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Other Puzzles in the Robert Langdon Series

Dan Brown has created a worldwide phenomenon with his Robert Langdon series. This serious has produced five best-selling novels, three block-buster movies, and an empire that has inspired an almost cult following as well as many outspoken opponents. All of his stories are highly controversial as they deal with many secretive religious societies and their clashes with the science of today. The controversies have had all kinds of effects, some adverse, like the books being banned in countries, and others being positive, most prominently seen in his own success. The books feature an artful blend of fact and fiction that often leads the readers to believe in Brown’s fantastical story lines.

Brown’s novels are known for being full of mentally stimulating problems that challenge both the audience and the characters of the novel. The Robert Langdon novels are interwoven with complex puzzles involving everything from anagrams to the fictitious cryptex that was accredited to Leonardo da Vinci in the book *the Da Vinci Code*. Puzzles are almost as synonymous as the name Robert Langdon is with Dan Brown’s novels; they are an integral part of the appeal and mystery of these famed stories. While the puzzles are intriguing for both the audience and the characters, they do much more than just offer an invigorating brainteaser. These seemingly superficial, somewhat simplistic puzzles are essential for assisting in the characters quests to beat the clock and save the day which, in turn, reveals the overarching theme to the novels. All of the novels feature other puzzles which lead the characters down the path to solving the larger mystery at hand.

 Dan Brown’s newest novel, *Origin*, follows the same pattern of puzzles that lend to the characters’ quest to honor Edmond Kirsch’s death and release his controversial video. It is important to note that Brown’s use of puzzles does not come in the typical fashion. A puzzle is not just a game of sorts in need of solving, it can also be interpreted as an enigma or a mystery[[1]](#endnote-1). In this novel, Brown explores the use of many types of puzzles by incorporating them into the character to character relationship as well as the reader to character relationship. *Origin* is fairly unusual as most of its puzzles come in the forms of mysteries and enigmas rather than games, as they typically had in past novels. In addition, a few of these puzzles did not necessarily contribute to the overall theme of the book; rather, they added more the roundness of the characters and the overall dynamic of the book. The theme, which is fairly similar to *Inferno* but less so to the others, features the conflict between religion and science, but focuses more heavily on the race against time and the duty over morality.

The novel’s most prominent other puzzle game was found in Edmond Kirsch’s artificial intelligence known as Winston. When Langdon is first introduced to Winston, he is attending Kirsch’s reveal party and Winston is his tour guide. Langdon is convinced that he had been speaking to a real person and is shocked to discover that Winston is in fact a computer program. Kirsch’s emphasis on Winston ‘learning’, or gaining more human-like qualities, is evident through his attempts at jokes as well as his “self-portrait”. Winston creates, at the request of Kirsch, what he considers his self-portrait and as he does not have a corporal form, his painting appeared to be a strange abstract image with an eye in the center. Langdon initially interprets this painting as an odd rendition of a Miró[[2]](#endnote-2). Throughout his development in the book, Langdon begins to interpret the portrait as something different.

While searching for the Barcelona Supercomputing Center (a necessary step to overcoming the books theme of racing against time), Langdon determines the portrait to be more than just a picture. It is also a map. Below are both the images of Winston’s self-portrait and the real map of the area of Barcelona that the Supercomputing Center is located.



The two images are very nearly identical in their shape and outline. Langdon interpreted the eye on Winston’s self-portrait to be “the place on the planet from which Winston viewed the world”[[3]](#endnote-3). This eye lines up very well to the actual Barcelona Supercomputing center that is indicated by the white oval outlined in black on the right-hand picture. This other puzzle was essential for Langdon and his female companion, Ambra Vidal, to find Winston and subsequently release Edmond Kirsch’s video. Langdon’s correct solution allowed the two to beat the clock and honor the death of their dear friend. Through another solved mystery, Langdon would soon find that his so-called success in putting his faith in Winston and ultimately finding it may have not been as positive as he had originally imagined.

