

COINCIDENCES:

ARE THEY THE SOUND OF ONE HAND CLAPPING?

BY

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I was Romeo.
You were my Juliet.
Now . . .

. . . I am Xerxes:
I built the bridge between East and West.

THREE QUESTIONS:

FIRST:

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY THE WORD “COINCIDENCE”?

The English word “coincidence” has its roots in several Latin words which, when put together, imply a situation in which several things or events are “cropping up together”. More than a decade ago, when I was a postgraduate student in Edinburgh, I was asked to write a little a little *Glossary of terms used in parapsychology*. In it I included on page 13 an extended definition of the word “coincidence”, and it runs as follows:

Two events are said to constitute a coincidence if they occur in such a way as to strike an observer as being highly related as regards their structure or their “meaning”; to dismiss such an occurrence as a “mere coincidence” is to imply the belief that each event arose as a result of quite independent causal chains (i.e. they are “acausal”) and that no further “meaning” or significance is to be found in this fortuitous concurrence; sometimes, however, a sense of impressiveness is engendered by the belief that the concurrence is so very unlikely to have been the result of “pure chance” that there must be some cause or reason for the concurrence, thus investing the coincidence with a sense of meaningfulness.

This book is about the meaningful sort of coincidence.

SECOND QUESTION:

WHAT IS THE SOUND OF ONE HAND CLAPPING?

This question — absurd as it seems — is an example of what the Japanese Zen Buddhists call a “koan”. What’s a koan, you ask?

“What’s a koan?” “What’s a koan?”, your western logic said.

A koan is a question that puts pain into your head!

The pain’s the pain of riddle — that you *know* an answer’s there,

That may not be so logical, yet one which if you dare.

It makes sense, and that’s the es-sence of a koan! Don’t you see?

You see the self-same koan-words but much more radically:

You see a different point of view — a kind of Gestalt switch —

A play on words, a logic-bust, perspective given twist.

Forgive me if I pun it but do listen, I enjoin:

It’s seeing things as if they were on other side of coin:

Behold a wheel that’s vertical, and turns in starts and fits:

The lowest point is Winter (which I tend to call “the pits”);

The highest point is Summer, summit of the yearly ball;

A-rising is the Spring-time, and decaying is the Fall.

You follow me thus far I hope, (or do you need a show?)

I’m sure I could come up with one in just a little mo:

Does the Wheel turn anti-clockwise or just clock-wise? Can you tell?

When you’ve answered this small koan you should hear go off a bell!

THIRD QUESTION:**COINCIDENCES:****ARE THEY THE SOUND OF ONE HAND CLAPPING?**

This book is devoted to giving an answer to this question. That answer will constitute a bridge between the two questions just asked — a bridge between East and West.



Question posed to the *I Ching*,

Monday evening, August 17th, 1992:

“What advice can you give me regarding my writing

“Coincidences: Are they the sound of one hand clapping?””

Answer:

#63: After the End: [Changing lines]: (#1) As you move forward with your plans, the pressure starts to build and you feel an urge to reconsider. You will be affected by the events that you have set into motion, but not detrimentally, since you are generally correct. (#2) You are suddenly vulnerable, whether by your own hand or by circumstances beyond your control. Do nothing. This time of conspicuousness will soon pass. (#3) The attainment of a highly ambitious goal is possible. It will take a long time and will leave you spent. Employ only the most qualified persons in your endeavor. (#5) This is an inappropriate time for ostentatious exhibitions of personal success. You will achieve more by small efforts than by large displays of power. (#6) You have initiated significant action. Do not assume that things will follow their course while you simply watch and wait. You have created responsibilities for yourself. Shirking them will invite great danger.

#59: Dispersion:

THE JUDGEMENT

DISPERSION. Success.

The king approaches his temple.

It furthers one to cross the great water.

Perseverance furthers.

Here the subject is the dispersing and dissolving of divisive egotism. DISPERSION shows the way, so to speak, that leads to gathering together . . .

Religious forces are needed to overcome the egotism that divides human beings. The common celebration of the great sacrificial feasts and sacred rites, which gave expression simultaneously to the interrelation and social articulation of family and state, was the means employed by the great rulers to unite human beings. The sacred music and the splendor of the ceremonies aroused a strong tide of emotion that was shared by all hearts in unison, and that awakened a consciousness of the common origin of all creatures. In this way disunity was overcome and rigidity dissolved. A further means to the same end is co-operation in great general undertakings that set a high goal for the will of the people; in the common concentration on this goal, all barriers dissolve, just as, when a boat is crossing a great stream, all hands must unite in a joint task . . .

In the autumn and winter, water begins to freeze into ice. When the warm breezes of spring come, the rigidity is dissolved, and the elements that have been dispersed in ice floes are reunited. It is the same with the minds of the people. Through hardness and selfishness the heart grows rigid, and this rigidity leads to separation from all others. Egotism and cupidity isolate human beings. **Therefore the hearts of human beings must be seized by a devout emotion. They must be shaken by a religious awe in face of eternity — stirred with an intuition of the One Creator of all living beings, and united through the strong feeling of fellowship experienced in the ritual of divine worship.**

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The topic of mythology has once again become popular today. Therefore, participating fully in this spirit, let me open with a myth!

I'm sure that most of my readers have heard of the Greek god Apollo. Not so many will know about his background and his attributes. Phœbus Apollo was the outcome of an illicit love-affair between his mother, Leto, and his father, the King of the Olympian gods, Zeus. He was god of light and particularly the sun (while his famous twin sister Artemis, or Diana, was goddess of the moon.) A statue of him, called the Colossus, straddled the entrance to the harbor at Rhodes, and was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Apollo got his name, which traditionally means "The Destroyer", by virtue of his slaying the dreaded serpent known as the Python (not to be confused with Monty Python!) Many areas of human endeavor were attributed to or even supposedly invented by Apollo, including eloquence, painting, poetry, medicine, archery, and prophecy, and indeed he had a famous and highly-thought-of oracle at Delphi the central voice of which was a medium called the Pythia. But in this book I will be concentrating on just one of his many attributes, that of the making of music, but music in a special sense.

Apollo is often depicted holding in his hand the musical instrument the lyre. He did not actually invent the lyre, as some have imagined: he was given it by Hermes, known to the Romans as the god Mercury. (As an interesting digression, and as a matter of historical fact, the lyre is represented in the Greek alphabet: the poet Simonides in about the year 500 B.C. proposed the single letter psi (Ψ) in place of the two letters *p* and *s* when in the combination *ps*, and his proposal was adopted. Thus, the letter which symbolizes the discipline of psychology is actually based on a musical instrument — a stylized lyre, showing the centre-bar, and the strings and stand as just one economical letter I. But, for the moment, I digress. I shall return! Let me get back to mythology.)

Now there is also such a thing as *personal* mythology, about which a book has been published by my colleague Stanley Krippner and his co-worker David Feinstein¹. This is more intangible than historical or religious mythology, but means something like the personal use of characters or historical figures or personalities in our *own* psychological life to stand for ideas or personæ we think we *are*, or, more often, processes which we — *but not necessarily anyone else* — are going through. So, sometime, ask me what *I* think *I* have in common with each of the following characters, individually even if not collectively: Romeo, Dave Bowman, Orpheus the musician, and Persephone Queen of the Underworld, also known as Kore! I have also appeared in the guise of the allegedly mad prophetess Cassandra — a bravura rôle in which I hope not to appear again very soon! But quite clearly, sex-changes occur quite easily in personal mythology! In summary, the process is something like a case of biographical identification. It's thought to be derived from the “myths” in the broad sense with which the surrounding culture is saturated and is constantly recapitulating.

Personal mythology as a source of inner guidance and wisdom becomes more important to the extent that our world is “stripped of traditional sources of authority and spiritual direction.”² The term “personal mythology” is thus also used with a more applied meaning to refer to the attempt of the individual to make cognitive and emotional sense of their *own* world, in a way that borders on being religious but which I prefer to call “cosmosophical”³. In my case, the very word “Apollo” has a personal mythological meaning *for me* in the following way: the prefix “a-” in Greek means “not”; Greek language experts will be horrified when I say I stretch things a bit and argue that the remaining part of Apollo's name — the “pollo” bit — can perhaps be derived *not* from the

¹ Feinstein, D., & Krippner, S. (1989). *Personal mythology: The psychology of your evolving self, using ritual, dreams and imagination to discover your inner story*. London, Sydney, Wellington: Mandala/Unwin Paperbacks.

² Quote presumably from Feinstein, 1989/90, California Institute of Integral Studies, Winter Workshop Brochure, p.10.

³ From the Greek *cosmos*, “world”, + *sophia*, “wisdom”.

verb “apollumi” — “I destroy” — but from the word “polla”, meaning “many things”, or “multiplicity” (like the phrase “hoi polloi”, meaning “the masses”.) Therefore, when *I* think “Apollo”, *I* tend also to think “that which is *not* The Many” — “That which is the Unity underlying the Diversity” — in other words, “The One” which is the object of apprehension in mystical experience — the universe as totality rather than as a collection of individual components that happen to be strung together, or, as I shall argue, the universe conceived of as a *song* rather than as the individual notes. I have thus engaged in a personal mythological process to express a mystical concept using the name of a Greek god.

What has this all to do with coincidences, much less with the apparently infuriating Zen Buddhist question to the effect of what is the sound of one hand clapping? I believe that they’re related, such that a bridge can be built between them. In this book I am Xerxes, King of Persia, who in ancient times constructed a bridge across the sea between Asia and Europe.⁴ Now I build a bridge of a different kind. But all things in their proper time. Have patience! Let’s discuss coincidence first.

This book is mainly about coincidences of the type about which we may exclaim “Gee, that series of events is amazingly improbable, and it must tell us something interesting about the way the universe operates and puts events together!” I’m about to regale you with an enormous number of coincidences which, I suggest, are, many of them, of this type. Sit back and wonder, or scoff.

⁴ Herodotus (1954). *The Histories*. Translated by Aubrey de Sélincourt. Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin. Pp. 456-458.

CHAPTER II

APPARENTLY NON-CHANCE THEMATIC COINCIDENCES
BETWEEN PASSAGES IN TEXT
AND EXTERNAL, UNPREDICTABLE EVENTS:

SOME EXPERIENCES WITH THE SO-CALLED
" S O R T E S L I B R A R I Æ "
P A R T I

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the ages, people have used various techniques for the purpose of divination — that is to say, to acquire information about situations past, present or future — information which, under the given circumstances, is inaccessible by ordinary means. One such technique involves randomly entering some point in a particular *book*, it being assumed that (a) the place at which the book is opened contains an answer accurate and appropriate to the inquirer's situation, and that (b) other places in the work would *not* have been as informative.

One of the best known of such techniques made use of the text of Vergil's *Æneid*, and, as a result, was known in Latin as the *Sortes Vergilianæ* (or Vergilian Oracles)⁵. I quote from W.F. Jackson Knight⁶ (p.376) (who is himself quoting from J.W. Mackail⁷):

. . . the *Æneid* became a sort of Bible. The famous *Sortes Vergilianæ*, a method of seeking in it for supernatural guidance, came early into vogue. The phrase as well as the thing was already established a century after [Vergil's] death [in 19 B.C.], perhaps sooner. Not only the practice, but a large measure of belief in its efficacy, lingered on into the seventeenth century. Oracles were sought by formal and ritual

⁵ *Sortes* (pronounced "sor-tace") is the plural of *sors*, which comes from the verb *serere*, meaning "to make a connection between", and is related to our words *series*, *sort*, and, alas, *sorcery*.

⁶ Knight, W.F.J. (1966). *Roman Vergil*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin.

⁷ Mackail, J.W. (1930). *The Æneid*. Oxford, pp.LXX-LXXII.

consultation of the Aeneid in temples. It took, for this purpose, the place of the discredited Sibylline Books. Hadrian, according to his biographers, consulted both, and received from both the prophecy of his future elevation to the principate. Clodius Albinus received his sors from two lines of Virgil in the temple of Apollo at Cumæ; Alexander Severus his in the temple of Fortune at Præneste: the great Illyrian Emperor Claudius his, towards the end of the third century, "in the Apennines", not only for himself but for his descendants, the Imperial House of Constantine.

Other famous books have been and continue to be used for a similar purpose. The Bible is one such book, the method in this case being named the *Sortes Biblicæ* (or Biblical Oracles)⁸. Again, I have heard it claimed (but have not yet been able to verify it) that some Icelanders use for purposes of divination the book called the *Edda*, written in Mediæval times by Snorri Sturluson. And of course for thousands of years the Chinese text known as the *I Ching* (pronounced "Yee Jing"), or Book of Changes, has been widely used both in the East as well as more recently in the West as a technique for gaining advice on a great range of issues. Recently I have seen what I believe to be essentially the same sort of divinatory practice described in the book *Illusions*, by Richard Bach⁹ (pp. 49-50). What follows is a portion of a conversation between the two main characters in the book, in a context which is intended to be spiritually didactic:

⁸ I had a "humorous" example of this on March 15th, 1991: I was wondering whether to wash some clothes, and also whether to take a bath. I opened a pocket Gideon's at what turned out to be page 213, John, chapter 21, verse 7: "Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on *his* outer garment (for he had removed it) and plunged into the sea." For an interesting apparently-more-than-chance coincidence involving a Christian religious text, see Weible, W. (1989). *Medjugorje. The message*. Auburn, Vic: Medjugorje Centre for Peace. Pp. 351-352.

⁹ Bach, R. (1977). *Illusions. The adventures of a reluctant messiah*. London: Pan. I wish to thank Mark and Baz Vucic for bringing this book to my attention.

I noticed something strange about the book [the title of which was: Messiah's handbook. Reminders for the advanced soul]. "The pages don't have numbers on them, Don."

"No," he said. "You just open it and whatever you need most is there."

"A magic book!"

"No. You can do it with any book. You can do it with an old newspaper, if you read carefully enough. Haven't you done that, hold some problem in your mind, then open any book handy and see what it tells you?"

Perhaps the most recent of books in this class is the one by Susan Hayward¹⁰, on the front cover of which it is baldly stated: "Hold a problem in your mind. Open this book to any page and there will be your answer."

Since little scientific work has been carried out to test the efficacy of any of these methods, mention should be made here of two studies conducted with the *I Ching*. The first of these (though reported only rather sketchily) was carried out by Lawrence Rubin and Charles Honorton¹¹. The *I Ching* consists of 64 unique "hexagrams", or six-line structures, each line carrying a piece of information (called a yin or a yang). Each hexagram has attached to it a distinctly different reading describing an outcome or human situation. The user of the Book asks a question, and employs either yarrow stalks (the traditional method) or three coins (the more usual method in modern time) to generate in a random way a particular hexagram, the reading for which, it is claimed, is the answer to the user's question. Subjects in the Rubin-Honorton experiment were given *two* readings from the *I Ching*, one chosen traditionally, that is, according to the throw of the coins, and another which was a randomly selected control. The subjects were not of course told which reading was the intended one.

¹⁰ Hayward, S. (1984), *A guide for the advanced soul*. Avalon, NSW: In Tune Books.

¹¹ Rubin, L., & Honorton, C. (1971). Separating the yins from the yangs: An experiment with the *I Ching*. *Journal of Parapsychology*, 35, 313-314.

They were asked to rate on a ten-point scale the degree to which each reading was relevant to their query. The difference between the ratings for the two readings was the score used in the analysis. If the coin-determined reading had no more tendency to be more accurate than the randomly selected reading then one would expect on average a difference-score of zero. However, the 24 subjects who believed in ESP obtained an average score of +1.75 — indicating that the coin-determined reading was slightly more accurate than the random one — while the 13 people who did *not* believe in ESP obtained a score of -3.23 — that is, they tended to give ratings to coin-determined readings that indicated, if anything, slightly *less* relevance than the purely random reading. The difference between the scores of the two subject-groups was statistically significant, that is, indicated that there was a genuine difference rather than one where the scores were purely a result of the luck of the draw.

I and three of my colleagues at the University of Adelaide attempted to carry out a similar piece of research¹². In our study, conducted along lines very similar to those of Rubin and Honorton, we found that subjects who believed in the efficacy of the *I Ching* obtained significantly higher difference-scores, indicating that they saw more relevance in their actual reading than in their control.

These two experiments therefore provide some evidence against the position which holds that any useful information gleaned by a reader from a selected text can be attributed *only* to chance and wishful thinking. It also suggests that the attitude of the subject may have some influence upon the perceived accuracy of the reading.

Because of the obvious similarities between all these “random reading” techniques, which differ only in regard to which particular book is employed, I suggest that we can subsume them all under the Latin name of *sortes librariae* (pronounced “sór-tace lib-brár-ee-I), or divination using books. It is assumed that in the practice of *sortes librariae* what occurs is a thematic coinciding (to a non-chance degree) between a passage in a text (usually

¹² Thalbourne, M.A., Delin, P.S., Barlow, J.A., & Steen, D.M. (1992-1993). A further attempt to separate the yins from the yangs: A replication of the Rubin-Honorton experiment with the *I Ching*. *European Journal of Parapsychology*, 9, 12-23.

randomly chosen) and some aspect of external reality, past, present or future, the topic of the coincidence being pertinent to the inquirer in some striking way.

SORTES LIBRARIE AND THE I CHING, OR BOOK OF CHANGES

The book which I myself have most frequently used is the *I Ching*, and I can say that experience with it has provided me with a large number of examples of striking accuracy in regard to my inquiries. I want to give you not just one example but a whole series, so that, like the River Colorado constantly wearing away the rock of the Grand Canyon, your disbelief too will eventually be worn down.

People tend to use the *I Ching* either for the sake of novelty, or because they are faced with a crisis. In late 1989, my crisis was a major one, and it was this: I was in Washington DC awaiting trial for climbing over the northern fence of the White House, and, also, for allegedly assaulting a Secret Service officer (though I believe that this, if it occurred, was purely an accident.) Despite the fact that I had been psychiatrically ill at the time of these events, I faced two years in prison or a \$2,000 fine.

On Wednesday, December 13th, 1989, the Court offered me a plea-bargain, but one which I found totally unacceptable, the result being that the case had to go to trial. A court date was set for February, 1990. My passport had been confiscated (effectively preventing me from leaving the USA), and my lawyer was attempting to have it returned so that I could at least go home for Christmas. Naturally enough, I asked the *I Ching*¹³ that very day “What will be the effect of my passport application?” It said firstly (hexagram #44) that I would be tempted by a suggestion made by a new acquaintance. Indeed, someone in the house in which I was staying did suggest, in all seriousness, that I make a run for the Mexican border; it is even possible that the Secret Service heard me speak of this suggestion if they had the

¹³ The version by Wing, R.L. (1982). *The illustrated I Ching*. Wellingborough, Northamptonshire: Aquarian Press.

telephone bugged at the time. More to the point, the reading continued¹⁴ to hexagram #43, entitled Resolution, saying that “An issue must be raised frankly and honestly in a place of judgement” — “a place of judgement” must surely refer to the Court House, I believed. The illustration accompanying the text even shows, quote, “an official who has returned home to again assume the position of arbitrator in the disputes of his people. Because he has been gone for some time, many are waiting to have their problems known and achieve a resolution.” Indeed, we had only seven work-days to have my application processed before the Judiciary broke up for Christmas, and their workload was very heavy.

When, three days later, on Saturday, December 16th, 1989, I asked the *I Ching* “What should be my attitude towards my desire to returning to Australia [for Christmas]?”, it gave the unpromising outcome Obstacles (#39): “When flowing water . . . meets with an obstacle in its path, a blockage in its journey, it pauses. It increases in volume and strength, filling up in front of the obstacle and eventually spilling past it . . . There is advantage in the southwest but none in the north east”. This situation would change to #33 — “Retreat will bring Progress”. The text here even used the following words: “The brilliance of the moon begins to diminish at the moment it reaches its fullness, while winter’s coming becomes apparent even in the summer. This natural pattern of advance and decline is reflected now in human affairs. Just as life prepares its enduring retreat from the dark stillness of winter, you must prepare to retreat from a rising darkness that will work at cross-purposes to your aim.” The first part of this last sentence alludes to the winter solstice. In fact, I left Washington DC to go to St. Louis within two days of the winter solstice! Later I did indeed go to the southwest, which was California if not Australia.

Up until this time I had been bitterly opposed to the taking of my prescription drug, lithium carbonate, on the grounds that it was an ineffective anti-depressant and impaired my thought processes, particularly memory and creativity. On Friday, December 15th, 1989, I asked the *I Ching* the question “What is the appropriate course of action for me to take in

¹⁴ Frequently, the process of using the *I Ching* yields *two* hexagrams, one for the present or recent past, one for the future.

regard to taking lithium?” The answer it gave me, after I’d thrown the three American pennies the required six times, was the very last one in the book, reading #64, translated as Before the End, or Before Completion. My friend Liz Kummerow has since kindly made a word-count of this page, and assures me that there are exactly 419 English words in this reading. Imagine my reaction when, having a month earlier climbed over the White House fence for reasons presumably due to *lack* of lithium in me, I read the following 75 words, constituting 18% of the entire page:

You will know what is involved in reaching the top because of your experience in the climb so far. However, when you do reach the peak, which has been in your sight for so many long days of effort, you will have done only that. You will have acquired little information and no experience whatsoever about descending the other side. To rush up and over the top in an overly confident manner could bring disaster.

