

IMPOSSIBLE KNOWLEDGE:  
EXTRAORDINARY SIMULTANEOUS EXPERIENCE  
NARRATIVES AS VERNACULAR FORMS OF PHILOSOPHY

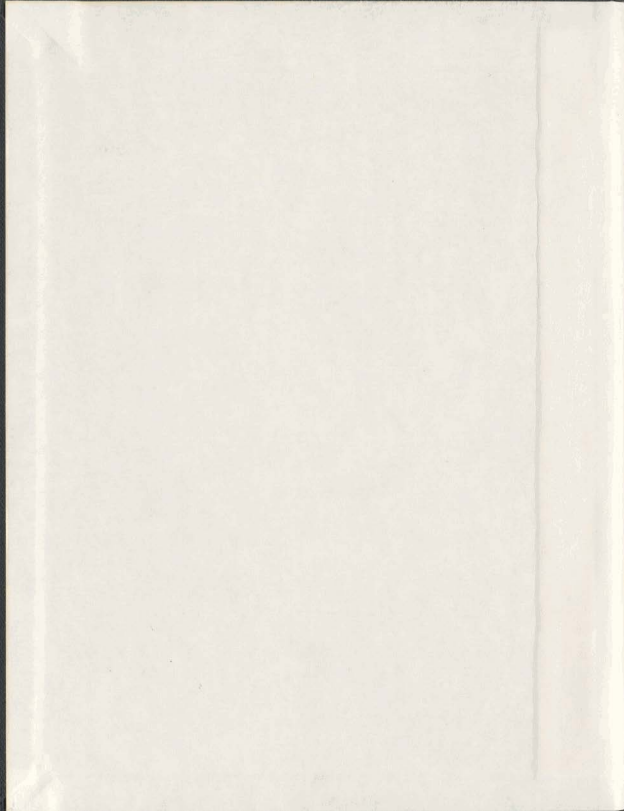
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EXTRAORDINARY SIMULTANEOUS EXPERIENCE NARRATIVES  
AS VERNACULAR FORMS OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

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# ABSTRACT

This thesis presents the hypothesis that extraordinary simultaneous experience narratives (ESENs) constitute a category of narrative which may be argued to have existed for many centuries. Emphasis on precise or probable *simultaneity* between intuitive knowing and a distant crisis, such as death or illness—*whether such emphasis is literal or rhetorical in any given version—is a primary, and philosophically important, characteristic of these narratives. This characteristic distinguishes them, in many cases, from stories of prophecy and premonition.* Whereas precognition accounts may portray tragedies which arrive some time more clearly *after* the moment of their anticipation—a day, a week, or a year later, perhaps—ESENs portray correspondences which approach precise simultaneity, separated at most by mere seconds, minutes, or hours within a day—if by any time at all. While premonition stories often describe human crises envisioned *before* they come to pass, ESENs emphasize the wonder of synchronicity, between crises and their intuitions elsewhere. As such, ESENs sustain a number of *fundamentally different philosophical explanations and beliefs about causality* than do precognition stories. Unlike a premonition, *an intuition of a distant simultaneous tragedy cannot be explained by folklorists’ concept of “foreknowledge” or what a philosopher might regard, more skeptically, as “backward causation,” for it is not the future which appears, so impossibly, to be known.* Neither can the fleeting vision of a person dying at that very moment in a distant place be attributed confidently to the agency of any “ghost”—in time, a death has not yet occurred: the beliefs the stories inspire must conform to the stories’ temporality.

Distinguishing between such story types *on the basis of temporality* (along with other general thematic features) allows hybrid versions—for example, a story about an ongoing feeling of nameless fear weeks prior to an unexpected death, culminating in a extraordinary simultaneous dream or vision—to be understood *and discussed more* clearly in terms of philosophical arguments and folk beliefs about causality. This kind of distinction also adds kindling to the interpretive debate surrounding all stories of extraordinary or supernatural experience, a debate in which scholars and storytellers *are equally authoritative participants*, on the subject of the stories' meanings and possible causes.

While I have found only one passage in the New Testament which matches the ESEN pattern, many *New Testament passages demonstrate* that beliefs about the holiness of coincidence existed in early Christianity. Narratives of holy simultaneities are more plentiful in medieval collections of exempla and legend, but these texts carry on the conventions of hour notation and envisioning *death and suffering as a moment*, conventions which are established in the New Testament. The persistence of these narratives in increasingly secularized contexts for centuries afterward, up to and including 20th-century academic literature and informal North American oral narration, may be explained by the fact that the stories manage to sustain many different interpretations, sacred and secular--psychological and biological ones, alongside the religious and the supernatural.

*Over forty informants participated* in this study, in St. John's, Newfoundland, and in Amherst, Massachusetts. Their explanations draw upon multiple belief paradigms--twin biology, genetics, divine intervention, the psychology of

divided consciousness, parapsychological processes, and various understandings of coincidence. *Most informants explored or at least considered explanations which proceeded from natural, supernatural, and religious premises, rather than limiting themselves to a single line of explanation. For these and other reasons, I present these stories and the speculation they inspire in informal conversation as vernacular forms of philosophy.*

**Key words:** Death, illness, token, twins, coincidence, narrative, philosophy, telepathy, simultaneity, synchronicity, Newfoundland



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For my mother and father  
and for Tom and Leslie Tentler

*Introibo ad altare Dei--  
ad Deum Qui laetificat juventutem meam*



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## INTRODUCTION

*He was gane about a year away,  
A year but barely ane,  
Whan a strange fancy cam intil his head  
That faire Nanciebel was gane.*

*Child 75, "Lord Lovel," Version D<sup>1</sup>*

### 1. What This Thesis Is About: Generating and Testing A Hypothesis

The definition which I am about to present, in this introduction, is a hypothesis--nothing more, and nothing less--about the existence of a belief story pattern concerned with synchronicity in human affairs. One scholar in our discipline, Leea Virtanen, recognized such a pattern over twenty years ago, despite its potential for overlap into some other recognizable--but also hypothetical--belief narrative patterns. Most other folklorists, however, do not, and perhaps would not, distinguish the type of story I call "extraordinary simultaneous experience narrative" (ESEN) from the stories they label "ESP," "token," or "death warning" narratives. I believe Virtanen was onto something important: a relatively neutral, more interdisciplinary way of classifying narratives about wondrous coincidences: not according to the explanations tellers buy or don't buy for what these experiences actually "are" (or how they are caused) but according to the temporality [i.e. simultaneity] of the stories' key events. Framing the stories in this manner may permit folklorists to talk with philosophers and parapsychologists and psychoanalysts about them a little more easily--in more of a common language and conceptual terrain. Scholars outside folkloristics may draw a blank when we mention "tokens," for example, as we tend to speak in the relatively esoteric argot of folk tradition. If we speak of stories about coincidence, though, most of them will have (or at least believe they have) something meaningful to contribute. This is one of the assumptions on which I proceed.

The pattern I call "ESEN" is defined formally below. I have collected stories

which match this general pattern from a small group of North American informants. By prompting them with a brief plot outline, or by playing a recorded example and asking

them to tell me a story "very much like" what they just heard, I have elicited the pattern from them without using any particular story labels—theirs, or my own. I also noticed that the labels informants *did* assign (when asked to do so) to these stories and related ones were many and varied; the labels were rarely belief-neutral: they usually seemed to reflect explanations tellers favored or were familiar with. I was surprised to find, for example, that four out of 19 students at the University of Massachusetts said "ESP"

didn't mean anything to *them* as an explanation for the story they heard. Two of these four said they'd never even heard the acronym or heard the phrase it stood for. I return in Chapters Two and Five to the problem of distinguishing story labeling from story categorization and story reproduction.

The pattern I call ESEN is akin to a story pattern I recognized (well enough to reproduce) as a child among my own Irish Catholic family and neighbors in suburban New York and Connecticut. Then, as now, I did not have much trouble distinguishing simultaneous experience stories from stories about premonition—in the future-oriented sense of that word. These early personal impressions have shaped the formation of my "ESEN" hypothesis and drove me to test that hypothesis in the field. I further refine my definition in Chapter Two, the fieldwork chapter, where I consider how and whether all of my 20 example narratives fit the original definition. However, lest my personal impressions be confused with the outcomes of field experiments and interviews (and mistaken for a preconceived agenda), let me preface my initial, formal definition with a reflexive description of the ways in which my personal experiences and general beliefs have influenced my thinking as a researcher throughout this project.

## **2. Personal Experience and Beliefs Which Helped Shape This Research**

As stated, the pattern I call ESEN is much like a category of story I recognized as a child, among Irish Catholic family members and mostly Catholic neighbors in suburban New York and Connecticut. I had little trouble, then, as now, distinguishing stories of simultaneous intuitions categorically from stories about predicting future events; I will explain why. Plenty of people I knew told stories about “knowing” about deaths and accidents and other tragedies at the very moment they occurred far away, most often through dreams. Such stories were among the poignant centerpieces of the wondrous story repertoires of my mother, my maternal aunts, a German Christian “aunt” (long-term friend of the family), an Irish-born Catholic mother of an elementary school chum, and one devoutly religious uncle (behind whose back most of my other male relatives preferred to grin in embarrassed disbelief and disapproval). These adults might be described as the specialists in a “conduit”<sup>2</sup> of legends and memorates concerned with ordinarily “impossible” kinds of knowledge. I resided within this active story-swapping circuit as an active participant throughout my youth, and the stories told by these specialists, then and now, continue to affect me today.

My Catholic peers in high school and, later, Jewish peers in college narrated simultaneous dreams and visions of others’ distress, almost as proof of their bonds to friends, boyfriends, girlfriends, or relatives far away. Stories about predicting future events, however, were less common, in my experience. Only one schoolmate I knew (Mary F.) told stories of her mother’s abilities to predict disturbing events well off in the future. The latter stories were received among my teenage schoolmates with qualitatively different reactions: Mrs. F’s reputed ability to write out (and seal in a dated envelope!) detailed accounts of accidents yet to occur to people—which she had

seen in dreams well before the fact—inspired more shock and amazement among us than did the much more common, but still wondrous, stories of simultaneous intuitions.

Both categories inspired debate, but the latter was valued and evaluated differently, as the evidence or the outgrowth of close, even “spiritual” bonds between people. “Premonition” stories, especially those in which some person’s having foreknowledge of others’ future misfortunes did not aid in preventing them, inspired an awe mixed with fear. By contrast, *simultaneous* intuitions (and here I include intuitions described as having happened at “exactly the time” or even “around the same time” as a distant crisis) permitted no significant window of time for the knower to have engaged in preventative action. By comparison to premonition accounts, these stories conveyed a rather humbler sense of hope about connectedness between people, in fearsome situations unfolding across a distance in space, rather than time. The time the intuitions arrived made all the difference in the feelings and thoughts these different kinds of stories could inspire. People like Mrs. F., who dreamt more or less clearly about tragic events well in advance, were separated to a degree from others by this exceptional power, a power of troubling import, but limited utility. Friends and relatives who dreamed about each other at the very moment one was in distress far away were not separate from other people, but like all of us at our best: they were the best of friends indeed.

Back then I’m not sure what I did and didn’t believe regarding the credibility of such stories; I was more of a general “believer,” probably than I am today. Nowadays, especially after having completed this study, I would describe myself neither as a believer or disbeliever in stories like these. As this is a statement people may doubt outright, let me be more precise. I “believe” deeply in these stories’ meanings, in their hopeful, emotional, moral, and spiritual value. I suspect they are projections of our

deepest wishes for a good death—one which occurs in connection with the human race, rather than in isolation. I wonder, in turn, where such a wish comes from. I *philosophize*, though, about their causes—how they work, how the world could work in order to make them work—and I think about them this way before, and apart from, believing or disbelieving their truth as the testimony of reasonable people. To borrow Dégh and Vázsonyi's legend "thesis" model (1975): my own approach is not "I believe that...", "I don't believe that...", or "I know that it is not true that..." the events in these stories unfold as the tellers say they do. My own thesis, when listening to most memorates or legends about simultaneous experience, is more creative than receptive: I usually end up thinking something like, "What can we *make* of the fact that..."

I refuse, in other words, to have my own emotional and cognitive responses to these stories pigeonholed into the dialectics of belief and disbelief, I have therefore tried to avoid pigeonholing my informants' perspectives in the same way.<sup>3</sup> Some readers may view such an approach to informants' interpretations of these stories as "missing the point," no doubt, because I am not very interested in reducing the experience of thinking about these stories into debates about credibility. Credibility of the accounts' events themselves, or of the tellers as trustworthy people with functional memory, is not always the issue, and it is not the only issue of theoretical import in the study of belief narrative. This is not to say that I think the question of whether they are or are not true and reasonable accounts is irrelevant or unimportant. That is the reason that, where circumstances permitted, I collected more than one version of the same experience account, leaving discrepancies intact for all to see. For me, it is just that there is also the pure, speculative joy of imagining new ways to explain, and the glee of escaping, to some extent at least, from the formulaic arguments for and against credibility, in order to believe one might go someplace entirely new.

Lest readers suspect that my interest in and definition of this story category stem from my religious or spiritual beliefs as a member of the local branch of the Theosophical Society, the League of New England Atheists, or, alternately, the Greater Massachusetts Wiccan Coven, let me also “out” myself as honestly as possible, as a highly secularized Roman Catholic. Inside or outside the parish church, as in the belief narrative context, I find myself in interstitial zones between, or away from, the polemics of belief and disbelief. Playing constantly with this personal identity, I do a lot of spiritual or speculative thinking apart from either pole altogether. I have laughed my way, for example, through H. L. Mackie’s “Evil and Omnipotence”<sup>4</sup> and Singer and Benassi’s “Fooing Some of the People All of the Time,”<sup>5</sup> out of respect for writers like these, debunkers who take the question of belief in God and the supernatural so seriously that they deconstruct theological and ordinary religious psychology to demonstrate that these forms of thinking are not necessarily rational or well-informed. I can’t help but notice, though, how people in the ecstasy of prayer--children, adults, across denominations, often have similar profound expressions on their faces. My favorite novels are those in which *supernatural and secular readings are plausible simultaneously*. I felt so consoled last spring by reading Iris Murdoch’s secularized moral philosophical *reinventions of the functional Christian concepts* of goodness, grace, and God, that I returned shamelessly to Catholic practice over the summer.<sup>6</sup> Murdoch wrote and thought from places in between, revisionist histories hitherto unimagined, places I would like to learn how to go. I look at the people who stand around me at Mass these days in a spirit of hopeful confidence that I know no more about the precise logic that brings any of them into the parish church than I do about the logic that keeps other people out of it, and still others in between faith and doubt, about anything and everything, any minute of any day. My wonder is increasing every day.



This, then is the “spirit” and the personal experience of story, the hitherto hidden agenda, which I bring to my analysis of narratives in this study. I hope and trust it does not interfere too much with my objectivity. The “ESEN” story pattern I am hypothesizing and testing here could be thought of as a manifest, hypothetical narrative classification which has been shaped, to some degree, by a pattern of story I was able to recognize or “categorize” latently in my early life experience among active bearers of such a narrative tradition. My approach to my informants’ explanations of how the stories’ events might work is certainly shaped by my own greater fondness for speculative modes, rather than the polemics of belief and disbelief. I did not name that category of simultaneous experience story back then, though I could recognize it and reproduce it. I manipulated no particular or consistent “handles,” generic or subgeneric, for the simultaneous experience stories I heard as a young person; neither did my friends or relatives; and neither do the informants I encountered in Canada and in Massachusetts, who are telling similar stories, at least to my ear, some twenty years later.

### **3. The ESEN: Initial General Definition**

#### *Definition and Its Purpose in Unifying Historical Examples to Come*

My formal definition of “ESEN” is dry by comparison with the stories collected herein, which are full of feeling. I believe they have at their heart--if stories may be said to have any center--a basic question: whether or not mortal human suffering must always or necessarily be a solitary experience, the ultimate and ultimately private problem of the individual. Extraordinary simultaneous experience narratives or “ESENs” are stories people tell about “just knowing” a death, an illness, or an accident was occurring in the life of another person, without communicating or being present with that person at that time, at least not in the ordinary sense. I define ESENs formally

as first- or third-person accounts of social situations in which one person experiences immediate, meaningful personal knowledge of another's status at a time of personal distress, despite the parties' separation from each other at that time. Narrators' notation of a precise or close correspondence in time between one person's intuition and another's distant distress is a primary characteristic of these stories.

I will return to this definition in Chapter One and assign letters to each of its basic components. Throughout the thesis, I will refer to it to clarify whether and how a given field-collected or historical text matches the pattern. The definition is examined in depth in Chapter Two, the fieldwork chapter, where I consider how each of 20 field examples fits or does not fit the original definition, after more of a micro-level analysis of each text. The definition itself is expanded on the basis of this in-depth analysis, and my references to the definition throughout the thesis are designed to make it clear that my example texts are not simply *ad hoc* illustrations but clear matches to a hypothetical pattern.

#### *Usefulness of Recognizing Temporality of Key Events as a Narrative Value*

By representing one party's knowing and another's distant suffering as simultaneous, ESEs sustain a number of *different causal explanations and beliefs* than do "precognition" or "premonition" stories. Let me be clear by providing two examples. Unlike a premonition, an intuition of a distant *simultaneous* tragedy cannot be explained by what scholars of folk tradition call "foreknowledge" (Bennett 1987a) or what skeptical philosophers like Antony Flew (1987) or Peter French (1975) might call "backward causation," for it is not the undetermined future which appears to be known before it has come to exist in time. To give another example in which temporality of key events limits causality: neither can the fleeting vision of a person near death at that very moment in a distant place be attributed confidently to the agency of a "ghost," for,

in time, a death has not yet occurred. A significant portion of the traditional beliefs and explanations these stories inspire conform to the stories' representations of temporality; hence the ways in which temporality is represented in these stories is of substantial concern.

Apparent knowledge of events yet to come is a philosophical problem which is separate from apparent knowledge of simultaneous distant events; both are equally serious, though, whether in vernacular or academic philosophical discussion—at least this has been my experience. I will return to the complex set of problems associated with either of these temporal values of “impossible knowledge” in the fieldwork chapter and my conclusion—something which I failed to do in an earlier version of this draft—in order to “do the philosophy,” that is to say, to consider via sustained reasoning (enlightened by informant testimony) what the differences could be between the apparent impossibility of foreknowledge and the apparent impossibility of simultaneous crisis intuitions. If there is or was any truly “hidden” agenda in previous drafts of this thesis, it may have been my assumption that the difference between these two temporal values of “impossible knowledge” was obvious. Distinguishing between precognition/simultaneous intuition story types on the basis of the temporality of key events will also allow hybrid versions—for example, a story about a person's ongoing feeling of nameless fear weeks prior to an unexpected death, culminating in a extraordinary simultaneous dream or vision—to be understood and discussed more clearly at the levels of philosophy and folk belief about causes (see, for example, my discussion of hybrid examples in Chapter Two).

*ESEN as Single Narrative Pattern Rather Than A Single Type of “Experience”*

I believe that ESENs might constitute a singular narrative category, if one believes narratives can be categorized at all, on the basis of thematic patterns,

explanatory frames, and so forth. I suggest that "ESEN" could work as a narrative category if one agrees to approach these narratives with a *primary interest in their representation of temporality*, and in the philosophical implications of temporality on causal explanations. I do not argue that the "ESENs" I have collected here describe just one type of conscious experience of "knowing" about the status of others at a distance; I view that kind of approach to belief narratives as unnecessarily phenomenological, a search for some sort of essential template or "pure description" of experience, separable from explanation. I think experience is *about* explanation, a lot of the time. According to my definition, then, the pattern is consistently concerned with the *simultaneity* of various forms of conscious experience with a crisis at a distance. Both the vehicles of consciousness and the types of "crisis" in the stories may vary to some extent.

*Variable "Vehicles" of Simultaneous Consciousness*

Experiencers' simultaneous knowledge, then, in these narratives is portrayed through many different subjective<sup>7</sup> modes or "vehicles" of consciousness: dreams, waking visions, sleeping-waking states, thoughts, and feelings. ESENs seem to narrate not one but several related forms of extraordinary and simultaneous experience. Experiencers I interviewed used more than one label, also, to qualify or classify their experience of "knowing," referring to their experiences as "dreaming," "day-dreaming," "feeling" and "knowing." These alternating uses of experiential labels raise rather subtle questions about the nature of the experiences themselves, making it difficult, again, to argue that some single type of conscious experience informs all these stories. The forms of experience ESENs describe *are* related insofar as they are all memorable and enigmatic cognitions, intuitions which would be regarded, most of the time, as impossible or extraordinary, rather than commonplace. The experiences ESENs describe *are* comparable also because experiencers associate them in meaningful ways

with simultaneous crisis experiences in the real lives of distant others. Above all, the stories share that emphasis on the wonder and the meaning of such a range of experiences of impossible "knowing" when these experiences are simultaneous with the troubles of distant others. I will try to show throughout this work that the stories are exciting both for their implications about causality and universal (rather than particularly individual) kinds of meaning.

*Variable "Crises" and "Relationships" Portrayed in ESENs*

Personal crises in ESENs range from illness, injury, and childbirth, to danger, grief, and death. The "crises" here are not trivial events, but crises in the dramatic and serious sense of that word, in relation to life history. Because stories which concern "crisis" in this sense seem to me to weigh in with a rather heavier cultural and personal import than stories which concern more mundane coincidences (e.g., friends phoning each other at the same time, etc.), I have excluded the more essentially "trivial" coincidence stories from my hypothetical category, though my overall story corpus (see Appendices) did include some of the latter. My twenty example narratives in Chapter Two demonstrate a wider range of *specific* events which qualify as "crises" in the serious and dramatic sense: a house fire, a marital separation, a child's being stranded in a snowy wilderness, and so forth.

The parties concerned in ESENs more often than not know each other previous to these experiences, whether as acquaintances, neighbors, friends, lovers, twins, or family members. The relationship between the knower (who may also be called a "percipient") and the distressed, distant party (who may also be called the "subject") is usually one of closeness, whether this mean intimate concern or a more general, human sympathy. More rarely, percipient and subject may be practical strangers to each other previous to their experience; they may come to know each other (or know each other

better) after the synchronicity of their experiences is discovered and spread by word of mouth. At issue, always, though, is the question of what human connectedness is, what "closeness" between people is about. ESEns question intimacy's prerequisites, asking what are the privileges of what we call "closeness," and what is its power.

#### **4. Precedents for This Hypothesis, Inside and Outside Folklore**

My general definition of ESEns relies in part upon Leea Virtanen's work to help establish this category of narrative as independent, in most cases, from the category of premonition (1990). A Finnish scholar, Virtanen is, as far as I know, the first and the only folklorist who has put the values of temporality and the questions of causal explanation first in her attempt to define this narrative area, and describe simultaneous experience narrative as a pattern in its own right. Unlike most folklorists, Virtanen recognizes--as philosophers and parapsychologists do more commonly--that the representation of temporality (i.e., the explicit or implied timing of events) in these stories significantly limits and shapes the stories' potential explanations and interpretations—among tellers and across disciplines. Virtanen's work draws on precedents in psychological research and parapsychology. Due to the communication gap between parapsychology and folklore prevailing today (a gap not quite so pronounced in Lang's day, as witnessed by his belonging simultaneously to societies of folklorists and psychological researchers), folklorists may not recognize the influence of parapsychological models upon her research, her analysis, and her general approach to narrative.<sup>8</sup>

Virtanen's definition of "simultaneous informatory experience" narrative and her collection's organizational scheme, for example, resemble those of belief narrative collector/parapsychologist Louisa Rhine (1951, 1961/1967, 1967/1968, 1970, 1975, 1981 and 1983). Virtanen briefly acknowledges Rhine's massive collection efforts and

scholarship similarly oriented to the temporality and causality of simultaneous and other forms of “ESP” narrative. Virtanen’s study also owes much to Gurney, Myers, and Podmore, psychical researchers who were the first scholars in any academic discipline to collect and explicitly describe simultaneous experience narratives as an independent category (1886). She acknowledges this scholarly debt throughout her work.

Andrew Lang proclaimed a century ago that “No kind of tale is so common as that of dying people appearing at a distance” (Lang 1987, 91). Lang’s use of the term “dying” rather than “dead” is significant, in that it suggests that he, like psychical researchers Gurney, Myers, and Podmore, was sensitive to the ways in which this temporal qualification (events in time before or during death, as opposed to after death) can determine which paradigms about causality apply to a given class of belief narratives. Gurney, Myers, and Podmore favored the “phantasm” explanation (apparition of a living or dying—rather than already dead—person) for tales Virtanen calls, with similar awareness, the “simultaneous informatory experience” narrative, and which I, in turn, am calling “ESEN.” Are we speaking of the same category? I believe so, if our common operational assumption is that the explanations of these stories are of primary interest and concern. I believe so, too, whether the events described are understood “objectively” as a dying person’s appearing—or, more contemporarily and “subjectively” framed—as a distant person’s knowing, through a vision or a dream, of another’s death. As I show in Chapter Three, such either/or subjective/objective dichotomies in thinking about belief stories are themselves the marks of modern secular thinking; within religious tradition, for example, distinguishing between a “vision” and an “apparition” is often more complex, less appropriate, and less necessary. Whereas Virtanen identifies such stories by what might be safely called “descriptive” features in our own day—temporality and general content, simultaneity and “information”—earlier

scholars identified them by features regarded as “descriptive” in an earlier time--phantasms, apparitions of the dying. I believe we are talking about the same “kind of tale,” as Lang says, loosely. We are all hypothesizing (rather than asserting ontologically or inductively, in the strict sense of these words) a category of story in which impossible knowing is simultaneous, in which one person is seeing, dreaming, or intuiting the state and fate of another, at the moment of death: not clearly before, and not clearly after.

## 5. General Thesis Goals

In this thesis I hope to place Virtanen's work more clearly in specific scholarly contexts within and outside folkloristics. My first, third, and fourth chapters trace the life history of ESEns over a wide range of literature, ancient and modern. Throughout the thesis I try to show how the descriptions of experience in ESEns function as ideological magnets: they can sustain interpretations characteristic of many literary, historical, and social contexts in which they appear. Responding to Dr. Gillian Bennett's close reading and critique of a previous draft of this document, I will also try to clarify, throughout, how each of the examples I have selected, whether historical or contemporary, might be *argued* to fit the definition I have put forward. Readers may not agree with all of my arguments; I will discuss the problems which arise in “making” these—and perhaps any body of narratives—fit into a hypothetical category, in Chapter Two (the fieldwork chapter) and in the thesis conclusion. My aim is to expose—more clearly than I have before--the range of practical and theoretical problems I have encountered in the attempt to hypothesize such a category of belief narrative. I hope that the perplexing problems of classification, through which I have struggled in this, my final project as a *student* of folklore--not an expert, may be of use to other folklorists working with belief narrative.



Chapter Two illustrates some of the range of causal and meaningful explanations ESEs can sustain, as exemplified in my collection of stories from a small group of North American subjects, many of whom were and still are strangers to me, others of whom I know well enough to call my friends. This study differs from some inside and outside folklore in that it avoids labeling these stories solely or primarily as tales of the supernatural or ESP. ESP is only one causal explanation for apparent impossibilities and meaningful synchronicities which have been described, and puzzled over, for centuries; indeed, a supplementary survey I administered to a class of undergraduate students at the University of Massachusetts in August of 1998 revealed that two students had never even heard the acronym “ESP,” and two others needed to be reminded of what the letters stood for, and what the concept consisted of. Instead of assuming these stories fall for all or most people into an umbrella category safely called “ESP stories” or “synchronicity stories” and the like, I have tried to document secular, nonsupernatural causal and meaningful explanations informants offer for the events narrated in these stories (twin biology, psychology, coincidence), alongside the religious, parapsychological, and other “supernatural” interpretations.

## **6. Twins, God, or Witchcraft?: Examples of ESEs in Multiple Interpretive Contexts**

ESEs describe knowledge which under most circumstances might be called impossible, and describe simultaneities whose causes are more enigmatic than self-evident. For these reasons they make full sense in a variety of scholarly and popular interpretive frames, rather than just one ultimate frame of explanation for cause and/or meaning. Events narrated in some ESEs can be explained causally, according to beliefs about the closeness of twins, for example. Similar events in other ESEs may be attributed (again, both causally, and meaningfully) to the power of God, though, or

to the efficacy of prayer. In this thesis I hypothesize that the stories might be viewed as a narrative type with precedents in the early medieval era, from which time they, like many other kinds of belief narratives, continue to attract rather an amazing variety of explanations. Two examples which follow illustrate this point.

The following short narrative, which appeared as a caption in *Parallels*, Stein and Wolner's 1978 photographic documentary of twins, meets the general definition of an ESEN which I offered above:

My sister fell down a flight of stairs in high school and injured her appendix. When they came to tell me this in class, they found me on the floor in pain. When the doctors took her into surgery, I could tell the exact moment when they started cutting and when they sewed her up. I was in the waiting room with Mother. She said, "Well, the operation should be over by now," and I said, "No, Mother, the doctor just started." And, indeed, the doctor later verified to us that the operation had been delayed. (Stein and Wolner 1978, 73)

This example illustrates the basic ESEN characteristics in that a sister experiences immediate personal knowledge of her twin's status at the time of an accident (and during subsequent surgery) without having communicated with her sister in a more ordinary way. The "vehicle" of the knowledge is not labeled or qualified by the experiencer in this brief example, but it could be described as a shared experience of pain as well as an enigmatic ability to "tell" (narrator's word) the progress of surgery as it was occurring. The narrative typically notes the correspondence in time (i.e., simultaneity or synchronicity) between the narrator's experience of "knowing" and the distant party's distress. The tradition of beliefs about extraordinary closeness and connection between twins is an obvious interpretive context for this ESEN, because it is suggested within the narrative itself and by the narrative's location in a documentary on twins. However, it is not the only available frame for explanation. Extraordinary

closeness and connection between twins is a paradigm which stands to explain this story's events both causally (a connection at the level of genes, biology, or common nurture allowed twins to co-experience surgery "in sync" in real time) and meaningfully (the events are a significant evidence of their history, as sisters, perhaps also, their common identity as twins).

Kenneth Woodward's article in *Newsweek* of March 31, 1997 opens with an ESEN which relies upon a religious interpretive context: belief in the power of prayer. The Woodward example, like that from Stein and Wolner, also demonstrates basic characteristics of the ESEN as I am hypothesizing this narrative category:

It was almost 20 years ago, but the woman, now a Los Angeles journalist, still trembles when she describes the scene. Late on a black, noiseless night in upstate New York, she decided to take a shortcut home, up a steep, unlit path. Then she heard steps behind her, faster than her own. An instant later the man was upon her, tightening her new striped scarf around her neck, then ripping at her pants. At home, her mother woke from a deep sleep, seized with fear that something terrible was about to happen to her eldest daughter. The mother immediately knelt down beside her bed and prayed. For 15 minutes she begged God to protect her daughter from the nameless but real threat she felt her daughter faced.

Convinced she had won God's attention--and protection--the mother returned to bed and a sound sleep. Back on the stony path, the would-be rapist suddenly ceased his assault. He cocked his head, almost beastlike, the woman recalls, and fled down the hill. (Woodward 1997, 57-58)

Like the former example, this narrative suggests an interpretive frame, in this case, belief in the power of prayer to bring about divine intervention against violence. More than one interpretive frame can apply to the events described in either one of these example narratives; interpretive frames such as these can contribute particular (and sometimes conflicting) sets of ideas about the probability, causation, and meaning of these stories' events.

As already stated, not all ESEs involve twins, related persons, or people who knew each other previous to their experience. Whatever the degree of acquaintance between percipient (experiencer) and subject (person in crisis), though, the relationship is, importantly, characterized by sympathy or at least common humanity, rather than malice. This general feature distinguishes ESEs substantially from witchcraft accounts. Differences between ESEs and accounts of simultaneous experiences related to sorcery are subtle, but they are also demonstrable and significant. As I assume this distinction throughout the thesis, I will clarify the rationale concisely here.

In witchcraft accounts, witch and bewitched share a relationship more likely to be characterized by suspicion, envy, or hostility, rather than sympathy. This distinction holds true if one uses, as I do here, for argument's sake, the ecclesiastical and civil-legislative (though not the skeptical) understandings of witchcraft from the fifteenth century up to the Enlightenment as a touchstone to narrow down the otherwise amorphous and very varied notions of what "witchcraft" or "witchcraft accounts" might consist of (Easlea 1980, 1-44). According to this perspective at least—the perspective informed by Pope Innocent VIII's bull against witchcraft and the pronouncements of Kramer and Sprenger in 1486 (Easlea 1980, 6) "witchcraft" was and still may be understood as the conscious intent and performance of Devil-directed *maleficium*, rather than magical healing.<sup>9</sup> (If witchcraft were not understood as *intentional* harm on the part of the accused, its very classification as a form of sin and its commission through the exercise of free will could hardly have lent their weight to Inquisitors' determination to see and hear the sin confessed, with or without the added inducement of torture, before sending the soul of the accused before God via death penalty.) To be sure, there is and there have been many ways to understand intentionality in the relationship between a witch and his or her victim, past and present,

as Easlea ably demonstrates (1980, 1-44). Speaking from this purposefully limited historical conceptualization of what “witchcraft” or “witchcraft accounts” might entail, I make a general and hypothetical distinction between such accounts and ESENs as follows.

Simultaneous experiences between people who are physically separated from each other may (and do) occur in maleficent witchcraft accounts, but generally in the context of a different relationship than that characteristic of the ESEN, i.e., between a consciously covetous or otherwise hostile sorcerer and a fearful and/or suspicious victim.<sup>10</sup> If witches have knowledge of their distant, bewitched victims’ status, it would, as stated above, be understood as knowledge intertwined with freely chosen (though diabolically supervised) responsibility for the distant party’s suffering or misfortune. Responsibility and conscious intent are, as already stated, consistent with the understanding witchcraft in its theological and legislative (if not its skeptical and humanist) history as a crime (Thomas 1971, 517-558; see also Easlea 1980, 1-44), although related popular traditions of witching belief, e.g., Evil Eye, have consistently allowed, apart from but alongside ecclesiastical tradition, that people of enviable good fortune might be bewitched or deprived of good fortune by the mere gaze of an onlooker, regardless of conscious intent.

By contrast, narrators of the ESENs examined in this study neither state nor imply any premeditative, personal responsibility for the suffering about which they seem to know, most often suddenly and unexpectedly. In the field narratives and historical excerpts I review, ill-will between percipients and subjects is not a significant or overt theme. Theoretically, this finding might be attributed to my choosing to study, and define, ESENs primarily in a first-person form; it might be argued, I suppose, that few narrators would ascribe ill-will or maleficent power to themselves, at least in most

interview contexts. I found no suggestion in my informants' first-hand accounts *or* their second-hand narratives that percipients willed or otherwise felt personally responsible for having brought about the simultaneous misfortune of distant strangers, friends, or family members. Although a theory of latent ill-will or intentional witching might be grafted onto these stories, this would still contradict experiencers' more common expressions of sympathy for distant parties, as well as their frustration at being burdened with apparent knowledge of others' troubles without the ability to help (for expressions of such discomfort see stories contributed by "Grace" and "Maureen" in Chapter Two). In summary, for all of the reasons discussed above which distinguish witchcraft and witch-victim relationships from the "knowing" and percipient-subject relationships described in ESENs, I have chosen to exclude any simultaneous experiences in witchcraft accounts from consideration here.

In Chapter Three I consider what is in my opinion a somewhat thornier problem: how and whether to exclude another class of story—memorates or legends of simultaneous healing—from the hypothetical category of ESEN. In these accounts, the protagonists are healers, yet they may also be regarded as percipients of distant subjects' distress, as in the ESEN. Healer-percipients, especially bilocating, reputedly clairvoyant healer-saints (e.g. Padre Pio Forgione, to give a contemporary example) may have a conscious intention to *heal* a distant subject from distress, from trouble which the percipient, again, would not be believed to have caused. Like the percipient in so many ESENs, they feel sympathy, rather than malice, toward the distant other; the relationship is one of meaningful closeness in time of crisis. I conclude, however, that stories about healer-percipients or healers' apparitions at a distance to heal the dying (bilocations), constitute a separate, though related, category of story—in that the intention to heal (like the intention to harm in witchcraft accounts) holds more thematic

importance in these stories than does the sense of wonder about synchronicity, more important in the ESEN.<sup>11</sup> Put even more simply: *witchcraft stories are about witching* thus defined, healing stories are about healer's simultaneous sympathetic intentions *and/or bilocations*. By contrast, ESEN consider a different enigma: the wonder of spontaneous and simultaneous intuition of another's distant suffering. Tellers of ESENs assume neither the role of healer, nor witch: their experience involves cognition, more often than heroic or maleficent action: they are as surprised by their experiences as you or I.

## 7. Summary of Thesis Argument

The thesis argument may be summarized as follows. I argue that ESENs constitute a hypothetical narrative category, which can be linked to Western, Christian, and some cross-cultural precedents in a highly selective "sample" of literatures, from the New Testament and medieval eras onward. *Readers should note that a comprehensive review of medieval historical sources and other bodies of literature, such as the works of the British antiquarians, would be well beyond the scope of this project.* My hope is that my selection of some of the most readily available sources from a relatively small slice of scholarly and popular literature will suffice to suggest (rather than prove) that the hypothetical category ESEN could be a useful conceptual tool in relation to belief narrative.

Evidence from ancient Greek drama and in ancient dream interpretation (Kaivola-Bregenhøj 1990; Oberhelman 1991; Van de Castle 1994) suggests that traditions of belief about holy and remarkable simultaneities might have existed before Christ. The earliest possible example of an ESEN I was able to locate appears in the New Testament; however, *numerous New Testament passages establish an ESEN-like pattern by envisioning suffering/death as a moment or an "hour," and by noting the hour*

at which one person contemplates another's trouble. Stories of holy simultaneities become much more plentiful in medieval exempla and saints' legends--in writings of Bede, Jacobus de Voragine, and Caesarius of Heisterbach, for example.

ESEnS' comparative abundance in this era reflect their consistency with Christian valuations of death and suffering, generally, as privileged "moments" and means to salvation in a life hereafter. ESEnS' persistence in present-day secularized North American conversation and literature might be explained by the wide range of secular, sacred, and supernatural explanations the stories can also sustain.

In thesis Chapter Two, I present informants' various explanations, sacred, secular, and supernatural. I examine 20 cases out of a larger collection of ESEnS and other belief narratives between 1993 and 1998, from over 40 informants, and present arguments to show how each of these cases does or does not match the ESEnS pattern at its five structural levels. I discuss how my methods were shaped in reaction to David Hufford's dominant contemporary paradigm in belief studies, the experience-centered approach (Hufford 1982a). In trying to make sense of ambiguity and questions about experience and memory built into these narratives, I question Hufford's approach and suggest a complementary one more oriented to highly interpretive and self-conscious narrative styles. In an effort to account for discrepancies between multiple narrative versions of experience, without necessarily concluding that the thinking or memory of informants is not coherent, I suggest that philosopher Daniel Dennett's "multiple drafts" theory of mind might be applied to the understanding of narratives of extraordinary experience, told as true, so as to avoid a reduction of the meaning of the discrepancies into the traditional and formulaic polemics of belief and disbelief.

In Chapter Four I show that ESEnS persist in some nonreligious writing after the Middle Ages, through a review of some well-known narrative collections by



antiquarians, psychical researchers, parapsychologists, and folklorists. Similar stories can also be found in the literature on disasters, especially disasters at sea. Popular histories of shipping accidents and other writings pertaining to the occupational culture of Newfoundland treat the subjects of death and God's will quite differently than the medieval accounts I examine in Chapter Three.

In contemporary literature and conversation, as in tracts of the medieval era, ESEs help make meaningful sense of universal forms of human suffering. Often they describe one last (apparent) "contact" between people whose lives and relationships are altered forever by natural and technological disasters, social and economic separations, illness, and death. As stated at the outset of this introduction, ESEs pose a fundamental question about mortality--whether death and suffering are, or should be, necessarily solitary, private, or individual. Because these stories can work like thought experiments that lead tellers and listeners to question mind-body relations and the limits of interpersonal communication, I consider their philosophical value in my last two chapters. The thesis conclusion considers (1) whether ESEs are in any respects an essentially Christian or religious kind of narrative and (2) how ESEs can be viewed as a vernacular form of philosophy. To sum up: emphasis on precise or probable *simultaneity* between knowing and a distant crisis is, as outlined above, a defining characteristic of these stories and distinguishes them from stories of premonition, a philosophical distinction which many folklorists do not recognize or emphasize as particularly as Virtanen (1990) in their studies of related narrative areas (Bennett 1987a, Bold 1989, Butler 1990, Glassie 1982, Halpert 1952 and 1991).

## **8. Chapter Overview**

The chapters to come are organized as follows. I open with a survey of interdisciplinary scholarship related to extraordinary simultaneous experience, starting

with folklore scholarship on tokens and death warnings, and proceeding into ancient and modern psychoanalytic dream interpretation, philosophical perspectives, and the views of parapsychologists and their critics. In Chapter Two (originally the fourth chapter in my earlier draft) I discuss my fieldwork in depth. I provide a detailed and critical presentation of the fieldwork methods, analyses, and findings, along with arguments for why most of the example narratives I select do match the ESEN pattern at its five structural components. The fieldwork chapter also presents the range of explanations informants applied to their stories. Chapter Three discusses a selection of historical texts which match the ESEN pattern while also drawing their meaning directly and primarily from Christian and Roman Catholic religious tradition. Chapter Four examines ESENs in non-religious literature: in the literature on disasters, as well as in the large and well-known narrative collections by antiquarians, psychical researchers, folklorists, and parapsychologists. The concluding chapter (Five) explores larger questions suggested by general thesis findings, including how and whether ESENs can be viewed as vernacular forms of philosophy.

#### **9. Theoretical Preview: Moving Beyond Hufford's "Traditions of Disbelief"**

As I have already indicated about, folklorists have concerned themselves for a long while with issues of credibility in the study of belief narrative. A few examples should suffice to support this point. Gillian Bennett has ably demonstrated how Andrew Lang's debate with Edward Clodd at the turn of the century can be interpreted in terms of David Hufford's model of the opposing formulae which rationalists and supernaturalists adopt as rivals in their assessments of the credibility of belief narratives as accurate descriptions of real experience (Bennett 1987b, working from Hufford 1982b). Bennett herself demonstrated how two separate (and generalizable) checklists of rhetorical features can be generated from the same story when it is told in (1) a

believer's style by a believer and (2) in a skeptical style by a disbeliever (Bennett 1982). Dégh and Vázsonyi's "The Dialectics of The Legend" (1973) is similarly concerned with how belief versus disbelief (and the semblance of either of these two attitudes) about the truth of the events described by legend tellers can affect transmission and variation in the "folk" as opposed to the "religious" legend (1973).

In seeing through the formulae that believers and disbelievers in anomalous or supernatural phenomena (and narrative) impose upon each other, we have made some of our most specialized contributions as folklorists, but in this effort we also join scholars in other disciplines just as eager as we are to expose academic ideology as a belief system in its own right, often (though not exclusively) resistant to seriously considering orders of world and consciousness not supported by the established theories of modern science. Peter Berger, a sociologist of religion, articulated this point of view well before Hufford (in his "Relativizing the Relativizers" in Berger 1969, 28-48; Hufford acknowledges Berger's precedents in "Traditions of Disbelief," Hufford 1982b). Theologian Paul Tillich pointed out three decades before (in various works) that the comparative study of religion is *de facto* something other than the experiencing of religion, and even Rudolf Otto's *Idea of the Holy*,<sup>12</sup> phenomenologically oriented as it is to pure description, might be most safely described as an idea of the idea of the holy. The point is, academics are more often than not in a position of distance and doubt in relation to accounts of religious or other extraordinary experiences of reality—and not always self-consciously so. The preoccupation of folklorists and other academics with issues of credibility is therefore justified and remains important. However, assessing whether or why folks find belief narratives believable or not need not be our primary approach. Hufford voiced just such a plea in 1982, after articulating his celebrated model of formulaic disbelief strategies in "Traditions of Disbelief":

If we can manage such a shift [recognizing traditions of disbelief as folklore on par with traditions of belief] our study of folk religion can in fact become a truly scientific enterprise rather than just a continuing argument between two traditions within our culture in which one side has the unfair advantage of occasional government funding. (Hufford 1982b, 55).

I read this passage as an expression of his hope that we would, somehow, move on. Perhaps one way to do this would be to approach people who tell belief narratives in a spirit neither of belief nor disbelief, but of “adequate belief for now,” in order to explore how people figure the world and human consciousness must work in order for these experiences to occur and mean something--rather than to be demonstrably true or false. That is what I am trying to do here; the reader will judge whether or not I have made any progress in shifting my focus away from questions of truth value toward questions of causality and meaning, in people’s explanations of the belief narratives they tell.

### Notes to Introduction

<sup>1</sup>From page 209, volume 2, of Francis James Child's *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, 5 vols., 1882-1898 (NY: Dover, 1965).

<sup>2</sup>For more on Linda Dégh's and Andrew Vázsonyi's concept of the legend transmission "conduit" see mainly their "Legend and Belief," in *Folklore Genres*, ed. D. Ben-Amos (Austin: U of Texas P, 1976) 93-123 and "Hypothesis of Multi-Conduit Transmission in Folklore," in *Folklore, Performance and Communication*, ed. Dan Ben-Amos and Kenneth S. Goldstein (The Hague: Mouton, 1975) 207-252. The concept comes up in passing throughout "The Dialectics of the Legend," *Folklore Reprints* 1:6 (1973): 1-65, as well. In "The Hypothesis...", page 211, they define "conduit" as "...the contact that becomes established between individuals who qualify as legend receivers or transmitters," contact which allows, as they argue, for repeated performance opportunities and specialization of tellers' skills in transmitting this genre, as any other.

<sup>3</sup>Similarly, some of the most satisfying "X Files" episodes are those in which ingenious and surprising explanations emerge and suggest that *both* the Christian rationalist Scully and the secular paranormalist Mulder could be onto something, though they arrived at their conclusions from alternate points of view.

<sup>4</sup>H.L. Mackie's "Evil and Omnipotence," reprinted in *Reason and Responsibility*, ed. Joel Feinberg (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1985) is a classic contemporary argument against the existence of God.

<sup>5</sup>This article appears in Kendrick Frazier's *Science Confronts the Paranormal* (NY: Prometheus, 1986) 57-64. In it the authors describe having hired a capable magician to demonstrate his technical skills before an audience of undergraduate psychology students, without making any claims to having psychical or magical abilities. They dressed their employee playfully, however, "in a purple choir robe, sandals, and a gaudy medallion." (57) Most of the people in the audiences believed he had psychic abilities anyway.

<sup>6</sup>Iris Murdoch, "On 'God' and 'Good'" (Chapter Two from *The Sovereignty of Good*, London: RKP, 1970), in *Women Philosophers*, ed. Mary Warnock (London: Everyman/J.M. Dent, 1996) 156-74. That wasn't the only reason I returned to full practice.

<sup>7</sup>I apply the adjective "subjective" here in the simple sense of "private," "personal," and "cognitive" experiences like dreams, daydreams, intuitions, etc., experiences which are not ordinarily thought accessible to or confirmable by other people. This sense of "subjective" does not exclude the possibility that "objective reality" (i.e. tangible things, beings, or forces verifiable by others) can give rise to, complement, or confirm such a subjective experience. I will discuss this tricky distinction in later chapters, in relation to an excellent case in point, the "Crack on the Red Goblet" story discussed, in more than one article, by Dégh and Vázsonyi.

I am not labeling "ghosts," for example, objective or subjective; I am open to arguments for one or the other in given cases, and I can imagine a sort of ghost which might be both "objectively" verifiable (leaving its footprints behind) and yet "subjectively" perceived in different ways by more than one person. [Such is sometimes the case in seers' reports of simultaneous visions of the Blessed Virgin Mary in one spot; some see her along with an angel, others along with her son, all during the same "visit" she is believed to be paying, for good and unified reasons, at a given time.]

<sup>8</sup>Folklorists Bill Ellis, Linda Dégh and Andrew Vázsonyi, and David Hufford are exceptions to this observation. Ellis's review of Virtanen's work shows an impressive ability to synthesize perspectives from parapsychology and debunking science with those of folkloristics (Ellis 1994). Dégh and Vázsonyi characterize parapsychologists (somewhat simplistically, I think, as they are after all *testing* their hypotheses) as a class of "believers" in their "Dialectics of the Legend" (1973), repeating this in "The Crack on the Red Goblet" essay in Dorson's *Folklore in the Modern World* (1978). Hufford's work with nocturnal supernatural assault tradition/experience (1982a) has been picked up by parapsychological historian/sociologist James McLendon (1994, see references to Hufford throughout). The two scholars published essays side by side in *The Journal of Medicine and Philosophy*, volume 18, in 1993.

<sup>9</sup>I am using the term "witchcraft" here in what Keith Thomas cautiously calls its "anti-social" sense (1971, 517-19), recognizing as he does that the term "witch" has referred historically both to wise women and cunning healers, as well as to those who are believed to "mysteriously injure other people" by occult practices (519). As Thomas points out:

Generally speaking, the cunning folk and the maleficent witches were believed to be two separate species. But they did sometimes overlap, and there are many examples of village wizards and charmers who found themselves accused of maleficent witchcraft. (520)

<sup>10</sup>Here I am including even those accounts which imply that the witch's bad intentions could have been latent, or only partially conscious, as could be theorized from a Freudian psychoanalytic point of view.

<sup>11</sup>Again, such a suggestion might be made, but rather weakly so, from a strict Freudian perspective that such experiences, like dreams, might mask unconscious hostile motivations of the percipient. Even so, it would be difficult to argue a percipient's intent and, subsequently, his or her responsibility for the fate of a distant person (as in witchcraft) on the basis of theorized unconscious desires.

<sup>12</sup>Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. John W. Harvey (London/NY: H. Milford/Oxford University P, 1925).

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE RELEVANCE OF EXTRAORDINARY SIMULTANEOUS EXPERIENCE NARRATIVES TO INTERDISCIPLINARY SCHOLARSHIP

#### Introduction

Whether they appear in literature or in the fabric of social life, ESEnS are stories which have a fascinating way of suggesting that one human being might be able to know or to co-experience the suffering of another person, without having access to the more ordinary channels of communicating tragic news. It is this central (and debatable) proposition which makes these narratives relevant to scholars whose general disciplinary concerns differ more often than they overlap: folklorists, psychoanalysts, philosophers, and parapsychologists. ESEnS test folklorists' criteria for classifying "token" and "death warning" narratives (Halpert 1952, 1991; Glassie 1982) and inspire a re-examination of other terms folklorists use to map out this domain of traditional belief: Bennett's "ESP and foreknowledge" (1987a), Kaivola-Bregenhøj's "premonitory dreams" (1990), or Butler's adoption of the Franco-Newfoundland term, "*avertissements*" (1990). The startling coincidences in extraordinary simultaneous experience stories have provoked psychoanalysts like Jung and Freud to theorize about "synchronicity" and telepathic dreaming, to account for such possibilities and their meanings. As case studies, ESEnS also call the perspectives of parapsychologists into confrontation with those of philosophers, permitting both kinds of scholars to assert or further define their dissenting views of the general principles limiting what one person can know about another's experience from a given distance in time or space. Jung's theory of synchronicity is something I



treat at length in Chapter Three, where I distinguish it from the religious significance of coincidence in the Catholic Christian tradition.

This chapter introduces the relevance of ESENs to contemporary folkloristic, psychoanalytic, parapsychological, and philosophical concerns. I begin with a general overview of the folklore literature on presentiments of death and disaster, which I follow with a single historical example of an ESEN—one which appears in the early medieval English ecclesiastical history of Bede—to show how such narratives describe and interpret experience at the same time, and to demonstrate how my own definition and method of narrative analysis will work throughout this study. The second chapter section is a general review of psychoanalytic, philosophical, and parapsychological perspectives pertinent to ESENs. The relevance of ESENs to these four disciplines—folkloristics, psychoanalysis, parapsychology, and philosophy—is summarized in the chapter conclusion ("Section III: Summary").

## **Section I: Folklore Scholarship Relevant to ESENs:**

### **A General Overview**

#### **1.1 Bennett and Virtanen**

The work of Gillian Bennett (1987a) and the work of Leea Virtanen (1990) are landmarks in the folklore literature relating to extraordinary simultaneous experience. Both of these scholars recognize a philosophical distinction between simultaneous experience stories and stories of premonition, as I do in this study. My chosen term "ESEN" takes in what Gillian Bennett meant when she delineated the telepathic (rather than precognitive) end of the "subjective strand" of ESP experience. "ESEN" also draws heavily upon Leea Virtanen's "simultaneous informatory experience" story category. My debt to these two scholars' thinking is substantial, and for this reason, I

begin this chapter's general review of folklore scholarship by summarizing their perspectives.<sup>1</sup>

In *Traditions of Belief* (1987a), Gillian Bennett's field report and historical annotation of the supernatural beliefs of middle-class British women, she notes that, among her informants,

Forewarnings about really bad things tend to be termed 'omens'; warnings about lesser events, 'premonitions'; and advance information about happy or trivial or undisturbing things, 'telepathy'.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to describing how her informants use these terms, Bennett traces the history of these and related terms throughout several centuries of literature. She herself prefers "ESP" and "foreknowledge" as the most general headings for this subject area.

In relation to the "ESP" or "foreknowledge" heading she differentiates the histories of two separate "strands of tradition." The first strand takes in omens and tokens: natural or supernatural signs traditionally associated with deaths, such as unusual animal behaviors, inexplicable lights, knocks at the door, and so forth. The second strand of tradition includes more individual and subjective experiences, such as dreams and waking visions (Bennett 118-22). The first strand of tradition requires that someone read an external, material sign correctly, according to knowledge of symbolic or divinatory tradition. By contrast, the second strand involves

subjective states of mind which 'mean' what they mean because they are directly caused by the events rather than related only indirectly to them by virtue of conventional symbolism.<sup>3</sup>

Bennett also quotes Dr. Johnson to illustrate what might fall into the second, subjective strand of ESP tradition:

...an impression made either by the mind upon the eye, or by the eye upon the mind, by which things distant or future are perceived and seen as if they were present. A man on a journey, far from home, falls from his horse; another, who is perhaps at work about the house, sees him bleeding on the ground, commonly with a landscape of the place where the accident befalls him...Things distant are seen at the instant when they happen...This receptive faculty...is neither voluntary nor constant. The appearances have no dependence upon choice: they cannot be summoned, detained, or recalled, the impression is sudden, and the effect often painful.<sup>4</sup>

Dr. Johnson's phrase "things distant or future" would seem to allow for a distinction between simultaneous and precognitive classes of experience.

Bennett recognizes a distinction between telepathy and precognition, but she does not dwell upon it at length. Instead, she cautions folklorists that these experiences may never be "entirely distinct from belief in omens and portents" at the emic level (Bennett 122). Dreams, for example, have been classed in either category (121 and *passim*). Bennett's points are well taken, but Leea Virtanen's work (following precedents outside folklore, e.g., Gurney, Myers, and Podmore 1886; Rhine 1953, 1961, 1967, 1970, 1975, and 1981) suggests that a basic distinction between knowledge of the future and knowledge of the distant present can be supported at an emic level, insofar as stories which emphasize simultaneous knowledge, rather than precognition, can be elicited easily and repeatedly. As I have already indicated in the thesis Introduction (and as Chapters Two and Three demonstrate by argument) I tend to side with Virtanen on this subtle distinction.

The most substantial treatise specifically devoted to extraordinary simultaneous experience stories in folklore to date is Finnish folklorist Leea Virtanen's *That Must Have Been ESP: An Examination of Psychic Experiences*.<sup>5</sup> Virtanen classifies types and subjects of "simultaneous informatory experiences" represented in her own collection of 865 Finnish accounts and compares her reports against extensive

British and European narrative collections assembled by parapsychologists in the 1950s and 1960s. The work proposes many useful comparative approaches to such narratives and emphasizes a gross distinction between simultaneous experience accounts and precognition stories (Virtanen 1990, 1).<sup>6</sup> While Virtanen's book includes verbatim quotation from narratives, she does not explore her informants' personal explanations for their experiences. This may be due to the enormous size of Virtanen's sample, and to the fact that she quotes accounts provided in response to surveys rather than personal interviews. Virtanen separates narratives according to the vehicle of the experience (dreams, visions, hallucinations, intuitions, physical changes, signs in nature, inner voices), the type of information conveyed (death, accident/distress, illness), and the percipient's relationship to the subject (spouse, parent, sibling, friend, neighbor, coworker).<sup>7</sup> She distinguishes between dreams that seem to correspond realistically (clearly) rather than symbolically (less clearly or metaphorically) with another person's experience (Virtanen 40-46).

Virtanen also provides some discussion of altered states of consciousness. She considers "visions" a subcategory of hallucinations, and says she classes "inner voices" under intuitions "unless an actual sound was heard" (Virtanen 39). She defines hallucination as a "sensory misperception [in any sensory mode] which is so like a real sensation that at the time the percipient perceives it as reality" (46). "In hallucination," Virtanen says, "we are concerned with a perception which originates inside the brain, without any concrete external stimulus" (46). The reader might be tempted to ask how informants determined whether there was or was not any actual source for their perceptions. However, because Virtanen's book focuses on informants' descriptions of experience, rather than their explanations, this and other interpretive questions cannot be resolved.<sup>8</sup> Virtanen's work draws heavily upon the analytic criteria for

extraordinary simultaneous experience narratives suggested by psychical researchers Gurney, Myers, and Podmore, in *Phantasms of the Living* (1886).

As stated above, the category "ESEN" in this thesis works from Bennett's distinction between traditional divinatory signs and subjective experiences, and refers exclusively to the latter end of this dichotomy (Bennett 118-22, 128). "ESEN" also takes into account Virtanen's gross distinction between simultaneous experience stories and precognitive or premonitory ones (Virtanen 1). As explained previously in the thesis introduction, an "ESEN" is defined in this study as a first- or third-person account of a social situation, actual or potential, in which a person experiences immediate personal knowledge of another's status at a time of some personal distress, despite the ordinary limits of their separation from each other (e.g., without having communicated or having been present, so as to know in a more ordinary way). Restating this definition as a series of five structural components, an ESEN is (A) a first- or third-person account, (B) which describes one person's [(C) more or less simultaneous] knowledge of another's status, (D) at a time of a crisis involving suffering [e.g. accident, illness, death], (E) while the parties are at some distance from each other. What I mean by "more or less simultaneous knowledge of another's status" is a moment in any vehicle of a person's conscious experience (a dream, waking intuition, vision, etc.) whose contents correspond mimetically or analogously with the contents of the experience of another, suffering person at a distance. By "more or less simultaneous knowledge" I mean correspondence which is established as simultaneous either by explicit reference to clock-time or by some other indication that simultaneity was probable (e.g., "at the same time," "at that very hour," a "meanwhile" construction, etc.).

The range of crises and relationships I have found to be characteristic of the ESENs I have reviewed is largely consistent with the ranges identified by Virtanen for "simultaneous informatory experiences." Personal crises in ESENs include births, illnesses, injuries, danger, grieving, and death. Parties involved often, but not always, know each other, as acquaintances, neighbors, friends, lovers, twins, or other family members. People seem to share, somehow, in the critical and often fearful experiences *of distant others in these accounts* by means of simultaneous sleeping dreams, waking or borderline visions, thoughts, feelings, and many other conscious vehicles. They "share" the distressful experience insofar as they seem somehow to know, without being informed in the ordinary ways.

The category "ESEN" does not take in accounts of dreaming or waking experiences whose correspondence to crisis events depends heavily or exclusively upon interpretation of traditional dream or divinatory symbolism. Instead, generally speaking, the stories investigated in this thesis narrate experiences in a variety of states of consciousness, which have either a realistic or a combined literal/metaphorical correspondence to distant crisis events, rather than purely symbolic association with real-life crises. Again, this distinction recognizes Gillian Bennett's differentiation between objective and subjective "strands" of ESP tradition (1987a). As Bennett observes, there is a *difference between the first and the second category of belief and experience*: the objective strand of ESP tradition involves the interpretation of external, natural or supernatural signs traditionally associated with death, while the subjective strand of ESP tradition involves internal, individual experiences, such as dreams and visions (Bennett 118-22). However, as I argue in Chapter Three in relation to religious interpretations of ESENs and ESEN-like accounts, I suspect that the need to apply any strict either/or subjective/objective dichotomy to these stories is

a product of a modern-day and perhaps unconsciously secularized mentality. It makes little sense, for example, to reduce medieval visionary accounts which match the ESEN pattern to a debate about whether they portray subjective visions or objective apparitions. Within the context of worldview which is fully and religiously supernatural (rare but present, in some cases, among my informants for this study), a genuine subjective (i.e. private and individual) vision is, precisely, a vision of a genuinely objective state of affairs, e.g., a good soul's separation from the body and simultaneous arrival among the communion of saints, at the moment of death.

## **1.2 Halpert, Classic, Butler, and Bold**

Violetta Halpert's 1991 article on death warnings in Newfoundland oral tradition illustrates the value and the difficulty of separating etic from emic terminology. Halpert opens by asserting that:

In Newfoundland there is a strong belief, particularly among the older generation, that persons "belonging to" someone who is dying will be forewarned in some way. "I don't believe in such things as ghosts and haunted houses," a man from Calina remarked, "but I do believe that someone will get some sort of warning before a person dies."<sup>9</sup>

Halpert explains how some Newfoundlanders, like some Indiana residents,<sup>10</sup> use several terms "rather loosely" to refer to various classes of "death warnings." Halpert claims that the term "sign" can and sometimes does denote, more strictly, a "natural object or event," "outside the control of the observer," which conveys warning. "Supernatural perceptions," however, are "nearly always called tokens," according to Halpert. The third term is "warning," which Halpert, along with her informants, applies as the umbrella term which covers "any kind of foreknowledge of death."<sup>11</sup>

Although Halpert observes that

People who speak of supernatural tokens speak of being warned "that same night," or "just about that time" (i.e., at the actual hour of death) (Halpert 1991, 78),

her general position seems to be that simultaneous knowledge of a death and premonitory knowledge need not be distinguished from each other, given the lack of distinction in emic terminology. As stated elsewhere, I disagree with this position--not through any suspicion that stories like Halpert's are *not* just as varied and ambiguous as she suggests, but because I believe (following Virtanen within folklore, and following Jung and many other scholars outside folklore) that there are basic differences between the concept of foreknowledge and the concept of simultaneous knowledge of the distant present. As I will show in chapters to come, although some texts support either form of interpretation, other examples do sustain one better than the other.

Like Halpert, Henry Glassie closely follows the usage of informants, though he uses the term "token" primarily, rather than "death warning" (Glassie 1982, 66). In his ethnography of Ballymenone, in Northern Ireland, Glassie discovered "tokens" occupied a high place in a working hierarchy of credibility among supernatural topics (66). More of the Ulster town's residents believed in tokens, he noticed, than in ghosts; a greater proportion believed in ghosts than in fairies, in turn. Apart from God, though, no category of the "supernatural" was exempt from doubt and debate (66).

Halpert has stated that tellers of full-length token narratives are often people whose belief in warnings is "deep and personal," reinforced by personal experience with them (1991, 79). Newfoundlanders of this description, Halpert reports,



sometimes regarded tokens as "something supernatural and therefore not to be talked about" in circles other than family and close friends (Halpert 1991, 79). Here, Halpert's views differ somewhat from Glassie's finding in Ballymenone (that no category of the supernatural, other than God, was exempt from critical discussion), but they are more consistent with the findings of Gary Butler.

Under the general heading, "supernatural signs and warnings" (1990, 61, 72-75) in his book, *Saying Isn't Believing*, Butler discusses death "tokens" or *avertissements*, as this belief category is called by French Newfoundlanders in L'Anse-à-Canards, on the island's west coast. On the basis of his field research between 1979 and 1985 on categories of supernatural belief in this area (2), Butler reports that people in L'Anse-à-Canards most often used family or personal experience narratives to express knowledge about tokens (74). Butler reports a high level of belief in the personal and family experience narratives he collected, a total of 81. Out of these 81 narratives, on a variety of supernatural topics, 59 were told with belief, 12 were told with an attitude of doubt, and 10 were told without corresponding belief (98-99). These findings support Halpert's general observation that Newfoundlanders told full-length token stories among family and friends only, in an attitude of belief based on personal experience (79).

Unlike Halpert or Bennett, Butler does not make a major distinction between subjective death token experiences, and symbols and signs which are believed to warn of death. His use of the words "token" and *avertissement* refers collectively to the signs (e.g., "rooster's crowing at night," or "glass jumping off table," 72) as well as the subjective experiences which warn of death (e.g., "apparition of one not yet dead," or "apparition moving away," 72). Butler's description of tokens in L'Anse-à-Canards also characterizes them all as premonitory, in other words, as warnings of "impending"

(72) and "imminent" (73) deaths, rather than deaths occurring simultaneously. By comparison, Halpert discussed the possibility of distinguishing simultaneous from premonitory death warnings but opted out of making such a distinction, because her informants did not seem to emphasize it in their categorical terminology. Butler, however, does not discuss this possible distinction at all, or report whether there were any such distinctions at the emic level.

Regarding the general level of belief in tokens in this community, Butler comments that

It is significant that...there is a total absence of anti- or "negative narratives" (Dégh and Vazsonyi 1976:112) concerning death tokens, a fact which again indicates the general acceptance of this belief in L'Anse-à-Canards. (Butler 1990, 74-74)

Butler's finding a "general acceptance of this belief" here is consistent with Glassie's findings about the high level of belief in tokens in Ballymenone, in comparison to other belief categories. However, Glassie seems to suggest that there may have been a bit more doubt and debate about tokens in Ballymenone than Butler describes in L'Anse-à-Canards for this particular belief category.

Folklorist Valentina Bold's study of a small group of Newfoundland women (1989) focuses not on traditional signs of death but upon dreams, one thread in what Bennett identified as the subjective strand of ESP tradition (Bennett 1987a, 118-22). In her discussion of her informants' supernatural dreams, Bold proposes a binary model for categorizing dreams which correspond predictively or supernaturally with real-life events. Drawing upon her informants' categorical distinctions, Bold differentiates "descriptive" dreams (with linear plots, minute detail, and local, almost immediately-discerned predictive value) from "symbolic" ones. The latter, according to Bold's informants, are dreams whose enigmatic imagery came only in snatches, and

whose predictive value emerged later, when events publicized in national or international media were argued to correspond, lending the formerly symbolic dream fragments unity in a real-life "plot" (54-65). This binary model suggests that linear or more enigmatic dreams could occur either simultaneously or prior to the events to which they are believed to correspond.

### **1.3 The "ESEN": One Historical Example**

In the third and fourth chapters of this thesis, I will be discussing specific examples of ESENs in religious and nonreligious literatures, respectively. In Chapter Two, I present and discuss 20 contemporary examples of ESENs, from a larger corpus of stories collected for this study through fieldwork with over forty Canadian and U.S. informants. Having just provided a general overview of how folklorists classify "token" and "death warning" narratives in tradition, I will now clarify further, by example, how my own definition of "ESEN," derived as it is from previous folklore scholarship, works as an inclusive and exclusive category in this thesis.

The category "ESEN" in this thesis relies generally (though not rigidly) upon a binary distinction between the transmission of traditions of symbolic association presaging disaster, and the description of subjective experiences of presentiment of death and disaster.<sup>12</sup> Generally speaking, I would classify a narrative about a person's dreaming of a blackbird, for example, around the time another person passed away, as a symbolic correspondence, and exclude it from analysis. I would classify a dream about another person's *death*, however, around the time another person passed away, as a more realistic correspondence, and include it for consideration in this study, even if some symbolic elements accompanied the dream's realistic death and dying content, as is the case with the following historical example.

An early specimen of an ESEN appears in English hagiography from the eighth century [Bede, 4.32, Colgrave and Mynors translation 1969, 411-413; Bitel 1991, 52]. Recorded in Latin by the English church historian the Venerable Bede, the following legend illustrates some of the basic features of the ESEN, as defined so far. Of Hild, a saintly abbess who died in the year 680, Bede wrote that

*After she had presided over the monastery [Whitby] for many years...she began to suffer internal pain and her last day came. About cock-crow she received the viaticum of the most holy communion and, summoning the handmaidens of Christ who were in the monastery, she urged them to preserve the gospel peace among themselves and towards all others; even while she was still exhorting them, she joyfully saw death approach or rather, to use the words of the Lord, she 'passed from death into life.'*

*On the same night it pleased Almighty God by a vision to reveal her death in another monastery some distance away called Hackness....In this monastery there was a nun named Begu who for thirty or more years had been dedicated to the Lord in virginity and had served Him in the monastic life. As she was resting in the sisters' dormitory, she suddenly heard in the air the well-known sound of the bell with which they used to be aroused to their prayers or called together when one of them had been summoned from the world. On opening her eyes she seemed to see the roof of the house rolled back, while a light which poured in from above filled the whole place. As she watched the light intently, she saw the soul of the handmaiden of the Lord [Hild] being borne to Heaven in the midst of that light, attended and guided by angels. Then awaking and seeing the other sisters lying around her, she realized that what she had seen had been revealed to her either in a dream or in a vision. Greatly afraid, she rose at once and ran to the maiden named Frigyth, who was then presiding over the monastery in place of the abbess. With many tears and lamentations and sighing deeply, she announced that the Abbess Hild, mother of them all, had departed from this world and that she had seen her ascend in the midst of a great light and escorted by angels to the abode of eternal light, to join the company of the citizens of heaven.*

*When Frigyth heard this, she aroused all the sisters, called them to church and ordered them to devote themselves to prayer and psalm-singing on behalf of the soul of their mother. This they did diligently for the rest of the night and at early dawn, there came brothers from the place where she had died to announce*

*her death. The maidens answered that they already knew of it and, when they explained in detail how and when they had heard of it, it was found that her death had been revealed to them in a vision at the very hour at which the brothers said that she had died. By a beautiful harmony of events, it was divinely ordained that while some of them watched her departure from this life, others watched her entrance into the everlasting life of the spirit. Now these two monasteries are nearly thirteen miles apart.* [Bede, 4.32, Colgrave and Mynors translation 1969, 411-413; Bitel 1991, 52]

I call the Bede text above a legend because it is a third-person account which presents a social situation in historical time which is potentially true, less debatably so, no doubt, in its original religious-historical context. This text describes one person's feeling certain of the status of another during life crisis--in this case, not injury or illness, but death. This feeling of conviction arises not through the appearance of a divinatory sign or symbol (although one element of the dream, the tolling of a bell, has traditional symbolic value) but mainly through a subjective experience: a dream with realistic or only partially metaphorical correspondence to a human crisis (death) at a distance.

The Bede account emphasizes the simultaneity of the visionary's experience and the death, and underscores the distance (thirteen miles) separating the percipient and the subject. This example is one of many which suggest that narratives of extraordinary simultaneous experiences have been circulating, especially in Christian religious literature and culture, for many centuries. The emphasis upon the *simultaneity* of the visionary experience with the time of death is particularly clear here. Emphasis on simultaneity (perfect synchronicity, or coincidence within hours or minutes in a day) rather than on a knowing ahead of time (e.g., days, weeks, or years before) distinguishes an ESEN from accounts of predictions or precognitions.

Like most ESENs, the Bede account is both an artifact of experience itself, and an artifact of the interpretation of experience, in a particular historical and cultural

context (e.g., medieval English monastic life). The list of occurrences in this account (the description of events) lends itself easily to a religious cultural explanation: events might be attributed causally, in this interpretive context, to the working of God's will. The descriptive portion of this narrative can be broken down roughly into a set of elements of "what happened" chronologically, and the interpretive elements may be broken down also, in a general way, into a set of those comments and inferences which explain how the described events occurred, what caused them, and what they mean. I analyze my field narratives in a similar manner in the next chapter, Chapter Two, which describes fieldwork methods and findings.

#### **DESCRIPTIVE FEATURES: BEGU'S DREAM ABOUT HILD**

1. Abbess Hild receives communion and dies at dawn.
2. At another monastery, nun Begu has a dream or vision of Hild in which she sees Hild's soul ascending to heaven in light, accompanied by angels.
3. Begu informs Frigyth immediately that Hild has died.
4. Frigyth orders nuns to pray for Hild's soul.
5. *Brothers arrive*, confirming Hild's death at monastery thirteen miles away, and affirming that death occurred at the same time as Begu's experience.

#### **INTERPRETIVE FEATURES: BEGU'S DREAM ABOUT HILD**

1. Begu's experience is attributed to the will of God ("On the same night it pleased Almighty God by a vision to reveal her death in another monastery some distance away...")
2. Begu (a) decides her experience was either a "dream" or a "vision" and (b) relies upon it as knowledge of Hild's death.
3. Frigyth and sisters act upon Begu's dream/vision as knowledge of Hild's death.
4. Simultaneity of dream/vision with actual death is given divine significance ("By a beautiful harmony of events, it was divinely ordained...")
5. Distance between location of dream/vision and scene of death is emphasized again ("nearly thirteen miles apart").

The cultural and experiential persuasions of the analyst help determine which elements of the narrative are designated the "bare facts" and perceptions in the

experience, and which features could be interpretations, rather than facts. Bede and other orthodox Christian writers might classify God's ordination of Begu's experience as a "fact" on the same order as Begu's having had, or reported, the experience, whereas I, working from a secular research perspective, categorize the attribution of Begu's experience to God's will as an interpretive feature, rather than a descriptive element. Hopefully, my use of explicit breakdowns (here, in Chapter Two, and in the Appendices) will clarify my own standards of differentiating "facts" from "interpretations" (i.e., my own biases) and leave the question of where, precisely, descriptions end and explanations begin in these narratives open for debate.

The interpretive and descriptive portions of the Bede text yield some additional general propositions characteristic of ESEnS. The first of these propositions is that humans might be able to sense the occurrence of a major mind/body event in another human's life, such as death, despite geographical or other separation which would ordinarily render such communication impossible. Second, it is proposed that these events can be experienced as literal, simultaneous viewing or experiencing of the event, rather than as an interpretation of divinatory signs and symbols before or after the death itself. A third proposition is that an experience such as this can serve as a relatively reliable source of interpersonal knowledge. The experience seems to have generated a degree of conviction about another person's status at a distance, and this conviction seems to have served as the basis for further action and belief. Propositions such as these can be revolutionary, in that they challenge people's more mundane convictions about what is and is not ours to know about the circumstances of other people's lives, in more ordinary social and historical contexts. I will now discuss some of the reactions to ESEnS and/or their central propositions in disciplines outside folkloristics.

## Section II: Interdisciplinary Scholarship

### Relevant to ESEns

What folklorists identify as examples of the tradition of "tokens" and "death warnings" overlaps with what scholars in other disciplines mean when they use related terms for extraordinarily coincident phenomena, and associated beliefs. Interdisciplinary terms with partial overlap into folklorists' area of death warnings include "telepathy," "synchronicity," "clairvoyance," and "precognition." In the section which follows, I will sketch the perspectives of Freud and Jung on telepathy and synchronicity, and I will discuss some of the differences between philosophers' and parapsychologists' views of telepathic, clairvoyant, and precognitive experiences. I explore Jung's synchronicity theory in much greater detail in Chapter Three, where I contrast Jungian explication with primarily religious interpretations for ESEns.

#### **2.1 Jungian and Freudian Dream Interpretation**

Dream science and interpretation are relevant to the study of ESEns insofar as dreams constitute one of the most common vehicles in these narratives for experiencing knowledge of others' distress at a distance. Virtanen reported that dreams were the vehicle for 28% of all reports in her collection (Virtanen 1990, 39). Precedents for Bennett's distinction between symbolic and the experiential strands of the token tradition and for Virtanen's distinction between "realistic" and "symbolic" dreaming and classification schemes can be found as far back as the second-century Greek dream interpretation book, the *Oneirocritica*, written by Artemidorus Daldianus. Contemporary psychoanalytic dream interpretation, such as that advanced in the twentieth century and earlier by Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung, has also been influenced by ancient dream interpretation.



Annikki Kaivola-Bregenhøj's 1990 article "From Dream to Interpretation" connects the present-day interpretation of "premonitory" and other dreams to the work of Artemidorus and other authors of ancient dreambooks and dreambook fragments (1990, 88-96). She also counts the "fragments of dreambooks discovered in Mesopotamia and Egypt nearly four thousand years ago" as important sources (88). Like other scholars on the history of dream interpretation (White 1975, Oberhelman 1991), Kaivola-Bregenhøj identifies the work of Artemidorus as an important early landmark. She calls the *Oneirocritica* the "most illustrious" writing on dreams in the late classical period (88). Kaivola-Bregenhøj (1990, 88) credits Freud, however, with pioneering the tradition of interpreting dreams for present psychological significance, rather than for their predictive value, as was more common in the ancient sources.

Centuries before Freud or Jung, Artemidorus and other ancient writers on dreams claimed that dreams could be read as the expressions of physical and emotional needs and desires. Ancient writers also recognized what could be called the telepathic and the precognitive hypotheses about dreams: that dreams could contain messages transmitted from other minds, regarding current or future events. Both Freud and Jung were open to viewing dreams from the perspective of the telepathy hypothesis. However, Freud expressed much more ambivalence about telepathy over the course of his career than did Jung. Freud also differed with Jung when he objected even more strenuously to the idea that dreams could be precognitive.

A long-standing tradition seems to have existed in medical science before Freud to view dreams for their value in the diagnoses of present states of physical health and illness (Freud *Interpretation* 1955, 3, 33-34; Flanagan 1991, 68; Oberhelman 1991, 32-36). Oberhelman, like Freud, dates the beginning of this tradition to the Greek Hippocratic *Regimen* dating to the fifth or fourth century before

Christ (Oberhelman 1991, 32). Whereas Artemidorus and other ancient writers attempted to de-mystify dream thinking in many ways, Freud re-mystified both sleeping *and* waking thought by positing the existence of unconscious and partially conscious drives which help govern thought and behavior, including dreams.

Freud believed that dreaming might be a less inhibited mode of cognition than waking thought, and that dreams might therefore be more reliable indicators of subconscious and unconscious conflicts. Subconscious and unconscious sexual and aggressive motivations might be expressed in the content of dreams, even though these motivations would normally would be denied in everyday, conscious waking behavior. Freud distinguished between latent and manifest dream content, the latter being the content the dreamer can consciously describe through free association and other questioning in psychoanalysis, and the former being the real wishes and messages the dreamer is expressing, less consciously, behind the manifest content (Freud *Interpretation of Dreams*, Strachey translation of 1955, 135 and *passim*).

Experimental parapsychologists Ullman, Krippner, and Vaughan (1973) and psychologist Robert Van de Castle (1994) compare the positions of Freud and Jung on the issue of telepathic dreams. Ullman, Krippner, and Vaughan provide the following anecdotal portrait of the rift between the two psychoanalysts regarding the question of paranormal phenomena:

There are few incidents of the unexpected that have had more influence than the mysterious explosive noises that occurred in 1909 and that signaled the break between Freud and his disciple Carl G. Jung. Jung and Freud were engaging in a heated argument on paranormal phenomena, especially precognition, which Freud vehemently rejected. A loud report erupted from a nearby bookcase, alarming both men. Jung said it was an example of "so-called catalytic exteriorization phenomena." Freud said it was bosh, but Jung predicted that there would be another such noise. Another detonation immediately occurred. Freud was aghast. (Ullman, Krippner and Vaughan 1973, 29)

The authors provide no source to substantiate this anecdote, although I have run across references to it elsewhere. Neither Freud nor Jung, it seems, regarded the telepathy hypothesis as entirely irrelevant to the project of accounting for the workings of the human mind in dreams.

In an essay written in 1952<sup>13</sup> Jung advanced his theory of "synchronicity" to account for inexplicable coincidences in the context of emotionally charged exchanges (Ullman, Krippner and Vaughan 1973, 30-32). Progoff (1973, 64-65) describes Jung's concept of "synchronicity" as a sense of meaningful coincidence, recognizing the role chance, rather than causality, plays in human experience and psychology. The "synchronicity" hypothesis works when arguments about causality do not explain things, or become meaningless:

The coming together by apparent chance of factors that are not causally linked but that nevertheless show themselves to be meaningfully related is at the very heart of the process by which the purpose of the individual's life unfolds and becomes his "fate." (Progoff 1973, 64)

According to Progoff, synchronicity was Jung's response to realizing over the course of his career that neither causality (event X causing unconscious desire or complex Y, leading to behavior Z) nor teleology (purposefulness and sense of choice) in human psychology account fully for how humans experience meaning in their lives.

In his article on synchronicity, Jung used something like an ESEN to illustrate the concept:

An acquaintance of mine saw and experienced in a dream the sudden death of a friend, with all the characteristic details. The dreamer was in Europe at the time and the friend in America. The death was confirmed next morning by telegram, and ten days later a letter confirmed the details. (Ullman, Krippner, and Vaughan 1973, 30 citing Jung 1952/1955, 38.)

Further investigation revealed that the death had occurred perhaps an hour *before* this dream, according to Jung. Jung's "synchronicity" hypothesis allowed for a telepathic exchange to have occurred shortly before or after such an event (Ullman, Krippner and Vaughan 30). Nevertheless, Jung's reflections on either possibility were still skeptical:

...there seems to be an *a priori*, causally inexplicable knowledge of a situation which is at the time unknowable...How does the unconscious image arise, and how the coincidence? I understand only too well why people prefer to doubt the reality of these things (Ullman, Krippner, and Vaughan, 31 citing Jung 1952/1955, 44).

The dream Jung described could easily be classified as a death warning, token, or simultaneous informatory experience, from the perspectives of Halpert, Bennett, Virtanen, and other folklorists whose work is discussed above. In Chapter Three, I discuss Jung's tripartite classification scheme for types of synchronicity, and distinguish his classification scheme from my own approach to simultaneous experiences in the context of ESEs.

Freud recognized differing implications of "precognition" versus "telepathy" as explanatory hypotheses for experiences like these. His objections to the notion of precognition were much more strident than his objections to the idea of simultaneous thought-transference. Freud preferred to pursue causal explanations for many of his patients' dreams as well as his own, rather than attribute them to any theory of meaningful chance, as Jung did. In the 1922 paper "Dreams and Telepathy,"<sup>14</sup> for example, Freud considered the case of a man who dreamt of his wife giving birth to twins, on the same night his daughter gave birth to twins, a month before term. Freud seems to have preferred to explain the dream causally (albeit laterally) as a projection

of the subject's unconscious erotic desire for his daughter (Ullman, Krippner, and Vaughan, 28).

In section V.D.b of Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Strachey translation, 1958, 248-271), written at the turn of the century, he explains how dreams of the death of beloved people can be interpreted consistently as fulfillments of past, unconscious aggressive wishes on the part of the dreamer, rather than present or conscious ones. Freud summarizes his own position regarding telepathy and precognition in dreams more succinctly later in *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901, Strachey translation 1965, 332-335):

Like every human being, I have had presentiments and experienced trouble, but the two failed to coincide with one another, so that nothing followed the presentiments, and the trouble came upon me unannounced. During the days when I was living alone in a foreign city--I was a young man at the time--I quite often heard my name suddenly called by an unmistakable and beloved voice; I then noted down the exact moment of the hallucination and made anxious enquiries of those at home about what had happened at the time. Nothing had happened. To balance this, there was a later occasion when I went on working with my patients without any disturbance or foreboding while one of my children was in danger of bleeding to death.

Freud concludes by saying that although he placed no faith in the coincidences reported by most of his patients, and he rejected precognitive accounts as events incorrectly remembered, he found that "in the last few years I have had a few remarkable experiences which might easily have been explained on the hypothesis of telepathic thought-transference" (Freud *The Psychopathology* 1901/1965, 334). These credulous remarks of Freud's may be compared with Jung's expressions of doubt about the experiences he labeled "synchronicity"; they suggest that neither theorist's position was entirely closed to that of the other. Neither psychoanalyst can be pigeonholed simply as a believer or a disbeliever in the possibility of telepathic

dreaming. Freud's ambivalence about the telepathy hypothesis seems to have been lifelong, expressing itself throughout his scholarship and personal correspondence, in alternating statements of skepticism and credulity (Van de Castle 1994, 131-134).