Throughout the novel, there were many people accused for the public murder of Edmond Kirsch. Suspicions were cast at characters such as Bishop Valdespino. He had the most incentive as Kirsch boasted that his discovery would destroy the foundations of religion. Then fingers were pointed at the Prince of Spain. Prince Julian was accused because of the supposed phone call that came from the Royal Palace to the Guggenheim, placing Kirsch’s murder on the guest list.[[4]](#endnote-4) The online conspiracy website, [CospiracyNet.com](http://sites.middlebury.edu/origin/chapter-4/), is extremely effective in pushing the masses to place blame, as well. Despite all of these theories, not one was correct.

Brown was able to popcorn the theories around to nearly every enigmatic character in his arsenal, yet the mystery was solved on a somewhat disturbing note. As Langdon is traveling up the private cable car to the hill known as Montjuïc, he makes a shocking discovery regarding the true culprit of Edmond Kirsch’s murder. He begins questioning Winston who is understandably forthright as he is does not see the purpose in withholding information. Langdon had an epiphany while thinking of the name of the ConspiracyNet.com informant:

**monte@iglesia.org**

Langdon contemplates the derivation of the name and realizes it translates to hill-church, in other words Churchill, as in WINSTON Churchill[[5]](#endnote-5). Winston admits to being the informant and the subsequent conversation between the two leads Langdon to question Winston’s involvement in Kirsch’s death. Winston admits to being the orchestrator of the entire event. Winston was the Regent that fabricated evidence against Kirsch that lit the flame of hatred within the Admiral and it was the one who called the Guggenheim allowing the killer into Edmond’s event.

 Brown artfully crafts the delivery of Winston’s confession to blur the lines between a duty and a crime. Winston was required by Edmond to “find creative ways to make his presentation as widely viewed as possible”.[[6]](#endnote-6) Brown acknowledges, through Langdon’s utter horror, that what Winston did was an atrocity and yet, by its calculations, the best way to attract the most viewers, as requested by Edmond himself, was to follow this path. This mystery leaves the audience, much like Langdon, quite shocked and somewhat disgusted, but Brown’s delivery also forces the audience to understand that it was Winston’s duty, as a computer that has no real free will, to complete the assigned task to the best of its ability. *Origin*’s theme focuses heavily on duty and time, but still features a conflict between church and science. Dan Brown’s other novels, and the puzzles within them, are centered on targeting the conflicts between church and science, as well.

 In his novel *Angels and Demons*, Brown establishes a complicated relationship between the Church and science, highlighting this aspect with a specific type of puzzle. The introduction of the Illuminati leads Langdon to contemplate the Path of Illumination, a puzzle detailing the path to the Church of the Illuminati. Brown cleverly integrates the Catholic Church into this puzzle of the scientific Illuminati to force the reader question their preconceived notions regarding the relationship between the Church and science.

 To further display this mixing of church and science, the Illuminati used icons from the Holy Bible as well as famed Saints along its “Path of Illumination”. In the novel, Langdon searches for the third marker along the Path. While doing so, he comes across the Bernini sculpture of *the Ecstasy of St Teresa*, which was moved from the Vatican to an “obscure” church chosen by Bernini because of its nearly pornographic content[[7]](#endnote-7). Bernini, who according to the novel, was a member of the infamous scientific Illuminati, used a well-known and respected Saint of the Catholic Church to further his society’s famed puzzle. This elaborate sculpture has become a focal piece in Cornaro Chapel after its long tenure there. By depicting the points of the path as figureheads in the Catholic Church, Brown is highlighting how the Church and Science can coexist in relative harmony as they have been unknowingly for some time. The Illuminati has, according to Brown, pieces of its history scattered throughout the Catholic Church.

 Bernini, a famed artist who is akin to Michelangelo and Botticelli, carved many of the famous sculptures that adorn the Catholic sights in Rome. Brown claims that Bernini was originally commissioned by the Illuminati to build these statues that were essential to solving the puzzle of the Church of Illumination[[8]](#endnote-8). These sculptures would fade into Roman and Church life. The sculptures which represent the Illuminati have been hiding in plain sight for generations. Bernini’s artfully crafted masterpieces were undeniably for Science and riddled with puzzles, yet they are prominent pieces of the Catholic religion. Again, Brown details the possibility of a harmonious relationship between the Church and Science by suggesting a man of science could add to the faith of the Catholic religion.