Four months of something like disaster *did* ensue, and, needless to say, I’ve stayed on my lithium as prescribed ever since (except for one naughty episode in 1993). But, in addition, I maintain that anyone who didn’t *gasp* at this reading should stop reading this book right now: you’re unimpressable!¹⁵

But I’ll try one last plum out of a number of smaller plums. On New Year’s Eve 1989, I asked my version of the *I Ching* “What is the best attitude for me to take into 1990?” Its answer? Hexagram #21: “Reform will bring progress. It is advantageous to let justice be administered.” Already the allusion to the application of the law. But in a different and more literal version of the *I Ching* which I was shown a few days later,¹⁶ we find on p. 86 under the same heading the more strikingly accurate phrase “the theme of this hexagram is a

¹⁵ It does seem to be true that one’s own coincidences are more surprising to ourselves than they are to others (see R. Falk [19XX]. Judgment of coincidences: Mine versus yours. *American Journal of Psychology*).

¹⁶ Wilhelm, R. (1967). *The I Ching, or Book of Changes*. Translated from Chinese into German, and rendered into English by Cary F. Barnes. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

criminal lawsuit” — exactly what I was facing in February. It also said that the task of overcoming my opponents would be arduous, but would be successful in the end — all true as it happened. And finally, to take the cake, the literal name of this hexagram is “Biting Through”. I was suffering from sore teeth and jaw because during the night, probably due to stress, I’d been grinding my teeth — in a sense, biting through. Or at least the reference to teeth is evident enough.

Is all this “just” coincidence?

CHAPTER III

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In the previous chapter, I recounted what seem to me to be some striking instances of the *sortes librariae* operating within the context of a conscious attempt to seek an answer from some text, in that case, the *I Ching*. What I want to do in this chapter is suggest that the conscious questioning such as is employed in many uses of the *sortes* may not actually be *necessary* for the occurrence of “a thematic coincidence of a non-chance degree between a randomly chosen passage in a text and some aspect of external reality”. At least *four* additional types of situation come to *my* mind which would seem to fall under the general rubric of *sortes librariae* and yet which lack the feature of *conscious oracle-seeking*, even though useful information turns out to be present in the text. What I shall do, then, is set forth these four types in turn, giving as many examples as I can of each — examples which I’ve been collecting and attempting to document for years, but especially in the period November 1989 to August 1993. While in the process of describing my extensive case material the reader will observe that I deploy a minimum of critical apparatus. This is partly because I am inclined to believe that it is not possible to explain away these coincidences by means of normal hypotheses.

TYPE I CASES:

**COINCIDENCES BETWEEN EVENTS AND
TEXTS RANDOMLY ENCOUNTERED AT A LATER TIME**

The first type of case is *where one may have a particular thought in mind or be engaged in some activity and then, or very shortly afterwards, we take a (preferably unread) text and select a page within it on which, we discover, there are striking correspondences with those earlier thoughts or activities*. Because I have more examples of this kind than of any other — at least 20 at last count — I have designated them as cases of Type I. I shall give them in order of occurrence, as best I can remember the dates.

NO. 1: THE CASE OF IPHIGENEIA IN AULIS

One day, most probably in 1984, as I was walking across an open area at Washington University in St. Louis, there was a tremendous summer rain-storm. The sky was completely overcast except for one part where there was a break in the cloud-cover, letting sunshine through onto a small patch of ground, like a spotlight. The situation struck me as exceedingly like a drama, and in fact for some reason or other I began to think about the ancient Greek play *Iphigeneia in Aulis*, by Euripides. In this story, the daughter of King Agamemnon was sacrificed to appease the wrath of the gods, and thereby allow the Greek army to sail for Troy. My mental image was of a naked woman lying on an altar surrounded by priests, the shaft of sunlight illuminating her body, the sacrificial knife raised aloft and then plunging into her abdomen, her body jack-knifing at the impact, spilling blood everywhere. I then imagined a huge outline of the god Zeus, superimposed against the clouds, looking down and causing the thunder to roll. I tried to think of the Greek word which would translate the English phrase “he has thundered”: “βεβροντησε!”, I kept saying to myself, “βεβροντησε!” (bebrontese).

I was actually on my way to the Physics Department library to look up a current issue of the journal *Science*. It happened that next to this journal, on the same shelf, there was a copy of the magazine *Science News*¹⁷. To the best of my recollection, I’d never seen this

particular issue before in my life. Yet on the front cover was a picture of the god Zeus casting thunderbolts one end of each looked like the two entwined serpents of the medical caduceus. The caption was “Religion meets genetics”, and I’m inclined to think that it could be said to have some sort of relationship to the play *Iphigeneia in Aulis*: the word “gene” occurs in both *Iphigeneia* and in *genetic*. I at any rate felt shocked by the striking correspondence between the content of my day-dream and the content of this cover-picture.

NO. 2: THE CASE OF THE CIGARETTE AND THE *BHAGAVAD-GITA*

This particular incident seemed as it were to herald, for me, a marked increase in the number of incidents of *sortes librariæ*.

It was the evening of Wednesday, November 8th, 1989. I had that week suddenly developed an extreme aversion to cigarette smoke, and was doing everything I could to avoid the smoke or persuade others not to smoke cigarettes. But I was on my way to a pub where I often met a small group of friends for a drink on Wednesday nights. Fortunately, when I arrived, and to my surprise, nobody was smoking. But before long people began to light up, and I went around to each as if on a personal mission to persuade them to put their cigarette out, on the grounds that the smoke hurt me. I experienced mixed success in this endeavor. One particular person was especially aggressive in his refusal: “I’ve had it up to here all day with doctors, so don’t give me a hard time, Michael!” (I understood that he had some medical problems, so wondered if he’d received a bad diagnosis that day.) But still I persisted: “*Please*, just for me, don’t smoke right now: it’s hurting me.” At this point he took his cigarette, which was about half burnt, held out my right hand, palm upward, and put the cigarette out in my hand, driving it into my palm! I just looked at him, somehow believing that there was a lesson for him in my submitting to his aggressive act. All the time I expected to feel the pain begin, but it did not. When he had finished I took a glass of water and poured it over my hand to wash off the ashes. Not only was there no pain. There was also not a trace of a burn or any injury of any kind. At the time, I wondered whether I had

¹⁷ March 24th, 1984, vol. 125, no. 12.

witnessed some sort of miraculous protection.¹⁸ But since more and more people were lighting up cigarettes, and my efforts to dissuade them were obviously to little avail, I decided to leave, as I had warned them I would do if they persisted in smoking. Within a few minutes I was on the bus going home.

I had been carrying with me for the past few hours a copy of the Hindu sacred text the *Bhagavad-Gita*¹⁹. I had always found this text quite hard to understand, and had never managed to make it beyond the first chapter. Therefore, chapters 2 through 6 were *terra incognita*. While sitting on the bus, it was as if an inner voice said to me — a voice that sounded like my own — “You have the ability to open up a book at a page which is particularly meaningful for you.” The scientific side of me doubted this: “Go on with you! I can’t do that!” “Try it and see!”, was its reply. So, taking care to open the *Gita* at a point beyond Chapter 1, I opened the page. It happened to be Chapter 2, verses 19 through 21 (pp. 98-99):

*He who understands him to be the slayer,
and he who takes him to be the slain,*

¹⁸ Reactions to my claim to have escaped injury — which if true might constitute an interesting phenomenon in its own right, akin to fire-handling or fire-walking — have been mixed. A member of my Psychology Department was so sure that the cigarette would have burned me that he doubted the veracity of my story. Other people have thought it possible to escape injury under such circumstances, but when I ask them to demonstrate likewise with a lit cigarette they all decline, for some reason! The most plausible hypothesis that I've heard was put to me by Michaelen Becker while she was at the Saybrook Institute in San Francisco, in January 1990. She suggested that anxiety might have produced sweat on my palms, and this somehow extinguished the tip of the cigarette. My response to this is that I do not recall being especially tense at the time, and the “attack” came so suddenly that it took me by surprise, before perspiration had time to be secreted. Again, no-one has been prepared to test this hypothesis, even with sweaty hands!

¹⁹ Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (1967). *On the Bhagavad-Gita. A new translation and commentary, Chapters 1-6*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin. 494pp.

*both fail to perceive the truth. He
neither slays nor is slain.*

*He [that is, Brahman, the Greater Self] is never born, nor does
he ever die;
nor once having been, does he cease to
be. Unborn, eternal, everlasting,
ancient, he is not slain when the body
is slain.*

*One who knows him to be indestructible,
everlasting, unborn, undying, how can
that man, O Partha, slay or cause anyone
to slay?*

One *might* make out a case for this passage on the immortality of the soul being relevant: after all, someone had tried to *injure* me even if not *slay* me. But I thought to myself: “I’m not convinced.” The voice then said, “turn the page to the one next”. I did so, turning to p. 100, and immediately caught sight of verse 23, which goes as follows:

*Weapons cannot cleave him, nor fire
burn him; water cannot wet him, nor
wind dry him away.*

I was of course struck by the extremely relevant reference to fire burning, or rather *not* burning. I was profoundly moved by this experience, and felt that I had uncovered a reliable source of intuitive direction within me.

NO. 3: THE CASE OF THE RECLINING BUDDHA

In the second half of 1989 I had lying on my coffee table at home a very large picture-book about China²⁰. I had looked through it perhaps once. It was probably the day after the cigarette incident described above (namely, Thursday, November 9th, 1989) that I again had the experience of the internal voice telling me that I could open any book to a meaningful page. In this case, the voice said that I could open this particular book to the double page depicting a rock-carving of the Buddha, reclining. I expressed considerable doubt: it was a while since I had read it, so I did not *consciously* remember even approximately where that particular picture was, and in any case the book was 160 pages long.

But I went ahead with the experiment. I intuitively chose a section of the book, and opened it to pp. 94-95. It was *not* the picture of the reclining Buddha. “See! What did I tell you? I can’t do this after all,” I said. Then the inner voice said, “Take the left-hand page, and turn it over”. I did this, and lo and behold, there was the two-page picture of the reclining Buddha (i.e., on pp. 92-93)! Even though I had not been right the first time, the number of pages in the book still made this an improbable event by chance. Again, I was very much affected by this experience, and left the book open on the coffee table, as a sort of reverent memorial.

NO. 4: THE CASE OF THE SPIRITUAL SEARCH AND *LE MILIEU DIVIN*

This case occurred on Sunday, February 4th, 1990, when I was staying with my friend Charlie Derleth at his house in St. Louis, Missouri. I had earlier in the day been saying that knowledge of a spiritual sort had not been coming to me in a ready-packaged way, but rather I picked up a little here, a little there, a little from some place else, and, in a very active process of work, put it all together, like a bee going from flower to flower to collect its nectar.

²⁰ Harris, B. (1989). *China. Land of eternity*. Godalming, Surrey, England: Bramley Books.

Some hours later, I went to Charlie's considerable book collection, and pulled out Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's *Le milieu divin*,²¹ a book which I'd never read. I opened it up at random, happening on page 32, about one-third of which reads as follows:

But this summing-up, this welding, are not given to us ready-made and complete with the first awakening of consciousness. It is we who, through our own activity, must industriously assemble the widely scattered elements. The labour of seaweed as it concentrates in its tissues the substances scattered, in infinitesimal quantities, throughout the vast layers of the ocean; the industry of bees as they make honey from the juices broadcast in so many flowers — these are but pale images of the ceaseless working-over that all the forces of the universe undergo in us in order to reach the level of spirit.

NO. 5: THE CASE OF THE BEE AND THE CEREAL BOX

This series of peculiar incidents occurred on Saturday, July 14th, 1990. It was a reasonably sunny day, and I was walking to our neighborhood shopping centre. Just about to cross the road from the residential side, I was almost attacked by a bee. I flailed wildly, and it went away without harming me.

Inside the supermarket, I was walking down the cereal aisle when a little boy asked me a question. I knelt down so as to be more on his level, and he repeated his question: "Where's the cereal with the bee dressed like a king?" Immediately I was impressed by the coincidence with my having been assailed by a bee just a minute before! Anyway, I thought he meant the cereal Honey Smacks, but no. Eventually we realized it was Weeties, but on the box wasn't a *bee* that was dressed like a king, it was a grain of wheat. He went off happily with his selection.

I stood there for a moment, looking at the picture of "Willie Weeties, the King of Cereals for 75 years." I thought, if there is a purpose behind everything that happens, as the

²¹ Teilhard de Chardin, P. (1960). *Le milieu divin*. London: William Collins Sons.

mystics maintain, then why have I been brought here to contemplate this picture? I was scraping the bottom of the barrel for possible reasons, and wondered whether in some metaphoric sense it was *my* picture on the box, and that I was being told that, rather than being like a bee — a symbol of the humble spiritual seeker — I was really like someone with delusions of grandeur, making themselves out to be a king. But I think “the reason”, if there was one, (or at least not only this), became clearer only when I got home. My landlord had left on my doorstep the Saturday newspaper *The Advertiser*. As I often do, I went straight to the comics page. The first strip was the Wizard of Id, and in the very first panel we see the Wizard holding a box of cereal and saying to his wife Blanche, “I’ll be darned! They put Rodney’s picture on a box of cereal!”

**NO. 6: THE CASE OF
THE EGYPTIAN WORD FOR WATER AND *THE SACRED SYMBOLS OF MU***

I do not have an exact date for this case, but it occurred probably during the latter part of the Australian winter or early in the spring of 1990. I was walking from Adelaide University to the State Library. I had just passed by, at a distance of some 10 metres, an obelisk carved with Egyptian hieroglyphs, a few of which I can read, having made a slight study of the language and script. As I neared the Library, and for no discernible reason, what I *believed* was the Egyptian word for “water” popped into my head, namely, “en-en-en”, as well as the image of the word in hieroglyphs, which consists of three ziz-zag or wavy lines underneath each other — the glyph corresponding to “n” repeated:



Once in the Library I was not able to find what I was seeking, but I *did* spot a strange book with the title of *The sacred symbols of Mu*, by a James Churchward²². I knew that Mu was the name given by some occultists to a legendary ancient continent whose supposedly

²² Churchward, J. (1933). *The sacred symbols of Mu*. London: Rider & Co.

advanced civilization, like Atlantis, had been destroyed by a cataclysm. Moreover, when I was experiencing psychosis in the latter half of February 1990, I had developed the notion that Mu was another name for Australia, and that due to my folly and a nuclear war between nations which had caused tremendous geographical destruction, my native land was now literally “the Land Down Under” — down under the *waves*! At the time, I had even written an aggressive poem in Latin addressed to the military, a line of which poem says “mactatum est Mu” — “Australia has been sacrificed [i.e., drowned]”.

The page at which I opened this book at random — p. 132 — (a) depicts water, corresponding to the concept I had in mind outside the Library, (b) depicts the water in a stereotyped way very like the Egyptian hieroglyph for water, and (c) implies that Mu had been *immersed* since it was now *emerging*. (This is confirmed by the text on the previous page, p. 130: writes Churchward, “I know of no country on the face of the earth today that has not been under water several times — thus each time it was emersed [sic] it was resurrected.”)

On January 24th, 1991, many months after this event, I went to a book of hieroglyphics to check that I was right about the likely pronunciation of the Egyptian word for water. I was wrong! According to my text²³ (e.g., p. 116), the pronunciation was not “en-en-en” but, remarkably, “mu”! Thus are these coincidences woven into an intricate web.

NO. 7: THE CASE OF THE END OF THE WORLD

The date was sometime — a week or two — before Saturday August 25th, 1990. On one occasion previously, in November 1989, I had been seized with the uncontrollable conviction that the world was about to end in nuclear war. Now, I was standing waiting for the city-bound bus on Norwood Parade, and was again overcome with the apprehension that the world was about to end. Vivid memory of 1989, I thought.

²³ Budge, E.A.W. (1966). *Ancient Egyptian language. Easy lessons in Egyptian hieroglyphics with sign list*. Chicago: Ares.

I duly arrived at university and immediately checked my mail. In it was a flier advertising that one of the postgraduates was leaving. The eye-catching heading: “THE END OF THE WORLD IS NIGH!”. I noted the coincidence, and calmed down appreciably, deciding that the flier it had been which was responsible for my emotional worry.

NO. 8: THE CASE OF THE SCARY SHADOW AND ALBERT CAMUS

I do not have a record of the date of this little incident, but it was probably in the third quarter of 1990. I was coming home fairly late at night, and before entering the house, turned to look up at the moon, which was shining brightly, having risen some way above the eastern horizon. I turned around to the west to go towards the front door, and (much to my embarrassment now!) I was very startled to confront my long dark shadow. Why it took me so much by surprise I don't know. Perhaps I mistook it for an intruder.

When I got inside I picked up *The essential writings* of Camus²⁴, which I had looked into only once before (see case #24), and allowed my intuition to select a page. What turned up was p. 56. On the seventh line from the top was the following sentence:

There is no sun without shadow, and it is essential to know the night.

Though we have here the sun rather than the moon being mentioned, the idea of shadow is clearly present. I might add that the sun and moon, and especially light and darkness, are of importance to me as personal metaphors. I had also rather recently (July) learnt that “the shadow” was a concept used by C.G. Jung to refer to the darker side of one's personality.

NO. 9: THE CASE OF THE ROW BOAT AND THE MYSTERIES

²⁴ Camus, A. (1979). *The essential writings*. Edited with interpretive essays by Robert E. Meagher. New York: Harper Colophon Books.

It was also about this time that I was coming home on the bus one evening and, as my own stop neared, I remember having the amusing but odd thought that instead of being in a bus it was as if I was in row boat, sitting at the back with someone else doing the rowing!

I'd been experiencing a number of insights and coincidences at the time which I interpreted as a result of mystical illumination. I was, however, unclear in my mind as to whether I should share with anyone else these insights and meaningful coincidences that to *my* mind at least were utterly astounding. I feared lest hearers would dismiss me as either deranged or trying to seek attention. To that extent I fancied I saw a parallel between my own situation and that of one initiated into the ancient Mysteries of Eleusis, and similarly was bound to keep silence about the experience we'd undergone.

When I got home I was moved to try my luck with the *sortes librariae*, and I opened at random my Penguin version of Vergil's *Georgics*²⁵. I opened to p. 53. In the second paragraph are mentioned "*the Mysteries celebrated at Eleusis, near Athens*", and "*the simile of the rower*"!

NO. 10: THE CASE OF THE TRAIN AND *THE FLYING PHOENIX*

I do not have an exact date for this case, but it was probably sometime in September, 1990. I was in the Barr Smith Library at Adelaide University, and descending to the lowest floor by means of the stairwell in the newer section. As I was doing so, there suddenly — out of the blue — came to me a memory of having done the same thing in a similar stairwell at the railway station in New Brunswick, New Jersey, on Saturday, February 11th, 1990. That memory triggered off another memory, that of having, immediately prior to that action, been on the train from Washington DC to New Brunswick. I remember the trip well because, amongst other reasons, the man next to whom I had first sat had a particularly bad smell about him, to such an extent that I felt obliged to move to a spare seat in front of him, thereby avoiding his odor.

²⁵ Virgil, (1982). *The Georgics*. Translated into English verse with introduction and notes by L.P. Wilkinson. Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin.

So, having descended the stairwell in the library, my mind was full of the memory of the train and the smelly man next to whom I'd originally sat. When I reached the general area of the stacks that I wanted, I intuitively felt impelled to select and open at random a book which I'd never seen before. The book that I chose was called *The flying phœnix*,²⁶ and the page to which I opened at random was p. 197. Quite apart from the mild coincidence — which I have only just this minute realized — that my memories were of events some of which took place in New Jersey, and this book was likewise published in that state — the more startling correlation is the fact that the word “train” (in a different meaning) occurs three times on the page (and “training” twice):

No one but me knew that the Golden Mother made her “train” every day. Then she would come here and I would kneel and beg the Golden mother, saying: “Mother, have mercy. All immortals and buddhas, have mercy. Since this Compassionate Truth [= the name of a woman] had an inescapable fate, I brought her to worship Mother. Please don't keep making her train, or else have her do it in the branch hall. Please help her to find peace.” [Mother] made her “train” outside . . . too. This was the Golden Mother protecting her fore and aft.

It's curious to me that the word “train” should so often appear in scare quotes, as if suggesting an unusual usage of the term. Curious and perhaps amusing is the fact that the name of the old woman whose words are quoted above was Exquisite Fragrance — suggesting not only an odor, but the very *opposite* kind of smell which I had been remembering just a moment ago! Finally, there are several references on the page to “vivid visionary experience”, to which I appear to be subject at times.