## **2.2 Parapsychology versus Philosophy**

Virtanen saw precedents for her study of the "simultaneous informatory experience" not in the work of Freud and Jung but in the 1886 collection *Phantasms of the Living* by parapsychologists Gurney, Myers, and Podmore. Frederic Myers, a founder of the English Society for Psychical Research, is reported to have coined the term "telepathy" in 1882, and to have defined it simply as "fellow-feeling at a distance." (Ullman, Krippner and Vaughan 1973, 11-12). "Fellow-feeling at a distance" seems to be close to what ESEs or simultaneous informatory experiences are essentially about, at the level of meaning.

In parapsychology, telepathy usually denotes supernatural, mind-to-mind communication beyond ordinary temporal or spatial limitations. "Clairvoyance" refers to a single mind's sensing of events despite similar limits. In other words, telepathy is an effect involving two (or more) minds, while clairvoyance would be an effect involving just one. These two terms often appear in the reports of contemporary parapsychologists, who conduct probabilistic trials to test for such effects. In the Maimonides Dream Laboratory studies initiated in Brooklyn, New York in the 1960s, for example, and in other contemporary studies, parapsychologists attempting to test a telepathy hypothesis have tried to induce correspondent dream imagery between subjects, and to induce sensory-deprivation hallucinations in receivers which correspond to video imagery randomly selected by senders in other isolated locations.<sup>15</sup>

The terms "telepathy" and "clairvoyance" also appear in surveys which parapsychologists administer to large populations, to determine the relative strength of and support for beliefs in the existence of various categories of paranormal phenomena. The surveys of parapsychologists and the belief ethnographies of folklorists are thus linked by a common purpose: to measure and compare the extent of belief in experiences which might be called tokens in the language of tradition, but which might also be called telepathic, in the language of parapsychology and psychical research.

In belief surveys conducted by parapsychological and other quantitative researchers, "telepathy" and "clairvoyance" have typically ranked high. Greater credibility is assigned to forms of "ESP" than to the existence of supernatural beings such as ghosts or to systems of divination, such as palm reading.<sup>16</sup> If tokens and death-warnings are considered to overlap categorically with telepathic experiences, these parapsychological and sociological findings support those of Glassie and Butler regarding the high degree of credibility stories of death warnings and tokens sustain in the communities they investigated.

Sociologist James McLendon's tallies of multiple national surveys of anomalous experience (rather than just belief) over the last two decades (McLendon 1994, 21) complicate the picture. His statistics indicate that reports of ESP experiences were consistently much higher than reports of contact with the dead, across four surveys of Americans between 1973 and 1989. Western European surveys revealed a different pattern, however. More respondents from all nations surveyed except Iceland reported ESP experiences than contact with the dead, but the overall percentages of people reporting experiences of ESP in European nations (never more than 50% of respondents) were substantially lower than in the American surveys (always more than

50%). McLendon's tabulations also suggest that in many of the Western European surveys the percentage point difference between those reporting ESP and those reporting dead contact was not as wide as in American surveys. Results from Ireland in McLendon's table were unusually skewed. In the Republic of Ireland survey, 19% percent of respondents reported ESP experiences and 16% reported having experienced contact with the dead. However, a survey of Northern Irish respondents showed 24% respondents reporting ESP experiences as opposed to only half that many respondents (12%) reporting contact with the dead. The greater number of ESP experiences the Northern Irish respondents reported, in comparison to experiences of contact with the dead, in McLendon's statistical table would seem to support Glassie's claim that his Ulster informants were significantly more likely to believe in death warnings (experiences potentially explained as ESP) than in ghosts (contact with the dead). High numbers of reports of personal experiences could be assumed to correlate with high levels of belief in a community, as Butler argued in his study of L'Anse-à-Canards (1990, 98-99).

The terms "telepathy" and "precognition" are not without their problems, particularly from the perspectives of philosophers and scientists who aim to "debunk" the validity of parapsychological experiments and claims. These scholars argue that telepathy and precognition hypotheses must be dismissed, because they contradict the temporal and spatial principles of physics, and they deny universal certainties in popular and academic Western thinking. Debunking scholars also dismiss parapsychologists' clinical experiments based on these hypotheses, arguing that the effects such probability trials ostensibly test for can never be isolated from more ordinary causal variables.



James Alcock is one debunker who would differentiate the statistical analyses that parapsychologists routinely perform to establish the possibility of *psi* effects such as telepathy and clairvoyance, from experimental "tests," in the sense of controlled observations of relationships between independent and dependent variables. As Alcock explains,

Unlike the psychologist who can contrast two groups of scores, the parapsychologist must argue his/her case on the basis of departures from a *chance model said to describe the population from which the data arises...* statistical conclusions cannot say anything at all about the existence or nonexistence of *psi*. All one can gain from statistical procedures is an indication that the observed results are unlikely to have been observed by chance...<sup>17</sup>

Alcock continues:

To decide that this unrecognized influence is a "psychic" influence is no more logically compelling than to decide that invisible creatures from another solar system are hovering in the laboratory and causing the observed departures from chance.<sup>18</sup>

Philosopher Peter French also discusses how precognition and telepathy hypotheses contradict some basic limiting principles on knowledge, one of those being

...that events cannot have effects before they themselves have happened. Another is that causation at a considerable distance in space in the absence of intermediate causes is not possible. Should a man tell us that the match he struck in New York on the 5th of October caused the eruption of a volcano on an Icelandic island we surely would think him a comedian. (French 1975, 11)

Following French's logic, the same might be said of an experience in which one person's distant distress was believed to have come into the conscious awareness of another person, without ordinary communication, as in the ESEN. Folklorist David Hufford provides an additional philosophical perspective, observing that not all hypotheses in worldview *can* be tested in principle, because some are not testable by definition. Hufford points out the absurdity of the notion of "controlling" for God

(setting up a parallel trial in which the effect of the omnipotent healer or "intermediate cause" in French's terminology is definitely "off"), as an example (Hufford 1992, 26-27).

The notion of precognition has also bothered philosophers of mind who, like Daniel Dennett, may be seeking to establish models of consciousness to explain experiences that appear to be precognitive. In *Consciousness Explained*, Dennett proposes a "multiple drafts" model of consciousness to explain how we anticipate, report, and even sense changes in visual and tactile stimulation before they occur and seem to occur. Dennett regards precognition as the "extravagant hypothesis," to be "postponed indefinitely," in a spirit of resistance to the Cartesian habit of ascribing supernatural origins to initially mysterious relationships of input and output to the multi-level consciousness of the brain.<sup>19</sup> Dennett's theoretic is built in part upon empirical studies of the psychology of divided consciousness.<sup>20</sup> Psychology of divided consciousness helps explain how we learn and remember things about our environment without realizing we are doing so, and how later, as a result, we are surprised to find out what we know--mistaking such unconsciously acquired awarenesses for telepathy, clairvoyance, or other forms of impossible knowledge. (For a "folk" version of the divided consciousness explanation for simultaneous experiences, see the section on my informants' various explanatory patterns, coming up in Chapter Two.)

One of the main thrusts of Dennett's "multiple drafts" model is the argument that there is no given, single conscious "moment" at which a simple "piece" of information is processed as what it is by our brain-dependent awareness. Rather, Dennett argues, we perceive things at any given moment at numerous conscious and less conscious levels (in multiple drafts) not as things-in-themselves, but as processes. Thus the fact that a person reports feeling the touch of a hand upon her arm before the

hand actually makes contact, for example, has less to do with bending temporal laws limiting knowledge (precognitive hypotheses) than it has to do with where in the midst of the complicated process of being touched, being aware of being touched, and reporting awareness we ask the subject to give us a draft of her perception "now."

Philosophers and psychologists using divided consciousness models of cognition would argue that apparently precognitive or telepathic experiences are most likely the result of people's not having a conscious awareness of how or when they came to know what they knew at a given time, about some distant other. Experiences of apparent precognition or telepathy can work in the same way that people can blink their eyes before they know they have even perceived a branch or a speck of dust approaching, or can drive miles before realizing they've passed a spot they wanted to explore. In summary, these scholars would argue that people can take in information in ordinary, sensory (but unconscious or only partially conscious) ways about the status of others before some distressful event (such as a death) occurs at a distance. People can then be surprised when that knowledge surfaces to conscious awareness (through a dream or a vision) at a later, significant time, and label it "precognitive" or "telepathic," through the lack of awareness of (or lack of faith in) any ordinary, sensory explanation.

### **Section III: Summary**

This chapter has shown how ESENs test folklorists' definitions of "token" and "death warning" narratives and how they necessitate a review of "ESP," "foreknowledge," "premonitory dreams," and other terms we use to map out the area of subjective and symbolic presentiments of death and disaster in tradition. Coincidences in ESENs provoked psychoanalysts Jung and Freud to theorize, skeptically as well as open-mindedly, about the possibility and meaning of

synchronicity and telepathic dreaming. Both scholars encountered narratives of extraordinary *simultaneous experience by working with their clients' dreams*. ESENs also set the perspectives of parapsychologists into opposition with those of debunking scientists and philosophers, on the subject of the limits of interpersonal communication across time and space.

Among folklorists, there is disagreement over whether a distinction between premonitions and simultaneous apprehensions of death and disaster is made at the emic level, with the informants with whom we talk. Bennett, Virtanen, and Halpert discuss this distinction and recognize it themselves, in their own analysis. Glassie and Butler do not distinguish between simultaneous experiences and premonitions at all, however, in their discussions of token and death warning tradition. Butler represents all the *avertissements* he studied in *L'Anse-à-Canards* as apprehensions of "impending" or "imminent" death or disaster, rather than of simultaneous crisis events. Bennett and Halpert question whether the distinction is relevant at the emic level, because informants use a variety of terms (e.g., telepathy, omen, premonition, ESP) rather loosely.

Although some psychical research and parapsychological collections have presented simultaneous and precognitive experience stories all together, as some folklorists do, they generally make clearer theoretical distinctions between simultaneous experience and precognition. Leea Virtanen is the only folklorist to devote a full-length work to proving that "simultaneous informatory experience" narratives are essentially different from stories of premonitions. Regardless of the variety of labels informants or analysts apply to these stories, Virtanen believes, these stories represent a separate tradition of belief and experience. Though Virtanen's distinction is not consistently shared by other folklorists, there is substantial academic

precedent for it outside folklore, in philosophy, psychology, and parapsychology. Bennett's quote from Dr. Johnson shows that he, too, made such a distinction (Bennett 1987a, 122). Virtanen draws heavily upon the work of psychical researchers Gurney, Myers, and Podmore (1886) and parapsychologist and narrative collector Louisa Rhine. These scholars' works will be discussed in greater depth in the next two chapters.

On the basis of literary and field research on this topic, I have come to conclude, with Virtanen and her parapsychological predecessors, that simultaneous experience narrative constitutes a tradition in its own right, even though scholars and informants use a great variety of labels for this area of tradition. The variety of terms used does not change the fact that people tell stories which consistently emphasize extraordinary simultaneous, rather than precognitive, experiences. This distinction has not been consistently recognized by folklorists. As Virtanen, Rhine, and other researchers have found, these stories can be elicited repeatedly and separated without too much difficulty from stories of premonition, precognition, and prophecy.

Not unlike folklorists, psychoanalysts Freud and Jung were divided over how to distinguish between extraordinary simultaneous experiences and precognition, and how to decide what such a distinction must mean. Freud and Jung offered different assessments of the significance of dreams or "hallucinations" of life crises reported to have occurred before, during, or after, corresponding tragic events. While Freud dismissed precognition outright as false memory and doubted the possibility of simultaneous telepathy or thought transference after the fact, Jung adopted a notion of "synchronicity" which allowed for telepathic communication to occur, or appear to occur, slightly forward or backward in time from the crisis in question.

In the thinking of philosophers and debunking scientists, reports of apparently precognitive experiences have likewise been treated differently from reports of apparently simultaneous experience, e.g., telepathy. These scholars dismiss accounts of premonitions on grounds that they suggest an impossibility in principle: backward causation. Philosophers have objected to reports of telepathy or extraordinary simultaneous experience, however, not so much in principle but on grounds that telepathy cannot be measured apart from more ordinary causes (e.g., divided consciousness) for experiences that might be mistaken for telepathy.

As I asserted at the beginning of this chapter, ESEs ask a question which not all belief narratives ask: whether it is possible or impossible for one living person to know about the distress of another living person at a distance, according to whatever limits one might believe would apply to communication between human minds and bodies. Philosophers and parapsychologists take opposing positions on these limits. In their clinical trials, parapsychologists repeatedly demonstrate their willingness to test for phenomena which defy the ordinary rules of causality in time, and they show their faith in the possibility of communication between parties denied, through distance and separation, the ordinary means of sharing in each other's experience.

Debunking scientists and philosophers, on the other hand, understand the *premises* of ESEs either as evidence of divided consciousness, or as violations of the way time and space actually limit interpersonal communication and knowledge. For debunking scientists and philosophers, the likelihood of there being ordinary, rather than extraordinary, causes for the events these stories describe renders the stories little more than reports of coincidence. Jung's theory of "synchronicity" holds fast against the skeptical objections of philosophers and debunking scientists, however, because it presents coincidence itself as a psychological pattern by which humans produce and

experience meaning in their lives. The Jungian notion of synchronicity asserts that coincidences, such as those described in ESEs, are no less meaningful because they can be ascribed to chance, rather than to an identifiable cause.

In summary, then, extraordinary simultaneous experiences narratives have inspired scholars in a variety of humanities and social science disciplines to question the limiting principles on communication between people in times of crisis, and to decide whether the events people describe in these stories should be regarded as random coincidences, or as coincidences caused in extraordinary or ordinary ways. In the coming chapters, I will explore a much wider range of literature, ancient and modern, popular and scholarly, in which ESEs can be found. In Chapter Two, the fieldwork chapter, which comes next, I will look comparatively at explanations that contemporary informants consider for their experiences, focusing on how these people, like the scholars I have just finished discussing, also attempt to understand coincidence, causality, and meaning in relation to simultaneous experiences.

### Notes to Chapter One

<sup>1</sup>Both scholars' works will be reviewed in more detail in later thesis chapters.

<sup>2</sup>Gillian Bennett, *Traditions of Belief* (London: Penguin, 1987) 129.

<sup>3</sup>Bennett 128.

<sup>4</sup>Cited in Bennett 122.

<sup>5</sup>Leea Virtanen, *That Must Have Been ESP: An Examination of Psychic Experiences*, trans. John Atkinson and Thomas DuBois (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

<sup>6</sup>As is illustrated later in this chapter, differentiation between precognition and simultaneous experiences (e.g., telepathy) is more common in psychology, philosophy, and parapsychology than in folklore. Virtanen's work also draws on important precedents in psychical research (Gurney, Myers, and Podmore 1886) and in parapsychology (works of Louisa Rhine, treated in Chapter Four).

<sup>7</sup>These are summaries from figures and analyses which appear throughout Virtanen's book, especially the third and fourth chapters.

<sup>8</sup>It seems to me that a difficulty in Virtanen's own understanding of hallucination is that it does not take into account the kinds of experiences in which people take what they see as if it were reality, at first, and then slowly realize that they must only be dreaming or hallucinating what they at first thought was real. A good, theoretical discussion of this problem (strong versus weak hallucination) appears in the prelude to Dennett's *Consciousness Explained* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1991) 1-18. How Virtanen's informants understood hallucination is unknown.

<sup>9</sup>Page 78, Violetta Halpert, "Death Warnings in Newfoundland Oral Tradition," in *Newfoundland Folklore: Community and Process*, ed. Gerald Thomas and J.D.A. Widdowson (St. John's: Breakwater, 1991) 78-108.

<sup>10</sup>Halpert makes similar observations of interchangeable terms (including "token") in "Death Beliefs from Indiana," *Midwest Folklore* 4 (1952): 205-219.

<sup>11</sup>Halpert, "Death Warnings" 78.

<sup>12</sup>This binary distinction is not only indebted to Bennett's thinking but also to Honko's distinctions between memorate and "dite" (what Butler would call



"traditum"), and to Butler's differentiations between "saying" and "believing" (Honko 1964; Butler 1990).

<sup>13</sup>C. G. Jung, "Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle," in C. G. Jung and W. Pauli, *The Interpretation of Nature and the Psyche* (New York: Pantheon, 1955). For more on synchronicity, see Chapter Three.

<sup>14</sup>The publication of this essay which Ullman, Krippner and Vaughan cite appears in G. Devereux, ed., *Psychoanalysis and the Occult* (NY: International Universities Press, 1953) 69-86. Two other essays of Freud's concerning the telepathy hypothesis appear in this volume. A complete list of the works in which Freud considered and dismissed telepathic and precognitive explanations for dreams is provided on pages 334-335 and in the bibliography of the 1965 standard edition of Freud's *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, trans. James Strachey (NY: Norton, 1989). Ullman et al. date "Dreams and Telepathy" 1921, whereas the Strachey bibliography gives it as 1922. For this reason, I have dated it as 1921/1922 in the thesis bibliography.

<sup>15</sup>See Mario Varvoglis's article "Ganzfeld and RNG Research" and other articles on dream and sensory deprivation studies, in the *Journal of Parapsychology* 57 (1993) dedicated to Charles Honorton.

<sup>16</sup>Numerous surveys, including Gallup polls, support and amplify this basic finding among many populations. See citations and discussion in Leonard Zusne and Warren Jones, *Anomalistic Psychology: A Study of Extraordinary Phenomena of Behavior and Experience* (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1982). Bennett's survey of her informants yielded similar results; she also cites sociological surveys (27-29).

<sup>17</sup>Pages 23-24 in James Alcock, "Parapsychology's Past Eight Years," in Kendrick Frazier, ed., *Science Confronts the Paranormal* (NY: Prometheus, 1984) 20-27.

<sup>18</sup>Alcock 23-24; James McLendon provides a good discussion of elite scientists' rationales for dismissing the claims of paranormal research in *Deviant Science: The Case of Parapsychology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984).

<sup>19</sup>Daniel Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1991).

<sup>20</sup>Zusne and Jones 225-64.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **DESCRIPTION OF FIELDWORK: METHODS, FINDINGS, AND CONCLUSIONS**

#### **Preface**

The fieldwork segment<sup>1</sup> of this thesis might be described aptly as a fishing expedition. Metaphorically speaking, it involved baiting a number of hooks for subjects, a lot of meditative waiting, a few bites, and, in the end, a modest haul. If such a venture should be judged by the size of the "catch" of informants in relation to an established quota system,<sup>2</sup> then perhaps the field trip was no great success. However, if the expedition might also be judged by the quality of meditation about the process itself, during the waiting periods, by the quantity of testimony collected (which is considerable), and by the degree to which the taste of the catch was savored, perhaps it was rather a success after all. In this chapter I will describe the fieldwork methods and findings as thoroughly as I can, to validate the research in the eyes of potential critics and to share useful information with future researchers working with such subject matter.

This chapter's discussion is divided, as in the earlier draft, into three parts, "Methods," "Findings," and "Conclusions." I open the "Methods" section, this time, with a description of the informants, my strategies for recruiting them and interviewing them, and the associated problems. I also discuss additional fieldwork I conducted during summer 1998 with students at the University of Massachusetts. As before, I describe the structure of the interviews and research ethics. I clarify further, in this new draft, my own understanding of Glaser and Strauss's "constant comparative method" (1967), as a method of qualitative data analysis, rather than a guide to qualitative data

collection. As explained in the introduction (see also endnote 1 above) this project is an experiment with narrative categorization, rather than a field study *per se*; I am not “representing” the values of any particular “community” here, or the values expressed by individuals as part of their life histories. I am simply struggling with how and whether to claim that a portion of the stories these people told me, and in some cases, repeated for me, in taped interviews, might be argued to belong to a hypothetical subgenre of belief narrative: the “ESEN.” I conclude this revised “Methods” section by explaining how my methods of interviewing, analyzing, and interpreting these narratives have been shaped primarily by my critical response to David Hufford’s experience-centered approach to belief studies in folklore and by my desire to test out an alternative but complementary approach. The experience-centered approach (Hufford 1982a) remains the dominant contemporary paradigm for research on folk belief in folkloristics; I explain, too, how the work of Leea Virtanen (1990) and Gillian Bennett (1987a) influenced my approach.

The “Findings” section has also been revised. I open this section now by cutting to the chase, in a sense: discussing some moments in fieldwork in which participants and I managed to break through theoretical emic/etic language differences and hurdle past the “dialectics of belief and disbelief” into what I consider performances of “vernacular philosophy.” Next, and more importantly, I discuss how and whether each of my 20 example narratives fit the initial general definition of this story pattern. Dr. Bennett and I seem to agree about which of my 20 examples are clear matches to the hypothetical pattern (1, 5, 6, 9, 12, 14, 15, 16, and 18) and which present challenging classificatory problems to the pattern (2, 3, 4, 7, 8, \* 10, 11, 13, 17, 20).<sup>3</sup> We differ, however, over the question of whether the latter examples can be *argued* to fit. I maintain that, for the most part, they can, and in this revised presentation, I present my

arguments for how and why these more problematic examples might be understood to match the definition of ESEN, in its five structural components. The definition itself is re-examined, too, in light of the questions which the more problematic examples raise, questions not only about my hypothetical category, but about how folklorists might go about categorizing belief narratives in general. Tellers used a variety of explanatory patterns to interpret these experiences and to explain *how* they could have occurred. I identify eleven explanatory patterns, and also discuss how and where the informants got their ideas about interpretation.

As before, I present in tabular format the full range and variation of ways in which each of these narratives' specific descriptive features compare to the key story elements required in my initial definition. These tables are evidence of my having done a micro-level thematic analysis (what Glaser and Strauss call "maximizing differences" in content analysis). The variations illustrated in the chapter tables are incorporated, in this revised draft, into my discussion of which stories might still be argued to "match" the pattern, which might not, and, most importantly--why.<sup>4</sup>

Under "Conclusions," I relate the findings back to the methodological goals, and to other folklore scholarship on supernatural and simultaneous experiences, especially the work of Hufford, Bennett, and Virtanen. I explain how the people I talked with were commenting philosophically on the nature of interpersonal experience. I maintain that ESENs and the conversations following them are vernacular or informal forms of philosophy, because (1) they function as thought experiments do in formal philosophizing, (2) they explore a number of if-then propositions about interpersonal relations and the world, (3) they suggest a reversal of the problem of other minds, and (4) they illustrate Daniel Dennett's multiple drafts theory of consciousness as it might be applied to the understanding of narrative. Finally, I offer a refined definition of the

ESEN as a hypothetical narrative category, and consider whether this hypothesis is, or is not, a useful theoretical tool.

*Note on Story Transcriptions:* In the earlier draft of this document, transcripts of the 20 example stories appeared, along with accompanying content analyses, at the end of this chapter. The narrative transcripts and analyses have been relocated to Appendix B in this draft, and in the course of the chapter I summarize and quote the example narratives where appropriate, in the course of what I hope is a more flowing, conversational narration of methods, findings, and conclusions. Narratives and comments from interviews are presented here, and in Appendix B, with minimal editing,<sup>5</sup> in a simple transcription style close to that recommended in Edward Ives' *The Tape-Recorded Interview* (1980). The content analyses accompanying each transcript in Appendix B broke down (1) the general descriptive features of the narrative, (2) the interpretive elements within the narrative, such as opinions or leading statements, and (3) multiple explanatory points participants offered in question-and-answer sessions after their narratives.<sup>6</sup> The transcripts and analyses are retained in this new draft so that readers can see on what basis I am making generalizations about the experiences these people described, and about the range of explanations they manipulated, individually, and as a group.

## **PART I: METHODS**

### **1.1 The "Sample"**

I hesitate to use the word "sample" in relation to the group of informants with whom I spoke for this project, in that "sample" (even when modified by adjectives like "nonprobabilistic" or "nonrandom") may imply some claim at "representation" of a larger and somehow homogeneous population. As already stated in the chapter's Preface above, and in my thesis introduction, this thesis is neither a community study

nor a field study, *per se*, but rather an experiment in applying a hypothetical narrative category to a selection of historical and contemporary story examples. The initial group of people I interviewed for this project have relatively little in common with each other, unless one counts willingness to tell stories about unusual experiences, a relatively high average level of post-secondary education, or exposure to a variety of Christian upbringings, to mean that they somehow “represent” North Americans, North American Christianity, or North American academic culture at large. I make none of these claims. All I claim they *do* represent, for the purposes of this project, is what a fairly diverse group of educated people of this day and age might do (and have in fact done) in response to my request that they try to tell me a certain kind of belief narrative, one that concerns synchronicity or simultaneous experience of crisis. The stories they shared, the explanations they offered, and their other responses have theoretical implications, I believe, for the way we folklorists approach the collection of belief narratives in folklore. I shall try to make these implications clearer, in this chapter and in the thesis conclusion, than I did in an earlier draft.

As Tables 2.1 and 2.2 illustrate below, there were 27 people in the initial informant group for this study. In August 1998 I made contact with 20 more people: 19 undergraduate comparative literature students at the University of Massachusetts/Amherst, and their teacher. I will describe the first subject group separately from the second, as fieldwork methods differed with the two groups, though my theoretical concerns--about the arbitrariness of story labeling and classification, versus people's demonstrable ability to reproduce (and, perhaps also, categorize) a given story pattern--remained largely consistent throughout.

Table 2.1 below lists a total of 27 initial informants for this study, seven men, 18 women, and two (female) children, who volunteered<sup>7</sup> between 1993 and 1996 in

response to a variety of contact strategies. The official number of 27 is the number of informants who contributed stories in *at least one taped interview*. The headcount of 27 does leave out some women I collected stories from, at a St. John's Twins and Triplets Association meeting and through related phonecalls in 1995 (refer to Narrative Inventory in Appendix A). On the other hand, this total includes informants "Teresa" and "Nora," who do appear in taped interviews, but whose contributions to the story corpus are small. My earlier draft gave the total number as 26; leaving "Nora" out. I will explain why I have elected to count both Teresa and Nora in the initial subject group this time.

The two "earliest" informants, technically speaking, for this project were Irina and Teresa, critical care nurses in St. John's. These women told me simultaneous experience stories in winter of 1993, in the context of a separate field project, in which I was investigating the story repertoire of nurses and their views on the role of "intuition" in their interventions in critical care. Their two stories—Irina's, about a dream she had simultaneous to a patient's death, and Teresa's, about intuiting her identical twin sister's marriage announcement at the moment her phone rang—helped spark my interest in the area of simultaneous experience stories in belief narrative, leading to this thesis project. The interviews for the thesis proper began the following fall, when I interviewed "Grace" in October of 1993. I include Irina in my official total of 26 for the initial subject group, because I maintained contact with her and eventually reinterviewed her for the thesis study. I exclude Teresa because I lost contact with her after she moved away from Newfoundland; her story, confirming as it did an important life event but not a "crisis" in the sense I am examining here, did not quite match ESEN pattern, though other stories in her repertoire as an identical twin might well have matched the pattern.

"Nora" is an informant I originally excluded from my official total, in my earlier thesis draft. She is the quietest of the three people interviewed, for this project, by another researcher, Ellen Damsky. Nora's testimony relates to another dilemma I faced in calculating the official number of "my" informants: whether or not to count a tape of interviews conducted by Ellen Damsky, a friend and fellow doctoral student, as part of "my" study at all. As Table 2.1 shows, I am counting Ellen herself, plus her interviewees "Joe" and "Laura," within "my" total. Ellen's tape submission was not solicited; it arrived as a surprise to me, after a number of stimulating conversations Ellen and I had about the project when it was just taking shape, in 1993. Through these conversations, Ellen acquired an understanding of the way I wanted to approach my interviews, and the general area of stories I was looking for; she knew, for example, that I was as interested in "explanations" (rather than "belief" or "disbelief" necessarily) as I was in hearing the stories themselves. Insofar as she filled her interviews with her own stories for me, as well as those of others, Ellen can be regarded as "my" informant; her own informants are of course at more of a remove from me.

Ellen presented me with her interview tape, to my surprise and delight, at the October 1994 meeting of the American Folklore Society, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. After listening to the tapes I elected to incorporate them into the study; Ellen's interview questions were similar to my own, and she provided substantial biographical information about her informants as well. I have since communicated with Ellen further about these interviews and contacted one of her subjects (Laura) personally to do some follow-up. As the Narrative Inventory in Appendix A demonstrates, Ellen



herself, and her friends Joe and Laura contributed a substantial number of narratives to the larger story corpus which I had to analyze, to comb out stories that might qualify as ESEnS. Hence I do count all three as “my” informants here. Nora’s inclusion remains arbitrary, however; her only contribution, other than serving as an audience during Ellen’s exchange of narratives with Joe, was a confirmation of a story kernel. As the Narrative Inventory makes clear, Nora contributes no full-length stories or fragments of her own. I list her simply because she did participate in one of the taped interviews.

In summer of 1998, after benefiting from Dr. Gillian Bennett’s close reading of an earlier draft of this document, I elected to test some of my ideas about this story category upon a new group of educated people, Americans this time: a group of students, 3 men and 16 women, in my friend Anita Mannur’s comparative literature class at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Anita also completed the narrative exercise and survey with her class, and participated in the taped discussion, all of which lasted two and one half hours. Adding the initial official total of subjects to the total subjects in this second interview group brings the official, final total of informants for this study up to 46, a total which is still lower than the number I had hoped for back in 1993. I will now describe the manner in which, as time passed, and varied informant contact strategies failed, I came to feel satisfied, and even challenged, by the prospect of analyzing the considerable body of testimony provided me by a smaller number of informants than I had originally anticipated when I proposed this project.

## 1.2 Demographics on Informants (Both Fieldwork Groups)

### **Table 2.1 The Initial Informant Group**

As Table 2.1 indicates, there were 27 initial interviewees for this study: 7 men, 18 women, and 2 female children (identical twins, age 7). The majority were in their twenties or thirties at time of initial interview. Four were over forty and one was over fifty years of age. Most (21 out of 28) are Canadians; more than half these Canadians (15 people) are Newfoundlanders. Five participants are from the United States, and one from the United Kingdom. Fifteen of these 28 people (over half) had some graduate level education, whether Master's coursework, an M.A., or doctoral work. Almost all had at least worked on or received a baccalaureate degree.

While almost half (13) of these people are students, not all of them were or are known to me in that capacity. Eleven of these people were completely unknown to me before the field project; two were acquaintances (people I had seen or spoken briefly with in St. John's but whom I did not otherwise know or socialize with). Two more were fellow students whom I did not know well at the time—one of whom (Judith) I know well enough now to describe as a friend. The remaining 12 were and still are my good friends, people I have met in the course of study at Memorial University. None of the informants is related to me. Most of the informants who did know me had had exposure to the study of belief narratives in folklore. I think that this was useful, rather than limiting, in the fieldwork: some of these people were able to talk to me about the differences in the ways they would talk "to folklorists" (or as folklorists) about stories,

TABLE 2.1.  
INITIAL INFORMANT GROUP

NAME	RESIDENCE	DOB	M/F	WHERE BORN	RELIGIOUS UPBRINGING	EDUCATION	OCCUPATION	RELATIONSHIP TO INTERVIEWER	INTERVIEWS AND FOLLOW-UP
Alan	St. John's	6/24/63	M	Can (ON)	Adhist	Master's	Researcher	Friend	2 int, PO, e-mail
Alicia	St. John's	10/25/52	F	Can (ON)	Adhist	Master's	Early Childhood Educator/Storyteller	Friend	Int, PO, e-mail
Aurora	St. John's	1970	F	Can (ON)	United	Master's	Retail Clerk	Friend	Int, PO
Bon	St. John's	2/7/66	M	Can (ON)	Catholic	Undergraduate Student		None	Int
Charlie	St. John's	4/27/54	F	Can (ON)	Anglican	Master's	Archivist	Friend	2 int, PO, e-mail
Clara	Mc. Paul	1960	F	Can (ON)	Catholic	High School	Public Sector	None	2 int, PO, e-mail
Ellen	New York	10/19/54	F	American	Irish	Doctoral student	Fellow/Student	Friend	PO, interview with e-mail
Gay	St. John's	1972	F	Can (ON)	Unknown	Undergraduate Student		None	Int
Gina	Mc. Paul	1986	F	Can (ON)	Catholic	Elementary (child)		None	Int
Grace	Mc. Paul	1972	F	Can (ON)	United Pentecostal	Undergraduate Student		None	Int
Irene	St. Phillips	1956	F	Can (ON)	United	Master's	None	Acquaintance	2 int, e-mail
Jean	St. John's	1972	M	Can (ON)	Unknown	Undergraduate Student		None	Int
Jae	Columbus OH	4/16/68	M	American	Catholic	Doctoral student	Teacher/Student	None	1 int by ED + e-mail to ED
Judith	St. John's	5/14/66	F	Can (ON)	Catholic	Master's student	Teacher/Archive Assistant/Student	Fellow student	Int, PO, e-mail
Julie	Mc. Paul	1960	F	Can (ON)	Catholic	Elementary (child)		None	Int
Karen (Kathleen)	St. John's	6/28/59	F	Can (ON)	Anglican	Bachelor's	Student	Fellow student	Int
Lauren	Columbus OH	1/6/60	F	American	Unknown	Master's	Social Worker	None	1 int by ED+e-mail, phonecall
Madeleine	St. John's	4/19/64	F	Can (ON)	United/Anglican	Master's	Welfare Administrator	None	Int + questionnaire
Mary	St. John's	1/15/60	F	Can (ON)	Catholic	Master's	Music Teacher	Friend	1 int, PO, e-mail
Matthew	St. John's	1970	M	Can (ON)	Anglican	Master's student	Musician/Mechanics Student	Friend	Int, PO, e-mail
Marcus	St. John's	1972	F	Can (ON)	Catholic	Undergraduate Student		None	Int
Maryn	St. John's	1/15/64	F	American	Baptist/Presby./Lutheran	Doctoral student	Teacher/Student	Friend	Int, PO, e-mail
Nora	Columbus OH	1960	F	American	Catholic	Doctoral student	Teacher/Student	None	1 int by ED + e-mail to ED
Robert	St. John's	8/22/55	M	Can (ON)	United	Doctoral student	Teacher/Student	Friend	1 int, PO, e-mail
Shirley	St. John's	1/15/60	F	Can (ON)	Catholic	Bachelor's	Public Agent	Friend	2 int, PO, e-mail
Teresa	St. John's	Nov-57	F	Can (ON)	Catholic	Master's	None	Friend	1 int + PO
Toni	St. John's	10/29/65	M	English	Anglican/Atheist	Doctoral student	Researcher/Student	Friend	Int, PO, e-mail

and the ways they would simply talk about and think about stories when they weren't talking with folklore in mind, or with folklorists around.

The category "Religious Upbringing" indicates that most of these informants had some exposure to Christianity early in life, exceptions being those raised atheist (Alan and Alicia) and Jewish (Ellen). "Exposure" to Christianity varied widely, too-- from merely being baptized in a given tradition and never revisiting the religion further (Tom) to routine denominational belief and practice throughout childhood and early adulthood. Whether informants' affiliations were Protestant or Catholic, Christian upbringing did not seem to be any reliable predictor of the line of argument (or "worldview") these informants currently adopt in their lives, or in conversations with me about these stories. Similarly, those raised atheist and Jewish were able to manipulate interpretations based on belief in a "soul." Early life affiliations did not seem to limit people's capacity for adopting all manners of speculative explanations for stories of anomalous experiences.

While a number of informants made it clear to me that they believed or practiced Christianity in various ways during their adult lives--the forms which "practice" took were also complex and variable. Mary and Sheila, for example, professed no belief in God but attended family wakes and funerals, and seemed to regard these as rather sacred events. Judith described herself as "a practicing Roman Catholic" who nevertheless confessed she "didn't belief half" of what her church required her to believe. Others, like Robert and Irina, seemed to apply some Christian values in their lives (e.g., soul belief, belief in an afterlife, beliefs about Jesus) without

being particularly active (or active at all) in any Christian congregation. Because current practice and belief issues were so complex, I have held back, for the most part, from even attempting to present informants' current religious perspectives--apart from the religious lines of interpretation they offered to explain the stories they told me. To do more might have resulted in another whole thesis. For the same reasons, and as I have stated earlier, I feel unable to make any claim that this group of people somehow "represents" North American Christianity, even though exposure to the Christian tradition is evident in their thinking.

**Table 2.2 The University of Massachusetts/Amherst Informant Group**

Table 2.2 presents information about my second informant group, all of whom (with exception of their teacher, 24-year-old Anita Mannur, a doctoral student) are undergraduate students at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst campus. Most of this personal information is culled from a survey which I conducted in Anita's Comparative Literature class on 4 August 1998. The survey, which asked students to respond to a taped example narrative (Judith's Story, an example which fits the ESEN pattern pretty squarely) was followed up by a taped classroom discussion, during Anita's two and one half hour class period.

As the table shows, only half the members of this group (as opposed to the majority of members of the initial group) were exposed to Christianity in their early years, exceptions being those raised Hindu (Anita), agnostic (Ethan, Fred), Buddhist (Rebekah), and other/no religion given (Deidre, Hugo, Jen, Jessica, Lucille, and Stacie). As with the initial informant group, people's religious upbringing did not seem a

predictor for the range of explanations they offered for the kinds of stories they told as matches to “Judith’s Story.” One line of explanation which this group explored in particular was the “maternal instinct” explanation; this pattern could be classified beneath the heading of “biological” explanations that many informants in the first group offered.

While the category “place of birth (POB)” is self-explanatory, it should be noted that the category “hometown” reflects both places of birth (for some people) as well as current or long-time places of residence—depending upon how the informants defined “home” for themselves. Most of the students in the UMass group are Americans, as can be seen from places of birth. However, two students were born outside the continental U.S. in Puerto Rico (Jessica and Ruth), one (Hugo) presumably in Taiwan, and one in Leeds, England (Alison).

Little demographic information, other than ethnicity, is available on Hugo, whom Anita described as being a Taiwanese student. Hugo participated in the class discussion and signed the release to have his taped testimony used; he described his beliefs about the stories we were discussing in class, particularly the fact that “ESP” was not a working category of explanation for him. However (as the survey was described as optional) he elected not to turn in his responses to the survey—hence information on him is scanty.

As the category “DOB” (Date of Birth) shows, most of the informants in the second group are, as in the first group—in their 20s or 30s. The oldest student (Laurie) was in her 40s. With the exception of Anita, whom I came to know over the past year



TABLE 2.2 - CONT'D

NAME	POB	DOB	M/F	HOMETOWN	RELIGIOUS UPBRINGING	EDUCATION	OCCUPATION (OR CURRENT STUDENT)	RELATIONSHIP TO INTERVIEWER	TOLD STORY "LATE"	TOLD STORY "CLOSE"	NO STORY AT ALL	CALLS SUCH STORIES	GOT STORY NAMES FROM?	TOLD AN EVENT
Ludie	Quincy, MA	4/24/68	F	Quincy, MA	None	Undergraduate	Teacher	None	YES	NO	NO	"True story without explanation, a narrative at length. I don't know if it's the 'old' tradition."	"These kids are superstitious. I don't know if I'll need to emphasize that it was real."	YES
Maria	Washington, DC		F	Huntington Beach, CA	Assembly of God	Undergraduate	None given	None	YES	YES	NA	Mixed/Religious story	"I'm very religious."	YES
Melinda L.	Methuen, Vermont, MA	10/27/72	F	Methuen, Vermont, MA	Catholic	Undergraduate	None given	None	NO	YES	YES	"Don't have one, my dream would be described as 'none'."	NA	NO
Melinda T.	Milwaukee, WI	5/27/76	F	Pittsfield, MA	Lutheran	Undergraduate	Subprocessor	None	YES	NO	NA	"True life story, dream-to-death story, near-death experience."	"It's a true story and (characters) would have died if it was paid attention to."	NO
Rebekah	Tucson, AZ	10/17/75	F	South Kingstown, RI	Buddhist	Undergraduate	None given	None	YES	NO	NA	"Near death experience story, dream-to-death story with death."	"I read some from my experience of feeling and knowing what we call 'the story'."	NO
Ruth	Porto Rico	Mid-40s	F	Porto Rico	Teachings Baptist	Undergraduate	None given	None	NO	NO	NO	Nothing	NA	NO
Stacie	Queens, NY	5/11/74	F	New York, NY	None	Undergraduate	Video Store Clerk	None	NO	NO	YES	Nothing	NA	NO



via friends in the Comparative Literature Department at UMass, none of these informants were known to me. Although a number of these students volunteered to provide me with more stories in further interviews, my contact with them at time of writing was limited to the two and one half hours we spent together in Anita's classroom. The design and purposes of my experiment and discussion in Anita's class are described further in the Methods section, below. The outcomes of my questions about story labeling and story categorization (which are given in Table 2.2 along with the demographics I have just discussed) are presented, further along, under "Findings."

### **1.3 "Baiting The Hooks" – Contact Strategies and Their Success/Failure Rates**

Between fall of 1994 and winter of 1996 I used four contact strategies to connect with informants for this study. Between October and December 1993 I ran a free advertisement in the MUN campus newspaper; this attracted four informants. In summer of 1994, I dropped off a stack of questionnaires in a New Age bookstore and gift shop in St. John's; this attracted one informant. In spring of 1995 I plastered a flyer across Memorial University campus, designed to attract skeptics; this attracted two informants, one of whom was a fellow student. All throughout 1995, though, and into 1996, while I was transcribing earlier interviews and searching for written examples of my hypothetical story category, I kept up a campaign of asking people I knew, friends, fellow students, professors, and sessional teachers, to recommend friends, students, or any other people they knew who might tell stories about unusual simultaneous experiences. In this manner, then, I managed to contact the remaining 15 of the 27 informants (minus Irina, Ellen, and Ellen's three informants) in this initial

group. The fourth strategy was, therefore, the most successful, with this initial informant group.

My official count of 27 initial informants does not reflect all the “leads” I pursued, either: a few undergraduates, for example, who when called or otherwise approached for an interview, backed out or didn’t show up. I also count as part of the fourth “snowball sampling” strategy my informative venture into one of the St. John’s Twins and Triplets Association meetings, in addition to a prior interview and, later, a series of phone negotiations with the Association’s President. At this meeting, on a rainy night at the Chateau Park Hotel in Mt. Pearl, in January 1995, I met a number of women who told interesting stories about twin-related simultaneous experiences, but only one of whom (“Diana,” and her twin daughters) seemed approachable for a follow-up interview. Despite repeated “warm-up” calls with the President to arrange further contacts—even my offering, at one point, to distribute to Association members copies of an extensive bibliography I had prepared of articles and books related to the experiences of twins, in exchange for access to more meetings, interviews, etc.—I was not able to break into this group, or, to be more precise, to change the President’s mind that researchers probably had no real place coming to these meetings, which functioned largely as support groups for young mothers. In the President’s mind, twins were already an over-researched and, often, exploited, group. In the end, I abandoned further efforts to work with the group, apart from contacting Diana independently, much later, to ask her for a follow-up interview, for second versions of her stories. I ended up interviewing Diana’s daughters, as well, after I had finished Diana’s interview. There were considerations (other than low informant returns) for my decisions to abandon the first three contact strategies during the course of fieldwork. The problems associated

with each of my strategies proved rather enlightening, to me, even though they were frustrating. I will elaborate on them below.

First, however, let me clarify what some of my initial thinking was, behind each of these four strategies. My gift-shop questionnaire and the newspaper advertisement were strategies designed to attract "believers." I had reasoned that a questionnaire directed specifically at people who would buy "dreamcatchers" for themselves or other people, in the hope that the objects might have a positive effect upon the content of their dreams, might fall into my "believers" category, and might also be expected to tell stories about significant *simultaneous* dreams they or others had experienced, among other stories about dreams. On the other hand, my cross-campus leaflet which asked first, in large type, "Do you suspect ESP is a lot of BALONEY?" was designed to attract "skeptics." "Believers" and "skeptics," I should clarify further, were two of three hypothetical sample groups I suggested in my thesis research proposal might be necessary to provide a balanced presentation of credulous and skeptical perspectives. I eventually revised my thinking on these counts, as I will also explain further on.

In my thesis research proposal, I defined "believers" as respondents who might use supernatural hypotheses more often than chance or "coincidence" explanations for their experiences, and who would self-identify as such. I defined "skeptics" as informants who would favor the discussion of coincidental or other nonsupernatural explanations characteristic of scientific and other traditions of disbelief. I made allowance in the proposal for uncommitted people as well, who might manipulate a multitraditional variety of explanations:

It is also possible that individual subjects, being multitraditional, may come to identify with the perspectives and arguments of groups other than the one with which they identified initially. Indeed, as interviews continue and rapport

develops, individuals in all groups may weigh, juggle, and synthesize intellectual positions characteristic of any number of religious, ethnic, familial, occupational, or academic traditions.<sup>8</sup>

The proposal described my plans to stratify the sample, in order to avoid recruiting a population predominantly composed of believers, whose perspectives might be skewed sharply toward representing perspectives of credulity. As my interviews progressed, however, I discarded some of my initial hypotheses about believers and skeptics. The first hypothesis I threw out was that informants were likely to self-identify as believers.

None of the people I contacted through my various methods and interviewed described herself or himself simply as a believer. No one maintained a single line of explanation or interpretation for her or his experience, as my discussion of eleven explanatory patterns makes clear, under "Findings," below. Most informants represented themselves as capable of withholding credulity or maintaining skeptical positions whenever they thought necessary. Only the "uncommitted" belief category seemed worth retaining as a possible umbrella descriptor of participants' actual self-identifications and intellectual positions. Eventually, I came to believe that informants were often sharing explanations and interpretations with me that moved beyond the model of belief-versus-disbelief, that we were considering ways of thinking about and explaining the way things appeared, in reality, that surpassed or somehow side-stepped dialectics of belief and disbelief on the way into a more purely speculative mode. I discuss this evolution in my thinking in my discussion of "vernacular philosophy" later in this chapter, in the "Findings" section.

### The Newspaper Advertisement

Returning to contact methods and their associated problems: each of my four contact strategies had its own, unique set of problems, though "snowball sampling" (asking people to recommend people), the fourth, worked best, for me, in the end. I will begin with the first strategy, the campus newspaper advertisement. The advertisement asked readers, whether they had ever "come to know that a friend or a relative was in a crisis of any kind, by means of a dream or another unusual experience." Narratives like the following ones, from the first two of four total respondents to my newspaper advertisement, made me begin to think that I needed to change strategies, for theoretical and practical reasons. Grace was the first person to volunteer for the study via a campus newspaper.

An undergraduate student with an avid interest in abnormal psychology, Grace explained that she was on leave during fall semester, 1993, after her father's sudden death over the summer due to a stroke. She told me the following story:

*...I think my Mom thinks I'm crazy. One of the worst things was ah, well, besides Dad of course, even though that wasn't such a strong, like I didn't really know what was going to happen, I ah, when I was oh, gosh, sixteen, so that was 1990, the fall of 1990, I was after getting out of the hospital for depression. And I was in class and I started daydreaming. And I, it was like I was ah, in the woods, and I was walking up to this tree and all of a sudden it wasn't me in the daydream anymore it was ah, a young guy? And he took a, he took like a rope, or something that looked like a rope, and tied it around the tree and he hung himself. And I just shocked myself out of it, I, went back to class, or went back to working in class and I just tried to forget about it, but it was still on my mind. And a couple of days later Mom told me that um, a young guy from here, in St. John's was after hanging himself in the forest.*

*He ran away. And ah, they couldn't find him. I think it was an extension cord that he used. I just couldn't believe that. I told my mother. They took me back to see my psychiatrist. I, I didn't get over it, I just ended up back in hospital, I just couldn't deal with that. That just--*

E: *Frightening.*

G: *Yeah, it was really frightening. Cause I hadn't had anything that strong before, especially waking. Dreams didn't bother me that much, but never a daydream like that. And like, even if it was coincidence, it was still just too weird to handle.*

Maureen, also an undergraduate, was the second person to respond to the campus newspaper ad. As she told me the following story, she fought back increasingly frightened tears.

*It's always been there for me, these--it's either a dream, or a feeling, or sometimes a smell, will trigger something. [sighs] And I was, I don't even know if I was conscious of it when I was younger, but it wasn't until I was about, eight years old that I realized that uh, it wasn't a natural thing. I still don't think it's a really natural thing. And it wasn't something I wanted. Like, I used to have dreams, I knew my mother was going to have her baby before she had a baby and like, I think it never bothered me and it was never something that ah, I considered abnormal until, I had a bad experience. And it was a, I was living in Halifax at the time. My father was going to, dental school, and I had a dream about people I, I still don't know who they are. It was about a fire. And um, a woman, they were in a townhouse, I suppose, assume, downtown Halifax, and uh. A woman was trying to get to her baby but she [pauses, sounding more and more upset remembering] she couldn't make it. [pause] And I woke up, crying. And ah, the next morning my father was reading a paper before he went to classes, about this fire that was downtown and ah, fatalities including a young child and single mother. And ah, I never told my parents that because it seemed so ah, it was a bad thing? It was not something that sat comfortably with me at all. So from that day on, I was conscious of, these feelings and that they were different from what other people were experiencing. Up until then I thought, everyone has the same thing...I think mostly the reason why it was frightening was because I was young, when I realized that uh, like, it's not normal, you know? And it wasn't a good experience that led me to believe that it was you know, kind of a different thing, it was bad. [breathes deeply, fighting back tears]*

Later in this interview, Maureen suggested to me that I try, as my study continued, to discover ways to make such experiences *stop*. She indicated that her experiences had

been frightening her for years, and she still hadn't found any way to control them, other than "trying to relax," as her boyfriend would sometimes encourage her to do.

These and the two other interviews I conducted with newspaper responders indicated to me that the newspaper ad was not necessarily attracting "believers," i.e., people who were less willing than others to consider coincidental or nonsupernatural explanations, as I had imagined it might. Instead, it *did* seem to have attracted people who had had *more* such experiences, more often, throughout their lives: Grace and Maureen, and two other informants, Jess and Gail. Grace and Maureen were palpably anxious and upset in narrating their experiences; they also seemed more intensely interested in locating potential explanations for their experiences, whether supernatural or coincidental. Their interviews alerted me to the possibility that continued solicitation of volunteers through a public advertisement for these kinds of stories might put me at risk of exacerbating informants' problems with serious depression and anxiety. This was one of the reasons I decided to stop running the ad after several weeks.

Jess and Gail, a couple I interviewed separately and then together, one afternoon on campus, were similarly replete with stories of "supernatural" experiences which, for them, as for Maureen and Grace, appeared to be more of a daily norm than anomalous. As the Narrative Inventory (in Appendix A) makes clear, most of their stories (mainly premonitory dreams and hauntings) had little to do with simultaneity. While they did not seem particularly anxious during their interviews, they shared (without prompting, and with very little inhibition) indications that at least a few of their experiences (separately and/or together) had taken place in the context of drug use. As a result, perhaps, Gail did seem anxious when I chanced to meet her again, on campus, in the weeks and months that followed. She avoided me and/or ignored me, looking not

angry or hostile, but simply embarrassed and uncomfortable. I had enjoyed those interviews, rich as they were with Jess's and Gail's interest in and beliefs about white, grey, and black witchcraft in contemporary practice—among their friends—in Newfoundland. However, at the same time, I felt uncomfortable with the prospect of amassing field data that simultaneously documented local social connections in which drug use seemed to be fairly frequent, if not the norm. This was another reason to stop running the campus ad; in addition, it discouraged me from my plan to run more ads in city newspapers, for fear that respondents from St. John's at large (not just the MUN student population) might be even more prone to self-selecting for what I thought were rather the wrong reasons, for me and for them.

Maureen's tears and comments, and Grace's frank discussion of her hospitalization for depression after one of her experiences opened my eyes to the fact that these early interviews seemed to be encouraging people to talk about experiences they might have greater needs to *control*, for peace of mind, than to remember and describe. I came to wonder, privately, whether these kinds of participants might not gain more peace by speaking with a caring and well-trained counselor, rather than baring their souls to some inquiring folklorist with a philosophical interest in their stories. An investigation of how ESEs might be related to states of anxiety and depression is beyond the scope of this study, obviously, but these stories' apparent connection with such states might be worth exploring. Such research might be conducted more ethically, I think, through the joint effort of a folklorist and a psychological counselor, rather than by a folklorist alone.

#### *A Gift-Shop Questionnaire*

In summer of 1994 I made up a questionnaire directed at purchasers of dreamcatchers, a Native American craft item, made up of a hanging circle, decorated



with beads, feathers, or rocks, and criss-crossed with string in a spider-web design. The item was sold in a number of local shops in St. John's, often with accompanying tags which explain how Plains Indian tribes hang dreamcatchers above a dreamer's head at night as a kind of filter, to eliminate bad dreams and promote good ones. I dropped a small stack of my dreamcatcher questionnaires off at a busy New Age gift shop/bookstore in St. John's,<sup>9</sup> where I spoke with the store manager and a clerk. The manager agreed to inform all cashiers to give every customer who bought one of their dreamcatchers a copy of the questionnaire to fill out. The questionnaires were pre-stamped and addressed to me, to facilitate return by mail. The shop displayed a collection of dreamcatchers right above the cash register, where they hung from the ceiling, and stocked them in smaller sizes, as jewelry, in a nearby glass case.

Among other questions related specifically to dreamcatchers, the questionnaire also asked consumers, "Have you or friends ever had any dreams you would call very unusual, coincidental, "ESP," or supernatural?" I had two purposes in utilizing this questionnaire (see copy in Appendix E). First, I hoped it would bring me in contact with people who could tell stories about dreams, since they were purchasing a product reputed to control dreams, and, perhaps, stories about dreams with simultaneous significance. I was also interested in dreamcatchers, per se, as a separate topic for future research, and was curious to know why people would buy them. My "oblique" phrasing of the inquiry about various kinds of dreams was an attempt to encourage people to tell me dream-related stories regardless of the various possible explanations they might prefer, whether supernatural or purely coincidental. I was hoping to hear stories about simultaneous dreams from believers and disbelievers alike, recognizing by then that most people would not identify in any simple way as one or the other, necessarily.

Over the next several weeks I paid a few visits to the shop, and I could see that the stock of dreamcatchers was moving. I assumed that purchasers had taken the questionnaires home but had not yet mailed them to me. Eventually, though, when nothing arrived in the mail, I returned the shop and inquired how many questionnaires were left, and discovered that the clerks still had almost the whole stack left just under the counter. They explained with embarrassment that they "kept forgetting" to give them out to people who bought dreamcatchers. Sensing that the questionnaires had been more of an annoyance for them, than anything else, I thanked them for what they had managed to do, and took the remaining questionnaires home.

Despite their reluctance, they had given out a few questionnaires, and I did get one back in July. This was from Madelyne, a woman whom I had met once or twice on campus, but did not know personally. She was a local writer, and she also worked as an administrator at the university. I later interviewed for this study. On her questionnaire, Madelyne described a number of dreams which she and her mother had had, at times when relatives and friends were in trouble. The stories sounded like what I was looking for. Madelyne describes a number of these further in her interview (see Narrative Inventory, Appendix A). I gave out a few more questionnaires to fellow students in the folklore department who told me that they did own dreamcatchers, and got one more questionnaire back. The dreams this student described did not sound like the kinds of experiences I was looking for, however. There were no ethical problems with this method; it just failed due to miscellaneous human errors. The experience did encourage me to keep soliciting informants by word-of-mouth, though, but from people I knew to be rather more reliable in terms of assistance.

*Cross-Campus Posting: "Is ESP Baloney?"*

In spring of 1995 I posted my "Is ESP Baloney" leaflet (see copy in Appendix E) all over campus. I taped these ads up every 20 yards, or so, throughout the Arts and Education Building, the Arts and Administration Building, the Chemistry/Physics building, the Earth Science Building, and all underground and above-ground walkways. I also posted the leaflet in the Folklore Department, near the copy machine, for all to see. I noticed that the ads were removed from the underground walkways (the busiest area on campus between class periods) so I replaced them there over the course of a few weeks. I got two responses, no more, no less. One was from a dyed-in-the-wool debunker, an older undergraduate student in anthropology/archeology named Ben. The second volunteer was an older M.A. student in our department, Judith, whom I did not yet know very well. She stopped me in the Folklore Archive one day and asked me about the study, giving me a preview of the kinds of stories she wanted to discuss.

An interesting issue that arose with this method (apart from its surprisingly low response rate) was the question of how it simultaneously attracted one person, Ben, who could indeed be viewed as a skeptic on most counts, and another, Judith, who seemed, at least by comparison to Ben, to be more of a "believer." Judith was quite willing to consider the possibility of ESP and/or a supernatural/divine dimension to explain an intuition she had, at a party, simultaneous to an emergency situation back home. In the course of deconstructing the concept of "the paranormal," as Ben so liked to do, one of his habits was to throw out what I would describe as "model" story frame (e.g., Billy goes out to school one day, and there's a snowstorm, and you're anxious about him, and suddenly you have a feeling about him, etc.), which he would then take apart, from a skeptical point of view, demonstrating that things are not necessarily as "paranormal" as they might seem. Judith, on the other hand, told her full-length

narrative of personal experience, which she explained rather speculatively, in various ways, most of which involved either the “supernatural” or the “paranormal.”

It would appear, then, that an ad which asks specifically if people believe ESP is “baloney” would and did attract people at the “disbeliever” end of the belief/disbelief spectrum. However, perhaps any ad which mentions ESP might attract informants who want to talk about the possibility of ESP, rather than the impossibility! This recalls an effect that debunkers Barry Singer and Victor Benassi reported in their article “Fooling Some of the People All of the Time” (1986). Singer and Benassi instructed “Craig,” a trained magician, to perform various tricks for an audience of undergraduates; despite the fact that they intentionally avoided representing Craig’s skills as paranormal or magical, two-thirds of the undergraduates surveyed believed he had magical powers anyway. “ESP” would seem to be a magical concept. In the case of my leaflet, “ESP” seems to have been the magic word, or at least, a word with connotative powers equal to or perhaps stronger than those of the word “baloney.” The fact that someone who didn’t necessarily think ESP was baloney (Judith) volunteered in response to this ad suggested to me, also, the possibility that the mere presence of “ESP” on any advertisement might have caused some debunkers to pass it by.

*Sticking with the Fourth Strategy: “Snowball” or Convenience Sampling*

In summary, then, after stopping my newspaper advertisement and while trying other strategies which met with few results, I continued to contact people, slowly but surely, on an ongoing basis, via a fourth strategy: “snowball” or “convenience” sampling. I kept soliciting interviews from everybody I could think of, apart from members of my own family. I hunted for simultaneous experience stories among friends, friends of friends, fellow students, and acquaintances, but especially from those

whom I had already overheard telling one or two such stories, as more *anomalous* personal experiences--and without upset--in casual, social situations.

Contacting folks I knew, even close friends, in some cases, seemed a safer bet, practically and ethically, than the other methods. It seemed to me to be a reasonable solution, also, to the ethical problems I had run into with the newspaper advertisement. Had I continued to interview newspaper recruits for whom extraordinary simultaneous or other "ESP"-type experiences were a disturbing and near-daily norm, I probably would have finished with a larger sample. The newspaper ad certainly worked faster than asking friends to ask friends. If I had worked with newspaper recruits, I might also have focused more, in my analysis, on the question of how such experiences might be controlled, as Maureen hoped I would. For most participants, though, as it turned out, such experiences were spontaneous and occasional, and the question of control was therefore less urgent and not central. The majority of informants (with the exception of the twins I interviewed) represented such experiences as infrequent in their lives and/or seemed to regard them as less upsetting overall. I hope that Maureen, Grace, and other participants who found their experiences particularly puzzling and upsetting, will find the explanations and perspectives other experiencers offered to be somewhat reassuring or otherwise useful. As Maureen herself observed,<sup>10</sup> mere "coincidence" explanations for these experiences (Explanatory Pattern 10) may decrease the amount of anxiety they would produce if explained otherwise. My early interviews with Maureen and Grace also underlined, for me, the importance of examining the interpretation of such experiences, rather than concentrating solely upon their description. Under the "General Fieldwork Statistics" heading below, I discuss the supplementary fieldwork experiment I undertook in August 1998 at the University of Massachusetts/Amherst. This experiment was more straightforward, methodologically, as my contacts with

these 19 students—a captive audience--were facilitated by a helpful friend, their teacher, Anita Mannur.

#### **1.4 Methods of Interviewing**

The interviews for this study were *semi-structured and in most cases* audiotaped. A copy of the interview schedule (list of questions) appears in Appendix E. By "semi-structured," I mean that I worked loosely from this list of questions and allowed participants to shape the directions of narrative and dialogue themselves. I *opened interviews not with questions but by asking people to tell me, first, their story or stories.* I tried to elicit any ESEs by asking whether they had "ever come to know that a friend or a relative was in a crisis of any kind," via a dream, or another unusual experience, or without knowing how they knew. I also encouraged people to tell me stories of extraordinary simultaneous experiences by asking them if they had ever heard stories that started out by saying, "I once had a dream about Aunt So-and-So, that she was dying" and wound up with "I later found out that sure enough, around the very time I had that experience, Aunt So-and-So had in fact died or been in some sort of crisis." I then allowed tellers to tell me stories which they felt matched such a description, without interrupting. In some cases I mentioned the phrase "crisis telepathy" to introduce the study, and my early participant consent forms described the study as a study of "crisis telepathy." However, as I gave the consent forms to informants when the interviews were done, I do not think the phrase "crisis telepathy" influenced their thinking very much, on the whole.

When informants seemed more or less to have reached the end of the stories they wished to tell,<sup>11</sup> I continued by clarifying details such as dates, times, and circumstances of the experiences. In most cases, I asked informants how they were feeling during the experience and what they had been doing just before it occurred, if

they had not already made this clear. I also asked speakers about the contexts in which they ordinarily told these stories, whether they had ever told them before, and whether other people in their family or community had had similar experiences. In order to uncover explanations informants would provide for their experiences, I asked informants whether they had religious or any other kinds of explanations for how these experiences might occur. After informants provided one line of explanation, I probed for further ones, asking if there were any other explanations they would consider. Usually tellers provided me with many more explanations than one. In many cases I wound up asking people how they distinguished between the roles of "mind" versus "brain," generally and in relation to their experiences.

Additional interview questions included inquiry about whether informants had read or heard about experiences from other sources, whether from people or via other media. I also asked approximately 50% of the (original) informants I interviewed (1) whether they had ever worked as a folk healer or as a psychic; (2) whether they had had any form of head injury or neurological illness, and (3) whether they felt that drug or alcohol use during their experience might have contributed in some way (by inducing it, making it more real, making it less real, etc.). I dropped these three questions from my interviews about halfway through the study (unless the issues came up spontaneously, as they did in some cases) because I found that they seemed to puzzle people and threaten rapport somewhat, without necessarily yielding useful information. Nearly everyone I asked about head injuries, for example, joked that they had fallen on their head as a youngster, or had had strokes in the family. In one interview, however, my question about drug use/alcohol use led to an interesting discussion. Judith's having felt a very strong, sudden, and disturbing intuition about an emergency at home, *despite*

the relaxing effect of drinking alcohol at a party, made the intuition all the more compelling for her.

During my interviews I avoided stating my own thoughts about credibility or causal explanations of the experiences people were describing, until the interview was nearly finished or until informants asked me my opinions. In some cases, late in the interviews, I ended up telling a few of my family's stories. When informants asked why I was interested in hearing about such experiences, I generally stated that I found the stories themselves moving and interesting, and that I was just as interested in how people might explain such experiences as in how they would describe them. I listened to narratives and participated in dialogue after narratives with an attitude that the events and ideas people were communicating might or might not be accurate, probable, or possible, and might be explained in different ways to be accurate, probable, or possible. I would like to believe that I projected an attitude during interviews which informants would be unable to typecast as that of Scully or that of Mulder on *The X-Files*, a demeanor which fell somewhere between the debunker vs. believer prototypes these two popular television characters represent. However, "the truth is out there," where it remains, on this count, for informants to decide.

By asking questions to clarify details such as dates and times, and to elicit further descriptive detail and any religious or philosophical explanations tellers favored, I believe I conveyed a sense of skeptical interest, rather than general doubtfulness or any simple willingness to believe. I know that these questions, and asking informants to define terms like "mind," "brain," or "telepathy" during interviews, shaped their responses. However, I have enough faith in the independent thinking of these informants to believe that the range of explanations and information with which they provided me could have been authentic statements of what they



actually think possible or not, rather than responses they were merely providing to keep me satisfied.

In some cases (Alan, Sheila, Mary, Robert, Alicia, Judith, Diana, Gina, Julie, Irina) I was able to collect more than one version of my example narratives; multiple versions appear in transcripts or e-mail communications, in the Appendices. Differences between versions emerged, whose significance I discuss under "Findings" below. Being asked to retell a story led informants like Alan and Irina to narrate their experiences with different details, differing time sequences, and more awareness of the ways in which their memories or interpretations were filtering the presentation of their experiences (see Alan's Story and Irina's Story, below).

### **1.5 General Fieldwork Statistics**

#### **Initial Interviews**

I personally interviewed 23 of the 26 informants in the initial informant group; most individually, some simultaneously, and some separately but on the same occasion, using opposites sides of the same interview tape. Ellen Damsky herself and the two others she interviewed are excluded from the 23 interviews I conducted. Ellen's two interviews last a total of 90 minutes, on either side of one tape. Similarly, I am not counting my two 60-minute interviews with Irina and Teresa, in the context of another project, into my total tape time for the thesis research, even though these women's stories shaped my thinking for this project. Irina's follow-up interview, however, is counted in my total tape time for the initial thesis interviews.

Total tape time for my own initial thesis interviews with 23 people (subtracting Ellen Damsky's informants and herself), can be calculated as follows. There were three interviews (with Madelyne, with Matthew/Aurora simultaneously, and with Ben) on 60-minute microcassettes; five interviews on four 60-minute standard cassettes

(Karen, Irina, Maureen, and Diana/Diana + daughters separately on opposite sides of the fourth cassette); eight interviews on seven 90-minute standard cassettes (Jess and Gail, separately, then together, on opposites sides of first tape; Tom, Alan, Sheila, and Mary simultaneously on the second tape; Grace, Robert, Judith, Maya, Alicia, individually, on remaining five tapes); and, finally, one interview on a 110-minute standard cassette (Darla). Thus, I interviewed 23 people in the course of 17 initial thesis interviews, lasting 17 total hours (I have subtracted a half hour from Karen's interview on a 60-minute tape, which fills only one side, and a half-hour from Judith's tape, which only lasted one hour on a 90-minute tape).

Follow-up interviews, phonecalls, conversations, and e-mails were completed with the following members of the initial interview group: Alan (interviewed twice; queried by e-mail in 1996 and 1998 for second and third story versions; queried in conversation multiple times), Irina (interviewed twice, e-mailed in 1998); Sheila (interviewed twice; queried in conversation on multiple occasions; queried by e-mail in 1998); Mary (interviewed once; queried in conversation on multiple occasions; queried by e-mail in 1998); Judith (interviewed once; pre-interviewed, off-tape, once; interviewed by phone in 1998 and e-mailed for second story version); Laura (interviewed once by Ellen Damsky in 1994; once by me in 1998; e-mailed for third story version); Robert (interviewed once; queried in conversation multiple times; e-mailed in 1998 for second story version); Alicia (interviewed once; queried in conversation multiple times; asked to submit account of dream from personal diary; e-mailed via Robert in 1998 for third story version); Darla (interviewed once; follow-up at a Brown Bag presentation and in 1998 e-mail communication); and Ellen (interviewed herself, once; queried in conversation on several occasions; e-mailed twice in 1998). It is rather difficult to provide an accurate count of the hours involved

in follow-up through these various channels. A very conservative estimate would be an average of two hours per each of these nine informants; this would add 18 hours of untaped field contacts to my 17 hours of taped interview time. To this might also be added the hours I spent collecting stories from members of the St. John's Twins and Triplets Association (3), visiting and speaking off and on by phone with the Association President (2), and collecting/discussing such stories with audience members at a brown bag lunch presentation in the Folklore Department, MUN, in February 1995 (1). This would bring my interviewing and follow-up contact hours with the initial informant group to approximately 40 hours.

For a variety of reasons, I elected not to ask Jess, Gail, Maureen, Grace, Matthew, Aurora, or Karen for follow-up interviews. The first four informants' interview problems have already been discussed above (anxiety, depression, and disclosure of drug use). Matthew and Aurora are a couple; as it took months for Matthew to agree to set a date for this interview, as he seemed somewhat tense relating it on tape, and as his story involved a close mutual friend who had passed away relatively recently, I did not contact either of them for a second interview, although I continued to talk with Matthew, from time to time, and informally, about the story. Like Darla's story and Karen's story, Matthew's was an instructive, but also problematic match for the ESEN category. Hence, eliciting secondary versions of these stories seemed unnecessary. Darla's stories concerned multiple, tragic deaths in her family, which occurred in the short space of three years. One interview was more than enough, for me, and for her, although she did retell some of her stories (along with Sheila and Alan) at a brown bag lunch presentation I gave on twins' simultaneous experience stories, in February of 1995. Unfortunately, the tape-recorder set up (by a

third party) at the presentation malfunctioned, and the recording of our discussion was lost. This presentation, and several others, is listed under "Untaped Interviews" in the Narrative Inventory (Appendix A).

*Supplementary Fieldwork at the University of Massachusetts/Amherst*

My contact with my second subject group, a comparative literature class at the University of Massachusetts/Amherst, consisted of a narrative listening/categorization exercise, a survey, and a lively, taped group discussion. As stated above, all of these activities fit into one of Anita Mannur's class periods, a 2.5 hour time slot, from 3:00-5:30 on the afternoon of 4 August 1998. Although I solicited addresses and phone numbers from students who would be willing to complete follow-up interviews in the future, I had not made any further contacts with members of this group as of the time I completed this write-up.

The exercise, survey, and discussion I conducted with this group were designed to test whether and how a group of people might, without any prompting at all, construct a narrative category into which one of my pretaped examples (Judith's Story) would fit, in their view. The story I played aloud for them, with transcripts so they could follow along, was "Judith's Story," an example which fits the basic definition of an ESEN rather squarely: in it one finds an apparently simultaneous intuition (Judith suddenly stops enjoying herself and tells husband they must go home "NOW") of a life crisis event (Judith's son's poisoning) at a distance (several miles away). I then asked the students to take a few minutes to think whether they could tell me about a story they had heard, or an experience they themselves had had, which they thought was "very much like" this example.

I followed this exercise up with a survey, designed to uncover some of the student's logic in constructing and naming a narrative category for the example they had just heard. The survey asked the students how they would *explain* the story they just told, and asked what they would *call* the story category in which they would place the taped example and/or their own example. After asking where the students acquired the names they gave to their story categories, I asked them (for the purposes of differentiation) whether they would call the story they told me (or Judith's Story, if they had offered none of their own) a "premonition story," or an "ESP story," explaining why or why not.

The results I got from the survey confirmed my suspicion that the names people assign to these kinds of belief narratives are more variable than consistent, though they do seem to correlate, in part, with the explanations people favor for what they think is going on in these accounts. It is therefore difficult, if not impossible, to argue that I have found either "emic" language or "emic" categories for the stories I collected. The concept of "what seems to be going on" was itself surprisingly variable; a number of students did not view Judith's Story or stories like it to have anything to do with "ESP" at all. After the survey, students engaged me and each other for about an hour in a lively and philosophically challenging discussion about narrative categorization, and the possible explanations for Judith's Story and their own experiences. I discuss the significance of these results more fully under "Findings," below.

All participants I interviewed in this study were informed verbally and/or in writing about the uses to which their participation would be put in the project. Information and Consent forms reminded participants of the voluntary nature of their participation and their option to withdraw from the project at any time, for any reason. These forms also gave participants a chance to express preferences and outline their own restrictions regarding confidentiality and tape and transcript storage and use. A group consent form was circulated to students at the University of Massachusetts/Amherst; this group was informed verbally about the project and the intended uses of their material. They were also given my electronic address and phone number, and I encouraged them to call or e-mail me if they had questions or concerns about their participation in the study.

Methods of maintaining anonymity and confidentiality were determined according to informant preferences, and according to the researcher's discretion. These methods included complete or partially restricted access to informant tapes and/or transcripts and the editing of material to maintain complete or partial informant anonymity in this report of the research results. People in the initial informant group are identified by pseudonyms; students in the second group are identified only by their (actual) first names. Copies of all forms used in this study appear in Appendix E. Some identifying personal details have been changed in the thesis to further protect the anonymity of subjects. Dates, locations, and general circumstances of the experiences have not been changed.



Figure 2.1. Fieldwork with Anita Mannur's Comparative Literature class, University of Massachusetts/Amherst, 4 August 1998.

### 1.7 Questioning The Experience-Centered Approach

In 1982, folk belief scholar David J. Hufford released his ground-breaking study of night paralysis experiences, *The Terror That Comes in the Night* (Hufford 1982a). The study presented thirty-six belief narratives describing experiences akin to what in Newfoundland folk tradition is known as an "Old Hag" attack. Hufford's analysis of these 36 narratives and others in his collection generated an inventory of common descriptive features. He tallied the frequencies of these features and presented them as the primary and secondary characteristics of this kind of experience. Primary characteristics of this nocturnal experience include an impression of wakefulness, a feeling of immobility, a realistic perception of one's surroundings, and a sense of fear (Hufford 1982a, 25). Because "sensing a presence" is listed as one of the secondary characteristics (1982a, 25, 267-68), it is not always entirely clear why Hufford chooses to identify this experience at times as an "assault," or as an experience that is "supernatural."

On the basis of research with populations inside and outside Newfoundland, Hufford reported that 23% of the people he surveyed reported such attacks, whether or not they were familiar with "Old Hag" or other cultural models for such an experience.<sup>12</sup> This discovery enabled Hufford to argue against the notion that cultural conditioning could be the only source for these narratives (the cultural source hypothesis). Instead, Hufford argued, his data supported an experiential source hypothesis:



This hypothesis holds that the Old Hag tradition contains elements of<sup>103</sup> experience that are independent of culture...[and] predicts that recognizable "Old Hag experiences" will occur with some regularity without contact with the tradition. (Hufford 1982a, 15)

In Hufford's introduction to *The Terror That Comes in the Night* (1982a, xiv-xvi) he called his interviewing method a phenomenological one, by which I believe he meant (as many social scientists do in calling their work phenomenological) that his inquiry and conclusions about his informants' testimony were more descriptive than interpretive. "Such an interview style," Hufford says, "attempts to draw closer to the actual perceptions that lie behind the most natural modes of expression" (1982a, xiv). He also stated that his experience-centered approach relies upon the dictionary meaning of the term "phenomenology," as

"the study of...appearances in human experience, during which considerations of objective reality and of purely subjective response are temporarily left out of account." (xv)

Hufford stated further that his method was aimed at the "description of specific subjective experiences with a minimum of interference from postevent interpretation and ambiguous language." (xv-xvi)

Hufford's experience-centered approach has substantial utility for scholars investigating supernatural narrative and experience. The experience-centered approach prevents scholars from interpreting informants' accounts of supernatural experiences as nothing more than products of cultural expectations. Scholars who employ an experience-centered approach can adopt the perspective that such narratives may be rational reports of real personal experience, whether or not the experiencers have been exposed to cultural models. As Hufford describes it, the approach is a mode of inquiry which directs its attention away from explanations which experiencers offer after their

experiences, in order to focus more intently upon specific perceptual details, clearly reported, in the narration of the experience itself. Such an approach respects the possibility that tellers' narrations will be clear and accurate, and that the experiences they describe are "real," at least in the sense that they may be what they appear to be. The approach opens the door to understanding what subjective experience is specifically like, and how objective sources for subjective experience might be tested or further investigated.

In my experience as a folklore student I have observed many interesting responses to *The Terror That Comes in the Night*, Hufford's best-known major work to date. I have often heard fellow students express curiosity about Hufford's informants' explanations for their experience, or about Hufford's own explanations.<sup>13</sup> Personally, I have wondered whether Hufford was truly studying one distinct phenomenon, or many related ones, with different explanations for their occurrence. Hufford intentionally presents his narratives apart from later explanations his informants may have offered for the experiences, and he presents a single version of each story. Curiosity about the interviews, other versions of the stories, and about informants' explanations helped shape my wish to do a study of belief narrative in which informants' own explanations for how and why their experiences occurred would somehow be documented alongside their descriptions of their experience.

Despite the strengths of the experience-centered approach, there are specific epistemological problems that come along with it. Like any theoretical approach to ethnography, it limits what a researcher expects to find out and come to know. The experience-centered approach may rely on at least two leaps of faith. One is that people who talk about unusual and supernatural experiences are in significant part simply and clearly reporting them. Another is that the experiences such narrators had

are of such a nature that they *can* be described clearly and straightforwardly, without simultaneously being guessed at, doubted, justified, explained, and re-explained. An experience-centered approach may encourage researchers to bring to an interview situation the theoretical assumption that perceptions "lie behind the most natural modes of expression" consistently, or in straightforward ways. This may not necessarily or may not always be the case, and stories which people tell may even express interpretive perspectives and subtleties which point, theoretically, to the contrary.

In a study of elderly women's "supranormal" narratives in Manchester, England, Gillian Bennett (1986) described the stories she collected as acts of interpretation and explanation, rather than straightforward description. Bennett observed that the "non-Labovian" (nonlinear and nonchronological) structure and style of the narratives her informants told arose "from speakers using narrative as a form of explanation" (417). In other words, these women's narratives reflected their desire to "have their version of events accepted as accurate, and their interpretations confirmed" (Bennett 1986, 417).

In this research, I have chosen to trust that the doubts, explanations, and even inconsistencies which tellers expressed along with their descriptions of their experiences were expressed sincerely and candidly, rather than rhetorically, even though I helped to elicit them, in the context of interviews. I have also chosen to trust that informants' ambiguities, like their consistencies, could represent the truth as it was recalled, rather than any bias inherent in my questioning. I have assumed that tellers were good critics of their own experience and that their sometimes contradictory presentations of their experience in narration might be conscious and intentional, rather than simply problematic or defensive. These are theoretical presumptions of my own approach, and my method of interviewing is described fully below.

Asking an informant to simply state the facts, as Hufford says, "unambiguously," and before too much "postevent interpretation" has occurred is justifiable in some cases, but less justifiable in others. Sometimes people tell stories that ask listeners to help them sort out what their original perceptions most likely *were*, rather than simply describing such perceptions unambiguously. In some cases, people may recount unusual or supernatural experiences in order to determine an adequate explanation for what actually happened. In others, they may be seeking to move beyond what they simply perceived, into considerations of (1) what is philosophically or plausibly possible and (2) how they themselves decided their perceptions amounted to supernatural or extraordinary experiences, during and after the experience. Assuming that a narrator is describing his or her experience, or encouraging narrators to "simply tell what happened" rather than allowing them or encouraging them to ask questions they want to ask about what could possibly have happened in a given situation, can reduce highly interpretive, self-questioning narratives into "bare fact" descriptions that they rather clearly are not.

I believe that an experience-centered approach can validate narrations of experience which focus on perceptual facts, especially reports of encounters with supernatural beings. However, I also believe that a more explanation- or interpretation-centered approach might validate narrations of more cognitive experiences (ESENs, premonition stories), which express meaningful doubts, in addition to, or rather than a set of "unambiguous" perceptual facts. While some belief topics may inspire different degrees and qualities of ambiguity than others, ambiguous and straightforward narratives can also be elicited and shaped as such by a researcher's interviewing style. Ideally, a researcher's role would be to encourage informants who remember and report their perceptions clearly to report any ambiguities as well, while also encouraging

informants who remember their experiences in partial clarity or ambiguity to be as clear as possible.

Alan's Story, Version 2, is an example of a narrative in this study which might be reduced by an approach which required as unambiguous a report as possible of perceptual facts. This version of Alan's Story is filled with qualifications of his own memory, expressions of attitudes about what it is probable that he knew and learned before and after the experience itself, and a number of possible explanations for why and how it appeared to him that he had experienced telepathy:

*I believe today that I realized/knew that there was something weird/telepathic going on and I knew this instantly as it happened...but I was not afraid or awestruck or weirded out...which is kind of surprising...I did not get up from my desk and or open the door to confirm that it was her [the woman he knew telepathically was at the door, upset because she had left her husband]—at least in my memory I do not think that I did, I was just so sure of it in my bones...I also remember that I did not check out if it was her or why she had come that day—I did not check this out in any active way—did not actively seek to confirm if I was right/if I had got the message right...I did not ask [my Mom] if they had split up...I am highlighting my lack of interest/curiosity in finding out if I actually had had a telepathic experience because I now find it interesting that I did not have more interest at the time/more wonderment/amazement at the very fact that I had had such an experience.*

This story does not only report what a telepathic experience feels like perceptually. It also asks questions about how one determines and decides with certainty that one has had a telepathic experience. If I had focused in my interviews on unambiguous and uninterpreted perceptual details, I could have ignored the parts of Alan's narrative in which he confronts some of the limits of his own memory of this event, and questions why he did not seek to test or confirm an experience he felt sure was telepathy at the time he had it. Alan contributed this particular narrative version (a written one) to the study after I explained that I was looking for multiple versions of accounts, not to prove

informants "wrong" in any sense, but to compare differences and similarities to consider, open-mindedly, what they could mean, alongside each other.

Despite remarking that he felt like he was "almost making it all up again" when narrating his experience, Alan also seemed to be striving to report as many details as he could, despite all potential contradictions and ambiguities. He reported confirmations he only remembered vaguely and tests which remained unconduted (see Versions 1 and 2, below). He speculated that the reason he didn't actively seek confirmations may have been his feeling of sureness, during the experience, that he knew what he knew via telepathy. The kinds of questions Alan's testimony raises about his experience, and such experiences in general, can also be assumed to be accurate and reasonable reports of experience, but I am not sure an experience-centered approach is necessarily the best, or the only, method of eliciting particularly ambiguous perspectives. The ambiguities seem, to me, to have an importance and a validity of their own, and to be worth reporting.

The experience-centered approach can imply a series of interpretive assumptions which do not apply to or enhance the understanding of *all* kinds of narration of unusual or supernatural experience. Perhaps the experience-centered approach is most suitably applied to accounts of supernatural experiences which are clearer, more confident, and less ambiguous; perhaps ambiguous and contradictory accounts call for different or multiple methods of analysis. Even Hufford himself says he "must acknowledge that no approach can be free of theory" (xvii), leaving room for scholars to take issue with the theoretical biases that inform his approach, like any other.

### **1.8 Method of Presenting Analysis**

In reading Hufford's work and that of James McLendon, a sociologist who has adopted Hufford's experience-centered approach to research a wider variety of supernatural and paranormal experience stories (1994), I have questioned how readers might best judge whether these writers were describing or interpreting the primary characteristics of narrated experiences. Hufford provides readers with a list of the stories and references to stories in his book that contain the primary and the secondary features of the "Old Hag" experience ((Hufford 1982a, 25 and 267-270). All citations may be checked by the reader to confirm that they contain the characteristic Hufford notes. McLendon, by contrast, provides no analytic back-up for the generalizations he makes (McLendon 1994, 238-239).

Hufford's basis for distinguishing which characteristics of Old Hag attacks are primary and "definitive" and which are secondary is still somewhat unclear, to me. He lists "fear," for example, as a primary characteristic, and gives ten supporting citations, but he gives twice that many citations for the characteristic "sensation of presence," which he calls secondary. Perhaps it is for these reasons that Hufford cautions readers that his outline of the characteristics of the Old Hag or supernatural assault experience summarizes his "initial" findings (1982a, 25) and that his arrangement of the characteristics is "somewhat impressionistic" (267).

I have tried to make my own content analysis of the stories and the frequency of patterns I found somewhat more explicit, by including them alongside narrative

transcripts, for reference, in the Appendices. When I identify a pattern of explaining simultaneous experiences as "coincidence," for example (pattern 10), readers may check the evidence supporting this pattern by turning to the transcripts and accompanying analyses, where they will find the number-coded explanatory points I refer to. Most explanatory points are verbatim quotations from informants' interview tapes; a minority are paraphrased. Descriptive patterns I discuss in relation to the collection as a whole can likewise be checked and verified by reference to the lists of descriptive features provided alongside every narrative transcript.

