

Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code*

Daniel Gerhard Brown was born in New Hampshire. He started his career as a writer after reading a copy of Sidney Sheldon's *Doomsday Conspiracy* in 1994.

His most famous novels are *Angels and Demons* (2000) about symbologist Robert Langdon who must uncover a plot to destroy Vatican City; *The Da Vinci Code* (2003) in which Robert Langdon investigates a murder in Paris's Louvre Museum; *Inferno* (2013) set in Florence. All of them have been adapted into films directed by Ron Howard.

In *The Da Vinci Code* police have found a mysterious code. While working to solve the enigma, Robert Langdon discovers a series of clues hidden in the works of Da Vinci. Langdon together with a French cryptologist, Sophie Neveu, learns the late curator was involved in the Priory of Sion, a secret society whose members included sir Isaac Newton, Botticelli, Victor Hugo and Da Vinci, among others. Langdon and Neveu have to solve riddles and face a mysterious man who seems to anticipate their every move. Here the secret of the Holy Grail is explained; it is not an object, but a real person.



Who is the Holy Grail?

Sophie stared at Teabing a long moment and then turned to Langdon. "The Holy Grail is a person?" Langdon nodded. "A woman, in fact." From the blank¹ look on Sophie's face, Langdon could tell they had already lost her. He recalled having a similar reaction the first time he heard the statement. It was not until he understood the symbology behind the Grail that the feminine connection became clear.

Teabing apparently had a similar thought. "Robert, perhaps this is the moment for the symbologist to clarify?" He went to a nearby end table, found a piece of paper, and laid it in front of Langdon.

Langdon pulled a pen from his pocket. "Sophie, are you familiar with the modern icons for male and female?" He drew the common male and female symbols.

"Of course" she said.

"These" he said quietly, "are not the original symbols for male and female. Many people incorrectly assume the male symbol is derived from a shield² and spear,³ while the female symbol represents a mirror reflecting beauty. In fact, the symbols originated as ancient astronomical symbols for the planet-god Mars and planet-goddess Venus. The original symbols are far simpler." Langdon drew another icon on the paper.

"This symbol is the original icon for male" he told her. "A rudimentary phallus."

"Quite to the point" Sophie said.

"As it were" Teabing added.

Langdon went on. "This icon is formally known as the blade,⁴ and it represents aggression and manhood. In fact, this exact phallus symbol is still used today on modern military uniforms to denote rank."

"Indeed." Teabing grinned.⁵ "The more penises you have, the higher your rank. Boys will be boys."

Langdon winced.⁶ "Moving on, the female symbol, as you might imagine, is the exact opposite." He drew another symbol on the page. "This is called the chalice."⁷

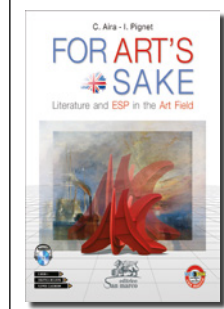
Sophie glanced up,⁸ looking surprised.

Langdon could see she had made the connection. "The chalice" he said, "resembles a cup or vessel, and more important, it resembles the shape of a woman's womb."⁹ This symbol communicates femininity, womanhood, and fertility." Langdon looked directly at her now. "Sophie,

GLOSSARY

- 1 void – 2 defence device – 3 weapon to be thrown – 4 sharp part of a knife – 5 smiled – 6 made a face –
7 religious wine cup – 8 looked upwards – 9 belly





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.

"Exactly." Langdon smiled. "The Grail is literally the ancient symbol for womanhood, and the Holy Grail represents the sacred feminine and the goddess, which of course has now been lost, virtually eliminated by the Church. The power of the female and her ability to produce life was once very sacred, but it posed a threat to the rise of the predominantly male Church, and so the sacred feminine was demonized and called unclean. It was man, not God, who created the concept of 'original sin' whereby Eve tasted of the apple and caused the downfall of the human race. Woman, once the sacred giver of life, was now the enemy."

"I should add" Teabing chimed,¹⁰ "that this concept of woman as life-bringer was the foundation of ancient religion. Childbirth was mystical and powerful. Sadly, Christian philosophy decided to embezzle¹¹ the female's creative power by ignoring biological truth and making man the Creator.

Genesis tells us that Eve was created from Adam's rib. Woman became an offshoot¹² of man. And a sinful one at that. Genesis was the beginning of the end for the goddess."

"The Grail" Langdon said, "is symbolic of the lost goddess. When Christianity came along, the old pagan religions did not die easily. Legends of chivalric quests for the lost Grail were in fact stories of forbidden quests to find the lost sacred feminine. Knights who claimed to be "searching for the chalice" were speaking in code as a way to protect themselves from a Church that had subjugated women, banished¹³ the Goddess, burned non-believers, and forbidden the pagan reverence for the sacred feminine."

Sophie shook her head. "I'm sorry, when you said the Holy Grail was a person, I thought you meant it was an actual¹⁴ person."

"It is" Langdon said.

"And not just any person" Teabing blurted,¹⁵ clambering¹⁶ excitedly to his feet. "A woman who carried with her a secret so powerful that, if revealed, it threatened to devastate the very foundation of Christianity!"

Sophie looked overwhelmed. "Is this woman well known in history?"

"Quite." Teabing collected his crutches¹⁷ and motioned down the hall. "And if we adjourn¹⁸ to the study, my friends, it would be my honour to show you Da Vinci's painting of her."

Two rooms away, in the kitchen, manservant Rémy Legaludec stood in silence before a television. The news station was broadcasting photos of a man and woman... the same two individuals to whom Rémy had just served tea.

GLOSSARY

10 entered the discussion – 11 deprive – 12 derivation – 13 sent away – 14 real – 15 exclaimed loudly – 16 crawling – 17 walking sticks – 18 (here) to go to another place

ACTIVITIES

1 Sum up the excerpt above.