NO. 11: THE CASE OF THE IMAGE OF MY FATHER, AND ARISTOPHANES

²⁶ Jordan, D.K., & Overmeyer, D.L. (1986). *The flying phœnix. Aspects of Chinese sectarianism in Taiwan*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

This case occurred on Saturday afternoon, September 15th, 1990. I had just had a visit from an acquaintance, about whose attitudes and behavior I gradually developed more and more negative feelings as the afternoon wore on. For example, this person stated that he *hated* books — something which I've never heard anyone else in my life say, and which was rather tactless given the number of books around my house. Again, he was in a supposedly satisfactory relationship, and yet had no compunction about being sexually involved with as many partners as possible from whom he kept an almost contemptuous emotional distance. At one stage he noticed a family photograph, and remarked with apparent surprise how similar I looked to my father. I responded somewhat testily that thank God we *did* look alike, or else there'd be some questions raised!

After he left, I immediately felt in need of the *sortes librariæ*, and randomly selected from a bookcase a copy of some of the plays of Aristophanes²⁷, none of whose work I'd ever read at that time. I opened up at p. 115, though I intuitively felt (as I sometimes do) that I was meant to read the next page as well. First of all, my mood seemed to be echoed in the lines:

Well, I'm not surprised, my dears, that you're all feeling very cross with Euripides, after hearing all this about him. I expect you're all quite boiling with indignation.

And further down the page:

Take me, for instance, I'm terrible. . . . I think the most awful thing I ever did was when we'd been married just three days. There was my hubby sound asleep beside me, and — well, I had this friend. Just a boy-and-girl affair, you know. Seduced me when I was seven. Well, the boy-friend wanted me — you know? — and came and tapped ever so lightly on the door, I knew who it was at once!

²⁷ Aristophanes (1964). *The Wasps, The Poet and the Women, The Frogs*. (Translated by David Barrett). Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin.

The description becomes a bit more graphic after that! But the pièce de résistance in this case occurs halfway down p. 116:

And the old midwife runs off to the husband, beaming all over her wicked old face: "It's a boy", she says, "a real lion of a boy and the image of his Dad . . ."

Part of the wry humor in this case was that the baby was *not* the real son of that man! I felt I had had good value from this instance of *sortes librariae*.

NO. 12: THE CASE OF GEMINI AND THE TERRIBLE TWINS

I was walking home from the bus just after midnight, the date technically being Saturday, January 19th, 1991, and was looking up at the clear sky at the zodiacal constellations visible at that time to the north — mainly Taurus and Gemini. I mused in my mind that the two brightest stars in Gemini were the Twins Castor and Pollux, and remembered that I had *still* not gotten around to finishing my paper on ESP in twins. When I got home, there in the letterbox in Friday's mail delivery was the latest issue of *Accent*, a publication of the AIDS Council of South Australia. My eye was immediately drawn to one of the headings on the front cover:

Andi & Andrew — The Terrible Twins

In my visionary experience, the names Andrea and Andrew are very important as symbolic representatives of the Human Race. (At the time I had that experience I believed — erroneously as it happened — that ἀνδρεία (andreia) was Greek for “humankind”.)

NO. 13: THE CASE OF THE BEES, THE PLEIADES, AND *THE GEORGICS*

I believe this case occurred later on the same date as the case of Gemini and the Terrible Twins, in the evening of January 19th, 1991. Three distinct elements are involved. First, it had earlier in the evening come up in conversation with a friend how very thin “to the

point of looking anorexic” a mutual acquaintance was. Second, at another point in the evening — which was a clear summer night — I went outside for a quick look at the sky and in particular at the planets Mars and Jupiter, which were very conspicuous at the time. I noted that Mars had moved out of the constellation of Taurus and was now right above the constellation known as the Pleiades, or Seven Sisters.

The third element was this. I went back inside, and was doing some ironing, and happened to start thinking about whether to put into my manuscript “Unseen Chemistry” a few lines which last October I had written very quickly, without polishing, using the bee as a metaphor, and which were meant to be an opener to the entire work:

*This is the story of me, of you, of us all —
The story of the Unseen Chemistry which courses this way and that,
Fatefully through our bodies, our minds, our loves, our lives,
The Unseen Chemistry beneath the stream of our days and nights.*

*Oh what a long long lay this song will be if I'm to tell all!
So much has happened in a twelve months' solar ring!
But telling the lay must be, for future generations soon to come —
For the infant Bees, asleep in their tiny wombs,
Unmindful of their adventurous missions ahead.
Yes, once long ago I slept as blissfully as they,
Not knowing the path that Goddess had set for me —
That Crafty old Queen Bee! —
Through roses and their thorns, to find my integral rôle
As a Bearer of Water in the Garden of Paradise.*

These lines kept going round and round in my head. A bit later on, I was impelled to pick up a pamphlet sitting on top of a pile of such pamphlets, and which was a literal

translation of Vergil's *Georgics*.²⁸ I randomly opened it, and happened upon pages 50-51. The entire two pages concern bees and their care! There was, moreover, a reference to their cells, as well as to the "king" bee²⁹. In addition, the earlier reference to anorexia was perhaps alluded to when Vergil discusses the diseases of bees and says "horrid leanness deforms the countenance" (p. 51). And finally, and quite clearly, we find on page 51 these words:

There are two seasons of that harvest [of honey]; one, as soon as the Pleiad Taygete has displayed her comely face to the earth, and spurns with her foot the despised waters of the ocean; or when the same star, flying [i.e., fleeing] the constellation of the watery Fish, descends in sadness from the sky into the wintry waves.

NO. 14: THE CASE OF THE PERSISTENT MCBEATHS

Strictly speaking this does not involve a book but a street-sign and a letter, and some may feel I am forcing the case into this category of *sortes librariae*. Let the reader judge.³⁰

I usually receive a Christmas letter from my friends Mike and Karen McBeath. Not so in 1990. I assumed that they'd moved, and expected that I might hear from them some time after they had settled. But nevertheless, I had things to send them, and on the morning

²⁸ Brodie's Classical Translations (no date). *Vergil: The Georgics Books I-IV*. Bath, Somerset, England: James Brodie Ltd.

²⁹ I would not want to press this interpretation, but given the war that was currently being fought in the Gulf some of Vergil's lines about the king bee are not entirely irrelevant to Saddam Hussein: "Besides, not Egypt's self, nor great Lydia, nor the nation of the Parthians, nor Median Hydaspes, are so observant of their king. Whilst the king is safe, there is one mind among all. . . He is the guardian of their works: him they admire, and all encircle him with thick humming, and guard him in a numerous body; often they lift him up on their shoulders, expose their bodies in war, and through wounds seek a glorious death." (p. 50)

³⁰ Perhaps we need to expand the category further to become *sortes scriptoriae* — any divination that involves writing.

of Sunday, January 20th, 1991, I distinctly recall thinking that I should write to some mutual friends either in St. Louis or in San Francisco to see whether they had the McBeaths' new address. A few hours later, I drove with a friend to a party at a house located in the nearby hills, in a suburb called Skye. I was amused to find that the street branching off the road on which we had parked was called "McBeath Drive"! High on the hillside, the view of Adelaide was superb. I also happened to mention to my friend how the McBeaths were always having trouble with people pronouncing their name "McBeeth" instead of "McBeth".

The next day, Monday, I was in the lift at work. A whole administrative section was in the process of moving to another building, and some of these people wheeled into the lift a trolley containing a large number of potted plants, while others carried them in their hands. The lift was full of greenery, prompting one man to comment, "It's like *McBeth* — carrying the forest to Dunsinane!" — a reference to the moving of Birnham Wood in Shakespeare's play!

That afternoon, when I got home, I found waiting for me my annual letter from the McBeaths, who had indeed moved, and to a place called — of all things — Mountain View!

NO. 15: THE CASE OF THE YOGI AND THE TELEPATHIC MESSAGE

From my point of view, these coincidences seem somehow to be "out there" in the world, waiting for me to be in the right place at the right time ready to spot them. I do not get the impression that I am earnestly seeking to find them, or over-zealously imposing some (perhaps tenuous) connection between isolated events in the variegated stream of events in which we are each constantly swimming every day. Indeed, I sometimes complain, though not very seriously, that these coincidences come so quickly that I can't keep up with them — and certainly don't have a chance to document them immediately as they happen. This next case happened at about the same time as the initial events in the McBeath case.

I'd just arrived at the hill-side party mentioned in the McBeath case. I'd been given only verbal instructions as to the address of the place, and had transmitted them, again verbally, to another friend who, like myself, had never been to the house. Unfortunately, I'd

made a slight error in the name of the road, and so I did something which I very rarely do, and even then often in play: I attempted to “send a telepathic message” to my friend, saying “Stuart, the name of the road is “*Coach Drive*”, not “*Coachman Drive!*”

My friend duly arrived. An intelligent young man, his success in locating us probably had nothing to do with my “telepathic message”.

That evening, I randomly selected a book from my shelves at home. It was Paramahansa Yogananda’s *Autobiography of a yogi*³¹, of which I have read only the first few pages. I engaged in my usual practice, which is to say, I opened the book at random, and read pp. 187-189. The theme? The yogi in question was going to be late for an appointment. He therefore apparently attempted to “send a telepathic message” to the two people awaiting him:

As Sri Yukteswar, a modern Yogi-Christ, neared the place where Dijen and I were standing speechless, Master smiled at my friend and remarked:

“I sent you a message too, but you were unable to grasp it.”

Dijen was silent, but glared at me suspiciously. After we had escorted our guru to his hermitage, my friend and I proceeded toward Serampore College. Dijen halted in the street, indignation streaming from his every pore.

“So! Master sent me a message! Yet you concealed it! I demand an explanation!”

“Can I help it if your mental mirror oscillates with such restlessness that you cannot register our guru’s instructions?” I retorted.

NO. 16: THE CASE OF THE NEW WORLD SYMPHONY AND FRANCESCO STELLUTI

³¹ (1980). Bombay: Jaico Publishing House.

I'd recently invented a new psychic game involving music. A drawer in my living-room contains approximately 50 cassettes of various styles of music. On the morning of Tuesday, January 22nd, 1991, I wanted to choose a cassette at random and have it somehow correspond in a striking way to an event later in the day. I removed the drawer containing the cassettes, closed my eyes and spun it around and around several times until I had no idea which section would meet my hand as I placed it in. The tape thus selected was Dvorak's *New World Symphony*, which I played and enjoyed. I wondered how the "new world" might come up in the day's events. Or was the phenomenon itself to be a part of a New World for me, I wondered?

I went to the Barr Smith Library to see whether perchance they had yet gotten up from store a book entitled *The controversy on the comets of 1618*³², in which was a paper by Galileo that I wanted to read. The first few pages I flipped through were actually a poem to Galileo by one Francesco Stelluto, and on p. 157 there appeared the following verse:

*Some men dare to turn their backs
On the Gates of Hercules
Sailing where there are no tracks
Hollow wood their home, impelled by ocean's breeze
Seeking roads through high-piled seas
Storming palisades of cold
Sailors add a new world to the world of old.*

NO. 17: THE CASE OF THE TEETOTALLER AND THE ALTAR WINE

It was the morning of Saturday, January 26th, 1991, and I had just finished a routine check-up with my psychiatrist, Dr. Bassett. I'd walked a little distance from the doctor's

³² Drake, S., & O'Malley, C.D. (1960) (Translators) *The controversy on the comets of 1618*. Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press.

rooms when I suddenly realized, “Oh, I was going to tell him that I had given up alcohol, and how much better I felt, and how much clearer my visual perception was. Now I’ll have to wait a month, and hope that I remember to tell him next time.”

When I got home, and despite the fact that I had plenty of case material for this chapter, I was nevertheless tempted to try my luck at the *sortes librariæ*. Without looking at the bookcase I chose a book and opened it at random before looking at the title. The book turned out to be the novel *The fancy dancer*³³, and the page was 57. My eye immediately went to the last paragraph on the page:

Father Vance never touched any liquor except the wine at Mass, and he was fond of saying that he wished the Lord had used milk at the Last Supper.

Now what happened next is typical of these cases. When I’d thought what a shame that I’d forgotten to tell my doctor that I was no longer using alcohol there was nothing special about the thought which said, “Stayed tuned! Something’s going to happen in less than an hour’s time which will correlate strikingly with this thought.” It’s when the correlation occurs that one immediately thinks back and makes the connection. As a result of this sort of process I was able to make three other similar connections:

- (1) That morning, before setting out to the doctor’s, and as I was sitting on my couch at home, I’d happened to glance at that section of the living-room bookcase which had some books on Christianity, and I distinctly remember having felt a certain resentment that Christ had drunk wine: the fact that *he* used it might make it seem that my total rejection of alcohol was somewhat extreme and unnecessary. “Perhaps”, I rationalized to myself, “it was very weak wine.”

³³ Warren, P.N. (1976). New York: Bantam Books.

- (2) Eight days previously I'd done something which I do very rarely indeed, and that is attend Mass, and I had taken communion under both species. I realized as soon as I'd drunk the small mouthful of wine that it probably had alcohol in it, and my action had therefore caused me some slight conflict and regret.
- (3) All of the above occurred within an hour of my leaving the doctor's rooms. About 24 hours later, I again selected a book, which turned out to be a novel by Mary Renault. For once, the pages to which I opened seemed to bear little fruit in relation to the events of my life. Either this passage would turn out to be highly relevant in the future, or else it was a failure of the technique. (One may ask how often such failures occur in my experience, and I would estimate them to be, at this period of time, perhaps 25%. Either such is the power of the human mind to extract correlations from just about any material, or perhaps the technique of *sortes librarix* really works. But the ratio of one to the other is important to know, and so I am trying religiously to keep a record of apparent "misses" as well as "hits".) Anyway, I was ready to give up this attempt as a miss. I then had a long-distance call from a friend in Sydney who has shown considerable interest in the phenomenon. Indeed, I was able to tell him of my latest specimen, the quote from the *Fancy dancer*. Now the question often arises whether the content of these coincidences "means" something in itself — as, for example, this particular correlation was reinforcing my resolve to remain abstinent — or whether what is really important is simply the fact of the correlation itself, irrespective of its content (although of course it may be that some or all coincidences have meaning on *both* these levels simultaneously, or, arguably, on neither) On this occasion I pushed the view that correlations had to be looked at from a "higher" or meta-level. And then it hit me! It wasn't the *text* of the Mary Renault book that was important in this case, it was its title: *The last of the wine!*³⁴

³⁴ Renault, M. (1956). *The last of the wine*. London: New English Library. Pp.145-147.

NO. 18: THE CASE OF THE MENTALLY UNSTABLE JOB APPLICANT

This case occurred the morning of Saturday, August 24th, 1991. My colleague Peter Delin had made a remark in the previous week that any potential referee I asked to support my application for a position at the University of New England might express doubts as to whether I was stable enough to hold down such a job. His remarks did, I must confess, bother and worry me. On this particular day I picked up a book I have never read³⁵, and opened it at random to p. 412, where I read the following paragraph:

I was breaking every rule there was. The funny thing is that people couldn't be absolutely certain which rule I was breaking in what way at what time because they were so hedged about with their own particular rule they could only follow me far enough to see that I had broken it and gone away, and become temporarily invisible, so that when I came back, when I returned to their own fold they didn't know enough about what I'd been doing and where I'd been to make real charges against me, other than the general one of being — what? Unstable?

NO. 19: THE CASE OF BEING IN THE RIGHT PLACE AT THE RIGHT TIME

This case occurred also on Saturday, August 24th, 1991, in the evening. I have sometimes in the past felt as if I were being influenced in a kindly way by my deceased grandmother. I wear her wedding ring. I was thus thinking of her and strongly moved to consult one of the volumes of Tolkien's *Lord of the rings*³⁶. Before reading the randomly selected passage I felt impelled first to close the venetian blinds, and then to lay down on my

³⁵ Scott, P. (1966). *The jewel in the crown*. Panther, Granada Publishing.

³⁶ Tolkien, J.R.R. (1979). *The lord of the rings. 1. The fellowship of the ring*. London: Unwin.

unmade bed, as if these were preliminaries to the reading. The passage turned out to be on p. 236, where there occurs the following paragraph:

Their bags and gear they piled on the parlour-floor. They pushed a low chair against the door and shut the window. Peering out, Frodo saw that the night was still clear. The Sickle [a footnote reads: “*The Hobbits’ name for the Plough or Great Bear.”] was swinging bright above the shoulders of Bree-Hill. He then closed and barred the heavy inside shutters and drew the curtains together. Strider built up the fire and blew out the candles.*

The hobbits lay down on their blankets with their feet toward the hearth . . .

In addition to the fact that I had just closed the blinds myself, it turned out when I looked down that my arm was resting on several blankets, and my feet were pointed exactly in the direction of my own fireplace in the next room. It felt as if my behavior had been elicited so as to correspond with what I was going to read.

Wasn't I amused when later in the evening I took up again my reading of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*³⁷ only to discover after but a few pages the sentence on p. 90

death's enormous sickle had swept those tremendous hills . . .

I don't believe she uses the word "sickle" anywhere else in the entire book.

The connection with my grandmother continued. I noted in my birthday book that it was the eve of her birthday. Feeling somewhat foolish, I said aloud, "Happy birthday, Gran!", wondering if that anniversary was still relevant in the after-death, or whether death was itself a new birthday. Later on in the evening on the television program *The bill*, one of the stories involved policemen visiting a home which was all done up with birthday

³⁷ Woolf, V. (1954). *Mrs. Dalloway*. London: The Hogarth Press.

celebrations. The twist was that the birthday girl had been killed in a motor accident sometime before, and yet the mother — with only a slight twinge of embarrassment — continued to celebrate her birthday as if she were still alive. So I felt less silly about what I'd said to my grandmother. Doesn't the Grim Reaper carry a sickle? Or is it a scythe?

NO. 20: THE CASE OF "GUESS WHO'S COMING TO DINNER"

It was late evening on Sunday, August 25th, 1991: I had just had two friends to dinner. I felt inexplicably drawn to consult at random one of my children's books translated into Latin³⁸. I had only a vague recollection of what was in the story, and I wondered what there could be in the book which was possibly of relevance. I opened it up at p. 53, where one of the four clauses went

duo amici eius ad cenandum venerunt. (two friends of his came to dinner)

I give dinner parties very rarely — not more than once or twice a year.

TYPE II CASES:

CORRELATIONS BETWEEN TEXT AND

EVENTS OBSERVED OR ENGAGED IN AT A LATER TIME

My second type of case is of a sort that could arguably be said to be simply Type I cases "in reverse". But for the sake of discussion I'll initially put them in a category by themselves. In cases that I classify as Type II, we may take some piece of printed matter (selected randomly or otherwise), read it, and then discover to our surprise later that there is a

³⁸ Potter, B. (1978). *Fabula de Domino Ieremia Piscatore*. Translated by Jeremy Fisher. London & New York: Frederick Warne.

striking correlation between its topic and an external event at some point later in time. Thus, instead of some thought or external event coming first and the reading in the printed matter coming later, the order is reversed.

NO. 21: THE *OMENS FROM CHANCE REMARKS* CASE

I've described above the case of the cigarette and the Bhagavad-Gita, and have also mentioned there the difficulty that I experienced next day in persuading a fellow member of the Psychology Department to believe that it had actually happened. My memory about this next point is hazy: perhaps I tried to tell him also about the phrase "no fire can burn" in the Gita. Anyhow, I dug out from one of my classical books³⁹ a section which I'd translated in high school — a piece from Cicero's *De Divinatione*, I, 46. In it Cicero gives two anecdotes about remarks which then later seemed to be correlated with or to predict other events. The second of these is pertinent here. I translate:

I have personally heard Lucius Flaccus, priest of Mars, when he told the story of how Cæcilia, daughter of Metellus, when she wanted to arrange a marriage for her niece, went to a certain chapel in the hope of getting an omen, a practice which was traditional amongst the ancients. Since the young woman was standing, and Cæcilia was seated in a chair, and no sound was heard for a long time, the girl became weary and asked her aunt to change places for a while so that she could have a rest in the chair: whereupon Cæcilia said, "Truly, my girl, do I give up my place to you." This remark turned out to be prophetic: within a short time Cæcilia herself had died and the young woman married the man to whom Cæcilia had been married.

I recall making copies of this section, and leaving them on a chair in my office before leaving for the United States the next day. On the 'plane, I was just settling into my seat

³⁹ Terry, J.H. (Ed.) (1958). *Latin Reader*. London: Longmans, Green & Co. Pp. 34-35.

when the air hostess came up to me and said, “There are two people who’d like to sit together, but we can’t find two spare seats which are next to each other. There’s a spare one next to you. Would you mind giving up your seat, and we’ll put you over by the window?” I gave up my seat for these two people, and then suddenly remembered the lines that I had re-read the day before, “Vero, mea puella, tibi concedo meas sedes” — “Truly, my girl, do I give up my place for you.”

NO. 22: THE RICHARD HEINBERG CASE

I believe that the first event which was a component of this coincidence occurred on the weekend of November 25-26th, 1989, when I had just arrived at the house of my friends Kathy and Jim Ross in St. Louis, Missouri. Both of them knew that I claimed to have had, at the beginning of the month, an extraordinarily powerful mystical experience. As it happened, Jim subscribed to a magazine called *Science of mind*, which is devoted to spiritual development. Prior to my arrival he had xeroxed for me two articles. One of these, by a Marion Newton⁴⁰, was an account of an experience of the mystical type. (There was some overlap with my own experience, and some differences, but it was interesting to compare notes, as it were.)