### **1.9 Method of Narrative Content Analysis: "Grounded Theory"**

The method I chose for analyzing my interview transcripts is a basic and noncontroversial method which has been used by both quantitative and qualitative researchers in sociology and other social sciences<sup>14</sup>: the constant comparative method of grounded theory.<sup>15</sup> In a sense, the method is little more than a more systematic and generalized articulation of how to do basic comparative narrative analysis, an approach with which folklorists are eminently familiar, given our admiration for the thematic comparativism of tale analysts like Antti Aarne, Stith Thompson, and Vladimir Propp. This method, outlined in 1967 by sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, simply requires a researcher to conduct a complete and comparative content analysis of interview transcripts (or other qualitative data) to generate thematic categories, and to test and/or redefine these categories by "constant comparisons" with further incoming



data. Ideally, this would allow a researcher to start generating theory from data, as early as possible, in any research project.

Discouraged by fellow sociologists' tendencies to conduct qualitative research with the aim to prove and reprove established disciplinary theories *ad nauseam*, Glaser and Strauss hoped that their method would encourage researchers, instead, to generate new theories from new themes in new collections of qualitative data, large or small. The method is particularly useful in early stages of what might (or might not) turn out to be larger research projects, because it encourages researchers to tease out theoretical implications in even a small amount of field-recorded, or alternately, written textual data. Glaser and Strauss define "theory" as general hypotheses generated from data, and tested and/or modified in relation to incoming data; hypotheses so derived and so tested should explain, predict, or be otherwise relevant to social values and behavior of the groups or individuals under study (1967, 2-6, 26).

Nowhere in their 1967 manual do Glaser and Strauss specify any minimum or maximum number of interviews, initial or follow-up, through which to test out their method; these protocols are left up to the researchers who elect to apply the method throughout their own research, however extensive that goes on to be. Their presumption is that the method will be used, however, in studies that will "go on" testing (and correcting) their own hypotheses with more and more informants and/or informant groups in time. Obviously, for the purposes of making comparisons, though, there needs at least to be a "sample" or range of perspectives, so that testimony from

individuals or groups of people might be compared to test how far preliminary hypotheses can be generalized without needing to be corrected. The authors make it clear, though, that the unit of comparative perspective can vary, from the individual to the large group: "Our discussion of comparative analysis... assigns the method its fullest generality for use on social units of any size, large or small, ranging from men or their roles to nations or world regions" (1967, 21; see also pages 49-50, and 75).

Barney Glaser's more recent *Examples of Grounded Theory: A Reader* (1993) is an anthology of studies which apply this method. There is considerable variation in the numbers of informants, hours of fieldwork, and range of qualitative data "slices" collected (e.g., interview transcript, newspaper accounts, etc.) in each study. Glaser saw fit to publish the results of many studies which were smaller, in these terms, than my own research for this thesis; hence, my use of their method of content analysis with the transcripts of my taped interviews with 23+ initial informants in this project (and, later 20 more people) to compare their testimonies against each other, seems to me to be a legitimate application of the method.

One of the basic techniques of the constant comparative method involves a two-fold kind of comparative analysis of the qualitative data (which in my case, means my taped interview transcripts). They call this technique "minimizing and maximizing differences." I have applied this technique with my data in a number of respects. Minimizing differences is what I (like most researchers venturing into the complexity of the world of oral and written narrative variation) did when I reviewed the historical

and field-recorded examples I had amassed in the process of researching this thesis, and first attempted to come up with a general, formal definition which would unite many, though not all, of these narratives under one heading, the ESEN pattern. I came up with this definition by “minimizing differences,” that is to say, focusing on broad similarities, rather than smaller differences, across a number of the narrative examples I had already seen—and some examples I remembered from past personal and past interview experience, as well. I express those broad similarities as units of my basic ESEN definition which appears in the introduction and Chapter One.

In order to test my initial hypothesis—that there is such a pattern as the ESEN as I defined it broadly—I then “maximized differences,” meaning, I looked more specifically at some of my ESEN-pattern examples (e.g., the twenty presented in this chapter, as well as others in the corpus), focusing on the range of variation in their individual motifs. Between these two levels of analysis, “macro” and “micro”-level (or in the language of folklore, type vs. version), conflicts should emerge which, according to Glaser and Strauss, help a researcher generate more theory from the data. In my case, I discovered significant conflicts between the “macro-analysis” (where I measured each of my example narratives against the original, initial definition of an ESEN) and the “micro-analysis” (where I then identified the full range of individual story motifs which fell under primary thematic areas in the initial definition). The results of the micro-analysis are tabulated in charts, under the “Findings” section. This

*forced me to reckon with my initial definition, once again, to ask in what respects the broad pattern could be argued to apply.*

By “constant comparison” and the “constant comparative method” Glaser and Strauss are not referring to comparison of data across initial and later interviews (an aspect of research which they no doubt assume as an eventual given) but they are referring more specifically to a directed form of comparison, across preliminary thematic categories in order to (a) justify or (b) modify these categories, thereby developing more reliable theoretical approaches to observable patterns in any given collection of data. The binary technique of minimizing and maximizing differences is part of the constant comparative method. In my own case, “minimizing differences” was the thinking that allowed me to hypothesize that one element in the ESEN pattern was, for example, the element of personal crisis. “Maximizing differences” led me, *on the other hand, to begin to observe all the kinds of crisis featured across these twenty example narratives.* In order to do that, I divided my content analysis into identifying my example narratives’ descriptive features, identifying their built-in interpretive features, and listing their subsequent explanations in the course of the interviews (for evidence of these levels of the content analysis, please see Appendix B). The “new theory” that emerged was a refined version of my initial definition of the ESEN, one which describes the allowable range of “crisis” (and other basic elements of the definition) more specifically. In my earlier “Findings” section I did not articulate the ways in which the variations in my example narratives challenged (and would therefore

refine) the original definition. The revised “Findings” section below should make clearer the value of Glaser and Strauss’s constant comparative method of content analysis.

### 1.10 Other Theoretical Influences on Methods

Gillian Bennett’s work and that of Leea Virtanen have also shaped my ideas about presenting and analyzing belief narratives. Gillian Bennett’s *Traditions of Belief* (1987a) complements Hufford’s work, as a tour-de-force of historical contextualization for the contemporary narratives she presents from her own collection. Bennett alludes to, describes, or excerpts specific historic narratives which parallel the contemporary ESP and ghost narratives in her own collection, but *Traditions of Belief* more often traces the history of broad patterns of belief about such phenomena as they are expressed through centuries of British and European scholarship and life. My review of historical and contemporary interdisciplinary sources for ESEns in earlier chapters is a modest attempt to emulate Bennett’s broad survey of historic and interdisciplinary material. Leea Virtanen’s and James McLendon’s precedents for acknowledging the history of parapsychology (Virtanen 1990; McLendon 1984 and 1994) encouraged me to extend my review to address psychical research and parapsychological collections, as well.

In *That Must Have Been ESP!* (1990), Virtanen’s comparative narrative research is strong because of the sheer number of accounts (over 800) on which she conducts basic statistical (and structural) analyses. Virtanen’s study presents the narratives themselves more often by allusion and summary than by transcription excerpts, which Hufford and Bennett prefer. Of these three scholars, Virtanen discusses skeptical

explanatory propositions most openly and at length, but her summaries of disbelieving arguments seem overly concise at times, due perhaps to some bias against positions of skepticism and doubt.<sup>16</sup> Hufford acknowledges the existence of multiple explanations for such experiences and informants' abilities to consider these explanations (Hufford 1982a, 10, 66, and *passim*) but he does not describe or analyze these explanations systematically or at length, as he does with descriptive features. Bennett outlines the overall frameworks of historical and personal values within which belief narratives have meaning, and discusses the structure and meaning characteristic of types of narratives in historical context. Although both Bennett and Hufford have systematically identified the traditional strategies of argument for and against belief in narratives of supernatural experience as descriptions of actual experience (Bennett 1986, 1987b and Hufford 1982b), neither of these scholars' book-length studies nor Virtanen's book documents in a systematic way the range of different explanations informants use to hypothesize *how* the experiences they describe could have occurred. Most of the eleven explanation patterns I identify under "Findings," below, are explanations for how experiences could have occurred, rather than whether these stories are believable or not as narratives of actual experience.

## **PART II: FINDINGS**

### **2.1 Examples of Vernacular Philosophy**

In beginning this revised presentation of the findings, before I discuss story examples and the questions of whether and how they match my hypothetical pattern, let me open by describing just two of many moments during this fieldwork in which I was convinced that participants and I had escaped what I think of as the vortex of the

dialectics of belief and disbelief--and had entered into the realm I think of as "vernacular philosophy." To capture these moments properly, I will also introduce the speakers.

### **Vernacular Philosophy I: Judith**

The strong, rebellious, over-fifty-year-old woman I call "Judith Power" in this study placed herself beyond the dialectics of belief and disbelief immediately by the label she used for the kind of story she told me: "psychedelic stories." Judith's ESEN was about having had a sudden intuition--in the midst of a jubilant anniversary party at a neighbor's--that an emergency was unfolding at home, a short drive away. The intuition--which she says impelled her to get home "*now*," occurred at the same time her son was in fact dangerously ill, having inhaled poisonous paint fumes. As she confessed in a recent (August 1998) follow-up interview, Judith regards this as a simultaneous, rather than a premonitory, experience; she calls stories like this "psychedelic," punning on "psychic," because people who know her know she doesn't necessarily believe in ESP--"or in half of what the Roman Catholic Church tells me I should believe" either. Judith describes herself nevertheless as "a practicing Roman Catholic."

In her original interview, Judith showed she was willing to consider not just one, but all sorts of hypothetical explanations for how she seemed to know what she knew when she did. Whether or not her experience was believable or not, as a real experience accurately perceived, was not the question. ESP was just one of several explanatory hypotheses which interested Judith. Similarly, her funny story label belies cunning ambiguities: "psychedelic" conveys "not psychic," to be sure, but sounds

almost like psychic, as well. Before her stories begin, she makes fun of herself with this label for the story category, daring her listeners to take her seriously or, at least, to judge for themselves. The phrase “psychedelic stories” encourages her audience to weigh the illusion of drug-induced hallucinations against the value of a wild and colorful tale, not in the spirit of combat between contradictory worldviews, but in a spirit of dialogue and play—what I would call vernacular philosophy, rather than the dialectics of belief and disbelief.

Like many narrators who share her ethnic heritage, Judith translates her Irishness and her Catholicism into a kind of narrative collateral. She speaks without affectation in the strongly Irish phrasing and tone of Fogo Island, Newfoundland, where she grew up; her prefaces to her own stories convey her esteem for story, and a sense of her own repertoire as a teller of good and true, if enigmatic, stories, at house parties, and in the classroom, probably, in her earlier life as a schoolteacher. Judith expresses a tolerant but realistic appreciation for social drinking—her children’s and her own--and its consequences, the enjoyable and the risky. She can trace her Irish ancestors back to the first who came to Newfoundland in 1752, from Dungarran, County Waterford. Her hair is woolly and wild, her eyes set deep in her aging face. Alternately, they light and tire.

One of the fascinating features of Judith’s approach to explaining how her experience could have occurred is her ready admission of belief in several possible hypotheses about causation. “I do believe in mental telepathy,” she stated, but also said, “I do believe that my [dead] father keeps an eye on me.” “I think all these people that I loved...the message could be coming from them.” Then again, she added, “...there has to be some thing, way that my brain can pick up signals that are coming from other places.” The challenge, for Judith, and for me, as I was listening and



thinking along with her, was not a matter of choosing between traditions of belief or disbelief about the real causes of her experience or about the general accuracy of her perception; it was more a matter of how to decide which of the various explanatory models that did make sense to her in general might fit *best* in this particular situation.

Having reviewed Judith's testimony many times in the course of this project (Judith's story was also the one I used to spark debate among the University of Massachusetts students in August 1998)—I don't believe that she resolved this challenge entirely. What she did do, though, was to settle (at least tentatively) on her preference for the explanations which involved some "third party," a mediating consciousness or spirit, which conveyed the "message" about an emergency at home, to her, at a distance away. She reached this preference in part by working her way through a metaphor for how human consciousness might work. The metaphor she used was one which several other informants used as well—the metaphor of a computer—which is probably something of a "folk idea"<sup>17</sup> about mind and brain in our day and age:

There's a lot more to us than a brain. You know, a brain is, is more, physical and more, to me [laughing] the brain is, is the conscious part I guess, the brain is, is dealing with the storing of it. The brain is your computer, that stores all this stuff. And, and there's all kinds of things inputting data into that brain, and you know, beyond, beyond that head there's, there's something else, you know, that keeps us in touch with all kinds of things...I don't know what, the *medium* is, or I don't know what the *method* is, but I do know that something works. And there's more to it than this little body—with this big body—we have [laughing] that has a brain in it, that's...computing data and all that...There's more to it.

Judith applied this general analogy to her own experience at the party, in which, as she said in her story, she felt words come out spontaneously, to tell her husband to take her home:

...in the middle of feeling really, drunk, really having a good time, it was like somebody hit me in the stomach and without any, warning or anything about what I was going to say, I said to my husband, "We have to go home NOW."

Applying the computer metaphor to this production of words, Judith hypothesized as follows:

Even if it's my brain that's doing all the, taking the data, and computing it, and getting you know, plunking in my voice cells in my brain to trigger, those words...even if it's my, own brain, my physical brain within the scalp that's doing that, in the skull, there's still some, somehow, that data. Because my brain, my physical brain in this room, cannot be in another room a mile away. Physically. So, somehow there has to be some thing, way that my brain can pick up signals that are coming from other places.

The "thing" that Judith seemed to prefer—at least in this interview--as the conveyor of distant facts, was the spirit of a beloved dead person: "I do believe in mental telepathy. *But in that instance* [emphasis mine] it's more that I think there was a third, party," who, as she went on to explain, might be any one of her dead loved ones, operating as an extension of the general and higher power of God—whom Judith described hopefully as a he, or a she, or an it.

### **Vernacular Philosophy II: Ben**

My most salient memory of the informant I call "Ben Hayworth" was his tendency to clutch his head, upsetting his heavy glasses slightly from his nose, and fix his eyes on some invisible in the empty space immediately surrounding him, in a gaze of obstinate penetration à la Vincent Price. Ben did this whenever he used the word "paranormal," to convey, I think, his discerning consciousness of that word's power and meaning in contemporary popular culture. He also burst into an uncontrollable,

nervous kind of laughter, again and again throughout his interview, barely able to conceal his delight with his own endless strings of colorful illustrations of “ESP,” “premonitions,” and cultural hypotheses that seemed to fascinate him and strike him as absurd, at the same time. He brought this unforgettable style to a broad range of profound themes he favored: the incomprehensible inevitability of death, and its permanence, for everyone currently alive on the planet; the extravagance of “psychic” and “paranormal” explanations where more ordinary ones might work just as well to explain experience of coincidence; the existence of ghosts and God; the strengths and weaknesses of the human species in comparison with other orders of animals; and the functional appeal of religious belief in the context of serious illness.

Ben blew into my fieldwork like a tumbleweed out of nowhere. Responding to the “Is ESP Baloney?” leaflet, he showed up on 23 February 1995 for an interview in an empty classroom on the fourth floor of the Arts and Education Building at MUN. He was a genuine autodidact, I believe, a scholar against the odds, a Newfoundland version of Orson Welles, with an unflattering pair of spectacles that Hollywood would have asked him to lose before his screen test. Having grown up on social assistance in boarding houses in St. John’s, with poverty and illness surrounding him, he spoke with the accent of a tough townie. At thirty-five, his age when I met him, he was working to finish his bachelor’s degree at Memorial, and his conversation demonstrated his flair for and absorption with his subjects of specialization, archaeology and physical anthropology.

I consider Ben as much of a narrator and a philosopher as Judith, although some readers might object to my referring to or presenting Ben's testimony as "narrative" at all. For the most part, Ben does not in fact tell "stories" in the conventional sense of that word. I would argue that he is indeed a narrator, though, because he habitually illustrated his critical points so colorfully, with situational, character-based examples—nutshell narratives, if you will. These narrative models, as they might also be called, were often *hilarious*, too: hilarious in their content and in their style of delivery (see Narrative Inventory in the Appendices for a complete listing of his stories, models, and points of argument). Ben's narrative models are brief, as brief as jokes, but they are carefully phrased and very well-timed: polished, I suspect, in his repertoire as something of a stand-up comic conversationalist.

Ben was a consummate performer at all times. In his narrative models he was able and more than willing to imitate the inflections and diction of so many voices other than his own, to convey horror, condescension, fear, bewilderment, skepticism, and many other moods and modes, often bracketing all of them within an ironic, parodic, or otherwise clearly playful frame. He had me sick with laughter, and astonished me with the sophistication of his imagination and critical thinking. Of all those with whom I spoke for this study, I think Ben was my favorite teacher. He taught me the most, by taking me far outside my own perspectives and back, with great humor to boot. What I have called his "nutshell narratives" or narrative models is akin to what Pauline Greenhill (1994) has called "*generalization narratives*." These models—two of

which I am about to reproduce—served Ben’s skeptical outlook well—in much the same way that a detailed personal experience narrative might serve a person with other kinds of beliefs. Ben’s narrative models exemplified his familiarity with kinds of belief narrative that *could* be told—that *he* could tell, if he chose to—to exemplify simultaneous “ESP,” “premonitions” of the future, or other forms of “the paranormal.” He used his own models, however, to deconstruct these kinds of narrative, to explain them away, perhaps—or, rather, explain them *his* way.

My two favorites of Ben’s various narrative models—the “Pass Me The Bananas” model and “Oh God, Jack” model which follow—emerged out of our discussion of what a “mind” could be:

B: Well the mind, I suppose, is the consciousness contained in the brain. Ah, ahm. A consciousness that that, I don’t think that we—we tend to think that we’re the only creatures that really have it, but I think probably we share it with most other creatures on the earth. I know I’ve got a—we’re told constantly that [adopting grave voice of authority] “Well, maybe chimpanzees have some ability to cognate, maybe dolphins, but all the other animals just run purely on instinct.” [talking in his normal voice] Well, I’ve always owned housecats, and I can *bloody well tell you* that housecats are as smart, or smarter than people sometimes [laughing], I’ve seen them do some uh, pretty—so I don’t think it’s something that, that we have exclusively.

And that’s another thing. I mean if we have ESP—if, if ESP exists—and we have ESP, why are we the only ones that have ESP? Have you ever walked by a chimpanzee cage and gotten this certain [pauses, clutches head] “Oh my God, I’m being *communicated* with!” right? [hypnotic monotone] PASS ME ALL THE BANANAS. PASS ME ALL THE BANANAS [E chokes laughing. B’s voice goes on, nearly breaking:] GIVE ME YOUR PEANUTS. NOW. [B takes breath, continues, barely retaining ability to speak] I mean it’s, it’s a logical question, I mean, if, if we [laughing] if we have ESP, why don’t other animals have ESP, because, conceivably other animals also have minds.

They're capable of making decisions, especially chimpanzees. Chimpanzees use and make tools. They uh, they uh, they have a long childhood just like we do, in which they have to acquire a lot of information. So it, they're very, very similar to us, biologically and behaviorally, to us. So I mean if we have ESP, if ESP exists, why don't *they*? I mean, *what? what?*-- do chimpanzees like-- [B pauses; E giggles, sensing another model coming on] I'm sure if a chimpanzee could see, you know, [clutching head, tone of horrified panic] "*Oh God, Jack's going to be eaten by a lion*" when he goes somewhere [E chokes laughing again, B continues in shaky voice] I'm sure there'd be a hell of a lot less chimpanzees eaten by lions than there are presently.

Ben's first "Pass Me The Bananas" narrative model demonstrates that he is familiar with the basic frame of a belief narrative which could sustain a simultaneous ESP (telepathy) hypothesis. Similarly, the "Oh God, Jack" model shows he understands the frame of a belief narrative supporting either a simultaneous or a premonitory ESP hypothesis. The fact that he uses narrative models instead of telling full-length memorates of these kinds could be explained by typecasting him as a disbeliever, a debunker, a skeptic on most counts. If this is true, it would seem important to give his style of narrating, as an expression of the "traditions of disbelief," equal consideration alongside the narrative habits of believers—the full-length, first-person belief narrative. Acknowledging the parity of Ben's kind of testimony is in line with David Hufford's recommendations in "Traditions of Disbelief" (1982b). Gillian Bennett echoes Hufford's point in her article, "The Rhetoric of Tradition" (1987, 32):

[Hufford's] essays significantly altered my attitude to the research I was then conducting into supernatural beliefs, memorates and legends. Chiefly, I began to record the comments and arguments put forward by sceptics as a form of folklore on a par with the narratives of believers, and drew up a catalogue of the reasoning used by both sides in the philosophical battle for the supernatural.

It is for precisely this reason that I present and discuss Ben's testimony—his narrative models—alongside the other, more conventional examples of belief narrative.

However, Hufford's and Bennett's calls for parity between forms of folklore which represent the polarities of belief and disbelief in the possibility of supernatural experience presuppose a dialectic—between the traditions of belief and disbelief in the supernatural itself. There is *more* going on in Ben's use of narrative models than the defense of one side of this dialectic, or the other. True, Ben may be typified as a disbeliever, skeptic, and debunker, on most counts: yet his narrative models had a way of taking me—for at least a few moments—somewhere else entirely: into a realm of multiple possibilities I had not considered before, the realm of vernacular philosophy. I will introduce this concept further here, and throughout this chapter, and I will explore its theoretical value in the thesis conclusion.

The escape hatch from belief/disbelief dialectics in Ben's two narrative models is the word "if." "*If* ESP exists," he says, "*if* we have ESP," he adds, then—why not imagine *if* a chimpanzee had it. Ben uses the word "if" to take him to a hypothetical situation which he portrays (and probably believes, personally) to be ludicrous, but which he is nevertheless able to *imagine*, as are we, the listeners, along with him. His imaginary situation—a primate sending a human the "vibes" to do this or that, at any given moment—engages us nonetheless, and, moreover, in spite of the dialectics of belief or disbelief. Ben's "if" reduces the dialectics of belief and disbelief to a black hole, thankfully distant, into which (to twist an astrophysical comment of Stephen Hawking's around) our broadest, most speculative thinking need not be sucked up,

narrowed, and flattened into spaghetti.<sup>18</sup> Remarkably, I think, Ben leads a listener to consider two important points: why it is that we might or might not attribute ESP as easily to animals as to humans, and why it is that chimpanzees at large (not unlike humans) can't seem to evade death by natural selection, due to the usual predators on the evolutionary scale. Translating the primate analogy back into human terms, the questions become: *do* we attribute ESP to humans over primates because it inflates our species-ego? If so, is ESP any more or less likely to exist, in humans or in primates? If ESP existed, would it not, presumably, reduce the incidence of accidental death? If it did not enhance species fitness, why might it not? If it did so, how could this reduction be measured, within our species or another? What, finally, might the limits be on communication across species lines?

### **What Might Vernacular Philosophy Be?**

This manipulation of if-then propositions, in the interest of exploring imaginative or speculative models of the real world, to generate new hypotheses about the way the world appears to work—*this* is the dialectic of vernacular philosophy. By “new” I don’t presume to mean “new” in an absolute sense. Many or most of these hypotheses are not new to formal philosophy, for example, or to folklore, but I am sure they are fresh and new to the tellers at times, and new to the listeners, new to many, if not to all. These ideas were certainly new and fresh to me. In this realm of thinking, the “sides in the philosophical battle for the supernatural” (Bennett 1987, 32) collapse upon each other, or, better yet, hold their fire, in the interest of common contemplation



of what reality would be like if a set of rather spontaneous and not necessarily formulaic propositions were proposed to apply in a given instance. Ben goes to just such a hypothetical place, one which is, above all, open to believer and disbelievers alike. In this thought-space, terms like “supernatural” and “evolutionary” are reduced—by their users—to the presuppositions behind them, or expanded—to the ramifications which extend from them. In this process, they lose their power, I think, as weaponry in a preconceived dialectical debate about the reality of the experience(s) under discussion. No one need question whether Ben’s models are real experience in the personal sense of sane and accurate perception. Ben does not narrate personal experience exactly—but his use of narrative models requires listeners to consider whether they might represent the real order of the real world, just as personal experience narratives represent “the real” in the general sense, in addition to the personal. Similarly, no-one need necessarily doubt whether a first-person belief narrative like Judith’s is true, as long as it is internally consistent in one telling, and, perhaps, somewhat consistent across repetitions. Truth can be hoped for and imagined, while not necessarily *presumed*, all along—throughout these informants’ descriptions of experience and their attempts to explain experience, too.

The point is not solely whether these various examples of “narrative”—Ben’s or Judith’s—inspire “belief or disbelief”; the point is, also, the deeper thinking they generate about the reality of the world, versus its appearances in story at the preliminary, superficial level of first review, or first hearing, of any story. It is at this

deeper level that Judith and Ben, who might both be type-cast admittedly as the “believer” versus the “skeptic,” meet not as opponents, necessarily, but as equals mutually invested in the common project of thinking philosophically about the implications of their respective examples. At the level of “if,” both parties are well-qualified to speak, and to engage in dialogue, rather than an ongoing battle made a bit too predictable by traditional formulae. At the level of vernacular philosophy the description of experience, and the project of interpreting it, remain always potentially new, and rather more exciting.

I should clarify, too, that I am not trying to set up some new (and mistaken) theoretical dichotomy, between “the dialectics of belief and disbelief” in folkloristics and vernacular philosophizing. An ability to identify—see through—the traditional formulae by which people dismiss or affirm each other’s personal experience stories (or third-hand accounts) as accurate representations of actual experience is one of the most exciting contributions folklorists have made to interdisciplinary dialogue about folk belief, religion, anomalous experience, and personal narrative. We think deeply about sidedness in camps of committed belief for or against the supernatural. Yet not all belief is committed, or for, or against a supernatural order; not all serious and meaningful thinking about questions of belief is necessarily even moving toward or away from such sided commitment. The deeper (or to be fair, different) thinking these examples inspire—vernacular philosophy—can nevertheless expand to examine issues surrounding truth in testimony. Identifying instances of vernacular philosophy should

not prevent folklorists from taking the issue of truth value seriously, alongside the power of the if-then propositions. They are separable and separate issues, to my mind.

From a perspective like “vernacular philosophy,” we folklorists might never be required to “suspend our disbelief” (or our will to believe, for that matter) for the sake of respecting informants’ testimony or at the cost of esteeming truth value—any more than we expect our informants to do this, for us. Judith’s story, for example, retains its philosophical implications regardless of what listeners decide about the credibility of her testimony as a representation of real experience. We might dismiss the story, perhaps the entire experience itself, as a shaky memory of someone who had admittedly had some alcohol at a party. Perhaps the whole thing was “merely” an alcohol-induced anxiety attack which happened to coincide with an emergency at home. Judith already dares us all to consider these line of thinkings, when she laughs and calls this account one of her “psychedelic stories.” Nevertheless, the story functions as a thought-experiment: it provokes this philosophical interest, by the “if” (it were true) and the “then”—then how could we explain it? It sets out the project of explanation before us like a ready meal beckoning at a common table. The door of “if” is the door to vernacular philosophizing, and it remains obstinately ajar.

## **2.2 Narrative Form: Some General Findings**

The previous section leads rather naturally into discussion of what terms like “narrative” or “story” can mean, if they cannot be applied in quite the same way to all the twenty ESEN examples I am about to discuss below. I use these terms here (and in

my Appendices) with some qualifications. Calling all my examples "stories" might lend a false homogeneity to the diversity of their "narrative" forms. I am using the terms "story" and "narrative" more open-endedly than these terms are used by Labov and Waletzky (1967), Labov and Fanshel (1977), Labov (1982), Blehr (1967), Butler (1990), and other folklorists. While most of my 20 examples are first-person belief narratives (memorates) concerning simultaneous experiences, I also present here what Pauline Greenhill (1994) calls "generalization narratives" related to simultaneous experience (Grace's Story B, Ben's previously discussed "Oh God Jack" model and others of his grouped under the heading "Ben's Non-Story"), stories of family experiences (Karen's Story, Diana's Stories), and one story of the experience of a friend (Grace's Story D).

In the context of interviews, it was not often clear, to me, when a "narrative"<sup>19</sup> was truly over. Informants had and took multiple opportunities during their interviews to return to and re-narrate portions of previously narrated experience, for clarification or expansion. While some accounts were encapsulated clearly by opening and closing formulae, some were not. My editorial presentations of the beginnings and endings of these narratives in the "Narrative Transcripts" section are therefore somewhat arbitrary. As a rule, I considered a narrative to have "finished" when an informant's turn at speaking at length about past experience had ended, for the moment, and interview communication had shifted into conversational dialogue about the informant's present-day assessments of the described past experience.

More than half the examples in this collection seem to begin with statements of the dates and/or places in which experiences occurred, a finding consistent with Labov and Waletzky's notion of an "orientation" section with which narratives generally open.<sup>20</sup> However, this pattern was not consistent. Not *all* narrators provided such specific information within their accounts; some provided these details later in their interviews, in follow-up contacts, or not at all. Dates were left out of accounts, I noticed, more often than places. Virtanen notes one instance in which the year given for a simultaneous experience changed between two versions of the story (Virtanen 1990, 13-14); I have noted more significant discrepancies across versions, which I will discuss below.

Stories like Judith's, Darla's, Maureen's, and Matthew's in this collection began not with orientations but with what Labov and Waletzky would call an "evaluation," an interpretive commentary which might ordinarily appear later on in a personal experience narrative, following, rather than preceding, the description of a complicating action.<sup>21</sup> Judith, Darla, and Maureen started off their stories by talking first about how the events they were about to describe could or should be interpreted.

(Judith)

*One particular incident that really reinforced my sense that there was more to this world than what we see and hear, was in the summer...*

(Darla)

*One [story I'm about to tell you] has to do with a response to grief, the haircutting episodes...this is one of my sisters...*

(Maureen)

*It's always been there for me...but it wasn't until I was about, eight years old that I realized that uh, it wasn't a natural thing. I still don't think it's a really natural thing. And it wasn't something I wanted...it never bothered me and it was never something that ah, I considered abnormal until, I had a bad experience...*

(Matthew)

*One thing that happened to me, that I was going to tell you about—and these things don't happen to me, you know, generally. I don't have rafts of stories of experiences that have happened to me, or I've heard of, a few...but anyway...*

I was surprised to hear informants start stories with interpretive comments, especially since my interviews began *not* with questions, but with brief prompts for any simultaneous experience stories an informant would like to tell me. Interpretive opening statements may have been these informants' ways of making it clear to me, in the context of these interviews, that they were as interested in explanations for their experiences as I seemed to be.

Presenting the ends of these stories also seemed a somewhat arbitrary editorial task. The only case in which the phrase "the end" appears, for example, is in Alan's second version, a written text which Alan spent a half hour composing and editing, then sent to me via electronic mail. The many other phrases in oral examples which might indicate closure ("that's the story," "so, that was about it," "there's no explanation," "that's one of the stories I always...remember," short interpretive remarks, and joking comments) did so almost provisionally, sometimes leading into continued narration. False- or near-endings and backings-up seemed to be permissible and even appropriate in these interview contexts, or perhaps with this subject matter. In many cases I was able to edit transcripts so that accounts "ended" after sections that return the narrative perspective to the present moment (what Labov and Waletzky called the "Coda"<sup>22</sup>);

however, in the context of the interview, I rarely felt sure that informants might not back up and re-narrate at any time, and sometimes they did.

Finding that narratives in the field don't necessarily match theoretical models is hardly new. My findings are rather consistent in this respect with those of Gillian Bennett, who discovered (1986) that elderly women narrators in Manchester, England told "supranormal" stories in nonlinear and nonchronological sequences because they were explaining their experiences, in addition to simply describing them. Bennett's study led her, too, to "doubt the universal applicability of the most commonly used model of oral narrative structure," namely, Labov and Waletzky's 1967 study (Bennett 1986, 415, *passim*). Bennett extends this line of argument in later published studies.

Even long pauses seemed only partially reliable signs that stories were coming to their ends. In many of these interviews, there seemed to be an unlimited sense of time to return to questionable points in the accounts in order to re-explore or clarify. Madelyne, for example, seemed to me to be concluding her account with wry reflection on her own portion of responsibility for the death of her cat ("so I can't complain"), but when she launched later in the interview into a full description of her dream's contents, I was faced with the problem of whether to represent "I can't complain" as the end of the story, or to include the later expansion as the last part of the whole. I chose the latter, because it seemed to me that the expansive dream report might have been incorporated into her initial narration of her experience, had she felt more relaxed earlier in the interview. As Madelyne continued to talk to me, she seemed to become more analytical and more oriented to explaining and interpreting the details of her own experience. A crucial interpretive point about her story—the fact that she believed she was intuiting the beginning of her mother's last illness, not just the death of the cat she had left, somewhat irresponsibly, behind in her mother's house—emerged much later in

her interview, well after the story, in its fits and starts, was over. Similar editorial decisions were made in representing the endings of other accounts.

In my experience during this research, interviewees and I have had a general agreement, not a formal one, on when a "story" was over during an interview, and when the question-and-answer period had begun. However, the rules were very often subject to alteration, or suspension. In the context of an induced natural context like an interview, it is probably not surprising that people sometimes felt they could back up into portions of their narrative, so as to expand or explain. However, I suspect it is also possible that ESEs raise so many intriguing questions about what people can possibly know about other people's distress at a distance, that returns, re-narrations, and re-interpretations of key time sequences and details for the purpose of clarification and evaluation might be their more-or-less natural, and not very predictable, style of delivery.

Probably the most obviously questionable cases identified as "stories" in this collection are what I have called Ben's "Non-Story" and Grace's Story B. My inclusion of both of these generalization accounts warrants explanation. As already stated, above, Ben's strong beliefs and arguments that telepathy and other "paranormal" phenomena do not exist seem to have precluded his providing any lengthy account of personal experience which might suggest comfort with or even indecision about such propositions. When I asked Ben, in the same way I had asked others, if he had ever had an extraordinary simultaneous experience, he repeatedly responded by noting that such experiences happen all the time, and could be explained in such-and-such a way. In other words, Ben repeatedly *chose* to use colorful, situational examples (narrative models or nutshell narratives) to challenge the principles involved in such stories, rather than to narrate any sustained, exemplary experience. When asked, later in the



interview, if he could tell a ghost story, Ben demonstrated that, indeed, he *could*: he provided an account of an experience which he knew--listing his reasons--had not, in fact, been a ghost. It seemed clear to me that Ben, like many people, might have been manipulated by multiple requests, variously phrased, into telling more "stories" rather than just using narrative models--but like Hawthorne's *Bartleby*, Ben simply, sincerely, "preferred not to."

Ben's contributions underline the point that persons whose beliefs lead them to explore skeptical explanations in meaningful ways, rather than tell a "story" in the conventional sense of personal experience narrative, should not be excluded as speakers about belief. If traditions of belief and disbelief are to merit equal consideration, committed disbelievers' preferred tactics of discourse ought to appear and be analyzed alongside those of the range of other speakers invested in exploring the same issues, as Bennett and Hufford have already argued. As Gary Butler points out in *Saying Isn't Believing* (1990, 75), Dégh and Vazsonyi (1976, 112) have examined the coexistence of negative or anti-narratives (narratives which oppose, rather than uphold, a given folk belief) with narratives upholding the same belief. Ben's anti-simultaneous-experience generalizations are an interesting Newfoundland contrast to Butler's finding that no negative-narrative tradition for death token stories seemed to exist among French-speaking Newfoundlanders in L'Anse-à-Canards, indicating "general acceptance of this belief" there (Butler 1991, 75).

Grace's Story B is, like Ben's, not the conventional package of opening, developing, and closing action that could be meant by the term "narrative," but a series of generalized, related cases conveying key views and propositions. Examples in Grace's Story B could have been expanded *into* full-length stories, but they were not. In the case of Grace's Story B, one proposition being explored is the idea that sisters

can literally share experiences, such as the pain of an illness, across a spatial separation. Both Grace's Story B and Ben's narrative models might be described by Greenhill's notion of the "generalization narrative" (1994, 10).

Greenhill observes that generalizations have been disregarded in folkloristics as being less authentic folklore than narratives (1994, 35) and her assertion that although "North Americans *do* repetitively tell stories about incidents that happened to them,"

...they also conventionally narrate generalizations...in similar contexts to those in which personal experience stories are used...tellers strategically use these two types to make different kinds of statements. (Greenhill 1994, 35-36)

Greenhill goes on to claim that "the generalization implies the relevance of a situation or observation beyond a single incident, where a personal experience does not." (Greenhill 1994, 36). While I have definitely found both kinds of narrative modes present in the context of my interviews, as Greenhill predicted, I doubt her predicate. If there were not some element of the general in the personal experience narrative, the narrative would never be told. I have not found, and personally I doubt, that personal experiences necessarily have any less general philosophical import; perhaps Greenhill was speaking more speculatively than it might appear. PENs are subject to different objections insofar as their being individual or personal (i.e. "subjective") accounts. The generalization (or narrative model) is probably the safer rhetorical form as its authority is not personal but general. As I stated above, I have found that the philosophical questions that PENs raise are as engaging—to me, to other listeners, and to these speakers themselves—as those expressed through Ben's (and other informants') generalized models.

### **2.3 How Selected Examples Fit the Hypothetical ESEN Pattern: Analytical Arguments**

This section discusses how and whether each of 20 examples selected from my larger story corpus fits the initial general definition of the story pattern. Ten of the 20 examples are rather clear matches to the proposed pattern (1, 5, 6, 9, 12, 14, 15, 16, 18, and 19). Ten others present more challenging analytical problems (2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 10, 11, 13, 17, and 20). More than half of the latter examples can be *argued* to fit the ESEN definition, however. In this revised presentation, I present the arguments for how and why the borderline cases can be understood to fit. To facilitate the arguments to follow, I present short summaries of these two groups of example narratives, in Figures 2.2 and 2.3; readers may need to refer to these short summaries to follow my arguments in the next two sections.

#### **Profile of the Story Corpus from Which Examples Are Taken**

My 20 ESEN examples come out of a larger initial collection of belief narratives, which I will describe. As readers can see if they refer to the Narrative Inventory in the Appendices (A), the corpus from the initial interviews included 113 full-length stories, 29 story fragments [brief outlines or incomplete versions of existent narratives of personal experience], 34 story kernels [allusions to existent stories by a single line or other very brief references], 14 narrative models or “generalization narratives” [explained above], and one joke.<sup>23</sup> Of these 113 belief narratives, 13 (about 12 % of the total) were straightforward matches to my ESEN definition; 11 were what I considered near matches or possible variants on this hypothetical pattern. The range of remaining narratives included what I would call premonition stories, ghost stories, twin stories, stories about life-threatening illness, and miscellaneous anomalous experience stories.

The teller of the greatest number of full-length stories in the initial informant group was Grace, with 17. A number of informants told only one full-length story. One informant (Nora) contributed a kernel but no full-length stories or fragments. The average number of stories (full-length) per informant in this group (113 divided by 26 informants, not including Teresa) was 4.3. If narrative models were considered the equivalent to full-length stories for the reasons I outlined above, Ben (with 4 stories and 14 narrative models) would rival Grace (17 stories) as the most prolific “narrator” in the group.

The 24 narratives which matched or nearly matched my ESEN pattern (whose summaries appear in boldface in the Narrative Inventory) constituted a little over 21% (the largest single story category) in this total corpus. Of these 24 I selected 18 full-length stories. To represent the more generalized narration habits of some informants, I chose to include two more selections: a generalized series of personal experiences of shared pain, from Grace (Grace’s Story B) and a series of narrative models about simultaneous/premonitory experience from Ben (Ben’s “Non-Story”). The total of 113 excludes (1) all duplicate story versions, (2) any stories I told myself in the course of interviewing, (3) one story (Teresa’s) collected in a taped interview immediately prior to my thesis fieldwork, and (4) a handful of stories collected in untaped interviews during this fieldwork project. As Table 2.2 indicated, above, I did collect 15 more stories (listed as “yes” to Told Story Like and Told Story Close categories in Table 2.2), through my supplementary fieldwork survey with the University of Massachusetts group in August 1998. Of these stories (which, like my earlier corpus, included stories about life-threatening illness, premonition stories, and other anomalous experience stories), five were clear matches to the ESEN pattern by my estimation. The students who told these five stories (Fred, Lucille, Maria, and Deidre, who told two) told them

**Figure 2.2.**  
**Summaries of ESEN Examples (Straightforward Matches)**  
**(Story #s 1, 5, 6, 9, 12, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19)**

<u>Story Number/Name</u>	<u>Summary</u>
<b>1 Judith's Story</b>	During a party, summer 1992, Judith suddenly experiences urgent need to return home immediately. She and husband leave party without saying goodbye. At home, they discover their son is seriously ill and afraid he is going to die. They remove him from his room, phone hospital, feed him coffee, and bathe his face in cold water until he improves. A few days later, through questioning, they discover he had painted his room with patio stain. Symptoms on can match; they conclude he was poisoned by inhaling paint fumes without ventilation.
<b>5 Sheila and Mary's Story</b>	Sheila goes to England in September knowing fraternal twin sister Mary. In Newfoundland, was scheduled to have surgery between July and December. Sisters exchange few letters and phonecalls, before and/or after Mary has surgery. Mary and family in Newfoundland decide not to tell Sheila the surgery date. At breakfast one morning Sheila panics suddenly, feeling "her world is threatened," and cries, concluding it must be Mary, since nothing is threatening her immediately. She feels "cut off" from Mary, believing she has had a car accident and is dead. Sheila phones home immediately, 5:00 a.m. Newfoundland time, and discovers Sheila is in the hospital about to have surgery.
<b>6 Madelyne's Story</b>	After moving to Vancouver and leaving cat with her mother in Newfoundland, Madelyne has a realistic dream in which she overhears her mother telling someone she has had the cat put down. Madelyne wakes up feeling this has in fact occurred; speaks to brother a week later and he confirms the cat has been put down, assuming her mother told her. Thinking back she believes she had the dream "the same day" the cat was put down, and also believes she was intuiting the beginning of her mother's last illness.
<b>9 Alan's Story</b>	Alan is on third floor of his house, occupied at desk, with door closed, when he hears doorbell ring. Immediately, he knows a friend of his mother is at the door, because she has just left her husband. He hears muffled voices. Approximately an hour and a half later he decides this must have been a psychic experience. Between 1 and 2 weeks later, Alan talks with his mother, who confirms that this woman had indeed visited for that reason on that night.

**Figure 2.2, Continued**  
**Summaries of ESEN Examples (Straightforward Matches)**  
**(Story #s 1, 5, 6, 9, 12, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19)**

<u>Story Number/Name</u>	<u>Summary</u>
<b>12 Laura's Story</b>	Sleeping soundly, Laura dreams she is talking with her father on the phone. He tells her he is in some trouble but that she is not to worry, because he will be okay. The phone rings and Laura wakes up. Her mother tells her her father has had a heart attack and has been taken to the hospital. Laura tells her mother it was not a heart attack and remains calmer than usual during a crisis, knowing her father will be okay. Her father is diagnosed with spasming esophagus. Laura tells father about her dream; he smiles and tells her he had been thinking about her and knew she would be worried.
<b>14 Grace's Story B</b>	(Generalized Examples of Simultaneous Illness Experiences with Sister) Grace's sister Diane in Halifax gets sick; Grace (in Newfoundland) will get same thing at same time, roughly, not quite as bad. In St. John's, one time, Grace goes to hospital with bad headache; diagnosed as a migraine. Informs her mother in Bonavista (NF) of what happened; mother tells her her sister had just called from hospital with a migraine, also. Also experienced simultaneous pain when sister had appendicitis surgery (which uncovered a cyst, not appendicitis) and says they share jaw pain, and pain after the surgery, on an ongoing basis.
<b>15 Grace's Story C</b>	After getting out of hospital for depression in 1990, Grace has a vivid daydream in class. In daydream, she walks up to tree in woods, is replaced then by a young man, who ties something like rope around tree and hangs himself. Grace "shocks herself" out of daydream and gets back to work in class. She tries to forget about daydream but can't. A few days later her mother tells her of a young man from St. John's who ran away and hanged himself with an extension cord in the forest. Grace tells her mother about the dream and is taken back to her psychiatrist. She does not get over this, is unable to cope, and is rehospitalized.
<b>16 Grace's Story D</b>	Grace's friend, age 30, from Clarendville, NF, is sitting at home watching television one winter day. Suddenly she declares her son Walter is drowning after skating on the pond. Her husband is puzzled. She takes husband to pond and finds son has fallen through the ice. The son is rescued/injured/dies (information left out). In speaking with Grace about such experiences, this woman tells Grace she has come to believe this ability is a gift from God.

**Figure 2.2, Continued**  
**Summaries of ESEN Examples (Straightforward Matches)**  
**(Story #s 1, 5, 6, 9, 12, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19)**

<u>Story Number/Name</u>	<u>Summary</u>
18 Maureen's Story	When Maureen is about eight, she dreams about a woman in a townhouse, trying to save her baby during a fire; she does not "make it." Maureen wakes up crying. In the morning, her father reads a newspaper account of a downtown fire (Halifax) in which a single mother and young child died. Maureen is frightened, and does not tell her parents about the dream.
19 Irina's Story	When Irina is on day shift as nursing supervisor, a blind man, about 44, is admitted to coronary critical care after a massive heart attack. She talks with him, notes that he is stable, on a cardiac monitor and IV, but not on ventilator. Irina sees him once more before leaving and goes home thinking about him. She has a clear detailed dream that night in which she and man are floating above his hospital bed. His relatives are around edge of bed. Man does not wish to leave his family but she comforts him and encourages him to move on. He does. She awakens and notes time on clock is "exactly twenty minutes after three." At work next day, nurses tell her the man was pronounced dead at ten to three, and they had been unable to ventilate him or do anything to save him. Irina follows up by asking pathologist about cause of death, a massive infarct of chest wall.

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**Please note: Summaries are condensations of "Central Descriptive Features," elements in my original analyses of these stories, which also appear in the Appendices.**

### Figure 2.3.

#### Summaries of ESEN Examples (Problematic Matches)

(Story #s 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 10, 11, 13, 17, 20)

<u>Story Number/Name</u>	<u>Summary</u>
2 Alicia's Story	In Toronto, September 1998, Alicia has a dream which goes as follows: She awakens in early morning light, goes to apartment bedroom window where blind is up, sees a demonic face there. The window changes to a tunnel down which demonic figure chases her. She arrives in a vaulted stone room with a chessboard. This dark, satanic, intelligent, and malevolent creature, with cloven hoofs, pointy face, and bright eyes advances toward her as if to kill her and she vanquishes him by seizing a King from the chessboard with a cross on it, saying, "I name you" three times. Alicia awakens, drenched in sweat. Two days later she receives a call notifying her that a former lover, with whom she had had a long, intense, and tempestuous relationship, had been killed around the time she had the dream, in a small plane crash in Switzerland.
3 Karen's Story	In Churchill Falls, Labrador, 1978-1980, Mrs. X wakes up in the night, sits up in bed, and sees a man standing at the foot of the bed for a few minutes. He has blond, curly hair and is wearing jeans and a shirt. He disappears. She is unable to move to wake her husband, an Anglican minister, until the experience is over. She knows she has seen a ghost. Next day in conversation with neighbors Mrs. X hears that a Roman Catholic woman across town had had the same experience on the same night; the RC woman has her house exorcised. Conversation with neighbors also reveals that the description matches a man who, years before, had died with his girlfriend by carbon monoxide poisoning, by backing his car into a snow bank, on the exact location of the X family's trailer.
4 Darla's Story	Darla and May, sisters, experience the death of three family members (both parents and a brother) within the space of three years. Two die by violent accidents. Within a year after the third death, within the same 24-hour period, and unbeknownst to each other, Darla and May remove their hair. Within several days of their haircuts they communicate by phone and are surprised to confirm the haircuts occurred on the same day. Neither sister seems to have been sure why she cut her hair as she was doing it. Both sisters seem to view such drastic haircuts as personally uncharacteristic for them, and odd. Both sisters let their hair grow back in.



**Figure 2.3, Continued**  
**Summaries of ESEN Examples (Problematic Matches)**  
**(Story #s 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 10, 11, 13, 17, 20)**

<u>Story Number/Name</u>	<u>Summary</u>
<b>7 Robert's Story</b>	In 1972 or 1973, while away from Toronto on a trip to Québec, Robert gets a clear vision of his young cat one night in bed, while he is in a state between waking and sleeping. In vision the cat is searching for him and Robert sends a "mental message" to the cat, telling it he loves it and will return. The image may have faded away, or Robert fell asleep. On returning to Toronto at the end of the week, Robert hears from housemates that the cat had disappeared for a few days but had come back. Neither the time of the cat's travels nor the day of the dream could be remembered and pinpointed exactly, in relation to each other; however, Robert believes that he and the cat "communicated" at that moment, implying simultaneity.
<b>8 Matthew's Story</b>	Matthew and girlfriend Rose do separate activities on Friday night. Matthew goes out for drinks and returns to a friend's house. Rose goes out to a party, gets into an accident, and passes away in hospital not long afterward. Matthew leaves his friend's house late in the night and composes part of poem for Rose during walk home. Words of the poem speak of "rest," "sleep," having "one more" before saying "goodnight," and a "fragile flower." At home he is informed Rose has died. In shock, he thinks back on poem he had been composing.
<b>10 Diana's Story A</b>	One of Diana's twin daughters has a Band-Aid [or two Band-Aids] on her knee. A teacher [or another student] in school told her if she soaked in the bathtub for "ten hours" the bandage would come off painlessly. In bathtub at home, Diana puts washcloths up to both girls' faces so as to remove the Band-Aid from one girl's knee. When she pulls the Band-Aid off, both girls reach for the same knee and start to cry. Diana asks why the twin without the Band-Aid is crying.
<b>11 Diana's Story B</b>	Diana's twin daughters are staying over at someone else's house [cabin], where one [or both] of them has a nightmare. They decide to put their heads together (literally) to make it better. Diana thinks it may have been about a killer clown. The girls take turns telling her how the dream went.

**Figure 2.3, Continued**  
**Summaries of ESEN Examples (Problematic Matches)**  
**(Story #s 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 10, 11, 13, 17, 20)**

<u>Story Number/Name</u>	<u>Summary</u>
13 Grace's Story A	Two weeks before her father's death in summer 1993, Grace begins telling friends "a storm is coming." She can imagine it and see storms clouds rolling in, when she closes her eyes. When asked to explain, Grace says, repeatedly, that something bad will happen within the next two weeks. She goes away to camp on Saturday morning and it starts to rain that night. After it starts raining hard, but not storming, at about 1:00 a.m., Grace wonders whether this might be the "storm" she was anticipating. The next morning after breakfast, camp director informs her her father had died at about 1:00 in the morning. Grace feels that at last she knows what the "storm" was she was anticipating. She describes the period immediately after her father's death as "stormy."
17 Ben's "Non-Story"	Various situational, character-based models which demonstrate Ben's familiarity (and skepticism) with the kinds of stories which convey a sense of "paranormal" knowing about other people's distress and other troublesome events, whether the knowledge is simultaneous or premonitory: these include the "Oh, Poor Little Billy" model, the "Aunt Matilda" model, the "Airline Crash" model, the "No Ship Sank" model, the "Pass Me the Bananas" model, the "Oh God Jack" model (models discussed at more length in arguments section below).
20 Aurora's Story	A small girl from Milburn, NF, gets lost in the woods, later claiming she was led astray by fairies and had hidden herself so as not to be seen, being afraid of them. The community searches for her for about a week. As the search party is giving up, a man from Lower Island Cove joins the search because he has had a dream about where she is. He goes to the woods and goes to the spot where she is hiding. The little girl (now 45-55 year old woman, known to the narrator) has one or two feet amputated.

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**Please note: Summaries are condensations of "Central Descriptive Features," elements in my original analyses of these stories, which also appear in the Appendices.**

as stories they perceived to be “very much like” Judith’s Story, which was the example ESEN from my corpus which was played for them in class. However, as Table 2.2 demonstrates, these and the other UMass students assigned a variety of labels to identify a variety of different categories they thought Judith’s story and/or their own stories fit into. I will return to the subject of informants’ methods of categorizing and labeling their own stories after the following arguments about the ESEN hypothesis.

### **Example Narratives Which Match the Initial Definition of ESEN**

In the thesis introduction, I defined extraordinary simultaneous experience narratives or “ESENs” as stories people tell about “just knowing” a death, an illness, or an accident was occurring in the life of another person, without communicating or being present with that person at that time. ESENs are first- or third-person accounts of social situations in which one person experiences immediate, meaningful personal knowledge of another’s status at a time of personal distress, despite the parties’ separation from each other at that time. Narrators’ notation of a precise or close correspondence in time between one person’s intuition and another’s distant distress is a primary characteristic of these stories.

This initial definition may be condensed to a formula with several essential elements. To meet this definition, an example narrative needs to be a (A) a first- or a third-person account, (B) which describes one person’s [(C) more or less simultaneous] knowledge of another’s status, (D) at the time of a crisis involving suffering [e.g., accident, illness, death], (E) while the parties are at some distance from each other. A review of the example narratives which I present in Figure 2.2 as the straightforward matches to this pattern, expressed in terms of the above formula, shows that all ten

narratives—story numbers 1, 5, 6, 9, 12, 14, 15, 16, 18, and 19—contain features that correspond with the essential elements of the formula.

The challenges which this group of example narratives present to the initial, hypothetical pattern are relatively minor, i.e., they do not, in my view, call for reformulations or further qualifications of the initial definition, as it is stated. Working through the stories at the level of each essential element in the formula, at levels A and B: one of these 10 examples, Story 5 (Sheila and Mary's Story) is a co-narrated account which "belongs" to both twin sisters—hence, strictly speaking, the example does more than describe "one person's experience" of another's status. In telling this story, the sisters alternate their perspectives—Sheila (the percipient) talks about her panic attack in England; Mary (the subject) recalls prepping for surgery at the time Sheila was—unbeknownst to her—frantically phoning their step-mother to find out what was wrong. All other examples in this nonproblematic grouping are accounts of the experience of one percipient. Grace's Story B (as discussed above) is a generalized "account" of several experiences which match the ESEN description, rather than a specific account of a single personal experience which matches that description. All other examples are "accounts" in the sense of specific descriptions of single experiences.

At level C, which concerns the description of the percipient's knowledge as more or less simultaneous, two of the ten examples are vaguer than the others about the synchronicity of events. Grace's Story C—the account of her vivid daydream of a suicide in St. John's—implies either simultaneity or foreknowledge; either reading is possible, but I suspect simultaneity is slightly more probable. Grace does not describe this experience in clearly premonitory terms, as she could have, and did in the case of another experience (as she does in her Story A, for example) in which she was able to

say that she felt something bad was *about to happen*. Her projecting herself into the first-person perspective of the boy, during her daydream, as if she was doing what he was doing along with him, could imply simultaneity. Likewise, the context of Grace's interview, in which she told me many more simultaneous experience stories than precognition stories, might also imply simultaneous intuition, rather than a foreknowledge of the suicide. In Madelyne's Story (Story 6), Madelyne says she believes she had her dream "the same day" her mother had to have her cat put down. She "believes," then, but is not sure; whether the synchronicity was precise, to the hour, is unknown, but remains a possibility; however, the real synchronicity in this story may not be reducible to a precise hour, as it may actually be between Madelyne's dream and the beginning of her mother's last illness, at that time, as Madelyne pointed out later in her interview.

As Madelyne is a short-story writer (and a good one), I suspect she may be prone to narrate and interpret even her personal experience metaphorically, to express multiple layers of meaning, including and beyond the literal. Hence the simultaneity in this narrative is uniquely difficult to pin down: there are two simultaneities being suggested, in two frames of time reference for correspondence. The correspondence between dream and cat's death is suggested, and might be precise to the hour; the correspondence between dream and the beginning of her mother's final decline is also suggested, and probably cannot be specified to an hour. The beginning of terminal illness would "occur" in a longer "moment" of time—a week, a day, the turning of a metaphorical season. Similarly, Maureen's account of her dream "the same night" as a woman and her baby die in a Halifax fire suggests that there was correspondence between the dream and the events of the fire during the night. Maureen does not speculate that her dream preceded the events, in any case. In the absence of precise-to-

the-hour correspondences, it seems just as safe to assume there is a simultaneous correspondence as that there was a premonitory one.

Working at level D, all ten narratives involve a percipient's knowledge of another person's suffering: forms of suffering range from a poisoning, open-heart surgery, commencement of final illness [and/or loss of family pet], dissolution of a marriage, a hospitalization, painful illnesses, a suicide, a near-drowning, deaths by fire, and a massive heart attack. None of the ten examples present any challenge to element D of the definition. Working at level E (distance)—the distance between percipients and subjects in all ten examples range from continents, coasts, provinces, miles, and, in one case, yards apart, separated by the stories and walls of a house. Most distances therefore can be described as geographical; one sense of "distance" (in Alan's Story, about intuiting his mother's friend's grief at the front door) might be better described as "spatial." The second ten examples I am about to discuss present much more problematic challenges to the essential elements of the definition.

### **How Problematic Examples Might Be Argued to Match (and Expand) the Initial Definition, Levels A through E**

#### *Level A*

A review of the example narratives which I present in Figure 2.3 as the problematic matches to this pattern, expressed in terms of the A-E letter formula, shows that all ten narratives—story numbers 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 10, 11, 13, 17, and 20—contain features that challenge one or more of the essential elements of the formula in substantial, rather than minor, ways. Working at level A ("first- or third-hand accounts"), all examples but Ben's narrative models match the general sense of "accounts" as specific descriptions of single, personal experiences. I have already discussed at some length my rationales for considering Ben's generalized narrative

models (and Grace's Story B, another generalization narrative) on par with more conventional personal experience narration. To allow for any future generalization narratives which correspond to the ESEN pattern at levels other than the A level, element A in the definition as it now stands might be expanded slightly, to read, "A first- or third-hand account, whether generalized or related to a single personal experience."

### *Level B*

Working at level B ("one person's personal knowledge of another's status"), Alicia's Story, Darla's Story, Karen's Story, Robert's Story, and Diana's Story B all present challenges to this element of the definition, either (a) because of the metaphorical, rather than realistic, correspondence of their knowledge with another's crisis, or (b) because the object of their knowledge is not clearly or not solely the crisis of the person with whom they are "in sync." In Robert's case, the object of his (realistic) vision is not person, not even metaphorically; it is a crisis in the life of animal. I included Robert's Story because it sets up interesting comparisons with Madelyne's.<sup>24</sup> Like Madelyne's, Robert's Story does match the ESEN definition pretty squarely at levels other than B. However, Robert's Story raises, more clearly, the question of whether the ESEN definition should be expanded to include "living things" at a distance. Madelyne's also raises this question, but only at the literal level; as she points out, the dream about the cat is "really" about the beginning of her mother's decline. If the ESEN definition were to be expanded to include animals, element B of the definition might need to read, "one person's knowledge of another living creature's status." At the end of this discussion of problematic examples, I will discuss whether or not each of the possible expansions of the ESEN definition seem justified, or not, in theoretical terms, and in view of patterns in my data as a whole.

Continuing at level B, though, other stories feature knowledge whose object is not necessarily that which I anticipated in the ESEN definition (another person's suffering in crisis). In both Darla's Story and Karen's Story, it would seem that, strictly speaking, there are two percipients who are "in sync" with each other in their awareness of (or connection with) a third "object," which is (Darla's Story) their common grief for the loss of three family members, or a threatening ghost appearing in two spots at once (Karen's Story). It is difficult, though not impossible, to conceive of the relationship between Darla and May, and Mrs. X and her neighbor (Karen's Story) as one of percipient and subject, as I will explain. As with Robert's and Madelyne's stories, these two permit interesting comparisons.

In a follow-up contact, Darla told me she would call the story of the two severe haircuts she and her sister underwent, provinces apart, on the same day, as a "synchronous grief response story." Darla did not seem to believe she and her sister were perceiving each other's pain that day. The distinction is rather subtle, however, between perceiving another's pain and sharing pain derived from a common—and pre-existing—stimulus. Darla stressed throughout her interview a close bond with her sister May; she described other simultaneous experiences which she did seem to believe had stemmed from the sisterly connection. In the haircutting story, though, Darla described the grief as something that had pre-existed the day of the haircut, the grief being the stimulus for her and her sister's parallel, simultaneous "response." It is thus problematic to call Darla and May "percipient and subject," although the overall grief the sisters shared could be understood to include each sister's awareness of the other's simultaneous experience of grief, at any given moment.

Compared with Darla's, Karen's Story, is less debatable. In Karen's case, two women simultaneously experience a visit from the same ghost (or, perhaps, as Karen



indicated, actually “dream” about the same dead person); unlike Darla and May, though, these two women have little personal knowledge of each other, other than residing in the same community. It is more difficult, in this case, to argue that the women are aware of each other’s experience during the experience; they do not learn of the simultaneity until after the fact, according to Karen’s testimony. It might be argued, I suppose, that each woman had personal knowledge of another person’s status at the time of a crisis—but the person is dead, and the crisis is over, at least in earthly time.

What, precisely, is going on in Diana’s Story B at level B is also open to some debate for a different set of reasons. It is not entirely clear, across versions, whether both Diana’s twin daughters had the same nightmare—and then described it to their mother (taped version), or, whether only one had the nightmare, as I had recorded in fieldnotes. I would give the taped version more credence for accuracy than my notes; however, I suspect Diana would have believed either to have been the case. On the two occasions I met with Diana, she treated her daughters’ tendency to co-narrate/co-claim so many of their experiences with a fair amount of kindly skepticism. If the two did have the same dream, it is still difficult, as with Darla and May, to separate a co-experiencing of a third stimulus (the dream) from an experiencing of each other’s experience.

The vehicle of Alicia’s personal knowledge of her ex-lover’s death is, rather like Madelyne’s dream about her “cat’s” death [but really her mother’s], a highly symbolic dream, which—by comparison to and rather more open to interpretation than the experiences of knowledge in the other example narratives. Unlike Madelyne’s metaphorical dream though (which I classed as a minor, rather than substantial variation at level B), Alicia does not appear to have sensed immediately that her

symbolic dream corresponded to a distant reality; it was a phonecall, two days later, notifying her of the simultaneous death of her lover, that seems to have made her interpret the dream as a simultaneous experience of the loss of this person. Alicia's Story raises the question of whether the ESEN definition should include experiences of knowledge which at the time they are experienced are not realistically correspondent, but highly symbolic and metaphorically connected. In view of the four examples I have just discussed, Darla's Story, Karen's Story, Diana's Story B, and Alicia's Story, I suggest that element B of the ESEN definition could be qualified as follows. ESENs would involve "one person's realistic, direct, and immediately realized personal knowledge of another's status" at a time of crisis. These qualifications to element B would exclude somewhat more clearly those accounts which involve highly symbolic experiences whose relation to the nature of the real crisis at hand (death, accident, illness, etc.) is open to broad (rather than obvious metaphorical) interpretation. The qualification also might exclude stories about dreams, visions, and so forth whose correspondence to distant crisis events does not suggest itself almost immediately, but emerges days or weeks later. ESENs, in other words, would be about *self-conscious* personal knowledge of another's status more or less on the spot: knowing that one knows about another, when one first knows it.

### *Level C*

Working at level C, where the knowledge is "more or less simultaneous," most of the examples meet this somewhat loose criterion for simultaneity, but four (Darla's Story, Matthew's Story, Grace's Story A, and Aurora's Story) present greater challenges, which I will address. First, however, readers may object that I have been too loose from the first, in my application of this element of the definition. Let me respond to such a potential criticism. I strongly suspect that belief in wondrous

meaning of synchronicity or simultaneity is expressed in these stories via apparently vague statements about correspondence between knowledge and crisis times. I maintain that these statements (e.g., “it may have been the same time,” “I think it was the same day, but we never sat down and figured out the times,” etc.) are not *simply* vague, though, but open-ended and suggestive—intentionally so.

Somewhat tentative statements about correspondences in time (and their measurement) encourage cautious (rather than gullible or immediate) belief in synchronicity, whose supernatural and other kinds of wonder, I have emphasized in other thesis chapters. The same may be said, too, for the expression of ghost belief in stories we might (or might not) call “ghost narratives”: narrators encourage listeners’ cautious belief, by saying they *think* (rather than asserting without a doubt) that they saw a ghost—with or without a statement of how they would or could have tested or measured their experience to back up such a belief about it. Hence, some open-endedness about correspondence in time seems to me to be part and parcel of the project of describing extraordinary synchronicities as real and true. In addition, some time statements in these example narratives *appear* to be more precise (e.g. “this happened at the exact same time”) while in fact, they are not. Beneath all these statements lies the question of what people believe time actually is; as philosophers have occupied themselves with this question for centuries, I do not expect my informants to have resolved this for themselves.<sup>25</sup> Their statements, though, do betray some assumptions about the nature of time, which I will discuss below, and I find it interesting to note (following D.W. Hamlyn’s history of western philosophy) that a number of philosophers, including the Presocratics and St. Augustine, have tried to solve the problem of defining time by asserting that time does not exist in any objective sense, apart from the perceivable changes in matter or the stream of events in the

continuous now (Hamlyn 1987, 24, 94). I have consistently, then, approached all examples in which open-ended statements about correspondences in time appear, as invoking belief in simultaneity—unless, as in the problematic examples I will now discuss—correspondence in time is described in debatable, or distinctly doubtful, terms.

In Darla's Story, her wonder at the synchronicity of her and her sister's spontaneous haircutting turns on an understanding of correspondence which is not "the exact same time" in the sense of that phrase which might imply a correspondence to the hour or the minute. It is enough, for Darla, in Newfoundland, that May, too, cut all her hair off the same day, in Ontario. Whether a correspondence in time is noted as the same hour, in one example, or the same day, in another, may not matter so much as the ability to qualify these correspondences as *very* same day, the *very* same hour or minute. Darla's sense of the window of time in which two events can be linked as wondrous "coincidence" stretches over a 24-hour period; the question is, on what basis can that window of time be comparable, in any sense, to more conservative, more apparently "exact" windows of correspondence, synchronicity within one hour, or synchronicity within one minute?

Confounding as it may sound, for the purposes of defining what is an essential element in my definition of this hypothetical story pattern—I suggest that what makes Darla's sense of simultaneity comparable to other narrators' sense of simultaneity is the fact that her sense of wonder is a relative, rather than an empirical, judgment about time: she chooses to attribute more significance to the proximity of the events to each other in time, than to their distance from each other in time. This is the meaning of the qualifiers "very" or "exact" alongside the phrases, "same time," or "same day"—"very" and "exact" do not imply measurement by a global time standard; they denote this

Table 2.3.

## Range of Representations of Simultaneity in Example Narratives

REPRESENTATIONS OF "SIMULTANEITY"	STORY + CDF#s
Meanwhile at home	Judith's Story (1, 2) Sheila/Mary's (4, 5, 6) Grace's D (1, 2, 3)
Meanwhile away from home	
About the same time as a dream, stated	Alicia's (3)
About the same time as a dream, implied by action	Laura's (1, 2, 3) Karen's (2)
Same night	Madelyne's (6)
Same day as a dream	Darla's (2)
Within same 24 hours	Robert's (5)
Meanwhile at home	
Later same night but probably not same time, not absolutely sure	Matthew's (4)
When [X occurred, then] ...both girls...cried out	Diana's A (1-4)
The same feelings...at the same time	Diana's A (2-5) Diana's A (3-4)
At the same time we started to cry	
When [X occurred then]...they put heads together	Diana's B, version 1 (1, 2)
"At the instant the doorbell rang" [X occurred and I knew]	Alan's, version 1 (2, 5)
"As soon as X and before I heard Y, I knew"	Alan's, version 2 (1)
Dreamed the same thing (same night)	Diana's B, version 2 (2) Grace's A, (4, 5)
About 1:00 and about 1:00, a.m.	
Possibly at same time as a daydream, implied by past tense of a news report some time after daydream	Grace's C, version 1 (2, 5)
Same night as a dream, implied by action	Maureen's, version 1 (2, 3) Irina's, version 1 (5, 6)
Same night, within same hour	Irina's, version 2 (3, 4)
Meanwhile (dream of location X while location X continued to be lost girl's hiding place)	Aurora's (1, 2, 3)

*CDF* = Central Descriptive Feature; see Appendix B.

relative judgment about correspondence in time, a judgment which other informants may or may not choose to recognize as significant. For other informants, the distance of two events within 24 hours will be more significant than their proximity; for these thinkers, perhaps. Darla's story will not seem really or truly to be about simultaneity. However, the language Darla uses to convey a sense of synchronicity or simultaneity resembles the language many (though not all) tellers of the example narratives used. Table 2.3 compares the range of ways in which simultaneity was represented across the example narratives.

Like the other informants, Darla's language indicates a relative, rather than absolute, value judgment about correspondence in time. As she put it:

Ah, we found out, comparing notes, that we had done the very same thing more or less at the same time...at the same time, you know? Within, I'm sure, the same 24-hour period, anyway. And we, neither of us knew, that we were doing this. And it was shocking to both of us.

The fact that Darla makes this judgment, in a pattern of language common to the tellers of nearly all these examples, cannot be ignored. According to this logic, I find it difficult to exclude Darla's Story, or Irina's Story (in which, in two versions of her story, Irina estimates the time difference between her dream and her patient's death to be a few minutes apart, but with either event occurring first) from consideration as an ESEN on the basis that the coincidence in them is somehow "not as simultaneous" as those in the other examples are, and that the story itself is therefore somehow not

“about” simultaneity any more, but about foreknowledge or some other kind of impossible knowledge. If Darla had expressed some beliefs that her experience had somehow *foreshadowed* that of her sister, had pointed out that the actions could not possibly have been at the same hour, or had even stated that the occurrence of one event before or after the other made some difference to her—as another informant, Matthew, indicates in his story, such an exclusion might be more clearly justified.

Matthew does not express wonder at the simultaneity of his composing a poem rather clearly, though metaphorically, about his girlfriend Rose’s death, just before getting the news she had been killed. He states also that he believes Rose would already have been dead, for a few hours, before he started composing the poem on his walk home, late at night. He professes no belief in the survival of the spirit after death, and no belief in God. He expresses his shock, though, at the coincidence (i.e. a relative judgment of proximity) of his composition, with both Rose’s death and his receiving the news—but he does not use the language of synchronicity or simultaneity other informants used, such as “exact same time,” “around the same time,” etc. Why then, have I included this narrative? I include it, for consideration, because of an ambiguity lurking behind the lines in the following passage:

I wouldn’t say that there was any correspondence between you know the time that she died, the time of the accident and when she died was, you know, later in the night. The tried to uh [pauses] they tried to save her or whatever [clears throat]. But there’s no correspondence with that time, and, you know, by the time that I was going home.

Matthew qualified this correspondence further, after his story was done, by reiterating, a third time, that he thought he had been composing the poem *after* Rose died, but *wasn't absolutely sure*. The above passage indicates, I think, that Matthew did engage in the kind of assessment for the value of synchronicity which other informants engaged in, leading them—if not Matthew—to declare in favor of a correspondence in time. For Matthew, the correspondence in time between Rose's dying, and her death, is doubtful; his thinking about the possible value of synchronicity is evident, though, in that he keeps reiterating the point that such synchronicity probably did not occur. Matthew's Story *might* be included in the ESEN definition's element C, perhaps under the lesser sense of "more or less simultaneous."

Grace's Story A is what I regard as an interesting hybrid between a premonition story and what could well be an ESEN example. Grace describes a metaphorical but rather clearly interpretable sense of anticipation two weeks before her father's sudden death. She readily translates her own sense of a "storm" coming into its straightforward, but still open-ended, meaning: something bad is about to occur. This anticipation culminates in a feeling of knowing that the storm had somehow arrived, at 1:00 a.m., rather precisely the time that her father passed away. According to Grace's narration, though, she does not appear to have connected her experience at 1:00 with her father's death, *per se*; she might reasonably have done so, however, in that, as she stated in her interview, her father had had serious health problems previously, and she had a general tendency to co-experience pain, mental or physical, with members of her



immediate family. In Grace's narrative there is both an emphasis on simultaneity (by virtue of the matching hours), and an emphasis on foreknowledge, as well. Both interpretations of the experience are sustained by the facts Grace describes, though, and one explanation would not substitute for the other. For this reason I have included it as a "more or less simultaneous" experience, as it offers the listener "more" than simultaneity—the additional wonder of foreknowledge.

Aurora's Story makes an interesting comparison with Grace's, above, in that it is narrated in such a way that it suggests that a man in Lower Island Cove, NF, could have had a dream that anticipated OR was simultaneous to a little girl's being lost in the woods. Aurora tells the story at some distance from the experience; it is not her own, or a close friend's experience. Instead, Aurora has heard it circulated by members of the little girl's community, Milburn. Hence Aurora is probably unable to specify the nature of the correspondence in time between the location of the lost girl in her hiding place, or places—and the time of the neighboring man's dream. Aurora does add some important details in relation to time: that the man "went in the woods" the day after his dream,

...and went to the spot she was hiding. Now it turned out people were passing, walking past her, all the time, you know, really close, she hadn't gone that far... And he went right to the spot where she was. And found her.

These statements imply that the little girl was stationary; in which case, the man's dream of the location in which she was in fact found, would have matched the location in which she was hiding, at any given time during the crisis. Synchronicity is suggested indirectly here, in a narrative which brings into focus the fact that the ESEN

pattern is more easily justified by examples which are not legends—as this one appears to be—but memorates, or at least, closer-hand narratives of personal experience, which can be more specific in their details about time.

All four of these problematic examples fit, nevertheless, under a relaxed rubric of “more or less simultaneous” experiences, while at the same time giving rise to a more specific definition of simultaneity, which, as I clarified above, is at least in some cases a relative, rather than strictly empirical, judgment about the relationship of significant events in time. It seems important, though it remains often difficult, to distinguish examples which suggest the possibility of simultaneity from those which might suggest foreknowledge. To make such a distinction, but also allow the ESEN definition to take in (a) examples which are either rhetorically or actually ambiguous, and (b) examples which express a relative, rather than empirical, judgment about synchronicity between events (as in Darla’s Story), element C of the definition might be made more specific, as follows, referring to personal knowledge which is “more or less simultaneous, by implication, overt statements about time, or absence of clear indications otherwise” with the time of a distant crisis. The qualifier “implications otherwise” would take in clear indications that (and judgments about the significance that) knowledge had occurred either before or after the crisis in question.

#### *Level D*

Table 2.4 demonstrates the variation at level D, “crisis involving suffering [accident, illness, death],” across example narratives. Several examples challenge this level of the ESEN definition. Robert’s Story already challenges the definition at level B, as his personal knowledge is about the status of an animal, not another person. At level D, a slightly different problem arises, how and whether to call an animal’s being lost a crisis in the same way that a human’s loss (e.g. Aurora’s Story) would probably

be admitted as a “crisis.” In this respect, Robert’s Story compares in an interesting way to Ben’s “Oh God Jack” narrative model. In the latter, Ben asks the same question, whether an extraordinary, apparently “paranormal” intuition of another’s peril is equally believable if the subject and percipient are chimpanzees. Ben’s suspicion, I believe, is that it is not, expressing his suspicion that the formula is not necessarily believable in principle, at all. However, Robert’s extension of “simultaneous experience,” at least in his own repertoire of stories, to include animals, whether as subjects, or percipients, perhaps—challenges Ben’s view.

If “crisis” is taken to mean a serious, painful, and/or life-threatening event, in the life of a human, then stories about the intuition of relatively trivial or even happy distant events (the mailing of a friendly letter, an engagement, a great dinner party, etc.) can be *excluded without much debate; such an exclusion may reflect a personal bias of mine*, that stories about trivial events are rather easily separated from stories about serious or tragic ones. Yet generic distinctions between comic and tragic types of story are widespread; Virtanen (1990) likewise has no trouble separating trivial and happy *news* intuitions from intuitions of tragic life events, though she collected both, together, as I have too (see especially Maureen’s testimony in the Narrative Inventory). Another reason for my willingness to exclude stories about happier life crises or trivial events is that I ran across very few full-length stories about intuitions of happy subjects,<sup>26</sup> compared to many more full-length stories about sad or worrisome events. Intuitions of trivial or happy events tended to be remarked upon in passing, in fragments or story kernels only. Somehow, I suspect, the intuition of tragic events, or near tragedies, makes for a better, or at least a longer and more detailed, narrative. For these reasons, I have been inclined to exclude such examples from consideration, when formulating the ESEN hypothesis.

What of several example stories which seem to contain more than one grave crisis, however? In some cases, crises appeared to be multiple, or manifold, rather than a double-entendre of some kind, as in Madelyne's Story, or in Sheila and Mary's story, where Sheila's intuition that Mary is "cut off from her" leads to the further assumption that Mary must be dead, by car accident, when she is in fact "only" at the hospital, preparing for heart surgery). In Aurora's story, should the crisis be considered a fairy leading, the loss of a little girl, the resultant amputation due to exposure, or all three? The crisis in Irina's Story could be defined as the patient's death, but could also be defined as the patient's first heart attack, hospital stay, and eventual death. If the "crisis" is further clarified to be that crisis, or portion of a crisis, which the percipient intuitively synchronistically, the interpretive problem is simplified. Irina's dream seemed to correspond only with the patient's death, so the patient's death matches element D of the ESEN definition.

Similarly, in Aurora's Story, the man from a neighboring community seems to intuit the Milburn girl's location, during the time when she is lost and hidden from everyone's sight. His intuition does not seem to be connected with *how* the little girl got lost (whether fairy-led or not), or what tragic eventualities resulted from her exposure in the woods (amputation) after the fact. In Grace's account of her daydream about a St. John's man's suicide, it might seem debatable whether the central crisis is the suicide itself or Grace's own hospitalization after perceiving a correspondence between her daydream and such a tragedy. By the standard I have just elaborated, the crisis is the former.

To reiterate, then, the "crisis" in the ESEN can be clarified as that crisis, or portion of crisis (tragic, often life-threatening, or at least painful) which occurs in the life of a human subject and is intuited by the percipient. This clarification excludes

Table 2.4.

## Range of Representations of Crises in Example Narratives

<b>RANGE OF CRISES</b>	<b>STORY/CDF #</b>
Sudden, life-threatening illness	Judith 2
Death in plane crash	Alicia 3
Seeing a ghost*	Karen 2
Haircutting OR response to grief*	Darla 2
Heart surgery (presumed to be accident)	Sheila/Mary 4/6
Cat put down OR mother's illness	Madelyne 5
Cat lost*	Robert 4
Death by car accident	Matthew 3
Break-up of marriage	Alan 1/2&5, 2/2&5
Painful removal of wound dressing*	Diana A1-4, A2-5, A3-3
Nightmare*	Diana B1-1, B2-2
Heart attack (false alarm)	Laura 3 & 5
Death by stroke	Grace A 1 & 5
Suicide by hanging	Grace C 5
Near drowning	Grace D 3 & 4
Deaths by fire	Maureen 3
Death by second heart attack	Irina 1-6&7; 2-4&5
Little girl lost/exposure leading to amputation	Aurora 1 & 5

*Please note that asterisks indicate those crises which I discuss as problematic matches to element D of the ESEN definition.*

Karen's Story and Darla's Story almost immediately, in which (as was already seen at level B) it is difficult to identify which party is a percipient, which a subject, and what they are experiencing separately or together as either knowledge or crisis. The parenthetical qualification "tragic, life-threatening, or at least painful" takes in crises which involve severe pain—such as Grace's experiences during her sister's hospitalizations—as well as lesser pains, *perhaps* even removal of a Band-Aid from a five-year-old's knee, or the terror of a nightmare (Diana's daughters' experiences). Diana's Stories A and B meet the level D criteria somewhat marginally, especially if their crises are measured against the seriousness of deaths in a house-fire (Maureen's Story).

#### *Level E*

Working at level E, "distance" between percipient and subject, Diana's Stories A and B present clear challenges. The "distance" between her daughters at any given time is, at least in spatial terms, in either of these stories, is rather minimal. One twin seems to feel the other's pain at the same time in the bathtub; what makes this impossible is not so much the distance between them preventing them from communicating, but the barrier (washcloths over eyes) which their mother creates to interrupt them from communicating, with her, or with each other. One twin seems to co-experience the other's nightmare; what makes this impossible is not so much their distance from each other (they are in the same room, possibly even in the same bed, in a cabin), but the fact that they appear to have been asleep at the time. Apart from these

examples, all other stories include an element of geographical or at least spatial distance between parties. While “distance” might be expanded to take in metaphorical kinds of distance, as in Diana’s daughters being “distanced” from each other by virtue of having their eyes covered, or both being asleep, “distance” might also be limited to literal, spatial distance.

**Refining the Definition: What A More Specific ESEN Definition Should Exclude, and How**

The arguments I have just made for exclusion or inclusion of problematic examples at the five levels of the original ESEN definition generated a series of qualifications to the original definition. To refresh readers’ memories, that original definition read as follows:

(A) a first- or a third-person account, (B) which describes one person’s [(C) more or less simultaneous] knowledge of another’s status, (D) at the time of a crisis involving suffering [e.g., accident, illness, death], (E) while the parties are at some distance from each other.

At level A, I suggested the qualification, “a first- or third-hand account, whether generalized or related to a single personal experience.” At level B, I suggested the qualification, “one person’s realistic, direct, and immediately realized personal knowledge of another’s status” at a time of crisis. At level C, I suggested the qualification, “more or less simultaneous, by implication, overt statements about time, or absence of clear indications otherwise.” At level D, I suggested the qualification, “that crisis, or portion of crisis (tragic, often life-threatening, or at least painful) which occurs in the life of a human subject and is intuited by the perceiver.” At level E, I

suggested the qualification, “literal, spatial distance. All together, these qualifications produce a reformulation of the ESEN hypothesis. An ESEN may defined, more specifically, as:

- (A) A first- or third-hand account, whether generalized or related to a single personal experience,
- (B) which describes one person's [(C) more or less simultaneous] realistic, direct, and immediately realized personal knowledge of another's status,
- (D) at a time of a crisis, or that portion of a crisis (tragic, life-threatening, or painful) which occurs in the life of a human subject and is intuited by the percipient
- (E) at a literal, spatial distance, where:

“more or less simultaneous” in C means simultaneous by implication, by overt statements about time, or by absence of clear indications otherwise.

I further suggest that any example narrative, whether from the collections I have reviewed here, or from future collections of example narratives, be excluded by this reformulated definition if the example varies substantially from more than one of the five components of the definition. Examples which vary at only one of the five segments of the definition might, I suggest, be reviewed as marginal cases, rather than excluded outright from study as a possible match to this hypothetical pattern, as it might continue to develop.

According to these criteria, then, 16 of the 20 examples I have presented in this chapter fit both the initial and expanded definitions of ESEN at all five levels. In extended argument, Robert's Story, Karen's Story, Darla's Story, and Diana's Story B do not match clearly at level B (one person's knowledge of another's status) and level D (the crisis), even though they could fit the *initial* definition. For this reason, I qualify



my use of the phrase "20 example narratives" hereafter in the thesis--to include the 16 perfect matches as well as the four examples which match the initial definition but drop out at levels B and D in extended arguments.

As Ben's "Non-Story" (as I have called his skeptical testimony for humor's sake) consists of several narrative models, rather than just one, I have elected to discuss it here, rather than attempt to integrate its various models into the discussions above. I would argue that Ben's "Oh Poor Billy" and "Aunt Matilda" narrative models do fit the ESEN definition (qualified, of course, to embrace the generalization narrative alongside the narrative of personal experience). Both these narrative models (or generalization narratives in Greenhill's language) contain generalized characters who either anticipate or simultaneously sense trouble for "poor Billy" who's late home from school, or "Aunt Matilda," *who is out driving and driving too fast*. I believe these two models demonstrate that Ben is quite aware of the basic frame of an ESEN, whether he chooses to reproduce that frame in its generalized form (as here) or to reproduce it (as he might, if he chose to) as a full-length narrative of personal experience.

Ben's other models do not match the pattern so closely. His "Oh God Jack" model fits marginally at level B (as it comments upon both an animal's and, metaphorically, a human's intuition of another's distress) and marginally at level C (the chimp's traumatic intuition of his fellow chimp's death might equally well be anticipatory or simultaneous). Ben's "Pass Me the Bananas" model does not quite fit at level D or E, as it concerns the intuition of a trivial, not a serious, thing (D) and the parties involved, *a human and a chimp (who stand metaphorically, perhaps, for one human to another)* are within plain sight of each other, not at a distance (E).