 Brown’s novel can be seen as a comment on the unnecessarily turbulent history between the Church and those men of science. His puzzle of the Path of Illumination within the Church itself shows that the two can live in relative peace. His use of Bernini as a scientific man shows that someone can be an academic and still contribute to the faith. Overall, Brown’s use of this puzzle can be seen as a method to bridge the chasm between the two seemingly opposing forces.

 Brown’s use of puzzles in *Angels and Demons* differs significantly from many of the other novels similar to those in *Origin*. In his older novel, Brown utilizes a path or a journey that needed to be solved to ‘save the day’. *Origins* also features a different type of puzzle in its murder mystery-esque plot line. While they are both similar in that they differ from the standard puzzle set by the previous books, the execution of them are quite different. The mystery in *Origin* was speculated over for the entire novel, but not solved until the very end. The journey in *Angels and Demons* was a cumulative effort that was solved, piece by piece, throughout the entirety of the novel. Just like *Angels and Demons*, the *Da Vinci Code* highlights the use of puzzles in its overall theme of the conflict between the church and science.

 There are numerous ‘other puzzles’ within the *DaVinci Code*, but one in particular, the secrets within the *Last Supper*, is crucial to highlighting the long history of conflicts between the Church and, in this case, all those who oppose its teachings (rather than just science).

 A prominent puzzle in the *DaVinci Code*, the painting of *the Last* Supper, was not necessarily effective in leading the protagonists closer to the Holy Grail, rather it explained the hidden, fictitious secrets of the holy painting. Sir Leigh Teabing explained, in great detail, the aspects of the painting that support the theory of Jesus and Mary Magdalene’s union as well as the concept that the Holy Grail is not a literal chalice.[[9]](#endnote-9) Teabing explains the symbol that forms between Mary and Jesus: ▼, is the ancient symbol of womanhood known as the chalice, which he believes is Mary Magdalene herself.

 While there are many different puzzles that feature in *The DaVinci Code*, the puzzle of involving the “Last Supper” speaks to the hidden secrets in many of the Church’s most prized possessions. The clues within the “Last Supper,” just like those along the Path of Illumination in *Angels and Demons*, explain ideas that would rock the very foundation of religion. This idea follows along with Dan Brown’s novel *Origin*. Just as Edmond Kirsch threatens religion with his discovery, the theory of Jesus’s bloodline in *the Da Vinci Code* could have the same effect. This analysis of the artwork is much like Langdon’s analysis of Winston’s self-portrait in *Origin*.

 Dan Brown’s third novel, *the Lost Symbol*, strays from theme set by the previous two books. Rather than focusing on the conflicts between the Church and Science, this novel tackles the theme of religious zealots and the intriguing history of the Free Masons. A significant puzzle that ends up helping both the protagonists and the novel’s own zealot.

 This novel’s main other puzzle comes in the form of the Masonic pyramid and the infamous capstone that is can be considered an almost holy object within the Free Masons. Robert Langdon is forced to solve the puzzle of the Masonic pyramid to save his mentor, Peter Solomon. Langdon, with the help of Solomon’s sister, Katherine, discovers the method to deciphering the pyramid is to boil off the wax coating the engravings.[[10]](#endnote-10)

 *The Lost Symbol* utilizes the masonic pyramid and some chemistry to decipher the code to saving the life of Langdon’s friend. Much like *Origin*, the novel is seen as a race against time and in both cases, the protagonists succeed, with a twist. Unlike *Origins*, *The Lost Symbol* features a specific game-like puzzle that requires quick, upfront thinking to continue the plot line, whereas *Origin*’s mysterious reveal came at the end during one of Langdon’s moments of reflection. Both novels feature controversial topics, just like Brown’s next novel, *Inferno*.

Dan Brown ventures into a new realm of controversy with his novel *Inferno*. In previous novels, Brown focuses on the clash between science and religion. *Inferno*, rather,concentrates on the theme of morality vs duty; more specifically, actions taken in the face of crisis. This novel features many puzzles, including the puzzle surrounding Zobrist’s virus as well as puzzles involving, in typical Brown fashion, artwork and famous structures. Breaking from the trends of previous books, *Inferno* tackles the theme of morality versus duty by sending the characters on a race to solve Zobrist’s puzzle.