The second article was not really about mystical experience at all (or so it seemed to me at the time), but was an interview by a Walt Murray with someone whose name I’d never heard, Richard Heinberg.⁴¹ Heinberg was described as having been, all his life, in search of what he called “the paradisaal state of consciousness” — a spiritual quest which he approached in part by an examination of ancient mythology. Thus had he come to write his

⁴⁰ Newton, M.M. (1989). Living light. The mystical radiance of the divine reality. *Science of Mind*, 62 (11), November, pp. 36-40.

⁴¹ Murray, W. (1989). In search of the Golden Age. An interview with Richard Heinberg. *Science of Mind*, 62 (12), December, pp.14-25.

just-published book *Memories and visions of paradise. Exploring the universal myth of a lost Golden Age*.⁴²

This interview was extremely interesting to me, because at one stage a few years ago I had written a chapter for a book (which I never finished) on a theory of paranormal phenomena. In it I'd postulated that humanity was once more in tune with whatever it was that enabled us more effectively to utilize what we now think of as psychic phenomena — especially intuition in the paranormal sense. More effective use of intuition would lead to greater avoidance of error and suffering, and this might produce a kind of paradisaal state, or Golden Age. Unfortunately, that attunement had somehow been broken, and error and suffering resulted, since, in general, humanity had only the resources of reason and the senses to which to turn. That a Golden Age followed by a Fall was believed in by the ancients is amply evidenced by passages in Greek and Roman authors, not to mention the most famous Paradise myth, the Garden of Eden.

I was therefore very excited to read about Heinberg's work, because he'd gathered together from a vast number of cultures evidence of a similar myth, thus supporting part of my thesis. (He also linked up the "paradisaal state" with what looked to be mystical awareness, practically applied.) All in all, I was keen to get hold of his book.

Little did I know at the time that within a month I was to meet Richard Heinberg! On Tuesday, December 12th, I flew to Washington DC for some business which I believed would require my staying only 24 hours. I'd arranged to stay overnight in a large communal house as the guest of a friend of a friend. Within a few minutes of arriving I'd learnt that everyone living in the house had an interest in some aspect of spirituality. I replied that I'd recently become much more interested in that very topic, as a result of my own mystical experience. Gene, the person to whom I was talking, then said that the previous evening he'd been to a talk by a Richard Heinberg, and had bought his book *Memories and visions of paradise*, which he showed me. It was three weeks since I'd read the article given me by my friend Jim, and I'd forgotten the various names. But I dug out the article and verified, to my

⁴² (1989). Los Angeles: Jeremy P. Tarcher.

astonishment, that we were talking about one and the same person! The likelihood of this coincidence occurring by chance seemed very remote to me. In addition to all this, it turned out that Heinberg was going to be in Washington the very next Saturday, giving a seminar on his ideas. What a pity that I would not be there in Washington to hear it, I thought.

However, it turned out that my business in Washington took until nearly Christmas to sort out, and so I *was* in town at the time of the seminar. I attended, met Heinberg himself, and bought a copy of his book, which he kindly autographed for me. Wasn't my friend Jim surprised when I told him that I had actually *met* the author who'd been interviewed in the article he had xeroxed for me!

NO. 23: THE CASE OF TACITUS AND "THE CORONATION OF POPPÆA"

There are occasions when the text uncovered does not immediately give any indication of what is to turn up later. On this particular occasion I picked up my copy of Tacitus' *The annals of Imperial Rome*⁴³, and opened it to pp. 120-127. It was about politics in the time of Emperor Tiberius. Later that day, I played my game of randomly selecting a cassette of music. It turned out to be one of my two tapes on which is recorded Monteverdi's *The Coronation of Poppæa*, in which one of the protagonists is the Emperor Nero. A 1 in 25 chance that this selection would occur. Apart from the book and the tape both having Roman themes, the name "Nero" appears in both.

TYPE III CASES:

TEXTS APPEARING TO FULFILL NON-CONSCIOUS NEEDS

Another situation is where one does not have a particular theme in mind, but rather *one is somehow "led", or serendipitously puts one's hand on, especially in a library, a text*

⁴³ (1971). Translated with an introduction by Michael Grant. Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin.

which is exactly appropriate for one's needs, though one wasn't thinking of that need right at that moment. I have sometimes heard this phenomenon smilingly attributed to "the library angel"⁴⁴.

NO. 24: THE CASE OF "SFUMATO" AND THE CHANGING BLUE SKY

I once had an experience of this type of coincidence when, as an undergraduate, I was writing a philosophy essay and would have liked to have a term which describes the way the sky on a clear summer's day changes imperceptibly from deep blue at the zenith to light blue at the horizon: I was looking through my dictionary⁴⁵ for another reason, and happened upon the word "sfumato", heading the left-hand column on p. 1438. Its meaning:

the transition of tone or colour from light to dark by imperceptible stages.
[It., pp. of *sfumare* smoke out, fade; c. FUME]

NO. 25: THE CASE OF

MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE, PSYCHOSIS AND DAVID LUKOFF

This coincidence happened in January 1990, when I was visiting the library of the Institute for Transpersonal Psychology at Menlo Park in California. It is important for the story that I say that about two months previously, I'd had an experience both of mystical experience *and* manic psychosis. In this library I discovered a shelf which had what appeared to be all the back issues of the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*. I reached out my hand to pick one up, and lo and behold, that issue had an article by David Lukoff, entitled

⁴⁴ See B. Inglis (1990). *Coincidence*. London: Hutchison. Pp. 48-53.

⁴⁵ Hanks, P. (1971). *Encyclopedic world dictionary*. London: Paul Hamlyn.

“Transpersonal perspectives on manic psychosis: Creative, visionary and mystical states”⁴⁶. To make sure that this sort of topic was not a regular feature, I looked through quite a number of other issues of the Journal, but to my mind found none which came anywhere close to being as personally relevant as the one I’d initially chosen “by chance”. Lukoff’s article is filled with relevant comments such as

The psychotic comes closer to the great secrets of life and offers a reservoir of mental health to those who are restricted by routine rationalism. (Quoted from Andre Breton)

and

Others who have worked with manic patients have also observed that in mania “religious truths are realized, the religious truths, the ones of the desert fathers and the great mystics” (Quoted from Podvoll)

NO. 26: THE CASE OF “ZOOMORPHISMS”

A former employer, Dr. Douglas Vickers, employed me in mid-1990 because he needed a Research Officer to track down bibliographic material relating to the topic of metaphor and other psycholinguistic issues. One day, I believe in November 1990, he revealed to me that he wanted to make an exhaustive collection of all the ways in which we liken human behavior and characteristics to animals (such as “wise as an owl”, “slippery as a snake”, and so on.) We already had a quaint article which looked at such comparisons using vegetable metaphors⁴⁷. In my entire compilation of references to metaphor — finally

⁴⁶ *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 1988, vol. 20, pp.111-139.

⁴⁷ Sommer, R. (1988). The personality of vegetables: Botanical metaphors for human characteristics. *Journal of Personality*, 56, 665-683..

numbering over 600 books and articles — I had not encountered any explicitly on this topic, so I was a little pessimistic about finding anything relevant and thought we would have to “brainstorm” a list ourselves.

A few days later — unfortunately I did not keep a record of relevant dates — I went to the university library in order to borrow a book my bibliographic details for which were deficient. The book was Maarten van Buuren's “*Les Rougon-Macquart*”. *D'Émile Zola de la métaphore au mythe*. Lo and behold, when I flipped through the work, I discovered that there was a whole chapter on animal (and vegetable) metaphors!⁴⁸ Doug reads French fluently, and so would have no trouble at all with it. So without even trying to find such an œuvre, one had spontaneously turned up when I needed it (though I wasn't thinking about the topic at the time). We were then treated to the slightly comic spectacle of me racing across the plaza after a Doug who was on the point of departing for home, so great was my eagerness to show him my find.

There is apparently very little available in the literature on this somewhat esoteric theme of animal metaphors, which makes my find at that particular time all the more remarkable. But the case does not end there. I had needed to borrow the 1987 volume of the journal *Psychological Reports* for an article on the psychology of belief in psychic phenomena. As is my custom, I perused the rest of the articles in the volume for anything interesting. This time, there turned up an article on what the author called “bestiamorphisms” — the “uncritical ascription of animal traits to humans”⁴⁹, on the analogy of “anthropomorphism”. The author was actually extremely critical of such usages. Interestingly, he cites no other references on the topic. Does the reader know of any?

⁴⁸ van Buuren, M. (1986). “*Les Rougon-Macquart*”. *D'Émile Zola de la métaphore au mythe*. Paris: Libraire José Corti. Pp.99-149.

⁴⁹ To be strictly purist, the correct neologism would be “zoomorphism”, from the Greek “zoon” (“animal”) rather than the Latin “bestia” (“beast”).

Post script: Roderick Main, who read an earlier version of this chapter, pointed out to us that Leonardo da Vinci⁵⁰ came up with such a bestiary, my favorite item in which is

For constancy the phænix serves as a type; for understanding by nature its renewal it is steadfast to endure the burning flames which consume it, and then it is reborn anew.

**TYPE IV CASES:
CORRELATIONS BETWEEN TEXTS AND
OTHER TEXTS RANDOMLY ENCOUNTERED**

NO. 27: THE CASE OF THE WORD “CALCULATE”

I believe this case occurred while I was preparing information for my tax return (probably 1989/1990). I had compiled and typed a list of figures in connection with my tax deductions, and I suddenly realized “Hey! I can probably get my computer to add up this sort of list rather than me doing it by using a calculator!” I wasn’t exactly sure how to do this, but I knew there was a command in my computer-program called “Calculate”. So I got out the manual for the software⁵¹ and looked up “Calculate”.

The relevant section was under the heading “Math” on pages 187 through 189. On those pages the word “calculate” or the like appear 19 times. The arithmetical operation worked perfectly.

⁵⁰ *The notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci.* Arranged, rendered into English and introduced by E. MacCurdy, vol. II, 1938. London: Jonathan Cape.

⁵¹ Microsoft Corporation (1989). *Microsoft Word Document Processing Program Version 4.0 for the Apple Macintosh.* Redmond, WA.

Next morning, I chose at random a book from my bookshelf of classics. It turned out to be Plato's *Republic*⁵². I opened it at random, and the page turned out to be page 292. A third of the way down the page it contains the sentence "*And number is the medium of counting and calculation*". But furthermore, in the second half of the page, and remembering that I had been doing calculations to maximize the size of my tax refund, we find this paragraph:

"We can, then, properly lay it down that arithmetic shall be a subject for study by those who are to hold positions of responsibility in our state; and we shall ask them not to be amateurish in their approach to it, but to pursue it till they come to understand, by pure thought, the nature of numbers — they aren't concerned with its usefulness for mere commercial calculation, but for war and for the easier conversion of the soul from the world of becoming to that of reality and truth."

NO. 28: THE COLUMBUS CASE⁵³

⁵² Plato (1955). *The Republic*. Translated by H.D.P. Lee. Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin.

⁵³ I began editing this case collection on Friday, 8th August, 1997, and by evening had reached this point before I finished for the day. Next day, August 9th, I decided to try again the *sortes librariae* with a book I had not yet read, F.W.H. Myers' *Human personality and its survival of bodily death*, Volume II (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1903). The page to which I opened at random was 281, my thumb resting on a paragraph about the middle:

...In the age of Christ, Europe felt the first high authentic message from a world beyond our own. In our own age we reach the perception that such messages may become continuous and progressive; — that between seen and unseen there is a channel and fairway which future generations may learn to widen and to clarify...

One lazy Sunday afternoon in the winter of 1990 I had some friends visiting, and at one stage I took from the coffee table where it lay a copy of the little-known nineteenth-century poem *The Columbiad*, written by Franklin Quinby⁵⁴. I casually read out the first few lines:

*Of thee, Columbia, sweetest land I sing —
Where freedom's reign crowns every man a king;
Where majesty of station and the means
To grace it crown our gentler creatures queens.*

“Columbia” was the poet’s name for America, obviously after Christopher Columbus.

Next day or thereabouts I played my game of randomly selecting a page in a book I had never read, and chose for this purpose *The essential writings of Albert Camus*⁵⁵. The pages at which I opened were 164 and 165, my attention being drawn to section 41. We find there the following sentence:

. . . there always comes a day when the palaces of oppression crumble, when exile comes to an end, when liberty catches fire . . . Believe me when I tell you that across thousands of miles, all the way from far-off Colombia, you and your collaborators have shown us a part of the difficult road we must travel together toward liberty.

No apparent correspondence with anything. But my eye was drawn up the page, where it alighted upon the sentence “...like the joy of Columbus sailing westward from Hierro”!

⁵⁴ Quinby, F. (1893). *The Columbiad. An historical poem on the discovery of the new world and the founding of our republic*. Chicago: W.B. Conkey Company.

⁵⁵ Camus, A. (1979). *The essential writings*. Edited with interpretive essays by Robert E. Meagher. New York: Harper Colophon Books.

Of course the Colombia mentioned here was in South America, but nevertheless the thematic and phonetic resemblance to the previous quote is striking. It is also of interest to mention that I myself, for reasons into which I will not go at this stage, was once incarcerated (shall we say “exiled”) in a sort of “far-off Colombia”, but in this case the *District* of Columbia, from which I had eventually (in March 1990) regained my freedom.

And then, in the next day or so I had tried the same game with my book of Whitman.⁵⁶ It is quite a volume, containing 892 pages. The page I opened it up to, p. 437, had on it the heading and the opening lines of a poem called “Prayer of Columbus”!

A day or two after that, I intuitively and randomly opened another book, this time one in the bookshelves in my office at university⁵⁷, and containing 248 pages. The page selected, page 236, depicted a picture of Queen Isabella of Spain! Again the theme of Columbus.

By then I was beginning to wonder whether there was intended to be some sort of message in the repeated theme. Having once being very enthusiastic about trying to establish world peace, I wondered whether “Columbus” was symbolic of the dove of peace⁵⁸, or perhaps of the dove sent forth by Noah and which returned with a sprig to indicate that land had emerged after the Flood. I couldn’t remember whether “columbus” meant “dove” or “pigeon” in Latin, so I took out my Latin dictionary to see. In fact it can mean both.

When I got to university that day, the department was abuzz with the news that the famous psychologist B.F. Skinner had died. Skinner had often used pigeons in his research, and on the blackboard of the Honours room was the slogan “Let the pigeons be freed!”, which in Latin would be “columbi liberentur”, I mused. Coincidence?

⁵⁶ Whitman, W.

⁵⁷ Fairley, J., & Welfare, S. (1984). *Arthur C. Clarke’s world of strange powers*. London: Collins.

⁵⁸ Later thematic correlations inclined me away from the pigeon/dove interpretation to the one of explorer in a New World.

Post script: the day I wrote up this coincidence (namely, Tuesday, January 29th, 1991), I received back from a former student a copy of an issue of the *Skeptical Inquirer*⁵⁹ which she had had on loan for nearly 18 months. The lead article? “Columbus poltergeist case”! One can begin to feel haunted by a given theme.

Skeptics may say that I’m not “haunted”, but rather my perception has become selective, being highly motivated to see continuations of the theme. But let me submit the following events to this explanation and see whether they’ll fit. The day after writing up the preceding paragraphs on the Columbus case (Wednesday, January 30th, 1991), I could not resist trying the *sortes librarie* one more time. I suppose I’m motivated by the desire to see a wonder, and to confirm that I haven’t “lost the touch”: I want to see if the faculty is still there. In a paragraph above I was rather coy about my “incarceration” in the District of Columbia. In fact I was placed in a forensic psychiatry unit for over a month where I was for most of the time extremely depressed about my prospects. I considered it to be a form of prison: there were locked doors everywhere, we were allowed out into a yard to exercise on one fine spring day only once during my stay, and had I been given a prison sentence my stay in the “hospital” would probably have counted towards it. Even the *I Ching* made statements to the effect that I was like “*a criminal who sits shackled behind thorn-hedged prison walls.*”⁶⁰ Ultimately, through the efforts of the Australian consul, I gained my freedom, and the two charges pending against me were dropped.

This same consul had been nice enough to come and visit me each Saturday, giving me support, and providing me with books, which I devoured voraciously. One that he brought was a copy of the *Reader’s Digest* for April 1989. It’s years since I’ve read a

⁵⁹ Vol.IX, no.3, Spring 1985.

⁶⁰ Wilhelm, R. (1967). *The I Ching, or Book of Changes*. Third Edition. Translated into English by Cary F. Barnes. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. My question, put on February 22nd, 1990, was “What should be my attitude towards the time I will spend in St. Elizabeth’s Hospital?” The resultant hexagram was # 30 (K’an/The Abysmal [Water]), the sixth line changing to #59 (Huan/Dispersion). The text quoted is from p. 118.

Reader's Digest, and I snobbishly considered it beneath me, so I never did read this issue. But it went home with me in my luggage, and sat in a corner of the living room.

The day I opened it, I happened upon page 74, part of an article by A.M. Rosenthal called “Into the heart of the Gulag”, subtitled, “The first foreigner to visit the Perm 35 prison camp discovers that the struggle for liberty in the Soviet Union is far from over.” The first column on page 74 has two references to prisoners being locked in a hospital ward.

Coming across an explicit description of what *I* had been in the District of Columbia — a prisoner in a locked hospital ward — the day after writing the said paragraphs above, seems to me quite a coincidence.

Furthermore, on either Thursday, January 31st, or Friday, February 1st, I received in the post the February 1991 issue of *Buddha House News*. On the front page is a photograph of the Lama Khensur Rinpoche *releasing a pigeon!*

NO. 29: THE CASE OF THE UPROOTED PINE TREE

On the evening of Saturday, February 2nd, 1991, I was reading for the first time *The Bacchæ* of Euripides⁶¹. In the play, King Pentheus, having ridiculed the religion of Dionysus, is in “the topmost skiey branch of a pine” (p. 215), spying on the women engaged in the rites of Bacchus. But the women spy *him*, and

. . . a thousand hands grasped the tree; and they tore it from the earth. (p. 216)

⁶¹ Euripides (1954). *The Bacchæ and other plays*. Translated by Philip Vellacott. Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin.

The next day, I was reading the Renaissance epic poem *The Christiad*, by Marco Girolamo Vida⁶². Referring to the Temple in Jerusalem, Jesus is made to say (Book I, p. 27):

“This huge building, this temple, as immense as it is, like a pine torn up roots and all by the wind, shall be suddenly overturned and fall a vast ruin. And retribution to match what you have done is imminent, Jerusalem, for you dared to attack so many of the prophets with the sword, or pelt them with cruel stones, although they have been divinely sent to you.”

The same simile occurs within less than 24 hours.

NO. 30: THE CASE OF REINCARNATION AND THE CHANGING OF COATS

One of the more striking cases of this type occurred sometime during the winter of 1991 (I forget exactly when). I was thumbing through a paperback book called *Coming back: The science of reincarnation* by A.C.B. Prabhupada⁶³. I was struck by an illustrated analogy about reincarnation on page 31, the caption to which said

You have now put on a black coat. The next moment you may put on a white coat. But you are not that black or white coat. You have simply changed coats.

Later that day I picked up a totally different sort of book⁶⁴ and opened it up at random to page 144, where I spied the following sentence:

⁶² Vida, M.G. (1978). *The Christiad*. A Latin-English Edition, edited and translated by Gertrude C. Drake and Clarence A. Forbes. Carbondale & Edwardsville, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

⁶³ (1982). Los Angeles: The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust.

⁶⁴ Holleran, A. (1978). *Dancer from the dance*. London: Corgi.

Forty blocks northward Malone and Sutherland swept through the department stores sampling perfumes, trying on coats, giving people little presents of dope and handwritten poems, and attending the astonishing number of parties raised, to an exponential degree, by the time of year . . .

NO. 31: THE CASE OF THE MYSTICAL SOURCE

In the course of an experiment conducted in 1991 which included manic-depressives as subjects I received from one man a very interesting description of his mystical point of view, by which I was particularly moved. I quote in part:

I feel that being manic-depressive is at the same time my greatest limitation and my greatest gift. The tendency to hypomania is a limitation if it leads to ego-inflation and paranoid delusions of grandeur; and a gift if it leads to a spiritual transformation that is sustainable through subsequent highs and lows. It is a gift when it leads to being able to live out of one's essential self in contact with the Source of all religions in the depth of the personality. To be in contact with this Source of wisdom is to transcend the religious tradition in which one worships without disloyalty to that tradition, while being able to appreciate the wisdom of other traditions and faiths.

On the morning of Wednesday, August 28th, 1991, I had a copy of this man's letter on my kitchen table, and glancing at it I thought how much I preferred the locution used by some modern mystics to the effect that they are in contact not with "God" but with the Source (of all being), as a more neutral descriptor for that Fountain, that First Cause. Meditating on the word "source", I was motivated to open at random the *Bhagavad-Gita* (again!), and fell upon the following sentence on p. 374, in the commentary to Chapter 5, verse 25:

Having risen above the egocentricity and selfishness of individuality, abiding in bliss-consciousness and fully connected with the source of energy, a man can but move about compassionately doing good.

