water]” (O, I, 16). Within the museum itself, Langdon was in his element. He has great interest in all of the art, as his “eyes were drawn from one colossal form to the next” (O, VIII, 44). Langdon is heavily engrossed by the impressiveness of the art, a trait seen in Brown’s other Robert Langdon novels. In *The Da Vinci Code*, Langdon feels “the tingle of anticipation that accompanies his face-to-face reunions with great works of art” (DVC, XXVI.125). Additionally, in Angels and Demons, Brown explains that “Langdon was amazed by the building’s striking transparent design. He had always had a fond love of architecture” (A&D, VI, 17). In all of the novels, Langdon spends vast amounts of time at famous museums, in beautiful churches, and searching through history-rich cities, looking at some of the most famous and breathtaking pieces of art.

One of Langdon’s attributes emphasized by Brown is his intellect. Langdon is often written to be “well-read” on many different subjects; he knows facts that are generally unknown, such as the requirements of becoming a Swiss Guard, the details of papal elections, and more. Consequently, he is the key to solving mysteries throughout the novel. He has confidence in his knowledge, most likely a result of his professorship at Harvard. Langdon compares almost everything to Harvard and his colleagues, such as in *Angels and Demons*, when he “wondered what his buddies in the Harvard physics department would say when he told them he’d spent the weekend hanging out in a Large Hadron Collider admiring z-particles” (A&D, XVII, 64). This intelligent side of Langdon is what unlocks mysteries throughout the novel; every discovery made due to Langdon’s knowledge adds to the complexity of the protagonist’s adventure. The same idea reoccurs in *Origin*, as Winston points out that Langdon excels at “the ability to discern how the data are interconnected and entangled… the interrelationship of ideas...” (O, VIII, 47). At one point in the novel, Langdon even outsmarts Winston. Even though technology takes on the role of the all-knowing in *Origin*, Langdon still shows the strength of his own human intelligence.

A new piece of information is given regarding Langdon’s intelligence in *Origin*. In prior novels, Langdon was clearly shown to have a highly functioning memory and level of knowledge. In the newest novel, one of the reasons behind this extreme intelligence is his eidetic memory. According to [www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com)[[6]](#endnote-6), eidetic means “of, relating to, or consulting visual imagery vividly experienced and readily reproducible with great accuracy and in great detail”. When Langdon discovers that a certain symbol is not an amalgamation, but something else, his eidetic memory is at work. This trait makes Langdon extremely knowledgeable throughout the novels. Additionally, Langdon even uses his eidetic memory to trick people: “Langdon felt a slight chill. He had chosen the date as a trick. One of the side effects of his eidetic memory was that dates had lodged themselves forever in his mind” (O, VIII, 47). Often, Langdon is able to stump those who try to challenge his intelligence. In this case, however, his eidetic memory was matched by a piece of technology, as Winston knew the answer his trick question.

Throughout the previous novels, Langdon was presented as not only a brilliant scholar, but also an extremely successful professor at Harvard. During his time as a professor, Langdon became a distinguished educator. In *Origin*, the reader finally meets one of Langdon’s most prominent and successful students. Brown presents Kirsch in the beginning of the novel: “Eddie Kirsch had been one of Langdon’s first students at Harvard University—a mop-haired computer geek whose interest in codes had led him to Langdon’s freshman seminar: Codes, Ciphers, and the Language of symbols. The sophistication of Kirsch’s intellect had impressed Langdon deeply, and although Kirsch eventually [abandoned semiotics] he and Langdon had developed a student-teacher bond that had kept them in contact over the past two decades since Kirsch’s graduation” (O, I, 13). Not only were Langdon and Kirsch extremely close friends, but they worked alongside one another and had mutual respect for one another. Kirsch believes Langdon to be his “culture connection… [his] own private bachelor of arts” (O, I, 13) and Langdon was proud to see how successful Kirsch had become. Brown shows the reader Langdon’s skill as a teacher by presenting a character like Kirsch; Kirsch enhances the idea of how successful Langdon was at Harvard.

In the Robert Langdon novels and movies, Langdon is characterized by his professorship at Harvard as well as his swimming career. The reader is informed that Langdon was an incredible swimmer during his years at Princeton University. Ever since his professorship at Harvard began, Langdon continues to stay in shape through his love of swimming. In *The Lost Symbol*, Brown wrote, “This morning at four forty-five, Langdon had plunged into dead-calm water, beginning his day as he always did, swimming fifty laps in the deserted Harvard Pool” (TLS, V, 13). This is a common theme throughout the novels. Langdon goes every morning to the Harvard Pool, where he stays in shape by swimming laps. In *Origin*, the reader sees this love for swimming and how it impacts his life: “For a moment, he was a twenty-year-old at the Princeton swimming pool. . . competing in the backstroke. . . perched on his mark. . . his back to the water. . . knees bent. . . abdomen taut. . . waiting for the starting gun” (O, LXXV, 336). The reader views Langdon as not only an athlete when he was younger, but presently a fit man in the novels. His fitness allows Langdon to make crazy adventures across various cities and countries in his novels.

