

REWRITING THE OFFICIAL VERSION OF HISTORY: A STUDY OF DAN BROWN'S THE DA VINCI CODE

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Abstract:

Literature includes art, history, and music in the form of writing to pass the human culture, practice, and events of the past and present to the next generation. History is one of the most referred terms in the world by which every race of humanity tries to find its unique lifestyle through documented events. In fiction, writers take on histories in many ways to reexamine or endorse the recorded events of the past with their own perspectives. The Da Vinci Code approaches the official version of history with a different dimension that creates new history for the official version of history and questions the credibility of the existing history. The study focuses on the Holy Grail, The Last Supper, the Merovingian dynasty, Mary Magdalene, The Priory of Sion and the pentacle in The Da Vinci Code. Brown's interpretations for the Holy Grail and the pentacle shake the rudimentary faith in the Church and the alternative history of both leads to a spiritual as well as historical discourse in and out of literary writings.

Keywords: The Holy Grail, The Last Supper, Man, Mary Magdalene, the Merovingian dynasty, and the pentacle.

Postmodernism opens to a wide range of creativity in fiction with more valuable questions on the credibility of the existing history rather than promoting unchecked records of the history. Intertextuality is one of the postmodern elements which helps the writers to cross examine the factual events of the past by referring the ancient scriptures and unwritten stories to give new interpretations to the official version of history. Dan Brown's use of the past histories of the Holy Grail, the pentacle and other existing monuments in The Da Vinci Code provides an alternative history that challenges the centuries-old documented events of the past.

In The Da Vinci Code, the Holy Grail becomes a center of discussion among the historians because of its alternative version of history that shakes the fundamental belief of the Church. The Church was built upon the faith which celebrated the celibacy of Jesus Christ and his divine power to heal people's sin, as Matthew 16: 18-19 says, "And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church... I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven". Brown's interpretation for the Holy Grail challenges the two thousand years old faith of

Christianity and destabilizes the role of Peter in the Church. By connecting the Holy Grail to Mary Magdalene, The Da Vinci Code creates a parallel version of history and decodes the Holy Grail through The Last Supper of Leonardo da Vinci.

Historically the Holy Grail was associated with Jesus Christ who used the Grail during the last meal with his disciples before the crucifixion on the Cross. Since the last meal of Jesus Christ, the cup or chalice has been a symbol of Christianity. In Christianity, the cup is considered as divine and it has miraculous power. The Once and Future King by T.H. White praises the healing power of the Holy Grail as:

The King's quest for the Grail was not a selfish one. He did not seek the Grail for his own sake, but for the sake of his kingdom. He wanted to bring peace and prosperity to his people, and he believed that the Grail would give him the power to do so. But as he journeyed deeper into the forest, he began to realize that the Grail was not a thing that could be taken by force. It was a thing that had to be given, and it could only be given to those who were pure of heart. (235-236)

Brown's interpretation of the Holy Grail contradicts the official version of the Church and he rewrites the Holy Grail's two thousand years history. According to Brown, the Holy Grail is not an object but it is a symbolic representation of Mary Magdalene. In The Da Vinci Code, Mary Magdalene is portrayed as a companion of Jesus Christ and she was supposed to be a successor of Jesus Christ in the place of Peter in the Church. Robert Langdon, a symbologist, and Sir Leigh Teabing, a British historian and Holy Grail expert involve into the disputable history of the Church in the conversation with Sophie Neveu:

'The chalice,' he said, 'resembles a cub or vessel, and more important, it resembles the shape of a woman's womb. This symbol communicates femininity, womanhood and fertility'. Langdon looked directly at her now. 'Sophie, legend tells us the Holy Grail is a chalice—a cup. But the Grail's description as a chalice is actually an allegory to protect the true nature of the Holy Grail. That is to say, the legend uses the chalice as a metaphor for something far more important.'

'A woman,' Sophie said. (Code 321) Merovingian dynasty's role in protecting the bloodline of Jesus Christ in The Da Vinci Code raises the questions about the real history of the Merovingian family tree which does not have any direct or indirect link to Jesus Christ in history. Brown's claims of the connection between Mary Magdalene and the Merovingian dynasty lead the entire story of The Da Vinci Code and such claims provide a different story of the dynasty from the official version. Historically, Merovingian family ruled Gaul, the modern-day France, and Western Europe from 5th to 8th century. Merovech was the founder of the Merovingian dynasty. Under Clovis I (481-511AD), the grandson of Childeric I in the dynasty, Frankish tribes were united to expand the dynasty through battles.