Ben's "Airline Crash" and "No Ship Sank" models do not fit at levels B, C, or D; in the "Airline Crash" model, Ben would be intuiting an airline crashing, not the

experience of any particular person dying in the crash; in the “No Ship Sank” model Ben describes having dreamed of a sinking ship; he can find no later correspondence in his own experience at all. All of Ben’s narrative models nonetheless have bearing on the question of how extraordinary simultaneous experiences, as I have defined them hypothetically within this narrative category, might be explained to occur. In the next section, I shall turn again to my findings about informants’ ranges of explanations, and to the subject of vernacular philosophy.

#### **2.4 Findings about Categorization and Explanation: Back to Vernacular Philosophy**

My analyses of the interpretive features inside these stories, and explanations tellers offered after they had finished their stories (see Appendix B for listings of explanations accompanying each narrative) identified eleven general patterns of explanation or interpretation. The number of patterns is as varied as the number of terms these informants (and the informants I surveyed at UMass, too) generated to label or categorize such stories. My having found so many, varied explanatory patterns supports my belief that a structural definition (like the ESEN one, or any other derived from observable patterns in data) is a more reliable way to demonstrate a generalizable narrative pattern, than relying on informants’ labels or informants’ spontaneous logic for categorizing the stories they are telling, at any given moment, especially in the course of performance. A few examples of my findings with both informant groups may help me explain their significance further.

##### **The Variety of Labels and Logic for Categorization**

Table 2.2 presented early in the chapter lists the informants I surveyed at the University of Massachusetts in August 1998. The third-to-last column in that table (“Calls Such Stories”) lists the variety of responses the UMass students gave me when I

asked what they might call Judith's Story and their own story (if they told one like Judith's), if they were to put them into a category. *None of the story labels match.* Furthermore, not one of the explanations students provide for how they came up with their story label matches either, other than the broad statement "I came up with it myself" (see second-to-last category of Table 2.2, "Got Story Names From?").

Some words pop up more than once in the story labels the students provided: "intuition" and "mother." Two people seemed to agree that Judith's Story was a story about a mother's intuition or instinct. Otherwise, the range of labels included "Traumatic Episode" story, "Toxic Paint" story, "Connection" story, "Miracle" story, or "Brush with Death" story. Two people identified Judith's Story and/or their own "match" narrative as a "Near Death Experience" story. I think this demonstrates amply the enormity of the difference between the academic connotation of this story label (a fairly well-defined category in the literature) and the informants' uses of this now-familiar phrase, as their own label and category; there is no description in Judith's story of her son coming back from any altered state of consciousness near death with anything to report. In follow-up contacts over the summer of 1998, and in their earlier interviews, my initial informant group offered me a similar range of story labels, many of which betrayed some preference, I think, for one explanation or another. The initial group called their stories psychic stories, ESP stories, synchronicity stories, connectedness stories, "psychedelic" stories, and so on. Informants' story labels represented a variety of levels of generalization also. While some pointed up one specific common motif (e.g., the "toxic paint" label), other labels suppose much more general levels of comparability between examples: "a bizarre love story," "a grief response story," "a testimony," or even, "a narrative." Only one informant, Aurora, a woman in her twenties who grew up in a Newfoundland outport community, was

familiar with the term “token” to apply to narratives in this area. I would hesitate, though, to claim that her use of this term denoted a set of discernible rules for the recognition of a category of story. Aurora herself used a variety of other labels to identify the kinds of stories she and Matthew told me. As one of my initial informants (a fellow student) pointed out most wryly: if he was talking with folklorists, he would call the stories we were telling “memorates,” if he wasn’t talking to folklorists, he would call them (and, perhaps, think of them too) as “spooky stories.”

Eight of the UMass informants answered that they would not call these stories “stories” at all. *This corresponds with an earlier informant’s (Alan’s) comment, in a very recent follow-up contact, that he might not call these accounts anything other than “things that happened to him.”* Similarly, Michelle L. (one of two Michelles) in the UMass group commented that she wouldn’t describe [a narrative about] her dreams anything but “dreams.” This finding seems to indicate that whether or not they have had any exposure to formal rules of classifying narratives according to truth value, some informants will hesitate to label narratives at all if they perceive them to be reports of real experience. If they are real experience, they are “not a story,” perhaps, a distinction which echoes some of folklorists’ distinctions between legend and *Märchen*. More importantly, though, these informants remind us all that *not everyone needs to or does categorize narrative at all*. If representation of informants’ thinking (not to mention reflexivity) is to be honest, we must admit at times that informants don’t really think like folklorists, and folklorists aren’t necessarily thinking like informants, either.

Even before I acquired the data I have just discussed, I suspected that informants’ methods of identifying patterns in narration could be rather arbitrary. I think arbitrary labeling and spontaneous attempts at categorization have been the case more often than not here, whether my informants were identifying pattern implicitly via

labels for a range of belief narratives each of them told me (as my first informants did), or whether informants were identifying pattern more explicitly through declaring for or against there being a “category” into which they agree to place one or more specific examples (as I asked the supplementary informant group to do at the University of Massachusetts). I simply *do not believe* that all the emic labels for story which we folklorists cite from our informants necessarily stand for the stable, complete, conscious, or consistent patterns which some folklorists (e.g., Glassie, or Ben-Amos) might argue they do. Bennett notes that her informants used a variety of terms loosely under the heading ESP, without bothering themselves too much about precision distinctions under this heading. I believe her characterization of her informants’ logic; I have no reason not to. Yet I would like to be able to ask Bennett whether she believes “ESP” is the *primary label or explanation they chose themselves, in most* conversations, and I would like to know how and whether Bennett might believe that label represented an act, or set of acts, of story categorization on the part of her informants.

In some cases, folklorists’ informants may be drawing upon the logic of a pre-existing tradition of story categorization, on the basis of received requirements about a given story pattern’s content, its form, its purposes, and its style. That may well have been the case for Glassie’s informants in Ballymenone, for example, who when someone used the story label *pant* for example, might have expected to hear a kind of story that matched a variety of inherited, and therefore somewhat stable, standards of classification (Glassie 1982). However, in many cases, especially in field encounters far outside the theoretical “little community,” I suspect informants, like mine, have not been drawing upon a tradition of categorization, but are, instead, inventing such a tradition, even making categories up on the spot where they did not necessarily

perceive any category to exist before. I suspect, instead, that many informants label and categorize stories quite arbitrarily, or by perceiving correspondences between stories at the level of a single common motif or a single explanation, when the applicable explanations and the common motifs may in observable fact be more than one. I believe story labels, then, often stand for something else, for other things than what stories are "about," in any objective or consensual sense. Story labels may not be what they seem at all. Informants' labels may stand for the ways that informants actually think about story (and we would, too) if pressed to do so spontaneously in the course of performing and explaining them on the spot.

In summary, then, my findings with the initial informant group and with the UMass students indicate that informants' labels and categories are based on spontaneously individual, rather than consensual or fully analytical, perceptions of a connection between a story at hand, and another they might know. Moreover, the connections these informants made were sometimes made on the basis of the presence of only *one* theme or component appearing across two or three examples they could think of, rather than upon any *set* of components observed to repeat themselves across a larger body of examples. The latter is the method of categorization that narrative analysts use, by contrast, in defining the "genres" or "subgenres" into which bodies of examples may be shown, through argument, to fall.

Informants in my initial group also considered many different lines of *explanation* for their experiences. The fact that more than one explanation may apply at the same time to the experiences they narrate does not compromise the "reasonableness" of their descriptions of those experiences. It does, however, enrich our bird's eye view into their interpretive thinking, and the variety of explanations probably did influence the range of labels the informants assigned to such stories. Even

if an informant's label favored one explanation for the events in their story, all informants considered more than one explanation. These findings call into question folklorists' manipulation of terms like "ghost story," "UFO story," and "ESP story." My having found that (a) story labels are themselves arbitrary constructions, (b) informants' perceptions of "match" between one example and another to form a "category of story" are spontaneous and monothematic, and (c) that some of the variety of explanations informants offer seem to correlate with their labels, while other explanations do not, suggests to me, in summary, that folklorists (myself included) may need to rethink the way we label story genres and story patterns in light of the multiplicity of applicable explanations. In doing so, it can be less than helpful to simply rely on references to "emic terms" or "emic categories." Emic terms, as I have found working outside the little community, are not in themselves very clear representations of how emic categorization works, and I think they are even more distantly related to what folklorists do when we categorize narratives and argue for genres so much more systematically at the "etic" level, as I have tried to do here.

### **The Variety of Explanations**

Collectively, narrators in the initial informant group told me directly (or otherwise made it clear) that they had acquired their ways of interpreting their experience not only from personal reflection, but also from their religious upbringing, later life religious affiliations, other family members' views, books on witchcraft and the supernatural (including Stephen King novels), religious texts, and higher education, particularly in psychology and folklore, subjects with which many of the initial informants were familiar.

The first pattern of interpretation/explanation is tellers' tendency to comment that their experience was **unexplainable**. Eight speakers offered comments to this

effect, mainly after their stories were finished. Ways of expressing the idea that there was no explanation for a given experience ranged from (1) saying more or less just that, to asserting (2) that an experience was a "mystery" with many possible explanations, (3) that unexplainable anxieties were common and often unjustified by any real danger, or (4) that one had "resisted" drawing conclusions about an experience.<sup>27</sup> A second, related pattern included comments about **incredulity or impossibility**: "I couldn't believe it" or "It's not possible" types of commentary. Participants making comments to this effect include Judith (E4), Matthew (E4, E5), Diana (A2-I2), Grace (C-I3), and Ben (E1). All but Ben's comments referred to given experiences; Ben stated more specifically that he didn't believe ESP or telepathy exist.

A third pattern of explanation/interpretation includes more **specific reasons given for disbelief** about specific possible causes for given experiences. *Please note* that by "disbelief" I am referring to a pattern of skepticism expressed as much about causality as about meaning in these stories. In explaining why he "didn't believe" his own experience, Matthew pointed out that he didn't believe in an afterlife (E2) and that *he only believed in sensory forms of communication (E6), hence he didn't believe Rose was communicating with him, via his composing a death-poem, just after she died.* Nevertheless, Matthew clearly believed he had the experience and was remembering it correctly, and that it meant something; hence his expression of "disbelief" means something more than writing the experience off. The clear and uncomfortable emotion which he suppressed in order to tell the story at all, and his description of feeling "shocked" at the correspondence may be, for Matthew, more expression of the meaning of the experience, than comments upon its causality.

In relation to both of her stories (A and B), Diana was of the view that twin children could be encouraged to "play up" the narration of their experiences (A1-E3,



B1-E1); sometimes twins tell stories, in other words, that are not necessarily accurate representations of their experiences, or their meanings or explanations are exaggerated or overemphasized for effect. Sometimes children make things up, together. This is "disbelief" in its most general and perhaps formulaic sense, I think. Diana is in fact raising the question of whether her daughters' versions of their experiences (rather than her own story versions, probably) are accurate and whether their narration might be related to real experience (e.g., their co-narrated dream) at all.

Aurora (E1) and Robert (E17) distinguished between beliefs about whether a type of experience was possible or not, and beliefs that a given story of that type of experience was true or false. Robert observed that in some cases "people can kind of create things with their minds" and "see things just because they're all wrapped up in it" (E17). This of course does not necessarily mean their perceptions are not possible *in principle*. Aurora counted a "half reasonable" testimony and a trustworthy narrator as contributing to the credibility of the narrative (E2). Grace pointed out that she herself had been "called a liar" (E4). All of these lines of explanation explore and expand the notions of belief and disbelief—as I have been trying to do in this study. These informants' comments show that they are familiar with the dialectics of belief and disbelief, the battle about whether there's a supernatural order or not, and which side can boast the most truthful narrators and accurate accounts—but they also demonstrate how informants understand that the assessment of "credibility" means the believability of the facts themselves versus the believability of the meanings of the facts presented in testimony. Informants can and did distinguish the credibility-in-principle of a story's events from the credibility of the narrative, the narrator, or a specific instance of an event. Such interpretive comments move listeners, again, beyond the belief/disbelief dialectic into the realm of philosophical distinctions about truth: when we "believe"

any of these stories, are we choosing to believe something about the facts in the story, the representation of the facts in the story, the meaning of the facts in the story, or their possibility in principle? This seems to me to be a kind of philosophy.

A fourth pattern includes **psychological interpretations and explanations**. Alicia offered the largest number of these (I3, E1, E2, E3, E12, and E13), pointing out the personal, psychological meaning that dream symbols and images had in her life, and weighing the interpretive comments of a friend, an Adlerian psychologist. Darla commented that the simultaneous haircutting she and her sister went through could be understood as a "response to grief" (I1, I4, I5) or to catastrophe (E1), as an assertion of control (E4) or as a reclamation of self (E6). Madelyne viewed her own guilt about having left her mother with her cat as one possible cause for her dream (E1), and preferred to interpret the dream from the point of view of "pathology" and "subconscious construction" (E2 and E5) in general. Mary, too, raised the issue of guilt, for not having written frequently enough to her sister and having concealed information about the surgery (Mary I2). However, it would be hard to argue that Mary's guilt had been a cause for her sister's experience, in the same way that Madelyne hypothesized her own pre-existing guilt about her mother had caused hers. Sheila clarified, by contrast, that she had *not* been "obsessing" with worry about Mary when she had her sudden panic (E5). Robert commented on the role of obsessive thinking as well, observing that persons who "fixated" on ghosts might be more likely to see them (E17), whether or not they were in fact there. Robert regarded ghosts as one of the various features of reality that one could believe in without expecting to see every day.

Ben characterized simultaneous experiences and premonitions as expressions of justified or unjustified anxiety about loved ones (E5, E7-12, E15) and linked such

experiences with the denial of mortality and other problematic features of the human condition (E18). Maureen acknowledged an anxiety explanation indirectly by describing her boyfriend's attempts to get her to "relax" by viewing her experience as a mere coincidence (E2). Irina implied that the strong attachment she formed with her patient could have given rise to her dream about him (Version 1, I1, I2, E5; Version 2, I1, I5, E2). She speculated further that the dream could have been a mechanism by which she coped with her own anticipation of the patient's death (Version 2, E3) or fulfilled a need to comfort the patient (Version 1, E6). Laura reflected that experiences which centered around people to whom she felt close could be "real comforting," while those involving people she did not know or barely knew could feel "weird" (E8). Aurora felt generally that psychological reactions must contribute to experiences like the one she described (E5).

A fifth pattern entails "**higher power**" **type explanations** which advance the idea that an experience could be explained by the intervention of a third, higher party, whether God, "God's helpers," or spirits of persons known or unknown to the experiencer. Judith, Karen, Laura, Grace, and Irina all considered or implied divine involvement in the events they described. Judith was willing to assign God or a "higher power" an ultimate kind of responsibility for her experience (I4, E5, E6) but she also *speculated that the spirit of her father, of her grandfather, or of dead loved ones could have been involved* (E7, E8), as "God's helpers." Karen commented that her mother was reassured through her experience of seeing a ghost in bed, by having her husband (a minister) around, as opposed to her Roman Catholic counterpart who arranged an exorcism after having seen the same ghost at the same time (I2). Laura and Grace considered the possibility that God had given them their simultaneous intuitive experiences, as a communication (Laura E7) or a gift (Grace D, I2, I3, E6). Irina

pointed out that her experience reinforced her own Christian spiritual beliefs (Version 1, E2) or could be interpreted from various Christian perspectives (Version 2, E3, E4).

A sixth pattern, one which particularly interested me, might be called a **"divided consciousness" explanation pattern**. A number of speakers (Mary, Madelyne, Robert, Alan, Laura, Maureen, Irina, and Aurora) expressed versions of an idea that an experiencer's previous subconscious perceptions about the status of another person might have contributed to an extraordinary simultaneous experience. In both versions of her story, Irina raised the possibility that *something she had seen or known* about the patient's condition during the day could have helped shape her dream about his death (Version 1, E5; Version 2, E3). As Maureen put it, "...we're always picking up cues from other people that we, decipher" (E4). Alan pointed out that he might "on *some level*" have heard his mother's friend enter the house and say she had left her husband, but said he was "almost positive that didn't happen" (Version 1, E4). Madelyne pointed to "subconscious construction" behind her dream (E5). Mary described how "lots of things that come in, to my mind, are ignored" (E6, E7). Describing people as "incredibly complex" and able to maintain levels of skepticism as well as spiritual belief (E12), Robert submitted that perhaps "you can move in and out of different levels of reality" and that the level of reality on which he and his cat had communicated could be "very real" but not the level that he was "normally operating on" (E4). Laura and Aurora both stated that "some people are more sensitive than others" (Laura E6) and Laura felt that such sensitivity was an "innate ability" that everybody had (E6). Laura's emphasis that she was "sound asleep" before her phone rang seems to anticipate and counteract the "divided consciousness" type of explanation (I1). She implies that her dream was *not* a half-conscious anxiety reaction to actually hearing the phone ringing while still partially asleep. Aurora said that some people

were better able to pick up on moods that were not "overt" (E6) and asserted further that "you could walk into a room and feel a mood without even seeing anybody, you know?" (E7). These interpretations are particularly philosophical, in that they debate what human consciousness and perception are like, how consciousness is controlled, limited, and layered, with or without the conscious action of the waking self.

Robert's and Aurora's comments demonstrate how discussions of human sensitivity and awareness sometimes flow easily into **speculations about how telepathy or extrasensory perception might work**. This is the seventh explanation/interpretation pattern. A number of informants specifically expressed some degree of belief in telepathy or ESP (Judith E7, I5; Alicia E10; Robert I2, E1-3; Diana Story A, E6; Laura E9; Aurora E3). Sheila and Mary judged a number of their experiences as twins as "borderline," "intuitive," or "logical" as opposed to "psychic" but never used the word "telepathy" or simply declared a belief in it (Sheila E1-3, Mary E2-5, E9). Maureen made explanatory comments which suggested belief in telepathy (E4, E5) without using the word. Madelyne stated explicitly that she *didn't* believe her dream involved any "remote viewing" of reality (Madelyne E6). Similarly, Ben stated at the beginning of his interview that he did not believe telepathy or ESP existed (E1). Matthew's statement that he believed only in sensory forms of communication excludes telepathy by implication (Matthew E6).

Numerous comments were made regarding the question of *how* telepathy might work. Laura characterized psychic ability as a trait that was "innate" (E6) and recognizable by other psychics (E9). Alicia did not offer hypotheses for how telepathy would work but said she felt divided on the question of whether telepathy was possible (E10). Judith declared that

*...because my brain, my physical brain in this room, cannot be in another room a mile away. Physically...somehow there has to be some thing, way that my brain can pick up signals that are coming from other places." (E9)*

While professing belief that there is "more to this world than what we see and hear," (I1) Judith added that she couldn't say what the "medium" or "method" was but she had no doubt that more than the brain was involved in keeping humans in touch with "all kinds of things" (E10). Aurora used the words "telepathy" and "energy" almost synonymously (E3-5, E8). In her view, thought is energy, humans don't expend all the energy they have, and humans are not entirely individual or alone, having such energy to tap into, whether or not they are directly in each other's presence (E3-5, E7-8). Grace and Irina seemed to prefer spiritual terms and explanations over parapsychological ones. Judith felt that she had been discouraged, as a Roman Catholic, from believing in psychic experiences (E2).

Robert asserted that "a lot of [Canadian native people] accept telepathy as being...a fact of life," relying upon telepathy rather than formally summoning peers to rituals (E7). Robert also suggested that he had been contacted by his cat on a "level" of reality other than the one he was "normally operating on," perhaps because his brain (or mind) was more receptive in a semi-conscious state (E4-5). Alan explained telepathy as a "distress vibe" that "came off" his mother's friend, in "large waves" or "psychic waves" that he "picked up" (Version 1, E1). People might be able to communicate their state to others across sense barriers, such as walls, he hypothesized (E1). One party's openness about emotions might contribute to the process (E2), but the process could be analogous to radiation or an isotope—naturally occurring rather than intentionally directed at a given person (E5). A person's distress could be "telegraphed" via the brain, without the mind's intention to do so (E6). The theme of the brain's "openness"

was echoed by Maureen. She suggested that the human brain may have "blocked off" such dreams and feelings as it evolved, as part of a "survival instinct"; her own "mind" might be "unblocked" somehow, she speculated, and migraine headaches and aneurysms might be involved in this process (E5).

Not surprisingly, ideas about **how the mind and brain work and relate to each other** (pattern 8) emerged in participants' discussions of telepathy, in response to interview questions, or in passing turns of phrase used in narration. The relevance of this theme of interpretation to formal philosophy hardly needs to be underlined. Fifteen speakers mentioned the mind, the brain, or both.<sup>28</sup> Eight people (Judith, Robert, Alan, Sheila, Mary, Matthew, Aurora, and Maureen) discussed the relationship between the mind and the brain and another (Irina) discussed the relationship of the "soul" or "spirit" to the body. Although they did not discuss a concept of "mind," when asked where they thought dreams came from, Diana's seven-year-old daughters Julie and Gina pointed simultaneously to their heads and exclaimed, "Your brain!"

All nine speakers who discussed mind/brain or soul/body adopted positions of dualism, whether hard, soft, or somewhere in between. That is, they speculated either that the mind and the brain could be (a) two different *concepts* related to a single real entity, the brain (soft dualism) or (b) two ordinarily interdependent, real entities which under certain circumstances (death, out-of-body experience, travel on the astral plane) could operate separately from each other (harder dualism). Sheila's comments are typical of a softer dualistic perspective, one which did not move too readily towards discussing the movements and activities of minds, souls, or spirits apart from the body:

*"To me, a mind is just, like, that which is me which is not physical. You know, my thoughts, my personality, those things...I mean that I can't see it. I don't think of it as the brain. I don't think of the mind as the brain. It comes from the brain in some way perhaps, or connected to the brain perhaps, in some way, but not in a physical way." (Sheila, E4)*

Combined with his earlier descriptions of how an "astral plane" might work to allow telepathy and communicative "travel," Robert's wry remarks represent a somewhat harder dualistic position:

*When I think of the brain I think of the physical entity, sitting there in your head. And...I just have a very, very small understanding of even what science knows about how the brain works, which is probably a pretty small understanding in itself...some sense of left brain and right brain...At the same time...I'm wary of people who say...everything that's way out and strange...is basically somehow produced in the brain, rather than, interpreted. I guess if I...step out in the morning and I see green trees and blue sky and feel the wind blowing in my face, there aren't too many people saying that the brain has produced all that. Whereas...if I say that I saw my cat, or uh, you know, I saw Jesus shining in front of me or something, people will say, "Oh, you know, isn't the brain marvelous, what it can do?" (Robert E9-10)*

Perhaps the hardest dualistic statements came, self-consciously, from Irina:

*If you were to look at [her experience] as if it was a real...spiritual, near-death experience then, it would, logically be around that time that--if that's what you believe in, that the spirit leaves the body--that it would have been around that time that that would have actually happened. (Version 2, E1)*

and

*...maybe my spirit...actually met his spirit, and was there at the very last few minutes of his, of his physical body, his life...and I think I believe that a little bit. You know, part of me says I should really believe it, if I have a strong, Christian spiritual belief, but then part of me says, "You're crazy!" [laughs heartily] (Version 2, E4)*



As Irina's testimony indicates, expressions of views on mind/brain or soul/body relationships were rarely expressed with a full or rigid sense of conviction, but more often advanced in an attitude of openness to alternative points of view.

Ben made no specific comments on the relationship between mind and brain. Ben might be assumed to be a materialist, however, on the basis of (a) his firm expressions of disbelief in telepathy, the paranormal, and the afterlife and (b) his description of humans as mortal primates, with bodies that decay after death. Only one interviewee in this study expressed a clearly materialistic view that there was no such thing as "mind" and that the concept of "mind" had no referential meaning other than to the brain. This was Tom, whose comments appear in the interview with Sheila and Mary.<sup>29</sup>

Many speakers used the word "mind" metaphorically, as if it were a space, a stage, or perhaps a machine. Madelyne spoke of putting anything "apparent, mundane explanation" "in a box, somewhere in my mind." (E3) For Grace, the image of a storm, representing a tragic event about to occur, "came into her mind" before and during the event (Story A). Her daydreaming vision of a young man committing suicide in St. John's (Story C) was "still on her mind," disturbing her, days afterward. Alicia related the meaning of her dream to a clash in the way her and her partner's "minds worked." Matthew allowed for the possibility that he would "change his mind" (E3) later in life about the possibility of an afterlife; Robert defined cynicism as "closing your mind" (E13). Laura (E4) and Irina (Version 1, I5) joked about people thinking they'd "lost their mind" when or if they discussed their experiences.

Ben, Judith, Diana, Sheila, Mary, and Laura considered **biological and genetic closeness** as potential explanations for extraordinary simultaneous experiences (pattern 9). Judith simultaneously suggested and doubted the possibility of a mother-child bond

as an explanatory model. If there were a "maternal string that connected us to our children forever," she said, then mothers would know everything about their children at all times. As a mother herself, Judith laughed and said she knew that *that* was not the case (E11). As an adopted child, Laura reflected that her experience with her father would have to be based on more of a "spiritual bond" than a biological one and could not be said to "run in the family" (I3, E10). Darla and Grace suggested that sisterly closeness *could* be tied to their experiences (Darla I2; Grace Story B, "she's the one I'm closest to"), but Darla allowed that her closeness with May could have been shaped as much by shared environment as by other factors.

Diana and other members of the St. John's Twins and Triplets Association (Diana Story A, E1-2) expressed beliefs that simultaneous experiences could be explained by twins' biological and genetic closeness, as well as their having shared time together inside the womb. Diana seemed confident that the bond her identical twin daughters shared was an "inner" bond they had shared since conception, which she would guess "unless you're a twin you can't understand" (Story A Version 2, E5). Furthermore, Diana thought that "a twin's bond goes much deeper than ESP...it's just, in the genes" (Story A Version 2, E6). While stressing that paranormal hypotheses were out of the question, Ben stated that

*...there seems to be, especially with identical twins...some kind of communication, above the level of what we normally communicate...as unrelated human beings...some special kind of communication...you hear a lot of very odd stories...you have to take an unbiased, scientific view of it...probably from the biological standpoint. (Ben, E16)*

As fraternal twins, Sheila and Mary viewed their closeness as twins as the result of both nature and nurture. "As twins," Mary said, "I think we often felt that we

had...experiences that, we knew what was happening to the other...this was one you could tell a story about." (Mary, E2) Yet both women pointed out that having shared experiences over a lifetime would also help explain how they knew what they knew at times (Mary E4, Sheila E3).

Nine participants debated about labeling their experiences **coincidence** (pattern 10). These speakers manipulated the word "coincidence" in the sense of (a) an unusual occurrence with a meaningful explanation, (b) an unusual occurrence with a dismissable explanation (such as random chance) or (c) an unusual occurrence open to either a random or a non-random interpretation. Sheila insisted that she could not view her experience as coincidence (in sense B) because to her, by contrast, "it was a very real feeling that Mary had been cut off from me," that is, a real event which called for some meaningful explanation, other than chance (E5). Mary used "coincidence" in sense B also. Most distant knowing experiences she and her sister shared could be "put down to coincidence" because "in the end" they could be explained away, but this one could not (E3, E9).

Madelyne said she might have regarded experiences like hers as "just coincidence" (sense B) when she first heard tell of them (E4). Robert's comments expressed his struggle with the cultural and personal meaning of the word for him:

*Talking about these things as, coincidence, in our culture, like, what does that mean? You know, it doesn't mean anything. It means, something happened that seemed to have great significance, but it didn't have any significance...where in a lot of cultures, the idea of coincidence doesn't exist...like Canadian Indians...a lot of them accept telepathy as being a fact of, a fact of life...I'll probably use the word 'coincidence,' sometimes. But I guess I would use it [i.e., reserve it] for things that seem very insignificant, to me. (E6-8)*

Grace used coincidence in sense C (Grace's Story C, I5, E1), saying even if her daydream about a young man's suicide was a coincidence, "it was still just too weird to

handle" (Story C, I5). Alicia (E6, E11) used the phrases a "striking coincidence" and "bizarre coincidence" in sense C.

Ben clearly used coincidence in sense B. He stated that he dismissed stories like the ESEN I outlined for him as coincidence (E13) and proceeded to explain an ESEN coincidence as a result of the number of chances there were that people in the United States population would be dreaming of a plane crash at the time of an actual crash (E14). In speaking with her mother, Maureen reflected that it was easier for her to "pass off" her experiences as coincidence (sense B, E1). Similarly, her boyfriend's advice to her was to "relax" and dismiss her experiences as coincidence (E2). However, Maureen's own opinion seemed to be otherwise. She seemed unable throughout her interview to dismiss the upset of her personal experience or to give up on speculating why and how it could have occurred, suggesting her own view of coincidence leaned toward sense A. Perhaps in dialogue with others, Maureen is open to random as well as non-random interpretations of her experiences (coincidence in sense C). Irina used "coincidence" more clearly in sense A, remarking that her experience with her patient seemed "such a coincidence," as if there was "some kind of connection or something" (I6).

Some informants made single interpretive suggestions, which were not echoed by others (pattern 11, **individual explanatory ideas**). Irina used the idea of an "out-of-body experience" or a "near-death experience" (Version 1, E3; Version 2, E1, E4) to explain how her spirit might have met that of her patient in her "dream." Women at the Twins and Triplets Association Meeting (at which Diana narrated Story A, Version 1) felt that twins could be encouraged by people around them and thereby conditioned to tell stories about extraordinary simultaneous experiences (E3). Irina also jokingly suggested that her dream might have been nothing more than the product of something

bad she ate for dinner (Version 1, I6). Robert was the only participant to explain telepathy using the term "astral plane" (E1, E2). The broad range of explanations these informants offer, and the additional variety of senses in which the informants understand concepts like "coincidence," "disbelief," "pathology," "biology," "perception," "mind," and "brain" bring listeners into the realm of vernacular philosophy; in terms of belief, these concepts free the tellers and the listeners to consider "if" questions about the world around us, and the way things work, in fact and in principle--rather than siding with the schools of "yes" or "no" on the question of whether the world (and the windows upon the world which each of these stories affords us) is ultimately a supernatural place.

## 2.5 Differences between Versions

*Before I progress on into my conclusion about my findings, I must present the thorniest findings of all: the fact that I have now collected quite a number of secondary or tertiary versions of these accounts of true experience, and the fact that the versions differ, in many cases, in their descriptions of the facts. Details remembered differently across versions of single narratives present immediate epistemological problems for listeners, analysts, and the tellers themselves. Which version is truest to the original experience? How might one tell? Alternately, how might both be true, or neither? Although one might conclude that one or neither story was perfectly accurate, the possibility remains that both are **approximately** accurate or even logically ambiguous expressions of what the teller understands consistently to have been the whole, complex truth of the matter.*

Between Version 1 and Version 2 of Irina's narrative, for example, times change. This presents an immediate problem to my claim that Irina's narrative does match my ESEN definition, both the initial one and the qualified definition I have

offered above. In Version 1, Irina says she awakens at "exactly twenty minutes after three" in the morning and finds out her patient had been pronounced dead at ten minutes to three (descriptive elements 5 and 6). In Version 2, Irina says she woke up at "3:04" or so, and found out her patient's arrest had been called at "3:10." These differences are significant insofar as they justify significantly different interpretations of the events. Version 1 raises the question of whether Irina dreamt her dream shortly after her patient's death; this version of the story asks whether a patient could still be in the process of completing his death after the time the death was pronounced. Version 2 raises the question of whether Irina could have been dreaming of her patient just *before* he died, and whether he had died before or after his arrest was called. Irina herself considers the meaning of these questions in the explanations she offers (Version 2, E2).

I believe there are three possible approaches to the problems Irina's differing versions present. One approach is the approach I have taken in my arguments above, in which I regard the informant's emphasis on the proximity, rather than the distance, between the intuition and the crisis event (here, Irina's dreaming and the patient's time of death) as a relative judgment of synchronicity—rather than retrocognition or premonition. Put simply, Irina doesn't tell either version of the story as a premonition story; she emphasizes the proximity of the dreaming with the death in both instances. Understanding simultaneity as a relative judgment about time allows Irina to be making the same meaningful presentation of the facts across both versions, regardless of discrepancies in time. The point—synchronicity—remains the same, whether she is dreaming or he is dying a few minutes before or after in any version of the story. From this perspective, both stories are essentially about the closeness in time between the dreaming and the death.

The second approach involves asking, across versions, whether the dreaming and the death might *in actual fact* have been even more “simultaneous” than a few minutes apart. I think that this too, is a valid approach. Why? Because across *both* versions—considering the implications of both as if either or both were the truth—we can understand that (a) the time Irina was dreaming may have been variable, by a few minutes either way, that (b) the time death was noted by an examiner may not necessarily have corresponded with the time clinical death was first observable cessation of vital signs, and that (c) the time death occurred might be understood even less objectively, as that full loss of consciousness which might even have occurred some time *after* clinical death could have been observed. Considering the implications of both versions, then, the time Irina was dreaming and the time her patient died could very well have been “*the same moment.*”

The third possible approach to Irina’s discrepancies is concluding that one version of her story is “the truth” about who dreamed and who died when, and one version is “not the truth” about who dreamed and who died when. Without knowing which version is “the truth” in this absolute sense, we can further conclude that neither is precisely simultaneous, down to the minute, and neither is much more simultaneous than the other. The version in which Irina wakes up before the time of death (presuming the time of death given corresponds to actual death, etc.) might be argued to be a premonition. However, if we take this approach, the other version of the story is still *not* a premonition, and, more importantly perhaps, Irina’s meaning across both of her versions of her experience and her credibility as a narrator (or rememberer, to be more precise) are called into question. I am not convinced that this approach is necessarily better than either of the two I have explained above, although it is certainly just as valid.

Similarly, Alan's first and second versions of his experience show small but significant differences in his reactions to his experience of knowing that his mother's friend was at the door, in distress over leaving her husband. In Version 1, Alan states that he heard muffled voices and might, "on some level" have heard his mother's friend enter and speak of her problems, although he doubted that. In Version 2, he says that he knew what he knew before he heard anyone come in. Alan speculates in Version 1 that he probably did know there were problems in his mother's friend's marriage, but would not have known "how far along" they had progressed. Although the wording is different, this is consistent with Version 2, where Alan says he might have known about tensions, but would not have known a break-up was about to occur.

Alan's first and second versions differ more substantially on the question of how his belief that his mother's friend did visit on that night for that reason was or was not confirmed. In the first version Alan says that

*I confirmed it in my own mind enough, I don't know if I actually asked my mother if that was the night that it happened or not, that she came, I think I might have. But I remember thinking to myself that I had confirmed it, in some way. But as I said, I didn't confirm it for like a week and a half or two weeks, and then, later on, it came up.*

In the second version, Alan is more specific. The second narration contains more reflection on what he did *not* do to check, test, or confirm his experience.

*I also remember that I did not check out if it was her or why she had come that day—I did not check this out in any active way—did not actively seek to confirm if I was right/if I had got the message right—I remember getting a very basic confirmation some weeks later when my mother mentioned in conversation that her friend and her friend's husband were separating—and I don't even know if the conversation was with me—I might have just been present and heard her say this to someone else—again, I did not ask her if they had split up..*



After these comments in Version 2, Alan reflects with surprise on his lack of interest in checking things out afterward, but links this to his feeling of certainty that the experience was telepathic when he was having it (Version 2, I4, I5, I6).

Across both versions, though, Alan repeatedly stresses his own awareness of the limits of his own memory of these events throughout his narration (Version 1, I1, I2, E8; Version 2, I2). He even goes so far as to remark that in narrating his experience now, he might be "almost making it all up again" (Version 1, E8). While such an admission might be taken, in the context of a courtroom, as a contraindicator of reliability, in the context of a narrative study its more abstract meaning must also be considered. Such a remark can be interpreted as a philosophical statement about how the narration of remembered past experience really works, or feels like, in practice. For a reflective teller, telling a story about an experience nearly twenty years before may be an experience of constantly feeling and assessing the limits of one's own memory of the truth.

Robert (E14), Aurora (I1), Diana (Story B, Version 2, I4), and even Diana's seven-year-old daughters (Diana's Story B, Version 2, I2, I3) express similar awareness that their narrations depend upon their memory generally and for specific details. When this level of awareness is so clearly evident, it seems unwise for an analyst to dismiss informants' critical comments about memory merely as rhetorical strategies to cover up the inability to tell the truth. Whether they are correct or not, speakers' frequent attempts to narrow the times of coinciding events down to specific hours and minutes suggest that precision and proximity remain meaningful enough *concepts* within these stories to be explored via speculative explanations. In addition, speakers' statements about the limits of their memory can be taken as statements of their

determination to tell meaningful stories which raise philosophical questions, in spite of the limited way in which narration, in general, captures life experience never in one version, really, but in multiple drafts which somehow aim, together, toward the truth.

### PART III: CONCLUSIONS

*I think of science, especially the human sciences, as having a narrative structure...individual theories of mind are often fruitfully read as stories about what the mind is or would be like if certain assumptions about it proved to be true.*<sup>30</sup>

#### 3.1 Summary of the Findings

Summing up my findings as generally as possible, I have found that ESENs or ESEN-like narratives appeared in the initial story corpus as approximately 21% of all the stories I was offered in the initial interviews (113 full-length narratives in total, not counting many narrative fragments, narrative models, and narrative kernels I was offered as well). Out of my selection of 20 case examples, 10 narratives confirmed the initial ESEN hypothesis, while 10 others called the hypothesis, as it stood, into question. Problems which these 10 narratives presented to initial definition resulted in a more specific, qualified, revised ESEN definition and in the conclusion that four example narratives could not be argued to fit the pattern because they did not match the pattern on at least two component points of the five-point definition.

Work with both informant groups demonstrated informants could and did manipulate a wide variety of explanations for their experiences. These explanations were not necessarily reducible to binary oppositions, e.g., a dialectic between belief and disbelief about the question of a supernatural world order. Rather, the explanations were philosophical, multiple, and open-ended; their very variety invited dialogue,

rather than two-sided debate, and encouraged considerations of how such experiences *could* occur, in fact and/or in principle, according to many possible explanations for (a) causality and (b) meaning.

Further fieldwork with University of Massachusetts students in August of 1998 elicited a smaller story corpus of fifteen narratives, 33% of which clearly matched the ESEN pattern. In this field experiment, ESENs and other belief narratives were elicited without any verbal prompting at all. Instead, I merely asked students to provide me with a story “very much like” an example narrative, *Judith’s Story*, which I then played for them on tape. This story categorization experiment also demonstrated that informants’ story labeling and story categorization *did not necessarily correlate with* each other. Informants did not use the same story labels in most cases, and their accounts of where they got their story labels were *equally varied*. Finally, multiple accounts of single experiences often differed at important levels of detail; informants’ *testimonies included ambiguities and discrepancies* within and across narrative versions. Informants nevertheless often demonstrated awareness of ambiguity and *discrepancy*, suggesting, in some cases at least, a higher-level intentionality and coherence within single narratives and across two or more tellings.

### **3.2 ESENs as Narratives of Enigmatic Experience**

The ESENs and other narratives which I have analyzed in this chapter are accounts which *do not* always describe unusual or supernatural experiences straightforwardly or unambiguously. The tellers sometimes reported portions of experience which they didn’t remember and couldn’t be certain about, alongside the features which were remembered clearly and with certainty. Alan, for example, remembered knowing instantly who was ringing the doorbell of his house and why (family friend was leaving her husband), but could not remember precisely what he

would or would not have been told about this woman's marriage before she arrived at their doorstep. Other narrators clarified what they did and what they didn't remember with the following comments:

As Robert said: *...we were never able to pinpoint a date cause I, I never remembered what day of the week exactly that happened and the other people didn't, didn't remember when the cat came back. But I really, very—very, very strongly felt that the cat was searching for me there and that we actually had communicated.*

As Madelyne said: *I don't know if it was the same day or not. I think actually, it was. But ah, I don't know.*

As Irina said: *...that's really about all I can remember of the actual dream and you know, the sort of, things around it.*

During or after their stories, tellers also sometimes acknowledged the absence of tests or confirmations, the improbability of the experiences themselves, or even their impossibility:

As Alan said: *...I did not check out if it was her or why she had come that day—I did not check this out in any active way—did not actively seek to confirm if I was right/if I had got the message right.*

As Alicia said: *What really struck me was that I must have been having that dream—I mean he died at the same, I can't, I have never managed, I never really sat down and figured out the time shift. But he was, he died at about the same time I had that dream.*

As Judith said: *I couldn't possibly have known, but I did know, you know?*

Some stories, especially those reported in more than one version (Diana's Story A, Alan's Story, Irina's Story) report multiple or probable chronological sequences of

action, rather than single, actual ones. Tellers of these ESEs are not only reporting *experiences; in their narration and in their interpretive conversations* afterward, they are also making sense of their reliance upon memory, and assessing what kind of experience it was probable or possible they had. Some narrators reckon with many such ambiguities in attempting to represent prior experience accurately in narrative; other narrators may remember and report their experiences more clearly and with fewer doubts about what did happen, might have happened, and could not possibly have happened.

Because of comments like these, I cannot conclude, as Hufford did with his data, that the narratives I am reviewing here are, as a group, evidence of a single, predictable order of experience with a stable set of primary and secondary characteristics. *It seems more likely that narrators are describing related experiences,* which they may or may not view as supernatural or even extraordinary. It does not seem appropriate for me to decide whether these narratives should be called "supernatural" or "unusual," when tellers explain them either way and both ways themselves. Tellers explain extraordinary simultaneous experiences as the results of divine intervention or ancestor protection (Judith), spiritual bonding (Rebecca), genetic and biological closeness (Diana), telepathic communication of waves of psychological pain (Alan), biological and genetic sharing of physical pain (Gina and Julie), as well as projections of guilt (Madelyne), unconscious awarenesses of others' moods (Aurora) and the results of reasonable, pre-informed anxieties about loved ones (Ben). All of these explanations express tellers' ideas about what their experiences, as they basically described them, could really be at more general levels.

Because they *explain* experience as well as describe it, belief narratives like these call for more than a dichotomized, either/or reaction of belief or disbelief. They

are not told or taken as true largely because they are the teller's *personal* experience, as might be the case with more mundane personal experience narratives, such as occupational life history. They are better described as potentially true, not in the as-yet-unverified "a friend-of-a-friend told me" sense of contemporary legend, but because they describe experiences which are, according to the tellers themselves, ambiguous, extraordinary, mysterious, inexplicable, and sometimes apparently impossible. I should probably note here that I think Judith called her experience "impossible" perhaps not in an absolute sense, but at least in the empirical sense of the miraculous, which for Hume meant a violation of natural law, or at least a contradiction of most—if not all—of one's previous experience of how the world works (see Section X of Hume's *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, "Of Miracles," for a clear exposition of this view).

Not all belief narratives concern experiences which are so ambiguous in description or so troublesome, even to their tellers, in principle. Diane Goldstein's informant, "Francis," a Newfoundlander with several years of post-secondary education, narrated a supernatural experience in a much more straightforward manner (Goldstein 1991). Francis described having seen a nun he didn't recognize performing the Stations of the Cross in his parish church. After he greeted her, received no response, and saw her vanish before his eyes, he consulted a parish priest, who confirmed that others had seen the same (Goldstein 1991, 32-40). Francis reported his perceptions and his memory of these events clearly and straightforwardly, without qualifying or questioning his perceptions or his memory. Evidence within his narrative supports rather straightforwardly the single conclusion that Francis had a supernatural experience: the figure he saw was not recognized by others as a known figure, she did not respond in the way an ordinary community member would (by returning Francis's "hello"), she vanished into thin air, and another source reported similar descriptions

from other witnesses. As Goldstein points out, this narrative includes "references to specific testing strategies" like those reported by David Hufford's informants on "Old Hag" attacks (1991, 35). Many of the narratives in this collection note precisely the opposite: *the lack or the impossibility of confirmation*.

Extraordinary simultaneous experience narratives in this collection stand apart from supernatural narratives such as these in other ways. Accounts like Francis's or accounts of visions of the Virgin Mary, for example, *might provoke an equivalent number of arguments for belief or disbelief in their truth as narratives of real experience*, but would not sustain quite so many diverse explanations for *how* such experiences could in fact have occurred. One could question whether or not the narrator saw the Virgin Mary (or a deceased nun), saw some other supernatural figure, saw something else altogether, or saw nothing at all (cf. Hufford's "traditions of disbelief," 1982b) but one could not speculate very easily that such an experience could be *the product of coincidence between distant parties, of divided consciousness, of telepathy, of genetic bonding, of ancestor intervention, or of the projection of informed but unconscious anxiety about another person's status at a distance*. The responses ESEs provoke move *naturally well beyond rationalizations for belief or disbelief, into multiple explanations for how the experiences they describe could be possible, again, as I have already argued, into the realm of philosophy, rather than of dialectic*.

For these reasons, I would prefer not to call these "*believed narratives*" as Hufford called the stories he collected in *The Terror That Comes in the Night* (1982a). They command more than either/or responses of belief or disbelief, precisely because they are described often and intentionally in *ambiguous* terms, and explained to be what *they seem to be* according to a number of possible if-then propositions about how the world and human consciousness work. They are telepathy, if minds can communicate

with other minds, despite a distance between human (and perhaps even animal) brains. They are bodily phenomena, if genetics and biological bonds enable relatives to share or communicate experiences without being physically present with each other (Diana, Gina, Julie, Sheila, and Mary). They are physical *and* mental phenomena, if people can sense waves of psychological pain or emotional energy from others without seeing them (Alan, Aurora). They are survivals of an unblocked, receptive neurological state, if during evolution, human brains lost their ability to sense the status of other humans at a distance (Maureen). For Judith, they are evidences of the beneficence of a God whose existence she would not even bother to question, though she still continues to speculate about "the method," "the medium," and "that data." The experiences in these stories are, from tellers' perspectives, answers to all of these intriguing "if" propositions about what interpersonal experience and mind are like. They express a range of *ideas*, rather than unequivocal "beliefs" or "disbeliefs," about what one person could know, in fact and in principle, about another's distress, at a distance. It is in these ways that these stories are philosophical and dialogical, rather than dialectical or dogmatic.

### **3.3 Vernacular Forms of Philosophy**

I have already elucidated why I regard these accounts and their associated explanations as acts of vernacular philosophy. I will offer here, though, a few more reasons to support this view. First, the stories themselves often resemble what in formal (academic) philosophizing would be called "thought experiments." Thought experiments are propositions or descriptions of proposed or actual situations designed to stimulate listeners' or readers' awareness of paradoxes and problems and to provoke questions and argument. When Judith tells the story of how she knew without any warning, in the middle of a boisterous party, that there was an emergency at home that



she needed to hurry back to take care of, and how she returned to find her son gravely ill, apparently from paint poisoning, listeners are provoked into (1) asking further questions about the circumstances to determine how she might have known and (2) arguing whether it was possible or impossible for her to have known, providing rationales for either position. As already shown above, Judith herself did these very things in explicating her story during her interview.

ESEs raise the question of how simultaneity could be tested or defined, and what kinds of cause-and-effect relationships could be involved in such situations. They also suggest paradoxes. The positing of a causal model—such as telepathy, where a sender's message causes another to receive it at a distance—might contraindicate simultaneity, because presumably a sender sends before a receiver receives, if one act is understood to have caused another. Claims of simultaneity raise questions in turn about cause-and-effect explanations: if two experiences occurred at "the exact same time," then it cannot be clear which preceded the other as its "cause." These questions can be resolved, to some extent, if one returns to the view of simultaneity as a relative, rather than an empirical, judgment about proximity in time, and its meaningful value. They linger though, philosophically, inviting further discussion. Not all the philosophical problems these stories suggest will be resolved in this thesis. I trust it is sufficient that I have already led readers through a good many of the interpretive problems presented within and across versions, at the levels of fit with the components of my hypothetical definition, and at the level of discrepancies between one story version and the next (e.g., Irina's Story, and Alan's, explicated above. I hope, rather, to have at least suggested some of the depth at which the stories can be taken apart, philosophically, and put back together—without necessitating belief or disbelief in them at the level of fact, representation of fact, or possibility in principle.

Yet another reason I consider these stories vernacular forms of philosophy is that ESENs examine a kind of reversal of the problem of other minds. The "problem of other minds" is the traditional philosophical attempt to account for how one could know without any doubt that another conscious human being truly existed, no matter how readily accessible to the senses this other person might appear to be. The problem of other minds involves debating, further, whether and how one person ever has real access to the conscious thoughts of another, irrefutable evidence of the another person's conscious being. This thought experiment brings to light the ways in which we generally take the conscious existence of other beings to be an indubitable and obvious fact, without being able to articulate our reasons for knowing for sure that another conscious being is really there. As anyone who has tried to explain how we "know" another conscious being exists can testify that *what in experience seems to be a reliable, obvious fact can be, in principle, hard to justify.*

ESENs are revolutionary narratives, in that they challenge a number of fundamental feelings of certainty about what is and is not ours to know about the circumstances of other people's lives, whether people are near us, or far away. More often than not, for example, people in Western society presume they *cannot* read minds, and their own thoughts *cannot* be read or known about, in proximity to another person or at a distance, in the absence of any sensory communication. If mind-reading were believed to be a possibility *more* often than not, university examinations would need to be canceled due to telepathic plagiarism, hypnotists would not need to provide their services in an office, and Tourette's Syndrome would amount to little *more than* speaking one's mind. What, then, is it in an extraordinary simultaneous experience narrative which might be compelling enough to justify a suspension of belief in reality's *usual* rules, or at least a qualification of those rules?

Reversing the problem of other minds, ESEns ask, instead, whether and how we can be entirely sure that people *cannot* possibly know anything about other minds, when they are at what is generally recognized to be an impossible distance away. What in daily life seems to be impossible or extraordinary knowledge, can also be, in principle and in the narration of meaningful experiences, necessary to explain. As a successful thought experiment, the problem of other minds allows people to feel a strange new sense of doubt about how we know anything about another person's thoughts and feelings, even at close range. The problem of ESEns, on the other hand, allows tellers and listeners to feel a strange new sense of hope and wonder for how we might know something about another person's thoughts and feelings at a distance.

Another reason I consider ESEns vernacular philosophy is that their ambiguities and multiple explanations illustrate how Daniel Dennett's "multiple drafts" theory of consciousness could be applied to understanding narrative. In *Consciousness Explained* (1991) Dennett tries to discourage readers from thinking about thinking as a function of input or output from a single "point of view," fixed in time or space. Dennett's theory presents thinking, instead, as a constant editorial process from multiple points of view in time and space. Perception is a constantly changing stream of versions of reality, just as memory is, in turn, a constantly changing editorial of the perceptual editing. Narrative is never the brain's final draft of its memory of perceptual input, but is, rather, just one draft: the product of just one moment's probe into the constantly changing stream of versions of reality. As Dennett explains,

Since perception turns imperceptibly into memory, and "immediate" interpretation turns imperceptibly into rational construction, there is no single all-contexts summit on which to direct one's probes. (Dennett 1991, 136)

Applied to the study of narratives, the theory works as follows. Human experience and memory of experience do not work like a photograph, or a piece of film. Unlike photos and films, human perception and memory cannot capture any coherent picture of the world without first putting it together and without continually revising it somehow, ever afterward. Every account of an experience is a draft, potentially subject to further editing in the process of memory and the process of narration. There are no final drafts, because consciousness is ongoing. Every account of experience is also *a draft of a draft*. Any story we tell about experience draws upon earlier "drafts" in perception, memory, and narrative.

This metaphorical view of narrating can be applied to the study of belief narratives. If any given narrative of extraordinary or supernatural experience is taken as a "draft of a draft" of reality, it can be assumed to be potentially *different from other* drafts without necessarily being ultimately "true" or "false" in relation to that other draft. The editorial processes become the focus of inquiry, rather than the question of whether a single draft should be believed to be a correct "copy" of reality or not. The best way for the editorial processes to be understood is by eliciting and comparing multiple drafts over a period of time. Together, these drafts can be considered, for the "truths" or versions of reality that they tell most and least consistently. Viewing narratives of supernatural or extraordinary experience as multiple drafts of reality reduces the need to believe, disbelieve, or definitively interpret any single narrative. This seems an appropriate way to study narratives which are performed in much the same way: most of the people I interviewed in this study seemed uninclined to provide any definitive interpretation, or demand unequivocal belief in their stories, themselves. Instead, they seemed to feel free to edit their perceptions and memories and to provide multiple, rather than single, interpretations and explanations for their experiences.

### 3.4 Other Conclusions

Some descriptive features reoccur across these narratives with regularity, but others do not. Such data suggest, at best, that tellers may be reporting a range of related experiences, with characteristics that overlap from story to story and in some cases even change between versions of the same story. Descriptive features which reoccur regularly include an emphasis on startling or even fearful simultaneities, sympathetic or neutral (rather than malevolent) percipient-agent relationships, personal crises involving suffering, and knowledge (through various cognitive vehicles) at a distance. *The correspondences between knowledge and crisis are subject to a variety of different explanations, which tellers offered, as the reader can see by referring to the lists of "Interpretive Features" and "Explanatory Points Following Story" in Appendix B.*

The narrators of these stories might be generally described as *having* experienced knowledge of another person's status at a time of personal distress, despite not being in a position to know in the ordinary way. However, despite the fact that my arguments which show the descriptive features these stories have in common, the features themselves vary, even when they do match components in the initial or the expanded definitions. Some stories describe dreams, and others describe waking impressions. The vehicles of "knowledge" or "intuition" are quite variable, as the following table illustrates.

Conventional labels for modes of conscious experience, such as "dream," "daydream," "knowledge," or "feeling of apprehension" are terms which may lend some interpretive cast to a given experience or story. Describing an experience as a "dream," for example, implies that the experiencer is sound asleep, at night, and less influenced by surrounding sounds, images, or activities than he or she would be in a waking state,

**Table 2.5 Range of Vehicles in ESEns**

<b>VEHICLE</b>	<b>STORY</b>
Sudden feeling of apprehension	Judith
Dream	Alicia
Experience of ghost OR dream of ghost	Karen
Urge to cut hair/get hair cut	Darla
Panic attack	Mary (& Sheila)
Dream	Madelyne
Waking-sleeping vision	Robert
Composing a poem	Matthew
Sudden knowledge	Alan, Grace D
Crying/feeling pain	Diana A
Sharing a dream/dreaming the same dream	Diana B
Metaphorical/literal experience of a "storm"	Grace A
Daydream	Grace C
Dream	Maureen,
Dream	Aurora
Dream	Laura
Dream	Irina
Vibe or communication	Ben

but not all narratives offer explicit clarifications. Laura's Story is an exception in this regard. *Laura makes it clear that she was sound asleep*, if we wished to question whether she had heard her own phone ring once in the middle of the night, and *then* dreamed her dream about her father as an anxiety response, and only *then* answered the phone. This is simply not the way it happened, according to Laura.

Both Alan's Story, Version 1 and Grace's Story D use terms like "knowledge" to describe percipient's experiences (Alan "knows" who is at his door and why, without being there in Version 1, and before he hears anyone enter in Version 2; Grace's friend "just *knew*" her boy was falling through the ice). "Knowing" implies a degree of certainty which Grace's Story D seems to support more strongly than Alan's accounts. While Alan's knowledge feels certain to him, it also remains less than completely verified by ordinary checking in both story versions. By contrast, immediate action *taken on the basis of Grace's friend's statements* confirmed her "knowledge" to correspond with an actual emergency.

Clearly, these stories present "knowledge" in various senses. I will explore the nuances and meanings of the concept of "knowledge" in these stories more fully in my thesis conclusion. Such variable notions of the vehicle of knowledge, or intuition, make it difficult to argue that there is some single, stable "order" of cognitive experience which gives rise to these kinds of stories over time. I am arguing, instead, and much more conservatively, that there seems to be a justifiable, hypothetical pattern of narrating a hypothetical pattern of association of various kinds of intuition with a range of painful life crises. I call this hypothetical pattern of narrating the "ESEN."

Biologically or socially close relationships between percipients and agents *appear in some examples, but not in others*. These factors significantly distinguish one person's extraordinary simultaneous experience from another's, even though both may

correspond to the pattern. There is a difference in the quality of emotion between stories in which the percipient-agent relationship is intimate (see Rebecca's Story, or Sheila and Mary's) and those in which parties do not know each other at all (Grace's Story C and Maureen's Story). Grace described her reaction to a vision of a suicide of a young man she does not know as what led her to be re-hospitalized for depression. As she explained,

*I just tried to forget about it, but it was still on my mind. And a couple of days later Mom told me that um, a young guy from here, in St. John's was after hanging himself in the forest. He ran away. And ah, they couldn't find him. I think it was an extension cord that he used. I just couldn't believe that. I told my mother. They took me back to see my psychiatrist. I, I didn't get over it, I just ended up back in hospital, I just couldn't deal with that...yeah, it was really frightening.*

Maureen also expressed extreme feelings of discomfort, while describing the dream she had about people she did not know, who died by fire in Halifax:

*...I still don't know who they are. It was about a fire. And um, a woman, they were in a townhouse, I suppose, assume, downtown Halifax, and uh. A woman was trying to get to her baby but she [pauses, sounding more and more upset remembering] she couldn't make it. [pause] And I woke up, crying. And ah, the next morning my father was reading a paper before he went to classes, about this fire that was downtown and ah, fatalities including a young child and single mother. And ah, I never told my parents that because it seemed so ah, it was a bad thing? It was not something that sat comfortably with me at all...*

By contrast, Sheila narrated her panic attack simultaneous to her twin sister's surgery with a strong sense of its meaningfulness in their lives, and Laura told the story of her dream simultaneous to her father's hospital admission with a sense of pride that it confirmed their spiritual bond. Though both of these narrators' stories meet the definition of an ESEN, their emotional qualities differ because the quality of closeness



in the relationship differs, as does the nature of the relationship itself. Readers will recall that I have eliminated the one story which was clearly about a human/animal relationship from consideration altogether. Unless the story is treating the human situation metaphorically by mentioning an animal (as Ben's narrative models do, and Madelyne's story did), I am not considering stories primarily involving animals as subjects or percipients (e.g., Robert's) to be an ESEN. I will consider the questions of how and whether these stories are essentially about closeness (human closeness, that is) in the concluding chapter of this thesis.

My findings differ somewhat from Leea Virtanen's findings about simultaneous informatory experiences. Virtanen states that in the narration of simultaneous informatory experiences, the exact time of corresponding events is not likely to be forgotten or changed from version to version:

More typical, however, is the loss of noncentral or peripheral facts. After only a short time, we generally forget the date, hour, day or exact place in which some event occurred. In *simultaneous* experiences, the date and especially the hour are of prime importance, more important than even the year. (Virtanen 1990, 13)

As I have already shown above, my informants did forget such things, often left them out entirely. However, I also found that there was a wider range of ways to convey simultaneity than naming the hour and minute of corresponding events. Stories can be about simultaneity whether or not they explicitly name the hour and minute of an intuition, and the hour and minute of a distant crisis. Some of the stories I collected conveyed simultaneity by specifying times in this way. Other stories relied on less specific methods—whether implying simultaneity in the sense of action occurring elsewhere “meanwhile,” or by less precise descriptions of time (e.g., “around that time,” “at the exact same time,” etc.). Moreover, examination of multiple versions of

some stories that *did* specify the hour (e.g., Irina's Story) indicates that the "exact" time can in fact change from version to version, without altering the basic point: that an intuition and a distant crisis occurred, most remarkably, *at or about the very same time*.

I agree with Virtanen's assessment of what simultaneous informatory experience stories are essentially about, however. As she describes them,

Accounts of so-called telepathic experiences are highly narrative in that they address deep human realities common to all people: the mystery of death, the meaning of love and affection, the ultimate nature of humanity. Forgetting details in the narrating of such an experience does not alter the human significance of the narrative to any great extent. (Virtanen 1990, 14)

Where Virtanen prefers to use the term "telepathy," I would avoid it (just as I avoid Bennett's "ESP" or Louisa Rhine's "*psi*"), because I found that only some of my informants labeled their experiences "telepathy," some of the time, and because they explained them, usually, in a surprising variety of ways. As the University of Massachusetts students made clear to me, "ESP" was not even a working hypothesis or a familiar term for some of them.

Unlike Virtanen, I have found, and do believe, that the forgetting or alteration of small details in multiple narrations of these experiences *can* alter the significance of the narrative substantially, in ways that many of the folks who spoke with me seemed quite aware of, too. "Small" changes in the report of time sequences can lead to changes in the conclusions tellers and listeners can draw; however, as I explained above, the implication of simultaneity may remain intact, as in Irina's Story, when ambiguities in time or circumstance which do support synchronicity (rather than clearly contradicting it) appear across multiple tellings of a single experience. In narratives in which informants seem to be judging the proximity of an intuition and a crisis in time as

significant, and neither describe nor explain their experience as more of a knowing-beforehand, I think it may be justified to regard such narratives as being relatively more about simultaneity than about foreknowledge.

Hufford's experience-centered approach supports an informant's need and right to describe unusual experiences straightforwardly and be believed. The approach I have proposed and used with these narratives supports these informants' need and right to *draft* their most accurate description of their experience, across more than one account of the same experience, if necessary. This approach has drawn attention to eleven explanatory patterns tellers used and has supported tellers' right to evaluate the ways in which what they say and remember about their experience is or is not precisely accurate, probable, or possible.

In summary, then, an approach oriented to examining explanations as well as descriptions of experience, may be more suitable than the experience-centered approach for narratives which report unusual or supernatural experiences in ambiguous ways. I believe Hufford's experience-oriented approach works very well with narratives like those in his collection or those collected by Diane Goldstein (1991). These narratives describe perceptual details, remembered time sequences, reality-testing strategies, and other basic features of supernatural experiences rather clearly and unambiguously. However, an explanation-oriented approach might help make sense of narratives like the ones I examined here, which as I have argued throughout this chapter, draw us into vernacular philosophy, the realm of if and then, rather than the world of simply believing, or not.

## Notes to Chapter Two

<sup>1</sup> I say "fieldwork segment" as I have nowhere in this document represented the project as a field study or ethnography *per se*. As explained in the thesis introduction and elsewhere, this project is an experiment in the application of a hypothetical narrative category, to select historical examples and to stories in a relatively small contemporary corpus. The corpus was collected from a small but varied convenience sample of informants who cannot be said to "represent" any particular community. For an example of what I would (and did) call a field study, see my M.A. thesis, "Confirmation: A Folklore Ethnography of Roman Catholic Parish Practice in Newfoundland," Memorial University of Newfoundland, Department of Folklore, St. John's, NF, 1992.

The latter is properly called a field study (i.e. ethnography), to my view, for several reasons: (1) the study aimed to understand and represent a single, nucleated denominational religious community, (2) the primary research mode was a year of participant observation within the parish church, school, and environs, and (3) data was triangulated (alternate modes of inquiry were used to reinforce each other, upon the same group of people). Over the course of my year with that parish I conducted focus-group and individual interviews with 114 adolescent confirmation candidates and their families, employed a number of questionnaires, and interviewed a number of leaders and elders in the community. In the present study I was attempting to do something different.

<sup>2</sup> To my knowledge, there is not an established "quota" of informants or interviews for doctoral theses in the Department of Folklore at Memorial University. Rather, the determinants of whether sufficient field research has been done in any given case are (a) whether the quantity of research is original and appropriate in the context of the study's overall goals, as described by the researcher, and (b) whether the thesis as a whole is represented as a field study, an archival/literary study, or a combination field/literary investigation. I would place my doctoral thesis in the third category. In August 1998 I hired an M.A. student in the Department of Folklore, Niko Silvester, to compile all available statistics on numbers of informants and interviews, in all the doctoral theses in the Folklore Department to date. Niko's findings indicate that my own sample size and number of interviews is higher, not lower, than many theses produced by our department. I hired Niko to do this research for me (which took her seven hours) because I was not able to travel back to Newfoundland to do it myself, living in Massachusetts. Her findings appear as Appendix C.

<sup>3</sup> Dr. Bennett listed narrative number 8, "Matthew's Story," in the straightforward match category; I place it in the problematic match category.

Otherwise Dr. Bennett's opinions on which examples matched or didn't match my initial definition concurred with mine--though her rationales were probably somewhat different than my own.

<sup>4</sup>It is on this point in my revision of this thesis that I am most appreciative of Dr. Bennett's critique. Her specific, and strongly voiced, objections to my including these 9 narratives among my set of 20 examples forced me to articulate parts of my analytical rationale which had never been expressed in any of my earlier drafts. Until I received her critique, I had assumed that the various rationales by which some of these more problematic examples (ones which I had simply called "diverse" in my last draft) could be seen to fit the definition were, somehow, obvious. Like many assumptions about what might be "obvious" to one's readers, that one was quite mistaken. I am very grateful to have been given the chance to make these rationales clear in a revised draft, rather than to have had to argue about them, on a case-by-case basis, at defense.

<sup>5</sup>By minimal, I mean that excessive repetitions of words and phrases which add nothing or little extra to the sense of a sentence (e.g., "you know," "okay," sentence re-starts, etc.) have been removed or replaced with ellipses. In some cases, ellipses also indicate removal of a section of conversation that digressed onto another topic altogether for a few moments, when the digression was not at all relevant to the narrative at hand or to the previous point being made. Loud exclamations are indicated with capitals, and heavy emphases are indicated with italics. Significant pauses and paralinguistic features, such as deep breaths and clearings of the throat, are indicated in parentheses.

<sup>6</sup>Most "Explanatory Points" in Appendix B are verbatim quotations from the interview tapes, and are indicated as such by quotation marks. In a minority of cases, "Explanatory Points" are summarized or paraphrased, when much lengthier comments to the same effect seemed cumbersome to quote verbatim.

<sup>7</sup>All original participants' names were entered into a compensation raffle at the very end of this project, resulting in the random distribution of two cash awards of \$25.00 each. University of Massachusetts participants were not compensated for their participation in summer of 1998.

<sup>8</sup>Page 18, Eileen Condon, "Doctoral Research Proposal," Memorial University of Newfoundland, Department of Folklore, St. John's, NF, 7 February 1994. David Hufford (1991, 14-31) uses the term "multitraditional" in a similar manner.

<sup>9</sup>For a fuller discussion of dream-catchers as a Native craft and sacred tradition see Bruce Mason and Eileen Condon, "The New Age: Where Folklore and Cultural Studies Meet Retail and Belief," *New York Folklore* 23 (1997): 65-88.

<sup>10</sup>See Maureen's Story, Explanatory Point 2, in Appendix A.

<sup>11</sup>For a fuller discussion of how I came to understand and decide, editorially, where these stories began and ended, see the "Conclusions" section of this chapter.

<sup>12</sup>In recent years, in presentations to the American Folklore Society Conferences, I have heard Hufford quote a somewhat higher percentage.

<sup>13</sup>A number of my peers at Memorial have critiqued Hufford's experience-centered approach in course papers, as well as in general conversation. One good example is Christina Barr's "Phenomenology in the Bedroom: Core Feature Links and Traditional Incorporation in Anomalous Nighttime Experience Narratives," a course paper for Folklore 6200 (Folk Belief), Winter 1995, taught by Diane Goldstein.

<sup>14</sup>I ran across "grounded theory" (see reference below) as method of transcript analysis not when studying folklore, but when working for (and later, socializing with) nursing professors and nursing students, at the University of Virginia and at Memorial University of Newfoundland. A number of nurses I knew in both settings used this method when they collected qualitative data from informants, and when they wished to *publish the results of qualitative research in quantitative nursing journals*. They considered the method a classic defense of basic qualitative analysis in face of basic quantitative objections.

<sup>15</sup>Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (NY: De Gruyter, 1967).

<sup>16</sup>I am referring in particular to Virtanen's brief summaries of three types of skeptical explanations for simultaneous experience narratives: the "coincidence" explanation, the "influence of tradition" explanation, and the "unreliable testimony" theory (Virtanen 1990, 3-5).

<sup>17</sup>Here I am recalling Alan Dundes' article "Folk Ideas as Units of Worldview," *Journal of American Folklore*, 84 (1971): 93-103.

<sup>18</sup>In the movie about his remarkable life as a physicist, Stephen Hawking describes black holes' effects on objects in terms of a spaghetti grinder.

<sup>19</sup>In Labov and Waletzky's terms, a narrative would be a sequence of clauses containing at least one temporal juncture (1967, 28).

<sup>20</sup>The orientation section would clauses which "serve to orient the listener in respect to person, place, time, and behavioral situation" (Labov and Waletzky 1967, 32).

<sup>21</sup>Labov and Waletzky 1967, 33-39.

<sup>22</sup>They identify three ways that codas may bring listeners out of the narration of the past and back into the present moment: (1) by the use of words like "that," "there," and "those," after and in contrast to earlier uses of "this," "here," and "these"; (2) by following one actor's actions up into the present, even if the action described seems irrelevant to the story; and (3) by describing the present effect of the narrated events on the narrator (Labov and Waletzky 1967, 40).

<sup>23</sup>*This is the corpus I originally described by a general estimate of 150 stories, without separating full-length narratives from fragments and kernels, etc. As the reader can see in this second version, the original estimate was conservative.*

<sup>24</sup>As may be seen in the Narrative Inventory in the Appendices, Robert does in fact tell another story which is an ESEN proper; his first wife has a sense that he is ill, at a distance from home, working in tobacco fields, without being in communication with him. She arrives unannounced to help him. I found the problematic example more useful, theoretically, though, and presented it in this chapter for that reason.

<sup>25</sup>Although as Hamlyn points out (1987, 15), "Aristotle said that philosophy begins with wonder."

<sup>26</sup>Teresa provided a short story about intuiting her twin sister's marriage announcement, and Maureen told a story about foreknowledge of a baby's arrival.

<sup>27</sup>*The eight include Judith (I6), Karen (E1, E7, E9), Alicia (E7), Mary (E3), Madelyne (E3), Ben (E2, E7), Irina (I-E1, 2-E4), and Aurora (E8). "I" stands for Interpretive Feature, while "E" stands for "Explanatory Point."*

<sup>28</sup>These are: Maureen, Judith, Robert, Alan, Sheila, Mary, Julie, Gina, Alicia, Madelyne, Grace, Laura, Irina, Matthew, and Aurora.

<sup>29</sup>Tom was not included in the sampling of speakers in this chapter because he did not narrate an ESEN himself, though he participated in the interpretive discussions following other informants' narratives. See the Narrative Inventory for other stories which Tom did contribute to the overall story corpus.

<sup>30</sup>Owen Flanagan, *The Science of the Mind*, 2nd ed. rev. and exp. (Cambridge, MA: MIT P, 1991) xiii.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE CASE FOR THE SUPERNATURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF SIMULTANEITY IN THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION

*for Tom Tentler*

#### **Introduction**

Within the Christian tradition, official as well as folk,<sup>1</sup> simultaneity, or what in post-Jungian parlance is sometimes called “synchronicity,” has supernatural and religious significance. This chapter examines some portions of Christian scripture, medieval hagiography, and other religious writing which sustain the claim that a general tradition of belief in the holiness of coincidence has existed for centuries within the larger context of denominational belief and practice. My argument is limited largely to Roman Catholicism, as that is the variety of Christianity with which I am most familiar, personally and academically.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, I hope to demonstrate that it is from such a background of traditional Christian beliefs about the supernatural significance of simultaneity that a number of example texts which match my hypothetical ESEN (extraordinary simultaneous experience narrative) pattern draw their fullest religious meaning.

Before turning to historical examples, let me open with a more contemporary match to the ESEN pattern: a story my mother shared with me over twenty years ago, hardly suspecting that the details of an odd dream she had would show up, paraphrased, in a portion of her daughter’s doctoral work. In two ways, this example introduces arguments to come. First, it illustrates the way in which narrative integrates personal experience with the Roman Catholic religious tradition; second, it assigns the notion of simultaneity a central, rather than marginal, significance within this tradition by associating it with the meaning of the Eucharist, the ultimate sacrament of union



between humans and the divine. The same connections appear in the first historical example I will discuss, a visionary account from Bede's eighth-century *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*.

*Moreso than other family narratives I recall, this story relies on the fragility of memory: my own distant recollection of a narrative which, as I discovered to my incredulity when I sought to confirm its details, no longer exists in my mother's memory today. About twenty years ago, on a day and at a time and in a place which I can no longer call to mind, but which would most likely have been at home, in Connecticut, my mother, Vera Tynan Condon, born in 1926 and raised in Yonkers, New York, told me about a vivid dream she had had one weekend. She dreamt about a childhood companion, one of her sister Helen's close friends, from their neighborhood of Sacred Heart parish, in North Yonkers.*

*In this dream, as my mother reported it to me, as I recall, she met Helen's friend Jeannie Fallon in a line of people going to receive Communion at Mass. Jeannie's hands were pressed together in prayer. Jeannie greeted her and said, "I'll see you in Communion." This dream disturbed my mother, causing her to express a worry that Jeannie was in fact dying, at that time. Jeannie resided an hour or two away, in New York State. Some time later, days or weeks after the dream, my mother heard through her sister Helen that Jeannie had indeed been close to death at the time my mother had had the dream, but had not passed away.*

*When I called this story to my mother's attention in 1998 to clarify and test the details as I remembered them, she reacted with a puzzled silence. "No," she said,*

*No, that was something Ed McGuinness told his wife on his deathbed. That was the last thing he said to her before he died. It gives me chills just to remember that. He was Jack's brother, I was dating Jack. They came back from the war*

and Ed got married, and he was diagnosed with cancer. *Died almost immediately.* He asked all of us, all of his friends to throw him a big party, which he had recorded, he wanted us to remember that, and he died not long after. He had only been married a short time. *I don't think his wife was Catholic, I think she was Protestant or something.* But that was the last thing he said to her before he died.

A debate ensued, about who was remembering what correctly or incorrectly. My mother claimed she did not remember the dream about Jeannie, though she granted that perhaps I was right, and perhaps she had somehow forgotten it. She did recall, though, that Jeannie Fallon had been ill with cancer for about a year before she passed away. My mother and her sisters ordinarily speak to each other once every several months; they would probably not have discussed Jeannie's welfare on a day-to-day or a week-to-week basis. Hence my mother would not necessarily have been aware of Jeannie's precise status at any given time after her diagnosis.

Like my interviews for this project, the debate with my mother renewed my appreciation for the mystery that is human memory, whether it is negotiated collectively or individually. Our debate also left me with at least two possible conclusions, neither of which entirely erases the power or the coherence of my own memory of my mother's account of the dream. The first possible conclusion is that my memory of my mother's dream is a confabulated conflation of two stories, one about Jeannie Fallon's diagnosis and death, and another about Ed McGuinness's diagnosis and death. A second possible conclusion is that my mother's dream about Jeannie (which I am remembering more or less correctly) shared a central motif with the story of Ed McGuinness's death. The fact that my mother still reacts with emotion to the phrase "*I'll see you in Communion,*" seems, to me, to indicate that Ed's dying words might have embedded themselves deeply enough in her memory to have emerged in her dreams, years after that death, when another member of their childhood circle had been stricken similarly, and was

feared to die. In such a way, the Communion motif might have regenerated itself as a dream image in the context of a related social situation. Such a process is related to Jung's notion of archetype, which I will discuss further on.

The work of Daniel Dennett, a contemporary philosopher of mind, sheds some light on the mystery of the process of imagining how to understand and trust memory. His work addresses the problematic interdependence between memory and multiple narrative drafts, a relationship which I explore at greater length in the fieldwork chapter and in my thesis conclusion. The above examples, like others throughout the thesis, illustrate some of the dynamics of this interdependence. *Because the possible errors in my memory (or my mother's) would appear to have occurred sometime after the telling of the original narrative or narratives, i.e., post-experience, the inconsistencies across our memories are what Dennett would call "Orwellian" memory revisions.* If one postulated that my mother's stories had themselves been conflated at the times she told them to me, then the error in my memory might be called "Stalinesque" revision, in Dennett's vocabulary, for it would be error which originated from the moment of perceptual input, not from processes that took place some time afterward.

In practical terms, though—and here is the way in which Dennett preserves the mystery—it often becomes a matter of complicated re-remembering, or in some cases, an exercise in speculation—to distinguish between which types of memory error (if any) *may have produced what looks and feels like real memory in the present* (Dennett 1991, 116-124). The ability to trust memory's coherence in the present (and to ascribe integrity to narratives which depend upon memory's coherence) is therefore rather akin to a religious matter: in practical terms, it becomes an act of faith, grounded as far as possible in reasonable assessments of the empirical facts.<sup>3</sup>

Beyond such questions of analogy and conflation, beyond or perhaps within the mystery of faith in the negotiated coherence of memory, the value of the phrase "I'll see you in Communion" in these two narratives retains its personal and its traditional cultural meaning. The motif belongs to no-one in particular, and to everyone, within a *common religious tradition older and larger than any camaraderie my mother and her friends knew in a Yonkers parish neighborhood*. The phrase is at once the expression of a husband's undying love for his wife, and a greeting with which a childhood friend might take leave of another in late middle age. "I'll see you in Communion" is moreover a literal statement of the facts of Catholic life, historical and contemporary. It points toward the customary: the routine of people who see each other, daily, weekly, or occasionally to do that very thing, see each other in Communion, before the altar in the parish church. Yet unlike the more mundane phrase, "I'll be seeing you," or the slight variant "I love you," "I'll see you in Communion" states more than the literal truth. It expresses a hopeful supernatural desire, one which is apodictically good, *regarding and regardless of any social context. Formulaic yet ever new, it is a spiritual declaration in the future tense, with which anyone who has loved another, within or beyond the Christian tradition, can make some sense of death*. It is a phrase which answers one of the most ecumenical of theological questions, namely, "What will give us the courage to die?"<sup>4</sup>

The Eucharistic motif anchors my mother's personal experience narrative within the Roman Catholic Christian tradition, contemporary and historical. What remains to be shown is how, despite their religious particularities, this contemporary narrative and the historical examples I am about to discuss, also match the hypothetical ESEN pattern. This pattern, which is the central subject of this dissertation, is not necessarily

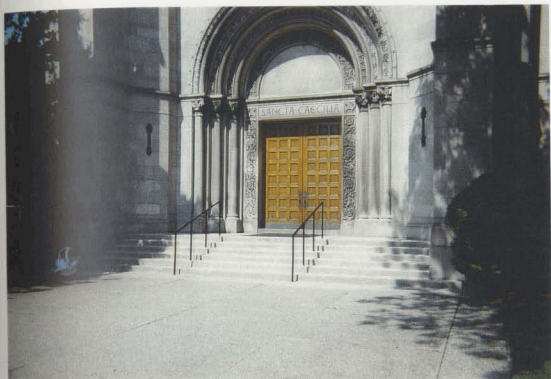


Figure 3.1. St. Cecilia's, Detroit, Michigan. One of a million parishes in which Roman Catholics see each other in Communion.

a religious pattern *per se*, but one which has at its heart one person's more or less simultaneous knowledge of another's status, at a time of crisis involving suffering. In the course of introducing some historical examples and showing how they, like my mother's account, fit or at least approach this pattern, I will make the broader two-part argument that (1) a tradition of belief in holy simultaneity exists within the larger Roman Catholic Christian tradition, and that (2) a selection of historical example narratives which match the ESEN pattern take their religious meanings from this tradition-within-a-tradition.

### **1. Simultaneity vs. Synchronicity**

I will begin by distinguishing my own idea of "simultaneity" in the ESEN pattern from Jung's broader concept of "synchronicity" within his psychological theory. Because the words "simultaneity" and "synchronicity" are often used synonymously in popular discourse (I use these words and the term "coincidence" more loosely, and somewhat interchangeably, in other sections of this thesis), I should make it clear that Jung's conceptualization of synchronicity does not just mean "simultaneity" but is actually a three-part conceptualization of coincidence. Within this larger framework of Jung's, *simultaneous* coincidence--the area which interests me and plays an important role in the example narratives I'll discuss--is just one of the three forms. In the course of making this distinction, I hope further to make it clear that even though as Hans Küng has observed, *Jung's psychological theories make more room for nonpathological religiousness and the existence of God than the theories of peers like Freud and Adler* (Küng 1990, 139),<sup>5</sup> the meanings that Jungian psychology lends to simultaneous coincidence should probably be separated, where possible, from the meanings such coincidences derive from religious tradition proper.

Jung's thinking opens itself (and its readers) to religiousness in many ways, but most noticeably by allowing a word like "soul" to survive in contemporary thinking. Among people I have interviewed for this project whose worldviews were strongly or even tentatively religious, the concept of "soul" has been inextricably linked to the interpretation of extraordinary simultaneous experiences. A number of my informants manipulated this concept when interpreting their experiences.<sup>6</sup> To sum up the argument to come then: simultaneity will be differentiated from synchronicity, and the Jungian senses of "soul" and "synchronicity" will be distinguished in turn from the traditional religious values associated with simultaneous coincidence, with reference to a specific historical example: the account from Bede.

In his paper "On Synchronicity"<sup>7</sup> Jung sets out a tripartite classification system for various phenomena he calls "synchronicity." Jung offers, in effect, three separate definitions of the phenomenon, as follows:

1. The coincidence of a psychic state in the observer with a simultaneous, objective, external event that corresponds to the psychic state or content...where there is no evidence of a causal connection between the psychic state and the external event, and where, considering the psychic relativity of space and time, such a connection is not even conceivable.
2. The coincidence of a psychic state with a corresponding (more or less simultaneous) external event taking place outside the observer's field of perception, i.e., at a distance, and only verifiable afterward...
3. The coincidence of a psychic state with a corresponding not yet existent future event that is distant in time and can likewise only be verified afterward.

In the second and third groups, Jung adds,

...the coinciding events are not yet present in the observer's field of perception, but have been anticipated in time in so far as they can only be verified afterward.

For this reason I call such events *synchronistic*, which is not to be confused with *synchronous*. (Jung, Volume 8 of *CW*, 1978; cited in Aziz 1990, 61-62).

By comparison, in the definition of an ESEN which I presented in the opening chapters, the concept of simultaneity is one of five components in a hypothetical narrative frame. To refresh readers' memories, examples which qualify as "ESENs" (extraordinary simultaneous experience narratives) need to be (A) a first- or third-person account, (B) which describes one person's [(C) more or less simultaneous] knowledge of another's status, (D) at a time of a crisis involving suffering [e.g. accident, illness, death] (E) while the parties are at some distance from each other. How does the simultaneity in elements B and C of my definition differ from what Jung means by "synchronicity"?

Let me first present what I mean by "more or less simultaneous knowledge of another's status," after which I will restate Jung's definitions in somewhat plainer language than his, for comparison. What I mean by that phrase is, a moment in any vehicle of a person's conscious experience (a dream, waking intuition, vision, etc.) whose contents correspond mimetically or analogously with the contents of the experience of another, suffering person at a distance. By "more or less simultaneous knowledge" I mean correspondence which is established as simultaneous either by explicit reference to clock-time or by some other indication that simultaneity was probable (e.g., "at the same time," "at that very hour," or a "meanwhile" construction, etc.). My mother's dream of Jeannie Fallon qualifies as such knowledge because--at least in my memory of the narration--my mother expressed wonder at the correspondence between the time she would have been dreaming of Jeannie, and the time that Jeannie was indeed suffering, some distance away. I do not remember my mother using hour notation to indicate simultaneity, I believe she relied on a "meanwhile" construction. However, neither do I remember her presenting the



experience as a “warning” or a “premonition” that Jeannie was “going to die.” For these reasons I identify my mother’s experience, as I can still “hear” it narrated in my memory, as an experience of *simultaneous* coincidence, rather than foreknowledge or some other form of correspondence.

The distinction between simultaneity and foreknowledge (or “premonition”) is a subtle one, but it can be understood by reference to my mother’s story as well as to the example from Bede’s ecclesiastical history, which I discuss further on. Focusing for now on my mother’s narrative, I make the distinction as follows. Contextual evidence my mother gave me in conversation suggested that the *serious or terminal nature* of Jeannie’s illness would have been known for approximately a year before her death. In this case, an experience of “foreknowledge” would not have delivered much in the way of news: Jeannie was generally known to be going to die. Her impending death was a given. By contrast, a dream about Jeannie’s simultaneous status would have answered more pertinent questions on the mind of the people who knew her and already knew she was ill, such as, How is Jeannie doing now, or How close is Jeannie now to death? The “more or less simultaneous knowledge of another’s status” in this example narrative appears primarily to break spatial limits on knowledge, rather than temporal ones. It asks, in other words, how could my mother have known Jeannie was sick when Jeannie was miles away, rather than, how could my mother have known Jeannie was *going to die before she did*. The story might be explained in various ways, not just “noncausally” as Jung might have preferred to “explain” synchronicity. A number of cause-and-effect explanations could apply, whether natural, supernatural, or religious, but within a religious worldview, like my mother’s, God would probably be identified as the first cause.