*

A COMMON SITUATION:

AN INTERWEAVING OF THE SEVERAL TYPES

Thus far I have attempted to distinguish, one from the other, different sorts of case of *sortes librariae*, dividing them according to whether the text coinciding with some thought is encountered at the end or at the beginning of a period of time, whether the text that is found “by chance” is one which fulfills some need, and whether one text corresponds in some striking way with another. But Nature in her richness does not always choose to serve us up a case of a single type but may instead opt to present more than one type in the one case. While these different types of coincidences may certainly be dealt with singly, it is clear that much is to be gained by setting all such coincidences, regardless of type, in their greater context so as to yield a broader picture, as different colored threads form the components of a larger tapestry.

I have three cases which exhibit this phenomenon of combining thematic correlations of different types into a whole. The third case happens to be one of the most complex, convincing, and sobering in my records. It therefore requires quite a bit of background description.

NO. 32: THE CASE OF THE PLENTIFUL TEARS

Monday morning on August 26th, 1991. I was pottering around my living room, and amongst my random thoughts was the one “what is the significance of crying during a manic episode?” My psychiatrist maintains that mania is a kind of suppressed depression, depression overcompensated for, and that one can see signs of this sadness in a manic episode. I maintain that one is simply very emotional, and can cry for joy, or be moved by great sadness, as a kind of compassion. Perhaps owing to my successes of late with the *sortes librariae* I happily picked up a book at random⁶⁵, and opened it up at random. There on p. 215, leaping up at me, was the brief sentence

She thanked Cassandra with tears in her eyes.

Unfortunately I’ve not kept a track of the dates, but over the following week or so it seemed as if a succession of attempts at *sortes librariae* yielded up constant references to tears. For example, random consultation of Homer’s *Odyssey*⁶⁶ produced the following passage from Book XI (p. 185), in which Odysseus is speaking to the shade of Achilles about his son Neoptolemus:

Then again, when we Argive captains took our places in the wooden horse Epeius made, and it rested solely with me to throw our ambush open or to keep it shut, all the other Danaan chieftains and officers were wiping the tears from their eyes and every man’s legs were trembling beneath him, but not once did I see your son’s fine color change to pallor nor catch him brushing a tear from his cheek.

⁶⁵ Bradley, M.Z. (1987). *The firebrand*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

⁶⁶ Homer (1946). *The Odyssey*. Translated by E.V. Rieu. Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin.

In a classical mood, my next selection was from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*⁶⁷, and it opened to a place which happened to be a section which I'd read before (because I had taught it in Latin class — a very small proportion of the entire work). It described the bad omens at the wedding of Orpheus and Eurydice (Book X, p. 225):

From there Hymen, clad in his saffron robes, was summoned by Orpheus, and made his way across the vast reaches of the sky to the shores of the Cicones. But Orpheus' invitation to the god to attend his marriage was of no avail, for though he was certainly present, he did not bring good luck. His expression was gloomy, and he did not sing his accustomed refrain. Even the torch he carried sputtered and smoked, bringing tears to the eyes, and no amount of tossing could make it burn.

The next time I attempted *sortes librariae* I used Milton's *Poetical works*⁶⁸. The book opened to his Psalm VI. Aug.13, 1653 (p. 194). It's all about being depressed and getting on top of it with the Lord's help. It seemed relevant to a recent depression, and when I first read it I interpreted its relevance as merely that and left it. But after realizing that the theme of tears was present in the previous two readings I went back to the Milton and realized that it was present there too:

*Wearied I am with sighing out my days,
Nightly my couch I make a kind of sea;
My bed I water with my tears; mine eye
Through grief consumes, is waxen old and dark
I' th' midst of all mine enemies that mark.
Depart, all ye that work iniquity.
Depart from me, for the voice of my weeping*

⁶⁷ Ovid (1955). Translated by Mary M. Innes. Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin.

⁶⁸ Milton (1966). *Poetical works*. Edited by D. Bush. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

The Lord hath heard;

NO. 33: THE CASE OF EURYDICE, ORPHEUS AND THE SNAKE

When I arose the morning of Friday, January 18th, 1991, I randomly selected a book from my bookshelf of classics, without even looking at the row of books. By this method I happened to select Mary Renault's *Funeral Games*,⁶⁹ and the page at which I opened it (again at random) turned out to be page 284. My eye was drawn to the sentence beginning "Kassandros' sudden departure for the north had left confusion behind him". The name "Kassandros" was immediately meaningful to me because, the day before at the Psychology Department I had described myself as being the unheeded Cassandra of a New Troy in regard to my concerns about the destruction that might take place in the then-current war in the Persian Gulf. I've also read a novel about Cassandra.⁷⁰ I had even, while under suspicion of psychosis, written a poem the previous October along these lines, putting the lament of an unheeded prophet into the mouth of Orpheus speaking to his father Apollo, God of medicine and prophecy. It's called *The curse of Cassandra*:

Orpheus:

*Is this, then, this Your Ultimate Joke, oh LORD?
That though I utter truth, few shall ever believe?
That I shall be New Troy's unheard Cassandra?
True prophetess, dismissed as truly mad?
Much-punishéd because I'd not submit
To "ministrations" from my doctor's lust?
Now bare myself to you, my Heav'nly Healer?
Submit to operations on my person?*

⁶⁹ Renault, M. (1981). *Funeral Games*. New York: Pinnacle Books.

⁷⁰ Bradley, M.Z. (1987). *The firebrand*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Allow You, LORD, to have your wicked way?

Submit to being raped by Lucifer?

Thy will, not mine, be done: they badly clash:

Two wills like bloody sides of gaping gash.

Apollo:

With time, our separate Wills will heal as One.

I'll be your hand-cuffed slave — your captive Sun.

Rather than reading just a single page, I sensed that I was to read several. Page 285 begins the description of how Queen Eurydike and her husband Phillip, imprisoned in a sty, are put to death, first Phillip at the hands of a band of Thracians, the leading one of which “wore an arm-bracelet of a triple-coiled snake . . .”: “He put out his arm — not the right, with the dagger, but the left with the coiled bronze snake — and swept her [Eurydike] out of the way.” (p. 287) The text then goes on to describe in some detail how Eurydike hangs herself.

What could the text be referring to? The imagery of hanging and choking have been coming up repeatedly for me lately: as a minor example, a student colleague confessed to me late yesterday that in a fit of rage he had virtually tried to strangle another of the students in the Department. This imagery had come up so often lately that I had previously enquired of the *I Ching* as to its meaning in case it was meant to be symbolic in my life.

Apart from these correlations I didn't know what to make of the passage. However, I later decided to select as music for the morning a cassette at random from a drawer containing at least 49 tapes. The tape that was produced in this fashion turned out to be Monteverdi's *Orpheo*, who was of course a Thracian, and of course one of the characters in the story is his newly-wed wife by the name of Eurydice, who very early on is bitten by a snake and dies. The correlation of “Eurydice” and “Thacian” and “snake” in the two contexts I regard as highly noteworthy.

But this wasn't the end of the coincidences. Later on in the morning I was watching the Gulf conflict on TV, and a commercial came on which seemed to be advertising about an alert system. One of the things to be alerted about was, it so happened, snakes, and they had a picture of one! Snakes had thus come up in three different contexts. The series of correlations, then, seemed to consist of the following elements repeated at a level above that which one would expect for chance coincidence: Cassandra, Orpheus, Eurydice, snakes, and death.

Post Script: on the evening of that same day did something I do extremely rarely: I attended Mass. I noticed that there was a statue there of the Virgin Mary — the one often seen depicting her treading beneath her feet the serpent, representing evil.

Post Post Script: Within a very short time, I read the following paragraph in Umberto Eco's *Foucault's pendulum*⁷¹, page 207, not randomly chosen but simply encountered in the course of reading the book for the first time:

It's like saying that Cassandra must have been born after Homer because she predicted the destruction of Troy. The belief that time is a linear, directed sequence running from A to B is a modern illusion. In fact, it can also go from B to A, the effect producing the cause. . . .

NO. 34: THE CASE OF "DEADLY MESSAGES" AND D. SCOTT ROGO

I had recently (December 1990) written a proposal for a small research grant to allow me to study whether there is any tendency for those people who are prone to psychoses such as schizophrenia or manic-depression to be more likely to believe in and report personal experiences of paranormal phenomena. There are in fact several studies — perhaps five — which provide evidence that there might be a correlation of this kind. (Assuming that there

⁷¹ Translated by William Weaver. London: Secker & Warburg.

is, we can then go on to ask whether the alleged psychic experiences reported by persons prone to psychosis are genuine or delusional — a very interesting but vexed question.)

Anyway, I had assumed that the literature on this topic was relatively sparse, when one day, for a completely different purpose, I happened to be looking through the diaries that I'd kept in the late 1970s. I'd not perused these diaries since the time they were written. I was particularly interested in the daily entries, but in the case of the 1978 diary I chanced to glance at the note section at the back. To my surprise and pleasure, I discovered that 12 years previously, while a student in Edinburgh, I must have heard about and made a note about (probably so that I could contact the author one day) an article entitled "The psychiatry and psychopathology of paranormal phenomena", by the then Professor of Psychiatry at Queensland, F.A. Whitlock! I believe that the journal in which the article appeared⁷² was probably not available in the library at Edinburgh University. Now back in Adelaide, I easily procured a copy of the article. A serendipitous event, to be sure.

Whitlock's paper was interesting, though it had less of relevance to my own topic than I'd hoped. I highlighted four passages, one of which was as follows on page 16:

Rogo (1974) [73] has recorded the case of a 32-year-old man recovering from a psychosis who claimed he was being persecuted by a poltergeist. Apparently this was not regarded as delusional and Rogo classed poltergeist phenomena as falling within the realm of psychopathology, indicating a kind of displaced aggression. Indeed he felt that the phenomena themselves might be therapeutic in that they permitted some exteriorization of aggression which might otherwise have been harmful if directed at other individuals.

⁷² Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry, 1978, 12, 11-19.

⁷³ Rogo, D.S. (1974). Psychotherapy and the poltergeist. *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, 47, 433-446.

Though I was familiar with Rogo's displaced-aggression hypothesis of poltergeists I hadn't actually read the article of his that Whitlock cited, and resolved that I must look it up some time, highlighting that and two other references in the rather long bibliography.

I believe the next part of the story occurred on Monday, December 17th, 1990, when I was seeing my own psychiatrist Dr. Darryl Bassett for a routine check-up. We'd discussed previously whether it might be possible to distinguish between believers in the paranormal who were experiencing psychiatric conditions and those believers who were not, and I'd shown him my proposal, of which he greatly approved. I told him that little research had been done, but to bolster the legitimacy of what I was trying to do I'd brought along to show him my copy of the Whitlock article that I had located by chance and which was in a journal very familiar to him. To my surprise, his reaction seemed to be one also of surprise and also pleasure, because during his psychiatric training in Queensland Whitlock had been one of his teachers! It so turned out that one of the topics covered by Whitlock in his article was stigmata, and this proved to be an interest of Dr. Bassett's also, he proceeding to show me some slides of ostensible cases! He was thus eager to make a copy of the article to read in full. The final thing to be mentioned about this session was that I explained very briefly to him how parapsychology and psychiatry might interact, and specifically talked about Rogo's theory that poltergeists might be due to displaced aggression and also that genuine paranormal phenomena had apparently occurred around an individual who was psychotic at the time.

I cannot be sure, but I believe it was after this session that I received a Christmas letter from my good friend Kathy Korner in England containing, amongst other things, the shocking news that Scott Rogo had been murdered in his apartment in Los Angeles the previous August. She enclosed a copy of a cutting from the *Los Angeles Times*. I'd known Rogo reasonably well as a colleague in parapsychology, and was rather upset for a time.

The story takes up again on the evening of January 9th, 1991. I'd noticed in the TV program guide that at 8.30 there was to be a movie entitled "Deadly messages". It is important to note what the blurb did (and did *not*) say about this movie:

A young woman discovers an old ouija board and when her flatmate disappears the only clue is the board.

Just before the movie began, I felt impelled to go into my study and select a book. Though it was not about ouija boards, I felt drawn to choose Scott Rogo's *The poltergeist experience*,⁷⁴ a book which, like several on my crowded shelves, I'd bought for a dollar "for future reference" but had in fact never opened. It contains some 284 pages of text. I opened it up at random at page 273, feeling in myself that I was to read the next page also. Page 273 was relevant inasmuch as it discussed "the theory that the conventional poltergeist evolves when its agent can no longer deal with pent-up hostility." But of much greater relevance was a passage still to come on page 274:

The first of these cases [of poltergeists showing motivation and intelligence] was . . . reported by Mary Williams, a Jungian analyst, who witnessed the PK [= psychokinesis] while treating a thirty-two-year-old man named Roger, who was recovering from a psychotic breakdown. Roger claimed that he was being persecuted by a poltergeist, a claim that Mrs. Williams apparently did not take seriously at first. But she revised her opinion when raps and other PK phenomena occurred during their therapy sessions. Mrs. Williams gradually came to realize that these outbreaks were not random occurrences, but occurred only when the patient's hostility turned toward her as a therapist.

Thus, without my even having to look it up consciously, I had found a description of the case of the psychotic man who was persecuted by a poltergeist!

The movie began, and the resemblances between it, various text on the pages of Rogo's book (which I kept open in front of me on the coffee table, weighed down by

⁷⁴ Rogo, D.S. (1979). *The poltergeist experience. Investigations into ghostly phenomena.* Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin.

something heavy), as well as Rogo's own death, began to come thick and fast — thematic resemblances which could not have been predicted from the tiny piece of information in the program guide. For instance, and at the risk of spoiling the movie for my readers, the main female character in the story becomes convinced that she is being haunted by a ghost who is trying to kill her (and which, she believes, has already killed her house-guest, though her body is not to be found.) She turns to the ouija board, and by automatic writing spells out a name, David, who claims to have been murdered in that room. She becomes convinced she is communicating with the dead. (*Comment: Here I was with a book in front of me about poltergeists, written by someone who had indeed been murdered in his own home! Moreover, I understand that the "D" in "D. Scott Rogo" likewise stands for "David"*⁷⁵!).

To continue the events in the movie, there had actually been a fire in the woman's apartment, in which her brother had supposedly died. She therefore goes to a newspaper library to look up the article that had been published about the incident. The article is in the *Los Angeles Times* (just as had been the article which I had been sent about the murder of Rogo.)

While most of my thematic correlations leave me with a very positive feeling of wonder, this series began to "spook" me. I wondered whether it was the appropriate thing to do to light a candle in memory of Scott. I turned to the right of me and considered whether to light the candle I keep there. But I rejected the idea, because it was hot night and the air-conditioner was on and would cause the flame to burn unevenly. I then picked up Rogo's book, and turned to look at the front cover, which I had not bothered to examine before. On the front is a picture in which there is (a) a candle, (b) a candle burning unevenly, (c) a candle-stick holder *identical* to mine, and (d) a curtain billowing in the breeze.

But the thematic correlations — the coincidences — did not stop there. In the movie, questions are raised as to whether there is something physically or mentally wrong with the woman. She undergoes a series of tests, as a result of which the family doctor concludes that

⁷⁵ See the article "ASSAP author murdered", *ASSAP News*, No.38, October 1990, p.1.

she is suffering from some sort of mental illness, most probably schizophrenia. Note that Rogo says, on pp.273-274 of his book — the pages to which I had opened “by chance”:

There can be little doubt that in most poltergeist cases the agent's repressed anger is usually directed at such emotionally binding targets as parents and guardians. This setting is also a classical breeding ground for the emergence of mental illness. Gregory Bateson, a noted psychologically oriented anthropologist, has developed what he calls the “double-bind” theory to explain schizophrenia. . .

The number and striking quality of such correlations left me prepared to consider the *possibility* that whatever might persist of Rogo himself in another existence, had somehow directed me to his book, those pages and the movie, as a form of communication. Or was it just some part of me? Or was it coincidence pure and simple, which, because unlikely correlations do sometimes occur by chance, is not to be remarked upon further?

NO. 35: THE CASE OF PENTHEUS AND THE TWO SUNS

The reader should not get the impression that every time I select and open a book at random I am invariably successful at finding a theme which correlates strikingly with one appearing elsewhere. However, I'm attempting to keep a record of such apparent failures in the hope that they will eventually prove illuminating. It seems that one possible cause for such “failure” is that the theme is related not to the recent past (as in Type I cases) but to the future (as in cases of Type II), and one has simply not allowed sufficient time to go before for that theme to appear. Of course I'm aware of the danger of allowing an indefinite amount of time to go by, all the time increasing the likelihood that the theme will come along just by chance. But if the theme is particularly rare, even a week's separation between first occurrence and next may seem unlikely. I present the following case for the reader's judgement.

At a point some time in January, 1991, I randomly selected a book of plays by Euripides, and opened it to pages 120-121.⁷⁶ The play was *The women of Troy* (also known in Greek as *Troiades*). The section concerned Queen Hekabe, lamenting the death of the child Astyanax and the destruction of the city of Troy. I could see no connection with anything in my life, recently or closely to follow. All I could think of was that the Middle East was at war, and the suffering and futility of it. I put the book aside on the little pile of such non-correlating themes.

I believe it was the morning of January 28th, 1991, that I randomly selected and opened Mary Renault's *The mask of Apollo*, a book of 285 pages⁷⁷. I opened at page 136, and felt permitted to read that and the next three pages — to the end of the chapter. The gist of the story is that a famous actor is invited to play in *The Bacchæ*, in ancient Syracuse. He is in conflict as to whether to refuse and return to Athens. He uses his Apollo mask as an almost divinatory focus for his thoughts. *The Trojan Women* is mentioned:

[Euripides] is sometimes impassioned over dead things, the war, the oligarchs and demagogues of his day, or that old scandal when the Spartans bribed the Pythia; then he gets angry himself, instead of leaving justice to the nature of things, which after all is tragedy. The old scores are settled, the scar on the play remains, like the mark of an old rotted goat-tether on a living tree. With the Troiades he rose above it; but with the Bacchæ he digs down far below, to some deep rift in the soul where our griefs begin. Take that play anywhere, even to men unborn who worship other gods or none, and it will teach them to know themselves. (pp. 138-139)

⁷⁶ Euripides (1954). *The Bacchæ and other plays*. Translated by Philip Vellacott. Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin.

⁷⁷ Renault, M. (1966). *The mask of Apollo*. London: New English Library.

At that time, I'd not read the *Bacchæ*. But I remembered from my Vergil a line or two in book IV of his *Æneid*, lines 469-470, describing the madness of King Pentheus. I translate:

Just as the demented Pentheus sees the band of Furies, and a two-fold sun, and Thebes appearing double.

Later that morning, as I was walking to the bus, I was tempted to look up at the sun, and then stopped myself from doing so, illogically thinking I would see two suns.

I had determined that one of the things I would do that day was to look up a passage in Philostratus' *The life of Apollonius of Tyana*⁷⁸, to examine Apollonius' views on the conditions he thought favorable to his own ESP. At the first opportunity, I looked up the index to locate the relevant passage, and found it listed under the heading "Wine, Apollonius renounces". I turned to the indicated pages, namely, 209 and following. In fact, the first part of this section is devoted to a discussion of sleep and the effect of alcohol on sleep. But a passage on page 211 is highly relevant:

Well I will prove, out of your own lips and following your own argument, how much advantage we who drink water have in that we sleep more sweetly. For you have clearly stated and admitted that the minds of drunkards are disordered and are in a condition of madness; for we see those who are under the spell of drink imagining that they see two moons at once and two suns . . .

I remember well as I was reading this, and came to the words "two moons", I wondered "Oh no! Is he going to go on to talk about two suns?" And of course he did! So my wonder was very great.

⁷⁸ Philostratus (1969). *The life of Apollonius of Tyana*. (In two volumes) With an English translation by F.C. Conybeare. London: William Heinemann.

Later, and just for the record, on page 215, Apollonius gets around to saying

And more than this, as a faculty of divination by means of dreams, which is the divinest and most godlike of human faculties, the soul detects the truth all the more easily when it is not muddied by wine, but accepts the message unstained and scans it carefully.

CHAPTER IV

TWO EXPERIMENTS:

GOAL: TO RECORD EACH AND EVERY ATTEMPT TO ELICIT (OR EVERY SPONTANEOUS EXAMPLE OF), THE *SORTES LIBRARIÆ* OCCURRING DURING DEFINED PERIODS.