Langdon is a complicated protagonist with many consistent qualities but new traits constantly emerge. Brown provides a balance between new and old characteristics. Many of Langdon’s attributes can be associated with Brown’s own characteristics. As the reader discovers, Brown uses specific details to characterize Langdon; many of these details are attributes Brown also possesses. Langdon’s serious regard for the works of art, history, symbols, and codes, is a trait Brown holds dear to his heart. In *The Da Vinci Code, Langdon* “[feels] disrespectful running past so many masterpieces without pausing for so much as a glance” (DVC, VI, 37). His great admiration for the arts, symbology, and history can be related back to Brown’s own interests. Brown created a successful, consistent character that can be traced back to himself[[7]](#endnote-7).

In many ways, Langdon can be considered the complete character. He has extremely positive qualities, such as his knowledge, intellect, and admiration. In the face of problems, Langdon is able to use those traits to solve said issues. Because of his positive assets, the reader often finds himself/herself rooting for Langdon. Aimee Meuchel, in her Master’s paper, *Traits and Stereotypes of Male Protagonists in High Fantasy Novels as Compared by Gender of the Author: A Content Analysis[[8]](#endnote-8)*, writes “. . . if the protagonist is believable and likable the author may have a book someone will want to read. If a character cannot be related to or understood, the book itself becomes difficult to enjoy and recommend to others. . . [The protagonist may] have an extremely unbelievable task set before him, but in the end, the reader must be able to relate to and understand him.” Since the reader wants to be able to relate to a protagonist, like Langdon, he has to have flaws. The claustrophobia Brown describes in *The Da Vinci Code, Angels and Demons, Inferno, The Lost Symbol,* and *Origin* is a flaw that makes Langdon more appealing to the reader. By humanizing Langdon, Brown makes him likeable and relatable. Therefore, throughout his journeys, the reader roots for him to succeed

Langdon’s qualities are extremely important throughout the storylines of the novels. *Origin* portrays Langdon as the same character, exhibiting the same characteristics as before. He is able to determine Kirsch’s 47 letter password using his intellect and knowledge, admire the Guggenheim Museum and all of the art, use his Mickey Mouse watch to stay young at heart, and more. His admiration for Ambra Vidal does not reach a level of infatuation, yet they become partners in crime and reach a deep level of friendship. A piece of Langdon is lost, however, as he is not sporting his Harris Tweed jacket throughout the novel.

The new information on Langdon adds to the protagonist’s role in not only *Origin,* but the rest of the Robert Langdon novels as well. Langdon’s eidetic memory is one of the most important of Landon’s characteristics that the reader learns about. Prior to *Origin,* the reader only saw Langdon as an extremely intelligent and knowledgeable character. Since Brown labels him as an eidetic, it provides a new outlook on his ability to solve issues. He can remember symbols, pictures, and information, due to his eidetic memory; this adds depth to the already bright and gifted character. Most of Langdon’s discoveries about passwords, works of art, clues, and symbols can be attributed to his memory. Langdon’s moments of sudden realization become more realistic with the fact that his memory functions more efficiently than most. This high level of eidetic brain activity, paired with his knowledge, makes him an unstoppable mystery solver.

Throughout the five novels, Langdon is portrayed in many different lights, all while maintaining the same characteristics. Brown creates a clear picture of Langdon’s physical features, such as his Harris Tweed Jacket, swimmer body, and Mickey Mouse watch, as well as his personal qualities, such as his admiration for art and intellect. The protagonist is knowledgeable, yet vulnerable, a bachelor, yet a romantic. He is a claustrophobic fascinated with symbols, art, and history; he is characterized in many different ways. In *Origin*, all of these qualities of Langdon are reiterated. He admits his claustrophobia, finds the Guggenheim museum breathtaking, sees the beauty in Ambra Vidal, jokes about his bachelorhood, and more. Although these traits change slightly throughout the novels, the basis of who Langdon is as a character stays the same. All in all, he is a complicated, dynamic character that adds depth to all of Brown’s Robert Langdon novels.

1. Dan Brown, *Origin.* (Doubleday: 2017). [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Dan Brown, *Inferno*. (Doubleday: 2013). [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Dan Brown, *The Lost Symbol* (Doubleday: 2009). [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Dan Brown, *Angels and Demons*. (Doubleday: 2000). [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code*. (Doubleday: 2003). [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. “Dictionary.com” [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Dan Burnstein, *Secrets of the Code: The Unauthorized Guide to the Mysteries Behind the Da Vinci Code*. (Squibnocket Partners: 2006). [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Meuchel, Aimee. “Traits and Stereotypes of Male Protagonists in High Fantasy Novels as Compared by Gender of the Author: A Content Analysis”. Apr. 1999. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)