Synchronicity for Jung is, likewise, a noteworthy correspondence, an analogy, between the contents of a person's consciousness and external events. The parallels I am examining are, like Jung's, correspondences between the contents of consciousness and external events. However, my scope is narrower; I am concerned not with correspondences to *any* external event, as Jung is in his three forms of "synchronicity," but more specifically with correspondences to external events occurring in the lives of other people. The external events which interest me are those which involve some other, and involve suffering, rather than happy or relatively more trivial circumstances. Jung's synchronistic correspondences are remarkable because they appear to break the limits that time, space, and causality set upon knowledge. By contrast, the correspondences I am examining appear, in the main, to break *spatial* limits on knowledge. Following my informants' lead, I allow for causal explanations as well as explanations of the "that's impossible" kind, and, as stated above, I allow for (and have recorded) explanations which proceed from natural, supernatural, or religious premises.

Whereas Jung posits an acausal or noncausal interpretive approach to simultaneous and other coincidences, to respect the search for meaning over the search for inconceivable or improbable causalities, I leave this question open. The people I have talked with about such experiences search for *both meaning and cause*; their recognition that an experience appears to violate a natural law does not prevent them from speculating about what "*natural law*" *really consists of*, and whether or not there are causes which either appear to or do in fact transcend natural law. Apart from (or alongside) their *personal or denominational loyalties*, my informants rarely limited their interpretations to the natural, the supernatural, or the religious: most people tried to *explore all imaginable avenues, not just one*. Because I exclude premonition accounts

from consideration, the stories I review here do not primarily give rise to the question, How could one be conscious of events which have not yet transpired in time? That question is related, to be sure, especially if and when a narrative contains a marked ambiguity in that respect; however, for the stories I have selected throughout this study, I contend that this is not the *primary* question: simultaneity is the more relevant question and area of belief.

In summary, then, Jung's forms of synchronicity prompt any one of three possible questions about the limits of knowledge: How can a person seem to know about event X when event X took place at a distance? How can a person's conscious thoughts correspond to event X if X has not yet occurred in time? How can a person dream about event X when event X was not caused by the dreaming, and the dream could not have been caused by event X? The narratives I am looking at inspire the first question, preclude (or at least de-emphasize) the second, and challenge the third by sustaining a variety of interpretations, both causal and noncausal. The next section illustrates these distinctions further in reference to a specific example.

## **2. Jungian "Soul" and "Synchronicity" versus the Religious Significance of Simultaneity**

The reason I am beginning with an application of Jung's thinking is to demonstrate that some of his terms and values are amenable to religious terms and values, though not necessarily synonymous with them. As K  ng puts it, in comparison to Freud,

... Adler and Jung left open the question of whether God exists outside of our own consciousness and psyches, but in no way did they reject religion as such. Adler tolerated it benevolently, and Jung took a basically positive stance toward religion in analysis and therapy. (K  ng 1990, 139)

The narratives I am examining in this chapter, however, and the hypothetical narrative pattern they match, sustain religious interpretations a bit better than psychological ones. As religious texts, they may prove amenable to Jungian approaches, but they take meaning directly and primarily from religious tradition. As Küng suggests, though, Jung's open-ended concepts can help open the door to a consideration of the religious interpretations. The narrative I am about to examine will therefore test the degree to which Jung's thinking is amenable with true religiousness.

One way to explore how Jung's thinking directs the interpretation of simultaneous coincidence toward the realm of religious thinking (while stopping just short of some of the heaps of faith characteristic of the latter) is to apply a Jungian analysis to a text which is unambiguously religious in content and context. For this purpose I return to the example mentioned in an earlier chapter: the legend of Abbess Hild's death, which appears in Bede's eighth-century English ecclesiastical history. Describing Hild, who died in the year 680, Bede wrote:

After she had presided over the monastery [Whitby] for many years...she began to suffer internal pain and her last day came. About cock-crow she received the Viaticum of the most holy Communion and, summoning the handmaidens of Christ who were in the monastery, she urged them to preserve the gospel peace among themselves and towards all others; even while she was still exhorting them, she joyfully saw death approach or rather, to use the words of the Lord, she passed from death into life.<sup>1</sup>

On the same night it pleased Almighty God by a vision to reveal her death in another monastery some distance away called Hackness....In this monastery there was a nun named Begu who for thirty or more years had been dedicated to the Lord in virginity and had served Him in the monastic life. As she was resting in the sisters' dormitory, she suddenly heard in the air the well-known sound of the bell with which they used to be aroused to their prayers or called together when

one of them had been summoned from the world. On opening her eyes she seemed to see the roof of the house rolled back, while a light which poured in from above filled the whole place. As she watched the light intently, she saw the soul of the *handmaiden of the Lord* [Hild] being borne to Heaven in the midst of that light, attended and guided by angels. Then awaking and seeing the other sisters lying around her, she realized that what she had seen had been revealed to her either in a dream or in a vision. Greatly afraid, she rose at once and ran to the maiden named Frigyth, who was then presiding over the monastery in place of the abbess. With many tears and lamentations and sighing deeply, she announced that the Abbess Hild, mother of them all, had departed from this world and that she had seen her ascend in the midst of a great light and escorted by angels to the abode of eternal light, to join the company of the citizens of heaven.

When Frigyth heard this, she aroused all the sisters, called them to church and ordered them to devote themselves to prayer and psalm-singing on behalf of the soul of their mother. This they did diligently for the rest of the night and at early dawn, there came brothers from the place where she had died to announce her death. The maidens answered that they already knew of it and, when they explained in detail how and when they had heard of it, it was found that her death had been revealed to them in a vision at the very hour at which the brothers said that she had died. By a beautiful harmony of events, it was divinely ordained that while some of them watched her departure from this life, others watched her entrance into the everlasting life of the spirit. Now these two monasteries are nearly thirteen miles apart. [Bede, 4.32, Colgrave and Mynors translation 1969, 411-413; Bitel 1991, 52]

Like my mother's story, this text describes one person's knowledge of the status of another at the time of a life crisis—in this case, not illness, but death itself. In these ways Bede's account, like my mother's, matches components B, C, and D of the ESEN definition. It is a third-hand, rather than a first-hand, account (ESEN component A). The feeling of conviction that a death has occurred—and occurred simultaneously—arises not through the appearance of an objective, external divinatory sign or symbol (although the bell toll motif has symbolic value, while also suggesting clock-time). The conviction arises instead through a subjective (i.e. private and individual) experience: a

*dream (or a vision)* whose images correspond more realistically than symbolically to the death at a distance. Unlike my mother's account, which implies simultaneity by a "meanwhile" construction (a verification after the fact that a friend was indeed suffering while she would have been dreaming), the Bede account repeatedly emphasizes the simultaneity of the visionary's experience with the death, by various features: a reference to "the very hour," a reference to "the same night," and a "meanwhile" analogy (ESEN component C).

The Bede account underscores the distance separating the percipient and the subject specifically, too, as being a distance of thirteen miles (ESEN component E). Emphasis upon the *simultaneity* of the visionary experience with the time of death is very clear in the example from Bede; again, the emphasis is upon *simultaneous* coincidence, rather than on a knowing-ahead-of-time. Like my mother's account then, but even more clearly and unambiguously, the Bede account matches the ESEN pattern. The narratives also share the Communion motif--a motif which, in both accounts, links *simultaneous* knowledge of another's suffering inextricably to core Catholic/Christian beliefs about connection between people and God, now and at the hour of death.

Jungian psychology opens the door to religious thinking in a subtle way, by granting readers (initiated or uninitiated in psychology or religion) the permission to read the word "soul," and believe that the word might refer to something real, whether sacred, supernatural, or secular. I am not the only reader who enjoys such permission; the enormous contemporary popularity of books like Thomas Moore's *Care of the Soul*

(1992) or *Soul Mates* (1994) attests to this fact. Moore's writing is indebted to Jungian thinking, by way of the writing of James Hillman, a Jungian psychologist whose writings (along with Jung's own) clearly influence Moore's more accessible style.<sup>8</sup> Apart from the rising tide of contemporary interest, what could a word like "soul" possibly mean?

The best teacher I have had reminded me recently that there are really only two conceptions of soul—the Aristotelian and the Platonic.<sup>9</sup> The Aristotelian soul is akin to life-force or personality, an embodied faculty of the self which dissipates when death separates it from the body. The Platonic is an immortal, ideal form, one which might not only eternally survive but also eternally pre-exist its incarnation or "copy" as an individual self in a body. Despite the fact that Aristotle conceptualized the relation between the world and God similarly to the way Plato conceptualized the relationship of the world to the Forms (Hamlyn 1987, 70-71), the Platonic concept of an immortal, indestructible soul is more reconcilable with Christian belief in God and afterlife. The Platonic soul resembles the Judeo-Christian soul made after God's image; for Christian Neo-Platonists, God is the architect in whose mind all forms exist, to be copied in the natural world. The Platonic concept of soul therefore probably "survives" better in the neo-Platonism adopted by Christian thinkers after Augustine and Ficino than it did in the Platonic writings themselves.<sup>10</sup> Arguments for the survival of the human soul after death are not consistent across the Platonic canon and are problematic, at best, in the *Phaedo*, the *Phaedrus*, *The Republic* (X), and the *Timaeus*.<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps there are more meanings of “soul” in the world than two. What could “soul,” have meant, for example, to Jung, and how would this conception apply to, or compare with, a sense of soul which Bede’s example might suggest or sustain? According to Robert Aziz, author of a full-length treatment of Jung’s psychology of religion and theory of synchronicity (1990), one of Jung’s senses of “soul” would seem to be less of an empirical entity than a human (and religious) responsibility to realize the unique meaning of one’s own life experience. In this sense, Jung’s concept of the human “soul” is rather more than a “copy” of the ideal, divine Form. Quoting from Aziz, who quotes Jung:

‘The *imitatio Christi* [imitation of Christ],’ Jung writes... ‘has this disadvantage: in the long run we worship as a divine example a man who embodied the deepest meaning of life, and then, out of sheer imitation, we forget to make real our own deepest meaning—self-realization.’ Rather than simply believing in Christ and neutralizing through that belief our own unique strivings, or in faith simply copying in our own lives what for Christ was his own unique destiny, what we really must do, Jung explains, is to accept the *imitatio Christi* as a challenge to realize our deepest, personal meaning ‘with the same courage and the same self-sacrifice shown by Jesus.’ (Aziz, 23, quoting Jung’s *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, 133-34)

In an essay entitled “Jungian Psychology and Religious Experience,” Eugene Bianchi explains that Jung defines “the Self” as “the God-image in the soul of each person.”<sup>12</sup> In this restatement of Jung’s thinking, “psyche” and “soul” are concepts which are interchangeable; therefore, “soul” would be the whole of mental life, which makes sense of the world through the archetypes, old and deeply human patterns of constructing and



projecting meaning onto others, the external world, and the self, by reference to symbols and symbolic images.

Not surprisingly, as Bianchi notes, the subjective angle Jung's thinking casts (or threatens to cast) upon concepts like "soul" and "God" (which enjoy a more objective existence in religious thinking) has been criticized as "the ultimate denial of authentic religion" by some religious writers (Bianchi, in Moore 1988, 26-27). Bianchi mentions Martin Buber as one of Jung's critics on the count of having reduced God to the confines of the human psyche (26-27). K  ng sees Jung's identification of self with God and his characterization of God as a "psychological truth" as more ambiguous and therefore more "friendly" to religious thinking in general (1990, 58-66). K  ng points out, also, that Jung "professed himself a Christian," at the end of this life, while still maintaining his theoretical stance as a psychological theorist (K  ng 1990, 65).

Two samples from Jung's own writing may suffice to demonstrate his ability to play both sides against a middle which is neither hostile to religious thinking nor clearly religious *per se*. He discusses "soul" in two senses, one sense (the archetypal) being rather more psychological than the other. When speaking of "soul" as archetype of *anima*, Jung means soul as an individual's unconscious, inner attitude, which projects sexual and affectionate desire, in the image of an ideal mate, onto another person:

We can, therefore, speak of an inner personality with as much justification as, on the grounds of daily experience, we speak of an outer personality. The inner personality is the way one behaves in relation to one's inner psychic processes; it

is the inner attitude... If, therefore, we speak of the *anima* of a man, we must logically speak of the *animus* of a woman... Wherever an impassioned, almost magical, relationship exists between the sexes, it is invariably a question of a projected soul-image.<sup>13</sup>

On the other hand, Jung speaks of soul in its relationship to God:

*It would be blasphemy to assert that God can manifest Himself everywhere save only in the human soul... the soul must contain in itself the faculty of relation to God, i.e. a correspondence, otherwise a connection could never come about. This correspondence is, in psychological terms, the archetype of the God-image.*<sup>14</sup>

The latter sense of soul is neither simply psychological nor simply religious. I would guess that this is the aspect of Jung's psychology which Kūng regarded as "friendly" to religiousness, though not necessarily committed.

With Jung's concepts of "soul" in mind then, turning back to the Bede text, the bare bones of that story are as follows. At daybreak, in the year 680, Abbess Hild receives *Communion and dies, exhorting her sisters at Whitby to keep the gospel peace.* At another monastery, Hackness, thirteen miles away, the nun Begu has a dream or vision of Hild. In this vision she hears a bell toll and sees Hild's soul ascending to heaven in light, accompanied by angels. Begu informs Frigyth, immediately and with emotion, *that Hild has died. Frigyth orders the nuns to pray for Hild's soul. Brothers arrive the next morning, affirming that Hild's death occurred at the same time as Begu's dream or vision.*

Such an experience would appear to fall into Jung's second category of synchronicity, identified above, as a "coincidence of a psychic state with a corresponding (more or less simultaneous) external event taking place outside the

observer's field of perception, i.e., at a distance, and only verifiable afterward."

However, this equation is problematic in a number of ways. In what sense might Hild's "soul" be understood as a Jungian "soul," the psyche which harbors the God-image? Should Hild's death be considered an "external event," and in what sense was the experience "only verifiable afterward"?

Interpretive clues within the Bede text clearly attribute Begu's experience and its ramifications within and outside her religious community to the will of God ("On the same night it pleased Almighty God by a vision to reveal her death in another monastery some distance away..." and "By a beautiful harmony of events, it was divinely ordained..."). Begu's realization that the dream reflects the actual fact of death (and the simultaneous fact of new life after death in the communion of saints) is immediate; likewise, her community reacts immediately and with conviction to the vision as a revelation of what is already the truth in real life. In these senses, then, it would not be consistent with the text to regard Begu's experience as "only verifiable after the fact"; as revelation from God, Begu's dream is received as knowledge, not speculation. The brothers' verification comes as no surprise to Begu or her community; their confirmation after the fact just reiterates the call for wonder and awe.

Hild's "soul" is mentioned more than once in this text.<sup>15</sup> Begu sees "the soul of the handmaiden of the Lord [Hild] being borne to Heaven in the midst of that light," and later the community prays and sings "on behalf of the soul of their mother." The soul in both instances is the soul separated from the body, of Hild who is already dead; this

sense of soul is more Christian than Jungian. There is little if any comment in the text on the soul's union with the living body, and little sense of a human soul's harboring a God-image in any psychological sense. Rather, the emphases here are on the human soul's location *within God*. Hild's soul, embodied and disembodied, is always within the communion of souls connected to each other by the will of God on earth and in heaven. Begu sees Hild's soul inside ("in the midst of") that light, and it joins the community of saints after death. *The religious senses of soul here—(1) the soul that lives disembodied, and (2) the soul that lives in communion with God on earth and in heaven—shed light in turn on the two senses in which Jung meant "soul."* Soul as Jungian *anima* enables a kind of communion between people which is analogous to the religious: it is passion and magic people feel one for another. Soul as psyche harboring a God-image may not survive a religious disembodiment in Jung's thinking, but it can at least be discussed in some relation to an "image of God." Whether that phrase for Jung is "merely" psychological or not—merely "inner" rather than outwardly and objectively existent--remains a mystery.

Should Hild's death or should her entrance into heaven be considered the corresponding "external event"? Viewing Begu's vision as corresponding to an "external" event does little violence to Bede's text; certainly the emphasis on distance makes it clear that Begu could not have known about Hild's death through ordinary perception. She had to know it through revelation, and the event was certainly "external" to her point of view. *It would be incorrect, though, to characterize Begu's*

dream of Hild's ascension as a *metaphor* for Hild's death; interpretive clues within the text itself give us to understand that the moment of death, understood in religious terms, if not psychological ones, is at once a departure and an arrival. In this way, the characterization of death as "passing from death into life" aligns itself, as Bede remarks, in a wonderful (textual) symmetry with (a) one community's watching Hild die and (b) another community's watching her arrive in heaven.

The tolling of the bell marks this moment which is simultaneously heavenly and earthly; the communion of saints on earth is unified in the same moment with the communion of saints in heaven. There is lamentation in one realm, rejoicing in another, and faith in both. At the toll of the bell, the earthly community is called either into union in prayer, or to be notified of a death; whether Begu heard the bell inside or outside her dream, both prayer and news of death are the result, in earthly life as in heaven. Hild's receiving Communion, after which she exhorts her sisters to "keep the gospel peace" underlines the chorus of calls for connection between souls in this remarkable narrative. The moment of death is marked here by communion between the human soul and God (including reception of the Eucharist), by the communion between earthly souls who are connected simultaneously by effort (prayer) and grace (that which pleases God), and by the communion of saints whose efforts and graces have already brought them to heaven.

Within this old Christian text, then, soul and God are involved objectively as well as subjectively in the action. The soul is surrounded by other souls under the

sovereignty of the will of God. The moment of death is a discernible moment: marked by the tolling of a bell, the waking from a dream, the notation of the hour in one community and another, the immediate mourning of the community on earth, the immediate welcome of the community in heaven. One person's knowledge of another's status at a time of suffering is not speculation but certitude, which springs not from any human perceptive capacity but from divine revelation. The moment of death is also inseparable from the moment of entrance into life after death. Finally, the will of God is given as the vision's cause; the text makes no room for a Jungian "noncausal" philosophy of synchronicity (in which any cause for the correspondence becomes inconceivable, "unthinkable" in Jung's words, and must surrender entirely to interpretation according to *meaning* rather than cause). The values embedded in the Bede text are religious values specific to the Christian tradition. At best, they parallel Jung's conceptualizations of synchronicity and soul. However Jungian values may get the ball rolling into the general worldview of the Christian tradition, they merely hint at the significance of simultaneous experience within that tradition, the topic to which I now turn.

### **3. The Supernatural Significance of Simultaneity in the Christian Tradition**

I will now proceed to outline some evidence in the New Testament, in medieval sources, and in theology which indicates the existence of a tradition of belief in holy simultaneity within Christianity. My review of the four gospels yielded one passage which matches the hypothetical ESEN pattern, as well as several closely related

accounts. The New Testament contains a good number of passages in which dreams, visions, and numinous encounters open with *a statement of the hour of the day (or night) at which the experience occurs*. This early convention of “noting the hour” sets an important precedent for the hour notation in medieval accounts of deathbed visions, such as the Bede example, and others. Relevant, too, in this regard is the phrase *in hora mortis* (at the hour of death) associated with a number of Latin prayers in the Roman Catholic tradition. In the chapter conclusion I touch upon the meaning of this phrase, and its possible relation to the habit of visualizing death (or suffering) as a “moment,” a habit which, like the notation of the hour, dates back to the New Testament, and is central to the ESEN hypothesis.

Before concluding, though, I will also sketch the relationship between the theology of bilocation and the general concepts of presence and location of the Eucharist, in Catholicism. Bilocation allows for the possibility that a human body might exist in two places at one time, for some holy purpose. *Analogously, Catholics believe that the body of Christ (i.e., Eucharist or Communion) can exist (“locate”) in more places than one at the same time, really and truly, in spirit and in substance, for a holy purpose.* The theologies of bilocation and Eucharistic location show that the supernatural significance of simultaneous experience is not a marginal but a central trope in Catholic thinking. In other words, the tendency to envision a supernatural link between a moment in one person's experience in one place, and a moment in another person's experience in another place, is a longstanding habit in Christian thought.

The theology of bilocation contextualizes not only the ESEN pattern but also a narrative pattern which I regard as a subtle but significant variant on the ESEN pattern, the bilocation story. Bilocation stories (which are not exclusive to the Christian tradition) involve holy persons who appear, body and soul, at the bedside of a sick person, in order to heal. Bilocation stories would resemble ESENs very closely, if they were told from the points of view of the healers. Ordinarily, though, they are not. Bilocation stories circulate as legends which preserve the point of view of the healee, or some third party, more often than the perspective of the healer—the person who knows about the distant, suffering other.

A Catholic healer about whom many bilocation stories are told is the twentieth-century Italian stigmatic, Padre Pio Forgione. In numerous published accounts, Forgione appears to have had simultaneous knowledge of many other people's status at times of suffering, and at a distance. Unlike the percipients in ESENs, though, Forgione (like bilocating healers in religious traditions other than Christianity) has an established ability to co-experience another's suffering. His ability is not so spontaneous or surprising to him or to others as such an ability would be to the percipient in an ESEN; instead, Forgione's ability to "know" about another's suffering in such stories confirms his pre-established role as a healer. Within this role, Forgione might be presumed to control his power, to some degree, but always through the grace of God. According to the bilocation interpretation, Forgione's body and soul often relocated to be with



someone suffering at a distance from his original, physical location--and in addition to that location.

By contrast, though, ESEs describe the spontaneous experience of ordinary people, not saints, who share the sufferings of others at a distance, without being able to bilocate or heal at that moment. In view of the subtle parallels between ESEs and bilocation stories, I conclude that bilocation stories are an interesting variant on the ESEN pattern. Both patterns are connected with a tradition which has long afforded significance to simultaneous connections between people across geographical distance, at critical "moments" of suffering, and at the hour of death.

#### *Holy Simultaneity in the New Testament*

Old Testament dreams may be straightforward or symbolic, political or personal, and truly or falsely prophetic; their proper interpreters (e.g., Joseph in Genesis, and Daniel in the Book of Daniel) are those whose strong faith in God qualifies them for the task; however, the dead and the dying do not appear in Old Testament dreams.<sup>16</sup> A possible exception might be Pharaoh's baker's dream, which prefigures his own death in Genesis 40. However, this dream is not a realistic or a clear, metaphorical vision of the dreamer's dying self, but a more lateral, symbolic tableau, interpreted by Joseph to predict death. Dreams are less common in the New Testament.

According to Oberhelman (1991, 44) only nine dreams or dream-visions appear in the New Testament: five in Matthew, most having to do with the early life of Christ, and four in Acts relating to Paul.<sup>17</sup> I count six dreams in Matthew; one which

*Oberhelman does not count* is Pilate's wife's dream about Jesus' passion (Matthew 27:18). This passage matches the ESEN pattern; it is the only clear match I have found in the Gospels. However, other New Testament accounts bear mention, and there are multiple passages which could sustain a tradition of belief in the holiness of coincidences, a tradition from which later Christian religious texts, like Bede's, can be argued to draw some of their religious meaning. I will now outline the relevant Gospel evidence.<sup>18</sup>

*In the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) a number of miracle stories contain or conclude with a notation of the very moment at which a person's suffering began or ceased. Matthew contains a number of references to "that hour" or "the very hour" at which a person was healed by Jesus (cf. 8:5-13, 9:18-22, 15:21-28, 17:14-21). These or similar healing accounts in Mark and Luke are translated in the *New American Bible* (1987) with the word "immediately" rather than mentioning an "hour" that suffering ended and healing began. Similarly, all three synoptics' descriptions of the crucifixion note the hour at which Jesus expires on the cross as three o'clock. Only Mark specifies that the crucifixion began at nine in the morning. Mark's account of the Agony in the Garden (see 14:35) also states that Jesus "prayed that if it were possible the hour might pass by him," the "hour" referring here either to the suffering which commences after he is betrayed by Judas, to the hour of Christ's death, or to the Passion as a whole.*

These passages are significant not only to bilocation narratives, which I will discuss a bit further on, but in that they portray suffering as a "moment" in time, whose "very hour" is worth noting. The "very hour" is associated with the wonder of these miraculous passages, as they unfold; hour notation is the motif which heralds the marvelous. While most parties are healed on the spot in the synoptic Gospels, occasionally a suffering person is healed immediately in a distant place (see for example the Centurion's servant's healing in Matthew 8:5-13 and related accounts, Luke 7:1-10, and, especially, John 4:46-54, in which the hour that the healing was requested and the hour it was accomplished by Jesus at a distance are specifically noted). These passages demonstrate that a supernatural attitude toward the status of a distant, suffering other, in a given moment in time, begins in the Christian tradition as early as the late first century, the putative time of the Gospel writing. This attitude is highly characteristic of the percipient's perspective in the ESEN.

In the Johannine gospel a number of passages contain hour notations. In some cases the hour of suffering is noted; in other cases the hour is an hour to wonder, or to believe. Whereas the synoptic Gospels describe the Agony in the Garden before the beginning of the Passion, the gospel of John contains a two-chapter section (16 and 17) previous to the arrest, which repeatedly states that "the hour is coming" and "the hour has come" for the Passion to begin (John 16/17). Generally speaking, phrases like "the hour has come when..." lend a revelatory quality to writing here and elsewhere in the

New Testament; the phrase lends weight to any passage, by suggesting that prophecy has been or is about to be fulfilled by the event or events which follow the phrase.

John states that Christ's crucifixion order came "about noon," but unlike the synoptics, he does not specify the hour of death. Jesus' *encounter with a Samaritan woman* (John 4:4-41) includes a notation of the time he sat down to talk with her; during their conversation he "tells her everything she has done," i.e. discusses her life history without having been told, and tells her "the hour" has arrived for her to believe. Finally, the healing-at-a-distance story in John (4:46-54) does associate hour notation with suffering at a distance. This account contains a notation of both the hour that a royal official asks Jesus in Galilee to heal his son, who is near death back in Capernaum, and the hour that the son is healed. On his trip back, the official learns the son began to recover "about one in the afternoon," and "the father realized that just at that time Jesus had said to him, 'Your son will live.'"

One passage in the Gospels can be argued to match the ESEN pattern (rather than establishing important components of the pattern, such as the hour of suffering or simultaneous knowledge about distant suffering). This is the short description of Pilate's wife's dream in Matthew (27:19). As Jesus is being sentenced by Pontius Pilate, Pilate waffles, asking the crowd whether he should release Jesus or release another prisoner; Pilate's wife encourages him to do the latter. She sends him a message warning him not to convict Jesus: "Have nothing to do with that righteous man. I suffered much in a dream today because of him." As Jesus was taken into custody from the early morning

hours onward, her dream would therefore be simultaneous to the progression of the Passion, rather than an anticipation of its beginning. The passage is a tantalizing kernel of the ESEN pattern because it suggests all the basic ESEN components: it is a first-person statement of what appears to have been one party's simultaneous knowledge of another's status at a time of crisis involving suffering, when the parties were spatially distant from each other.

An account in Luke's Gospel is not quite so closely related, but bears mention. This is the story of Mary's visit to her older cousin Elizabeth. Elizabeth's baby moves within her when her cousin arrives, and she states her knowledge of Mary's conception and new pregnancy at that moment, without having been told by anyone:

At that time [the time of receiving annunciation of Jesus' conception and Elizabeth's pregnancy via the angel Gabriel] Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb [John the Baptist] leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!" (Luke 1:39-45, *Holy Bible*, New International Version 1984)

Were two more ordinary women and unborn children to be substituted as characters in this narrative, and given a secular dialogue, the encounter might easily be labeled a case of "telepathy" or ESP. The female body, in which early pregnancy would not normally or necessarily be visibly clear, might constitute a kind of "distance" between the women and their babies, i.e., an ordinary physical boundary limiting one woman's access to and

knowledge of the other's state of mind and being. The "distance" between the percipient and the subject would be corporeal rather than a geographical and spatial, as required by the "distance" component (E) of the hypothetical ESEN pattern.<sup>19</sup> For this reason the passage should probably be excluded, although, as I establish in my fieldwork chapter, I prefer to judge narratives as non-matches to the ESEN pattern after they fail clearly to conform to *more* than one of the five components of the definition. Whether or not it matches the ESEN pattern, this passage from Luke celebrates a holy and deeply carnal coincidence, and couches it, not unlike the Bede account, in terms of female perspective and experience. Along with the foregoing accounts, this passage contributes to a tradition of belief in the supernatural significance of simultaneity.

*Holy Simultaneity in Some Medieval Sources*

Medieval Christian miracle literature is replete with accounts of dreams and visions of religious persons, and of wondrous events which occur at the hour of their death. Like the New Testament passages discussed above, some of this writing also supports the existence of a more general Christian tradition of belief about holy simultaneity. Narratives which clearly match the ESEN pattern are more plentiful in medieval literature than in the gospels. However, the medieval ESEnS I have located are connected to the New Testament passages insofar as they carry on the New Testament conventions of noting the hour of suffering, and conceptualizing suffering and death as moments in time.

In his *Index Exemplorum* (1969, 517-523) Frederic Tubach states that Pope Gregory's *Dialogues* served as one of the sources for important medieval collections of exempla, of which there are many, such as the Franciscan *Liber Exemplorum* and the Cistercian *Dialogue on Miracles* by Caesarius of Heisterbach.<sup>20</sup> Folklorist Gillian Bennett sees the apparition and vision accounts in Gregory's *Dialogues*, the *Liber Exemplorum*, and Caesarius' *Dialogue* as the precedents for ghost, fetch, and wraith stories in later centuries (Bennett 1987a, 61, 154-155). In the section which follows, I discuss some medieval death-hour narratives which match the ESEN pattern or, at least, support the claim that a tradition of belief in holy simultaneities exists, more generally, in such literature. Readers should note that my discussion of medieval sources cannot possibly be considered "representative" of any part of this enormous canon. I am simply concentrating for the sake of argument on a few examples, from Bede, Caesarius, and Jacobus de Voragine, three important sources within the canon.<sup>21</sup>

Under exemplum number 1475 (1969, 119-120), Tubach lists miscellaneous death-omens and 13 categories of death predictions. Medieval exemplum number 1492b is more specifically relevant to the tradition of ESEnS, though, because it pertains to wonders *at* (rather than before) the hour of death. The category appears in Tubach as follows:

*Death-hour, appearance at.* A dying monk kept his promise and appeared at the hour of his death to his brother monks. (Tubach 1969, 122)<sup>22</sup>

The ambiguity between "apparition" and "vision" is evident here, and worth noting.

This exemplum number is relevant to the ESEN pattern insofar as a dying monk's

"appearance" could also constitute a brother monk's "vision." Judging whether to call the text an account of an apparition or a vision depends on a textual review to discern whether the narrative perspective is primarily that of the visionary, of the dying person, or some combination, as in a story told from a *third-person point of view*. Though Tubach glosses this exemplum number with only one reference (an account in Caesarius, I.35, which I will discuss below), his descriptive phrase "Death-hour, appearance at" might be applied to a number of passages, exemplary and legendary, in the sources I have examined.

The prime example from Bede's ecclesiastical history has already been discussed, above, at length. The 1955 Sherley-Price translation indexes Bede's other references to visions, most of which occur within English religious communities (1955, 364 note). Six accounts involve monks' or nuns' seeing another (usually a superior) cleric's soul leaving or being summoned to leave his/her body, to head towards heaven.<sup>23</sup> Four cases are visions by which clerics learn the time of their own approaching death<sup>24</sup> or the time of their own death relative to that of another.<sup>25</sup> Two more cases include a vision of souls suffering in hell, so real as to leave a burn mark on the visionary<sup>26</sup> and a dying man's vision-journey through hell and heaven.<sup>27</sup> Four visions predict events other than individual deaths,<sup>28</sup> one of these foretelling tragedy by fire.<sup>29</sup> One remaining account involves a child's calling out the name of a nun, with his dying breath; the nun simultaneously takes on the child's malady and dies, "following" him to heaven (IV.8, 219-220). Over half of the seventeen visions indexed (including the Hild/Begu story)



concern themselves with the hour of death or relate to the suffering of parties at a distance from each other. Where deaths are not simultaneous in these narratives they may occur in immediate succession, with one party "calling" and another "following" or answering the call.

The exemplum in Caesarius' 13<sup>th</sup>-century *Dialogue on Miracles* which Tubach (1969, 122) cites in support of his index number 1492b (Death-hour, appearance at) appears in the first book of that work, which concerns conversions.<sup>30</sup> The story is that of Godfrey, a pious contemporary to Caesarius, who left the Order of Black Monks in Cologne to join the Cistercians (Caesarius' own order) in Villers, some time in the early 1200s, or thereabouts (Caesarius, I.35, 46-48 in Scott/Bland translation, Vol. I, 1929). At the hour of his death (which Caesarius notes "happened to be the dinner hour of the convent"), Godfrey bids the monk in attendance to go to dinner, telling him he will see him again before he dies. The monk sees Godfrey pass him at dinner, heading toward the church, then hears the death-bell toll.

This account bears obvious resemblances to the Bede account, while retaining important differences. One difference is that the event is narrated not so much as a vision from the perspective of the attendant monk, but from a third-person perspective which focuses (here and throughout a narration of Godfrey's life) upon Godfrey himself, and his *appearance* to his brother monk. Whether this is a subjective vision or an objective appearance is therefore rather ambiguous. However, Caesarius' text emphasizes the point that Godfrey's appearance was so real that his brother monk's first

reaction was not to assume he had died, but to presume that he was present, in the flesh, and had recovered his health:

Godfrey opened the door of the refectory, looked at him, and passed on his way toward the church. The attendant was astounded, and thought that he had miraculously recovered his health. Immediately after the departure of Godfrey, the gong sounded to signify his death, and the monk remembered the promise the dying man had made him. (Scott/Bland translation 1929, 48).

While a modern-day mentality might ask whether this account describes a subjective or an objective experience--a vision or the "objective" appearance of a soul liberated from its body, I suspect that the same subjective-objective unity that pervaded the Bede account (Begu's dream of Hild) might apply to this one. The separation of a cleric's soul from his/her body and a fellow cleric's vision of the same would amount to one event, rather than two; the appearance and the vision would constitute two sides of the same, real, religious reality, rather than an either/or, subjective/objective dichotomy which might be more familiar to the modern imagination. Like the Bede account, this story contains hour notation, by reference to the hours of monastic routine (dinner time for Godfrey's attendant vs. morning prayer for Begu) and to the sounding of a bell/gong. Like Bede's story of Begu and Hild, the story of Godfrey concerns one person's knowledge of another's status at the moment of death, despite a spatial separation.

The fact that the attendant monk sees Godfrey's soul apart from his body might seem to indicate that he is seeing Godfrey after his death. However, following the text closely, simultaneity seems a safer conclusion. Why? Godfrey's appearance fulfills a prediction that was worded as follows: "Go in peace...for I shall see you again before I die." Godfrey's appearance is followed "immediately" by the sounding of a gong, which indicates his death. Hence, Godfrey, like Hild, would appear to have been *at the*

*moment of death* when he appeared and when his fellow monastic saw him. This example stands with the Bede account as evidence of the convention of hour notation and the tradition of belief in the religious significance of simultaneity. Both of these stories match the ESEN pattern.

Jacobus de Voragine's 13th-century *Golden Legend* (Ryan translation, 1993)<sup>31</sup> draws upon Pope Gregory's *Dialogues*, Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, and many other works to chronicle the lives of Christian saints. The *Golden Legend* is popular source which, like other medieval religious narrative collections, presents the legendary alongside the historical. However, the *Legend* can be regarded as more popular than most, due to exceptionally high number of editions of the work translated and recopied over time, and to Jacobus' original tendency to present reliable and unreliable accounts together, as if on par with each other.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, the *Legend's* pages celebrate many holy simultaneities: simultaneous martyrdoms, shared dreams, coincidental deaths, and visions at the death-hour. The stories of Saints Peter and Paul, St. Ambrose, and St. Francis in the *Golden Legend* are cases in point. Like Bede's description of Hild's death, these later texts represent simultaneous deaths, visions, and dreams as evidences of saintly grace and the workings of the will of God, thus supporting the claim for a Christian tradition of belief in holy simultaneity.

Simultaneous martyrdoms are easily located in the *Legend*. They are frequently commemorated on single or successive feast days named for pairs of saintly comrades and siblings, who suffered their ends together in the same place or perished in separate locations at or around the same time. The feasts of Saints Peter and Paul are one example. Jacobus tells readers that

There are some who question whether Peter and Paul suffered martyrdom on the same day. Some say it was on the same day, but that one suffered a year later than the other. But Jerome and almost all the holy fathers who have dealt with *this question agree that they suffered on the same day and in the same year.* This is clear also from the letter of Dionysius; and [from what] Pope Leo (or Maximus, as some think) says in a sermon....Granted, however, that they suffered on the same day and at the same hour, they did not suffer at the same spot but at different locations. When Leo says that they suffered in the same place, he means that they were both martyred in Rome. (Ryan 1993, Volume 1, 349).

The fact that the writer refers to the writings of saints, popes, and other "holy fathers" in this passage as *the authorities on the question* of whether sufferings were or were not precisely simultaneous is a testament to the religious significance of the idea of simultaneity in this era. Simultaneity of the deaths of two saints is not an inconsequential detail in the account of their martyrdom, but a question worth consulting one's religious superiors about. The association of one apostle's date of martyrdom with the first anniversary of another's is a religious precedent for the secular belief in "day fatalities" (multiple death anniversaries and other unlucky or lucky days) recorded by antiquarian scholars like John Aubrey centuries later.<sup>33</sup> Jacobus wrote the *Legend* around 1260, about the same time various writers were probably editing and circulating various versions of the Cistercian *Dialogue* after Caesarius' death.<sup>34</sup>

To take another example from Jacobus, on the night of St. Ambrose's death a *number of local people* became aware of his death in the course of sleep and dreams. Ryan's 1993 translation tells the story as follows:

In the place where the saint lay on his deathbed, he saw Jesus coming toward him smiling joyfully. And Honorius, the bishop of Vercelli, who was expecting Ambrose's death, was asleep when he heard a voice call out three times: "Get up, because the time of his passing is near." He rose and hurried to Milan, arriving in time to give the dying bishop the sacrament of the Lord's Body.

Moments later Ambrose extended his arms in the form of a cross and breathed his last with a prayer on his lips. He flourished [died] about the year of the Lord 379. When his body was transported to the cathedral on the night of Easter, a number of baptized children saw the saint. Some of them saw him seated on the episcopal throne, some pointed him out to their parents as he went up to it; still others told how they had seen a star above his body. (Ryan 1993, Volume I, 234)

In the 1993 translation of this passage, it is unclear whether the children who "saw" Ambrose had visions (1) during or after the transportation of the body, or (2) in their own homes or elsewhere, without being prompted by expectation or knowledge of Ambrose's death. As with the example from Bede, though, this passage contains a Communion motif, and there is likewise an alignment between the dying person's reception of Communion and the union of Christian souls, a state of communal connection in which distant parties (in this case children, rather than fellow clerics) can "see" what is going on at or around a saint's hour of death.

The same passage is presented differently in the adapted translation by Ryan and Helmut Ripperger (1941/1969). Here the children's experiences are specifically called dreams. If the children's experiences are dreams, this allows for simultaneity with the death itself (which would have occurred during the night while the children were dreaming). As dreams, the children's experiences would presumably have been at a distance, too, rather than at the scene of Ambrose's wake or his funeral. The possibility of a period during which the body may have been lying in state in the cathedral seems to have been precluded:

...in the night of Easter [379 a.d.], when the body of Saint Ambrose was borne to the church, a multitude of Christian children saw the saint in a dream. Some saw him seated upon his throne, others mounting his pulpit; and some of them related to their parents that they had seen a star above his head. (Ryan and Ripperger 1941/1969, 29).

The *Golden Legend* also contains a bevy of coincidental or closely timed spiritual experiences related to the dying of St. Francis of Assisi. Francis passed away in 1226, surrounded by friars of the order he founded. Jacobus describes Francis's last moments as follows:

Finally he was suffering from a long illness and knew that his last days were at hand. He had himself laid on the bare ground and had all the friars who were with him summoned to his presence. He laid his hands on each of them, blessed all present, and distributed to each a morsel of bread....His last hour came, and he fell asleep in the Lord.

One of his friars saw his soul like a star, as large as the moon and as bright as the sun. The minister of the friars who worked on the farms, whose name was Augustine, was also in his last hour. He had long since lost the power of speech, but suddenly he cried out: "Wait for me, father, wait! See, I am coming with you!" The brothers asked him what he meant, and he said: "Don't you see our father Francis, who is on his way to heaven?" And he slept in peace and followed the father. (Ryan 1993, Volume II, 228-229)

All three medieval sources I have explored above contain narratives which underscore the religious significance of simultaneity, especially experiences simultaneous with the hour of death. Understanding death as a supreme divine gift to those bound heavenward is traditional in Christianity, and it may help explain why successive and simultaneous deaths within religious communities are noted so frequently and enthusiastically, by Jacobus and these other writers. Jacobus quotes Paulinus' *vita* to tell how St. Ambrose, for example, shed tears for three reasons: at the confessions of sinners, at violence, and for the joys of eternity. When Ambrose was asked "why he wept so much for holy men when they died, he answered, 'Because they have gone ahead of me to glory'...." (Ryan 1993, Volume I, 235). Augustine's *Confessions* and countless other traditional Christian writings sublimate fear and sorrow about death similarly into the consolation and joyful anticipation of the promise of an

afterlife in the presence of God. Such refocusing, difficult as it may be to sustain rationally through grief and anxiety, is nevertheless a Christian commonplace. Bede's accounts narrate events at or around plague years; as such, they must have lent some religious sense to the disproportionate numbers of deaths by plague in given places and in short intervals of time. At the height of plague, "coincidental" deaths during a given hour may have been more the rule than the exception. Christian beliefs, official as well as folk, would have to have accommodated these facts of life in some meaningful way.

### *The Theology of Bilocation*

Simultaneities at the death-hour are noted so frequently in medieval legends and exempla as to suggest the tradition would have had a popular dimension. As narrative types, such stories and their subtle variants would presumably have circulated among the Christian populace, before or after they were recorded by compilers. However, there are themes in more authoritative Christian writing—in the theology of saints and sacraments—which lend simultaneous experiences around the death-hour an official religious value, as well. These are what I will call themes of location: (1) the "location" of the Eucharist as the real, substantial presence of Christ, in one place or many places, at the same time, and (2) "bilocation," a concept which allows for the possibility that saints can be present, body and soul, in more than one place at the same time, especially in order to be present as healers during other people's illnesses.

The word "bilocation" can be found in Catholic and non-Catholic encyclopedias. Harper's *Encyclopedia of Mystical and Paranormal Experience* (1991, 57) describes bilocation straightforwardly as "the appearance of an individual in two distant places at once" and as

an uncommon but ancient phenomenon...experienced, and even practiced by will, by mystics, ecstasies...and magical adepts. Many Christian saints and monks were famous for bilocation, such as St. Anthony of Padua, St. Ambrose of Milan, St. Severus of Ravenna, and Padre Pio of Italy. In 1774 St. Alphonsus Maria de Liguori was seen at the bedside of the dying Pope Clement XIV, when in fact the saint was confined to his cell in a location four days' journey away. (Guiley 1991, 57)

This entry associates bilocation with the work of early psychical researchers (whose work I discuss elsewhere) and states that "spontaneous and involuntary bilocation sometimes presages or heralds the death of the individual seen" (Guiley 1991, 57). This source (Guiley 1991, 48-49, 525-527) and Occhiogrosso's 1996 *The Joy of Sects* (65) link the power of bilocation with avatars like Sai Baba of Shirdi (d. 1918) and Sathya Sai Baba (b. 1926), holy men venerated in this century by Hindus, Muslims, and New Age followers around the world. For comparative value, I will discuss some of the non-Christian bilocation narratives alongside Catholic ones, after my introduction to the theology, below.

Due to the controversy which surrounds the Catholic theology of bilocation, it is difficult to find references to bilocating saints in recent Catholic encyclopedic sources. The controversy seems to have reached its last crescendo in theological literature in the late nineteenth century. The possibility of bilocation (and the specific examples traditionally associated with this idea) have been downplayed since then. Three Catholic encyclopedia entries, which I am about to discuss, allude to the theological debates attached to bilocation, but still avoid any mention of the saints traditionally credited with the ability to bilocate.

The 1965 *Maryknoll Catholic Dictionary* defines bilocation as "a miraculous phenomenon in which one individual appears to be present personally in more than one place at the same time," commenting further that this phenomenon is "contrary to



reason only when actual physical presence in several places is implied" (1965, Volume II, 77). The *New Catholic Encyclopedia* defines bilocation similarly as "the location of one body in two places at the same time" (1967, Volume II, 559) but sheds more light on the history of theological controversy implied in the *Maryknoll* entry. Entry writer P. R. Durbin comments that bilocation thus defined

presents a special difficulty in scholasticism, where the Aristotelian notions of location (*ubi*) and place are applied to events of the supernatural order. The difficulty is usually resolved by distinguishing between true bilocation, or simultaneous location in two places commensurately, and apparent bilocation, where the second supposed location is noncommensurate. (1967, 559)

Citing two pre-Vatican II theological works (Masi 1961 and Hoenen 1956), Durbin explains that there are two schools of thought in regard to bilocation. One school of thought, the Suárez school, puts forth evidence for a "true" variety of bilocation; another school, represented by St. Thomas Aquinas and most Scholastic theologians, emphasizes "apparent" bilocations.

The controversy grows out of two separate understandings of the concept of "location"--how a body can or must exist in relation to its place, or surroundings. The Suárez school argued that location is "absolute" and "independent of external place" (1967, 559) and as the prime example of location, cited the Catholic doctrine of the Eucharist--the ability and necessity of the body (and complete presence) of Christ to exist simultaneously in more than one place, in the form of consecrated elements (bread and/or wine). The Scholastic school understood "location" to mean that a body is "completely surrounded by its place" (1967, 559) and as a result admitted no comparably complete (commensurate) "surrounding" of the body in more than one place at one time. Scholastics explain the Eucharist as a "noncommensurate presence in

place" and they view reports of saintly bilocation as miraculous, secondary *appearances* only, rather than true bilocation (1967, 559).

*The Catholic Encyclopedia* of 1907 did not offer any concise definition of bilocation. Instead, entry writer F.P. Siegfried considered the depths of the theological *question* of bilocation against the changing understanding of the natural world. He said, for example,

That bilocation (multilocation) is physically impossible, that is, contrary to all the conditions of matter at present known to us, is the practically unanimous teaching of Catholic philosophers in accordance with universal experience and natural science. (1907, Volume II, 568)

Nonetheless, Siegfried explains how Catholic theologians have allowed for the possibility that an all-powerful God might choose to allow a living person to exist somehow, simultaneously, in more than one place. The major steps in this theological argument may be summarized as follows. (Points in Step 1 are mine, not Siegfried's; they state the most basic presuppositions upon which his argument, as a Christian view, would have to rest.)

#### **Theological Argument for Bilocation (summarized from Siegfried, 1907)**

(1. God is omnipotent. The will of God is not *necessarily* always in accord with the universal laws of the natural world God created. It is therefore possible to ask whether laws and properties generally recognized to be "universal" in the natural world are or are not absolute in certain circumstances, and whether they might or might not be subject in given situations to supernatural, miraculous or other divine interventions.)

2. A living human being has a physical body, which according to universal natural law exists in one place and one place only. A body is surrounded by its location in the sense that the space the body itself fills is completely within (or surrounded by) that location.

3. *The human soul has no material substance itself and it exists in the place of the body by will rather than by being surrounded physically, as a finite whole, as is the body. Unlike the body, the human soul "locates itself by its spiritual activity" (1907, Volume II, 568). Its location is therefore not absolutely dependent upon the location of the body.*

4. It is therefore not absolutely impossible that, thanks to a divine act of suspension of *universal natural law*, a body could exist in a mixed mode of location--existing "circumscriptively" in one place (its material substance surrounded in its place in that location) while existing "definitively" (really) elsewhere at the same time, in a spiritual or spiritual-physical sense. God could, in other words, allow a human spirit or a human body to be separated and/or multiply located, without compromising the existence or the *essence of either* part.

This argument for bilocation, true or apparent, acknowledges what natural scientists and ordinary people generally hold to be physically impossible, but boils down, finally, to an affirmation of the Christian assertion that "*nothing is impossible with God*" (Luke 1:37). However, Siegfried's turn-of-the-century entry on "bilocation" also shows that the question of a human being's apparent or actual simultaneous existence in two or more places provoked a deep, philosophical consideration of the relationship of the human body to the human spirit, and the relationship of the will of God to universal natural law. The Catholic theological understanding of the relationship between the body and the soul in bilocation is a complicated interpretive context in which medieval and later narratives about *simultaneous experiences* at the death-hour make sense. The context of this theology gives secular readers important clues about how bilocation narratives and ESEs can be understood to work, on a supernatural level, and in the minds of contemporary religious people who tell these stories.

*Bilocation Narratives versus ESEs: Some Examples*

In biographies of Padre Pio Forgione (1887-1968), the Italian Catholic stigmatic, and the Hindu/New Age avatar Sathya Sai Baba (1926-), the gift of bilocation is frequently associated with the power to heal (Gaudiose 1974; McCaffery 1978; Ruffin 1982; Shulman 1971). The following narrative is typical of many bilocation stories associated with Padre Pio. The priest appears "in spirit" beside the sickbed as he is asked to intercede for healing:

On February 2, 1918, one of Donna Maria's sisters [of the Campanile family, long-time devotees of Padre Pio] suffered a fall at home. She complained of violent pains in the area of her liver and then lost consciousness. The doctors who examined her determined that her liver was damaged and that there were other grave internal injuries. There was nothing they could do for her, they said; she could not live.

Immediately, Maria hurried up the hill and asked for Padre Pio, who told her that her sister would recover and not to worry. Even so, the situation looked very grim that evening when Maria returned home. The sister was in a coma, vomiting every fifteen minutes. Maria called her name, tapped her, and even pinched her. The injured woman was oblivious to everything.

A lady friend was also in the room. All of a sudden, this woman, who is not identified, turned pale. Maria asked if she felt ill. "No," she replied, "the padre is here." Donna Maria confessed that she was stupefied. Up to that point she had never even heard of the phenomenon of bilocation. She asked her friend, "What do you mean, the padre is here?"

"He is here in spirit," said the friend. "How is he dressed?" asked Maria, who saw nothing. "Like a monk." "If I touch him, will I feel anything?" "Of course not. He's spirit. See," she said, poking the air. "He has come near your sister, and he has said, 'Poor child.'"

Ten minutes later the friend told Maria, "Now he has gone away." Maria went to her sister and called her name. "How do you feel?" she asked her. "Much better," said the sister, regaining full consciousness. Maria looked at her watch. It was 8 p.m. The next day, with her sister well on the road to a rapid recovery,

Donna Maria went to the friary and found Padre Pio in the courtyard. She asked him point-blank, "Padre, what time did you come to my house last night?" He looked at her and, without batting an eye, answered in a matter-of-fact way, "Around eight." (Ruffin 1982, 130-131)

John McCaffery's informal recollection of tales associated with Padre Pio opens with the following one, which a farmer from the Padua area told him while they traveled together by train from Bologna to Rome:

He asked me whether I was coming back directly from Rome to my business-base in Milan, and I said no, I was going further south. Might he ask where? Well, to a little place he had probably never heard of called San Giovanni Rotondo...He looked at me, took out his wallet, produced a photograph, and said, "Is that him?" I took out my own wallet, produced my own photograph, and replied "Indeed it is!" We both laughed heartily, and I asked him "Have you been down there?" "Seven times", he replied; and then, after a pause, "You see, I had a miraculous cure through him before I even knew of his existence"....And here was the story.

On his farm one day, not long after the end of the War, this man had a very serious accident, the outcome of which was a double embolism, one on each lung. They filled him up, as he related, with the new drugs, and these seemed to work for a while; but then the embolisms came back worse than ever, and he realized that he was going to die.

He was young and strong, and he did not want to go yet. He was also religious and intelligent; and he prayed to God in a way I had never heard of anyone's praying before. "I asked God with all the supplication I could muster," he said, "to let someone more worthy than me intercede for me." It was an extraordinary prayer, and it had an extraordinary answer.

"I had," he told me, "what I can only describe as an apparition. There was a bearded monk by my bedside. He bent forward and laid his hand on my chest, smiled, and then disappeared."

He felt immediately that he had been cured, and, to the amazement of the doctors, this was fully confirmed. But he told no one of his "apparition" excepting his mother.... They both wondered who was the monk in the case, and concluded, naturally enough, that he must be some great saint of the past.

Thus several months passed, until one morning he was in Padua doing business with a man who afterwards invited him home to lunch. "As I entered the living-room," he said, "I was transfixed. For there on the wall was, not a picture, but a photograph of the monk who had appeared to me!" (McCaffery 1978, 1-3; punctuation reproduced as in original text)

Undertaking a trip by train to San Giovanni Rotondo immediately, the farmer arrived in time to see Padre Pio say Mass, and reported that

[Padre Pio] blessed me, and I made my Confession. And then at the end of it, he said to me with the most natural voice in the world, "And tell me, what about the lungs now? How are they?" "Thank you, Father," I answered him, "they are perfect." "Have you had them X-rayed?" "Yes, Father." "Good. Thanks be to God, and God bless you." (McCaffery 1978, 3)

McCaffery attaches no specific names or dates with the events in this story, narrating it as he does from memory of a casual conversation with a fellow traveler. Moreso than the first example, this bilocation story leaves open the question of whether Padre Pio's spirit or his body-and-spirit located in two places at one time. Hence, the stories together echo the theological queries discussed earlier regarding true versus apparent bilocation.

Like McCaffery's memoir, Arnold Shulman's biographical portrait of Sathya Sai Baba (1971) incorporates some bilocation stories he heard about Baba while traveling through India. Shulman describes his own experience, in which Sai Baba appears to him, before they meet in person, in a dream. Referring to himself humorously in the third person, as "the writer," Shulman describes being healed by Baba, but his tone is more skeptical than credulous:

Actually, the writer was not completely unhappy about missing the tour (which would have led to a meeting with Baba). The night before, about midnight, he began vomiting, having diarrhea at the same time, and shivering uncontrollably. He took his temperature and discovered with great alarm that it was a hundred and four.

Every few minutes he took the pills he had brought along for such emergencies, but each time vomited them up again immediately after swallowing them....The first Indian newspaper he had seen when he got off the plane carried two small items....One told of forty-one people who had died after eating at the Calcutta airport canteen. The other reported seventy-eight students dead after eating at the cafeteria at *Nehru Medical College. Twelve more in critical condition....*

He put on all the clothes he had with him, including an overcoat, and crawled under all the blankets he could find. His teeth were chattering. The back of his head was throbbing with stupefying pain.

Finally, about four o'clock in the morning he dozed off. In a dream, or what seemed like a dream, he looked up and saw *Baba standing at the foot of the bed*. The writer was startled. He sat up. Baba just stood there, looking stern and quite clearly with disapproval, and then he disappeared.

The writer could hardly breathe. Nothing like this had ever happened to him before. He had no idea of whether he had just awakened or if he had been sleeping at all. He didn't know if what he saw was a dream or some kind of hallucination. Then he noticed, to his surprise, that he no longer was shivering. His nausea had gone and, taking his temperature, he noticed that so had his fever.

Earlier in the evening, before he got sick, he had been reading about Baba in the book Gokok had given him. A number of cases were reported in which Baba had appeared to his devotees in dreams, often to solve desperate problems for them and in some cases *even to perform surgical operations*. Baba was said to be able to leave his body and travel through astral time and space.

The cases made fascinating reading but none of them seemed credible, really, the writer decided. Having read the book caused him to have the dream and the fact that he no longer felt ill was nothing more than coincidental. (Shulman 1971, 16-17)

Later in the book, however, Sai Baba affirms having appeared to Shulman. His affirmation resembles those Padre Pio offers. Without prompting, Baba recalls Shulman's illness in his hotel room, says that he was there in a dream, and he tells Shulman other facts about his life previous to his arrival in India that Shulman seems not to have told him or any intermediary (Shulman 1971, 108-110).

Stories which might be considered bilocation narratives also appear in Judaism. In *Legends of the Hasidim* (1968), Jerome Mintz points out that narratives detailing the healing and helping powers of orthodox Jewish rabbis portray the "interconnectedness" of the Rebbe with his hasidim, whether in European community contexts or in later settlements in the United States (1968, 102). One narrative in Mintz's collection may serve to demonstrate how a Rebbe (of the Stoliner court, an orthodox group centered historically in Russia and in the twentieth century in *Boro Park, Brooklyn*) was believed to appear for healing purposes in the dreams of those in need:

This happened to me. My wife was very sick, and one time, when I made a blessing before the Torah, he [the Stoliner Rebbe] hollered at me, why I didn't come to him and ask him I should be granted a favor. He knew the seriousness of the case and he was angry at me. He wanted to help whoever he could, especially someone attached to him. He wanted to help on this case.

One Friday, just after the Shabbes meal, I lay down to rest. The Rebbe came to me in a dream. He appeared to me. I saw his face, a holy face. He said he knows my bitter heart and wished my wife be well again in every way. Then I woke up.

The doctor said, "In such a case, if a person comes out a hundred per cent, it's very unusual." To his amazement everything was all right.

I hadn't asked the Rebbe because I didn't want to nag him about such a case. He came to me in a dream. I went to other Rebbes in the neighborhood, but I know that it was through the Stoliner Rebbe that my wife was helped. (Mintz 1968, 317-318)

The foregoing account, collected by Mintz between 1959 and 1963, shows a 50-year-old New York City storekeeper's belief in his Rebbe's power to heal without being directly present and without being asked. Unlike accounts involving Padre Pio or Sai Baba, this narrative ends without further elaboration and without a confirmation of the



precise time of the healing via a later visit with the healer. The Stoliner Rebbe's ability to appear in dreams for healing purposes and his wondrous knowledge of the need for healing are comparable to the powers attributed to Padre Pio and Sai Baba, though they would not necessarily be called "bilocation" in these cultural contexts.

While the bilocation stories above resemble the medieval stories of death-hour appearances discussed previously, they still represent an important variant from the ESEN pattern. Bilocation stories describe a "knowing" between the saintly percipient and the distressed subject that is *mutual*. The healer not only knows about a distressed person's plight at a distance, but the distressed person knows that the healer knows, because he or she typically sees (and sometimes feels) the healer appear at the bedside. Most ESENs I have collected have not been mutual experiences (subject has not also known, in turn, that a percipient knew about his or her distress at a distance).<sup>35</sup> Bilocation stories share a number of important components with the ESEN: they involve one person's knowledge of another person's status, a geographical or spatial separation between parties, emphasis on "moments" in suffering and near death, and, often, the convention of hour notation. However, these experiences are more concerned with spiritual healing than with spiritual *knowing*, I think; they are also ordinarily narrated from the point of view of the *healee* or some other party altogether, not from the perspective of the healer (who would be the experiencer of the other's distant suffering, as in an ESEN). For these reasons, I regard bilocation stories as an

interesting variant on the ESEN pattern. Both narrative patterns indicate the breadth of the tradition of Christian beliefs about simultaneity.

### **Summary**

The foregoing chapter argument outlines longstanding habits in Christian thought, namely, the tendency to envision death and suffering as moments in time, the convention of hour notation used to herald and measure numinous experiences in time, and the attribution of religious and supernatural significance to visions and other events which coincide with the hour of death or suffering of a distant other. These habits of thought form the traditional background against which narratives like Bede's story of Begu, Caesarius' tale of Godfrey, my mother's dream of Jeannie Fallon, and many other ESENs draw their religious significance. As other parts of this thesis make clear, the hypothetical ESEN pattern is not a religious pattern *per se*. Some of the 46 informants who participated in this study are religious people, but more are not. Regardless of religious inclinations, my informants told stories that matched *most or all of the ESEN* pattern's five structural components. Stories which match the pattern crop up in literature that is more supernatural than religious (such as parapsychologists' and folklorists' collections of ESP stories), and they appear in secular literature as well, such as the history of disasters at sea. The next thesis chapter discusses the appearance of the pattern in contexts which are not religious.

In uncovering old religious texts which matched the ESEN pattern, I have been struck by the ways in which these old texts and the stories contemporary people have

told me are comparable. The kind of dream or vision that Bede regarded as a beautiful *harmony of events ordained by God alone*, is much like the kind of dream or vision Irina, a critical care nurse, reported to me in the context of two interviews for this project (see fieldwork chapter). Whereas Irina checked her bedside clock upon awakening from a dream about a patient's death in hospital, determining the next day that her dream coincided with the moment of death, give or take a few minutes, Begu heard a bell tolling that told her the time she was dreaming and the time Hild had died. While Begu's report of her dream was made "public" (in her community) immediately and treated as a revelation of fact, Irina treated her own experience much more tentatively, rarely sharing her report with others, and requesting anonymity even in this study, to protect her professional reputation. Irina's own interpretations of the significance of her experience ranged from the purely psychological (she dreamt of a workplace routine, out of rational anxiety about her patient's welfare) to the quasi-Christian (her dream involved an actual separation of her patient's soul from his body at the moment of his death, and her own soul's travel out of her sleeping body, to nudge this patient's soul onward toward a source of light).<sup>36</sup> In summary, then, stories which match the ESEN pattern sustain fundamentally different explanations among different people, in different times, but may easily support religious and secular explanations at the same time, if a narrator (like Irina) manipulates both.

The fact remains that a number of unequivocally religious passages, in the New Testament, hagiography, and other religious writing, match or otherwise inform the

ESEN pattern. If the pattern—which is neutral in and of itself—does at least testify to the Christian habit of thinking of death or suffering as crucial "moments," one might still ask whether the religious examples of ESENs express a view of death and suffering which is essentially Christian. This question raises another: is death or mortal suffering always, or ordinarily, conceptualized as a moment in the Christian tradition? If Christian death is a moment, then what sort of a moment is it, for those whom it concerns?

In the context of a study of the background to Peter Lombard's theology of deathbed repentance (*penitentia in fine*), a religious historian whom I have had the pleasure of knowing addresses all of these questions in a discussion of the meaning of the phrase *in fine*. As he so carefully points out,

The phrase *in fine*...has different connotations. Although "the end" always implies that an alternative timing [for repentance and sacramental penance] would have been preferable, it might mean anything from months or days to moments. At its most elastic and demanding, the end is conceived of as any period of time too short either to prove *sincerity of repentance by living* a reformed life or to perform the works of satisfaction that one's sins require. The best way to avoid this kind of *penitentia in fine* would be to repent while healthy and then assume a blameless life of charity and self-denial. But much briefer time spans are also envisaged. The end can mean the death crisis itself, that indeterminate space of time when one is critically ill and when pain, fear, and weakness are believed to undermine the will. And the end can be much shorter: enough time for a bishop or priest to arrive and *grant forgiveness; enough time* to experience contrition and perhaps to express it; or a truly bare minimum—the instant required to implore mercy. Which definition of the end an author intends is not always clear, and it is common for a text to imply a multiplicity of meanings. (Tentler 1996, 285-86.)

As Tentler's comments indicate, Christians past and present remember their end not in one way, but in as many ways as there are to worry or hope about final judgment and

salvation. There is also the kind of "end" that turns out not to be the end, not just yet (cf. Caesarius, Book 8, Chapter LXXIV), that realm of close shaves known nowadays under the rubric of "near-death experiences."

Yet alongside the truth Tentler tells about *penitentia in fine* there stands the meaning of another traditional phrase, *in hora mortis*. This is the idea of the hour of death as final moment, a memento embedded in Catholic prayer--and thus in ordinary Catholic lives--for many centuries. The phrase *in hora mortis* appears in the *Anima Christi*, the *In Te Credo*, and, most notably, the *Ave Maria*. Toward the end of the series of supplications to Christ in the *Anima Christi*, a prayer associated with (though not composed by) St. Ignatius of Loyola in the sixteenth century, the phrase appears within the plea, *In hora mortis meae voca me* (at the hour of my death, call me). The *In Te Credo* declares "I believe in Thee, I hope in Thee, I love Thee, I adore Thee, O Blessed Trinity, one God," and then asks that God to "have mercy on me now and at the hour of my death and save me" (*miserere mei nunc et in hora mortis meae et salva me*). The intercessory portion of the *Ave Maria* (standardized in the sixteenth century but in circulation long before) asks "Holy Mary, Mother of God" to pray for sinners, "now and at the hour of our death" (*nunc et in hora mortis nostrae*).<sup>37</sup>

The last of these prayers, moreso than the first two, is inculcated in most Catholic Christians in early childhood. Many of us therefore learn to contemplate the hour of our death before we learn to read, tie a shoe, write our name. And we learn to imagine that moment always in relation to an act of supernatural communication, across

whatever distance we may happen to find ourselves from God's various persons when that moment arrives. A craving for some form of communion, then--some mysterious evidence of communication across the physical and spiritual distance between self and another--seems to survive at the heart of extraordinary simultaneous experience narratives, particularly, though perhaps not exclusively, in those historical and contemporary examples which celebrate specifically religious values in their text and context.



Figure 3.2. Young communicant at Holy Name, Springfield, Massachusetts, 1998.

### Notes to Chapter Three

<sup>1</sup>For an explanation of how folklorists define "folk religion" and find this two-tier distinction enriching (rather than limiting) in examining religious culture from perspectives of pew and pulpit, see Don Yoder, "Toward a Definition of Folk Religion," *Western Folklore* 33 (1974): 2-15.

<sup>2</sup>My M.A. thesis focused on Roman Catholic sacramental practice in a Newfoundland parish. Most of my research so far (as a student) has been tied to questions I have learned to ask in relation to this area of Christian tradition.

<sup>3</sup>In his early book *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat* (1985), neurologist Oliver Sacks portrays various brain-damaged patients' continuing reliance upon whatever memory they do have, in order to function, the result often being the production of patently false narratives or contradictory impressions, which to nonbrain-damaged individual around them, seem troubling and absurd. Sacks even raises the question of where a patient's "soul" must go when the self that long-term and short-term memory always preserved seems to be slipping away. Ironically, though, it becomes clear that "normal" people trust their memories in just the same way as do people with damaged brains. The fact that normal people's memories just happen to be working *correctly* seems rather like a function of grace, from this perspective.

<sup>4</sup>This is a paraphrase of one of the series of questions Hans Küng asks in *On Being A Christian* (1976); they appear on the opening page of David Lodge's *Souls and Bodies (How Far Can You Go?)* 1980.

<sup>5</sup>This work of Küng's is funny, insightful, and very comforting to any reader trying to negotiate true religiousness as an individual (and as Küng says, following Jung, "without regression") in the real world.

<sup>6</sup>See, in particular, the testimony of "Judith" and "Irina" in the Appendices; in the fieldwork chapter I discuss their use of concepts of God and soul to explain their extraordinary simultaneous experiences.

<sup>7</sup>"On Synchronicity" appears in Volume 8 of the *Collected Works*, 1978 edition. See the thesis bibliography for the full citation. Aziz also cites this portion of the article (Aziz 1990, 61-62).

<sup>8</sup>These observations are sustained by any quick perusal of Moore's writing or Hillman's. Moore, a Catholic who lived for twelve years in religious life before

marrying, is the editor of the anthology *A Blue Fire: The Essential Writings of James Hillman* (NY: Harper & Row, 1989).

<sup>9</sup>I think of you as the best for plenty of reasons, but if you remember, you opened the door, and then you and Leslie held my hands as if I were family. I'll never be able to give thanks enough, but I know where to go now to try.

<sup>10</sup>I am relying here on observations of Donald Wilcox, "Neo-Platonism," *In Search of God and Self: Renaissance and Reformation Thought* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland, 1975) 106-122, and those of Peter Brown, in his introduction to Augustine's *Confessions*, trans. F. J. Sheed (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993) xx. Under "soul" and other entries, Stockhammer's *Plato Dictionary* (1964) discusses the scant support in the Platonic writings for the idea of survival of the human spirit after death.

<sup>11</sup>Stockhammer 1964, *passim*; Hamlyn 1987, 46-51, 70-71.

<sup>12</sup>Bianchi, pages 26-27, in *Carl Jung and Christian Spirituality*, ed. Robert Moore (NY: Paulist Press, 1988) 16-37.

<sup>13</sup>Pages 100-104, *The Essential Jung* (1983). The citations are from Jung's definitions of his terms in *Psychological Types* (1921); the excerpt is not necessarily as heterosexist as it appears, although Jung's view of homosexual love and desire seems connected, in his thinking, with an idea that the choice of same-sex partners results from some sort of "lack" of individuation from parents. However, so many forms of heterosexuality emerge, in Jung's views, out of twists and turns in the mysterious process of individuation that it is hard to interpret "lack" of individuation as a negative concept in itself, with clearly negative ramifications for any kind of loving human relationship.

<sup>14</sup>*The Essential Jung* (1983, 423); the excerpt is from Jung's *Psychology and Alchemy* (1944).

<sup>15</sup>As *anima* and *animam* in the original text, as noted in Jones' 1929 concordance to Bede, 32-33.

<sup>16</sup>All the points I make in this sentence are summarized from Oberhelman 1991, 41-43.

<sup>17</sup>In his total of nine dream-visions Oberhelman does not count "visions concerned with birth stories," three of which he points out in Luke (1:5, 1:26, and 2:8), being, respectively, an angel's appearance to Zechariah, Elizabeth's husband; the Angel



Gabriel's annunciation to the Virgin Mary, and angels' appearance to shepherds at the Nativity (1991, 44).

<sup>18</sup>For brevity's sake my review is limited to the Gospels, and does not extend into Acts, the letters, or the Book of Revelation. Maybe in future approaches to this topic I will have the time and the space to do so.

<sup>19</sup>An interesting negative case appears, too, in Luke 2:41-52. Here Joseph and Mary lose track of the boy Jesus, who stays behind, unbeknownst to them, in Jerusalem after Passover to converse with teachers in the temple. When his "astonished" parents find him, Jesus asks, "Why were you searching for me...Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" (Luke 2:49). The question underscores the enigmatic quality of this episode, in which Mary experiences an extraordinarily *ordinary* crisis: she remains unaware and anxious about the whereabouts of her divine son for some length of time. The will of God seems the only explanation for the mysterious way in which Jesus, according to the text, seems to have been found more or less by chance by search party rather than by some protective, divine revelation of his simultaneous location through a vision or impulse.

<sup>20</sup>For a brief overview and useful explanation of medieval exempla collections, earlier sources, and other related materials see Tubach's entire discussion in Appendix I to his *Index* (Tubach 1969, 517-523).

<sup>21</sup>I have limited my discussion to these three sources for clarity and brevity of argument within a single (and hopefully, readable) thesis chapter. I regard these sources as important because they are frequently referenced, as stated, inside and outside of folklore, and because, considered together, they represent facets of "tradition" in the Middle Ages which are neither completely elitist nor completely vernacular.

<sup>22</sup>Most of the examples seem to center upon men. In her extensive review of the *feasting and fasting habits of medieval religious women (Holy Feast and Holy Fast, 1987)*, Caroline Walker Bynum reports that Caesarius' *Dialogue* contains 62 stories about dying, only 8 of which concern women. Similarly (as she observes), the great majority of exempla on any subject in Tubach's comprehensive index relate to men (Bynum 1987, 78).

<sup>23</sup>These are: III.8, 154; IV.3, 209-210; IV.3, 212; IV.9, 221; IV.23, 248-250; and IV. 23, 250.

<sup>24</sup>These are IV. 9, 220; IV.10, 222; and IV.11, 224.

<sup>25</sup>This is III.27, 196.

<sup>26</sup>This is III.19, 173-74.

<sup>27</sup>This one (V.12, 289-294) has some features of what in modern scholarship might be called an out-of-body experience.

<sup>28</sup>These are II.6, I.10, II.12, 122-126; IV.25, 254-257; and V.9, 283-284.

<sup>29</sup>This is IV.25, 254-257.

<sup>30</sup>This is "conversion" not in the modern general sense but in the medieval Latin sense of entering monastic life (see the helpful note to this effect on page xv of Scott/Bland translation of Caesarius, 1929).

I do not have room in this chapter to treat the variety of stories in Book XI which concern "the dying," but I was surprised to discover (as Tubach must have, in his own review) that there were no "appearance at death-hour" stories in that book which closely resembled the story of Godfrey, or the ESEN pattern. A common motif in the Book XI stories, however, is that of one holy person "following" another immediately through death and into heaven; this motif appears in various accounts in Bede, as well. Immediately successive deaths certainly border on the *simultaneous suffering theme*, but the model of one death causing or preceding another some short time later clouds the issue of simultaneity a bit. Clearly, though, such accounts explore a related theme. There are a few accounts in Caesarius which seem to me to involve death-hour appearances of various kinds (e.g., Book 8, Chapter LXXIV) though not of the simultaneous-experience variety, but Tubach does not classify any accounts other than I.35 in relation to his index number 1492b.

<sup>31</sup>The version of the *Golden Legend* I am working from is the first complete modern translation in English, by William Granger Ryan. Ryan's 1993 translation is based upon the 1845 Latin text produced by Graesse (Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*. Trans. William Granger Ryan. 2 vols. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1993). In cases where the 1993 version differs substantially from the 1941 adapted translation by Ryan and Helmut Ripperger, the 1941 translation is cited for comparison. *The Golden Legend* is not a scholarly tract but a collection of legends, influential nevertheless on popular thought due to numerous reprints and wide distribution long after its original composition.

<sup>32</sup>William Granger Ryan makes this clear in his introduction to his 1993 translation (cited fully above), pages xiii-xv.

<sup>33</sup>In Chapter 1 (7-20) of his *Miscellanies* (1696), John Aubrey recorded numerous nonreligious examples of "day fatalities." I discuss day fatalities elsewhere in this thesis.

<sup>34</sup>Scott/Bland translation 1929, xvi.

<sup>35</sup>The question of whether the experience of knowing could be mutual could be asked about any ESEN, especially those which involve twins (see for example, "Sheila and Mary's Story" in the fieldwork chapter). In this example, Sheila, Mary, and other interviewees do debate the question of whether Sheila could have known, without being told, that Mary knew (without being told) that Sheila was undergoing heart surgery across the Atlantic.

<sup>36</sup>Irina attributed this interpretation to her Christian upbringing; without that attribution I would necessarily describe this as a Christian explanation. Irina was also of two minds about how to interpret the dream she had; for that reason I use the prefix "quasi-."

<sup>37</sup>This entire paragraph is informed by Michael Martin's wonderful annotations and reproductions of the traditional Latin prayers on the Internet. His 1994 work appears on a web page linked with the Latin Liturgy Association's web-site (<http://www.latinliturgy.com>); the 1998 version of his *Thesaurus Precum Latinarum* can be viewed at <http://unidial.com/~martinus/Thesaurus.html>.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### EXTRAORDINARY SIMULTANEOUS EXPERIENCE NARRATIVES IN SCHOLARLY COLLECTIONS AND OTHER NONRELIGIOUS LITERATURE

Now the common mistakes in dealing with this topic have been to make too much, or to make too little, of the coincidences between the hallucinatory appearance of an absent person, and his death, or some other grave crisis affecting him.

--Andrew Lang, *Cock Lane and Common-Sense* (1894, 188)

#### Introduction

This chapter reviews examples of ESEs in a small selection of well-known and readily available collections of supernatural stories published by antiquarians, psychical researchers, folklorists, and parapsychologists. Using Bennett (1987a) and Dorson (1968) as general guides to scholarship before this century, I examine some older sources (Aubrey 1696; Kirk 1691; Gurney, Myers, and Podmore 1886; Lang 1894, 1897) and some twentieth-century collections (L. Rhine, 1961, 1981; Virtanen 1990; McLenon 1994). I examine some of the field narratives Gillian Bennett presents in *Traditions of Belief* (1987a), as well. Finally, I discuss ESEs in the literature of disaster history, where stories that match the pattern are common. By contrast with the sources examined in the preceding chapter, none of these sources or source-areas is religious, *per se*. The interpretations ESEs attract and suggest in these contexts are therefore either secular or supernatural in a nonreligious or at least nondenominational sense.

In *The British Folklorists: A History* (1968), Richard Dorson locates the roots for nineteenth-century folk belief studies and psychical research in the antiquarian fascination with superstitions, omens, dreams, day-fatalities, apparitions, prodigies, miracles, and the Second Sight. Dorson focuses on the work of John Aubrey (1626-

97), Henry Bourne (1694-1733), John Brand (1744-1806), Francis Grose (1731?-1791) and other writers on these subjects (Dorson 1968, 1-43). In her chapter on "ESP and Other Experiences" in *Traditions of Belief* (1987, 110-148), Gillian Bennett identifies historical precedents for the study of experiences identified nowadays by the term "extrasensory perception."<sup>1</sup> Bennett praises Lavater's *Of Ghosts and Spirits Walking By Nyghte* (1572) for its extensive list of death omens, Kirk's *The Secret Commonwealth* (c. 1691) for its discussion of Second Sight, Baxter's *The Certainty of the World of Spirits Fully Evinc'd* (1691) for including letters describing Welsh death tokens of that era, and Bekker's *The World Bewitched*, published the same year, for theorizing that telepathy operated by a kind of love chemistry (Bennett 1987, 113-115, 118). Bennett mentions Mary Beer's *Prophetical Warnings* and Robert Nixon's *Cheshire Prophecies* (Bennett 1987, 116-117) as popular eighteenth- and nineteenth-century works on death warning and prophecy, and she singles out John Abercrombie's 1830 work, *An Enquiry Concerning the Intellectual Powers and the Investigation of Truth* for dedicating "a whole chapter to dismissing cases of precognitive dreaming." (Bennett 1987, 117). I will proceed now to examine two of the older works: Aubrey and Kirk.

### **1. The Miscellanies of John Aubrey (1626-97)**

Dorson describes Aubrey's *Miscellanies* (1696) as a collection of personal encounters and experiences,

...Spectral signs, sounds, and sights [which] foretell death or reveal the presences of the walking dead...themes [which] attracted Andrew Lang two centuries later, when he sought to blend the study of folklore with psychical research...Today they are known among folklorists as memorat[e]s, a designation suggested by the Swedish scholar Carl von Sydow. (Dorson 1968, 9)

Though the *Miscellanies* includes accounts Aubrey collected himself, he also tapped Joseph Glanvil's and Richard Baxter's 1681 and 1691 witchbooks, along with John Gibbon's 1678 collection of "day-fatalities" and William Dugdale's 1656 *Antiquities of Warwickshire* for material (Dorson 1968, 7-8), works which Bennett discusses in *Traditions of Belief* (Bennett 1987, 114, 118, 166-175).

Under the heading "apparitions" in Chapter VI of the *Miscellanies*<sup>2</sup> (45-46) an excellent and well-known example of an extraordinary simultaneous experience narrative appears. The example is reprinted from Isaac Walton's 1640 life of John Donne.<sup>3</sup> The narrative opens by describing Donne's ambivalent decision to leave on a two-month journey with Sir Robert Drury to the French court of Henry IV, despite his pregnant wife's initial request that he remain at home. Donne's vision after arriving in Paris is described in detail:

...Mr. Donne was left alone in the Room, where Sir Robert and he, with some others, had dined: To this place Sir Robert returned within half an Hour, and as he left, so he found Mr. Donne alone, but in such an extasie, and so altered as to his Looks, as amazed Sir Robert to behold him, insomuch as he earnestly desired Mr. Donne to declare what had befallen him in the short Time of his Absence? To which Mr. Donne was not able to make a present Answer, but after a long and perplex'd pause, *I have seen a dreadful Vision since I saw you: I have seen my dear Wife pass twice by me through this Room with her Hair hanging about her Shoulders, and a dead Child in her Arms; this I have seen since I saw you.* To which Sir Robert replied, *Sure Sir you have slept since I saw you, and this is the result of some Melancholy Dream, which I desire you to forget for you are now awake.* To which Mr. Donne's reply was, *I cannot be surer that I now live, than that I have not slept since I saw you, and am sure that at her second appearing she stopt and lookt me in the Face and vanished--...* (*Miscellanies*, 46)

A messenger sent to inquire about Mrs. Donne's health returned twelve days later to report that

...he found and left Mrs. Donne very sad, Sick in her Bed, and that, after a long and dangerous Labour, she had been deliver'd of a Dead Child: And upon Examination the Abortion prov'd to be the *same* day, and about the very Hour that Mr. Donne affirmed he *saw her* pass by him in his Chamber. (*Miscellanies*, 46)

Aubrey presents this narrative without comment. However, his decision to classify it as an "apparition" rather than to place it under "Dreams," "Impulses," "The Second Sight," "Omens," or "Portents" sheds light on his interpretation of events in the account. That Aubrey does not locate this account in Chapter V ("Dreams") would seem to indicate that he disregarded Sir Robert's suggestion that Donne had been asleep and dreaming as a potential explanation, placing more trust in Donne's ability to assess his own state as a waking vision.

Under the "Impulses" category (Chapter VIII), Aubrey lists includes examples of sudden, spontaneous declarations made by people about distant simultaneous or, more often, near future events ("My Father is Dead," "We shall certainly be Robbed," 71). The Donne account and the examples of impulses all involve a knowing of distant *tragic events which may result in an immediate response*. The difference between an apparition and an impulse, in Aubrey's scheme, seems to lie in the unexpected, immediate nature of an impulse; unlike an apparition, an impulse seems to occur instantaneously in thought, without any introductory vehicle, such as a vision of a person in distress.

Aubrey reserves his "Omens" category (IV) for cases in which events of royal or military import seem to have been presaged by unusual animal behavior, falling objects, strange weather, and the violation of burial taboos. "Portents" (Chapter III) include atmospheric phenomena--appearances of rainbows, mock suns, and other signs in the sky, associated, again, with events of political or national import. *In the last chapter of*

the *Miscellanies*, Aubrey treats Second Sight very systematically. He reprints a series of queries regarding the Second Sight in Scotland, in effect a questionnaire to which several learned contemporaries had provided answers. The second query inquires whether Second Sight applies to things past, present, or future; respondents affirm that it applies exclusively to future things and their numerous illustrations support this point (113-125). The simultaneity clearly established in the Donne account would therefore have precluded Aubrey from classifying it as Second Sight.

Aubrey's citation of the Donne account does not include the explanatory analogy or the series of sacred references Izaak Walton appends to the story to support its credibility, in his biography of Donne.<sup>4</sup> Walton's explanatory analogy is as follows:

This is a relation that will beget some wonder, and it well may; for most of our world are at present possessed with an opinion, that visions and miracles are ceased. And, though it is most certain, that two lutes being both strung and tuned to an equal pitch, and then one played upon the other that is not touched, being laid upon a table at a fit distance, will—like an echo to a trumpet—warble a faint audible harmony in answer to the same tune; yet many will not believe there is any such thing as a sympathy of souls; and I am well pleased that every reader do enjoy his own opinion. (Walton 1640/1895, 15-20)

Walton's commentary also connects Donne's poem "A Valediction, Forbidding to Mourn"<sup>5</sup> to this incident, asserting that Donne gave the poem to his wife before he departed for France (Walton 1640/1895, 18-19). The authoritative version of Donne's poem appears below, as Figure 3.1, with the Walton version following it (Figure 3.2) for comparison.<sup>6</sup> I present this poem in this chapter because its standard version, at least, is a well-known and lovely sample of John Donne's poetry, and, of course, because the story the poem draws upon is clearly matches the ESEN pattern.



Figure 4.1. John Donne's "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" (Standard Version)

As virtuous men pass mildly away,  
 And whisper to their souls to go,  
 Whilst some of their sad friends do say,  
 "The breath goes now," and some say, "No,"

So let us melt, and make no noise,  
 No tear-floods, nor sigh-tempests move,  
 'Twere profanation of our joys  
 To tell the laity our love.

Moving of the earth brings harms and fears,  
 Men reckon what it did and meant,  
 But trepidation of the spheres,  
 Though greater far, is innocent.