PERIOD I: SEPTEMBER 10TH TO 21ST, 1991

**NO. 36: THE CASE OF THE JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES
AND THE BEGINNING AND END OF TIME**

This case occurred on Wednesday, September 11th, 1991. I had arrived home around 6.45 pm, went to the book case in my bedroom, and without looking chose blindly and at random a particular book from the Classics section. I opened it up at random, and it turned out to be page 208 of Lucretius' *On the nature of the universe*⁷⁹. The lines are about traditional Roman religion and how Lucretius thinks that it is superstition in the face of natural forces. This general theme of religion, (and a particular one which I'll come to in a minute), seemed to correspond with a conversation which I'd been having with my friend Sam Moore on the bus in the previous half hour: he was complaining about how difficult it had been to get rid of two Jehovah's witnesses, and how ridiculous were some of their beliefs. He was also discussing at length the theory propounded by Richard Dawkins in his *Selfish gene* about the origin of life as a result of purely chemical processes. Finally, he'd also asked me how the preparation of a seminar I was working on was proceeding. I told him that I'd started at the end rather than at the beginning — and went on to joke that wasn't that something that God might say? In view of this conversation the following paragraph appears to be not unrelated:

⁷⁹ Lucretius (1951). *On the nature of the universe*. Translated by Robert Latham. Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin.

When we gaze up at the supernal regions of this mighty world, at the ether poised above, studded with flashing stars, and there comes into our minds the thought of the sun and the moon and their migrations, then in hearts already racked by other woes a new anxiety begins to waken and rear up its head. We fall to wondering whether we may not be subject to some unfathomable divine power, which speeds the shining stars along their various tracks. It comes as a shock to our faltering minds to realize how little they know about the world. Had it a birth and a beginning? Is there some limit in time, beyond which its bastions will be unable to endure the strain of jarring motion? Or are they divinely gifted with everlasting surety, so that in their journey through the termless tract of time they can mock the stubborn strength of illimitable ages?

Sam had quoted the Biblical saying to the effect that God was “The beginning and the end, the first and the last . . .” And here we have a reference to the beginning and the end of the universe.

NO. 37: THE CASE OF THE MEDICAL MODEL AND THE MEDICINE MAN

This case occurred early in the afternoon of Thursday, September 12th, 1991. I had just received my copy of the monumental work *Manic-depressive illness*, by Goodwin and Jamison⁸⁰. I was reading the first few pages of the Introduction, and had just read (and had stopped after reading) the following paragraph on page 4:

The title of this book and its table of contents make it clear that we see manic-depressive illness as a medical condition, an illness to be diagnosed, treated, studied, and understood within a medical context. This position is the prevailing one now, as it has been throughout history.

⁸⁰ (1990). Oxford University Press.

No room for any transpersonal interpretations of the condition, I mused. Anyway, there had just been left on the table in front of me in the tea-room a copy of a new book of cartoons by Gary Larson⁸¹. I had had some success in the past with *sortes librariae* using books by Larson, and so with some confidence I picked up this new one and opened it to see what it would produce. The page was page 41, and depicted an African village. A man dressed in overalls in which were handyman's tools is saying to a white explorer

"You need to see medicine man — me just handyman."

The theme of medicine, cropping up immediately after reading the above paragraph, struck me as a noteworthy coincidence.

NO. 38: THE CASE OF ISAAC NEWTON AND THE APPLE

Though in this experiment I've attempted to be as careful and as accurate in documenting each various occurrence, I confess that I've not always succeeded, and this particular case is a case in point. It is fact that on the afternoon of Tuesday, September 10th, 1991, I'd borrowed from the Barr Smith Library Frank E. Manuel's *A portrait of Isaac Newton*⁸², being interested in the allegations of mental instability imputed to Newton.

Probably not more than two days later, while sitting in the tea-room having lunch with my colleagues, one of them, Lynn Ward, began to bounce her apple off her biceps. Frank Dalziel, noted for his sense of humor, called out to her that "It's already been done before by Newton". Lynn and I cannot recall Newton ever having been the subject of tea-room conversation, and Frank of course had no idea that I'd just borrowed a book on Newton, nor that I must have read, sometime in the previous 48 hours, on page 28:

⁸¹ *Wiener dog art. A far side collection.* 1990. London: Futura.

⁸² Frederick Muller: London, 1968

It was in his mother's garden in Woolsthorpe that he noticed the apple drawn to the earth — a story to which he frequently adverted in his last years.

A week later Frank divulged to me the questions that he would be setting for the Animal Behavior exams which I would be marking, one of them being about Clarke L. Hull, who, said Frank, fancied himself the Newton of his area, the psychology of learning.

NO. 39: AN APPARENT FAILURE

If I remember correctly this event occurred on the evening of Thursday, September 12th, 1991. Outside of a bookstore there was a display of books, and I was attracted to one called *Layayoga*. I opened it up at random, but immediately regretted it, because if there were a thematic correlation then I would not be in a position to engage in my usual practice, namely, to xerox the page(s) with the relevant passage as a record. In fact, I could find nothing in the paragraph which seemed remotely connected with me.

NO. 34: THE CASE OF WISH-FULFILMENT AND THE PROSTITUTES

This case occurred on Friday, September 13th, 1991, just before midday. Despite wanting to leave for the university fairly soon, I'd made a conscious decision to try the *sortes librariae* using, as so often, the bookcase of books in my bedroom. Prior to the attempt I'd been somewhat anxiously considering the possibility that all my work on characteristics of believers in ESP and all my work on mania would lead to one and the same conclusion: that people believe what they want to believe, and reported cases of psi (or of exalted station in mania) are simply cases of wishful thinking.

My hand, thrust into the book case, happened to pull out John Rechy's *City of night*, a novel 368 pages long⁸³. I opened it randomly to page 218, and my attention was drawn to these lines about the centre of the page:

That did it. I mumbled something about having to leave, and I walked away. They said something, but I didnt [sic] hear what it was — undoubtedly something Bitchy.

But had I left really because I was annoyed at what he had said? — or was it that I had wanted all along to do what I was now doing?

These lines seem to have some correlation both with the fact that I was wanting to leave to go to work, and with the attribution of wish-fulfilment as a motive. I read the rest of the page, both above those lines and below, finding nothing which was as good a correspondence.

However, within a very few minutes, the passage became much more relevant. *City of night* is basically an account of the very sleazy underworld of male prostitution in America. On the bus to university I bumped into a young friend in some distress. I took him aside to my office and coaxed from him the news that the previous night he had met a male prostitute at a bar and subsequently been threatened and robbed by him. Such stories are almost unheard of in my experience, so the coincidence of the theme of prostitution was very striking.

That night, feeling very emotional, and as if feeling the anguish of my friend, I felt impelled to go the same bookcase in my bedroom and, in the dark, select and open another book. It turned out to be Mary Renault's *The praise singer*⁸⁴, and the page to which I opened was page 167. Much of the page is relevant, but perhaps the most relevant passage was as follows:

⁸³ 1963, Granada Publishing.

⁸⁴ Corgi, London, 1978

Only now it came to me that the party had been just the appetizer of Hipparchos' feast. The main course would be enjoyed in private. He had bought for each guest a night with one of the first hetairas in Athens. It was his little joke. He had done it mainly for me.

The Greek word *hetaira*, meaning literally “companion”, is of course something of a euphemism for a high-class prostitute.

So there we have it: two books chosen at random on the same day open to passages about prostitutes, and in between a rather tragic real-life story of a prostitute who turned on his client. Can chance explain such things?

NO. 41: THE CASE OF THE PAT ON THE HEAD

On the evening of Saturday, September 14th, 1991, I was getting ready to go to a party, when I decided to try the *sortes librarie* with Susan Heywood's *A guide for the advanced soul*. As she suggested, I held a problem in my mind before opening at random. “The problem of love” was the issue for which I sought advice. The answer was

*Life is like a wild tiger.
You can either lie down
and let it
Lay its paw on your head —
Or sit on its back and ride it.*

Other things happened — or rather *didn't* happen — at the party, as will become clearer with the next case. But at one stage a young friend practiced some of his newly acquired skills in massage on me as I sat in a chair. When I got home that evening and reviewed this passage, I realized that someone — if not a wild tiger — had indeed placed their “paw” on my head,

giving me a scalp massage! That's the only correlation I can see. The problem of love remained. However, I did decide to take a more active rôle in the pursuit of love that week.

NO. 42: THE CASE OF "AY MAY" AND ROMEO AND JULIET

At the aforementioned party, I'd been awaiting eagerly the arrival of one of the invitees who, however, did not show up. I was crestfallen. At one stage I sighed and uttered some phrase which sounded like "Ay may!", a confused recollection (or combination) of Monteverdi's character Orpheo who, when he learns of the sudden death of his wife Eurydice, uses (I've since verified), the Italian word "Ohimè") and of Juliet who in lonesomeness, and believing herself to be alone, sighs "Ay me!" (II,ii) (just before Romeo, hidden in the orchard all the while, plucks up the courage to speak to her.)

When I got home, feeling ill from a cold and frustrated in love, a strong impression almost like a commanding voice told me to open at random Aldous Huxley's *Brave new world*⁸⁵, (a book I had never read) and "READ! READ UNTIL YOU FIND SOMETHING!" I opened to page 122, and had only to read to page 124 to find the astonishing coincidence that I felt had been promised: there there was a long reference to *Romeo and Juliet*, and "the scene in the orchard", and the character Helmholtz mocking Juliet's predicament about being forced to marry someone she did not love. Ah yes, the problem of love.

NO. 43: AN ADDITION TO THE CASE OF THE PLENTIFUL TEARS

I have no recollection of exactly which day this case occurred on. The book that I had selected was *The intimate enemy. How to fight fair in love and marriage*, by George R. Bach and Peter Wyden⁸⁶. I opened at random to p. 62, and something told me to read just the section near my finger:

⁸⁵ Bantam: New York, 1932

JOYCE (on the verge of tears): Dammit, why can't I ever depend on you for anything that might be fun for me?

Once again, the topic of tears, as if to augment the number of examples in a previous case.

NO. 44: THE CASE OF SCIENCE AND SIMILES

I believe this case occurred on Tuesday, September 17th, 1991. I had just recently finished the draft of a scientific paper in which I likened anxieties to vultures hanging around carrion, or like lions homing in on their prey. I was walking along to the bus and imagining myself speaking before a departmental seminar. I fantasized that someone would complain about my style and that they would say I had been reading too much ancient poetry with its love of simile.

When I boarded the bus I opened up to the next section of the biography of Isaac Newton that I was reading, and, lo and behold, the whole page and a half (pages 76-77) was, to my surprise, about just this issue:

If the classics were not to be a moral inspiration, neither could they serve as models for the expression of thought, as examples of wit and elegance, of style. . . The Royal Society made an ideal of setting things forth in a chaste, practical, matter-of-fact language without periphrastic turns, digressions, and elaborations. The Society's motto, Nullius in Verba, was primarily a renunciation of the verbal authority of ancient scientists, but there are also overtones of a more general prejudice against literary culture. Wilkins is considered responsible for the initiation of a barebones style, simple, straightforward, to the point, excellent for communicating mathematical and physical ideas, for minute and accurate description, but rather inadequate for the rendering of poetic and emotional images or the intricate fabric of feelings. The

millions of words Newton left behind in manuscript are virtually without adjectives, beyond the simple ones that denote quantity and color and are associated with numbers. . . . In the 1670's there were still signs of elegance in Newton's correspondence; and his early classical education left its mark in hyperbole, even a species of wit on rare occasions, and, mirabile dictu, a simile.

NO. 45: THE CASE OF THE MIND-BODY PROBLEM

This case definitely occurred late in the afternoon of Tuesday, September 17th, 1991. I had just been to a lecture on the Psychology and Philosophy of Consciousness. Given by Dr. Chris Cooper, it had been entirely devoted to the different theories regarding the relationship of mental events to brain events.

Immediately following the lecture I returned to my office, and picked up one of the three questionnaires that had been returned that day in connection with my latest study of manic-depression. On the back of these questionnaires is a statement to the effect that "if you have any other comments on the subjects raised, please feel free to write them in the space below." Most people who respond to that offer talk about their medical condition; some describe paranormal experiences; and a few complain about the narrowness of the forced-choice response-options allowed them. On this particular day, however, the response was very different:

I [would] like to raise another subject: Are thoughts causing the change of chemicals in our brain or are chemicals changing our thoughts?

I was so pleasantly amused by this coincidence of theme with lecture that I immediately raced down to Chris' office to show him the questionnaire and share with him my excitement. He was reasonably impressed, and said something about Jung being right about synchronicity (the fancy word he (Jung) invented for such coincidences)!

NO. 46: ANOTHER APPARENT FAILURE

I unfortunately did not record the date of this attempt, though it is probably in approximately the right chronological order. I was feeling very emotional again, as I had the time I selected *The praise singer*, and I felt that this might be a sign of success of the quality that I had experienced in that case concerning the prostitutes. The book chosen at random was *Zen and the art of motorcycle maintenance. An inquiry into values*, by Robert M. Pirsig⁸⁷, and the pages to which I opened were pages 110-111. Stimulating though those pages are, I found nothing which obviously correlated with concerns of mine.

NO. 47: THE CASE OF “THE WISDOM OF THE SAINTS”

There have been times when I have picked up a book in a bookstore and opened it up to find something strikingly relevant to me, and thereupon bought the book in the hope that it would be a fruitful source for such occurrences in future. Such was the case with Jill Haak Adels’ *The wisdom of the saints. An anthology*⁸⁸. I seem to remember that some moments before I spied this book I’d been wondering whether death was like the caterpillar in its cocoon, appearing to die and then emerging as a butterfly (the symbol of enlightenment). Standing at a street sale, I’d opened this book at random to find the following paragraph by Teresa of Avila on page 203:

Die! Die as the silkworm does when it has fulfilled the office of its creation, and you will see God and be immersed in His Greatness, as the little silkworm is enveloped in its cocoon. Understand that when I say “you will see God,” I mean in the manner described, in which He manifests Himself in this kind of union.

⁸⁷ Corgi, London, 1974

⁸⁸ Oxford University Press, New York, Oxford, 1987

Though the ideas are not precisely concordant, mine being about death, Teresa's being about mystical union, nevertheless the mention of the word "cocoon" seemed to be more than coincidence. Buy the book as a record of the incident? Because of the price, I resisted at the time, but did eventually go back to get it, despite its very traditional theology.

I believe it was probably on Sunday September 15th, 1991, that I opened the book at random in the expectation of finding something interesting. My finger was resting on the following paragraph (on page 211):

CLARE OF ASSISI (1194-1253). A daughter of the local nobility, the eighteen-year-old Clare was so inspired by hearing St. Francis preach that she ran away from home to join him. Her mother, two sisters, and other notable ladies eventually joined the group, which became the Poor Clares. Clare obtained from Pope Innocent III a special privilege guaranteeing the Poor Clare's right to hold no property at all. Second only to that of Francis, Clare's influence is responsible for the remarkable flourishing of the Franciscan movement.

I could not see any correlation whatsoever between this passage and anything remotely connected with my life and thought. A failure, I wondered? If so, *why* did this fail where others appeared to succeed? I decided that it might refer to something that would happen in the future, and therefore to keep alert.

That week there arrived the latest issue of the *Journal of the Society for Psychological Research* (volume 57, no. 823, April, 1991). I noticed that in it was an obituary for a David St. Clair (page 445). Apart from the name (spelt differently from "Clare", and I'm not even sure that Clare of Assisi was a saint), I could find no further correlation. I remained unimpressed.

Slightly more interesting, but still not as persuasive as one would like, was an incident which occurred a few days later, on Thursday, September 19th, 1991, when I was walking to a Government office to apply for rent relief, my most recent job having come to

an end. On the way, I was walking alongside the Cathedral of St. Francis Xavier, and the name suddenly reminded me of the “St. Francis” of the quotation, and my hopes were for a brief second raised that light would be shone on the obscure Clare *sortes*, only to realize hurriedly that I had the wrong St. Francis — I needed Assisi, not Xavier. Nevertheless, I was passing a bus shelter at the same time, and noticed that on it was written (as graffiti) some lines intended to be poetry. In view of the above, they are worth quoting in full:

To the one I want the most

I luv to say

For ever it is en clair,

Have a good day!

How odd to have a French phrase in such a context! I understand as a result of inquiries that “en clair” means something like “in the open”. Thus did “Clare” become more clear?

NO. 48: THE CASE OF THE BIRDS AND THE SEEDS

Saturday morning, September 21st, 1991. I had just risen, and was looking out the window of the living room, noticing a bird of some sort hopping around on the lawn looking for seeds. [My immediate association is the reading in the *I Ching* (Wilhelm, 1967), #62, “Preponderance of the small”, where the Judgment states in part (p. 240), “The flying bird brings the message: It is not well to strive upward, It is well to remain below”, interpreted as (pp. 240-241) “But a bird should not try to surpass itself and fly into the sun; it should descend to the earth, where its nest is.” And later (pp. 243-244), “If a bird will not come to its nest but flies higher and higher, it eventually falls into the hunter’s net. He who in times of extraordinary salience of small things does not know how to call a halt, but restlessly seeks to press on and on, draws upon himself misfortune at the hands of gods and men, because he deviates from the order of nature.”] On a different line of thinking, I am driven to wonder whether birds kept as household pets, such as budgies, if released into the wild,

would know how to forage for seeds, having had them provided for them throughout their domesticated lives.

Being ill, I returned to bed, and opened up my book on *Manic-depressive illness*, to continue reading from the night before. I believe I took up in the second column of page 26, and immediately my eye caught the word “scythe” further down, standing out clearly from the text, reminding me of an earlier coincidence (case No. 18). But I read the whole column, in which was the following poem written by a person in a hypomanic episode:

God Is a Herbivore

Thyme passes, mixed with long grasses of herbs in the field.

Rosemary weeps into meadow sweeps

While curry is favored by the sun in its heaven.

The glinting scythe cuts the mustard twice

And the sage is ignored on its rock near the shore.

Hash is itself: high by being.

Laws says shallots shall not — so they shan't

But . . .

The coriander meanders, the cumin seeds come

While a saffron canary eats juniper berry

Ignoring opened sesame seeds on the ground.

While it's true that I had been thinking about budgerigars rather than canaries, there is surely some thematic resemblance between those ideas and the final two lines of this poem. And the association warning the bird not to fly too high in Icarus fashion, could symbolically recall the “flying high” of hypomania. But why did my eye catch “scythe” and not the more recent notion of “seeds”?

NO. 49: A CODA TO THE CASE OF THE PLENTIFUL TEARS

This is not in my opinion a striking coincidence, because the text may very well have arisen in a book of the kind I was reading. I provide it merely as substantiation that there does exist a psychiatric viewpoint of the kind I was quoting in an earlier case, *the Case of the plentiful tears*. A few pages on from reading the material in the previous case in *Manic-depressive illness*, I came across a few minutes later the following paragraph (pp. 30-31):

It would appear that the traditional conception of mania and depression as representing “opposite” pathologic extremes of affective expression is simplistic and reductionistic in several ways. While most depressive states share the common affect of sadness, mania appears to be not as well characterized by elation but by a state of heightened overall activation, with enhanced affective expression together with lability of affect. The co-occurrence of severe depressive thought content and behavior (eg, crying) with elation and heightened anger and other affects in varying intensities in the same manic individual suggests that the equation of elated mood with mania represents an oversimplification of the varied phenomena of mania.

NO. 50: THE CASE OF GETTING ONE’S HOUSE IN ORDER

Saturday evening, September 21st, 1991. I reach for my Latin dictionary⁸⁹ to look up the word *somnium* to verify my suspicion that it means “dream”. I am then tempted to try with this book the *sortes librariae*. The temptation is too great, and I turn to what happens to be page 248, my finger landing in the entry for the word *ingere*, “to form”. Immediately I regret what I’ve done, there already being so much case material to write up — why add even

⁸⁹ Simpson, D.P. (1968). *Cassell's new Latin-English English-Latin dictionary*. Cassell: London

more before that is completely written up? A centimeter above my finger is the line “to arrange, put in order what already exists”. Exactly.

*

Post script: I spent a good part of the evening of Saturday, September 21st, properly documenting the previous cases that have fallen within the delimited time period. I will now take the pressure off myself and no longer require (for a while at least) that I document each and every case of *sortes librariae*. The experiment has demonstrated that, whatever the mechanism, it is comparatively easy (for me at least) to discover thematic resemblances in a majority of the cases — resemblances of a sort which may sometimes be attributable to assiduous and attentive scanning but which on at least some occasions seem to be too striking to be mere selective perception operating in concert with capitalizing on chance.

Post post script: the evening that I finished writing the above post script (as well as the day after) there continued to occur various new coincidences, for example in relation to the word “dream”. I’ve resisted the impulse to continue recording them (just for now): the process could be never-ending, and my little experiment has proved its point. Besides, it’s so time-consuming to have to document all the intricate mental and physical circumstances in enough detail to render the coincidence explicable to someone other than myself. More serious, it may be possible to become obsessed with actively looking for “non-chance meanings”, in a way that may be mentally unhealthy. Perhaps better that they occur spontaneously and unbidden. From the elicited variety I am giving myself a holiday. But I wonder how long I can resist the temptation to be brought back into the game, with all its possibilities of producing an awe-inspiring coincidence!

The next experiment of this kind that I allowed myself to indulge in was some four months later, and is described in the next section. All attempts were recorded on a single day.