Clovis I converted himself into Christianity and he made a thick connection to the Catholic Church. Due to Merovingian dynasty's strong bond with the Catholic Church, there were numerous churches and bishoprics established to spread Christianity and the Church consolidated power over the kingdoms. Such historical records are viewed through a new interpretation of Brown in The Da Vinci Code. The Da Vinci Code claims that Merovingians

were the decadences of Jesus Christ and Mary Magdalene and they took the responsibility to protect the Holy Grail. The History of the Franks by Gregory of Tours describes the Merovingian dynasty as: In those days, the Franks chose for themselves a king named Merovech, from whom the kings of the Franks are called Merovingians. It is said that his father was

Chlodio, a man of great power among his people.... The Merovingian kings who followed him were known for their long hair, which was a symbol of their royal power and divine right to rule. They believed that their authority came from God, and they ruled with the support of the Church and the loyalty of their warriors. (Franks 123)

The Priory of Sion was a secret organization in The Da Vinci Code keeping the secret of the Holy Grail by passing through the Grand Master, Jacques Saunière who is murdered at Louvre Museum, Paris. Brown's narratives in the novels resurface the feminine importance in the Church during the time of Jesus Christ. Sir Leigh Teabing's prolonged research in the Holy Grail substantiates his arguments with The Last Supper which was the master piece of Leonardo da Vinci during the Renaissance. The Last Supper pictures the last meal of Jesus Christ with his twelve disciples who were all men in the portrait. For centuries, the Christian doctrines have been rooted in the belief and work of Jesus Christ that undisputedly favours to male-centric in particularly, in leading the Churches. The Reformation of the Church by John Calvin strictly upholds the values of the Church which is determined to be a men-centric than women-centric: "The government of the Church is committed to men, and not to women... For the apostles were men, and the apostolic ministry is committed to men" (234).

The Da Vinci Code claims that the Church has abolished the role of Mary Magdalene to keep the patriarchy in the Church. The systematic removal of feminine worship in the Christianity laid a foundation for men's supremacy in the Church. Brown's alternative history of Peter and Mary Magdalene in The Da Vinci Code challenges men's supremacy by narrating a new story for the Grail which is against the centuries-old history of the Grail. Moreover, Brown's fictional characters in the novel bring out the undocumented history of Mary Magdalene and Peter through their dialogues:

'The same, except for one catch. According to these unaltered gospels, it was not Peter to whom Christ gave directions with which to establish the Christian Church. It was Mary Magdalene'. Sophie looked at him. 'You're saying the Christian Church was to be carried on by a woman?' 'That was the plan. Jesus was the original feminist. He intended for the future of His Church to be in the hands of Mary Magdalene.'

'And Peter had a problem with that,' Langdan said, pointing to The Last Supper. That's Peter there. You can see that Da Vinci was well aware of how Peter felt about Mary Magdalene'. (Code 334)

Dan Brown substantiates his argument about the Church's systematic oppression on feminine worship by giving alternative history of the Pentacle which has been a symbol of devil worship in the modern history. Jacques Saunière's brutal murder in Louvre Museum leaves a bloody star which is connected to the feminine worship before Jesus Christ. According to Brown, the pentacle has a long history than the Church as it explained in The Da Vinci Code: 'One of the oldest symbols on earth. Used over four thousand years Christ'... 'Symbols carry different

meaning in different settings', Langdan said. 'Primarily, the pentacle is a pagan religious symbol.' Fache nodded. 'Devil worship'" (Code 59-60).

The pentacle, a five-pointed star enclosed in a circle was first used in ancient Mesopotamia as a symbol of celestial bodies and divine protection. It was associated with mathematical perfection and a symbol of health and harmony in the Pythagoreans era. Pythagoreanism by Carl A. Huffman explains as, "The pentagram's recursive geometry, where each intersection generates a smaller pentagon, symbolized the Pythagorean doctrine of the eternal recurrence of celestial cycles and the immortality of the soul" (127). The Da Vinci Code approaches the pentacle or pentagram from religious and cultural point of view by which Brown exposes a purposeful degradation of the pentacle in the Church to defame the feminine worship which was once a predominant ritual before Jesus Christ. It analyses the historical and spiritual background of the pentacle through the conversation between the characters. Brown blames the Church for its systematic and deliberate attempts to erase the feminine important in the religious institution. The deliberate attempts made a new perception on the pentacle and the pentacle became a symbol of evil and cult in and out of the Church.

The Church began eradicating the non-Christian practices in the medieval period of 5th to 15th centuries. Using the geometrical figures in rituals became a symbol of devil worship and a satanic cult in the medieval period, particularly during the Crusades and Inquisitions. The Da-Vinci Code has restated the pentacle's historical significance in nature worship and gender equality: "The pentacle,' Langdan clarified, 'is a pre-Christian symbol that relates to Nature worship. The ancients envisioned their world in two halves – masculine and feminine. Their gods and goddesses worked to keep a balance of power. Yin and yang. When male and female were balanced, there was harmony in the world'"(Code 60).

Jacques Saunière's bloody symbol of the pentacle connects to the Holy Grail to emphasis the forgotten history of feminine role in worship. The Da Vinci Code becomes a historical guide to the readers with an alternative history of the official version of history. Dan Brown rejects the modern perspective of the Holy Grail and the pentacle and he substantiates his arguments by comparing the era before and after Jesus Christ. The Da Vinci Code challenges and rewrites the official version of history by raising questions about the traditional narratives of the Holy Grail and the pentacle. It reaches to an end with a message that history could be a complex web of narratives rather than a series of events.

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