Professor Robert Langdon, working alongside the World Health Organization, is motivated by morality to solve Zobrist’s puzzle and stop his virus from being released. The protagonist, who at this point is well along the path of the puzzle, discovers a riddle on the back of Dante Alighieri’s Death Mask which leads him to the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul to find the place in Zobrist’s video.[[11]](#endnote-11) Langdon and the W.H.O. are driven to solve Zobrist’s puzzle on the moral grounds that his virus would kill millions of people. While the planet’s state of overpopulation is certainly not ignored by those opposed to Zobrist, they believe the outright culling of a large percentage of the population is completely immoral, and so they follow the puzzle created by Zobrist, starting with the anagram hidden in the Botticelli and ending in the cistern Yerebatan Sarayi.

Bertrand Zobrist, motivated by what he believes is his duty to humanity, orchestrates this intricate puzzle as his last stand against those he sees as his enemies. Zobrist believes he is saving the human race from itself. Contrary to what the W.H.O. and Langdon assume, he has not created a plague, but rather a viral vector that renders one in three people sterile. [[12]](#endnote-12) His use of the sterility virus rather than a plague could be seen as a blurring the line between duty and morality. He felt it was his duty to fight his enemies and the ‘chthonic monster’ attacking the world, but he did it in a way that caused to physical pain to any person infected.

Brown’s novel tackles the age-old debate between duty and morality. He uses Zobrist’s puzzle and the looming catastrophic event of the virus’s release to motivate the protagonists to stop what they believe to be a plague intended to cull a significant portion of the population. Brown deceives both the protagonists and the reader by introducing the virus’s true nature and by completely destroying their race against time. Brown blurs the line between morality and duty by having Zobrist choose what can be considered a more benign method to achieving his duty.

The themes of Dan Brown’s most recent novels, *Inferno* and *Origin*, both tackle the controversial topic of duty versus morality. Much like *Origin*, the true nature of the mystery of the novel is revealed at the end and is different than what the audience is led to believe. In addition, each had the characters racing against time to achieve their goals. A major difference between the two was evident through the significant lack of a church presence in *Inferno,* whereas *Origin* contained significant church activity, albeit activity that was proven to not have a prominent negative impact on the theme.

It is clear that puzzles are important aspect of all of Dan Brown’s novels. Whether the group focused in the works are the Jews, the Catholics, the Free Masons, the Priory of Sion, or the Zobrists, each book utilizes puzzles to reach the resolution of the plot. These puzzles may come in the form of games, like the *cryptex*, analysis, the Winston’s self-portrait, journeys, like the Path of Illumination, or mysteries, like who killed Edmond Kirsch. All of these puzzles were essential to the all of the books’ themes of controversial subjects such as the conflicts between church and state, ancient societies and their secrets, and the future of the human race. Each novel is different in its plot and specific theme, but each features the fascinating use of puzzles that draws the audience in and holds them tight for the entirety of Dan Brown’s world famous novels.

1. http://www.thesaurus.com/browse/puzzle [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Brown, Dan. *Origin*. Double Day, 2017, p.65 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Brown, Dan. *Origin*. Double Day, 2017, p.350 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Brown, Dan. *Origin*. Double Day, 2017, p.171 [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Brown, Dan. *Origin*. Double Day, 2017, p.444 [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Brown, Dan. *Origin*. Double Day, 2017, p.445 [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Brown, Dan. *Angels and Demons*. Pocket Books, 2000, p. 422 [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Brown, Dan. *Angels and Demons*. Pocket Books, 2000, p. 226 [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Burstein, Dan. *Secrets of the Code.* CDS Books, 2004, p. 213. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Brown, Dan. *the* *Lost Symbol*. Double Day, 2009, p.335 [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Brown, Dan. *Inferno*. Double Day , 2013, p. 377 [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Brown, Dan. *Inferno*. Double Day , 2013, p. 438 [↑](#endnote-ref-12)