**ONE FURTHER EXPERIMENT:
PERIOD II: JANUARY 19TH 1992**

NO. 51: THE CASE OF THE SHADOWS AND THE AFTERNOON WEARING ON

This case occurred on Sunday, January 19th, 1992, at approximately 12.20 pm. I had been looking out the window of my bedroom, which faces north, at the shadow cast by the stobie pole. Remembering the principles of the sun-dial and of the shadow stick, I was at first surprised that the shadow was not pointing more directly south, as befits midday in the southern hemisphere, until I remembered that it was daylight saving and the “real” time was actually 11.20 am, nearly an hour before midday. Even so, I was struck by the obliqueness of the shadow’s angle.

Immediately afterwards I was moved to select, blindly and at random, from the top row of the book-case in the same room, open the book at random, and read the section where my finger rested. It turned out to be *The Odes of Horace*⁹⁰, page 201, Ode 28 of Book Three. The eight lines upon which my finger rested were:

*What better way,
Lyde, to celebrate the festal day
Of Neptune than
Uncupboarding the hoarded Caecuban [wine]?
Come girl, don’t wait;
On with the siege of wisdom’s fortress gate!*

⁹⁰ 1964, translated by James Michie, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin

*The shadows grow,
The afternoon wears on . . .*

The girl's name, Lyde, is of slight interest since I was speaking with a Lydia not two hours earlier, but I do not consider the match an especially close one⁹¹. More interesting perhaps is that I was undecided as to which of two places to go to this afternoon. One of them possesses a statue of Neptune complete with trident! Though I many years ago translated Book One of Horace's Odes, I do not believe that I have ever read any in Book Three. Memory thus seems out of the question as an explanation for opening the book at this relevant section.

NO. 52: THE CASE OF THE BIBLE AND THE FRIEND VISITING EGYPT

This case occurred about 2.30 in the afternoon of Sunday January 19th, 1992. I was trying to work out in my mind what to do with myself that afternoon. I got to musing over a piece of information that I'd received over the 'phone from a friend in the US, namely, that a mutual friend had gone to Egypt for a wedding. Knowing that he was to stay two weeks, I was wondering whether he would tour the sights and imagined him seeing the pyramids. In frustration at my indecision, I inwardly expressed the desire for guidance, closed my eyes, and made my way to the book-shelf in my living room, to pick a book at random. It turned out to be the Bible — an inadvertent *Sortes Biblicæ*! — it being the Revised Standard Version/Catholic Edition⁹², p. 843). The text at my finger was Ezekiel, Chapter 31, verses 25-26, and went as follows:

⁹¹ Nevertheless, not two days later, on the evening of Tuesday, January 21st, I was reading for the first time Book II of Marco Girolamo Vida's *Christiad*, and on p. 62, line 344, came across the name "Lyde", a Latin translation of the Hebrew place name Lydda.

⁹² 1966, The Liturgical Press, St. John's Abbey, Collegeville, Minnesota

And I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon, and put my sword in his hand; but I will break the arms of Pharaoh, and he will groan before him like a man mortally wounded. I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon, but the arms of the Pharaoh shall fall; and they shall know that I am the Lord. When I put my sword into the hand of the king of Babylon, he shall stretch it out against the land of Egypt; and I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations and disperse them throughout the countries. Then they will know that I am the Lord.

The correlation that I see is the repeated mention of Egypt when I had just been thinking of that country. However, the name no doubt occurs frequently in the Bible, and the chances of coming across it are relatively high. No other part of the reading seems relevant, nor did it solve the problem for which I had sought guidance.

NO. 53: THE CASE OF APOLLONIUS, PHILOSOPHER AND FINANCIER

This attempt occurred immediately after writing up the previous one. I wondered whether I might have any better success with a book no part of which I'd ever read and which was sitting on the bookshelf next to my computer, *The World is Mine*, by Clayton Rand and Robert Smitley⁹³. I opened to pages 210-211. Nothing seemed especially accurate. A failure.

NO. 54: A CASE WHERE PATIENCE MAY HAVE PAID OFF

I spent much of the afternoon of Sunday, January 19th, 1992 reading for the first time an article published in 1895 by a woman identified only as "Miss X", and called "On the

⁹³ 1958, Fleet Publishing Corporation: New York

apparent sources of subliminal messages”⁹⁴, which was mainly an attempt to understand various aspects of the extrasensory information that she appeared to receive in large abundance. At some time, I believe about 3.15, when I was taking a break, I wandered by my living-room book-case and happened to notice that one book was jutting out ever so slightly: *Man and his symbols*⁹⁵. With some ambivalence, I opened it at p. 249, and when I examined it could find no obvious correspondences. The part of the text to which I opened was as follows:

The symbol of the circle has played a curious part in a very different phenomenon of the life of our day, and occasionally still does so. In the last years of the Second World War, there arose the “visionary rumor” of round flying bodies that became known as “flying saucers” or UFOs (unidentified flying objects). Jung has explained the UFOs as a projection of a psychic content (of wholeness) that has at all times been symbolized by the circle. In other words, this “visionary rumor,” as can also been seen in many dreams of our time, is an attempt by the unconscious collective psyche to heal the split in our apocalyptic age by means of the symbol of the circle.

My attention was also drawn to the two illustrations on the page, one “from a 16th-century German broadsheet of some strange circular objects seen in the sky — similar to the “flying saucers” that have been seen in recent years. Jung has suggested that such visions are projections of the archetype of wholeness.” I gather that what is meant is that UFOs are really subjective rather than objective. The other illustration was *Landscape from a Dream*, by Paul Nash (1889-1946), in which, among other things, there is depicted a frame of a screen or windows or the framework of a house, through which can be seen cliffs and the rocky shoreline by a sea. I saw no connections.

⁹⁴ *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*, 1895, *II*, 114-144.

⁹⁵ Carl G. Jung, M.-L. von Franz, Joseph L. Henderson, Jolande Jacobi, and Aniela Jaffé (1964), Aldus Books, Jupiter Books: London.

But when I returned to my reading of the article by Miss X, at least one connection arose. For on p. 137 there occurs the sentence "... I often stand at the door or bay window and look out across the sea." But apart from that, there was nothing to do with the text from Jung. A poor coincidence.

NO. 55: THE CASE OF THE GOD WHO BEARS THE TRIDENT

This case occurred at 5.10 pm on Sunday, January 19th, 1992. I was lying propped up in bed about to meditate, when I clearly heard the name "Ovid". I knew I was meant to try the *sortes librariae* with a book by him. I have several books by Ovid, but I "knew" that the one which was meant was his *Metamorphoses*⁹⁶, of which at the time I'd read only a tiny portion. My thumb rested on page 251 at the following paragraph which, as it turns out, has a connection with the first reading of the day:

Apollo, when he had taken his revenge, left Tmolus and journeyed through the clear air, but stopped short of the narrow strait of Helle, Nephele's daughter, and alighted on the plains of Troy. There, on the right of the Sigeon promontory, and to the left of the Rhoetean, stood an ancient altar, sacred to the Thunderer of Panomphe; and from there the god saw Laomedon, beginning to raise up the walls of his new city, Troy. He saw, too, that the great task the king had undertaken demanded no small resources, and that it was proceeding with much toil and difficulty. So, along with the god who bears the trident, the father of the swelling seas, Apollo disguised himself as a mortal and, on receiving a promise of gold in return for the city's defences, built the walls of Troy for the Phrygian tyrant.

⁹⁶ 1955, translated by Mary M. Innes, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin

The “god who bears the trident” is none other than our friend Neptune, whose day Horace was feasting in our first case. I was inclined to view the repetition as a message that I should indeed go swimming that evening in the pool overlooked by the statue of this god.

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To summarize this little one-day experiment we can note that of six cases of attempting the *sortes librariae*, two were failures (No. 52 and part of No. 53), whereas the other four were successful to a greater or lesser degree.

CHAPTER V

SOME RECENT EXAMPLES OF THE *SORTES LIBRARIAE*

Since January 1992 — case No. 54 — and though I have continued to obtain successful coincidences with the technique of *sortes librariae*, I have not been in the habit of exhaustively recording my experiences. The most that I have done is to photocopy the pages of the relevant book, with the hope of eventually writing up the complete case, but without recording in addition the circumstances of the rest of the coincidence — the mental or physical event to which the book corresponded — which takes more effort. Much to my frustration, I cannot now remember with sufficient clarity the circumstances surrounding the majority of these post-1992 cases, which number in their dozens. As an exception, I have in my possession a copy of pages 194 and 195 of the Penguin edition of Homer's *Iliad*⁹⁷. On the fifth line down on p. 194 there occurs the phrase “sheep or goats”. The significance of this — I can still remember, even at this stage — is that, not two minutes earlier, I had been thinking of the *parapsychological* meanings of these two terms, “sheep” referring to believers in ESP and “goats” being the disbelievers. In the *Iliad*, sheep and goats came up in a more literal sense, but I still maintain that they did so in an improbably hasty manner after my recent contemplation of their parapsychological namesakes.

Unfortunately, for most of the rest of my case-notes I do not have a record of the mental side of the coincidence, nor relevant dates. In two comparatively recent cases I have satisfactory memory of the mental events but can no longer locate the relevant passage in the books. I can only plead by way of excuse that writing up cases is tedious, and when the coincidences come thick and fast one is hard put to keep up with their documentation. A partial exception is my use of the *I Ching*: In the four years that have elapsed since I wrote the chapters that precede this one I have consulted this oracle more than 300 times, with full

⁹⁷ Homer (1966). *The Iliad*. Translated by E.V. Rieu. Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin.

documentation of the readings (though not usually the observed outcome) and with a fair degree of success.⁹⁸

As mentioned above, and excluding the *I Ching*, the *sortes librariae* in intervening years 1992-97 have not been without promising results. For this final chapter I have gathered some mostly recent examples where documentation permits a complete record to be made of the coincidence.

NO. 56: THE CASE OF THE BODILY TEMPLE

This coincidence occurred on or somewhat after May 12th, 1992. If I remember correctly, I was walking beside the South Australian Art Gallery, which is adjacent to the University of Adelaide. For some reason I was thinking “the body is a temple”. When I arrived at the Psychology Department I found a copy of the local newspaper *The Advertiser* on the tearoom table. In it, on page 19, was a photo of Lisa Forrest, and the caption

“Your body is like a temple”.

NO. 57: THE CASE OF THE SAVING GRACE

Again I have no date for this coincidence, if that’s what it was. As a manic-depressive I experience from time to time periods of suicidal depression. I was in one such state as I was coming home on the bus one late afternoon. I was reading, for the first time, Vida’s *Christiad*, Book II, in fact about Judas. I came to line 119, and read some text which seemed very pertinent to me:

⁹⁸ Thalbourne, M.A. (1994). Postscript to an experiment with the *I Ching*: How many changing lines? *European Journal of Parapsychology*, 10, 130-136.

Half-mad wretch, do you not feel God in your heart? Do you not drink in his divine presence either with your eyes or with your ears? What great folly has transformed you? See from what a summit you now hurl yourself, from what a height you are falling to destruction! Do you not realize what sort of illusion has beset your mind? What are you plotting? Or whither does this fearful compulsion, which now madly possesses you, hurry you, mindless and darkened as you are? What good fortune are you now losing, a gift forever lost, which a thousand generations to come in after years shall yearn for? And as for the wishes you cherish, the hopes your mind entertains, all these the wind shall rip to pieces and sweep off through the air, puffed up crazily as you are with foolish glee. Tear this terrible temptation from your heart while you can, and all the anguish that has seeped into your very marrow.

For whatever reason, I survived, and am here today to tell the story.

NO. 58: THE CASE OF THE REPEATING SPRING

Once again I can give as date only the early 90s. For a reason which is now obscure to me, I must have been thinking about Spring, the season. I then proceeded to pick up and open (at pp. 36-37) the unlikely book *Rocks and minerals*⁹⁹ which, if I had read it at all, I had done so in my childhood when I took an interest in the subject. As the illustration shows, at the bottom of p. 36 the caption to a gold mask says “Xipe, God of Spring”. This coincidence, striking in its own way, is nevertheless weakened by the haziness of the recollection of my introspective state prior to opening the book.

NO. 59: THE CASE OF JUPITER AND APOLLO

⁹⁹ Zim, H.S., & Shaffer, P.R. (1957). New York: Golden Press.

It was probably in early 1991 that I wrote the poem which I reproduce below. I was inspired in part by the appearance in the night sky of the brilliant planet Jupiter.

HYMN TO JUPITER, *DIEI PATER*¹⁰⁰

Once, oh LORD, I feared the starless night,
 Filled with all foreboding, filled with fright,
 Alone along the valley floor I trod,
 Alone, without companion, without God.

But now the nightly sky reveals your star,
 The shining planet Jupiter afar,
 The seed of change-for-better in the yin,
 The harbinger of yang, the good's begin.

Oh lamp of Heaven, nightly fears' allay!
Diei Pater — Parent of the Day!
 Father of Apollo, or Apollo's son?¹⁰¹
 Not either/or: the half of "1 + 1".¹⁰²

On Tuesday, 5th February 1991 I sent a copy of this poem to my friend Bob Petersen, as a sort of brain-teaser.

In the evening I went to the cinema, and remember standing around outside during the intermission thinking of Jupiter and Apollo. I even saw a fellow patron wearing the "Son of the sun" cartouche.

¹⁰⁰ Latin for "Father of the Day" or "Father of the Sky" — the ultimate derivation of the name Ju-piter.

¹⁰¹ Apollo as understood as "the One". Cf. the Introduction, p. 12.

¹⁰² This was intended to be a little koan. The answer is $1 + 1 = 0$, in the case where the yin symbol and the yang symbol combine to form a circle, symbol of enlightenment.

When I arrived home I was moved to try the *sortes librariae* with the biggest book I have, *The Globe illustrated Shakespeare*¹⁰³. I have read an infinitesimally small portion of this text. I opened it to Coriolanus, p. 1684 (out of a total of 2364 pages). The text next to my thumb read

Or Jove for's power to thunder.

NO. 60: THE CASE OF THE COLORED DAYS OF THE WEEK

In the summer of 1992 I was in Melbourne, at one stage in a second-hand bookstore. As I perused the psychology section there practically jumped out at me Peter McKellar's *Imagination and thinking*¹⁰⁴. I flipped through the pages and immediately alighted on p. 56, where the following quote occurs:

Another kind of a-typical imagery is colour association. This association is often with days of the week: "When I think of Sunday I see dark red; Monday is brown; Tuesday pale blue; Wednesday red-blue; Thursday dark royal blue; Friday yellow; and Saturday white.:"

The coincidence? Some days before this incident my psychiatrist had brought up during a consultation that he had color associations to days of the week. I had no idea where to find in a psychology text any reference to this phenomenon. And then, by chance, a reference came into my hands when I was not consciously looking for it! My psychiatrist was surprised and pleased.

NO. 61: THE CASE OF GOD AND THE HONEYCOMB

¹⁰³ Edited by Howard Staunton. New York: Greenwich House. 1983

¹⁰⁴ (1957). London: Cohen & West.

It was probably in January 1993 that I wrote the following mystical poem:

GOD IS THE HONEYCOMB

God is the honeycomb: our bodies are His cells,
 The ever-questing worker bees our never-resting souls
 On wings spread forth like ocean-fanning sails
 A-gathering sweet nutriment; from flowers one resiles,
 A-pausing just a moment on the ledges and the sills;
 A-tombing cells replete with sweet with death-like waxen seals,
 Their angel's food a treasure-trove of hard-won golden spoils.

Sometime after this — and unfortunately I have not recorded the precise time-interval but I believe it to have been short — I must have picked up and opened at random a book only a few of whose pages I have read, namely, *Lingua Latina secundum naturae rationem explicata* [*The Latin language, explained according to the natural method*]¹⁰⁵ The page to which I turned was p. 213. As the illustration shows, in the right hand column is a picture of a bee (apis) and a honeycomb.

NO. 62: THE CASE OF NOAH'S ARK

This case occurred at about 5 pm on Thursday, January 11th, 1995. I was on the bus going home and reading Tom Cross' article "The Noah's Ark case: Corroborative evidence of survival"¹⁰⁶. I had just read (on pp. 95-96) the following interchange between a medium (M) and Tom Cross (S for self):

¹⁰⁵ Arthur M. Jensen (1965). Amsterdam: The Nature Method Institutes.

¹⁰⁶ (1994). *Journal of the Society for Psychological Research*, 60, 95-97.

M Did he cut things out like, with a jigsaw?

S Yes, he was a very able woodworker. Very able.

M And he made something like a Noah's Ark, or something?

S Very like a Noah's Ark, yes...

I was looking particularly at the photographs on p. 97 of the collapsible wooden toy ark that the deceased gentleman referred to above had made, and at the giraffe sticking out of one section. But before finishing the article I had to get off the bus to go to the supermarket. At the checkout I received my docket, on the back of which was advertising material which I was usually in the habit of ignoring. But on the back of *this* particular docket, I happened to notice, was a cartoon depicting Noah's Ark with animals coming out of it, and in particular not one but *two* giraffes poking out at the top! This was the first notable instance of the *sortes librariae* that I'd experienced for some time.

NO. 63: THE CASE OF THE CHINA TEACUP

This case occurred most probably in 1997, though I do not have an exact date. I was playing music (Enya's album *The Memory of Trees*) and decided to attempt the *sortes librariae*. I selected a book from my living-room bookshelves and called *Letters from Iceland*¹⁰⁷. (It is true that I had read this book, but not since 1978, nearly 20 years earlier.) I opened it up "at random" to p. 177. Next to my right thumb was the sentence

The hut boasts one teacup with a design of pink roses...

The coincidence? The song playing at that moment was called (and had the words in its lyrics) "China roses"!

¹⁰⁷ Auden, W.H., & MacNeice, L. (1937). London: Faber and Faber.

NO. 64: THE CASE OF THE DOGGY DOOR

Probably early in 1997 I was reading a novel entitled *Wolf and iron*, written by Gordon R. Dickson.¹⁰⁸ On pp. 396-397 there occurs the following sentence:

Investigating a slight noise in the outer room one afternoon, she had all but stepped out on top of a cougar, who had come in through the swinging wolf door that Jeebee had built for Wolf, into one wall of the smithy.

The coincidence was this. Only a few minutes before (exactly how many I cannot now say), there had floated into my mind the memory of a relatively recent incident that had occurred at the home of my brother Peter's: when no-one was at home, a young girl had entered the otherwise locked house by crawling through the doggy flap, and had stolen \$100! Why I had thought of this at that particular point in time I cannot say. But I assure the reader that, at the time I thought of the incident, I was some way ahead of the quoted pages, ruling out subliminal perception as a possible explanation.

Post script: Sunday, August 10th, 1997. While I was browsing briefly (and, as it turned out, unsuccessfully) through *Wolf and iron* looking for the doggy-door quote I had on TV the Simpsons. At that moment Bart Simpson was shooin' some puppies down a laundry chute, as if to mock me. Coincidence?

NO. 65: THE CASE OF SYNÆSTHESIA

Through e-mail I correspond with a professional colleague in Switzerland by the name of Peter Brugger. For a reason which I still do not understand, he got it into his head that my research would benefit from a greater knowledge of the topic of synæsthesia.

¹⁰⁸ (1990). London: Orbit.

According to my dictionary, synæsthesia is “a sensation produced in one physical sense when a stimulus is applied to another sense, as when the hearing of a certain sound induces the visualization of a certain colour”¹⁰⁹. Anyway, Peter promised to send me some articles about this phenomenon, and they duly arrived from Zürich on Tuesday, April 22nd, 1997. When I got home from university that evening there was a message on my answer-machine from an Anna. When I called her back it turned out that she worked for the university’s radio station, and that they were putting together a program on synæsthesia, and would I like to participate? (I declined, on the grounds that I was presently too ignorant of the topic until I had read the articles that had arrived that morning from Switzerland!)

Two days later when I wrote to Peter I told him of this coincidence, and he was duly impressed!

NO. 66: THE CASE OF THE IRREGULAR CHEQUE-WRITING

I do not have exact dates for this next series of coincidences, but it occurred sometime during July 1997. I was talking to my colleague Frank Dalziel in the tea room of the Psychology Department at the University of Adelaide and he was mentioning how efficient his bank had been in sending him money when he was overseas. I did not ask but wondered in my mind whether the bank sent him traveller’s cheques, and doubted it because of the danger of someone obtaining the cheques and signing them before they reached Frank for his signature. The money must have been sent another way.

Very shortly after — I guess within 24 hours — I was reading Sir Oliver Lodge’s book *The survival of man*¹¹⁰ — about life after death — when, in the course of reading, I came across this passage (p. 136) in the context of fraud:

¹⁰⁹ Hanks, P. (Ed.) (1971) *Encyclopedic world dictionary*. London: Hamlyn. P. 1589.

¹¹⁰ Lodge, O. (1911). *The survival of man. A study in unrecognized human faculty*. London: Methuen.

... it is not efficacious if, on finding his cheque-book, we proceed to fill up and sign his cheques.