Dull sublunary lovers' love  
 (Whose soul is sense) cannot admit  
 Absence, because it doth remove  
 Those things which elemented it.

But we, by a love so much refined  
 That our selves know not what it is,  
 Inter-assured of the mind,  
 Care less, eyes, lips, and hands to miss

Our two souls therefore, which are one,  
 Though I must go, endure not yet  
 A breach, but an expansion,  
 Like gold to airy thinness beat.

If they be two, they are two so  
 As stiff twin compasses are two:  
 Thy soul, the fixed foot, makes no show  
 To move, but doth, if the other do;

And though it in the center sit,  
 Yet when the other far doth roam,  
 It leans, and hearkens after it,  
 And grows erect, as that comes home.

Such wilt thou be to me, who must,  
 Like the other foot, obliquely run;  
 Thy firmness makes my circle just,  
 And makes me end where I begun.

[Reproduced from Arthur L. Clements, ed., *John Donne's Poetry* (1966; NY and London: W. W. Norton, 1992) 31-32.]

**Figure 4.2. John Donne's "A Valediction, Forbidding to Mourn" (Walton Version)**

As vertuous men pass mildly away,  
And whisper to their Souls to go,  
Whilst, some of their sad Friends do say,  
The breath goes now, and some say no:

So, let us melt, and make no noise;  
No wind-sighs, or tear-floods us move,  
'Twere profanation of our joys,  
To tell the Laity our love.

*Movings* of th' earth, cause harms, and fears;  
Men reckon what they did or meant,  
But trepidation of the Sphæars,  
Though greater far, is innocent.

Dull sublunary lovers love,  
(Whose soul is sense) cannot admit  
Absence: because, that doth remove  
Those things that Elemented it.

But we, by a Soul so much refin'd,  
That our souls know not what it is,  
*Inter-assured* of the mind,  
Care not, hands, eyes, or lips to miss.

Our two souls therefore, which are one,  
Though I must go, indure not yet  
A breach, but an expansion,  
Like gold, to airy thinness beat.

If we be two? we are two so  
As still twin-compasses are two:  
Thy soul, the fixt foot, makes no show  
To move, but does, if th'other do.

And, though thing in the Center sit,  
Yet, when my other far does roome,  
Thine leans, and hearkens after it,  
And grows erect as mine comes home.

Such thou must be to me, who must  
Like th'other foot, obliquely run:  
Thy firmness makes my circle just,  
And me to end, where I begun.

[Reproduced from Izaak Walton, *The Lives...* (Edinburgh: Turnbull & Spears, 1927) 43-44.]

## 2. Kirk's *Secret Common-Wealth* (c. 1691)

The *Secret Common-Wealth* (written between 1690 and 1691) is the Reverend Robert Kirk's short but well-known treatise about law and order in the fairy worlds in which his Scottish Gaelic parishioners believed. Kirk's dual role as a Church of Scotland minister and a collector of folk belief renders his work a particular gem for folklorists. Kirk paints a portrait of a local tradition of Highland folk belief which is not entirely Christian but wholly supernatural, including as it does remarks on the Second Sight, witchcraft, and divination, in addition to fairy lore.

As Sanderson observes in his introduction to his 1976 edition of the work,

...one hardly expects to find a minister of the Kirk advocating, as a counterblast to godlessness, such pagan superstitions...His argument, that the existence of fairy spirits is a proof of the spiritual orders more usually encountered in Christian theology, is both ingenious and disarming, especially when one remembers that it was produced at the end of a century of harsh conflict in matters ecclesiastical and political, when blood was spilt and thrones overturned on points of dogma as well as of church government. (Kirk/Sanderson edition 1976, 1-2)

In the 1976 edition there is a passage with direct relevance to my ESEN hypothesis.

Kirk describes belief in something like a doppelgänger or astral double: the "*coimimeadh*" or Co-Walker, which is "oft seen...both befor and after the Original is dead..." (52). In Kirk's full description of this "Reflex-man" there emerges a set of beliefs which work as a good explanation for why one person might see another's double around the time of death, and conclude that a person was simultaneously suffering, dying, or dead at a distance:

Some men of that exalted [i.e. second] sight (whither by airt or nature) have told me they have seen at those meetings [i.e. funerals and banquets] a double-man, or the shape of the same man in two places, that is, a Superterranean and a Subterranean Inhabitant perfectly resembling one another in all points, whom he notwithstanding could easily distinguish one from another... They call this Reflex-man a *coimimeadh* or Co-walker, every way like the man, as a Twin-brother and Companion, haunting him as his shadow and is oft seen and known among men (resembling the Originall) both befor and after the Original is dead, and was els often seen of old to enter a house; by which the people knew that the person of that liknes was to visit them within a few dayes. This copy, Eccho, or living picture, goes at last to his own herd. It accompanied that person so long and frequently, for ends best known to itselfe, whither to guard him from the secret assaults of som of its own folks, or only as a sportful Ape to counterfeit all his actions. (Kirk/Sanderson edition 1976, 52-53).

Beliefs about the Co-walker are a fascinating counterpart to the theology of bilocation, whose relevance to the ESEN pattern and to bilocation stories has already been discussed in the previous thesis chapter. There are some significant differences, however. Co-walker belief, at least as Kirk portrays it, explains apparitions (and/or visions) before and after death. The Reflex-man is an alternative explanation for phenomena explained otherwise as wraith and ghost, that is, if "wraith" and "ghost" are understood as the separation of soul from living and dead human bodies, respectively. However, the Reflex-man is not here associated specifically with the hour of death or an hour of suffering noted by reference to clock- or bell-time, as death-hour visions and apparitions are in the early and later Christian writing examined in the previous chapter. Unlike bilocating saints, who appear beside a deathbed to heal the sick party through the power of God, the Reflex-man's purpose is enigmatic. His appearance may bode well as well as ill. He is a more mischievous being than a saint, he is not necessarily God's representative, though presumably, from Kirk's point of view, one of God's creatures. His purposes may differ, furthermore, from the intentions or actions of his

real-life double, the human person he so mysteriously resembles when he is seen through *Second Sight*.

Kirk's portrait of Second Sight, unlike Aubrey's, is *not* limited to knowledge of things future; it extends to knowledge of things distant and to vision of beings other, invisible to "first" or ordinary human sight. Kirk and Aubrey portray forms of folk belief which are not entirely or necessarily Christian, but which complement and challenge Christian supernatural beliefs. The story of Godfrey in the Cistercian *Dialogue on Miracles*, a clear match to the ESEN pattern which was discussed in Chapter Three, might provocatively be re-explained, in Kirk's day and age, or in our day, as the appearance of Godfrey's Co-walker to his brother monks at the hour of his death. In Godfrey's own day, though, the assertion that a "Subterranean Inhabitant," perfectly resembling the good Godfrey in all points, walked past his attendant on the way to the Church, would hardly constitute a good medieval German Catholic testimony to Godfrey's salvation in the hereafter. In summary, Co-walker belief is not simply or necessarily consistent with Christian explanations for extraordinary simultaneous experiences between people in moments of suffering and death, but either set of beliefs is functional explanation for some of the death-hour events in narrative examples which match the pattern I have hypothesized as "ESEN."

### 3. Gurney, Myers, and Podmore (1886)

The very first full-length collection of extraordinary simultaneous experience narratives is the two-volume study by psychical researchers Gurney, Myers, and Podmore, *Phantasms of the Living*. As a collection by men who were among the founding members of the British Society for Psychical Research, *Phantasms* set an early standard for the scholarly investigation of the paranormal, in this case, telepathy.

Finnish folklorist Leea Virtanen's work on "simultaneous informatory experience" narratives (discussed in Chapter One and further, below) cites *Phantasms of the Living* as the "classic" in this field and the earliest inspiration for her own research (Virtanen 1990, 39).

Dorson reports that Andrew Lang, a leading figure in folklore and psychical research at the end of the 19th century, "refers with keen interest" to this and other psychical research works in columns he wrote for *Longman's Magazine* between 1885 and 1905 (Dorson 1968, 213-214). Lang and other folklorists have cited Gurney, Myers, and Podmore's collection extensively (Lang 1894, 5, 69, 85, 91-103; Bennett 1987, 218; Virtanen 1990, 39; Dorson 1968, 214) and references to *Phantasms* are even more commonplace in research in and on parapsychology (Knight 1969, 83, 429; Rogo 1975, 61-70, 120, 127; L. Rhine 1981, 125-126, 145; Alvarado 1983, 147-150; Schouten 1983, 323, 328; Beloff 1993, 76-80; McLenon 1994, 41).

A thirteen-hundred-page treatise in two volumes, *Phantasms of the Living* consists largely of informants' first-hand testimonies of spontaneous, rather than induced, experiences of crisis apparitions. Approximately seven hundred cases are presented and classified. The collection demonstrates that Gurney, Myers, and Podmore recognized in 1886 that experiences which appear to be precisely *simultaneous*, rather than separated backwards or forwards in time by hours, days, or longer periods could form a distinct category of narrative and belief--separable from precognitive experience. Gurney, Myers, and Podmore understood the difference between telepathic and premonitory experiences not in terms of emic/etic classifications but in terms of sheer probability. As they explain:

...the odds against the accidental occurrence of a unique impression of someone's presence within a few hours of his death, enormous as they are, are

less enormous than the odds against a similar accidental occurrence within five minutes of the death. (201)

A general philosophical distinction between telepathy and precognition, based on understanding of probability, was therefore established in 1886, setting an important precedent for folklorists like Andrew Lang and Leea Virtanen, as well as for later parapsychologists who collected belief narratives, like Louisa Rhine.

The classification system in *Phantasms* unifies all included accounts under the general definition of what these researchers viewed as their common, experiential core and their apparent cause, namely the "transmissions of thought and feeling from one person to another, by other means than through the recognised channels of sense." (xi, xxxv) *These researchers' perspective on causality is notably secular, in comparison to the religious perspectives (bilocation and divine intervention) discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis.* Gurney, Myers, and Podmore describe the accounts in this collection as "*apparitional*" ones, in which "*impressions, voices, or figures*" of persons "*undergoing some crisis--especially death--are perceived by their friends and relatives.*" (lxvi) They estimate that death-related accounts "*constitute about half*" of the collection (229-230).

Gurney, Myers, and Podmore generally exclude or dismiss accounts concerning apparitions of persons already known to have been dead. They provide the following rationale for this important distinction:

...it is this actual psychical condition [immediately preceding death]--while it lasts, and not after it has ceased--that really concerns us here. Our subject is phantasms *of the living*: we seek the conditions of the telepathic impulse on the *hither* side of the dividing line, in the closing passage of life; not in that huge negative fact--the apparent cessation or absence of life--on which the common idea of death and of its momentous importance is based. (230)

By overtly avoiding any treatment of apparitions of the dead, the authors of *Phantasms* may have intended to distinguish themselves as "psychical researchers" (in the skeptical sense discussed above), to distance themselves from the nonscholarly perspectives of convinced Spiritualists of their day,<sup>7</sup> and to dissociate themselves from the reputation of fraudulent mediums.<sup>8</sup> Gurney, Myers and Podmore defined the energy by which brains communicated telepathically with other brains as "psychical" rather than "physical," but their dualistic willingness to consider the action of "minds" as separable from the supporting motion of "brains" did not extend, in this work at least, to assertions of the survival of mind or soul beyond bodily death.

In contrast to the work of contemporary belief scholars who analyze extraordinary experience narratives more often by common descriptive features (Hufford 1982a, McLenon 1994) rather than by causality or other forms of interpretation, Gurney, Myers and Podmore were fully concerned with explanations. They classified crisis apparition cases both causally and descriptively. They broke down what they viewed as the common cause--telepathy--into spontaneous and induced forms, allowing for situations in which crisis-related "thought-transference" might have been (1) intentionally or consciously sent or received, (2) unintentionally or unconsciously sent and received, and (3) reciprocally experienced at the same time by two conscious, waking parties.

These scholars also distinguished between experiences occurring in dreams, normal waking states, "borderland" states between sleep and wakefulness, and mind states affected by pathology and by hypnotism. Their discussion of altered states of consciousness is a clear basis for Virtanen's discussion of "vehicles" in her study (1990). Unlike Virtanen, however, Gurney, Myers, and Podmore noted that experiences which



occurred in such different vehicles of consciousness and perception would present theoretically different problems of credibility and verification. For this reason, they expressed a preference for treating waking experience accounts over descriptions of dreams, believing (a) that dreams take place in a less accessible and more subjective state akin to death's void, deep sleep (Volume I, 230) and (b) that dreams occur regularly and offer their experiencers a boundless sea of imagery with which to construct meaningful correspondences with earlier or later life events (Volume I, 28-299; Volume II, 380-448). They present narratives of single percipients along with "collective" cases involving multiple receivers and senders (in Volume II). Single or combined sensory modalities in which telepathic experiences manifest themselves are considered as well.

Another unique feature of this collection, more clearly recognizable in retrospect, is the authors' description and understanding of hypnotism. Their discussion of induced or experimental telepathy makes it clear that *they conceive of hypnotism not* in the contemporary sense of a meditative brain state induced by perceptual stimuli, characterized by increased susceptibility to verbal suggestion and retroactive memory loss, but in the nineteenth-century sense of an act of controlling or influencing the *thoughts of another* in part or entirely by means of telepathic willpower, at any distance. Excerpts like the following one show contemporary readers that the popular notion of hypnotism in the nineteenth century was more congruent with belief in telepathy than it is today:

Very much rarer are the really crucial cases where the intended effect--the origination or inhibition of a motor-impulse--is brought about at the moment by a deliberate exercise of volition...of that specific sort which temporarily alters the whole condition of the "subject," and induces the mesmeric trance. In the *Zoist* for April, 1849, Mr. Adams a surgeon of Lymington, writing four months

after the event, describes how a guest of his own twice succeeded in mesmerising the man-servant of a common friend at a distance of nearly fifty miles, the time when the attempt was to be made having in each case been privately arranged with the man's master. On the first occasion the unwitting "subject" fell at the time named, 7:30 p.m., into a state of profound coma not at all resembling natural sleep, from which he was with difficulty aroused... (Volume I, 88)

Sample cases from the 1886 edition of *Phantasms of the Living* demonstrate the variety of simultaneous experience in the accounts in their classification system. An 1883 letter submitted to the collectors from Joan Severn, wife of Arthur Severn, a landscape painter, provides an interesting narration of a simultaneous experience of pain:

I woke up with a start, feeling I had had a hard blow on my mouth, and with a distinct sense that I had been cut, and was bleeding under my upper lip, and seized my pocket-handkerchief, and held it (in a little pushed lump) to the part, as I sat up in bed, and after a few seconds, when I removed it, I was astonished not to see any blood, and only then realised it was impossible anything could have struck me there, as I lay fast asleep in bed, and so I thought it was only a dream! but I looked at my watch, and saw it was seven, and finding Arthur (my husband) was not in the room, I concluded (rightly) that he must have gone out on the lake for an early sail, as it was so fine.

I then fell asleep. At breakfast (half-past nine), Arthur came in rather late, and I noticed he rather purposely sat farther away from me than usual, and every now and then put his pocket-handkerchief furtively up to his lip, in the very way I had done. I said, 'Arthur, why are you doing that?' and added a little anxiously, 'I know you have hurt yourself! but I'll tell you why afterwards.' He said, 'Well, when I was sailing, a sudden squall came, throwing the tiller suddenly round, and it struck me a bad blow in the mouth, under the upper lip and it has been bleeding a good deal and won't stop.' I then said, 'Have you any idea what o'clock it was when it happened!' and he answered, 'It must have been about seven.'

I then told what had happened to *me*, much to *his* surprise, and all who were with us at breakfast.

It happened here about three years ago at Brantwood, to me. (Volume I, 188)

Like so many others in this collection, the following account centers upon death; unlike many other accounts, however, the vehicle is not a waking set of impressions but a dream. The simultaneity is approximate, rather than precise. The dream is not separated more than three hours from the death in time, but within that period the dream may have occurred before the death, during it, or afterward:

In 1874, when reading for college, I frequently visited a man named William Edwards (of Llanrhidian, near Swansea), who was then seriously ill; he often professed pleasure at, and benefit from, my ministrations. He at length recovered so far as to resume work. I left the neighbourhood, and amid new scenes and hard work, I cannot say that I ever thought of him.

I had been at college some 12 months, when one night, or rather early morning between 12 at midnight and 3 in the morning, I had a most vivid dream. I seemed to hear the voice of the above-named William Edwards calling me in earnest tones. In my dream I seemed to go to him, and saw him quite distinctly. I prayed with him and saw him die. When I awoke the dream seemed intensely real, so much that I remarked the time, 3 a.m. in the morning. I could not forget it and told some college friends all particulars. The next day I received a letter from my mother, with this P.S.: 'The bell is tolling; I fear poor William Edwards is dead.' On inquiry I found that he did die between 12 and 3; that he frequently expressed the wish that I were with him. I had no idea that he was ill. (Volume I, 345; from a letter of 1885 from Rev. W. D. Wood Rees, Vicar of Barmby Moor, York.)

By its classification scheme for narratives and by its perspectives on the causation of telepathy, *Phantasms of the Living* set important standards for folklorists' and other scholars' later analyses of "crisis apparitions" or extraordinary simultaneous experiences.

#### **4. Andrew Lang (1894, 1897)**

An Oxford scholar educated in classics, Andrew Lang (1844-1912) was a broadly informed commentator on extraordinary simultaneous experience narratives, ghost stories, precognition reports, and other narrative forms. Known in folkloristics as an advocate for a more rigorous comparative approach to folk narrative than solar

mythological theory, Scottish-born Lang was by 1911 the president of the British Society for Psychical Research (Dorson 1968, 213-214). His books *Cock Lane and Common Sense* (1894) and *Book of Dreams and Ghosts* (1897) developed out of his numerous papers on "psychic lore" (Dorson 1968, 213) and the latter, in particular, offers useful examples and explanations of extraordinary simultaneous experiences.

Self-identified as a "psycho-folklorist,"<sup>9</sup> Lang maintained dual citizenship within psychical research and folk belief studies, a bicameral position which would be impossible for a scholar to hold today, given the greater distance which stands today between parapsychology and folkloristics. His interests in these areas peaked around the same time skeptical belief scholar Edward Clodd rose to prominence as a leader of the British Folklore Society in 1895. A son of English parents who hoped he'd become a minister (Dorson 1968, 248), Edward Clodd (1840-1930) was a banker and an autodidact in folklore and anthropological literature. The perspectives of Lang can hardly be discussed without reference to Clodd, his clearest intellectual rival in folklore on the subject of folk belief. President of the British Folklore Society by 1895, Clodd's attitude toward the Spiritualist mediums and séances of his day was one of suspicion and scorn, a position more characteristic of late 20th century debunking scientists than of the open-minded skepticism of psychical researchers of his day (Clodd 1895, 1917).

Where Lang regarded crystal ball or "clear depth" visions as enigmatic experiences universally reported, Clodd viewed them as products of liver pathology (Dorson 1968, 215, citing Clodd 1895). Clodd's comparative, evolutionary, and animistic theoretical approach to modern Christian belief and practice, expressed in his presidential addresses to the Society (Clodd 1895 and 1896), alienated some Society members and earned him a statement of condemnation from the Catholic Truth Society

(Dorson 1968, 256). Former Prime Minister Gladstone's *withdrawal from the Folk-Lore Society over the publication of these speeches and his threat in a letter to Clodd to make public his reasons for doing so* (Dorson 1968, 254-255; Bennett 1987a, 96) call into some question the view that Clodd had been speaking from an entirely secure position within a "dominant tradition of disbelief" (Bennett 1987a, 97).

The clash between Lang and Clodd at this time is already well-documented (Bennett 1987a, 96-104 and 1987b; Dorson 1968, 215-216, 248-250, 256-257) and has been shown by Bennett to have involved old and formulaic strategies of argument for belief and disbelief in the supernatural (Bennett 1987a, 91-103 and 1987b, *citing* Hufford 1982b). However, both scholars' *positions and interests* were also shaped by an agenda of concerns distinctly characteristic of nineteenth-century Spiritualism. Many of their disagreements turned, for example, upon the credibility of narratives relating (or relevant to) activities at séances, a relatively new context in which old questions were being explored and tested in new ways. Séances directed critical attention upon the feats and claims of mediums, crystal ball use, communication with spirits of the dead and the living, telepathy, foreknowledge, psychokinesis, and other topics of the day. The oppositions in these two scholars' arguments seem to have *attracted greater attention in contemporary folklore scholarship than the similarities*.

*Clodd and Lang* were both well-read, comparative narrative scholars who supported their respective "formulaic" arguments for or against belief in various phenomena by pointing out analogies between ancient and distant magico-religious beliefs, practices, and stories, and the Christian and Spiritualist ones of their own day and place. It seems doubtful, therefore, that either of these learned men would have

perceived his *own* argument entirely in formulaic terms, or would have accepted unequivocally Bennett's observation that

...their arguments are almost entirely predictable; they would be very familiar to a long line of disputants. Lang says no more and no less than Joseph Glanvil and Richard Baxter in the seventeenth century...Clodd's opinions and arguments are just those that Lavater and Scot used four hundred years ago and those that sceptics employ today. (Bennett 1987a, 103)

Clodd the skeptical anti-theist and Lang the hopeful half-believer both engaged considerable powers of analysis and breadth of literary and cultural comparativism. I find it hard to believe either scholar simply intended to recreate a classic binary pattern of debate. I suspect both would more likely have been counting on the possibility that their arguments were saying something somehow new to readers, by virtue of the social and intellectual milieu of new possibilities created at that time by Spiritualism and psychical research.

Lang's citations and comments in his 1897 *Book of Dreams and Ghosts* demonstrate the scope of his comparative scholarship and his involvement in the folklore and psychical research of his day. Lang cited *Phantasms of the Living* extensively for examples of crisis apparition narratives (Lang 1897, 5, 69, 85, 91-103) and praised *Phantasms* as proof of his own view that "No kind of tale is so common as that of dying people appearing at a distance" (Lang 1897, 99). Lang cited similar reports from New Zealand Maori, footnoting a Maori case in *Phantasms* (Volume II, 557) and another in E. B. Tylor's *Primitive Culture* and claiming Maoris regard such apparitions as proof of death (Lang 1897, 91).<sup>10</sup>

Lang connected still other traditions of belief cross-culturally in relation to crisis apparitions, in *Dreams and Ghosts*. He linked the notion of wraith, as an appearance of

a spirit of a living person to another person at a distance, to the Catholic theological concept of "bilocation," the belief in holy people's ability to appear simultaneously elsewhere for the purpose of enacting God's grace (1897, 88; see discussion of bilocation in Chapter Three). He also compares the concept of a wraith to the notion of an "astral body" which one person might *purposefully* project to another at a distance, through sleep or hypnosis (89). Finally, Lang distinguished between unconscious or enigmatic appearances of apparitions, and the conscious projections of such apparitions in experiments by hypnotists of the era. As he so carefully put it:

These appearances of the living but absent, whether caused by some mental action of the person who appears or not, are at least, *unconscious* on his part. But a few cases occur in which a living person is said, by a voluntary exertion of mind, to have made himself visible to a friend at a distance. (Lang 1897, 88)

Were Lang alive today he would probably recognize the connection between a projected "astral body" concept and the popular psychology model of the out-of-body experience (McLenon 1994, 49-50) and reports of telepathic lucid dreams (LaBerge 1986). Tying together Catholic theological tenets with hypnotic experimentation and Maori death beliefs, Lang commanded the attention of both Christians and Spiritualists of his day. His scholarship did not encourage simple credulity, but called implicitly for a unified description and explanation of cross-cultural experience and belief.

Lang presents dream narratives apart from stories of waking visions and, like Gurney, Myers, and Podmore, makes a point of distinguishing stories of visions of the living or dying, from visions of the dead. When presenting cases which have been reported more than once, Lang calls attention to discrepancies within and between versions (1897, 36-37), an approach characteristic of Martin Gardner and other scientific debunkers of the late 20th century.<sup>11</sup> Lang cites Brierre de Boismont's 1845

book *Des Hallucinations* for this example of "a dream which apparently reveals a real fact occurring at a distance":

Miss C., a lady of excellent sense, religious but not bigoted, lived before her marriage in the house of her uncle D., a celebrated physician, and member of the Institute. Her mother at this time was seriously ill in the country. One night the girl dreamed that she saw her mother, pale and dying, and especially grieved at the absence of two of her children: one a *cure* in Spain, the other--herself--in Paris. Next she heard her own Christian name called, "Charlotte!" and, in her dream, saw the people about her mother bring in her own little niece and god-child Charlotte from the next room. The patient intimated by a sign that she did not want *this* Charlotte, but her daughter in Paris. She displayed the deepest regret; her countenance changed, she fell back, and died.

Next day the melancholy of Mademoiselle C. attracted the attention of her uncle. She told him her dream; he pressed her to his heart, and admitted that her mother was dead.

Some months later Mademoiselle C., when her uncle was absent, arranged his papers, which he did not like any one to touch. Among these was a letter containing the story of her mother's death, with all the details of her own dream, which D. had kept concealed lest they should impress her too painfully. (1897, 35-36)

After his translation of this narrative, Lang comments that "Mental telegraphy," of course, would explain all, and even chance coincidence is perfectly conceivable." (36)<sup>12</sup>

In *Cock Lane and Common-Sense* (1894) Lang balances his interest in explaining particular narratives by telepathy, with the recommendation that instances of simultaneous correspondences between visions, dreams, and distant, real-life events should be assessed according to how frequently they appear in proportion with negative accounts (unconfirmed or noncorrespondent cases) in large polls (1894, 192-197). Along with other members of the British Society for Psychical Research (194-195) Lang recognized the significance of visions which turn out *not* to match with any such simultaneous crisis, and of crises which telepathic warnings might have announced, but



did not. Lang praises Gurney for making note of negative cases alongside positive ones, and encourages the collection of both kinds of narratives, noting shrewdly that

The general reader, even if credulously inclined, is more staggered by a few examples of non-coincidental hallucinations, than confirmed by a pile of coincidental examples...it is the *story* that takes the public: if we are to be fair we must give the non-coincidental story in all its features, as is done in the matter of wraiths with a kind of message or meaning. (1894, 196-197)

Lang's view here concurs with that of Freud, who described cases of crises where telepathy might have been expected, but did not occur (*The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* 1901, Strachey translation 1965, 332-335) and would seem to foreshadow folklorists' interest in skeptical anti-narratives nearly a century later (Dégh and Vászonyi 1976, cited by Butler 1990).<sup>13</sup>

In retrospect, perhaps both Lang and Clodd may be viewed as skeptics. Because he viewed the hypotheses and methods of psychical research as unsound and unscientific (Dorson 1968, 216) and scorned mediums generally as fraudulent tricksters, much of Clodd's work can be seen in historical perspective as oriented to scientific debunking.<sup>14</sup> As has been shown above, Lang's reviews of crisis apparition cases were also relatively skeptical. Lang was often willing to acknowledge discrepancies across repeated testimonials of extraordinary experience, something which daunts many belief narrative students today, grounded as they (we) are in the nearly unquestioning reverence for testimony characteristic of an "experience-centered approach." From Lang's well-informed perspective as a comparative literary and social scholar, he was able to put individual reports of paranormal or other phenomena in critical, historical perspective (much like what Hufford does with nightmare phenomena today). I suspect that the skeptical features of Lang's thinking are somewhat de-emphasized today,

though, when his orientation is contrasted with Clodd, rather than examined in its own right.

Lang's general orientation was that of a folklorist; in *Cock Lane and Common-Sense* (1894) and *The Book of Dreams and Ghosts* (1897), his primary interest was in collecting supernatural or paranormal narratives, and criticizing them comparatively. As David Hufford does now (1982a), Lang hypothesized that repeated instances of consistent, corroborated testimony from reasonable persons regarding extraordinary phenomena might constitute evidence of cross-cultural and real, if enigmatic, human experience. Lang's openness to the psychical investigations which flourished during the age of Spiritualism, along with testimonies of supernatural experience from "honourable men" (Lang 1895) might also be seen to foreshadow Hufford's experience-centered approach to understanding belief and belief narrative (Hufford 1982a), an important paradigm in contemporary folk belief scholarship in folklore.<sup>15</sup> Gillian Bennett has already compared Lang with Hufford and other American folklore scholars (Louis Jones, Wayland Hand and Lynwood Montell) noting the absence in their work of "sneers," "whimsicality," and "common-sense" put-downs of informants' experiences (1987a, 14). To such comparisons, I would simply like to add the following suggestions: that Lang's willingness to examine contradictions and discrepancies across multiple versions of supernatural or anomalous experience narratives be remembered by folklorists today, and perhaps even revived.

##### **5. Louisa Rhine (1891-1983)**

By the 1930s, J. B. Rhine's quantitative studies of telepathy and other ESP phenomena via card-guessing and other probabilistic trials at Duke University detoured what was formerly known as "psychical research" still further away from the question of

survival after bodily death. Rhine steered "parapsychology," as he renamed the discipline, largely in the direction of quantitative research, where it remains today, separated methodologically from folklore. However, Rhine's wife Louisa operated more from a folklorist's orientation to narrative, and she continued to collect and analyze ESP stories until her death in 1983. Rhine's work is a strong but underacknowledged precedent for the work of folklorist Leea Virtanen (1990), and her dedication to collecting crisis apparition and other ESP narratives stands as a lasting reminder that folklorists and parapsychologists often work on adjacent, if not common, ground in the study of traditional belief.

Virtanen identifies Louisa Rhine as a major collector and classifier of ESP accounts, but refers, puzzlingly, only to Rhine's 1953 article "Subjective Forms of Spontaneous Psi Experiences" in the *Journal of Parapsychology* to support this claim (Virtanen 1990, 39, 165). Over the course of her lifetime (1891-1983) Rhine wrote five books on psychic experiences (*Hidden Channels of the Mind*, 1961; *ESP in Life and Lab*, 1967; *Mind over Matter: Psychokinesis*, 1970; *Psi, What Is It?*, 1975; and *The Invisible Picture*, 1981). She contributed more than 20 articles on ESP to the *Journal of Parapsychology* between 1943 and 1970<sup>16</sup> and before her death finished a history (*Something Hidden*, 1983) of the beginnings of quantitative parapsychology at Duke University. The size of Rhine's ESP narrative collection, moreover, far surpasses that of Virtanen.

As Rhine explains (1981, 18), she began her enormous collection and qualitative study of telepathic, clairvoyant, and precognitive ESP accounts in the mid-1930s after being asked by J. B. Rhine, her husband and co-worker at Duke's newly formed Parapsychology Laboratory, to answer letters from the public. By 1951, Rhine reports

(1981, 18) she had selected 1600 accounts from these letters and had conducted her first study of them, results of which she published in an article in the *Journal of Parapsychology* that year.<sup>17</sup> Thus, Rhine was working with a selection of ESP narratives about twice the size of Virtanen's collection (865 in total), nearly 30 years before.

In *Hidden Channels of the Mind* (1961, reprinted 1967) Louisa Rhine presents nearly 300 pages of examples drawn from the same collection. Her organization and analysis of these narratives closely resemble the scheme used by Virtanen in 1977 (discussed below, and in Chapter One). Rhine divides ESP experiences according to their apparent sources, their perceptual vehicles, the range of subject matter concerned, and the resultant responses, such as successful or unsuccessful attempts to avoid precognized danger. She also considers gender, age, and personality differences among reporters of such experiences, and considers the general conceptions of space and time in ESP accounts. Rhine identifies three main sources for ESP: other minds (telepathy), mindless objects (clairvoyance), and the future (precognition). She considers these "sources" not necessarily in an intentional or causal sense, but as origins for information somehow acquired by extrasensory perceivers:

In some instances, people seem to receive information from another person's thought; in others, from a distant or hidden thing; in a third, from an event that has not yet happened. (1961/1967, 14)

Rhine distinguishes four categories or "forms" of experience: realistic, unrealistic, hallucinatory, and intuitive. Most of the realistic and unrealistic forms in her collection are dreams. By "realistic" she means dreams or other classes of conscious experience in which the experiencer gets a "true and detailed" view of a scene from a specific viewpoint (1961/1967, 42) corresponding to a past, present, or future event.

By "unrealistic" Rhine means experiences which correspond metaphorically, rather than literally, with life events. An "unrealistic" example would be the case of a San Francisco woman, who in 1945 had a dream that her son visited her and handed her his wet uniform to wash. Seeing the dye spread in the water, she then heard him complain in fear, and comforted him. The dream was later associated with his death in combat at sea on the same night (1961/1967, 44-45).

Rhine distinguishes between psychic and nonpsychic hallucinatory experiences. Ordinary hallucinations, in her view, are experienced by persons who are ill or drugged, whereas psychic hallucinations are experienced by people who are not (56-57). She defines hallucination as follows:

Today the term hallucination is used only if the person is awake and at least *momentarily thinks his sense organs are actually involved*. The word hallucination, as now used, covers all kinds of waking experiences which involve the senses when nothing is present to excite them. Ordinary hallucinations usually occur to persons who are drugged or ill or in delirium. Any hallucination, whether coming from an abnormal mental state or even from a strong emotion, as in certain religious experiences, is characterized by the (mistaken) impression that the object perceived is present to the senses. (56)

In psychic hallucinations, Rhine adds, "the thing that seems to be there *does have reality of some kind*, even if only as a thought in someone's mind" (56). Unlike religious hallucinations, in which the "thing there" seems to be God, the subjects of psychic hallucinations "can be checked and proven to have reality" (56). Rhine's final division, intuitive experiences, she defines as "a sudden 'just knowing,'" which can be attributed to no sensory input (63-64). Her "intuitive" category resembles Aubrey's notion of "impulse," discussed above, and is also a precedent for Virtanen's "intuition" category (1990, 58-62).

The rather surprising line Rhine draws here between religious and psychic hallucinations must be read in historical context. Her effort to distance her work from the study of religious experience is consistent with the efforts of psychical researchers to distinguish themselves from the religious attitudes of Spiritualists, decades before (Rogo 1975, 58). Rhine subdivides "pseudosensory" experiences according to sensory modality. In classing religious and pathological hallucinations apart from psychic ones and claiming only psychic hallucinations result from real stimuli, Rhine conveys other interpretive biases. She does not seem to acknowledge, for example, the difficulty of specifying a single origin for any ESP experience, the problems in differentiating pathological states of consciousness with certainty from nonpathological ones, or the prejudice inherent in separating the experience and testimony of religious persons, *per se*, from those of agnostics or atheists.

Rhine presents the following ESEN as an illustration of "fully visualized" telepathy. Rhine defines telepathy in much the same way as Gurney, Myers, and Podmore did in 1886, as a situation which involves "apparent communication of thought from one person to another otherwise than through the channels of sense" (16):

The expression of telepathy is not always, by any means, one so fully visualized....Quite different indeed was the experience of a woman in New Jersey. She was tossing, sleepless and restless, in her bed one night in 1947. "I hadn't been asleep for several nights and this was in the middle of another sleepless night," she recalls. "Due to a series of unhappy events concerning my family and myself, and to my rundown state of health, I just couldn't see any sense in my life or any sense in going on. With my thoughts seething round and round in endless circles, I began to think of ways and means to end it all, when suddenly, as clearly as if she were in the room, I heard the voice of a dear friend say: 'Don't do that, Marion!'"

I was so utterly dumbfounded that it jolted me right out of my senseless state of mind. She lived in Florida and I was in New Jersey at the time. She was an

older woman who had taken a great liking to me, for I resembled, she thought, her only daughter who had died some time before. To hear her speak to me in the dead of night when I knew she was over a thousand miles away was quite a disturbing experience. Yet--I began to think it was all due to my overwrought nerves, until next day I received an air mail, special delivery letter from her saying she had been awakened *in the middle of the night by an urgent sense that I needed help*. She said she had arisen and prayed for me until dawn.

Her letter was proof to me that somehow she had been aroused from her sleep by my great need and she had reached me over all those miles to comfort and protect me. It was one of the most beautiful and mysterious experiences I have ever had." (Rhine 1961/1967, 16-17).

According to Rhine's classification scheme this account would qualify as a psychic hallucinatory experience for Marion (who heard a friend's "voice" while knowing her friend was elsewhere) and an intuitive experience for her friend, who was awakened according to Marion by "an urgent sense" that Marion needed help. The narrative implies that Marion's grief coincided with her friend's awakening, without providing precise times.

Later in this work (Chapter 13, "The Telepathy Impasse" 229-240) and more extensively, 20 years later, in *The Invisible Picture* (1981, 86-97, 121-134) Louisa Rhine does consider problems with the sender-receiver and stimulus-response models for telepathic communication. The problems she recognizes include (1) how to classify accounts in which one party claims to have received a message from another person, who in turn claims not to have consciously "sent" any message (as clairvoyance or as unconscious telepathy?) and (2) how to separate the roles of receivers and senders with precision (as in a case like Marion's, where there appeared to have been a volley of exchange--Marion sending, Florida receiving, and sending comfort back). In general, though, Rhine holds the view that "ESP experiences...have no physical chain of causation" (87). Her thinking here is comparable to Leea Virtanen's statement that ESP

phenomena are "assumed to be independent of limitations of time and place" (1990, 8). Physical or nonphysical, Rhine writes, the causes of ESP experiences, whether telepathic, clairvoyant, or precognitive, seem to be hidden:

The situation in ESP is obviously so different from that in sense perception that it seems to be in contrast at every point. Still, could it be possible, I wondered, that somehow hidden below the surface a specific stimulus of some extrasensory kind does exist, some regular feature that even though hidden elicits the call response? Or is it a situation still more inexplicable, one of a response without a specific stimulus? (Rhine 1981, 87-88)

After in-depth analysis of 279 cases in which narrators described specific "calls" from one person to another, as in Marion's account above, Rhine concluded that she could find no consistent features that pointed toward any overarching, specific stimulus. Her comparative analysis led her back, paradoxically, to her initial hypothesis that the ultimate causes of ESP, whatever their nature, remain concealed.

To a scientific debunker, this conclusion would amount to a tautology, as any search for nonsensory data would, by definition, turn up nothing to see. Parapsychological colleagues reviewing Rhine's lifetime contributions<sup>18</sup> stated in 1983 that as a qualitative analyst of spontaneous cases, Rhine never aimed to prove the existence of ESP. Instead, they maintain, she hoped that despite sampling and other biases built into her materials, her work might inspire new trials for quantitative experimenters like her husband, J. B. Rhine, on whom the burden of proof, she felt, did fall (Weiner and Haight 1983, 304-305).

## **6. Gillian Bennett (1987a)**

Gillian Bennett's *Traditions of Belief* (1987a) is not only a useful historical reference on belief studies, as is made clear in this chapter and Chapter One. As a fieldwork report, as well, the book also presents and analyzes the supernatural



narratives Bennett collected from 107 middle-class British women, most of whom she describes as elderly, church-going, and family-oriented. Here I consider the classificatory and interpretive logic which Bennett directs upon her own field materials, among them, a few narratives which could be called ESEs.<sup>19</sup>

As stated in Chapter One, Bennett distinguishes her informants' uses of classificatory terms from their usage in scholarly discourse. The women with whom she spoke sometimes used a triad of terms--omens, premonitions, and telepathy--for what Bennett, speaking generally, chooses to call "foreknowledge" and "ESP." As she explains, the three terms varied, in these women's usage, with the degree of gravity of the message acquired in advance. Major, tragic events were forecast by "omens," while "premonitions" heralded less important but still serious events. "Advanced information about happy or trivial or undisturbing things" was conveyed by "telepathy" (Bennett 1987a, 129).

Bennett identifies two distinct but interwoven "strands of tradition" having to do with foreknowledge or ESP. The first is the inventory of natural and supernatural signs traditionally associated with death, and the second takes in individual and subjective experiences such as dreams and waking visions (Bennett 1987a, 118-122). However, she notes that her informants did not make this sign/subjective experience distinction themselves, and were liable to use terms interchangeably and loosely, speaking for example of a "telepathy with the future" (Bennett 1987a, 128-29). In general, Bennett cautions folklorists to recognize that subjective cognitive experiences (e.g., visions and dreams) are "never entirely distinct" at the emic level from belief in the objective signs in tradition, such as the bird in the house or the rap at the door (122).

Bennett uses a three-part approach to present and analyze these contemporary women's narratives, some of which recount extraordinary simultaneous experiences. She presents narrative transcripts, she historicizes their form and content against centuries of previous British and international scholarship, and she explores relationships between her informants' rhetorical patterns and the quality and degree of their belief and disbelief. Bennett notes words and phrases her informants favor in discussing various supernatural topics, and her Appendix lists phrases, gestures, and intonations associated with each of five degrees of persuasion, ranging from "Convinced Belief" to "Convinced Disbelief" (213). Bennett presents her informants' narratives under titles such as "[informant's first name]'s Legend" or "[informant's first name]'s Story." She uses an easy-to-read transcription style which indicates emphases, loudness, pauses, and quotation (1987a, 12).

Under the chapter heading "The Dead," Bennett discusses ghosts according to their traditional and contemporary purposes (or lack thereof). She classifies wraiths, fetches, and warning ghosts as "The Good Dead," in whom there is more general belief; these are the spirits of benevolent, dead loved ones who hover near the family and appear or act for good reason, unlike malevolent or disorderly counterparts, such as poltergeists (50). Bennett's own definition of her terms is most useful:

A 'wraith' is the apparition of someone who has just died or is about to die, or, alternatively, of someone in acute distress far away and needing the support of loved ones. Strictly speaking, in tradition a 'fetch' is one's *own* wraith—one sees one's soul as already separate, a sure sign of imminent death; but in practice the term is often stretched to encompass traditional family omens of death or the family ghost who comes to 'fetch' one to the next world. (60-61).

The flexibility of the definition of "wraith" in tradition, as a spirit which can convey news of its own death *either* before or after the death, is supported, as Bennett notes,

by the range of purposes listed alongside "wraith" motifs listed in Thompson's *Motif Index of Folk Literature*.<sup>20</sup> Bennett sees a lineage for wraith, fetch, and warning ghost stories in medieval accounts of visions and apparitions, such as in the *Dialogues* of Pope Gregory or the *Liber Exemplorum* (61).

An example of an ESEN which emphasizes simultaneity quite clearly appears in Bennett's discussion of "The Good Dead." She titles this memorate "Gloria's Story":

'Only one time that I vividly remember, and this was many years ago, and we were in Spain. And my husband's mother...we *wanted* to take her with us, actually, but she wouldn't come. It must be about eight years ago, and it was about two o'clock in the morning. Now, it wasn't *dark* or anything. We'd just

come back from a nightclub, and my husband was in the bathroom cleaning his teeth. And I just said to him...and we hadn't had a lot to *drink* or anything ...I said, "That's *funny*! I've just seen your MAM! Isn't that SILLY?" Now, all the lights were on.

'And I forgot all about it until the next morning. We were going out to this BOWLING they have in the open air, and we had a *telegram* saying that his mother had *died*. That was unexpected because, although she had sugar diabetes, when we left her about eight days previously she was *well*.

'And she's died, as the coroner thinks, about quarter to *two* on the Tuesday night. But it was the Wednesday morning before they found *out*, because the bedroom door was *locked* and they couldn't get *in*.

'Now THAT...And I've never forgotten that. It's VERY funny.' (1987a, 56)

Another example appears in Bennett's book, in the "ESP and Other Experiences" chapter. "Sylvia's Story" is as follows:

'My *sister* died some years ago and she was desperately ill. And we'd been to see her in hospital on the Sunday.

'And on the Sunday *evening*, the specialist phoned and said that the crisis was over and she would be on the mend.

'And I could HEAR her TALKING to me ALL evening. And *suddenly*, at five to six she just said, "I'm sorry, Sylvia, I can't hold on any longer." And the phone went, and it was the hospital. She'd *died* at five to six.

'But it was as if she was actually in the *room* with me! And said, "I'm sorry, Sylvia, I can't hold on any more." (1987a, 133-134)

This story's focus on times is exceptionally precise. A comparable narrative, emphasizing coincidence down to the minute, is "Irina's Story" in Chapter Two, which I collected in two versions, in interviews for this study.<sup>21</sup>

Bennett classifies "Gloria's Story" as an example of a type of memorate concerning a family death, with a simple, two-part structure. The first part describes in detail the condition of the percipient, who is unaware or unalarmed that a distant death is impending. The second part describes the appearance of the person who is dying or dead in the distant place (56). Bennett observes that "Sylvia's Story" and others in the ESP chapter were narrated in a convincing style, emphasizing specific places, times, and persons (130, 135) and set in the course of women's daily routines (130). While a few contain traditional death omen motifs, more often, Bennett says, "the forewarning comes to them in the form of a strange physical or emotional state" (130). Gloria's story contains an apparition while Sylvia's contains a disembodied voice; apart from this difference, which might be Bennett's reason for classifying these accounts separately, the stories share most structural and stylistic traits she describes for each. Both describe simultaneous or closely coincidental experiences, rather than apparently precognitive or retrocognitive ones. Most examples of ESP stories Bennett provides are precognitive.

One comes away from reading the field narratives and analyses in *Traditions of Belief* with a strong sense of both the meaning and the truth value these women attach to their own stories, and to supernatural experience stories in general. Listening closely to her informants, Bennett points out the way the extraordinary events described in these stories vindicate social values, such as the triumph of protective, affectionate familial relationships beyond death. The reader gets a sense of why such events might occur, from the perspective of these women's cultural values. Bennett also describes how her informants judged such stories to be believable or not (1987a, 91-96). Bennett's portrayal of her informants' narratives in contexts of meaning and credibility contrasts with the approach of Louisa Rhine, who pondered questions of causality behind such stories almost to the exclusion of questions of meaning.

#### **7. Leea Virtanen (1990)**

Finnish folklorist Leea Virtanen's 1977 *Telepaattiset kokemukset*, translated by John Atkinson and Thomas DuBois into *That Must Have Been ESP: An Examination of Psychic Experiences* (1990), is the result of a statistical analysis and qualitative assessment of seven separate collections of ESP accounts. These collections were elicited during the 1970s primarily through questionnaires published in newspapers and magazines, and secondarily through interviews conducted by Virtanen and 150 University of Helsinki students. Out of the total accounts gathered in the seven collections, Virtanen selects 865 narratives of *simultaneous* experience. Virtanen defines telepathy, clairvoyance, and precognition and describes "simultaneous informatory experience," but these definitions do not entirely clarify her criteria for separating "simultaneous" accounts from precognitive and ambiguous ones.

She describes simultaneous informatory experiences as ones in which an "individual...receives information through some means other than the normal sensory channels," which "may concern an event...or the feelings and thoughts of a person not in the vicinity," whether by means of "a dream, a hallucination, an impression, an intuition or in some chance in the surroundings" (1990, 1). The information may correspond as a whole and with precision to a distant real-life situation, match up partially with some specific correspondent features, or coincide only vaguely as a feeling of anxiety, pain, or presence of/with someone/something (1990, 1).

Virtanen then differentiates telepathy and clairvoyance from precognition as follows:

In telepathy, the communication is believed to stem from the feelings or imagination of another person. Clairvoyance describes the experience in which the communication appears to stem directly from an event, an object, or a situation. ESP is assumed to be independent of limitations of time and place. Precognition generally refers to ESP-mediated awareness of future events, while retrocognition is a less common phenomenon involving awareness of past events (8)

The simultaneous informatory experience, she claims, is one which

...can be distinguished from precognitive experiences...in which some time elapses before the events foretold come true, be it an hour, a day, or even years. (1)

However, Virtanen says that among parapsychologists, precognition, telepathy, and clairvoyance are sometimes considered one phenomenon:

...the present [1977] tendency is to avoid rigid subclassifications, and many researchers prefer to speak of GESP (general extrasensory perception)...since all forms are considered part of the same phenomenon. (8)

Virtanen's comments about GESP (general extrasensory perception) and the ways in which she nevertheless attempts to differentiate several types of ESP add up to some contradictions.

The contradictions are as follows. As the citations above show, she has argued (1) that clairvoyance can be distinguished from telepathy at the level of origin, or informational source (events vs. other minds). She also maintained (2) that simultaneous informatory experiences are distinguishable from precognitive ESP experiences by their simultaneity in time with correspondent real-life events. However, she weakens both of these arguments by stating that the origins of ESP experiences cannot be determined with any certainty ("the origin of any such experience can never be established for certain," 1) and by maintaining that all forms of ESP are free from time and space limitations ("ESP is assumed to be independent of limitations of time and place," 8). The result of these contradictions is that her own rationale for considering her collection a collection of *simultaneous* experience stories remains hard to pin down.

While some narratives in Virtanen's collection suggest coincidence and seem to warrant the telepathy interpretation by identifying precise, correspondent times for events separated in space, others only imply such a correspondence. Some portray circumstances in which simultaneity seems difficult to assume. The following narrative, submitted in response to an *Apu* magazine questionnaire in 1973, is an example:

There was a deep drift of snow outside the wash-house window. My wash tub was in front of the window. It was a lovely day. I don't know whether I was dozing or awake. In the window I saw a graveyard; there was no snow. Instead, there were lovely flowers and flowering bushes and crosses. I don't know how long I had been unconscious. I had washed a pile of laundry, used a lot of firewood, and goodness knows how much water. (35)

Virtanen finishes the story, telling us that

The informant "awoke" when her little girl spoke to her; the graveyard disappeared, and the snow returned. The woman guessed that something had happened at home, and, indeed, her sister had given birth to a stillborn baby just then. That this experience occurred in fact during a hypnotic trance is suggested by the partial loss of memory and the impaired sense of time. (35)

In this narrative, the informant's testimony calls attention to her own unawareness of the passage of time. It would have been interesting to find out how or whether the informant came to regard this particularly ambiguous example as a simultaneous experience. Further information from the informant might have clarified how or whether the informant determined or assume that her experience occurred before, during, or after her sister's misfortune. Ambiguous narratives such as these, with built-in questions about memory and the passage of time, call for further investigation and, perhaps, a theoretical approach geared toward eliciting informants' explanations, as well as descriptions.<sup>22</sup>

While Virtanen's collection calls attention to the philosophical difficulties of interpreting these stories as simultaneous or precognitive, she facilitates the study of simultaneous experience narratives by identifying structural variables across the stories in her collection. She analyzes narratives according to the vehicle of the experience (dreams, visions, hallucinations, intuitions, physical changes, signs in nature, inner voices), the type of information conveyed (death, accident/distress, or illness), and the percipient's relationship to the subject (spouse, parent, sibling, friend, neighbor, coworker). Percipients include men, women, and children. She also distinguishes between dreams that seem to correspond realistically (clearly) rather than symbolically (less clearly or metaphorically) with another person's experience (40-46). Her examples throughout the book show that traditional symbols of death may be incorporated into



the narration of a variety of subjective experiences. This supports Bennett's observation that belief in traditional symbols is frequently interwoven with the narration of individual personal experience (Bennett 1987a, 122).

Virtanen offers other statistics about her 865 simultaneous experience accounts. She reports that death was the subject in most accounts (62%); accidents or distress were the next most common subjects, while a small proportion concerned other events, such as births and infidelities (1990, 91). She makes it clear that her sample is not random. She says she selected "more dramatic" accounts out of the total narratives available to her and excluded examples of "everyday telepathy" with more cheerful subjects (81). Subcategories of everyday telepathy reports include shared dreams, knowledge of the arrival of visitors, knowing whom one is about to meet, and other examples of simultaneous, precognitive, or retrocognitive thought-transference (92-103). Virtanen's "everyday telepathy" category is comparable to Bennett's informants' looser use of "telepathy" to refer to ESP experiences involving happy, undisturbing, and comparatively trivial affairs (Bennett 1987a, 129).

Virtanen also notes statistics on the relationships between perceivers and persons perceived (agents or subjects) in these experiences. Overall she reports that the overwhelming majority of percipients are women; female percipients figure in 81% of the adult, individual experiences in her collection (106). While the distributions of vehicles and subjects appeared equivalent for men and women percipients, Virtanen found a different distribution of agents in men's experiences versus women's. Types of people in men's experiences differed proportionately, though not in kind, from those in women's experiences. Virtanen found that Finnish men had more experiences which involved neighbors or coworkers, while women's experiences more frequently involved

family members. Fewer women than men had experiences which involved their spouse (108-109).

Virtanen's discussion of the various states of consciousness in which these experiences occur (sleep, waking states, borderline states between sleeping and waking, and trances) is informed more by the discussion of such states in *Phantasms of the Living* than by medical or psychological literature on altered states. Nearly half of her 865 accounts were reported to have taken place during wakeful states, nearly a third occurred during sleep, and just under a quarter occurred in borderline states between waking and sleeping (1990, 27). In her "wakefulness" category, Virtanen includes states of reduced awareness, or trance states "which percipients did not recognize as such" (27).<sup>23</sup>

Virtanen defines hallucination as a "sensory misperception [in any sensory mode] which is so like a real sensation that at the time the percipient perceives it as reality." (46) She states further that "in hallucination, we are concerned with a perception which originates *inside* the brain, without any concrete external stimulus." (46) Though she acknowledges the existence of "pseudohallucination," the perception of a "powerful image" which the percipient "recognizes as unreal," (47) she does not discuss what might make some hallucinations strong, believable, and ultimately meaningful in her informants' experience and others weak or "unreal" for them.<sup>24</sup> Due no doubt to the great size of her sample, Virtanen does not explore individual narrators' explanations or interpretive commentary on their stories. Whether and how informants decided there was an actual cause or source for their perceptions remains an open question here, as in Louisa Rhine's work.

### 8. James McLenon (1994)

In *Wondrous Events: Foundations of Religious Belief* (1994) James McLenon, a sociologist influenced by the theoretics of folklorist David Hufford (1982a), presents a cross-cultural, experience-centered analysis of what he terms "wondrous event narratives." Following Hufford (1982a) he uses first-hand informant testimony as evidence, treating anomalous experiences as "sociologically real" events which shape narrative and culture, rather than the results of religious cultural conditioning (xi-35). His examples stem from his collection of more than 1000 anomalous experience narratives from Caucasian-American, African-American, Japanese, and Chinese university students, and from elite scientists belonging to the American Association for the Advancement of Science (36-37). His "wondrous events" category encompasses apparitions, precognitive dreams, waking extrasensory perceptions (ESP), night paralysis, out-of-body and near-death experiences, synchronistic events, déjà vu, psychokinesis, occult experiences, and other kinds of events. Excerpts from and references to extraordinary simultaneous experience narratives appear in McLenon's book under four subheadings: "Apparitions," "Waking ESP," "Synchronistic Events," and "Out-of-Body and Near-Death Experiences."

McLennon defines "apparitions" as perceptions of a "seemingly paranormal nature," which are not limited to visions but may involve any or all of the known senses (39). His use of the term "apparition" covers substantial ground: what previous scholars have called wraiths and phantasms, as well as ghosts. He discusses two classes of apparition, however: (1) apparitions identified as spirits of those already known to be dead, and (2) apparitions of persons later found to have died at or about the time of the perception. McLennon calls the latter "crisis apparitions." Like Lang and Virtanen,

McLenon cites *Phantasms of the Living* by Gurney, Myers, and Podmore as an early crisis apparition collection, and, following Lang, calls crisis apparitions a more common form of account than the ghost story (1994, 41). He cites an important Japanese collection of World War II crisis apparitions<sup>25</sup> and reports having encountered many accounts of "apparitional images and psychokinetic phenomena coinciding with the death or emergency of a relative, friend, or neighbor" in his own research (41).

McLenon's "Waking ESP" category includes both precognitive and simultaneous nonsensory "knowing" about distant deaths, illnesses, and accidents, or about more mundane subjects. Of five short examples provided to illustrate this category, only one, from an elite American scientist, claims some coincidence between the knowing and the distant event:

Recently, at dinner (7:30 p.m.), I "knew" that an ill friend of friends (whom I knew only casually) had died. Two days later, we learned that he died that evening, when I had the "feeling." (McLenon 1994, 47)

McLenon notes that these stories are interpreted by their tellers in terms of "wonderment" rather than "religious awe" and often involve persons known to the perceiver (47-48). The distinction between waking ESP and the "crisis apparition" categories seems to be that waking ESP experiences (like Aubrey's "impulse" category) involve knowing without a perceptual vehicle that involves the senses, as an apparition would.

"Synchronistic Events," a heading which recalls Jung's theory of "synchronicity" or meaningful coincidence (discussed in thesis Chapters One and Three) is another closely related category, under which the following story appears:

One morning a couple of years ago, a bird flew into (hit the glass of) our bathroom window. I mentioned to my parents that a teacher I had in high school once stated that an old myth says that when a bird hits your window a

relative is supposed to die. Later on that day we received a phone call telling us that one of my father's uncles had died that morning. (51)<sup>86</sup>

The source given for this narrative is a Caucasian-American student. McLenon describes synchronistic events as "cases in which two seemingly unconnected incidents appear to be related." (51) By using the word "unconnected" McLenon seems to be recognizing the arbitrary nature of *symbolic* connections between objective signs and death in tradition. This category also covers miscellaneous coincidences, which may or may not involve death or precise simultaneities, but which lend themselves well to prophetic, symbolic, or otherwise meaningful interpretations. "Synchronistic events" seem analogous with what Bennett identified as the area of belief in traditional "omens and portents," which in Bennett's view was not entirely separable from subjective experiences such as dreams and visions (122).

One of McLenon's examples of an "out-of-body experience" (OBE), offered by another elite American scientist, would qualify more clearly as an ESEN:

A family member was ill and hospitalized. I "kind of went into a trance" [and] "traveled" in my mind four hundred miles to the hospital where I had never been, looked down into the operating room, saw her there at the beginning of the surgery. As the surgeon prepared to make the incision on the right side, I said to him (in my mind) "No--it's on the left side." The surgeon changed over, made the incision...When I received information about the surgery, I asked, "Which side was involved?" I was told, "They finally decided it was on the left side." I understand that this kind of ethereal travel is possible. (49-50)

The four other examples McLenon better support his description of OBEs as experiences which "entail the feeling of being exterior to one's body" (49). This informant's repeated statements that the travel and dialogue took place "in my mind" seem to contradict his later label for the experience, as a "kind of ethereal travel." Simultaneity is implied in this narrative, rather than clarified. As in Virtanen's study, the

reader is left to wrestle with provocative ambiguities, in the absence of further clarifications from informants.

### 9. ESENs in the Literature of Disaster

Literature which documents the loss of human life through technological or natural disaster is a nonreligious context in which stories which match the ESEN pattern appear and have meaning. Whether technological or natural, "disaster" in this context can be explained not so much as an act of God but as the equally incomprehensible result of circumstances of particular occupations or modes of transportation. Stories of disaster in public transport, for example, may be divided according to whether they occur in the air, on land, at sea, or in space. In many cases, though, the causes for disastrous events are not single and clearly identifiable, but multiple, interdependent, and unresolved, as in situations where environmental conditions (such as poor weather) may have helped to set the scene for a technological failure never entirely explained. Oral and written histories of other disasters—earthquakes, plane crashes, plagues, fires, and mining accidents—often contain accounts of extraordinary experiences which occur simultaneously with the deaths or injuries of relatives and friends. The cases reviewed here represent only a fraction of this literature. I focus instead upon examples (of world-scale or smaller, local significance) which relate to Newfoundland's geographical location or to its occupational culture.

In *The Wreck of the Titanic Foretold?* (1986) debunking mathematician Martin Gardner takes issue with the articles in which parapsychologist Ian Stevenson promulgated "the view that there were widespread psychic premonitions of the *Titanic* disaster" (Gardner 1986, 17, referring to Stevenson 1960, 1965, and 1970). Gardner skeptically reviews 12 of what he considers the "best cases" from Stevenson's first

article in 1960 and all seven of those in Stevenson's 1965 article. He concludes, generally, that the cases Stevenson discusses frequently lack corroborating evidence, such as named sources, specific dates and places, precise rather than general correspondences, witnesses, and sworn statements (Gardner 1986, 16-23). Gardner expresses his skepticism regarding a case of a dream which could be classified as an extraordinary simultaneous experience, rather than a premonition:

A New York woman awakens her husband on the night of the *Titanic's* sinking to tell him she dreamed her mother was in a crowded lifeboat. The mother survived the disaster. This seems impressive until we learn that the account comes from a book called *The Mystery of Dreams* (1949), in which the author, W. O. Stevens, does not even tell us the names of the mother and daughter! Stevenson is reduced to referring to the daughter as "Mr. Stevens' friend." (Gardner 1986, 18)

Gardner discusses a long list of the circumstances which contributed to the sinking of the *Titanic* off the coast of Newfoundland in April, 1912. Citing a death toll of 1,522 persons for the *Titanic* disaster,<sup>1</sup> Gardner points out that

A combination of careless events produced the disaster. The captain ignored warnings of icebergs. The ship's speed was increased to set a crossing record. The ship was inadequately supplied with lifeboats. The crew was untrained for emergencies. Lookouts were not given binoculars. A radio operator in a nearby ship was asleep and failed to receive the SOS. Another nearby ship did not respond soon enough when they learned of the sinking. No person or group could be singled out for blame. More than any other disaster of the time, the *Titanic's* sinking raised in stark form the old unanswerable question for any theist--why would God allow such a senseless loss of life to happen? (Gardner 1986, 16-17)

Cassie Brown provides a similar inventory of factors which resulted in the Newfoundland sealing disaster of April 1914, in which over one hundred stranded sealers froze to death on the ice (Brown 1972). Brown reflects that the Newfoundland sealing disaster might have been averted if "any one of the following factors" had

intervened—if Captain Abram Kean had known the correct location and direction of his ship, the *Stephano*, and its distance from partner vessels; if a leader among the sealers had insisted that the sealers stay aboard the *Stephano* for the night rather than following the order to return to the ice as a blizzard was coming on; if the lost sealers had stopped walking earlier and built themselves a better ice-shelter; if the *Newfoundland* had been equipped with wireless equipment; if Kean's son Joe had followed his inclination to look for the lost men and his son Wes had kept a ship's whistle blowing (Brown 1972, 215-216). Lengthy lists of contributing factors including human errors, environmental conditions, and technological inadequacies, demonstrate the difficulty of classifying disasters like these as natural or cultural.

An improbable confluence of so many unfavorable circumstances lends such tragedies a more predestined or senseless quality. This may heighten people's need to wonder about them, and ask what their meaning could possibly be. Brown's 1976 account of the loss of 94 passengers in the *Florizel's* wreck on Newfoundland's southeast coast in 1918, opens as follows:

Fate, the weaver, selected with infinite patience and delicacy a thread here, a thread there, uniting the various strands of life into a pattern of disaster (Brown 1976, 3).

Stories which recall precognitive or extraordinary simultaneous experiences of victims and their relatives may lend some meaning to otherwise meaningless, painful events by affirming the connectedness of parties painfully separated by occupational risk and routine. In *Death on the Ice*, Brown refers to crew members' precognitive and déjà-vu experiences (Brown 1972, 167) as well as other hallucinations, dreams, and visions (Brown 1972, 165, 168, and 182). Similarly, in her narration of *The Wreck of the Florizel* (1976) Brown portrays the prophetic nightmare the ship's cook has before



leaving (18) and mentions a "ball of fire" one crewmember's wife saw near their home, taken (after the fact) as a bad sign presaging disaster for the departing ship (Brown 1976, 28-29).

A story which is closely related to the ESEN pattern appears early in *Death on the Ice*, in reference not to the large-scale disaster at sea in 1914 but to a more individual and perhaps more common form of tragedy: the death (or near-death, in this case) of a wife while a husband is away at sea, hunting seals. According to Brown, sealers in 1914 were acquainted with the following, earlier story:

One of the older sealers from the north (aboard the Newfoundland on its ill-fated sealing trip in 1914) told about Mrs. John Dower of Conche in White Bay, whose love for her sealer husband had caused her great anguish whenever he went to the ice. On March 10, forty-one years before, the vessel *Eleanor*, owned and commanded by John Dower, had left Conche for the seal hunt. About a week later Mrs. Dower complained of feeling ill. Her condition worsened rapidly, and within six hours she was dead.

The news spread, and the neighbours gathered, but as she lay "waking," friends from far and near remarked that poor Mrs. Dower looked as if she were merely sleeping. Then, on the third day of the wake, word was passed that the *Eleanor* was coming into harbour with her flag at half mast. This could mean only that somebody had died on board ship, for in those days there was no communication between ship and shore, and Captain Dower could not possibly know that his wife was dead.

Then a strange thing happened. From Mrs. Dower's body came a long, weary sigh, and the cold, waxen figure began to move. Before the terror-stricken eyes of the good people, colour and warmth returned to her cheeks, and she sat up, murmuring, "I am tired...I have been far...I have been with John."

It was true, they said. John Dower later told how his wife had come over the ice to him. He had seen her coming and, believing her to be dead, had lowered his flag and sailed for home, his heart full of grief. When he saw his wife alive and well his joy was unbounded.

He never went to the ice again, but it was always his proud boast that his good wife had gone and returned from the ice-field even quicker than his smart little ship. (Brown 1972, 41-42)

In telling the story of the *Florize's* end, Brown deftly incorporates cases of premonitions and/or simultaneous experiences on the part of relatives to crewmembers and passengers aboard the ship. Readers are encouraged to turn the book's pages ahead to see which experiences ashore corresponded in time or in realistic or symbolic detail to the disaster that unfolds. Relatives' lack of premonitions or any sense of the disaster other than being informed of the news is also reported (wife has "no premonition" morning of disaster, 170; wife dreams/sees candle boding ill, 171). After receiving bad news about the ship, but before getting word about her husband's fate, George Crocker's wife and family seem to have weighed the oddity of feeling sure of the fate of a loved one without any confirmation against the equivalent oddity of *not* knowing:

Dora Crocker...knew in her bones that George was dead. Amy did not believe in such things, and tried to persuade her mother that it was nonsense. "It's just superstition, Mother," she said. "I feel it. I know it," Dora whispered, her faced ravaged with sorrow. She and George had been too close for her not to know. (Brown 1976, 212-213)

This passage is not an example of the ESEN pattern (Amy's knowledge is "in her bones" but seems to have been a response to receiving bad news about the ship and also having seen a sign in nature, in a form of a fiery light in the sky). However, it shares an existential question which is central to stories which do match the ESEN pattern: "How could one not know?" As I illustrated in Chapter One, Freud asked the very same question about his own experience of *not* knowing loved ones were in distress at a distance. The question arises from a paradox, between the existential absurdity of *not* knowing the essential facts about loved ones (whether they live or are dead, for

example) and the cultural expectation that one *should* know, somehow, if one loved another person enough.

When "tokens" in Newfoundland are explained as the appearances of a "double of a living person," the close relationship between token stories and stories of bilocations becomes clearer. The second edition of the *Dictionary of Newfoundland English* (1990) defines token as "death-omen, apparition; fetch" (*DNE* 1990, 570-571) and defines fetch as "an apparition or double of a living person, the appearance of which often portends death or disaster; ghost; token" (*DNE* 1990, 172). The *DNE* offers colorful explanations and examples, taken from archival and historical records of Newfoundland speech in the 1960s,<sup>1</sup> to support its definition of token. Clearly, this definition bears some resemblance to Kirk's outline of the beliefs about the Co-walker or Reflex-man, discussed above. Violetta Halpert's 1991 article "Death Warnings in Newfoundland Oral Tradition" defines token as "the image of someone on the threshold between life and death" (105) and, according to an informant, the "seeing [of] a person who is far away from home, at or about the time that the person loses his life" (105; citing MUNFLA collection 64-5, card 71). Halpert presents a number of token narratives which, like the Dower account cited above from *Death on the Ice*, take on particular meaning within the context of economic dependence upon occupations such as seal hunting and fishing, which distanced one or more male family members from the family home for days, weeks, or months at a time.

Reporting from her collection and review of death warning materials submitted by students to Memorial University's Folklore and Language Archive, Halpert states that "one student's grandmother told of her father's experience while fishing on the Grand Banks":

One night while in bed he heard his wife calling him clearly...The voice was definitely the voice of his wife. Three months later he returned home to find his wife dead and his children spread out among friends. By accident he discovered that the night he heard the voice was the very night she had died. (Halpert 1991, 105-106; citing MUNFLA collection 73-9, card 18)

Halpert also includes a narrative that deals with a Newfoundlander's drowning during military service, two in which the victims die while fishing, and one in which a Newfoundlander or Newfoundland emigrant returns in spirit to Newfoundland upon his death in a construction accident in New York (106-107). She points out that her data sample comes mainly from "persons who met unnatural deaths, being lost at sea, drowned in some other way or killed in an accident or disaster" but observes cautiously that

On the basis of these Newfoundland examples, it is fair to conclude that the majority of experiences called tokens are warnings of deaths that are sudden, unexpected, accidental, and/or away from home. (Halpert 1990, 106)

By extension, then, Halpert's research, like Cassie Brown's, supports the notion that ESEs, identified as "token" narratives in Newfoundland, can be collected and interpreted in the context of economic and political circumstances which distance Newfoundlanders from home and family. These circumstances include fishing, marine transport, migratory employment, military service, and war.

Among the local legends Lara Maynard has collected from Tapper's Cove, Newfoundland (Maynard 1995) is a striking story of one brother's vision of another, whose schooner was lost on a seal hunt. Two generations ago, "Old Jake" told his wife one morning that he saw his brother, who had gone seal hunting in his place, standing in the bedroom in a dripping suit of oilers (1995, 73). Preoccupation with the possibility of death by drowning, at a distance from home, is a fundamental concern in Newfoundland token or death warning narratives and this concern is echoed in the

folklore of seafaring cultures around the world. Horace Beck, the author of *Folklore and the Sea*, puts it this way in his chapter on sea-faring superstition, custom, and belief:

Perhaps the largest single body of [sea] lore concerns the supernatural and, in particular, the dead. Living as he does a hazardous life where no man can be sure of seeing the sun rise on the morrow, it is only natural that the sailor should be inordinately concerned with the spirit world, and this concern is augmented by sea conditions, where fog, ice, mirage, exhaustion, bad food and isolation from normal living enable a man to see, to hear and to feel things not ordinarily experienced by other mortals. (Beck 1973, 280-281)

Beck points out that songs, folktales, legends, dities, and other folklore of the sea sometimes locate the souls of dead or dying mariners in undersea afterworlds such as "Davy Jones' locker" or "Fiddler's Green" which correspond as much to pre-Christian concepts of afterlife as to Christian hell or heaven (Beck 1973, 281). In addition, he says, "the dead are believed either to travel from the spot where they lost their lives to visit the quick, or to return to the spot where they died..." (Beck 1973, 289). Beck devotes seven pages to discussing the significance of dreams and second sight in sea lore (1973, 294-299), and among his examples he mentions one case in which simultaneity is emphasized clearly:

A member of the Royal Ocean Racing Club told me that he had a strange dream racing across the channel many years ago. When he was called for his watch, he told his friends that he had dreamed about a man he knew slightly who was in trouble. His name was Bobby Lowen, and in the dream Lowen was just entering a French harbor. There was smoke or fog around him, and a French trawler was mixed up in it somehow. It subsequently came out that at the very hour of the dream the man in question was entering a French port when his stove blew up, trapping him below. A French trawler came to his assistance, but he put out the fire and made port unaided. (Beck 1973, 294-295)

As in so very many accounts I have considered, in the context of religious and nonreligious literature and belief, Beck's account contains the phrase "at the very hour." Like other stories which match the ESEN pattern, this account seems to justify the Tylor's observation that

...he who says that his spirit goes forth to meet a friend, can still realize in the phrase a meaning deeper than metaphor. [E. B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 5th edition (1913/1929), Volume I, 440]

### **Summary**

This chapter has reviewed the work of ten interdisciplinary scholars: antiquarians Aubrey and Kirk; psychical researchers Gurney, Myers, and Podmore; folklorist and psychical researcher Andrew Lang; folklorists Bennett and Virtanen; parapsychologist Louisa Rhine; and sociologist James McLendon. This review shows that stories which match the ESEN pattern and beliefs which could give rise to such stories, have existed in nonreligious or not-entirely-religious literature since Aubrey's time. Such stories, and/or the experiences they represent, have been identified as "apparitions" and "impulses" by antiquarians; "crisis apparitions" and "phantasms" by early psychical researchers and McLendon; "telepathy" examples by parapsychologists after 1882; and "ESP," "wraith," or "simultaneous informatory experience" stories by folklorists. In 1886, Gurney, Myers, and Podmore produced the first full-length work devoted exclusively to the presentation and analysis of extraordinary simultaneous experience narratives. Their work would be followed by two more full-length books devoted exclusively or mainly to this category of narrative and experience: Virtanen's study (1990) and Rhine's (1961).

Despite differing terminology, these scholars have consistently called attention to coincidence in time between unusual subjective experiences and corresponding

distant events such as accidents, illnesses, injuries, births, and deaths. Simultaneity is conveyed rhetorically by parallelisms, time-related specifications, and other comments across the narratives themselves. Examples of some of the parallel constructions and time-related phrases in the ESEN examples presented in this chapter include the following:

- "The *same* day, and about the *very* hour" (Aubrey)
- "At the time named" (Gurney, Myers and Podmore)
- "Have you any idea what o'clock it was..." and "It must have been about..." (Gurney, Myers and Podmore)
- "...I remarked the time..." and "On inquiry I found that he did die between..." (Gurney, Myers and Podmore)
- "It was about two in the morning" and "And she's died, as the coroner thinks, about quarter to *two*" (Bennett)
- "And suddenly, at five to six she just said..." and "She'd *died* at five to six" (Bennett)
- "...and, indeed, her sister had given birth to a stillborn baby just then" (Virtanen)
- "One morning..." and "...one of my father's uncles had died that morning" (McLenon)
- "As the surgeon prepared...I said to him (in my mind)" (McLenon)
- "She had reached me over all those miles" (Rhine)
- "...at the very hour of the dream the man in question was entering a French port when his stove blew up, trapping him below." (Beck)

As these excerpts show, these accounts specify that one event occurred at precisely the same time as another on the same day, or imply simultaneity (not foreknowledge) through other constructions.

While folklorists and antiquarians (Aubrey, Brand, Lang, Virtanen, and Bennett) have collected and compared narratives as evidence of experience in contexts of cultural meaning and rhetorical credibility, psychical researchers and parapsychologists (Gurney, Myers, Podmore, and Rhine) have also engaged in extensive narrative collection. However, their concerns have been more with hypothesizing the causes and the origins of the events the narratives describe. Telepathy, clairvoyance, and precognition are hypotheses which psychical researchers, parapsychologists, and, to a lesser extent, folklorists (Virtanen) have used to understand ESP stories, despite debunkers'

objections to such hypotheses in principle (Clodd, Gardner, and others). These hypotheses suggest that information can be communicated via the working of the mind alone, or can be known, from distant or future circumstances, by humans in nonsensory ways. While writers like Rhine and Virtanen portray these alternative communicative channels as nonsensory, nonphysical, and free from ordinary space/time limitations, others, like Lang and McLendon leave the ultimate nature of "extrasensory" perception open to as-yet-unrecognized physical explanations, or to other less anomalous interpretations.

In retrospect, both Lang and Clodd may be viewed as skeptics: folklorists more influenced by a debunking mentality than many folklorists are today, due perhaps to the widespread influence of David Hufford's preoccupation with narrative as straightforward and "phenomenological" description of experience. In his review of crisis apparition cases (1894, 1897), Lang, unlike Hufford today, considered discrepancies across repeated testimonies with a critical eye, and compared the multicultural models for understanding experiences such as these--from the religious explanations (bilocation) to the secular (telepathy and coincidence). However, his respectful reporting of informants' testimonies (especially those he associated with "honourable men") is comparable to Hufford's experience-centered approach to folk belief in this century (1982a). Lang's contemporary Edward Clodd expressed skepticism in a different manner. Unlike Lang, who was content to criticize inconsistencies across narratives, Clodd viewed the hypotheses of psychological research themselves as unsound and unscientific (Dorson 1968, 216). Like James Randi, Martin Gardner, and other debunking scientists decades later, Clodd preferred to seek out quite



mundane explanations for apparently anomalous events, and regarded both mediumship and religious practice with suspicion, if not scorn.

One basic difference between a debunker's orientation to extraordinary simultaneous experiences or "crisis apparitions," and a psychological researcher's orientation to the same, is the debunker's tendency to view simultaneous events as products of random chance, rather than mysterious, meaningful cause-and-effect. However, Myers, Gurney, and Lang make a nod in the direction of the debunking view by measuring the significance of crisis apparition stories according to statistical probability. They regarded precise simultaneities between distant events as less likely to occur by chance than approximate simultaneities, and therefore judged reports of precise coincidence to be more meaningful and worthy of study.

In historical perspective it is almost ironic that McLendon, a historian of parapsychology, can subtitle his book on wondrous event narratives as "the foundations of religious belief." As skeptics who inherited the SPR's distaste for even the relatively secularized Spiritualist profession of faith in the afterlife, Gurney, Myers, Podmore, and Rhine emphasized the distinction between their studies of "crisis apparitions" and "telepathy," and the study of religion. By contrast, folklorists like Lang, Virtanen, and Bennett have no particular need to dichotomize their study of supernatural or anomalous experience narratives from the study of religious experience. Bennett and Lang consider the interplay between Christian and other interpretive contexts for belief narratives, in their informants' value systems (Bennett) or from comparative cultural perspectives (Bennett and Lang).

The literature of disaster is an interesting case in point, in regard to the values espoused within the Christian writings I examined in the last chapter. By contrast with the wondrous death-hour visions associated with clerics in the Middle Ages, which direct the reader's attention faithfully past death, through God's will, into the light of heavenly communion--premonitions and simultaneous presentiments in the literature of disaster, focusing as this literature does upon incomprehensible loss of life by natural accident or technological/human error, have a way of directing the reader's attention away from the inscrutable role of God in such events, and back toward closeness and other comforting aspects in the lives of people on earth. My own informants' sacred, secular, and supernatural explanations for extraordinary simultaneities draw upon a wellspring of traditional values connected with the hour of death and other key moments of human suffering, values which are expressed in the religious writing examined in Chapter Three, and in the nonreligious writing which I have just reviewed here.

### Notes to Chapter Four

<sup>1</sup>Bennett's use of the term "ESP" seems to reflect the usage of her contemporary informants, rather than the introduction of this phrase in 1934 by the founder of parapsychology, J.B. Rhine.

<sup>2</sup>I am citing the *Miscellanies* as it appears within John Aubrey, *Three Prose Works*, ed. John Buchanan-Brown (Fontwell, Sussex: Centaur Press, 1972) 5-125.

<sup>3</sup>The life of Donne is one of several chronicled by Walton between 1640 and 1678, which appear together in Izaak Walton, *The Lives of Doctor John Donne, Sir Henry Wotton, Mr. Richard Hooker, Mr. George Herbert and Doctor Robert Sanderson*, with an introduction by Vernon Blackburn (London: Methuen, 1895).

<sup>4</sup>It is interesting to note here that Andrew Lang's reference to the Donne account in his *Book of Dreams and Ghosts* (1897, 28, footnote) does include a reference to this explanation.

<sup>5</sup>This poem is entitled "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" in Clements' second authoritative edition of *John Donne's Poetry*, 1992, 31-32. Differences between the Walton version and the standard text become apparent by comparison of Figure 3.1 with Figure 3.2. The changes to line two, stanza two remove all gaseous connotations.

<sup>6</sup>Gillian Bennett identifies the Donne account, a celebrated story, as an example of "official" folklore, one of a "received body of tales" repeatedly cited through centuries of literature on the supernatural, having been selected for their "weirdness," "pathos," or association with famous persons (1987a, 201-202). I am selecting it, of course, because it clearly matches the ESEN pattern I have proposed.

<sup>7</sup>For an account of the personal involvements of Gurney, Myers, and Podmore in searches for evidence of life after death during the Spiritualist era see Leonard Ashley's introduction to the 1970 edition of *Phantasms* (Volume I, v-xi).

<sup>8</sup>This possibility is suggested in part by Leonard Ashley's remark that "the three collaborators...insisted that psychic phenomena were much more than 'old wives' tales,' delusions, or deceptions, [while] at the same time they wanted to take these matters out of the hands of the idle sensation seekers and the naive who were dabbling in such matters for fun and in search of a new faith" (Ashley, introduction to *Phantasms*, 1970 edition, Volume I, ix).

<sup>9</sup>Lang's chosen prefix would seem to have had fewer prejudicial connotations in his pre-Hitchcockian era than did a word like "clod," for example.

<sup>10</sup>Lea Virtanen cites several Maori cases of extraordinary simultaneous experience, from the German version of Ernesto Bozzano's *Popoli primitivi e manifestazioni supernormali* (1946), page 42 (Virtanen 1990, 158).

<sup>11</sup>In Chapter Two, I adopt a similar approach to discrepancies between narratives (see Alan's Story and Irina's Story, in particular).

<sup>12</sup>It seems appropriate to note here the ease with which technological metaphors for communication have lent themselves to the project of explaining telepathy. Telepathy is in Lang's phrase compared with telegraphy, described later by a parapsychological author as *Mental Radio*, referred to by Bennett's informants as "being on the same wavelength" (Bennett 1987a, 129) and likened by Walton to sympathetic vibrations.

<sup>13</sup>Perspectives of Freud, Dégh and Vászonyi, and Butler are discussed in Chapter One and elsewhere in this thesis.

<sup>14</sup>Like latter-day debunkers in CSICOP (The Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal), Clodd suspected mediums of fraud, and was not shy about expressing his suspicions. His characterization of Madame Blavatsky as a "colossal old liar" is in line with numerous debunkers' evaluations of her, decades later.

<sup>15</sup>Hufford's experience-centered approach was critiqued in thesis Chapter Two, on fieldwork.

<sup>16</sup>This tally is taken from Rhine's reference list in *The Invisible Picture: A Study of Psychic Experiences* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 1981) 259-261.

<sup>17</sup>Louisa E. Rhine, "Conviction and Associated Conditions in Spontaneous Cases," *Journal of Parapsychology* 15 (1951): 164-191.

<sup>18</sup>Debra H. Weiner and JoMarie Haight, "Charting Hidden Channels: A Review and Analysis of Louisa E. Rhine's Case Collection Project," *Journal of Parapsychology* 47 (1983): 303-322.

<sup>19</sup>It should be noted here that a revised edition of Gillian Bennett's *Traditions of Belief* is forthcoming, under the new title: *"Alas, Poor Ghost!": Traditions of Belief in*

*Story and Discourse*. The revised edition was not available to me at the time of this writing.

<sup>20</sup>Bennett reprints seven of the 24 wraith motifs in the index; while many examples are ambiguous, others specify an appearance before or after death (61-62).

<sup>21</sup>To my surprise, I discovered the precise times given for the coincidence across versions did not agree. This finding is discussed in Chapter Two.

<sup>22</sup>In Chapter Two, I presented a method more suited to ambiguous belief narratives like this one, and many of the stories informants shared with me in interviews for this study.

<sup>23</sup>She does not clarify where she classified accounts in which the percipients *did* seem aware, during or after, a trance state.

<sup>24</sup>Dennett provides a good introductory discussion of the concept of strong versus weak hallucination in his *Consciousness Explained* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1991) 1-18. To be recognized during or after their duration as such, hallucinations must differ in some way from what we expect reality to look, feel, or sound like, in other words, in order for us to differentiate them from ordinary perceptions.

<sup>25</sup>McLenon reports that a Japanese Naval Defense Academy professor, Soji Otani, collected crisis apparition accounts from Japanese World War II widows who "perceived apparitions of their husbands at the time of the spouses' deaths" (1990, 41). McLenon mentions Otani's work in passing on page 41, but there is no reference for it in his bibliography. I have not yet located the citation myself; it is not clear from McLenon's wording whether the "collection" is published yet or not.

<sup>26</sup>I refer to this narrative simply as a "story" because I would exclude it from consideration as an ESEN, due to the fact that the correspondence between coincident events is symbolic, rather than realistic.

<sup>27</sup>Walter Lord's *A Night to Remember* (1955) lists other estimates, according to other sources: "the American Inquiry, 1517...the British Board of Trade, 1503...the British Enquiry, 1490" and an estimate of 1635 from other sources (Lord 1955, 172).