About a week later I was reading one of Ian Stevenson's books on the topic of reincarnation¹¹¹ and, again in the course of reading, came across the following passage on p. 288:

His conduct of his own financial affairs seemed somewhat haphazard, and he was known to have signed a whole chequebook in advance of filling in the names of the payees and amounts; this was supposedly in order to save himself the bother of doing so later.

Again, within about a week, we have the theme of fraudulent or unorthodox cheque-signing, in books whose topic (namely, parapsychology) would seem unlikely to produce reference to cheques.

Unlikely, but not impossible. I later (at a date I have not recorded, but probably within the month) was reading the first volume of Frederic Myers' *Human personality and its survival of bodily death*¹¹² when I came across the following paragraphs on p. 392 (Vol. I):

I was called at eight this morning, and my letters left outside the door. I fell asleep again, and had what seemed a long and troublesome dream about a cheque which I had to fill up and sign. At nine I awoke, with a vivid recollection of my dream, got up, opened a packet of letters forwarded from home, and found among them a registered letter containing a cheque for a large sum, which I had to sign as trustee.

L.J.J.

¹¹¹ Stevenson, I. (1977). *Cases of the reincarnation type. Volume II. Ten cases in Sri Lanka.* Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia.

¹¹² (1903). In two volumes. London: Longmans, Green, and Co.

N.B.—I had no reason to expect the receipt of the cheque. The dream was not in any way concerned with the real cheque, but was rather my ineffectual attempts to draw a cheque properly on a blank sheet of paper. But the coincidence was very remarkable.

Skeptics will argue that this final occurrence only serves to show how frequently, after all, the theme of cheques arises in the course of reading over a month. It must be conceded, however, that the final example in the series is *not* about the prior theme, which was not cheques *per se* but the *unorthodox* signing of cheques.

NO. 67: ANOTHER FAILURE

This incident occurred in July and/or August 1997. I picked up a book which I had never read: Teilhard de Chardin's *The prayer of the universe*¹¹³ The passage to which I opened the book meant absolutely nothing to me (the theme being, I *believe*, love in relation to atoms), and, foolishly, I closed the book in disgust. A failure of the *sortes librariae*. Some weeks later I wanted to get hold of the precise passage, and could not find it by thumbing through. In the circumstances, I felt compelled to read through the book in its entirety. This I did, though the task was an excruciating one, and, after all that, I failed to find the passage which I was so sure was there! This taught me that I needed to be as careful in documenting failures as I was successes.

NO. 68: THE CASE OF THE SANDWICH-BOARD MAN

This case occurred on the afternoon of Saturday, August 2nd, 1997. I was being visited by my friend Bernard Price, and at one stage he was accusing certain people of advertizing themselves by the clothes they wore, "like sandwich board men". I had never heard him use this quaint expression before. But within the last few hours I had been reading

¹¹³ (1965). London: Collins. Pp. 191.

about a telepathy experiment in Myers' book (mentioned above), and in it is the following paragraph (p. 552, Vol. I):

No. 17. Subject: A sandwich man with an advertisement of a play. P. said, "Something like letter A—stroke there, then there." Mrs. Sidgwick.—"Well, perhaps it will become clearer." P.—"Something like a head on the top of it; a V upside down—two legs and then a head.—A man with two boards—looks like a man that goes about the streets with two boards. I couldn't see what was written on the boards, because the edges were turned towards me." Mr. Smith told us afterwards that he had pictured to himself the man and one board facing him, thus not corresponding to the impression which P. had.

I doubt very much whether the expression and concept of a sandwich man ever occurs again in Myers' work, so it seemed remarkable to me that two instances of it should crop up, independently, so close together in my experience. Nevertheless, my friend was unimpressed, demanding a life-or-death coincidence of astronomically close correspondence in its parts.

NO. 69: THE CASE OF THE MUZZLING

This case occurred later that same night as the case of the sandwich man, about 9.40 pm. I was in bed reading, this time another of Ian Stevenson's books on cases of the reincarnation type¹¹⁴. I had just started reading chapter 9, the case of Süleyman Zeytun (pp. 260-271) and had reached the third page (p. 262). Something then happened which I have very rarely encountered: I had an eery premonition that a coincidence was about to occur.

¹¹⁴ Stevenson, I. (1980). *Cases of the reincarnation type. Volume III. Twelve cases in Lebanon and Turkey.* Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia.

This in fact happened: at the bottom of p. 262 and the top of p. 263 the following text is to be found:

Mehmet Cosman's horse became restless and bit him on the shoulder. (Marks of the horse's bite were found on Mehmet Cosman's shoulder afterward. Informants differed about the shoulder—right or left—on which the horse had bitten him.) Mehmet Cosman then put a muzzle on the horse. (The muzzle was afterwards found on the body of the drowned horse.)

I was astonished! Less than 20 minutes earlier I had been watching the TV program the Bill, and towards the end of the program the police officers, encountering dogs at a house, had asked the owner to have them muzzled. The next scene was of two dogs in a basket wearing their muzzles! I don't recall this muzzling theme ever having arisen before in the TV series.

NO. 70: THE CASE OF THE RECURRING MUSIC

This case occurred on either Friday 8th or Saturday 9th August, 1997. On a whim, I had fetched from its bookshelf my copy of D. Scott Rogo's *The poltergeist experience*, which, the reader may remember, figured so largely in case No. 33. I recall that I was thinking of the topic of music as a metaphor, and casually opened Rogo's book to the first page, containing the author notes. Much to my surprise, they mentioned that, amongst all his psychological and parapsychological qualifications "in graduate school he concentrated on the psychology of music before turning to parapsychology." A little-known fact, and therefore something of a coincidence with my musing seconds before.

Later that night I was in bed reading Ian Stevenson again — the same volume as mentioned above in case No. 59. On p. 360, the page on which I started reading, Dr. Stevenson asks towards the end of the page:

If the subject [who remembers a previous life] has tapped with extrasensory perception the memories of persons still living who knew the presumed previous personality of a case, we can ask why he never showed such paranormal powers in connection with other living persons or in connection with more than one deceased person.

I continued onto the next page, p. 361. Tangential to my reading, I began for no reason in particular to think about the music coincidence described above. Then, 11 lines down the page there occurred the following paragraph:

Where else can we find examples of persons with a talent so powerfully developed that can be expressed in only one situation? As a possibly instructive analogy, I ask the reader to imagine a pianist who can play Beethoven superbly without being able to play Chopin or Brahms at all. Let us allow that he might prefer to play Beethoven and could play his music much better than that of any other composer; but a pianist surpassingly skillful with the music of one composer and completely unable to play that of any other would pass beyond my understanding.

Here again we have the theme of music cropping up, in a book where the topic would seem unlikely, and encountered within a short time of another coincidence involving music.

*

And this is just the *sortes librariæ*. I seem to be just as prone to coincidences *not* involving books. But that, as they say, is another story.

CHAPTER VI

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY “COINCIDENCE”?

A FURTHER LOOK AT THE QUESTION

In the opening pages of this book I posed the question “What do we mean by the word “coincidence”?”. There I defined two meanings, one of which we may call the “Isn’t that amazing!” sort of coincidence, as opposed to the “So what?” sort of coincidence. Both of these meanings have something in common in that they agree that the two events or elements of the coincidence are highly related in regard to their “structure”. Again, they may each often (though not always) agree that the coincidence in question is extremely unlikely. Where they usually *differ* is in the degree of significance or meaningfulness that they attach to the coincidence, or to the reason for its occurrence: one school says that nothing but chance is involved, where the other school maintains that there is some non-chance reason for the coinciding of events.

I’d now like to go a step further in this analysis. First of all, I want to use the concept of “pattern”. A pattern is simply a collection (or constellation) of characteristics. A pattern can be recognized, even if a person cannot enumerate all the essential or incidental characteristics that go to make it up. I’m now going to maintain that what a coincidence is, in essence, is a *repeated pattern*. What happens in the case of a repeated pattern is that a second (or further) instance appears which has enough of the same characteristics as the initial instance to say that it embodies the same pattern. Thus, a coincidence of the sort that tends to excite amazement is one where the likelihood seems to be very small of the essential elements of the original pattern being repeated so quickly. Thus, my encountering the text “no fire can burn him” within minutes of someone attempting unsuccessfully to burn me, might come into this category of amazing coincidences. But according to *my* definition, there are far more coincidences around than those which I’ve lovingly described to the reader in the previous chapters — we simply don’t regard them as extraordinary. Thus, if there is a cup on the table, and someone puts another cup beside it, I say that you thereby have a

“coincidence” (or perhaps a “coinciding”) — a repeated pattern. Not an *amazing* coincidence, I grant you, but a coincidence nevertheless. The cups do not have to be identical in shape or look — the fact that they’re cups is sufficient for some essential aspects of the original cup to be repeated in the second. If we notice a brick wall, by my definition we are seeing literally *hundreds* of coincidences — a particular pattern repeated over and over again, with minute variations to be sure, but with enough similarity for us to recognize that we have many bricks.

Notice in this definition that it’s no longer a defining characteristic of a coincidence that it seem unlikely in any way. Most of the “coincidences” — the cases of “things cropping up together” around us are not in the least unlikely. It’s simply a matter of the recognition of similarity of pattern between one object or event and another.

Human beings are very good at noticing the repetition of a pattern. Indeed, we credit people as more or less intelligent to the extent to which they can see the common characteristics between two events, and even credit them with creativity if they can see or impose useful similarities between events where no-one has seen them before.

One of the multitudinous forms that coincidence takes is rhyme. Take for example some of the first words that Romeo utters upon seeing Juliet:

So shows a snowy dove trooping with crows

As yonder lady o'er her fellows shows.

(Romeo and Juliet, I,v)

Here we have not only the repetition of the “o” sound at the terminus of each line, but the cropping up of it in assonance *throughout* the lines (“shows”, “snowy”, “fellows”). This is thus a case of a bounty of coincidences in my sense, albeit of the auditory (and visual) type.

Another type of coincidence, again having to do with sound and language, concerns humor. I was again reading Peter McKellar’s book *Imagination and thinking*, on the bus, on the way to university one morning, and, in particular, the section on p. 100 where a psychotic person was asked to explain the proverb, “Those who live in glass houses shouldn’t throw

stones.” The person was able to explain it by getting around to the parable of the mote and the beam “by a purely associative chain of ideas: glass houses —> glass —> crystal —> palace —> castle —> moat —> mote —> mote and beam parable.” The subject seemed to be a bit troubled by the illogicality of the moat-mote connection.

When I arrived at university I must have opened up or perused a copy of one of Larson’s books of cartoons, and found in it a cartoon which bore an amazing resemblance to what I’d just been reading: the setting is a tropical location with two native men talking outside some grass huts, out of one of which is sticking a spear. One man is saying to the other, “OK, Zukutu — that does it! Remember, those who live in grass houses shouldn’t throw spears.” There is an obvious resemblance of patterns between the proverb in the McKellar book and the caption to this cartoon. In one case a pattern of sound (moat-mote) is considered characteristic of psychotic thinking, in the other case the cartoonist has relied on a similar pattern of sound to generate humor. Many jokes rely on this kind of verbal association — in other words, they rely on coincidence, especially coincidence that is inexact, as most coincidences are. We enjoy plays on words, though of course some puns can be painful!

There’s another area of human endeavor where coincidences in my sense are extremely important. To understand this let me tell you a story. It was January 1991 — a period during which I’d had (and managed to record) an enormous number of coincidences. I enjoyed having them happen — they were a constant source of wonder to me. On Saturday, January 26th, I put the question to the *I Ching* “What is the most productive way to view my coincidences right now?” I threw the coins, and two hexagrams were produced. The first was #52, Meditation, and not terribly informative. The second one was #23, Deterioration — a most pessimistic prognostication! I didn’t know quite what to make of this reading, except that it implied some sort of decline was imminent in my coincidences.

Later that day, I was sitting on a bus listening to music on my Sony Walkman. But alas, the batteries ran down, and the music came to a standstill. And then I suddenly realized! Most music (at least of the traditional form) *is made up of coincidences* — patterns of sounds that are repeated either identically or with variations. Music is nothing less than a

string of coincidences! Thus, given this perspective, my “coincidences” *had* declined! The *regular* sort of coincidence continued unabated. I cannot now listen to music without being betwitched by the creative changes in patterns that can produce such beauty by their carefully crafted alterations and repetitions. Both perfect and less-than-perfect coincidences are the life-blood of music.

I’m now ready to tell you about how I came upon my answer to the question “What is the sound of one hand clapping?”

CHAPTER VII

WHAT IS THE SOUND OF ONE HAND CLAPPING?

ONE ANSWER

The winter of 1989 in Washington DC was a cold one, with snow deep on the ground. As I recounted in Chapter II, I was awaiting the outcome of an application to have my passport returned, so that I could return to Australia for Christmas. Apart from negotiating with my lawyer and with the Australian consul, I spent my time in reading, mostly spiritual works. The one which I was reading the most was Evelyn Underhill's classic book entitled simply *Mysticism*¹¹⁵. Though I didn't understand everything she said, I found much of value, and even one coincidence: in a previous work¹¹⁶ I've described a dream I had while in hospital during the previous month:

I dreamt, over and over again, that the universe had been exploded into ashes, and that eventually the ashes gently settled, and that in those ashes were seeds which germinated and grew and produced a whole new civilization (or perhaps the same one repeating itself endlessly), until it too met with its destruction at the hands of Shiva, only to reborn again, like the Phœnix.

Says Underhill, on p.401:

“Everywhere one Being, one Life” — this is the goal of mystical activity; the final state of equilibrium towards which the self is moving, or rather struggling, in the dimness and anguish of the Dark Night. “The soul,” says Madam Guyon in a passage of unusual beauty, “after many a redoubled death, expires at last in the arms of Love;

¹¹⁵ Underhill, E. (1910). *Mysticism*. Meridian books.

¹¹⁶ Thalbourne, M.A. *Unseen chemistry. Letters from a manic-depressive mystic*. Unpublished manuscript.

but she is unable to perceive these arms . . . Then, reduced to Nought, there is found in her ashes a seed of immortality, which is preserved in these ashes and will germinate in its season . . .”

But a more important quote for my present purposes was one from the Neo-Platonic philosopher Plotinus (205?-270 A.D.), given on p. 233 of Underhill. It is from his *Ennead VI.8*¹¹⁷. I prefer my own interlinear translation, which I give as follows:

Και αι μεν περι αυτο,

And we are always (how shall I put it?) “around” the One

ουκ αι δε εις αυτο βλεπομενον:

But we do not always perceive it:

αλλ' 'οιον χοροσ, 'εξησ αδων, καιπερ εχων περι τον κορυΦαιον

We can compare the situation to the members of a musical cast which, in the order of the numbers, generally keeps with the Conductor,

τραπειν αν εις το εξω τησ Θεασ,

but which sometimes lets their attention wander away from him;

'οταν δε επιστρεψη, αδει τε καλωσ

but, when the cast turns its attention back to him,

it sings harmoniously,

και ονωσ περι αυτον εχει,

and is truly in accord with the Conductor.

'ουτω και 'ημεισ αι μεν περι αυτον. . .

Analogously, we are always, as it were, “around” the One. . .

. . .'οταν εις αυτον ιδωμεν,

. . .When we do behold the Conductor of all Things,

τοτε 'ημιν τελος και αναπαυλα

¹¹⁷ Plotinus (1988). *VII. Enneads VI. 6-9*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Then have we found our goal in life and our resting-place

και το μη απαδειν

And, no longer out of tune,

χορευουσιν οντωσ περι αυτον χορειαν ενθειον.

People sing and dance their inspired number around the Conductor.

Comments Underhill (p. 234), “Such a beholding, such a lifting of consciousness from a self-centered to a God-centered world, is of the essence of illumination.”

The story moves forward in time two months to February 1990, and moves place, from Washington DC to St. Louis, Missouri. I was staying with my friends Kathy and Jim Ross, and both they and their son Jordan were out either at school or at work. I therefore took the opportunity to play — rather loudly — a tape of music composed by Ray Lynch and called *No blue thing*. I really love much of that music. I was dancing around, and moving my right hand in time to it as if I were conducting the orchestra. And then it happened! The penny dropped! Of course! It was a play on words! The conductor of the Plotinus quote — God — would move his hand (or baton) in such a way as to look like it was “one hand clapping”. And I was hearing the relevant sounds! The sound of “one hand clapping” was music, conceived of as a series of “coincidences” of sound, or indeed, metaphorically, and more broadly speaking, “music” conceived of as *any* set of coincidences.

The Conductor is, in this case, also the Composer. (This is an assumption, I grant you, but a parsimonious one.) Every event in the cosmos is determined by the Composer, and thus has its place, like a note in a musical score. There is no free will, just as it is not up to a note to choose to be where it is to be played. The Composer has so ordered things that, within a given time span, some pattern may be repeated in two (or more) contexts. In the course of those events, the Composer may put us in a position to *observe* the coinciding of this repeated pattern. Some coincidences will be probable, others improbable according to chance. Enough improbable coincidences eventually persuade us (if we did not believe it already) that the cosmos cannot be a random place — that it contains pieces of “music” that should not exist if the materialistic scientists are correct. Thus, highly improbable

coincidences are, as it were, commercials in the show of Life that tell us more arrestingly that a Composer-Conductor exists, and that we are a part of the orchestration.

CHAPTER VIII

ISN'T-THAT-AMAZING COINCIDENCES: MY CONCLUSION

And I say to you:
That this sort of marvel has been happening almost continuously,
Right up to this very day,
So rapidly and abundantly that
I no longer always have the opportunity
To keep a written record of
The intricate coincidings of events which enter my awareness —
Coincidences which inspire such awe that I
Can no longer disbelieve for long that such wonders are truly possible
And that they are happening in our midst,
And that there is a Cause at back of them —
Conducting the Cosmic Orchestra.
For if there is a Plan, then I have glimpsed it,
And It is brilliant — absolutely brilliant!
And if there is a Path, then I have been following it,
Whether with eyes seeing or unseeing.
And even now, with each new rising sun,
I am following that Path wherever it leads,
With growing faith that it will lead me to my Home:
My feet, no longer aimless — once weighed down as if by lead —
Are feet whose steps in One direction now are gently led.

POSTSCRIPT

Apollo plays Music upon me, his lyre, as he plays on everyone. But I am also, coincidentally, a liar as well as a lyre. Apollo has made a liar of me. For I have borne false witness: I promised to tell you what is the sound of one hand clapping. The answer thus far given is true enough, but is not *actually* the response that I was given. However, in order to explain the answer I received I could not (as will be appreciated later) jump straight to the finish. I had to take a step-by-step route. We have now covered most of the intervening steps. It remains to elucidate the final steps towards the end — an entirely truthful answer to the koan “What is the sound of one hand clapping?”.

In chapter 6 (p. 105) I asserted that “Music is nothing less than a string of coincidences” in the sense of repeated patterns of sound. However, listening to much music in the meantime has persuaded me that while this statement is largely true, music can also consist of unique sequences of notes that are not repeated. Nevertheless, I argue that my original statement holds. Its truth depends crucially on what we mean by “coincidence”. I have taught that there can be coincidences that are ordinary and in no sense improbable, for instance, the example of the two cups side by side (p. 103) or the wall of bricks. The two cups may be extremely different, but still possess characteristics in common that constitute their “cupness”. We have only to have two objects or events that are superficially similar to each other for there to be one (or more) coincidences. Persuading ourselves of the existence of such ordinary coincidences is easy: just look around! Two hands. Two feet. Two coincidences. Such coincidences are everywhere. It is simply important to repress the requirement that such coinciding be improbable to be legitimate coincidences.

Just as part of a musical score may contain a sequence of notes that does not repeat itself, we may encounter individual events or objects that have no obvious partner-in-coincidence. It would *seem*, then, *prima facie*, that not everything is a coincidence. This is a problem for my theory. In the case of the musical sequence, the solution to this problem is to return to basics: “a coincidence is, in essence, a *repeated pattern*.” (p. 102). And “A pattern is simply a collection (or constellation) of characteristics.” (p. 102). It is crucial to point out

that the *number* of characteristics shared is actually optional. Thus, any two (or more) musical notes have in common the fact that they are notes, regardless of whether they are the same, and regardless of whether they together form a pattern that is repeated. In a song, a note is succeeded by another note, not by a taste or a smell but another sound. (Repeated sequences of notes constitute coincidences in *two* senses: this generic sense of repeated sounds as well as the higher order one of repeated pattern.) Thus, from this broader view, *all* the musical notes in a song constitute a series of coincidences.

But, as a single note does not constitute a song, neither does a single object or event constitute a coincidence. It has to be juxtaposed with something else which has similar characteristics. I would therefore argue that two randomly chosen objects must constitute a coincidence by virtue of the unassailable fact that they are, at the very least (and in probably more ways), inhabitants of the same cosmos. Seemingly single objects may also constitute a coincidence in that there may be an idea of them in the mind of the Composer. Thus, it follows, that *all* of creation consists of coincidences, and therefore *all* of it consists of Music. The cosmos is an emanation of music-like patterns, directed by the Supreme Conductor, with us as his instruments and players simultaneously. The sound of one hand clapping, then, is the Universe.