<sup>28</sup>The quotations cited in the *DNE* in support of this definition of "token" are taken from a 1966 interview with I. Caines, Port Saunders (Tape C272, collection 66-24); a 1966 interview with P. Hynes, Southern Head Harbour (Tape C-315, collection 66-25); and from card number 32 in collection 70-15, filled out in 1969 by Marcus Hopkins, of Heart's Content, Trinity Bay.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION**

### **EXTRAORDINARY SIMULTANEOUS EXPERIENCE NARRATIVES AS VERNACULAR FORMS OF PHILOSOPHY**

#### **Introduction**

A thesis conclusion is, I have been told, a place to "thump" one's achievements in earlier chapters, theoretical or empirical, reminding readers (in case they weren't reading carefully) of intention, act, and order. I would rather do something else here: thump myself on the head, in fact, by imagining objections from three scholars whose theories about belief and belief narrative have shaped my own, as a folklorist. First, thought, let me simply sum up the main thesis points as concisely as possible, trusting they are by now abundantly familiar to the reader.

In this thesis I have introduced a hypothetical narrative pattern, the ESEN, contextualizing it in my personal experience of story. I have located the pattern by an objective standard--this five-part definition, in both its initial and expanded versions--as a relatively small percentage of overall stories in the story corpus I gathered from over forty subjects. I have described the fieldwork extensively to validate the research in the eyes of potential critics and share information with others working in this area. I have presented some significant, and hopefully interesting, precedents for components of the pattern in the narrative and belief of the Roman Catholic Christian tradition.

I have reviewed narrative collections of a small group of scholars inside and outside of folklore, where I have discovered accounts which seem to place more emphasis on the knowledge of distant crises in the present, rather than knowledge of

crises yet to occur in time. I have suggested that this could be an important and useful distinction in the study of belief narratives, one which may invite parapsychologists, Jungian psychologists, and philosophers to talk with us folklorists, because it is a distinction they already recognize. I have distanced myself appreciatively but critically from the dialectics of belief and disbelief, and the experience-centered approach, out of a wariness about typecasting informant testimony as more formulaic and experiential, than hypothetical and interpretive. All informant testimony is all these things, of course, but the chaotic and cognitive aspects of my informants' testimony are the ones which interested me most.

In the pages which follow, I will address two questions which have already been raised and answered, to a degree, within the thesis already: (1) whether or not the ESEN pattern is fundamentally a Christian pattern or proposition, and (2) what vernacular philosophy might be: as a mode of narrative performance and as an approach to belief narrative. First though, I wish to engage in an imaginary dialogue, one which is entirely fabricated, but which will demonstrate to any fellow folklorist as invested as I am in the study of belief and belief narrative that I have done my homework: that I have read enough of the recent and classic contributions of other folklorists to the study of belief and belief narrative to be able to imagine their most strenuous and substantial objections to my own points of view. Onward then, to a room in my head, where a soft light shines through a big window, and Linda Dégh, Gillian Bennett, and David Hufford are waiting.



# 1. The *Res Mirabilis*: A Hitherto Unpublished Platonic\* Dialogue on Belief, Experience, and Wonder

\*Platonic is used here in the sense of respectful friendship, the *Ideal Form* of relations between academics everywhere.

*Hufford*: Let me open our informal and completely imaginary examination of this thesis, my fellow folklorists, with a hearty congratulations to Eileen, for having begun and very nearly finished her study toward a degree in this, our *unusual discipline*, whose strength lies in the constant challenge we face to explain our perspectives not only to each other but to more established academic disciplines and their representatives around the globe. In folklore there is a freshness and an academic freedom which few other disciplines can afford their members, which stems precisely from the lack (or, more optimistically put, the gradual dissemination) of received views about our theoretics in the academic world at large.

In the Canadian system, and North American degree programs generally, the doctoral thesis is a final proof of a student's capability and committed desire to publish and teach in the chosen field after graduation. It is not a complete fulfillment *per se* of the requirements for commencement, however, but a partial fulfillment of the North American requirements. The doctoral thesis proceeds only upon the successful completion of coursework and comprehensive examinations. It is ideally, though not necessarily, a publishable work. It is necessarily the last substantial piece of writing a

folklorist submits as a student, under supervision. As such, it may be understood as a learning experience.

My question to you, Eileen, in this last stretch of your status as a student, concerns the issue of ambiguity in belief narrative, a topic which I tackled in my earliest and latest publications, for example, in my article, "Ambiguity and the Rhetoric of Belief" (1976) and in my recent exposition, "Beings without Bodies: An Experience-Centered Theory of the Belief in Spirits" (1995). In your doctoral thesis you present a hypothetical narrative pattern, the ESEN, which, as you show in your fieldwork chapter, has five structural components. The percentage of stories which match this pattern, according to your arguments, stands around 13% of your total initial story corpus. That is a significant finding. However, I am more concerned theoretically with your interest in documenting ambiguity in your tellers' narrations, and your commitment to presenting so many potential explanations for any given experience, as represented in single or across multiple texts. As I stated in "Beings without Bodies,"

*The conventional view has assumed that spiritual beliefs are one kind of interpretation of the same sets of experiences to which secular interpretations refer. That is...that there is no distinctively "spiritual" set of experiences, that there are, rather, spiritual interpretations of ordinary experiences that vie with secular interpretations of the same things. One person's miracle is another's coincidence, one person's mystical experience is another's sense of awe at the beauty and majesty of the universe, one person's visit from the dead is another person's dream. (1995, 27)*

Understanding, as you must, my definition of the cultural source hypothesis and the reasons I value an experience-centered theory of belief: is this what you would have us believe about the stories you have presented here? Is there no distinctively spiritual set

of experiences preserved within the testimonies you have collected? How does your presentation of ambiguity differ from the classic arguments of debunkers and others who use ambiguity to argue that secular and supernatural explanations apply simultaneously, indicating, therefore, that the experience of a supernatural order does not necessarily exist? How does your presentation of ambiguity, in other words, honor the supernatural truth your informants might be trying to tell?

*Eileen:* Dr. Hufford, thank you for raising questions about ambiguity. Let me preface my remarks by stating that I would like to believe myself as much of an empiricist as you. However, where your empiricism directs itself largely upon experience itself as a fact, my empiricism directs itself upon the multiple drafting of experience as a fact. We interpret our empiricism together, then, but differently. You argue for the existence of conceptually unmediated experiences which inspire supernatural beliefs, in beings without bodies, for example (1995, 29). As you say, many widespread spiritual beliefs are supported by experiences that "refer intuitively to spirits without inference or retrospective interpretations" (28). I agree with you. I believe that people do have such experiences; they run into a form that feels right then and there like a ghost, moves like a ghost, talks like a ghost, and disappears through a wall, like a ghost. It is a ghost. It is a *ghost experience*. If they describe their experience as an experience of a ghost, they are being reasonable and accurate. Their observations are empirical.

However, I also believe that a person's description of having a relatively unambiguous experience, supernatural or natural, at a moment in the past is a separate fact from the facts of interpretation which inhere necessarily (but not predictably, in any given case) in perception, in memory, and in narration of any given experience, natural or supernatural. The discrepancies which emerge across repeated narrative "drafts" of an experience are facts in and of themselves, with a hypothetical logic of their own. They are often facts which do not necessarily affect an issue of credibility, but which help determine a relative appropriateness of "fit" of a set of explanations for the experience--explanations which not I but my informants themselves have juggled and weighed and collected, with interest. These are facts I cannot deny. I cannot deny that Irina told me two versions of her story of her "dream" about a patient's death. In neither version was she convinced that her dream was merely a dream; in neither version was she convinced her soul had left her body. Both were real possibilities, for her. In one version she woke up minutes after the death; in another she woke up minutes before the death. In both versions there were specific, interpretive problems with which she and I had to reckon. Here is just one: when might a person be judged dead? At the moment of clinical death? At the moment of brain death? Or at the moment the death was "called" to the best of the knowledge of the hospital officials?

Because of, rather than in spite of such ambiguity, Irina's story versions were still about simultaneity, though perhaps not empirically so: she judged the proximity of her awakening and her patient's given time of death to be more significant than their

distance or their succession in time. There was little sense in which Irina's story was about *knowing a patient was going to die*, in other words. There is little to support such an interpretation in the text or in Irina's own interpretive remarks. It was the story of an experience about a correspondence felt and later confirmed to have occurred within an orientation to the present: what is my patient doing right (about) now?

The representation of temporality in stories like these places them somewhere along a continuum in relation to beliefs about foreknowledge, at one end, and belief about simultaneous coincidence, at the other. Of course there is also retrocognition: a belief which is more esoterically parapsychological, I suspect, than broadly folk. Irina's story (like Grace's story of her growing premonition of a "storm" which culminated in an experience of a real storm, simultaneous to the moment of her father's death) falls somewhere between the middle of such a spectrum. Whereas Grace's Story hovers around the midline, Irina's leans toward the simultaneous end. I am, of course, open to discussion on this point.

To return to ambiguity and its theoretical import: there are "core experiences," to use your phrase, which are in and of themselves enigmatic, intuitively referring to more than one explanation, at the time of experiencing and ever afterward. The experiences which people have described in ESEs are core experiences of this kind; perhaps this is a secondary category of core experience which you would consider equally empirical. Here is where we differ, in a nutshell: you argue that there are experiences which are "not necessarily mediated by the concepts to which they give

rise." I believe that there are experiences which are not necessarily mediated by concepts to which they give rise, but which do give rise nonetheless to multiple explanatory concepts which call for selective interpretation, whether on the spot (as part and parcel of the experience itself) or after the fact. One person's miracle may therefore (1) remain that person's miracle or (2) be considered tentatively as that person's coincidence at times, as well. "Another person's coincidence" doesn't enter into my argument, because *I am looking at the alternating explanations for single experiences which informants themselves hold.*

I suspect also that your theory fits your data in a way that it would not fit mine; experiences which give rise, in an unmediated way, to belief in spirits are not as enigmatic as experiences in which people appear to have more or less simultaneous knowledge of the status of a distant other in distress. The experiences I am examining are more essentially ambiguous as they are experienced. As Jung pointed out in his definition of synchronicity, *simultaneous correspondences* (like premonitory correspondences, for that matter) can only be verified after the fact, although in some cases (as in Begu's dream of Hild in the late seventh century) they are experienced and/or interpreted as knowledge prior to any ordinary confirmation.

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**Bennett:** Eileen, I hope and trust that you are sufficiently familiar with my work to know that one of my primary points in my recent article on foreknowledge (Bennett

1995), expanding upon a similar observation I made in *Traditions of Belief* (1987a), is that after the Enlightenment, death omens and death tokens--external signs believed to predict death, disaster, and change--took something of a back seat in British folkloristic writing to less "extravagant" manifestations of the human ability (and desire) to predict death and foretell the future: dreams, visions, and other "subjective" experiences.

*As time went by, accounts of omens, signs, and warnings became less dramatic and their range more restricted. The most striking effect, however, was the gradual internalizing of supernatural experience. By the mid-nineteenth century, therefore, there were two main strands in British folkloristic writing about foreknowledge: on the one hand, accounts of divinatory practices and the interpretations of signs and tokens; on the other, accounts of visions, dreams, and "presentiments." ...Both these strands of tradition continue to be actively transmitted in our own century: the one relying on the interpretation of external stimuli, the other dependent upon a sensitive response to personal events--"internal" events such as dreams, visions, "hunches," and strange perceptions of states of mind. (Bennett 1995, 124).*

I would like to know why you insist on emphasizing the subjective end of the tradition, Eileen, at the expense of the historical importance of its counterpart: the strand of tokens, omens, and other externally verifiable signs? Second, how do you rule out the possibility that in any of your given examples in this thesis, one might not be dealing in as likely a manner with foreknowledge as one is with a simultaneous intuition?

**Dégh:** Dr. Bennett's concerns are similar to my own. Perhaps you have not heard about the crack in the red goblet.

**Eileen:** Dr. Bennett and Professor Dégh, I thank you for reminding me of all that I need to read. I suspected that you were wondering whether I had run across Dégh's and Vázsonyi's various references to the red goblet story. I have. It is as follows:

*Mrs. D [friend of the writers] herself received the goblet from a favorite aunt back in Hungary and brought it along when she emigrated; for decades it stood with other knickknacks on a shelf in her china cabinet. One day, not so long ago, she thought she heard a soft clink from inside the glass case. When she looked to see what was the matter, she was horrified to see the sudden fracture on the garnet-red goblet. Of course she sensed what it portended, and a letter came a week later with the sad message confirming her fear that her aunt had died the same minute the glass cracked. (Dégh and Vázsonyi 1973, 17)*

This example is a significant one, in that it confirms not only that the "extravagant" (external-stimulus-oriented) side of the tradition Bennett calls "foreknowledge" of death is alive and well in relatively recent memory, but also demonstrates the difficulty of separating "internalized" subjective experience from the interpretation of external stimuli, in a given case. The phrase "of course she sensed what it portended" is particularly intriguing. It downplays the act of interpretation of a traditional symbol, almost suggesting, instead, Hufford's notion of an unmediated, core experience which results immediately--and not naively--in a spiritually significant intuition.

To Dr. Bennett, then, I grant the point that my separation of "subjective" experiences from "objective" ones cannot be absolute. I hope it has not been taken that way, as I have made efforts to qualify what I meant by "subjective" (i.e., private and individual) throughout the thesis. That being said, I did make it clear that within the examples of simultaneous experiences in religious contexts--in Bede and in Caesarius--a



subjective/objective distinction between vision and apparition would have made less sense then than it would today. Then, unlike now, the authenticity of a subjective vision would have been counterbalanced necessarily with the corresponding, objective facts of faith. Visions are described in those texts as revelations of what clerics would have *experienced* as the actuality of a good soul's entrance into the communion of saints at the moment of death. Vision and apparition are two sides of the same coin in this context, unlike our own, in which the supernatural value and the legitimacy of either phenomenon is questionable with or without reference to the other.

The red goblet example also proves a point that I have been trying to make throughout this thesis: that there are stories which emphasize precise simultaneity between a knowing in one place and a crisis in another. To describe the story of the crack in the red goblet as an example of foreknowledge, in the sense of knowing before the event has transpired, is not right. The simultaneity is what makes for the wonder. Wonder is the word that comes closest to capturing what it is I hope to capture about folk belief and belief narrative. Wonder might promote dialogue better than belief and disbelief in credibility debates. Wonder is hypothetical. Wonder watches the door of "if" in any description or interpretation of experience. Wonder is the virtue inherent in the action of vernacular philosophy, which I will treat further on. In any case, I thank you all for coming.

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## **2. The Dialectics of Belief and Disbelief. An Exemplum, Which Is More for Me than for My Readers.**

In the early 1980s I was a student at the University of Michigan, a large, liberal public university at whose center is an open, concrete plaza called "The Diag." The Diag is flanked by an enormous library on one side and the tallest of trees on the others. It is a crossroads of sorts on the campus; four paths lead in and out, in the shape of a giant X. The Diag was a prime spot for preachers to the newly unconverted undergraduate masses—preachers of all shapes and sizes. Almost any day of the week, a shouting match erupted between rattily clad twenty-year-olds recently nourished on Hume and Nietzsche and Marx, and some young evangelical Christian man declaring the scriptural bases for objective moral standards. Phrases like "free will," "faith," "reason," "hypocrite," and "hell" had a way of floating through the windows into the classrooms in nearby buildings, no matter how removed the subject was from such concerns.

On a sunny late fall day I walked through the Diag and encountered a "Moonie" set up there, a representative of the Unification Church of the Reverend Sun Myung Moon. The young man had charts nearby, which illustrated various orders of universal Beings. The effect was rather arresting. He wasn't particularly vocal or daunting, so we struck up a discussion. He spoke so confidently of the order of the world according to his various beliefs that the discussion turned into a debate. I began to argue against everything he asserted, on principle, since he couldn't seem to justify why any of his

precepts were believable in and of themselves, or in relation to each other. I used all the formulaic ammunition I'd acquired in Catholic school, regardless of what I personally believed. I clouted him with violation of natural law, the authority of experience, problems of dualism, problems with authority by consensus, reason versus revelation, gradation in things, uncaused causes. I had such a ferociously wonderful time taking what he said apart (with the aid of his own inability to defend a single premise within the dialectics of belief and disbelief) that I remember the argument's close. "So you admit that the only reason you believe any of this is *because you want to*," I asserted. "Yes," he said, looking defeated. None of the evangelicals would have given in in such a manner. Triumphant, my aggression turned friendly. I asked him if he wanted to go get a coffee. He said yes. He told me a bit about his life. He was a white South African who had traveled from that continent to the United States, as a church member. We parted ways in a friendly manner. I felt bad. He seemed lonely, grateful for the social outing, and I imagined the church was something of a ticket for him out of the politically troubled place in which he was born.

In retrospect I view that interaction as an example of how *never* to study folk belief in folklore--even the folk belief of a Moonie. I came away from my formulaic brandishments with little to any sense of why this man believed what he believed: whether and in what proportion he derived his conclusions and his confidence from experience and from nurture within a culture. I absorbed nothing of his worldview because I reduced our entire interaction to questions of credibility, questions to which

he and I both knew the answers, though we maintained separate sets. The belief/disbelief dialectic is indeed formulaic, whether it proceeds by folk or official premises, objections, and defenses. Nowadays I more routinely suspect its very formulas constitute something like the seductive anti-intellectual trap they did for me that crisp fall day on the Diag. On the basis of such personal experience with the dialectic, I tend to question nearly every application of the "traditions of disbelief" paradigm to people's speech. I often imagine such dialectics might be camouflaging something more interesting, or at least, something more. I have a tendency to treat my own perceptions of any preconceived formulas in other people's speech with suspicion. If I therefore ignore the formulaic articulations of belief and disbelief in testimony, to some degree, my approach is not necessarily any more "right" than approaches which identify these formulas. I am simply interested in other things.

I often suspect, moreover, that *my* way of seeing things stands in greater danger of being rehearsed and prefabricated than my informants' ways of seeing things, in any given discussion. Why "rehearse" (Bennett 1995, 125) when you could do improvisations? An over-attention to formula might make belief studies into a vernacular theology, a constant verification of the indubitable. Yet no attention to formula at all would divorce us from tradition, the communicative dynamics of which are our peculiar disciplinary specialty. The constant effort to identify the dialectic of belief and disbelief, and the formulaic language and logic in which the dialectic is expressed, in informant testimony can make our informants out to be and to sound,

well, rather--boring. I am not often bored in ethnographic interviews about anomalous experiences *so I have searched for a different sort of approach*, one that does justice to Ben, and to Judith, to their styles of narrative performance, and to the contemplative, unpredictable contents of their thought.

I hope I can continue, through reading, to imagine the critical scrutiny of all the folklore scholars I have mentioned thus far, in this concluding section. I would like particularly to approximate the attitude of Erika Brady, though, who in a tone that impressed me as honest and passionate, described the testimony of priests who interpret the supernatural--including its darker side--for a living. In "Bad Scares and Joyful Hauntings" (1995) Brady describes a cleric's experience of evil in a way that preserves, for me at least, a sense of wonder, a sense of fact, and a sense that Brady went out of herself and her own set of mental formulas into this man's experience, as it was mediated on the spot and after the fact:

In his prison interviews with the boy [who had led an allegedly satanic gang murder of a classmate in Missouri], this man [priest] experienced a sense of the presence of evil, not as a theological abstraction, but as a reality with which he sat and conversed. The sense of evil inhered not only in his knowledge of the boy's participation in the murder, but also forcefully and tangibly in the boy's very being as the older man experienced it in their talks: in a taped passage so fraught with false starts and qualifications that it defies coherent transcription, he tried to tell me of his sensation of irrational fear and horror at watching the boy calmly pocket a handful of toothpicks that had been left by the jailer on the table. Some how this simple act, seemingly harmless but enigmatic, conveyed an explicit sense of evil not in the orthodox theological sense of "absence of good," but as a challenging presence in itself. (Brady 1995, 155)

There is little question in my mind that Brady presents this account as a telling of the truth. Credibility is not at issue here. Yet the account's enigmatic quality, its property

of self-interpretation throughout makes it conscious, makes it *real*. At second hand and in a paraphrase, no less, Brady captures, for me, the way in which the narration of experience describes the experience itself as an act of interpretation, a moving from enigmatic pieces of perceptual input, in and out of an individual's personal assessment of culture's interpretive options, to a conclusion, about meaning and about cause. The experience is not mediated by the concepts to which it gives rise, but it gives rise to concepts on the spot which inhere in the experience itself, and persist within repeated tellings of the story after the fact. The story is about *the decision about truth that experience is*. The decision about truth that experience is is not a passive reception of input, natural or supernatural. Experience itself is naturally and culturally oriented to truth. Belief and experience together always make up more than the move between yes and no. That is what I hope to capture about experience as it is drafted again and again in belief narrative. What Brady achieved so effortlessly here is akin to what I am searching for systematically, by approaching belief narratives as vernacular philosophy, which I will describe under Question Two, below.

### **3. Question One: Whether ESEs Are A Story Type Which is Essentially Christian**

The third thesis chapter argues that the ESEN pattern seems to draw upon some important narrative and belief conventions in Christianity. The convention of hour notation and representation of death and suffering as "moments" in time date back to multiple passages in the New Testament. Noting the time of visions and apparitions at

the death hour would appear to carry on into medieval exempla and legends, at least those that appear in Bede, Caesarius of Heisterbach, and Jacobus de Voragine's *Golden Legend*. The frequent association of simultaneous experiences at the death-hour with the receipt of the Eucharist and with entrance into the communion of saints in heaven can be connected in turn with the theology of the location of the Eucharist as the real and substantial presence of Christ, in body and spirit, at more than one place at any given time. In a real sense, then, Catholics expect to connect with God and others, through Communion, at the hour of death. The presumption of such communication at that hour is inculcated, furthermore, in most Catholic Christians as soon as they learn the words of the Hail Mary (which implores Mary to "pray for us, sinners, '*munc et in hora mortis nostrae*').

ESEnS in the medieval sources I examined did seem to promote a peculiarly Christian valuation of death and suffering as "moment" and means to salvation in a life hereafter. The stories portray death as a climactic "hour" of transition, from a state of mortal suffering to one of eternal joy. In the medieval narratives the death-hour seems to offer the dying party (the mystic, particularly) the ultimate opportunity to exercise the virtue of "contempt for the world" (*contemptus mundi*) prescribed by church orthodoxy by the middle of this period.<sup>1</sup> Medieval ESEnS, not unlike my own mother's stories of the deaths of her childhood friends, imbue the moment of death with an exemplary holiness, and they suggest that being able to know about these moments in the lives of distant others, through a vision or another subjective experience, could be a form of grace. Unlike later ESEnS presented in this study, the ESEnS I reviewed in

medieval ecclesiastical literature featured monastics and occasionally children, as the visionaries, rather than ordinary adult folk--the presence or absence of divine grace being a less controversial subject, probably, regarding the orthodox and the innocent.<sup>2</sup>

The reader may wonder if I am begging the question of whether ESEnS are essentially Christian stories, since this study clearly demonstrates that stories which share the definition's components, and emphasize correspondences in time, continue to appear for centuries after the medieval era, with or without specifically Christian frameworks for their explanation. I am not begging the question. I am suspicious about the consistent emphasis across so many of these stories upon a single "moment" of death or suffering, rather than upon a series of such moments, or a lengthier period of time in which processes of suffering and dying might begin and finish occurring. I cannot help but wonder if these stories' central emphasis upon "the hour of death," or the precise instant of distant suffering, might not be a real artifact of early Christian thinking and culture, embedded tenaciously within these narratives in spite of secularization, post-Reformation bans on Marian devotion, and other kinds of change in religious-cultural contexts over time. Perhaps the hope that "I'll see you in Communion" at the hour of death is the fossil in the amber of such a story pattern. I suspect my own Catholic background may have predisposed me, to some degree, to see the distinction between simultaneity and foreknowledge more clearly and as a more meaningful and necessary distinction. The distinction between discernment and prophecy as separate gifts of the Holy Spirit is practically a commonplace in the culture in which I was raised. However, the foreknowledge/simultaneous coincidence distinction is also justified by the pattern of hour notation in narrative examples, examples which are by no means Christian. The foreknowledge/simultaneous



coincidence distinction also relates to the distinction between telepathy and premonition in parapsychology and philosophy.

In further opposition to the possibility that the perception of death as a holy "moment" (knowable at a distance through grace) might be a peculiarly Christian idea--are the many alternative conceptualizations of death, which exist inside and outside Christianity. As Tentler indicated (1996), medieval Christian alternatives to thinking about death as a final moment vary along the axis of the length of time left to repent properly. *"The end" could be enough time before death to assume a blameless life of charity, or enough time to confess and receive absolution, or enough time to beg for mercy* (Tentler 1996, 285-286). The nonChristian alternatives to *thinking of death as a final point, climax, or "hour"* (in Catholic language) include conceptualizing death as a voyage over bridges or water (Hughes 1995, 71-88), death as a decline with formulaic psychological twists and turns (Kübler-Ross 1969), death as an edge a person may reach more times than once in a lifetime, requiring multiple sacramental preparations in each case (as in Roman Catholicism), or as a gradual fading away or "elanguescence" of conscious being for some time after the body ceases to function as a living organ.<sup>3</sup>

The notion of wondrous simultaneities, an idea central to the meaning of these stories, seems to me to hinge strongly upon an understanding of death as a climactic moment or point, rather than upon alternative understandings of death and dying, such as those I have just identified. This is just one way to imagine death. More process-oriented envisionings of death might render the "death-hour" somewhat less privileged a value in the overall lengths of time ordinarily involved in both accidental and natural deaths.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, perhaps there is something universally human, and not necessarily religious, in conceiving of death as a particular instant, at which friends,

relatives, and even strangers at a distance might somehow mysteriously sense the loss of an individual: that a person could cease to exist in space of an hour, or in the flicker of the merest moment.

#### **4. Question Two: How ESEs Might Be Considered a Vernacular Form of Philosophy**

If "philosophy" can be defined as "the study of first or most general principles" or of "presuppositions behind ways of thought, or of ultimate reality" (Martin 1994, 177), then the ways in which tellers of ESEs reflect upon the most general principles and presuppositions on which their stories depend can be considered a kind of philosophizing. As such, the study of the range of explanations informants offer in relation to the events described in ESEs adds to the understanding of what Gillian Bennett identified twelve years ago as the context of "belief, opinion, and philosophy" in which belief narratives are performed, as acts of explanation rather than just description (Bennett 1986, 416). ESEs have a way of getting tellers, listeners, and readers talking and/or thinking philosophically about the nature of interpersonal experience: about what it is possible or impossible for one person to know about another in an instant of distress, elsewhere, without receiving the worrisome news in the more usual ways.

ESEs allow tellers and listeners to consider the limits of intersubjectivity with more philosophical open-mindedness than many of us would adopt in the course of our mundane expectations about how the world works in daily life. More often than not, for example, people in Western society presume that they *cannot* read minds, and that their own thoughts could not possibly be read, in proximity to another person *or* at a distance, in the absence of any sensory communication. This is reflected, in part, in Judith's comment that, on one hand, she "couldn't possibly have known" what she did

seem to know, at a distance, about an emergency at home. If mind-reading or remote sensing *were* believed to be real possibilities more often than not, everyday life would look rather different than it now does. Hypnotists would not only not need to rent any office space but there would also be shorter job interviews, less need for TV and telephones, and fewer unsuspecting victims of every kind. What is it about extraordinary simultaneous experience narratives that is compelling enough to suggest some suspension of the usual rules people accept as governing intersubjective reality on a daily basis?

Perhaps the answer lies in the fact of the occurrence of an extraordinary simultaneous experience itself, an event which seems *per se* to have broken the ordinary rules. Perhaps ESEs, like all narratives, simply note these occurrences as "strange, uncommon, or unusual" and therefore worth reporting (Bennett 1986, citing Labov 1967:370-371). Perhaps it is the fact that the crises in ESEs sometimes have to do with large-scale human suffering: plagues, natural and technological disasters, economic circumstances which separate friends and family, even at the hour of death. Perhaps ESEs make a particularly hopeful and reassuring kind of sense in historical and cultural contexts in which the physical separation of loved ones from each other at the hour of death prevents the realization of the good death scene: some quiet place where the dying person is surrounded by loved ones, or in the company of at least one other person.

I am calling these stories a vernacular form of philosophy in recognition of the fact that both philosophers and folklorists can, unfortunately, suggest through the use of the concepts of "world view"<sup>5</sup> or *Weltanschauung*<sup>6</sup> that the way people think when they share and reflect upon narratives in informal contexts of "everyday life" may be

somehow "other" than the ways of academics and academic tradition: less critical, more purely phenomenological, or nonspecialized. Philosophers who have undertaken the task of defining "folk psychology" for example (Horgan, in Audi 1995, 268-270; Martin 1991, 95; Lacey 1996, 111-112; Stich 1983, 1996)' have become as aware of the classism and condescension suggested by their language, just as folklorists and anthropologists who have tried to define terms like "folk" (Thoms 1846; Dundes 1965; Doucette 1993), "folk ideas" (Dundes 1971) and "world view" (Dundes 1969, 1971; Redfield 1952, 1960; Geertz 1957/1968; Toelken 1975, 1996; Georges and Jones 1995, 4, 170-175).

An important step taken by a folklore scholar in the last two decades to strike down such misconceptions about how "the folk must think" is David Hufford's insistence (1982a) that apparently sane and reasonable people's reports of unusual categories of experience must be believed sufficiently to be studied and documented in detail, whether or not they may call and believe their experiences to have been "Hag attacks" (supernatural assaults) or episodes of night-time paralysis. Here, Hufford works in the tradition of Lang, who forged a path away from debunkers' suspicious *ad hominem* attacks on psychics and other reporters of anomalous experiences, while retaining a sense of evidential rigor toward the narratives he reviewed. To Hufford's theoretical challenge I would like to add two more, one which is Lang's, and another which is more or less my own.

First, I would suggest that Lang's willingness to compare conflicting versions of belief narratives from the same tellers might be carefully reprised in the contemporary collection and study of belief narrative. In accordance with Hufford's experience-centered respect for informant testimony, presenting more than one version of

anomalous events (when they contain problematic or theoretically challenging discrepancies) from the same teller seems to have become a bit taboo. Juxtaposing different versions of anomalous or supernatural experience might result in a renewed theoretics of appreciation for both truth and memory in informant testimony, without necessarily compromising respect for the people who share such narratives honestly as they happen to evolve over time. To take more of a debunker's perspective, comparing versions of stories might also bring to light serious discrepancies, which on occasion *might call an informant's credibility seriously into question*. This might not be an undesirable result, as uncomfortable and ethically problematic a situation as it might create for interviewers and subjects. *While I would not subscribe to the "trust no one"* orientation that debunkers like James Randi might adopt, it seems to me to be quite appropriate for a folklore fieldworker to convey guardedly that she or he merely "wants to believe," rather than trusts completely, while still in the process of collecting evidence of extraordinary experience. "Wanting to believe" seems to me to be akin to wonder, and "philosophy begins with wonder."<sup>8</sup> Wonder is a cognitive virtue. It makes way for surprise.

Second, I would suggest that the explanations tellers provide along with their experiences, and the implications of these explanations to tellers themselves, need to be recorded, presented, and analyzed as clearly as their narratives. Removing interpretive and explanatory detail from teller's transcripts, or collecting "just the facts" of a narrative *"phenomenologically"* makes it conveniently possible for an analyst to provide definitive explanations (should he or she want to) and appear, in the end, as either the "empiricist" or ultimate interpreter par excellence. For this reason, *I have tried to resist offering too many interpretations of my own throughout this thesis on ESEs, in favor*

of highlighting the variety of historical explanations for this hypothetical pattern. On an epistemological level, separating the descriptive portions of narratives or interviews from the interpretive and explanatory hypotheses also dehistoricizes and decontextualizes the artifact and the experience the artifact represents. The result is an artifact which teaches an observer a bit less about the times and places in which the experiences and their interpretations occurred. Compared over time, the explanatory comments within and around ESEs and other belief narratives, may have a greater value as artifacts of intellectual history than do presentations of consistent, repeated descriptions of related anomalous experiences.

As already suggested in the fieldwork chapter, I consider the explanation and interpretation built into and surrounding the telling of ESEs to be "vernacular" philosophy, for three reasons: (1) it is performed outside or on the margins of the academic institution, (2) it is shaped by rules of face-to-face communication in small groups rather than rules of published philosophical texts, and (3) it relies upon narrative to illustrate and question general principles in the way that more formal philosophizing depends upon "thought experiments" to do the same thing. By "vernacular" philosophy, I mean philosophizing which is quotidian and informal rather than formal and academic. Many of the interviews for this study were conducted in private homes, for example, but equally many took place in offices or empty classrooms on the campus of Memorial University of Newfoundland. One (Madelyne's) took place on a bench, outdoors, in a campus courtyard; others took place at a party (Laura's) or in the informant's workplace (Irina's). Some of my exchanges with Alan occurred via electronic mail.

Informants' philosophizing in and around ESEs is therefore vernacular in that it took place outside or on the margins of any official, institutional academic forum. Of

course, the philosophizing in ESEs collected for this study still occurred within the context of the informants' previous *personal* experience with literacy and academic culture. The informants I interviewed for this study were educated well and fully literate. Therefore, the narratives I collected in the field and analyzed might be better described as "verbal" performances in David Buchan's precise sense (Moreira 1995, 2, citing Buchan 1972, 2) rather than "oral" ones.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, I doubt that less educated informants would be less philosophical; that is not what I hoped this study would convey.

In informal, semi-structured single and group interviews, turn-taking and questioning were more frequent than they might be in some formal academic contexts for philosophizing, such as lectures or moderated seminars. In interviews, informants finished their stories open-endedly, leaving room for backings-up, corrections, continuations, and joking interjections. Narratives conformed only partially to the common structures Labov and Waletzky outlined for oral narrative (1967). The narratives informants shared in interviews were frequently followed by questions, from me, or from other interviewees, in group interviews. The degree to which a single speaker's philosophical hypotheses could be extended and developed was more limited by time in these informal contexts than would be the case in prepared academic orations or in philosophical texts: what is typically considered canonical "philosophy" in the academy. What was not limited, however, was informants' abilities to contribute meaningful, critical thoughts to philosophical exchanges that arose in these contexts.

Extraordinary simultaneous experience narratives seem to me to be functioning philosophically as thought experiments: ones which explore an alternative position to the ironic reluctance of some contemporary philosophers to recognize death as an

example of a fact unlike most others.<sup>10</sup> ESEs are fundamentally concerned with the subject of death and human distress, and they address this concern in the context of the question of how and whether humans are alone with these formidable crises, or not. As such, they might be described as a vernacular existentialism, comparable to (though more optimistic than) the work of writers in this literary-philosophical school. I am fascinated by the idea that in telling such stories, people seem to take time to consider philosophically whether or not God, telepathy, multiple levels of sensory awareness, or coincidence might play a significant part in situations in which, otherwise, suffering people might be alone in the world with grave and universal forms of trouble. This constitutes, for me, a skeptic on many counts, the great beauty of these stories and their performance. However, I am, like most of my informants in this project, not consistently inclined to equate beauty with the truth.

If ESEs function as thought experiments, what kind of thought experiments are they? I suspect that ESEs may be thought experiments which explore a kind of reversal of the classic philosophical "problem of other minds." The "problem of other minds" is the traditional philosophical thought experiment with solipsism, a challenge to meditate skeptically about how one knows without a doubt that anything that appears to be "outside" his or her own mind, such as another human being, must also be conscious. As one philosophical writer explains it, the problem of other minds arises as follows:

If you suppose that the existence of your own mind, and its contents, can be "perceived" directly only by you...[and] that you can't directly perceive anyone else's mind or its contents, this raises the problem of what ground (if any) you have for thinking that anyone else has a mind, and is not, for example, just a body with external appearance and behavior much like yours. (Martin 1994, 190)



Absurd as it may sound, this thought experiment has been used in philosophy to bring to light the ways in which people generally take the conscious existence of other human beings to be an indubitable and obvious fact, without being able to articulate our reasons for knowing for sure. As such, it is closely related to what might seem like an equally absurd but spooky proposition in artificial intelligence, which is, how can we be sure that a machine which behaves as if it is conscious--a robot, let's say, or a talking computer--*cannot* be conscious, if it can be programmed to replicate human responses to external stimuli convincingly in a variety of test situations? What in experience seems to be one of the most reliable and least questionable facts of everyday life (the life of another person's mind) can be, in principle, hard to prove through argument.

ESEs, on the other hand, are *anti*-solipsistic thought experiments: they examine a kind of reversal of the problem of other minds. These stories ask whether and how we can be entirely sure that people *cannot* possibly know anything about other people's minds (and bodies), when they are at what is ordinarily assumed to be too far a distance away to know what is happening at any given moment. What in daily life seems to be obviously impossible knowledge (Judith's "I couldn't possibly have known") can also be, in principle and in the narration of meaningful experiences, necessary to explain ("...but I did know, you know?"). As a successful academic thought experiment, the problem of other minds allows people to feel a strange, new sense of doubt about how we know anything about another person's thoughts and feelings at close range. The problem of ESEs, on the other hand, as a successful vernacular thought experiment, allows tellers and listeners to feel a strange, new sense of hope about how we might know something about another person's thoughts and feelings at a distance.

This hope is expressed in many of the explanations tellers offered for their experiences. As shown in Chapter Two, informants propose many different preliminary causal hypotheses to justify such hope: that telepathy (mind-to-mind communication) accounted for these apparent communications, that divine intervention or holy healing was involved in informing one person of another's distant status, or that a soul's ability to separate from one party or the other could result in dreams, visions, or other forms of impossible knowledge. Yet not all the explanations informants offered were of a causal variety, and not all of my informants' reactions to their experiences were hopeful or even positive.

Some explanations tellers offered reinforced noncausal perspectives, akin to the acausal view Jung adopted toward such events in his theory of synchronicity. Noncausal perspectives include multiple informants' observations that their stories were unbelievable, unexplainable, or "coincidental" in both the meaningless, statistically improbable sense, or the meaningful, statistically predictable sense of that word. "Coincidence"-type explanations were often accompanied by psychological ones: informants interpreted their own experiences of coincidences as the expressions of guilt, grief, control needs, anxiety, obsession, and subconscious constructions. While three informants, Darla, Sheila, and Robert, believed their experiences could be explained psychologically without being explained away from being anomalous, supernatural, or telepathic experiences at the same time, one informant (Madelyne) employed a "pathological" (her term) psychological explanation, to the *exclusion* of other possible interpretations.

Informants' own speculations in interviews often employed formulaic lines of argument, but moved well beyond arguments for or against belief in the supernatural

(Hufford 1982b, Bennett 1987b) to include traditional questions about mind, body, genetics, psychological motivation, coincidence, and extrasensory and ordinary perception. Most speakers juggled more than one traditional line of interpretation and some (Robert, Judith, and Alicia) considered quite a large array: as many as ten or fifteen possible theories of explanation.

Considerations of possible causes and mechanisms by which these experiences *could* have occurred sometimes seemed to push aside the question of whether a narrative should be taken as true testimony or not (i.e., as the reasonable report of a reasonable person). Reasonableness seemed to be the mutual operating assumption between informants and me. In other words, informants' explanations for these stories moved beyond questions of belief or disbelief in the stories as reliable testimony (Bennett 1987b, Hufford 1982b) into questions of belief or disbelief in a variety of philosophical principles lying behind the stories' described events. As Chapter Two demonstrated, many of the narratives informants shared were self-critical and ambiguous. Built into informants' narrations were questions about the nature and the sequence of the events described, as well as self-critiques of the quality and degree of personal memory of events. As such, these stories may not necessarily be comparable to the clearer and empirically tested statements of experience other folklorists have found in their study of belief narratives (Hufford 1982a; Goldstein 1991, 35-37; noting Hufford's recent elucidation of more and less enculturated accounts of core experiences, also, in 1995, 32-33). Because many of these accounts seem to question how to make sense of experience, theoretical approaches more oriented to interpretation and explanation may do them more justice than approaches which are more phenomenologically oriented to description.

### Concluding Remarks

Even as ESENs assert some triumph of sympathetic connection over human separation at critical times, they also concede a bit of dark victory to those circumstances which separate these people from each other in the first place. The enigmatic simultaneities which ESENs celebrate and explore would have little place or meaning within the tableau scene of a *good* death: the quiet location where loving family members, neighbors, and friends surround a dying person. In this scene, no "impossible knowledge" would be necessary or so strangely thrilling, for all the conventional social obligations between the living and the dying (or suffering) person could be and would be fulfilled. Donne described just such a good hour of death in the *Valediction*: "...sad Friends do say/The breath goes now, and some say no." In such a scene, by contrast, the moment of death could be observed and understood in ordinary, rather than extraordinary, ways.

Thus, social situations characterized by separations which are profoundly culturally (and personally) *undesirable* are precisely what lend the coincidental sympathies in ESENs meaning and allure: a child's wandering away from her community in a snowstorm (Darlene's Story), a student in school daydreaming of a lost suicidal young man, as yet unknown to her, miles away (Grace's Story), or a sister remaining uninformed of her twin's undergoing heart surgery across the Atlantic (Sheila and Mary's Story). ESENs highlight the absence of more ordinary, reassuring connections between people in times of trouble, connections which are culturally prescribed by familial obligation or expected in the context of friendship. Simultaneously, ESENs celebrate the "impossible knowledge" with which parties reconnect themselves in spite of such separations. The result of this dual thematic

emphasis in ESEns--on ordinary separations and on extraordinary links across the most culturally undesirable divides--is a kind of narrative which speaks strongly and didactically against occasions of solitary individual suffering. Their message expresses a social morality which is neither entirely Christian, modern, or existentialist. ESEns call tellers and listeners to remember their end, to contemplate the possibility of a solitary death at a distance from others, and to value social connection--of the extraordinary or ordinary varieties--at that time.

### Notes to Chapter Five

<sup>1</sup>Here I am referring to Pope Innocent III's *De Contemptu Mundi*, which Stannard (1977, 21) describes as follows: "...written at the turn of the thirteenth century, [it] was for several centuries regarded as the seminal statement on the subject of man's relation to the world and the afterlife."

<sup>2</sup>Describing seventeenth-century England, in which ordinary men and women's unorthodox public claims of foreknowledge were often met with punishments such as imprisonment or death, Keith Thomas shrewdly observes similarly that

Many godly men were thought to have had divine presages of their own deaths; and the same privilege was enjoyed by those miniature Puritan heroes, the children who were too good to live...they reflected the popular assumption that a man who was holier than his contemporaries was likelier to be endowed with a special gift of foreknowledge. (Thomas 1971, 132).

Thomas's discussions of "foreknowledge" do not distinguish revelations of distant things present from revelations about cataclysms yet to come.

<sup>3</sup> "Elanguescence," as philosopher Tom Powell explains, is a conceptualization of death as a passing from the state of living to a condition of having died, in a series of incremental moments of being gradually less and less present (Powell 1990; see his bibliography for a full reference to the earlier article on elanguescence). The process could start some time before and continue for some time after a person appears by onlookers' general assessments to be dead.

<sup>4</sup>The same could be said of ideas of death which take into account the loss or decrease of consciousness (and with it, perhaps the ability to experience physical and mental pain) that accompanies the last stages of many terminal illnesses.

<sup>5</sup>Folklorists and folklore students today are likely to be acquainted with "world view" as it has been defined by anthropologists Robert Redfield (1952, 1960) or Clifford Geertz (1957/1968), and interpreted by folklore scholars Alan Dundes (1969, 1971) and Barre Toelken (1975). Introductory folklore textbooks (Schoemaker 1990, 52-53, 241; Georges and Jones 1995, 4, 170-175, 177; Toelken 1996, 22, 194, 263-307, 338, 275-93) also present the concept and outline its utility. None of these sources acknowledges the role that German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) played in introducing this term as *Weltanschauung* in the late nineteenth century, in the context of his own philosophy of cultural science.

"*Weltanschauung* is defined by one contemporary philosophical dictionary as "a general view of the universe and man's place in it which affects one's conduct" (James Cargile, in Honderich 1995, 909) but in the context of Dilthey's work, *Weltanschauung* "world view" meant a philosophy. In *The Types of Worldview* (1911) Dilthey identified three different classes of philosophic *Weltanschauungen*: materialism, idealism, and vitalism (Inwood, in Honderich 1988, 909). Folklore and anthropology share a commitment to the idea that the diversity and change characteristic of human life (as opposed to animal life and non-living reality) cannot be reduced to material or mechanical explanation (i.e., explained in chemical or physical terms alone); these ideas characterize a vitalistic world view (Inwood, in Honderich 1988, 901-902). Dilthey's own philosophy, oriented as it was to understanding and valuing human life through biography and ethnography, has been viewed as vitalistic, and has been explained as a reaction to the scientific materialism of John Stuart Mill and Émile Durkheim (Parkinson 1988, 789).

Dilthey viewed the subject matter of social science (the study of mind, meaning, and choice, the human world viewed from within) as essentially different from the subject matter of the natural sciences (the study of the external and nonhuman world, determined by cause and effect) (Parkinson 1988, 789-90). The aim of much of his work was to ground cultural science in basic principles of inquiry. These principles included a) attending to the realm of lived experience (*Erlebnis*) rather than explaining the external world (*Erklären*) as in natural science, and b) applying *Verstehen*, a method of empathetic *understanding* (rather than uninvolved, scientific *observation*) of past and present expressions of the human spirit in the humanities (Inwood, in Honderich 1995, 201; Parkinson 1988, 790).

The study of multiple, culturally relative world views contributed, in Dilthey's view, to the ongoing project of acquiring objective self-knowledge (Inwood, in Honderich 1995, 201). Dilthey similarly valued biography as a means to attaining general understanding of human experience. The application of Dilthey's method to texts and to other artifacts of art, religion, and history—insofar as they can be read *as* texts—is known as his *hermeneutics* (Parkinson 1988, 791-793). By virtue of Dilthey's emphasis on "life experience" as the data for social science, the connections he made between biography/ethnography and self-knowledge, and his enthusiasm for reading expressive cultural behaviors as texts, Dilthey can be seen as an important shaper of social science theory in the twentieth century. His thinking relates clearly to contemporary theoretical concerns in social science and in folkloristics, not only to the anthropological interest in world view (Redfield 1952, 1960) but also to issues such as reflexivity, experience-centered and data-driven research (Glaser and Strauss 1967;

Hufford 1982a; McLendon 1994) and the uses of "text" as a theoretical construct (Dundes 1966/1980, Geertz 1973).

"Folk psychology" has been used by twentieth-century philosophers of mind to distinguish the tautological and faith-based arguments ordinary folks use to justify their beliefs, from the arguments philosophers provide to justify theirs about the world. Contemporary debunking scientists continue to utilize "folk psychology" in argument as if its meaning were an unproblematic given (see articles in Frazier, 1984 and 1986) moreso than contemporary philosophers. However, the presupposition that philosophers or scientists think qualitatively different, more critical thoughts than "ordinary people" survives today, in less obviously condescending statements by contemporary philosophers of mind. A good example is Daniel Dennett's statement that

...normal people may often confabulate about details of their own experience, since they are prone to guess without realizing it, and mistake theorizing for observing. (1991, 250)

For a good discussion of the uses of "folk" and "folk psychology" in cognitive research, see Gregory Schrempf, "Folklore and Science: Inflections of 'Folk' in Cognitive Research," in *Journal of Folklore Research*, 33.3 (1996): 191-211.

<sup>8</sup>Hamlyn 1987, 15, paraphrasing Aristotle.

<sup>9</sup>As Jamie Moreira has pointed out, "The term 'non-literate' indicates a culture in which reading and writing are unknown or known only by a select class of people (Buchan 1972, 2)...Buchan himself used the term 'oral tradition' to signify transmission in non-literate contexts and the term 'verbal tradition' to signify transmission in literate contexts, but the discipline has been very slow to adopt these usages." (Moreira 1995, 2).

<sup>10</sup>I am remembering here a comment Richard Rorty made while philosophizing conversationally with an audience of students and faculty, after delivering a paper at a meeting of the Atlantic Canadian Philosophical Association, here at Memorial University of Newfoundland in 1994. A woman asked Rorty (in relation to a foregoing paper presentation) how death, as an example, could be understood to be a "fact." Rorty's first response was to ask, rather seriously, why death was an example with more merit than any other.

I assume that this was a demonstration of "irony," as Rorty describes it, a perspective contrary to common sense [see Rorty's *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989) 73-77]. My experiences in these interviews



disincline me to categorize my informants' philosophical views according to either end of Rorty's irony/common sense dichotomy. Their natural tendencies to redescribe and re-explain seem more to me an ongoing series of choices they make about what to believe they believe, than any clear expression of systematic doubt or faith about the meaning of the language they choose to use.

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### **Interviews Cited**

For a complete listing of the thesis interviews please refer to the Narrative Inventory in Appendix A.

## APPENDIX A - NARRATIVE INVENTORY

**Note:** The following Narrative Inventory lists and briefly describes the contents of all the taped interviews related to this thesis, from 1993 to 1996. The Inventory also describes the contents of a tape Ellen Damsky, a friend and fellow student in the doctoral program, donated to the project. Two good examples of ESEns appeared on tapes from a separate study I was conducting with critical care nurses in 1993; I re-interviewed one of these informants for the thesis research.

Supplementary fieldwork with Anita Mannur's Comparative Literature Class at the University of Massachusetts in summer of 1998 in Amherst, Massachusetts brought me into contact with 19 more subjects, plus their teacher, who also acted as an informant. These men and women produced written versions of ESEns after hearing a taped example of an ESEN and being asked simply to "write down a story you've heard or experience you've had that is **very much like this one.**" The class also discussed the example and their own stories on tape (listed as tape 17 below). At the end of the Narrative Inventory I append photocopies of the handwritten texts of five ESEns provided by Deidre, Fred, Lucille, and Maria, members of the UMass group.

The Inventory also lists untaped interviews related to the thesis, as well as some interview tapes which provided me with useful information for the thesis, although they were completed in the context of an earlier research project with critical care nurses. Narrative tallies at the end of the Inventory provide some basic information about the kinds of stories, story fragments, and story kernels that make up the total story corpus.

Narratives which matched or closely resembled the ESEN pattern have been highlighted in boldface.

<u>Tape#</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Informants on Tape</u>	<u>Narrative Summary</u>	<u>Narrative Form</u>
1	10/27/93	"Grace"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•<b>Premonition + Simultaneous Exp.</b></li> <li>•<b>Related to Father's Recent Death by Stroke</b></li> <li>•Dream about Father's Earlier Minor Car Accident</li> <li>•<b>Intuiting Distant Sister's Ailments by Her Own Pains/Ailments at Same Time</b></li> <li>•Misc. Relatives' Premonitions of Guests' Visits</li> <li>•Father's Attempts at Psychokinesis, Staring Straight Ahead at Objects on Table</li> <li>•<b>Daydream Simultaneous to a Suicide</b></li> <li>•A Memory from Day before Father Died</li> <li>•Schoolteacher's Vision of His Own Ghost</li> <li>•Best Friend's Ghost Experience in School</li> <li>•School Chum's Premonitory Dream about Teacher's Lesson Next Day</li> </ul>	<p>Story</p> <p>Fragment</p> <p>Fragment</p> <p>Fragment</p> <p>Fragment</p> <p>Story</p> <p>Story</p> <p>Story</p> <p>Story</p> <p>Story</p>

Tape#	Date	Informants on Tape	Narrative Summary	Narrative Form
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Older Friend's Simultaneous Experience Related to Son's Accident, Falling through Ice on Pond</li> </ul>	Story
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Personal History of Near-Death Experiences, Proving She Has Survived for Some Meaningful Purpose</li> </ul>	Fragment
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Premonitions of What's in the Mailbox</li> </ul>	Fragment
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Lost Tablecloth – Simultaneous Thoughts and Questions about Mundane Things</li> </ul>	Fragment
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Anticipating Friend's Phonecalls/Simultaneous Letter Writing and Speaking w/ Friends</li> </ul>	Fragment
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Premonitory Dream about Trip to Ottawa</li> </ul>	Story
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Progression of Father's Illness/ Their Troubled Relationship</li> </ul>	Fragment
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Simultaneously Intuiting Moment Father Received Separation Letter from Her Mother</li> </ul>	Fragment
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Story of Father's Earlier Stroke/Death on Five-Year Anniversary/Not Knowing He Was Trying to Call When Having Stroke</li> </ul>	Story
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Father's Friend, former MP, Has Deja-Vu Experiences</li> </ul>	Kernel
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Premonition about Having an Accident in Gym Class (Colliding with Another Girl in Basketball Game, Cracking Nose Cartilage)</li> </ul>	Story
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Story of Her Problems Learning and Remembering the Concept of Time</li> </ul>	Story
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Story of Comforting Dream After Father's Death (Dad with Symbolic "Shepherd" Dog), Requested through Prayer</li> </ul>	Story
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Story of Comforting Dream After Father's Death (Dad Tells Her It's OK to Leave School), Requested Through Prayer</li> </ul>	Story
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Story of Her Successes in Guessing Hidden Prices on Game Shows</li> </ul>	Story
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Premonition of Friend's Experience with Teacher's Inappropriate Sexual Gesture</li> </ul>	Story
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Friend's Father's Dream about a Crying Virgin Mary Statue</li> </ul>	Fragment
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Simultaneous/Shared Nightmare with Friend Tanya (picked up hitchhiking by Freddie Krueger, saved by friend Sheldon)</li> </ul>	Story
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Story of Experiencing Amnesia about Family Conflicts, in Psychiatry</li> </ul>	Story
			[17 stories; 11 fragments; 1 kernel]	
2	11/03/93	"Maureen"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Story of Dream Simultaneous to a Fatal Fire in City Where She Lived</li> </ul>	Story
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Premonitory Dream about Birth of a Child One Month Prior to Aunt's Pregnancy</li> </ul>	Story



<u>Tape#</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Informants on Tape</u>	<u>Narrative Summary</u>	<u>Narrative Form</u>
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Dreams and Anticipations One Day Prior to/Simultaneous with Boyfriend's Brain Hemorrhage on Airplane</li> <li>•Boyfriend's and Her Anticipation Hours Before Near Accident with Moose on Boyfriend's Drive Home with a Friend</li> <li>•Story about Questioning Catholic Faith After Asking a Woman in Church Why She Was Praying Rosary/Not Getting A Satisfactory Answer, as a Child</li> <li>•Mother's Anticipation of Father's Illness While They Were Courting</li> <li>•Boyfriend's Mother's Simultaneous Experience Related to Her Brother's Sudden Death</li> </ul>	<p>Story</p> <p>Story</p> <p>Story</p> <p>Kernel</p> <p>Fragment</p>
3	12/12/93	"Gail"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Premonitory Dream about Behavior of Friends and Scenery on a Vacation Trip</li> <li>•Premonition Hours Before A Fire in Neighboring Apartment in Downtown St. John's, NF</li> <li>•Story about Playing A Board Game in a Haunted House: Rolling Sevens So Many Times She and Friends Decide to Leave the House</li> <li>•In Bed, Sick, in Same House, Asking House to Stop Trying to Drive Her Out, Leave Her Alone, Feeling Better</li> <li>•TV Set Turning Itself On and Off in House/Possibility of Power Surge vs. Haunting</li> </ul>	<p>Story</p> <p>Story</p> <p>Story</p> <p>Story</p> <p>Story</p>
		"Jess"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Sensing When Parents and Grandmother Want Him to Call Them</li> <li>•One Evening in a Haunted House: Bite Marks on A Housemate's Arm Attributed to a "Grenlin" Creature Haunting the House</li> <li>•Cold Room and History of Aggressive/ Passionate Behavior among People Who Spend Time in Room</li> <li>•Abnormal Behaviors of Cats in House (Attacks, Fur Standing on End without Apparent Provocation, etc)</li> <li>•His Vision of a Glowing Red "Gate" in Room, Confirmed by Another Housemate As Having Been Seen There Before</li> </ul>	<p>Fragment</p> <p>Story, made up of misc. shorter vignettes indicating house's haunted character</p>

<u>Tape#</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Informants on Tape</u>	<u>Narrative Summary</u>	<u>Narrative Form</u>
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Departure and Return Several Hours Later with Female Friend ("Grey" or Natural Witch) Who Performs Ritual to "Close the Gate"</li> <li>[1 story; 1 fragment]</li> </ul>	
4	09/18/94	Maya	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•<b>Premonition of a Hospitalization, Just As Phone Rang Bringing Her News Of Friend's Accident and Hospitalization Earlier That Day</b></li> <li>•Ghost Story: Calling Upon Dead Friend To Talk to Him One Last Time, Seeing A Light Pattern On Hallway Wall Which Promptly Disappeared</li> <li>•Mother's Unusual Experience After Grandmother's Death</li> <li>[2 stories; 1 kernel]</li> </ul>	<p>Story</p> <p>Story</p> <p>Kernel</p>
5	09/28/94	"Alicia"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•<b>Symbolic Dream Simultaneous to Former Lover's Death in Airplane Crash</b></li> <li>[1 story]</li> </ul>	Story
6	04/30/95	*Interviewed Simultaneously*: "Alan"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•<b>Simultaneous Experience Relating to Parents' Friend's Visit Upon Separating From Her Husband</b></li> <li>•Having His "Mind Read" by Aunt after Mentioning the Phrase "Exercise Bike"—Which She Then "Knew" He Had Discovered By Exploring A Storage Space in Their Bedroom</li> <li>•Guessing A Word Uncle Was Looking For in a Word-Jumble Puzzle, Spontaneously Without Consciously Paying Attention to the Game (Relatives Amazed)</li> <li>•Fisherman Sees Wife's "Fetch" in House Upon Returning from Work, Wonders Why She is Not in Kitchen Making Him a Meal—She Has Already Had Heart Attack and Died</li> <li>•Man Sees Ghostly Funeral Procession, Recognizing Only One Face (Person Who Has in Fact Died)</li> <li>•Pregnant Woman Driving Home on Toronto Freeway, Falls Asleep at Wheel, Hears Baby's Cry, Averting Disaster</li> <li>•Premonitions and Dreams Simultaneous to Famous Welsh Mining Disaster; People Calling In From All Over Country to Report Them</li> <li>•Friend Has Twin Brother, Died at 3-4 Months of Age, Always Feels as if He's Missing Something</li> </ul>	<p>Story</p> <p>Story</p> <p>Story</p> <p>Story</p> <p>Fragment</p> <p>Story</p> <p>Kernel</p> <p>Fragment</p>

<u>Tape#</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Informants on Tape</u>	<u>Narrative Summary</u>	<u>Narrative Form</u>
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Sheila Wonders Whether Friend's Alcoholism Can Be Attributed to Having Lost His Twin Brother</li> <li>•Female School Chum "Willing" Herself to Win A Santa Claus Prize, Doing So</li> <li>•Male Friend Reporting Frequent Deja-Vu Experiences, Hearing Misc. Dialogues Before They Occur</li> </ul> [5 stories; 4 fragments; 2 kernels]	Kernel Fragment Fragment
		"Tom"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•"Disappearing Tree" Story: Remembering Playing as a Child Under a Tree That, Upon His Return Years Later, Appeared Never to Have Been There</li> <li>•Woman's Dreams Simultaneous to Other People's UFO Sightings/Experiences</li> <li>•Hearing a Friend Remark She Was Going to Win Door Prize at Bar Before She Won</li> </ul> [3 stories]	Story Story Story
		"Sheila"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Uncle's Dog Goes Around Small Community Barking While He Is Dying—Phenomenon Is Remarkd by Neighbor at the Wake, Who In Turn, Dies 3 Weeks Later</li> <li>•Friend Loses One of Her Twin Babies—She And Sister Feel Very Bad, Especially for Twin Left Alive</li> </ul> [1 story; 1 fragment]	Story Fragment
		"Mary"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Premonition about Loss of Loved Ones at In Shipwrecks, in One of Cassie Brown's Books</li> <li>•Panic Attack Simultaneous with Time That Twin Sister Is Scheduled To Have Open Heart Surgery, Unbeknownst to Her (co-narrated with Sheila)</li> <li>•Episode of Apparent "Mind-Reading" with Sister, Who Started A Question, to Which She Answered "Yes"—Explained as A Frequently Asked Question About A Place They Were Passing in Car Which Triggered a Common Memory</li> </ul> [2 stories; 1 kernel]	Kernel Story Story
7	07/24/93	Side A:		
		"Joe"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Premonitory Dream that His Mother Called to Tell Him She'd Been Diagnosed With MS; Conversation Occurs One or Two Days Later</li> <li>•Predicting Football Games as a Kid, Comparing Experiences to "The Rocking-Horse Winner" (D.H. Lawrence)</li> </ul>	Story Story

Tape#	Date	Informants on Tape	Narrative Summary	Narrative Form
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Dream about Someone's Having A Wasting Illness, After Hearing Cousin Was Ill But Before Diagnosis of Cancer</li> </ul>	Story
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Mother's Dreams and Intuitions about Father's Impending Mental Breakdown</li> </ul>	Story
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Relative's Dream about Dangerous Man; Meeting Someone Who Looked Just Like This in a Drugstore</li> </ul>	Kernel
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Daydreaming in Church, Imagining Statue of Mary Bursting Out of Top of Mountain, Same Day as Mt. St. Helen's Volcanic Eruption</li> </ul>	Story
			[5 stories; 1 kernel]	
		"Nora"	Affirms Sister's Dream of Dangerous Figure	Kernel
			[1 kernel, already counted above for Jamie]	
		Ellen Damsky (Interviewer)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Intuition about Teacher Being In Danger, Urging Her , Out Loud, "Don't Go," Morning Of Challenger Disaster</li> </ul>	Story
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Friend's Out-of-Body Experience on Day John Lennon Was Shot</li> </ul>	Kernel
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Dream about Comforting Phone Conversation with Dead Grandmother, After Death and Funeral, but before Unveiling of Headstone; Grandmother Says She's in Akron, Ohio</li> </ul>	Story
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Another Dream Phonecall with Grandmother, Suggests Grandmother "Call" Her Mother to Let Her Know Where She Is; Grandmother Doesn't "Call Back" (Appear in Any More Dreams) Due to Grudge Against Daughter, Who Was Not At Bedside During Her Death</li> </ul>	Story
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Dreams about Paternal Grandmother after Her Death; Asks Grandmother to Come Back Again In Dreams; Tells Father (Story Repeated On Side B)</li> </ul>	Story
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Story of British Doctor in NF Who Contracted TB Himself</li> </ul>	Kernel
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Same Doctor's Wartime Experience w/ Friend, Waiting to Be Hit by Approaching Bomb, Watching It Veer Off Suddenly and Land In Nearby Field</li> </ul>	Story
			[5 stories; 2 kernels]	
7	08/03/1994	Side B:		
		"Laura"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Dream Simultaneous to Father's Being Taken to the Emergency Room for What Is Thought to Be A Heart Attack</li> </ul>	Story

Tape#	Date	Informants on Tape	Narrative Summary	Narrative Form
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Intuition about a Job Offer—Not to Take It Although It Was Offered to Her—Went Against Her Gut Feeling, It Turned Out to Be Bad</li> </ul>	Fragment
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Near-Death Experience at Age Four, Due To Scarlet Fever + Eye Infection; Sees A Bright Light While Sick in Bed in Hospital</li> </ul>	Story
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Gets Mysteriously Lost Following Signs to A McDonald's Off Interstate, Misses Being Caught in A Three-Person Drunk-Driving Fatality at That Destination</li> </ul>	Story
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Childhood Memories of Picking Pansies for Elderly Neighbor with Cancer, Neighbor Dies, Pansies Bloom Through the Snow</li> </ul>	Story
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Pregnant Friend's Father Dies Suddenly Due to Stroke, Baby is Born Premature; Father's Ghost Appears in White, Happy, in Baby's Room, As I f To Say "I Have Seen Your Baby"</li> </ul>	Story
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Visits Aunt after Stroke, Encourages Her to Go to Her Husband if She Wants To, Dreams Husband Is Holding His Hand Out to Help Her Up A Hill; Aunt Dies Days Later</li> </ul>	Story
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Grandmother's Readiness for Death at Age 104; Her Own Not Feeling Ready</li> </ul>	Fragment
			[6 stories; 2 fragments]	
		Ellen Damsky (Interviewer)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Bad Feeling about Imminent Surgery—Almost Dies During Surgery—Dreams During Recovery That She Is Hit by Lightning, Knows Then She Will Recover</li> </ul>	Story
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Two Weeks Before Previous Surgery, Had Tooth Pulled by Untrustworthy Doctor; Strapped Down after Panicking, Develops Bone Infection But Doctor Recommends She Go Ahead with Operation Two Weeks Later</li> </ul>	Story
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Surrounded by White Light For Weeks (Story in a Book)</li> </ul>	Kernel
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Loss of Female Friend After Short Illness; Finds Piece of Paper in Pocket A Year Later, with Her Name on It</li> </ul>	Story
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Male Friend's Death by AIDS Is A Shock; She Expected Him to Survive</li> </ul>	Kernel
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Father Has Humorous Dream about Dead Friend; Explains to Friend He Can't Go Out with Him for a Beer "Because You're Dead"; Friend Explains He's Still Trying to Understand the Rules, And Waiting for New Clothes to Come In</li> </ul>	Story
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Dreams about Paternal Grandmother after Her Death; Asks Grandmother to Come Back Again In Dreams; Tells Father (2<sup>nd</sup> Version)</li> </ul>	Story

Tape#	Date	Informants on Tape	Narrative Summary	Narrative Form
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Hair Turns Prematurely White, Like Her Grandmother's Had Turned at Age 21, While Grandmother Is Dying; Grandmother Notices This On Deathbed; Ellen Reassures Her She Is Happy, Though Unmarried</li> <li>•Grandmother's Cat's Death Before Her Death</li> <li>•Missing Her Grandmother's Birthday Party Before Her Death</li> <li>•Feeling Sick Day Before Mother's Near-Death Experience</li> <li>•Loss of Friend to AIDS; Looked Like an Old Man; She Still Wasn't Ready for Loss</li> </ul>	<p>Story</p> <p>Story</p> <p>Story</p> <p>Kernel</p> <p>Fragment</p>
8	04/16/96	"Diana" (Interviewed alone)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Twin Daughters React Simultaneously in Pain When Mother Tries to Remove Band-Aid in Bathtub, after Covering Girls' Eyes with Facecloths</li> <li>•Twin Co-Workers Also Know When One Needs the Other, Etc.</li> <li>•Girls' Identical-ness: Always Able, As A Mother to Tell Girls Apart, in Ultrasound and in Basinettes in Nursery Ward, Even When Staff Got Mixed Up</li> <li>•Friend Just Lost One of Her Twins, Has to Step In to Fill the Gap in Surviving Twin's Life</li> <li>•Closeness She Feels with Own Sister, Very Much Like Twinship, But Not As Deep as Bond between Her Daughters</li> <li>•First Time Twins Were Separated at 1 ½ Years; One Dislocated Arm; Other Twin Cried Desperately While She and Sister Were at Hospital</li> <li>•Staff Unnecessarily Suspicious about Injury at Hospital, Claiming Parents of Twins Were More Likely to Abuse Their Children; Specialist Defends Her</li> <li>•Grandmother's Ability to Dream about Crisis Events Before or As They Were Happening To Family Members</li> <li>•Mother's Similar Abilities</li> <li>•Daughter's Arguments about Tendency to Speak Simultaneously</li> <li>Fragment</li> <li>•Co-Worker Read Her Palm; Predicted Her Husband Would Die; Husband Died in Accident A Few Years Later; Also Predicted Three Children</li> </ul>	<p>Story</p> <p>Kernel</p> <p>Story</p> <p>Kernel</p> <p>Fragment</p> <p>Story</p> <p>Story</p> <p>Fragment</p> <p>Kernel</p> <p>Fragment</p> <p>Story</p>

Tape#	Date	Informants on Tape	Narrative Summary	Narrative Form
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Daughters "Shared" A Nightmare; One Awoke, Put Their Heads Together, Both Narrated the Dream to Make It Less Scary</li> </ul>	Story
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Simultaneous Dream Nov. 14th With Husband about Conceiving Twins; Knew On Emergency Ultrasound in February That It Was Indeed Twins</li> </ul>	Story
			[7 stories; 3 fragments; 3 kernels]	
		"Gina" and "Julie" (Interviewed together, with mother present)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Story of Shared Dream (already counted above as mother's version)</li> <li>•Games They Play re: "Are You Thinking What I'm Thinking"</li> </ul>	Story
		Fragment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•They React Simultaneously in Pain When Mother Tries to Remove Band-Aid in Bathtub, after Covering Girls' Eyes with Facecloths (already counted above as mother's version)</li> <li>•Paternal Great-Grandmother Died in Childbirth with Twins</li> <li>•Getting Their Ears Pierced at Very Young Age</li> <li>•Funny Playback of a Karaoke Tape</li> </ul>	Story
			Fragment	
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Tooth Falling Out, with Older Sister's Help, Plus an Accident</li> <li>•Mom Never Getting Twins Mixed Up, Even in Hospital (already counted as mother's version, above)</li> <li>•Wearing Pop-Eye Suits of Blue and Red; Being Dressed by Someone Else; Everyone But Mom Getting Them Mixed Up</li> <li>•Mom's Habit of Asking One to Sit on Left, Other on Right, Just as They Were When She Was Carrying Them</li> <li>•Older Sister Cuts One Twin's Hair; Mom Takes Both, Angrily, to the Barber for Haircut</li> </ul>	Story
			[6 stories; 3 second story versions; 2 fragments]	
9	07/21/95	"Karen"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Simultaneous Ghost Experiences: Two Women in Small NF Town See Or Dream Similar Ghostly Figures at the Same Time; Figures Match Description of Local Man Who Died in Accident Years Before</li> <li>•Minister-Father's Reports of "Feeling Presence" of One of His Parishioner Returning to Talk with Him From Time to Time</li> </ul>	Story
			[2 stories]	Story

Tape#	Date	Informants on Tape	Narrative Summary	Narrative Form
10	11/19/96	"Robert"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Just Before Sleep, Away from Home, Dreams About Cat Being Lost and Looking for Him; Finds Out Cat Was Probably Lost At That Time</li><li>•Becomes Sick While Working with Tobacco Plants/Taking Care of Kids Alone at Distance from Wife; Wife Has Simultaneous Experience Just Before Sleep Which Leads Her to Return to Help Him</li><li>•Experiences of Canadian Indian Friend's Showing Up for Meetings without Needing Any Announcements</li><li>•Meeting A Number of Friends Unexpectedly After Having Seen Strangers Who Reminded Him of the Person He Was About To See</li><li>•Example of Lesser Coincidence: Noticing Similar Themes and Jokes Across Comic Strips in Paper on a Given Day</li><li>•Drug-Induced Visionary Experiences He's Still Not Sure How to Explain or Explain Away</li><li>•Dreams He's Awakened from and Believed Were Real, Not Sure How to Explain or Explain Away</li><li>•Praying for a Sick Cat; Cat Makes Remarkable Recovery during Night</li><li>•Has Lucid or "Real" Feeling Dream about Wife's Friend Doing Black Magic against Him and Wife; Realizes She Has Many Reasons to Feel Envy; Native Friends Give Him Ceremony To Counteract This; opts Out of Using Ceremony; Uses Own Mental Imagery (Mirror) Instead</li><li>•Local People Confronting a Witch Directly in Cape Breton</li><li>•Hippy Friends He Had at 18; One Man's Stories of Encounters with Devil, Cain</li><li>•Experience of Praying, Unbeknownst to Patient, While Working as Massage Therapist; Patient Reports Feeling "Bones Shifting"</li><li>•Falling Asleep, Hears Voice Ask Him: Which Side Are You On? (Good or Evil)</li><li>•Goes for Massage for Muscle Soreness; Envisions an Angel, Therapist (Former Nun) Tells Him Other Patients Have Told Her They Saw the Same Thing</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Story</li><li>Story</li><li>Fragment</li><li>Story</li><li>Kernel</li><li>Kernel</li><li>Kernel</li><li>Story</li><li>Kernel</li><li>Kernel</li><li>Kernel</li><li>Story</li><li>Story</li></ul>
Eileen			<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Mother's Dream Simultaneous to Childhood Friend's Being Apprehended for Drug Use</li></ul>	Story







<u>Tape#</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Informants on Tape</u>	<u>Narrative Summary</u>	<u>Narrative Form</u>
14	6/16/95	"Madelyne"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Dream That Cat, Left with Her Sick Mother, Has Been Put Down; Finds Out This Has Indeed Happened, Probably Same Day Cat Was Put Down</li> <li>•Aunt's Misc. Simultaneous Intuitions About Children Living Far from NF</li> <li>•Aunt Dreams Daughter Is Little Girl and Crying Hysterically at Time of Break-Up of Daughter's Marriage</li> </ul>	<p>Story</p> <p>Kernel</p> <p>Story</p> <p>[2 stories; 1 kernel]</p>
15	2/23/95	"Ben"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Statement of Strong Disbelief in ESP or Telepathy</li> <li>•Problems that Science Hasn't or Can't Solve Don't Have to Be Understood as "Mystical"</li> <li>•Psychic Hotlines on TV Make Him Angry</li> <li>•Generalized Negative Case Examples of Premonitions/Simultaneous Intuitions Which He Views as Based in Reasonable or Unreasonable Anxieties:</li> <li>•Your Uncle Goes Out in Snowstorm</li> <li>•Aunt Matilda Goes Out Driving (Badly)</li> <li>•Billy Might Never Make It Home from School, Comes in with Cast on Arm</li> <li>•Person Dreams About Airline Crash: Airplane Does Crash; Why He Dismisses This As Coincidence</li> <li>•Dreamed about Traveling on Ship That Sank; Ships Never Sank</li> <li>•Differences in Forms of Communication between Identical Twins: There Might Be Something To That, Not Necessary "Paranormal Activity"</li> <li>•Paranormal People Should Stay Away from Studying Twins, Leave It to More Scientific Scholars</li> <li>•True Stereotype of Parapsychologists: They Ignore the More Ordinary Non-Paranormal Explanations for Haunted House Phenomena, Etc.</li> <li>•Case of Curtis Torpedo Bombers Lost in Bermuda Triangle; One of Six Crew Members Had Dream and Called in Sick; Misc. Nonparanormal Explanations, Including Bad Flight Record of Curtis Bombers</li> <li>•The World Is Complicated Enough without "The Paranormal"; People Want to Believe in an Afterlife and Pretend Are Not Simply Primates But Are the Apple of God's Eye</li> <li>•Belief in Paranormal Akin to Religious Belief; People Are Afraid of Death; Death is Incomprehensible</li> </ul>	<p>Statements of Belief</p> <p>Model</p> <p>Model</p> <p>Model</p> <p>Model</p> <p>Kernel</p> <p>Statements of Belief</p> <p>"</p> <p>"</p> <p>Story</p> <p>Statement</p> <p>Statement</p>

Tape#	Date	Informants on Tape	Narrative Summary	Narrative Form
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Other Than Identical Twins, He Doesn't Believe People Share Experiences At A Distance; Moreover, People Only Claim to Have Extraordinarily Simultaneous Experiences Within One Culture; People Don't Claim to Have Same Experiences as People In Other Countries; "Telepathy" Etc. Is Product of Shared Culture</li> </ul>	Statement
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•People with Shared Culture (Family, Community, Values) Tend to Have Parallel or Related Experiences</li> </ul>	Statement
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•We Shortchange Ourselves by Categorizing Things We Don't Yet Understand as Having Religious Significance</li> </ul>	Statement
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Vignette from book, <i>Motel of the Mysteries</i>—Woman Putting Ancient Toilet Seat On Head, Believing It's An Object Of Religious Significance</li> </ul>	Kernel
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Examples of Things That Needn't Be Labeled Paranormal:</li> </ul>	
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Communication between Identical Twins</li> </ul>	
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Big Clouds Over the Swamp</li> </ul>	
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Thinking He Saw A Ghost As A Kid, Reasons He Might Have Believed That Then</li> </ul>	Kernel
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Church Roof Never Fell in on Him</li> </ul>	Model
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Never Struck by Lightning by Avenging God</li> </ul>	Model
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Seeing What Seemed Like A Ghost As A Kid ("Hello, I'm a Single-Visit Apparition")</li> </ul>	Story
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Incredibly Vivid Dreams (What, I'm Not in Los Angeles? Who's This Woman Beside Me?) Are Just That, Not Paranormal</li> </ul>	Model
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•His Definition of "Mind": Consciousness of the Brain; Housecats Are Sometimes Smarter than People, So Animals Have "Mind" As Well As "Instinct"</li> </ul>	Statement
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Why Do We Not Attribute "ESP" to Animals? (Example: Getting A Vibe Passing A Chimpanzee Cage at the Zoo: "Pass Me All Your Bananas")</li> </ul>	Model
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•If A Chimp Could Know His Buddies Were About To Be Eaten by a Lion...</li> </ul>	Model
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Paranormal Activity Is Used, Like Religion Used to Be, to Explain Real Occurrences (e.g. Volcanic Activity)</li> </ul>	Statement
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Shared Experience of Twins in Womb, Might Constitute Different Biology, but Don't File It Away as Paranormal Activity</li> </ul>	Statement
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Has Never Had a Head Injury; Grew Up in Boarding Houses with People with Epilepsy; These People Have No More Paranormal Connections Than Anyone Else</li> </ul>	Statement
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•People with Serious Illnesses, Esp. Fatal Epilepsy or Illness, Are Drawn to Religion; It's a Lifeboat When Your Ship Is Going Down</li> </ul>	Statement

Tape#	Date	Informants on Tape	Narrative Summary	Narrative Form
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Would Like to Believe He Wouldn't Turn To God If Desperate:</li> <li>•If Diagnosed with Lung Cancer, As He's a Smoker</li> <li>•If Leafs Need to Win Stanley Cup</li> <li>•Friends in Boarding Houses Were Uneducated; Disabled Kids Didn't Have Much Opportunity for Education Then, or Contemplating Mind/Body Relations; More Likely to Contemplate Relation Between Stomach and Piece of Toast, etc....</li> <li>•All He Heard Them Talk About Was Dilantin, Dosages, Etc.; Their Lives Seemed Centered Around the Medication</li> <li>•Description of Friend's Seizures</li> <li>•Why His Girlfriend Banishes Him from Room While She's Watching "The X Files"; Long-Distance Alien Visits to "Slime Some Guy in Cornfield" as Inane as Driving to Toronto Just to Get a Coke; Humorous Plot Summary Of Every X-Files Episode</li> <li>•<i>The Bermuda Triangle Mystery Solved</i>, a book with simple explanations for mysteries that influenced his thinking.</li> <li>•Story of the <i>The Cyclops</i> which he read in a book: she sank "disappeared" because she was "loaded to the gunwales with iron etc!"</li> </ul>	<p>Model Model</p> <p>Statement</p> <p>Statement Statement</p> <p>Story</p> <p>Model</p>
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Humans evolved from nondivine human origins (there's archeological evidence from fossils and from behavioral and genetic links between us and chimpanzees hence the idea that humans are separate from rest of animal kingdom is chauvinism akin to Southern racism</li> <li>•We Romanticize Mating as Love but It's Not Much Different Than What Happens Between Lions</li> <li>•Human Feces Smell Worse Than Any Animal's</li> <li>•Humans Have Big Brains, Language, and Opposable Thumbs for Tool Manipulation; Other Animals Have Other Skills, Other Animals Run Faster, Are Stronger, Fly, Bite Better; Hence We Are Not "Better"</li> <li>•Our Teeth Won't Defend Us; No Claws (Unless You Count Ladies' Nails), etc.; Our Skills Are Limited; We're Not that Special; Religion and The Paranormal Contest This Realization</li> <li>•Until Someone Proves Animals Have ESP He's Prepared to Regard ESP Belief as Humans' Chauvinism</li> <li>•Human Origins in East Africa; How Did We Get to Newfoundland</li> </ul>	<p>Statement</p> <p>Model Model</p> <p>Statement</p> <p>Statement</p> <p>Statement</p> <p>Statement</p>

<u>Tape#</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Informants on Tape</u>	<u>Narrative Summary</u>	<u>Narrative Form</u>
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Jane Goodall Has Been Out in the Bush Too Long; Women Leakey Sent Out to Study Primates</li> <li>•"I'm Not An Average Human" – In Case This Tape Is Dug Up Years From Now</li> </ul>	<p>Story</p> <p>Statement</p>
16	8/19/96	"Darla"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•She and Sister Arrange Rocks in Identical Order Decoratively, at a Distance, without Having Communicated About It; Not at Same Time</li> <li>•She and Sister Cut Hair Simultaneously (Same Day) in Response to Grief, at a Distance</li> <li>•Husband Shaves Beard Off for First Time in Life, After Learning That Twin Brother Has Been Burned</li> <li>•Sees Dead Bird on Sidewalk Afternoon Her Brother Is Killed; Feels Rush of Fear for Him</li> <li>•Has Nightmare (Mother Drowning) So Intense She Must Call Her Mother during the Night; Mother Has Stroke Several Months Later</li> <li>•Has Dream about Father and Brother Well Before They Die, Both, Together, in Setting in Which Brother Does Later Have Accident (Snowy Hills)</li> </ul>	<p>Story</p> <p>Story</p> <p>Kernel</p> <p>Story</p> <p>Story</p> <p>Story</p>
		Eileen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Friend's Tendency to Cut Hair as Reaction To Stress of Thesis-Writing</li> <li>•Piercing Ear at Peak Stress Period</li> <li>•Getting Short Haircut in Reaction to Stress of Separation from Partner</li> <li>•Losing Hair Six Months After Trauma of Father's Stroke, Getting Short Haircut to Cover Hair Loss</li> </ul>	<p>Story</p> <p>Kernel</p> <p>Kernel</p> <p>Story</p>
			[Interviewer's Stories Not Included in Tally]	

**TOTALS (NOT INCLUDING DUPLICATE VERSIONS OR RESEARCHER'S STORIES)**

STORIES IN CORPUS: 113

ESENS: 13 ( matches) + 11 (near matches/variants)

ESENS AS % OF

TOTAL STORIES: 21.2% (including matches + near-matches + variants on initial definition) OR  
11.5% (including perfect matches to initial definition)

FRAGMENTS: 29

KERNELS: 34

SKEPTICAL STORY "MODELS" (GENERIC EXAMPLES): 14

JOKES: 1

### Supplementary Survey and Taped Group Interview, Summer 1998

<u>Tape#</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Informants on Tape</u>	<u>Narrative Summary</u>	<u>Narrative Form</u>
17	8/4/98	Anita Mannur's Comp Lit Class Univ. of Mass. (19 students)	Discussion of Judith's Story and associated explanations: maternal instinct, intuition, ESP, <i>divine intervention</i> , <i>maternal</i> anxiety, coincidence, simultaneity versus foreknowledge	(discussion/debate)

### Taped Interviews (Featuring 2 ESEnS) from Fieldwork with Critical Care Nurses (1993)

<u>Tape#</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Informants on Tape</u>	<u>Narrative Summary</u>	<u>Narrative Form</u>
(1 or 18)	1/27/93	"Irina"	•Dream Simultaneous to Critical Care Patient's Death; She Guides His Spirit Towards a Light (duplicate version)	Story
(2 or 19)	1/26/93	"Teresa"	•Story about Knowing Twin Sister Had Decided to Get Married Just As She Called from Long Distance To Inform the Family •Misc. Simultaneous Experiences Related to Status of Identical Twin Sister [1 story, 1 kernel]	Story  Kernel

### Additional Interviews (Untaped)

#	Date	Informants	Narrative Summary	Narrative Form
1	1/5/95	Elizabeth X, President of St. John's Twins and Triplets Association	Testing Teenage Twin Daughters of an Association Member at Association Meeting: Comparing Answers to Questions Asked of Each Twin in Separate Rooms [1 story]	Story
2	1/18/95	Members of the St. John's Twins And Triplets Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Twin Daughters React Simultaneously in Pain When Mother Tries to Remove Band-Aid in Bathtub, after Covering Girls' Eyes with Facecloths (Duplicate Version)</li> </ul>	Story
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Daughters "Share" A Dream (Duplicate Version; 2 Other Versions Noted Above; Only One Version Counted in Story Tally)</li> </ul>	Story
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nightmare Simultaneous to Husband's Death on Oil-Rig Accident in Nova Scotia</li> </ul>	Story
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adult Twin Sister's Simultaneous Childbirth-Like Pangs When Other Sister Goes into Labor at a Distance; Doctor Queries Nonpregnant Twin re: A Recent Delivery upon Examination</li> </ul>	Story
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Various Twins' Fondness for Sleeping Together in Early Childhood [2 stories; 2 duplicate versions; 1 kernel]</li> </ul>	Kernel
3	2/23/96	"Daria," "Sheila," "Alan," et al. at EC's Brown Bag Lecture Discussion On Twins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (Daria) Husband's Upset/Shaving Beard Upon Learning of Twin Brother's Accident and Being Burned (Second Version)</li> </ul>	Story
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (Sheila) Twin Sister's Simultaneous Panic Attack Morning of Her Surgery (third version, lost due to machine malfunction; taping done by party other than researcher)</li> </ul>	Story
4	12/10/96	"Alan" – E-Mail Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Simultaneous Experience Relating to Parents' Friend's Visit Upon Separating From Her Husband [1 second version]</li> </ul>	Story

See Appendix D for additional story versions collected through e-mail communications with "Alan" (Mark Ferguson), "Mary" (Susan O'Brien), and "Judith" (Clara Byrne) during summer of 1998.



ESENS SUBMITTED BY UMASS INFORMANTS (DEIDRE,  
FRED, LUCILLE, AND MARIA)  
SUMMER 1998, AMHERST, MASSACHUSETTS

DEIDRE (2):

Deidre Jones.

I do not believe this is rare. There are many incidences when a <sup>instinct</sup>sense has increased my awareness or motivated my action. More times than I can count. This spiritual or instinctive dimension is part of humanity. Once I was upstairs at home and my baby was downstairs. I had a sudden urge to run down to her, I found her with a piece of broken glass in her mouth. The same child was climbing up a slide, feeling uneasy I ran up the slide only to catch her just as she fell. It amazes me that anyone would find this sort of experience out of the ordinary or hard to believe.

Just a few days ago I had a dream of a friend's mother carrying too many things and I <sup>then</sup> commented how strong she was. When I talked to her she was burdened with problems and having a difficult move to another house. I ended up helping her move and believe this dream was a communication from my soul of love and concern.

## FRED (1):

The closest thing I can remember to anything like that, happened when I was a junior in high school. I had a girlfriend. A girl that I was completely in awe and love with. To this day I love her as much as anyone else in the world.

Regardless, one evening ~~we~~ we had split up for the night. She had gone to go see a friend at hers from work who was leaving for college, and I was out with some of our friends. At around eleven I got into a conversation with a friend of mine concerning her, my girlfriend, and how hard it would be when she went away for school. She was a year older than I. During the course of the conversation I became severely depressed. I stopped talking, managed to walk away and into the street where I sat alone and started crying. After a few minutes alone I stopped and decided that I needed to see her, know she was alright. ~~2011~~

With my legs folded, head down and completely motionless, I fell into a sleep like state. I know it wasn't sleep because I remember two cars passing me, yet I didn't move. I just wandered in my head. Several minutes passed and I felt as though I was willing myself to where she was, I felt like if I tried hard enough I could just know. I began to see a streetlight go from red to green. I saw a donut shop sign, a bank sign, and a sign for a supermarket. I knew this place, but I did not know the bank sign. I mean I did not think it was supposed to be there, I had never seen it before. This ended and I jumped in my car and headed for this area where the signs were.

I got there several minutes later and no one was there. I had figured it was all my imagination. Later that night Laura ~~to~~ paged me and we got together. She looked a little upset and when I enquired as to why she ~~just~~ said that she had gotten into a fight with her friend and that he had scared her. ~~After~~ she continued by saying that he was upset that she was leaving and would not see him or get involved with him romantically, so he was driving like a maniac. He had been flying down the road where I saw the signs (I did not tell her about that) and on to the highway and she was freaked out and trying to calm him down. I asked her when she got on the highway because the entrance was maybe 500 feet from where I had seen the signs. She said around eleven - eleven ~~thirty~~ fifteen. Also the sign I had never noticed was from a bank that had just opened that past week.

Recently a friend of my niece was killed in a car accident. He had just graduated from high school and was at a party. His twin brother decided to stay home that night. At the party his 'girlfriends' left with someone else. This upset the boy (I'll call him Steven and his twin at home Tom) and he left in a hurry to catch up with his girlfriend.

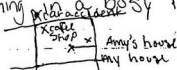
At home Tom had been sleeping and suddenly just after midnight he sat up in bed and started screaming 'Steven don't do it! don't do it!' His mother came in to see what was wrong. Tom was very upset. He said 'Mom Steven is dead!'

Soon after the police arrived at their house and confirmed Tom's premonition. Steven died while traveling at 100 mph. - he lost control and was killed instantly!

## MARIA (1):

When I was in high school some friends and I went to listen to a band play at a local coffee shop. When we were there we heard a loud car accident. We were all aroused by the crash and were talking about it. We looked around, but the accident was too far away to see. One girl, Amy, started saying how her parents were going out that night. It was their anniversary or something. This was in CA where each city block is 1/4 mile ~~or~~ around; ~~on~~ the perimeter. Amy & I lived in the block of the car accident but on the opposite side. The coffee shop was on the same opposite side.

We all shunned Amy off. Why would it be her parents, we thought. After we went home 3 of my friends were to spend the night; Amy too. Amy decided she had to go home though. Five minutes later Amy called us. Her mother was in the hospital but her dad was okay. The accident was them. A girl from the coffee shop was drunk & ended up rear ending them or something in a busy intersection.



I don't know if the situation is the same, but Amy sure knew something was wrong. I believe it was God & angels that protected her parents. They are all fine now.

## APPENDIX B: NARRATIVE TRANSCRIPTS AND ANALYTICAL BREAKDOWNS

### 1. Judith's Story (1995)

*One particular incident that really reinforced my sense that there was more to this world than what we see and hear, was in the summer, August, of 1991, or 2. I'm not sure of that. I have to backtrack. It would have been '92. And, my husband and I had been invited to a friend's 25th anniversary party. Our son would have been 20 years old at the time and a daughter who was 15, were both at home. Or were out and in, for the evening, but we were out. It was quite the party. It was at the home of the couple, it was a surprise party. I drink--I drink beer, I get feeling pretty good, I love to dance, tell jokes, tell stories, and was having a really good time. My husband \*doesn't\* drink; he does all the driving.*

*And around 12, 12:15 in the night, in the middle of feeling really, drunk, really having a good time, it was like somebody hit me in the stomach and without any, warning or anything about what I was going to say, I said to my husband, "We have to go home NOW." And uh, telling this story is, very emotional because, it was so scary. He said, "Oh, why, what's wrong?" And I said, "Uh, nothing, I just, I just have to go home now." We didn't even stop to say goodnight to anybody. We left that house. It was about a 6-7 minute drive to our place. We were living in Gander, a small town at the time. We drove home. When we had gone out the kids were both out. But when we got home our daughter was in bed and she said, "I don't know what's wrong with Paul, he's downstairs." So I went down and his bedroom, he had two rooms downstairs. And uh, off the bedroom was a room that he used as a sitting room. And uh, a messy room, total state. But he was on his bed, looking like he was about to die.*

*I had seen him drunk--I knew he wasn't drunk. I'd seen him drunk before that, many times. I'd seen him sick, from drinking. So I said, "We got to get him upstairs." I got, we got him upstairs, we linked him up, he was in, a state--nothing worked on him. His legs were just swinging, his arms were just, nothing. We got him upstairs, I said to my husband, "Get him strong coffee, maybe it is a booze that I'm not familiar with, maybe he's into something." And he was looking at us--by this time we had him sitting in a chair in the living room. And he was, he was almost crying, he was saying, "Mom, I'm going to die." And I was saying, "No, you're not" and I phoned the hospital. So I phoned the hospital and I said, "I don't know what's wrong with him, I don't think he's drunk. But he could be. I do smell booze, but I, I really don't think he's drunk. It doesn't look like that." She said, "Oh, just keep an eye on him, you know, get some coffee into him, and watch him."*

*So I got him in the, we got him in the bathroom, and I filled up the sink with cold water and proceeded to bathe his face, and pour the coffee into him and he was really, really scared, he was crying by this time and saying, "I don't want to die, I'm going to die and I don't want to." So, and I was operating without thinking, these things were just going on, probably took no more than 10 minutes, all of it. So anyway we tried to get out of him, what were you drinking? And he wasn't afraid to tell us, because, I always knew when he went drinking, from the time he had a driver's license he would say, "No Mom, you know, we're going to someone's house tonight, I'm not going to drive, I'm not going to party, I won't take the car," or "I will take the car" so I knew he wasn't afraid of us, to tell if he was drinking cause this wasn't something that was done in secret. So, I got my daughter up, do you know? "No," she said, "he and Herb were downstairs," his friend, "and Herb left and went home." And she said, "I heard Paul come upstairs" and she said, "I went out and he looked really strange" but she said "I thought maybe he was drunk, because they were after coming home about an hour before that, she said, and [they?] went on downstairs.*

*So, we, we got—I started to notice he was improving and he was getting more, more rigidity in his legs and arms, he was starting to move normally. And about 3 o'clock in the morning he was, well enough that I went on to bed. But my husband stayed up, sat up, and watched him. And when he got up in the morning, we started to question, what were you doing, were you drinking? And he said, "Herb and I went up to the pool hall and we had a few games of pool," and he said, "I had a beer. We walked home," which was about half a mile. He said, "When we got home I poured each of us a rum and Coke. We went downstairs" and he said, "I don't know what happened to me." He said, "I don't know if Herb slipped something into my drink, thinking it was a joke or whatever" and, and I didn't, he didn't think Herb would do it, and I didn't. None of us thought that that was possible. So, a few days after that I went down in his room, went into the sitting room part of it, which you could only approach through his bedroom. So it had no ventilation. And on the wall were painted all kinds of symbols, peace signs and rolling—you know things like that—so I came out and I said, "When did you paint your room?" And he said, that night that you were out to Bernadette's anniversary party. He said, "When Herb and I came home," he said, "I decided I'd do some painting." I said, "What paint did you use?" He said, "I used the patio stain." (pause)*

*And the patio stain, when we read the side of the can, he had all the symptoms of being poisoned from inhaling the fumes of the patio stain. And I am convinced—cause he had stayed in his own bedroom, which just had an opening, it wasn't even a door between the two—that he would have died. And I don't know what told me, in the middle of my being—cause I was pretty, feeling pretty good, I was, I would be drunk under the breathalyzer—what, I don't know—and I was dancing, I was up in the*



*middle of the floor I went "boom!" And the next day, the hostess called me, she said, "What happened to you last night? Nobody saw you leave." And I said, "Nobody saw me leave because I left too quickly." And I'm convinced that something, a higher power than me, hit me in the gut and said, "Go home. There's something wrong." And that's, I will be convinced that, there are things out there that are more powerful than us, and that I had a real psychic experience. There's no explanation. There's no, natural logical sensible explanation for what happened to me that night.*

#### **CENTRAL DESCRIPTIVE ELEMENTS:**

1. In the midst of a party in summer 1992, Judith suddenly experiences an urgent need to return home immediately and she and her husband leave the party without saying good-bye.
2. When they get home, they discover their son is seriously ill and afraid that he is going to die.
3. They remove him from his room, phone the hospital, feed him coffee and bathe his face in cold water until he improves.
4. A few days later, through questioning him, discovering he had painted his room with patio stain, and checking symptoms listed on the stain can's label, they conclude that he had been poisoned by inhaling fumes in an unventilated room.

#### **INTERPRETIVE FEATURES WITHIN STORY:**

1. The incident "really reinforced my sense that there was more to this world than what we see and hear."
2. "...telling this story is, very emotional because, it was so scary."
3. Judith says she believes her son would have died in his room if they had not intervened.
4. "I'm convinced that something, a higher power than me, hit me in the gut and said, 'Go home. There's something wrong.'... there are things out there that are more powerful than us."
5. "I will be convinced that...I had a real psychic experience."
6. "There's no explanation. There's no, natural logical sensible explanation for what happened to me that night."

#### **EXPLANATORY POINTS FOLLOWING STORY:**

1. "It's certainly something that I, that I don't need to be convinced of. That people have different kinds of psychic experiences."

2. "As a, Roman Catholic I mean we're not encouraged to believe in these sorts of things, you know? These are not, part of our religion in any way, not even our folk religion, where I come from...."
3. "It's beyond the capabilities I have...certainly not within the realm of, normal, in brackets I put that, normal life experiences...we're not supposed to know what's going on outside of anything other than the real world, you know, we're not taught, you know, my personal experiences, my life experiences, my education, my upbringing certainly did not encourage me to, to look for meaning beyond the actual, you know. And this was beyond the actual."
4. "I couldn't possibly have known, but I did know, you know?"
5. "I would say, 'Well, you know, God was watching over him.' I don't know if I've ever said it, but it's, you know, it's within my, my, person to say that, and to believe that. You know, that, and when I talk about a higher power, my higher power is God."
6. "...it wasn't my son's time to, he wasn't about to die, he wasn't going to die, and shouldn't die and wasn't ready to die, and [God would be saying] 'Okay what are we going to do about this.' It has to be something human, you know, human intervention--I'm not going to come down and take this out of his system but--'...if I started to argue it, on that level, that's the way I would argue it."
7. "I do believe in mental telepathy. But in that instance, it's more that I think there was a third, party?...my father is dead, but it may be my father, who's still in, well, if you want to say, heaven or, another realm, you know, who was keeping an eye--like I don't necessarily think that God himself or herself was doing all the watching of my family because, if the God person is the way I believe it is, they're awfully busy (laughter)."
8. "...so that, you know, I do believe that my father keeps an eye on me and I think that my grandfather, I think all these people that I loved, who loved me...It could be them and the message could be coming from them...it's like, you know, God's got all these little helpers that go, run around, in the spirit world."
9. "...even if it's my brain that's doing all the, taking the data, and computing it, and getting, you know, plunking in my voice cells in my brain to trigger, those words. You know, even if it's my, own brain, my physical brain within the scalp that's doing that, in the skull, there's still some, somehow, that data. Because my brain, my physical brain in this room, cannot be in another room a mile away. Physically. So, somehow there has to be some thing, way that my brain can pick up signals that are coming from other places."
10. "There's a lot more to us than a brain. You know, a brain is, is more, physical and more, to me (laughing) the brain is, is the conscious part I guess, the brain is, is dealing with the storing of it. The brain is your computer, that stores all this stuff. And, and there's all kinds of things inputting data into that brain, and

you know, beyond, beyond that head there's, there's something else, you know, that keeps us in touch with all kinds of things...I don't know what, the *medium* is, or I don't know what the *method* is, but I do know that something works. And there's more to it than this little body—with this big body—we have (laughing) that has a brain in it, that's, that's, you know, computing data and all that, that we put in and take out and everything. There's more to it. There, I have no *doubt*. I don't even question that."

11. Judith says she would not accept a biological explanation for the connection between mother and child as an explanation for what happened, because she didn't believe there was "a maternal string that connected us to our children forever." If that were the case, she said, then mothers would always know everything about their children at all times and she knew that *that* was not the case.

## 2. Alicia's Story (1994)

*I lived in this apartment [in Toronto] on the second floor looking up over the back roof. And I dreamt, one night, that I woke up. I woke up, in the dream, and I looked to the window that gave out onto this back ah, back roof. And the way the window was built, uh, the bottom part slid, sideways. So that was the only way you could open the window at all. It was sort of inadequate actually but was about oh, a foot square. With a screen. And I used to take the screen out so the cat could jump in and out. And in the dream I woke up and I looked, towards the window. And the blind was up. And it must have been, in the dream, it was early morning. There was enough light to see. And I saw a dark face at the window. And it was human-like but it wasn't human, it was—rather demonic. You know, pointy ears and uh, there was, actually I think I got up, before I saw the face, it seems to me, I got up, I knew there was something there and I got up, that's right, I got up to see what was at the window. I was aware that there was something at the window and I got out of bed, to go and look at the window. And when I looked, here was this, face, staring at me. And all at once the window disappeared and it turned into a tunnel. And this figure which was, very frightening, and black, and pointy, um, was chasing me. And he was—it was definitely male—and he was at the far end of the tunnel and I had, there was some distance. Ah, he wasn't right upon me, there was some distance between us. And the tunnel was um, of stone if I recall correctly. I'm pretty sure it was. And I lost—I don't remember a great deal of whatever the chase was, but what I remember very clearly was that we emerged into a room which was, vaulted stone. Something, it, it had a very medieval feel to it. And there wasn't much light in it but yet there was enough light to see. And it was completely barren, except for a table on which there's a chessboard. That was set with all the chess pieces. And, this, by this point I was aware that it was a matter of life and death, really, it was a terrifying dream. I, I could, you know I could feel my, heart pounding and ah, aware that I had to do*

something, immediately. And this creature emerged and it was clearly, he, it was satanic, he was Satan, he was, it was black, he had cloven feet—I mean it was kind of literal (laughing) but it was definitely a very frightening figure. And very intelligent and had dark burning eyes. Bright actually but, everything about him was dark. And uh, intense. And I knew that he didn't mean me any good at all and he was going to do me in if he could. And, I reached for the chessboard and I picked up the King, and the King has a cross, on him. And uh, I brandished it, this chess piece at him, and screamed, "I name you I name you I name you." And he just shriveled before my eyes. Just sort of deflated. Just, shrunk down into this tiny little figure that was of no, danger whatsoever. And at that point I woke up, and I was drenched in sweat. With a sense of both terror and relief. I had a real sense of being through something. So that was the dream.

And what was strange was, ah, now I would have had that dream in September of 1988. And the previous November I'd broken up with my friend Joel...I'd broken up with him but we'd had a long-standing and tempestuous but very intense relationship. And, it was, we were both really drawn to one another, and at the same time it was clear that we were not going to come to terms. And even when we split up, it was more a recognition of, this is just plain not going to work. It wasn't an acknowledgment that we didn't care about one another anymore.

But. I heard I guess two days after I'd had the dream that Joel had died at about the same time I'd had that dream. In Switzerland. He was a camera-man and he, ahm, was killed in a plane crash. A small plane crash. And people hadn't thought to call me right away because I was no longer immediately in his life. Ah, and a friend called to say, have you heard? God. You know (laughs softly) that's—really, really taken aback. But, what really struck me was that I must have been having that dream—I mean he died at the same, I can't, I have never managed, I never really sat down and figured out the time shift. But he was, he died at about the same time I had that dream. And the reason it seems significant to me was that in a way our clashes had to do with values. And with, um, I guess the way our minds worked. And he, in a way, represented, he represented many things, but among them he represented a kind of, reason and thinking that didn't take other things into account that seemed of importance to me. And that figure seemed to be that quality personified. And uh. Of course I didn't think that I needed to—I didn't need him to die for me to be rid of it—but in a funny way it freed me, to get on with my life. Although I certainly, I, I, it's been one of the, you know, losses of my life to have him die. But in a way I suspect it's been easier for me to get on with my own life because I think he would have been an ongoing attraction, had he been alive.

**CENTRAL DESCRIPTIVE ELEMENTS:**

1. In Toronto, in September 1988, Alicia has a dream which goes as follows: she awakens in early morning light, goes to her apartment bedroom window where the blind is up, sees a demonic face there. The window changes to a tunnel down which the demonic figure chases her. She arrives in a vaulted stone room with a chessboard. This dark, satanic, intelligent, and malevolent creature, with cloven hoofs, pointy face, and bright eyes advances toward her as if to kill her and she vanquishes him by seizing a King from the chessboard with a cross on it, saying "I name you" three times.
2. Alicia awakens, *drenched in sweat*.
3. Two days later she receives a call notifying her that a former lover, with whom she had had a long, intense, and tempestuous relationship, had been killed around the time she had the dream, in a small plane crash in Switzerland.

**INTERPRETIVE FEATURES WITHIN STORY:**

1. Alicia feels both terror and relief after awakening from the dream, having "a real sense of being through something."
2. Upon receiving word of her friend's death she is "really, really taken aback."
3. "...he, in a way, represented...many things, but among them he represented a kind of, reason and thinking that didn't take other things into account that seemed of importance to me. And that figure seemed to be that quality personified."
4. Alicia identifies the death was one of the losses of her life, but acknowledges that it made it easier for her to get on with her life apart from him.

**EXPLANATORY POINTS FOLLOWING STORY:**

1. "I've noticed that I've had dreams that have certainly had to do with my life...no question that they've been symbolic representations of something, that was, you know, of issues that, were really important."
2. "It's been very important to me to accept who I am, and in holding up that chess piece, um, in a way I've been able to name something. Or I was able to name something that was really problematic for me."
3. "...there's been a real clash in my life between the highly rational...[and] things that you can't see. I'm interested in, the unconscious, and dream, and story..."
4. "Picking up something with a cross on top of it seemed kind of odd for somebody who's been brought up as an atheist and who I guess at present, I mean I'd describe myself as an agnostic..."

5. "...one of my friends, an older woman...looked it up, someplace...it seems to me that she said that the cross also represents the earth...the four directions. Which I found kind of intriguing."
6. "I don't even know whether they're related. It just struck me as rather, striking, coincidence that I should have had that dream when Joel died. But I'm not sure that there's anything more to it, than that."
7. "On the other hand there's part of me that thinks, well, maybe there is. But uh, I don't--I guess I'm open to these things but I wouldn't say I believe in them."
8. "I don't know whether I'd actually say supernatural but I, I guess I feel like the whole thing is a mystery...that's how I feel about, about religion, and the works. The whole thing seems mysterious to me. Personally, I haven't had any great revelation that has made things clear to me. Um, but I do think that there's lots we don't know. So, I feel quite open to the possibilities."
9. "...it was a strange thing because in a way it had to do with the death of, what he represented, and then he died. So you put those things side by side and you think, hmm, that's odd."
10. "Part of me does and part of me doesn't [believe in telepathy.] There's part of me that thinks it's completely possible."
11. "...it really was quite an extraordinary experience...it really shook me...a bizarre coincidence, at the very least."
12. "...a friend of mine who's a psychologist, he's an Adlerian...said, 'I wish I could have a dream like that. It sounds like you've moved past something.'"
13. "I felt like I still hadn't, I still had to let go of some of that stuff. You know it was more, to me, like an entry dream as opposed to a, to a finishing-off dream? But it did sound, the dream itself certainly sounds like I had come to terms with something. But I think I certainly had to absorb it a little bit."
14. "I think it was after I heard the news [that I associated the dream with this person]. Although I couldn't swear to it...I don't know when I wrote it down...it might have been after, I might have, geez, I don't know...I'll check."

### 3. Karen's Story (1995)

*Well it occurred between 1978 and 1980, and it happened to my mother. It was up in Churchill Falls, Labrador. And, she had an experience where she woke up in the middle of the night, and it was like she was frozen. She sat up in bed and she couldn't really move to wake up my Dad until after the experience was over. And that was a man, standing at the foot of her bed, he had blond curly hair and he was wearing just casual clothing, jeans, and a shirt. And ah, it was just, she got, she knew then it was like, a ghost. And he was just there for a few minutes and then he just disappeared.*

*And the next day just talking around the community where it is a small community she had heard that a lady across town, the same night, had had the exact same*

*experience. So ah, this one woman, she was Roman Catholic, and she had her house exorcised, but ah, Mom didn't go to such drastic measures: my Dad is an Anglican priest so (laughing) I guess she felt a bit more reassured there, but. Yeah, it was the exact same experience at the same night, and it really scared her. And I think about it still today and she does too, she still remembers it. And, very vividly.*

*But the point of the story that was really interesting was, ahm, when talking to other locals in the area, ahm, the description matched a man who had been I guess, asphyxiated—with carbon monoxide in his car? —backed into a snow bank years before that and died, him and his girlfriend. And the description matched him to a T, and where he died was the exact location of the trailer we were living that had been built on top of this location. So, that was about it. Pretty scary I guess, that's all.*

#### **CENTRAL DESCRIPTIVE ELEMENTS:**

1. In Churchill Falls, Labrador, between 1978 and 1980 Mrs. X wakes up in the night, sits up in bed, and sees a man standing at the foot of the bed for a few minutes. He has blond, curly hair and is wearing jeans and a shirt. He disappears. She is unable to move to wake her husband, an Anglican minister, until the experience is over. She knows she has seen a ghost.
2. The next day in conversation with neighbors Mrs. X hears that a Roman Catholic woman across town has had the same experience on the same night.
3. The Roman Catholic woman has her house exorcised.
4. Conversation with neighbors also reveals that the description matches a man who, years before, had died with his girlfriend by carbon monoxide poisoning, by backing his car into a snow bank, on the exact location of the X family's trailer.

#### **INTERPRETIVE FEATURES WITHIN STORY:**

1. When Mrs. X hears of the Roman Catholic woman's same experience the same night she is scared.
2. The presence of her husband, an Anglican minister, reassures her, by comparison to the Roman Catholic woman's reaction (arranging an exorcism after the experience).
3. The matching description with the dead man also makes the story more "scary."

## EXPLANATORY POINTS FOLLOWING STORY:

1. "They didn't speculate as to why her spot [the Roman Catholic woman's] was involved at all."
2. "I would assume it's just because if the ghost...if the ghost was around that night, maybe he just wouldn't choose to visit one location and maybe that location meant something to him. Maybe that's going too deep into it, but, that's what I would think."
3. "She had no doubts that it was a ghost."
4. "And it really, really scared her. And I--she still doesn't really like talking about it a lot cause it was such a traumatic, traumatic experience, where she couldn't even wake up my father and she had to deal with it on her own until after he was gone."
5. "I think she just felt that it was a presence there, that she could just tell it was a ghost. And then to hear the stories later, about this man, and to have a lady across the other side of town have the exact same experience on the exact same night. And if it wasn't a regular person you know like, how did they get in? There was no explained, entry, or anything other than if that, was a ghost...He was just there and then he wasn't there." (K adds that her mother did talk to the Roman Catholic woman personally.)
6. "...it wasn't a dream, at least you'd think it wasn't a dream. It could have been a dream. But it seemed like real at the time."
7. "I wouldn't even be able to guess as to why this ghost, other than what I said earlier, why he would visit, these two women on the same night."
8. I don't think...he [Rev. X] saw it as evil or anything. I think he's, like, comfortable with the idea of ghosts, and stuff like that...I think he's pretty comfortable with, you know, afterlife and, the fact that there are spirits and they're always around and you might be able to see them and sometimes you might not...."
9. "He doesn't usually try to explain those things. He just accepts them I guess."
10. "I think [Mrs. X is] more frightened by the experience, where it's a unique experience. And, I guess just thinking about ghosts yeah would be a scary concept and stuff. She's more relaxed with it now, to a degree, but I know she still doesn't like talking about it."
11. "I do remember the story quite clearly. was only between the ages of eight and ten at the time, and I'm not sure how, I was thinking, there was this man, in the room, just two or three doors down the hall from me, you know. I didn't feel his presence, I didn't wake up but I mean, just hearing the story a few days later I was very scared."



12. "I would say she thinks of the ghost as something more, more than just a presence, it has to be you know almost physically there. But I think my Dad, the way he feels about ghosts is more, a spiritual presence, and that he just knows they're there, without seeing them."

#### 4. Darla's Story (1996)

*One has to do with a response to grief, the haircutting episodes...this is one of my sisters. But we find, as sisters, we do, all of us, sort of interchangeably do, very similar things. And it might be, environment, or it might be, whatever, but it just happens. And we all, make note of it and find it memorable, noteworthy, rather...the haircutting, now, that was, I've since thought about it, and rationalized it as a, a reaction to trauma, and wanting a sense of control, over, fairly chaotic situations, and trauma. And ah, we found out, comparing notes, that we had done the very same thing more or less at the same time. And that was, cut our hair off. Um, but, dramatically, like much more so than—very daring, and in an uncaring way, really. And ah, just for the sheer, sense of changing something. To, to exert some kind of control. This is how I've rationalized it. But we found, in comparing notes, found out that we did it at the same time, you know? Within, I'm sure, the same 24-hour period, anyway. And we, neither of us knew, that we were doing this. And it was shocking to both of us. That we did it like that, that, you know, totally accepting of one another but (laughing) whoa! and, mine was to, shave it off, and go much further than the barber had ever gone. He'd never cut a female's hair before, and certainly he'd, never, like, period. He hadn't trained, done anything, he'd never touched a female's head to cut hair (laughing), had never done it in all his years and ah, and then when I asked him to shave it he was totally, like totally shocked, and resistant. This was down at Atlantic Place [downtown St. John's]. This was at Pat Healey's Barber Shop, his name was Paddy (laughing) and he kept saying, "Are you sure? Are you sure?" as he progressed through the edges with the razor, getting finer and finer and finer. And I said, "Just keep going," you know. And um, and then, at the same time, well, within the same 24 hours, later on, we found out, May [sister, three years older] had gotten up in the middle of the night, I guess, yeah, she, well, couldn't sleep I guess, and got up and took the nail scissors to her hair. And cut it. Like, just chopped it—snip. Wildly, with abandon. (laughing) Monstrously. She did, and it came off, and ah, hers wasn't as ah, it didn't have any kind of professionally cut look to it or anything, it was definitely—gone (laughing).*

*E: (laughing) Do you have any pictures from this era?*

*D: Yeah, I have one and, and ah, I don't think May has one from when she cut it (laughing), the after-picture. But she said she didn't really know why she was doing it. She, probably both had the same, or similarly long, length. And hers was*

*probably more hair, she had more hair left on her than I did. But it was not very styled, at all. Like it was (laughing) it was quite hideous, was how she described it. Well she just got at it, and started snipping. And this was um, soon after we had experienced these deaths in the family, yeah.*

*And uh, other things, like my husband shaved his beard off for the first time, ever, that I had ever seen. And got all his hair cut as short as he could, and um, all of this was going on, this kind of, need to change, something that was indelibly your own...it was in response to, I think, a trauma too...his twin got burned, severely, all over. Disfigured. And that, I think that, he did that within a day or so of hearing about that.*

*E: So is that an identical twin?*

*D: Fraternal. Yeah. So it was interesting, because all this hair was coming off, all over the place (laughing).*

*E: The fur was flying, as it were.*

*D: New looks, and then we spent all this time growing it out, and the growing it out was ah, it was ah, it would test anybody's sense of humor about life, anything, having to withstand the growing-out period. It was really, the shock of it was bad enough, I mean to get adjusted to it, but it was just so, just such a clean cut, and such a clean course of action, but we were left with the growing out, which lasted years. (laughing) It was awful. And we have pictures from that time, and we look at them and say, "Oh my God!" It's like, we hardly recognize ourselves. So I think we were definitely in an altered state. It was out of the norm. Totally irrational.*

*E: How long after the events, were you doing that?*

*D: Uh, well, probably within the year, after, for me, for May and I, and for Henry, all three of us, within a year...and within a day or so after Henry found out about his brother, which all happened in the same time frame...it was just an onslaught of you know, really a series of traumas. Life-changing things. To people close to us.*

*E: So it was your Mom and—*

*D: My Mom and my Dad, and my brother.*

*E: And all within the space of, how much time?*

*D: --Three years. And there were two, two of them were killed. Like violent, it was violence, yeah...there was so much going on, it was like a war...we were prepared to hear anything, anytime, it totally changed our sense of time. And reason, there was no reason, for anything. It still seems all very precarious, to me. But that happening so intensely, and so impossibly--because it had that sense of impossibility--um, it really uh, kind of shoots down any, well, just standard frameworks of time and space that people say, exist. There just isn't that, anymore, and certainly not then...it still does, but very much then had, the sense of being in a dream. With no time, no sense of time, and elements of the past mixed with, present and, future, and, so in that way, the simultaneous thing, there was enough ah, the fact that it happened to both of us, I don't know if it was at exactly the same time, it didn't really seem to matter. The fact that we took the same action, you know, and whether that's a predictable human reaction, I, I don't know.*

#### **CENTRAL DESCRIPTIVE ELEMENTS:**

1. Darla and May experience the deaths of three family members (both parents, and a brother) within the space of three years. Two die by violent accidents.
2. Within a year after the third death, within the same 24-hour period, and unbeknownst to each other, Darla and May remove their hair.
3. Within several days of their haircuts they communicate by phone and are surprised to confirm the haircuts occurred on the same day.
4. Neither sister seems to have been sure why she cut her hair as she was doing it.
5. Both sisters seem to view such drastic haircuts as personally uncharacteristic for them, and odd.
6. Both sisters let their hair grow back in.

#### **INTERPRETIVE FEATURES WITHIN STORY:**

1. Story opens with Darla's interpretation of the simultaneous haircutting as "a response to grief."
2. The simultaneous events are related to Darla's being sisters with May, whether that bond is shaped by shared "environment" or something else.
3. Simultaneity is viewed by both sisters as noteworthy, significant, and memorable.
4. Perhaps such behavior is a predictable human reaction to grief.
5. Perhaps viewing the events as a response to grief is merely a "rationalization" of these events.

### EXPLANATORY POINTS FOLLOWING STORY:

1. "I think there's a sense of recklessness you have, in response to any kind of catastrophe...because your limits are stretched. So that you have a sense of, fearlessness, too. And so there's an odd sense of exhilaration, when you do stuff like that."
2. Haircut marked an "ugly time"--"It almost makes you feel better, saying that, that you've come some kind of distance, when you can look back at a picture and say that was, I wasn't quite [better], yeah."
3. "Also to keep people away, to mark that, in some way that, shows that you're in a different time, and space, and framework, and you don't want people treating you like it's, everything's the same, because it isn't the same. And maybe that's a way to, you know, to signify it, too. It certainly makes you very humble though, as you look the worst you've ever looked in your life (laughing)...a black dress would be much easier to do, but I can see the similarity (laughing)."
4. Haircut could be an "assertion" of some kind of "control" when there's "rapid fire destruction all around."
5. "The haircutting was the one, seemingly serendipitous thing that was so personal, between us, that it, to me it has more significance than anything else. In my life anyway. Because it was so uncharacteristic. And just, the time, the time also, was within the 24-hour thing, I noted that at the time, thinking, that's really, really odd...I asked, I said, 'Well what night?' and it was close enough afterwards, I said 'What night did you do that?'...we hadn't been in touch...not talking about that."
6. When it was new, the haircut provided Darla with a sense of "novelty" and "fun," and of "reclaiming a person she didn't know," who was herself (she saw her head bald, for example, as she would have looked as a baby).

### 5. Sheila and Mary's Story (1995)

*Sheila: I was in England and I knew this, somewhere between--Mary was supposed to have open heart surgery, somewhere between July and December. And I, had gone, and I had to leave here in, the start of September I guess. So I knew that sometime during the term she would, she would have open heart surgery. But one morning I uh--*

*Mary: But just to, point out that during this time--and I was an extremely bad letter-writer (laughs). In fact, wrote very few letters (giggling)*

*S: And we had many a, a fight about this after I came home.*

*M: But ahm, it was at a time where there wasn't much money around so we, very rarely made phonecalls so I, probably you know, that term alone, there would have been, not very many phonecalls.*

*S: There was only one phonecall, apart from this call that I made. And that was, at five o'clock in the morning--*

*M: Most of the communication happened through Dad and Dad was generally looking over the check right? (laughs)*

*S: No, no but that first month Mary, the first month I was gone or the first number of weeks, we wrote. Frequently. It was only after you had your surgery that you weren't writing. But anyway. I was ah, one morning I got up and uh, you know, went down to the refectory for breakfast, and was sitting here just having gotten my cold cereal and got a coffee (laughing) and ah, you know it was a normal morning, getting up. And ahm, all of a sudden, panicked, ah, literally like, heart pounding, ah, crying, not knowing why, it just, all of a sudden, panicked, and ah, just left the table, ran up the stairs, tripping and falling on the way (laughs) and ah, ran to the porter to ah, you know I was crying, and in desperate shape, and ah, to get me an overseas line.*

*And called home, and Marilyn answered the phone, our stepmother. And I said, "Where's Mary?" And she said, "Sheila, listen, what's wrong?" And--"Where's Mary!?" (laughing) And she said, "Sheila do you know what time it is?" And I said, "Where's Mary--" you know I was just, really, like, Shut-up and tell me where Mary is! And she ah, you know she was saying, "You know Sheila, it's five o'clock in the morning--she's asleep!" (laughing) And I said, "Well where is she?" And "oohh!" (M's response) So I finally got it out of her that she was in the hospital and she was having the surgery that morning. So, that was, that experience.*

*M: And we had decided that we weren't going to tell her, that in fact there was no need to tell her until after I had the surgery because, you know, she was going to be over--it wasn't like, she could do anything but worry on her own. So we thought we'd tell her--after I had the surgery (laughs in mock-guilt).*

*E: Yeah. Save her that--grief. (laughter) Meanwhile.*

*M: Meanwhile she's running around panicking!*

*Alan: And do you remember, that morning, being awake? That early, at all, and thinking about anything?*

Mary: Ah, well I certainly was awake because by five o'clock I went into surgery. I was already, they woke me up to prep me at five, right? Our time. So I was already awake and was uh, you know I went down to surgery at seven, so I was already you know, they'd be giving you you know your--Valiums and what-all the drugs they give you to, relax you and whatever. So I'd already been on the go for a number of hours. Not--and I wasn't at all panicked. I wasn't, you know, I wasn't, you know, not even the slightest bit panicked.

Tom: You'd think it would have calmed Sheila down, really, having Valium running through your veins! (laughter)

Mary: But they give you, a relaxant before you go.

Alan: When you were upset, Sheila, you knew though, it was something to do with Mary. You knew you had to call home.

Sheila: Oh yes.

Alan: But you didn't know what it was, at all?

Sheila: Ah no, in my mind, it was a car accident. In my mind, Mary, 'cause the whole--by the time I got upstairs, got the porter, got the phone line, I was trying to figure out what it could be. And, in my mind it wasn't the surgery. Ahm, in my mind, Mary had been cut off from me, and in my mind, she was dead. So that's, that's what my experience was, I thought she was dead. I thought she had had a car accident and was dead.

Alan: And did you know instantly, as soon as it started to happen, at the table, that you were ah, that that was about Mary?

S: Oh yeah, and you know, the only thing that could upset me like that would be, you know, if--I knew that my world was threatened. I was sitting there fine, there was nothing imminently threatening me, so it had to be Mary.

## CENTRAL DESCRIPTIVE ELEMENTS:

1. Sheila goes to England in September knowing Mary, in Newfoundland, was scheduled to have surgery between July and December.
2. The sisters exchange few letters and phonecalls, before OR after Mary has the surgery (unclear which).

3. Mary and the family in Newfoundland decide not to tell Sheila when the surgery is to occur.
4. At breakfast one morning in England, Sheila suddenly panics, feeling her world is threatened, and cries. She knows nothing is imminently threatening her, and concludes it must be Mary. She feels cut off from Mary. She believes Mary has had a car accident and is dead.
5. She calls home immediately to find out where Mary is.
6. Their step-mother answers the phone, at five o'clock in the morning, Newfoundland time, and finally admits to Sheila that Mary is in the hospital, about to have open-heart surgery.

#### **INTERPRETIVE FEATURES WITHIN STORY:**

1. Both sisters attempt to remember frequency of phonecalls and letters previous to the surgery, but the frequency (and content) remains unclear.
2. Jokingly, Mary conveys guilt about not having communicated enough during the separation, and about deciding to hide the surgery date from Sheila.
3. Sheila suggests that although their step-mother initially attempted to keep up the pretense, her persistence brought the truth out.
4. Mary notes that while Sheila was panicking over her surgery, she herself was not "even the slightest bit panicked."
5. Sheila points out that her interpretation of the meaning of her panic attack (concluding a) it must be Mary and b) it must be a car accident and death) took place between the time she panicked at the table and the time she got an overseas line.

#### **EXPLANATORY POINTS FOLLOWING STORY:**

##### **Sheila's:**

1. "You often have experiences, like you know that there's something wrong, I mean that's quite common...and so you, you go home, you search out your family...it might be something small, wrong, somebody's upset about something or something's gone wrong, minor, and you know it's minor because you still go and you search out everybody, I mean, those are ordinary things. And this was that, in a bigger way."
2. "I mean, how often have I come home from school, come home at lunch time 'cause I know there's something wrong [at home, with Mary]?"
3. "Knowing one another so well and having a history," Sheila says, has allowed her to answer her sister's questions before she finishes asking them, but this is "logical" rather than being "any psychic thing."

4. "To me, a mind is just, like, that which is me which is not physical. You know, my thoughts, my personality, those things...I mean that I can't see it. I don't think of it as the brain. I don't think of the mind as the brain. It comes from the brain in some way perhaps, or connected to the brain perhaps, in some way, but not in a physical way."
5. *Oh I don't think it was a coincidence--to me it was a real, a very real feeling that Mary had been cut off from me. So, no, as a coincidence, no. I mean I wasn't, I didn't spend a lot of time--I was of course worried about her surgery, I knew that she was going to have it sometime and I wasn't going to be around. And in ways I was more, I don't know for sure, but I suspect I was more worried about it than Mary was. But I didn't spend time obsessing about it, no."*
6. *"No, in this case the physical thing was happening before I was figuring out what was happening. I mean, I was crying and my heart rate was going mad, before I knew what was...probably, two, one second, two seconds, you know, that I was sitting there at the table, you know, starting to eat a bowl of cereal and all of a sudden I was up and running. And it was while I was running, I guess, that I was figuring out why I was getting upset, that there was something terribly wrong at home, but I was already up and gone...I was with somebody, you know, I was having breakfast with someone...we'd gone down to breakfast...I know she was running after me, you know (laughing)."*

#### **Mary's:**

1. "At the time, you know, again, Sheila's feeling clearly wasn't my feeling."
2. "As twins I think we often felt that we had, little, sort of, experiences that, we knew what was happening to the other. And I can't remember any of them, and this was one that was easy--this was one you could tell a story about. Like, it happened often, I mean, in ways, in little ways and I can't tell you, any little details, I can't remember, any of them, but this is one you could remember to tell."
3. "Most of it, in the end, when you hear the coincidence--'oh yes,' you know, 'Sheila is upset' or, oh yes, this did happen, you generally put it down to, you know, a mixture of knowledges and stuff that you had that you put together and you figured this out, and so you then follow it up. And so most of it, in ways, if you really wanted to find an explanation, you could find an explanation. This one, at the time, we really felt that there was no explanation."
4. "The way I generally think of it is, because you've spent so much time, you know, together, growing up, and everything else, you're just way more attuned to what each other are, thinking, and things, just because you know each other so well."



5. Mary disagreed with Sheila, pointing out that some instances of their answering questions before they were finished were "borderline" and relied on "intuition."
6. "Yeah I think of the mind again, as definitely, to me, not my brain, my mind is me, in a sense, right? But it's me, counting all these things from senses, so there are, you know, there are sensory things coming into my mind from all over, from all of my senses all over me, and sometimes my mind is sort of better at putting bits of puzzles together than it is other times. Cause lots of things that come in, to my mind, are ignored. Sometimes I don't ignore these things and pick them up and put them together, yeah?"
7. "I don't know if it has to do with my will, I mean, I suppose you know the sort of way I think of mind is affected now by computer-y things, it's, it's things coming in, in there and some of them sort of get calculated and whatever and some of them just sort of, float, and just never get in anywhere to be calculated. It doesn't have to do with will, it just sort of happens, to do more with, you know, sort of, luck. What, gets put together and what doesn't. Sometimes things don't, and sometimes things do."
8. "It might have been, like, spiritual, but spiritual not in the religious sense, you know?"
9. "As opposed to, like there's lots of things that have happened to us that we can put down to coincidence, coincidence and knowing each other so well...and if you wanted to trace them back, there's a very reasonable and logical reason that you know, what happened or that this was going to happen. But in this case, there really wasn't."

#### 6. Madelyne's Story (1995)

*Usually these stories are associated with a major traumatic event, somebody's brother was in a car accident, and you know, he died, that kind of thing. Compared to that, it seems trivial. But it's not trivial—it's about my cat (laughs).*

*E: Okay, I've had someone else tell me a story about a cat.*

*M: Oh, good, I feel better now. (laughter) Ah, I went to Vancouver. I moved to Vancouver, and I left my cat, with my mother. She was never keen on, having a cat. She never got contact with cats. She grew up here in Newfoundland, you had animals for a reason, not just to have them, you know? So I had this dream, that, my mother took the cat to the vet, to have it put to sleep. And when I woke up, it was that whole feeling, oh, this has really happened...I'll hear about that now. So I was talking to my brother about a week later. And he said, "I have some bad news." And I said, "She took Cleo to the vet—had her put to sleep." He said, "Did Mom tell you?" I said,*

"No." (laughs) So, I don't know if it was the same day or not. I think actually, it was. But ah, I don't know.

E: So how long ago would this have been?

M: Oh, a little over two years, about two and a half years ago. That's the last cat I had, that's probably why I remember it.

E: So did you have any inkling that the cat was sick? Was it an old cat, or?

M: No. It wasn't sick, actually. My mother was sick, and couldn't take care of it. So. It wouldn't have been my choice. I would have found another home for it, at my brother's. And I mean, you know, I left the cat there so, it kind of absolved my cat responsibility (laughs) so I can't complain.

(later in the interview, Madelyne described the dream itself)

*I came into the house, I was coming up the stairs. And the stairs, the landing was by the kitchen, so I was in the kitchen. So as I came into the house, I heard my mother talking on the phone, and when she heard the door, she stopped talking. And then she said something in a low voice for me not to hear. So ah, and my mother is hard of hearing. So something that she thought you couldn't hear, you actually could? (laughs) So although she thought she was keeping me from knowing that she had done this, she was telling somebody on the phone that she had had to take the cat to the vet and had it put to sleep...so uh, then we sat down at the table, and I already knew. But I made like, I didn't know, so that she could tell me, in her own way, what had happened. And I was getting myself ready to understand it, and not make a fuss. Not in any way, make her think that I thought she shouldn't have done this. So while I was half-listening to her in the dream, I was actually having this running kind of plan, going on in my mind, of how I was going to react. And it was very real, it's the kind of thing that you really do, in awkward situations.*

#### CENTRAL DESCRIPTIVE ELEMENTS:

1. After moving to Vancouver and leaving her cat with her mother in Newfoundland, M has a realistic dream in which she overhears her mother telling someone she has had the cat put down.
2. M wakes up from the dream with a feeling that her dream was real, i.e., related to this actual outcome (that the cat has been put down).
3. She speaks to her brother a week later and he tells her he has bad news.
4. She guesses that the cat has been put down.
5. He confirms this, and assumes their mother had told her.

6. Thinking back she believes she had the dream on the "same day" the cat was put down.

#### **INTERPRETIVE FEATURES WITHIN STORY:**

1. M prepares the listener to consider whether or not her story may be trivial, compared to other crisis-related stories like this, because hers involves a cat.
2. M prepares the listener to consider the mother's action from a cultural point of view--as a Newfoundlander, she is accustomed to thinking of keeping animals for practical purposes ("for a reason"), rather than as pets.
3. M shifts the responsibility for the cat's fate to herself, having chosen to leave the cat, rather than taking it with her or finding another home for it before she left town.

#### **EXPLANATORY POINTS FOLLOWING STORY:**

1. "Of course, you could say it was my guilty conscience, because I did, you know, kind of take off and leave the cat, someplace else (laughs)."
2. Usually considers a "pathological explanation."
3. "Anything that, doesn't have an apparent, mundane explanation--and I don't have any faith system to fall back on it, to explain it--I just kind of put it in a box, somewhere in my mind (laughing). And that's one of those things that I might get explained one of these days, but I don't have one for now. It doesn't freak me out or anything."
4. When M first became aware of this phenomenon--she said she might have regarded it as "just coincidence."
5. "There's a certain amount of probably subconscious construction, maybe, for instance that situation. I knew my mother was sick, there was something wrong, that she wasn't telling me. My relationship with my mother had been, I was very anxious not to add to her responsibility, to, you know, impose. So, those things together, I'm sure, it was working, you know, somewhere in my mind. That could be an explanation. At the time I didn't need to say this, to construct it, but now that I think about it, that could be a logical explanation for it."
5. "My normal dreams are you know, disjointed and, impossible things happen, and rooms change, and things like that. And these dreams are exact, and none of that stuff happens. It's a very, like real time too, it feels like real time, more than--you don't skip around in time."
6. In M's view, the dream didn't correspond directly to what had happened. For example, her brother was the person who actually took the cat to be put down,

at her mother's request. Did not view the dream as a "remote viewing" of reality.

## 7. Robert's Story (1996)

*This happened, many years ago, it'd be 1972, or '73. And I was living with a group of people in Toronto, and we were living in a commune, there were, oh, about eight of us. And we decided to go, together, and buy some land in Québec. So uh, about four of us went up to this place in Québec, Shawville, Québec area, where we knew people. And at this time I had a young cat, a kitten, oh, it'd be less than a year old, so you're getting fairly grown. But this was the first time I'd gone away from the cat, and I was gone for a week. And sometime in the middle of the week, I was lying down at night, and I was just drifting off to sleep and I was in that state of, not being asleep yet but not really being awake either, sort of semi-conscious. And all of a sudden I could see my cat there in front of me, just vividly, with my eyes closed. And I could see that the cat was searching for me. And I sent this, uh, well I, sort of a mental message to the cat, that said, you know, something on the line of, "Hey, I love you, I'm coming home again." And uh, after, you know, after a bit the cat faded away, or I fell asleep, or whatever happened.*

*Anyway, at the end of the week, when I went back to Toronto, the people there told me that the cat had disappeared for a few days, and came back mid-week. But we were never able to pinpoint a date cause I, I never remembered what day of the week exactly that happened and the other people didn't, didn't remember when the cat came back. But I really, very--very, very strongly felt that the cat was searching for me there and that we actually had communicated. Yeah.*

### CENTRAL DESCRIPTIVE ELEMENTS:

1. In 1972 or 1973, while away from Toronto on a trip to Québec, Robert gets a clear vision of his young cat one night in bed, while he is in a state between waking and sleeping.
2. In this vision the cat is searching for Robert and Robert sends a "mental message" to the cat, telling it he loves it and will return.
3. The image may have faded away, or Robert fell asleep.
4. On returning to Toronto at the end of the week, Robert hears from housemates that the cat had disappeared for a few days but had come back.
5. Neither the time of the cat's travels nor the day of the dream could be remembered and pinpointed exactly, in relation to each other; however, Robert believes he has communicated with the cat at that moment, which implies simultaneity.

### INTERPRETIVE FEATURES WITHIN STORY:

1. Robert points out that the times of these events could not be determined with certainty, which suggests that they might not or might indeed have been simultaneous.
2. Nevertheless, Robert describes feeling strongly that the cat had been searching for him and that there had been a communication between them.

### EXPLANATORY POINTS FOLLOWING STORY:

1. Robert pointed out that language was a limited way to convey experience, but "the word that comes to mind is, telepathy, and the word that we used to use back, a lot, at that point, was "astral plane."
2. "[astral plane] That there was some ah, plane outside normal, work-a-day existence, that people and things can communicate on, and travel around on, and go places on. I don't know that the word "astral plane" means that much to me now..."
3. "...but I strongly believe that there is such a thing as telepathy, that there are ways of ah, communicating outside, you know, outside, the, speech and telephone (laughing) and Internet, and all that."
4. "My own belief in reality is that there's a lot of different levels in it, too, and that you can move in and out of different levels of reality and that, you know, there's something, wherever that cat was contacting me, was very real. But it's not the level that I'm normally operating on."
5. "Maybe I normally wouldn't be receptive, maybe it's because I was in that state, where I was semi-conscious, that my brain was working in a different way, or my mind was working in a different way and I was able to pick this up" and pointed out that he would apply this explanation to similar experiences that would involve humans communicating with humans.
6. "Talking about these things as, coincidence, in our culture, like, what does that mean? You know, it doesn't mean anything. It means, something happened that seemed to have great significance, but it didn't have any significance. That's essentially what, you (laughing) were just thinking about me and all of a sudden I came around the corner, but it doesn't really mean anything."
7. "Where in a lot of cultures, the idea of coincidence doesn't exist. They think, oh of course, you know, he came around the corner and I was just thinking of him, yeah, yeah, this is all, all connected. And, people, ah, you have these experiences and you rule them out...you define them as being insignificant. Where, ahm, like Canadian Indians, for instance, don't. Don't think that way...a lot of them accept telepathy as being a fact of, a fact of life [in coordinating participation in rituals and hunts, Robert provides examples]."

8. "I'll probably use the word 'coincidence,' sometimes. But I guess I would use it for things that seem very insignificant, to me...where you're thinking about something and an article about the same thing pops up in the paper and it seems to me much less, much less significant than a person, you know, say, who you haven't seen for a couple of years [and are thinking of] suddenly comes around the corner...it doesn't seem in any way to, affect me, or mean very much to me...I am open...to the idea of coincidence..."
9. "I think the brain is incredibly complex. And, why do I separate your mind and your brain, well I guess when I think of the brain I think of the physical entity, sitting there in your head. And...I'm no scientist, I don't, I just have a very, very small understanding of even what science knows about how the brain works, which is probably a pretty small understanding in itself...I don't think most scientists claim to have a great understanding of the brain...I have some sense of left brain and right brain and, things like that, which is probably more than most people do..."
10. "At the same time...I'm wary of people who say, oh, the brain is wonderful and wondrous and uh, everything that's way out and strange and everything is basically somehow produced in the brain, rather than, interpreted. I guess if I...step out in the morning and I see green trees and blue sky and feel the wind blowing in my face, there aren't too many people saying that the brain has produced all that. Whereas...if I say that I saw my cat, or uh, you know, I saw Jesus shining in front of me or something, people will say, 'Oh, you know, isn't the brain marvelous, what it can do?'"
11. "What do I mean by 'mind' as opposed to brain? I guess when I think of mind I'm thinking more of the functioning of the whole thing and how we use it and read it and interpret it. I don't know if I'm being very clear at all."
12. "Sometimes I'm skeptical...one thing is ah, I think people are incredibly complex. And I think we have very different parts of ourselves...I think we have these complex personalities and what you might be willing to believe by the graveyard at midnight and what you believe in the university classroom in the daytime may be quite different...I think a lot of us on some level might have spiritual belief or religious belief and on another level we're very skeptical of it...intelligent people have to be skeptics and should be skeptics, at times. And should be questioning these things."
13. "I separate skepticism and cynicism...cynicism to me is just, closing your mind to things, and, 'Ah, that's just a load of bullshit.' Where, skepticism is, 'Well I don't know, I gotta think about this, this has to be proven to me'...there are times when I think about things like that and I think well, I don't know, maybe, maybe that doesn't mean all that much."
14. "But to some degree it depends on how vivid the experience is...the thing with the cat was just so vivid to me...I don't know that I was ever very questioning about [more vivid experiences]...the farther removed I get from it, the easier it

- is to be skeptical...you're not skeptical at three in the morning when you've just woken up, but, you know, ten years later when the dream's not as vivid and the whole experience is farther away...[he'd read explanations that attribute dreams to the consumption of certain foods and think] maybe that's all it was."
15. "There are a lot of people who, if they can't see it, if they can't stub their toe on it, if...it isn't there solidly in front of them, they basically don't believe it. And I think...often if you do talk with them, they have experiences that are as unusual or uncanny as anybody else's but, they're um, somehow they can file them away and detach themselves from them, more...I'm not big on blind faith...I'm a person who never had a great problem with the idea that there are things that exist that we don't see everyday...."
  16. "As a child I believed in God and as an adult I believed in God, and my understanding changed really, really significantly, over the years. Which I think helps you, keep your belief, cause I think if...you're 20 years old and you still have a four-year-old's understanding of God well then yeah, the only intelligent response is to be an atheist. But somewhere along the line you've got to come up with an adult's concept of God...people tell stories about ghosts and psychic experiences and fairies and everything else, and I never had a great problem with that."
  17. "Now I don't believe that every single experience that a person talks about is true, and I...do believe that people who get really fixated on ghosts and things, see them where they aren't and...people can kind of create things with their minds and get really wrapped up in something, and see things just because they're all wrapped up in it, but at the same time I believe there's, lots that happens...it isn't hard for me to accept."
  18. Robert explained that he would put a psychic experience in a different category than a mystical experience, although he would also argue that such experiences also occur "in God" because God was, to him, in everyone and everything, and vice-versa, but that a theological explanation for it could be as complicated as a scientific one.

## 8. Matthew's Story (1995)

*One thing that happened to me, that I was going to tell you about—and these things don't happen to me, you know, generally. I don't have rafts of stories of experiences that have happened to me, or I've heard of, a few...but anyway, uh (clears throat) you remember Rose, I went out with Rose. And ah, she was going to a party that night or whatever, and ah, I wasn't going to move, or I didn't want to go. And ah, I was going to stay home. I don't know, I think I was gonna, I'd been doing some work or something. Anyway, I ended up not doing work. Going out somewhere else. Cause it was Friday night or something. Anyway I was having a few drinks and stuff and went back to my ah, to my buddy's house afterwards, who lives...about a five-minute walk*

*from my house, ended up there for a couple drinks afterwards. So anyway, so, later in the night, I don't know what, later, two o'clock, I decided to go home. You know, time to go home anyway so I was walking home and in the five minutes I was walking home I composed a poem, in my head. I, I, I used to sort of write poetry, but I don't, not very—, not something that I do all the time. Just sort of struck me [to make up] for her, and I composed this poem in my head. And uh (laughs) it's no great poem, but I'll tell you what it is anyway. (clears throat) "One more, then" "One more, then we will say goodnight, for more than a rest, to sleep/For once I touched this fragile flower" and for some reason I had this stuff in my head, by the time, you know, a five minutes' walk home. This is a little, little group of words that I somehow, grouped together. Anyway when I came home, when I went up, you know, getting ready for bed, Mom and Dad, were in the room waiting for me to come, to come, to get home, and ah, you know, told me that Rose had died. And it struck me as really, well, you know, I was, I was in shock to find out that she died, and of course then I couldn't stop thinking about that, made up this little poem, you know? I wouldn't say that there was any correspondence between you know the time that she died, the time of the accident and when she died was, you know, later in the night. They tried to uh (pauses) they tried to save her or whatever (clears throat). But there's no correspondence with that time, and, you know, by the time that I was going home. But the fact that I, that I came up with these words, you know, on my walk home...that sort of shocked me...I haven't drawn any conclusions about it, but...That's my story about that.*

#### **CENTRAL DESCRIPTIVE ELEMENTS:**

1. Matthew and his girlfriend Rose do separate activities on a Friday night.
2. Matthew goes out for drinks and returns to a friend's house.
3. Rose goes out to a party, gets into an accident, and passes away in the hospital not long afterward.
4. Matthew leaves his friend's house late in the night and composes part of a poem for Rose during the five minutes it takes him to walk home. The words of the poem speak of "rest," "sleep," having "one more" before saying "goodnight," and a "fragile flower."
5. As soon as he returns home he is informed that Rose has died. He is shocked at the news and thinks back on the poem he had been composing before he got the news.

#### **INTERPRETIVE FEATURES WITHIN STORY:**

1. Matthew points out that he does not have many unusual experiences of the kind he is about to relate.



2. Matthew emphasizes the "five minutes" it took to compose the poem, and the fact that he didn't or doesn't write poetry all the time.
3. Matthew says he was "in shock" at the news and also felt "shocked" when he thought about the poem, afterward.
4. He points out that the time of the writing of the poem may not or did not correspond with the time of her accident or death.
5. Matthew says he has resisted drawing any conclusions about interpreting the experience further.

#### EXPLANATORY POINTS FOLLOWING STORY:

1. Matthew said he generally considers himself to be "really skeptical about all that."
  2. Says that he "might be a Christian" but he doesn't "believe in an afterlife" so generally wouldn't see any evidence for its existence.
  3. Allows that he might change his mind when he gets older.
  4. "Well, I'm not just skeptical, I (laughs) I don't believe it--period. You know, generally."
  5. "But I don't know how to explain it, that was really, the scariest thing--to try to, you know, you don't believe it, but [you think] what's going on here now?"
  6. Only believes in sensory forms of communication.
  7. Reiterated that it was probable that he had been composing the poem *after* the time Rose died, but he wasn't absolutely sure.
9. **Alan's Story (1995, 1996)**

#### Version 1 (1995)

*I was in grade thirteen in Ontario, in Toronto, and I was living at home with my family and we lived in a three-story townhouse. And ah, I was upstairs on the third story, in my room with my door closed, doing some homework, I believe--hard to believe, I know--I was like that in the past, too. And um, the doorbell rang downstairs, you could hear the doorbell through the house. It was an electric, electronic thing that made a loud noise, so you could hear someone was at the door. And as soon as the doorbell rang, I'm sure it was as the doorbell rang you know I thought, you know, I wonder who that could be, I don't know if I thought that, but right away I knew who it was at the door, it was a friend of my mother's, who had just, divorced from her husband, not, or well, just left her husband, in the, plan to divorce him, cause she just left the house, where they were, had been living together, for the last time. And she came right, directly to my mother's house, to my parents' house, to talk to my mother about it. And I knew that, upstairs on the third floor, that that's who she was, and that's what had happened.*

*Um, I didn't come out of the room, ever, I never went down, I never actually, I think I heard muffled voices, later, or like a few minutes later when she came in for a while, but I think they might have gone out. And I never went outside, never actually went to see, if it was her or not, particularly. And ah, and I didn't ask about it for a week and a half. And about a week and a half later, or two weeks later, in casual conversation with my mother, it came up, that she had left her husband. And I didn't, I didn't even ask, try to confirm whether it was that night, that I recall. And I didn't say anything about it to her at the time, that I had had this experience. Um. Now I knew that they were having trouble, I think, um, before this, event. I knew that they, she, wasn't very happy with her husband and, whatever. But, so, but the amazing thing was I knew, three floors up behind the door that she was outside of the door, that's who it was and that's what had occurred. And I confirmed it in my own mind enough, I don't know if I actually asked my mother if that was the night that it happened or not, that she came, I think I might have. But I remember thinking to myself that I had confirmed it, in some way. But as I said, I didn't confirm it for like a week and a half or two weeks, and then, later on, it came up. But anyway.*

*E: So what was that moment like sort of made it stand out so much in your mind? Did you know, did you have some, anticipation of it, do you think, before?*

*Alan: Before she even got to the door, you mean?*

*E: Like, you had a sense that she was divorcing her husband, before?*

*Alan: As I say, I think I knew that there were problems in their marriage, I had no idea where, at that point, how far along it was, or how upset it was. I mean she was still living with—this was the day she actually left the house, and never went back to live with him again. This was the moment that she went away from the house...my mother worked with her and she knew her quite well. This guy, I knew the guy too, I mean he'd come down to the house a few times, built some stuff in our backyard and things. He was a, a builder of some type I think.*

*Anyway, so uh, as I say, I think I knew they were having problems but not, I don't know how, I'm sure I wouldn't have known how bad they were or whether she was about to leave him. I remember at the time just thinking, you know, thinking how, I wasn't like, freaked out or upset, but I was quite surprised in a way, in my mind, that I knew, this. And I remember thinking, I don't want to go out, I don't particularly want to go down there as she's—. I mean on some level, right away, I believe I clicked in to the fact that, you know, she was in great, stress. I mean she was very, very upset obviously. Very freaked out by the whole thing...it was like a flash, almost. It was the flash of, knowing. I don't think I had a picture, particularly. I don't*

*remember there being like, I don't remember sort of seeing her out there in tears or something like that. I just remember, I just knew instantly who it was, and what was wrong.*

#### **CENTRAL DESCRIPTIVE ELEMENTS:**

1. Alan is on the third floor of his house, occupied at his desk, with his door closed.
2. He hears the doorbell ring and immediately knows who is at the door and why (a friend of his mother's has just left her husband).
3. He hears muffled voices.
4. Approximately an hour and a half after the event he decides it must be a psychic experience.
5. A week and a half to two weeks later, Alan talks with his mother and confirms that this woman had indeed visited for that reason on that night.

#### **INTERPRETIVE FEATURES WITHIN STORY:**

1. Alan points out that he does not know whether he asked himself who was at the door, implying that he cannot remember precisely what he thought at the time, other than knowing right away who was at the door.
2. Alan repeatedly uses phrases "I think/don't think" or "I remember thinking" in trying to remember precise details and time sequences.
3. Alan says he did not go downstairs that night to confirm whether his impression of who was at the door was correct or not.
4. Alan says he might have already had some knowledge that there were problems in this woman's marriage, but would not have known "how far along" the situation was.
5. When the doorbell sounded, Alan remembers his impression was "surprising" to him, came to him "instantly" as a "flash, of knowing" but not as a "picture."

#### **EXPLANATORY POINTS FOLLOWING STORY:**

1. She was sending out a "distress vibe" that came off her in "large waves" or "psychic waves" and he "picked them up." People can communicate their state across sense barriers (across walls, for example) by just being, that other people can "pick up on," and "interpret," and "know."
2. The woman's general openness about emotions might have contributed.
3. More extreme an experience than an "intuition"--drawing a line between psychic and intuitive he would class this as "more psychic than intuitive."
4. "On some level, maybe I did hear her come in the house and maybe I did hear her say, I've left my husband, but I'm almost positive that didn't happen." Alan

clarifies further that he remembers knowing who it was as soon as the bell rang. Remembers hearing voices but believes any talk he could have overheard was after the doorbell rang, and after he already "knew."

5. Her being conveyed this emotional state, perhaps radiation, like an isotope, so her whole was giving off waves of pain, but not to him intentionally. Just occurred.
6. Believes it's a function of the mind, but "in the brain." "I don't think it's, her knee communicating with me, particularly, or my knee responding to hers (laughter)." (Jokes about knee-jerk reactions vs. gut reactions.) Views "mind" as having to do with conscious intentions, and this wasn't consciously or intentionally projected to him. This occurred in an unconscious way. Her distress was simply "telegraphed"--though the language is a problem. Wouldn't say her "soul" was speaking either.
7. No religious explanations.
8. Allows that the story could be less than accurate as he's relying on retrospective memory and "almost making it up again" as he goes along.

#### **Version 2 (E-mail Communication, 1996)**

*One year, in one of my final years of high school in Toronto, I was working upstairs on the third floor of my parents' town house with my door closed--it was late afternoon. I was doing schoolwork when I heard the doorbell ring three floors below. As soon as it rang and before I heard anyone come in, I knew who was at the door and why. It was one of my mother's good friends, a woman she had worked with, and she had just come from the final leave-taking of her husband who she had decided to leave/get divorced from. So she was very distraught. I believe today that I realized/knew that there was something weird/telepathic going on and I knew this instantly as it happened...but I was not afraid or awestruck or weirded out...which is kind of surprising. I remember feeling how upset she was and feeling vaguely sad for her, vaguely worried though not very--it was more of a sad feeling of concern, but I knew my mother was there for her/with her. I did not get up from my desk and or open the door to confirm that it was her--at least in my memory I do not think that I did, I was just so sure of it in my bones. I also think that my mother and her went out somewhere almost immediately--they didn't stay in the house, and I also remember that I did not check out if it was her or why she had come that day--I did not check this out in any active way--did not actively seek to confirm if I was right/if I had got the message right--I remember getting a very basic confirmation some weeks later when my mother mentioned in conversation that her friend and her friend's husband were separating--and I don't even know if the conversation was with me--I might have just been present and heard her say this to someone else--again, I did not ask her if they had split up...I am highlighting my lack of interest/curiosity in finding out if I actually had had a telepathic experience because I now find it interesting that I did*

*not have more interest at the time/more wonderment/amazement at the very fact that I had had such an experience. I sort of put this down to the fact that at the time the gravity/graveness of the situation [the upsetting splitting up of the couple, friends of my parents] seemed more significant than the telepathy, and MORE IMPORTANT, was just how very matter of fact the telepathic moment of knowing seemed--it was like so very certain/straightforward as it occurred--I was just sitting there one moment knowing nothing, next moment, bell rings, and I know in a very certain way a very significant fact about the person who is at the door who given where I am in the house etc., I should not be able to know the identity of, never mind anything salient about her thoughts. I just kind of accepted that I knew, that I had suddenly been sent and/or received this information--and as the days passed and eventually I found out they had split--it all seemed perfectly normal/inevitable--I think I remember feeling as I heard that they had split a sense of "oh yeah, so I was right, so I did get that message," and again it all seemed so matter of fact--I wasn't shocked or amazed or worried that I was getting telepathic messages--I did not tell anybody about it for many months, maybe even a few years later. But I always certainly knew that there was something supernatural about it--or extrasensory is likely a better word. As I mentioned, I think that even as it occurred I realized there was something extrasensory about it...but this was not disturbing per se.*

*The other thing worth mentioning is that I don't think I knew to any great extent that she and her husband were on the verge of a break up--I might have known [I think] that there were some tensions in the marriage, but I certainly don't believe that I knew they were going to split up. I certainly don't recall my mother or parents discussing this before it happened. Anyhow. the end!!*

(Note: All ellipses in this written version are Alan's own, and do not represent deletions. Paragraph breaks and punctuation are also retained as is.)

#### **CENTRAL DESCRIPTIVE ELEMENTS:**

1. Alan is on the third floor of his house, occupied at his desk, with his door closed, in late afternoon.
2. He hears the doorbell ring and before he hears anyone come in, he immediately knows who is at the door and why (a friend of his mother's has just left her husband).
3. As soon as he knows this ("instantly") he decides he is having a weird/telepathic experience.
4. Alan feels how upset she is, and feels concern for her.
5. Some weeks later, Alan's mother confirms that this woman and her husband are separating.

**INTERPRETIVE FEATURES WITHIN STORY:**

1. Alan points out that he was not afraid or awestruck when he realized or knew that something weird or telepathic was going on.
2. He uses phrases "I think that," "I remember feeling," "at least in my memory," "I don't even know if," and "I believe today that" in trying to recall precise details.
3. Alan says that he did not get up from his desk or open his door to confirm who was visiting because he felt sure he knew.
4. Alan also wonders in retrospect at his lack of curiosity to confirm afterward whether the woman had been at the door that night for that reason.
5. Alan speculates that he might not have sought to confirm the visit on the spot because of the gravity of the situation.
6. Alan says he accepted the experience matter-of-factly at the time and knew it had been supernatural or extrasensory.
7. Alan says he might have known about tensions in the marriage but cannot recall hearing about the split from his parents, and therefore would not have known that this woman was on the verge of a break-up.

**EXPLANATORY POINTS FOLLOWING STORY:**

None. Written version clearly marks its own end ("the end"). All explanation and interpretation is included within this version of the story, rather than following it.

**10-11. Diana's Stories****Story A, Version 1 (Diana, from field notes, 1995):**

*She said, "I only had one time with Julie and Gina where..." and launched into a story about a time when one girl had two Band-Aids on her knees and came home saying her teacher told her that if she soaked in the bathtub for "ten hours" the Band-Aids would come off (afraid of tearing them off, apparently). So the two girls were in the tub, soaking, that night and Diana says, she covered both of their eyes with washcloths and when she went to pull Gina's Band-Aid off while she wasn't looking, both girls reached down to the same knee and cried out as if she had done it to both. "And there was no way they—they both had the washcloths over their eyes." And she said she asked the other one, "Now why are you crying?" (Can't remember what the girl's answer was, exactly.)*

**CENTRAL DESCRIPTIVE ELEMENTS:**

1. One of Diana's twin daughters has two Band-Aids on her knees.
2. A teacher in school told her if she soaked in the bathtub for "ten hours" she could get the Band-Aid to come off painlessly.
3. *In the bathtub at home, Diana puts washcloths up to both girls' faces so as to remove the Band-Aid (Band-Aids?) from one girl's knee.*
4. When she pulls the Band-Aid off, both girls reach for the same knee and start to cry.
5. Diana asks why the twin without the Band-Aid is crying.

**INTERPRETIVE FEATURES WITHIN STORY:**

1. Diana points out that in her experience of raising the twins, there is only one incident of this kind.
2. Diana questions why the other twin is crying, rather than assuming there had been a simultaneous experience.

**EXPLANATORY POINTS FOLLOWING STORY:**

General discussion at the Twins Association meeting at which this story was told covered three possible explanations for such events:

1. That such experiences could be explained by twins' being so closely related biologically and genetically.
2. That such experiences could be explained by twins' having been together in the womb.
3. That such experiences could be explained by twins' being encouraged and conditioned to tell dramatic stories demonstrating their closeness as twins.

**Story A, Version 2 (Diana, 1996):**

*It was a shock to me, you know, because they were ah, just sitting there in the bathtub, and when it happened, I just had to sit back. I couldn't believe the both of them reacted the way they did. What, so you want me to tell it from the beginning? Okay. One of mine [of her twin daughters, then at age 3 or 4] had fallen and scraped her knee, so she had this, this Band-Aid on it. And it was on it for, well over a week. And no way would she take it off. But one of the little girls in daycare told her that if she soaked in the bathtub for ten hours, the Band-Aid would come off. So when I had them in the bathtub, they had planned to stay there for ten hours to get this Band-Aid off. So I got the two of them—because I know if one saw the other one she would tell, that I was going to take the Band-Aid off—so I got them both to put*

face cloths up to their eyes. And while they both had the face cloths up to their eyes, I ripped off, the Band-Aid (laughs). But the two of them grabbed their knees, screaming hysterically. And screaming and screaming. So I just sat back on the toilet and just cracked up laughing because I just couldn't believe it. You know, that the two of them reacted when both of their eyes were covered, so it's not like one could see the other to like, to know that, what was happening. So it was quite a, quite a shock to see them both have the same feelings. You know, at the same time.

*E: So the other one didn't have a Band-Aid?*

*Diana: No, she just grabbed her knee and started screaming, just like the other one who did have the Band-Aid.*

*E: Amazing. So...did they react while they still had the washcloth over their eyes?*

*D: They sort of dropped it, and grabbed their knee I guess at the, at the second I pulled it off. You know, it was just like an instantaneous thing. One didn't wait to see what the other one was going to do, they both did it together. Which really, you know, surprised me...*

#### **CENTRAL DESCRIPTIVE ELEMENTS:**

1. One of Diana's twin daughters has a Band-Aid on her knee for over a week.
2. A little girl in daycare tells her if she soaks in the bathtub for "10 hours" she could get the Band-Aid to come off painlessly.
3. Both girls get into the bathtub and plan to stay there until the Band-Aid comes off.
4. Diana puts washcloths up to both girls' faces so as to remove the Band-Aid from one girl's knee.
5. When she pulls the Band-Aid off, both girls reach for their knees and scream.

#### **INTERPRETIVE FEATURES WITHIN STORY:**

1. Diana describes feeling both "shocked" and amused ("sat back...cracked up laughing") at the incident.
2. "I just couldn't believe it..."
3. "...the two of them reacted when both of their eyes were covered, so it's not like one could see the other to like, to know that, what was happening."
4. "It was quite a, quite a shock to see them both have the same feelings. You know, at the same time."



**EXPLANATORY POINTS FOLLOWING STORY:**

1. "I had heard, twins feeling the same and all that, and you know, you're not sure if it's real or not, but I was really, really, really surprised."
2. "I do believe it, but I guess I had never experienced it for myself, so it was you know, like, room for doubt, there? But then when I witnessed it, it was like--yeah."
3. "They had always done things together, and if one cried the other cried. But it was usually when my back was turned so I never knew, you know, got all of the story."
4. "It was [snaps fingers] instant, together. There was no break, you know, there was not a, a breath before the other one started to cry. They both started screaming together. Yeah. At the same time...when they were babies if one cried, the other one would cry. But not when they got older, they were old enough to get past that, that stage."
5. "I think it's just an inner bond that they have from conception, that, it's just there. You know they're together for nine months inside, and then, mine are so close...they just do have, I don't know, this thing between them that I guess unless you're a twin you can't understand."
6. "I think it goes a little more than ESP, you know, because we all have a sixth sense about something. You know, like we could have a feeling that someone's not happy in your family so you can give them a call, but theirs--I think a twin's bond goes much deeper than ESP. You know, it's just, in the genes (laughs)."
7. "I don't hold it as a religious thing. I really thing it's, just, in the genes: either you have it or you don't. And I think twins are more fortunate to have it...I think they're very lucky."

**Story A, Version 3 (Diana's daughters, age 7, 1996)**

*E: So do you guys remember the story about the Band-Aid?*

*G and J: Yes.*

*E: So you can remember this.*

*J: Yes--*

*D: Mommy was so mean, wasn't she?*

*G and J, shouting over each other at first, until G continues:*

*I had this Band-Aid for a long time and every time I started to take it off it would hurt, so when, Mom's, said for us to close our eyes and she, we were in the bathtub, so she gets the face cloth and pretends she was just washing our face then she goes SHH and ripped off my Band-Aid and at the same time we started to cry--*

*J: (shouting from the word "Band-Aid") AND THEN SHE--I had to think up an excuse cause it hurt me when it hurt her cause, then she started to cry, then it hurt me when she started to cry, so I started to cry, and then, um, I had to think up an excuse, and she goes, and she goes, Mom goes, "JULIE, what's wrong?" And I go (loudly, as if crying) "My throat hurts!" (laughter)*

#### **CENTRAL DESCRIPTIVE ELEMENTS:**

1. Gina has a Band-Aid on for a long time and every time she starts to remove it it hurts.
2. Diana says for the girls to close their eyes and washes their faces with a washcloth.
3. Diana rips off the Band-Aid.
4. At the same time, Gina and Julie start to cry.
5. Diana asks Julie what is wrong.
6. Julie answers that her throat hurts.

#### **INTERPRETIVE FEATURES WITHIN STORY:**

1. Diana jokingly suggests that she had been mean (to rip off a Band-Aid).
2. Gina asserts that her mother was "pretending" to wash their faces, when her real intention was to rip the Band-Aid off.
3. Julie says that she had to think of an "excuse" to explain her reaction, which was saying that her throat hurt.

#### **EXPLANATORY POINTS AFTER STORY:**

Refer to explanatory points after Story B, Version 2 below, collected in the same interview.

#### **Story B, Version 1 (Diana, from field notes, 1995)**

*She also told about a time that the girls said they had had a nightmare, were staying over somewhere, and they explained that when one was having her nightmare, they decided to "put their heads together" (literally) and that would make it better. And Diana said she asked them what it was about (a killer clown?) and one would tell her how it went, then the other would continue, then the other, and so on. Other women*

*at the meeting reacted by saying/agreeing that they didn't "play it up" as then the twins would be more liable to feel they should "tell stories" (for spooky effect.)*

#### **CENTRAL DESCRIPTIVE ELEMENTS:**

1. Diana's twin daughters are staying over at someone else's house, where one of them has a nightmare.
2. They decide to put their heads together (literally) to make it better.
3. Diana thinks it may have been about a killer clown.
4. The girls take turns telling her how the dream went.

#### **INTERPRETIVE FEATURES WITHIN STORY:**

None recorded in notes.

#### **EXPLANATORY POINTS FOLLOWING STORY:**

1. Diana agrees with other women at the meeting who point out that twins can be encouraged to "play it up."
2. Diana's earlier comment about Story A being the "only" incident of its kind suggests that she does not take this story quite so seriously as a simultaneous experience.

#### **Story B, Version 2 (Diana's daughters, age 7, 1996)**

*E: So do you remember what the dream was about?*

*D: No, but I could probably ask them, they probably would. They don't forget anything. I can't remember. I have a lousy memory...I don't know if it was a clown*

*who was chasing them, or, it was like a bad clown and not a good clown (laughter)...they can probably tell you better, you know, because, where it's them...*

*[While tape is off, girls are summoned.]*

*D: Can you guys remember your dream, your nightmare that you had at the cabin?*

*J: Yes.*

*D: And what did you do?*

*J: Dreamed the same thing.*

*D: Dreamed the same thing. But what did you do to share the dream?*

*G: We put our heads together.*

*D: Like what? (girls lean heads sideways until they touch, D and E laugh) So what was your dream about, can you remember?*

*G: A wolf--?*

*D: A wolf?*

*J: Mm-hm, and we killed him.*

*G: I can't remember all of it (J giggles); it was a while ago.*

*D: I know it was a long time ago.*

*E: A wolf. So you think it was a wolf? Was it other things than a wolf or just a wolf?*

*G: Us.*

*J: And Mommy was in it. You and us killed the wolf.*

*D: Oh is that right?*

*J: Jasmine wasn't in it.*

#### **CENTRAL DESCRIPTIVE ELEMENTS:**

1. Diana asks if the twins remember the nightmare they had at the cabin.
2. They answer yes and say they dreamed the same dream.
3. Diana asks what they did to share the dream and they answer that they put their heads together.
4. The girls say their dream was about a wolf, which they and their mother killed.
5. They say their sister was not in the dream.

### INTERPRETIVE FEATURES WITHIN STORY:

1. Diana's prompt "like what?" suggests that they put their heads together "to share the dream."
2. The apparent need for questions suggests that the story might not be remembered as fully or enthusiastically in the family as the Band-Aid story (Story A, above).
3. Gina points out that she can't remember all of the dream because it was "a while ago." Diana agrees that it was a "long time ago."
4. Diana comments, before the girls come in to tell their story, that her own memory is "lousy" and her daughters' memories are better than hers.

### EXPLANATORY POINTS FOLLOWING STORY:

1. "...when we have scary nightmares when we go, when we're together, it doesn't make us so scared, if we're with someone."
2. When asked where they think dreams come from, both girls point to their heads and answer, "Your brain!"
3. The girls describe playing games of "guess the number I'm thinking of" with their sister.
4. "...sometimes we used to say, um, 'Are you thinking what I'm thinking?' and she goes, 'I'm thinking what you're thinking, what are we thinking?' then we would say it out, at the same time" (with the answer being correct).
5. They assert that they are never wrong, but when asked to try the numbers game then and there, they shyly decline.

### 12. Laura's Story (interviewed by Ellen Damsky, 3 August 1994)

*L: I was asleep, sound asleep and um, I had a dream. I'm really, really close to my father. I'm the only child and he's always been like my hero, and, a man I've always looked up to and I've always been really close to him. I was sound asleep one evening, he never had medical problems before and, I dreamt that I was talking to him on the phone...and, I answered the phone and, he said "hi" back. And I'm like, "Hey Dad," you know, "What's going on?" And he said, "Why, I'm in a little bit of trouble." And I said, "What kind of trouble are you in?" And um, cause I was thinking, you know, is it work trouble? Is it family trouble? Is it car trouble? And he said, "Well it's just a little bit of trouble but it's nothing that I want you to be concerned about 'cause it's going to be okay." And then my phone started ringing and woke me up. And I picked up the phone and it was my mother and she said, "Laura get out of bed. We've just taken your father to the hospital, he's had a heart attack." I'm*

like, "No he didn't, Mom." And she's like, "Laura Lynn, you wake up!" (laughing) "And get dressed! And get over here." And it was like, really weird 'cause I, normally I'd freak in situations like that but I just, he told me he was going to be okay. So I just got dressed and I drove over very calmly and I walked in, and my Mom's a wreck and she's like, it's serious. And I'm like, no, it's not. He told he was going to be okay. And then um, it turned out he had like a spasming esophagus, which gives the same symptoms as a heart attack, but it was not an actual heart attack.

ED: Did you, did you tell your father about that?

L: Uh huh.

ED: What did he, what did he say?

L: My Dad's a very quiet, he doesn't talk about his emotions much or what's going on inside of him. All he said was, "I was thinking about you and I knew you'd be worried."

ED: How did he react when you told him.

L: Just smiled.

ED: Knowingly?

L: Just smiled.

#### CENTRAL DESCRIPTIVE ELEMENTS:

1. While sleeping soundly, Laura dreams that she is talking with her father on the phone. He tells her he is in some trouble but that she is not to worry, because he will be okay.
2. The phone rings and Laura wakes up.
3. Her mother tells her her father has had a heart attack and has been taken to the hospital.
4. Laura tells her mother it was not a heart attack and proceeds more calmly than she ordinarily would in a crisis, knowing her father will be okay.
5. Her father turns out to have had a spasming esophagus.
6. Laura tells her father about her dream; he smiles and tells her he had been thinking about her and knew she would be worried.

**INTERPRETIVE FEATURES WITHIN STORY:**

1. Laura mentions twice that she was "sound asleep" when she had this dream.
2. She points out that her father had never had previous medical problems.
3. She states that she has always been very close to her father, as an only child, looking up to him as a hero.
4. She characterizes her ability to stay calm as "weird," saying that normally she would "freak" in situations like this one.
5. She says that her father is quiet and rarely speaks of his emotions.
6. When questioned, Laura does not qualify her father's smile any further (repeats that he "just smiled").

**EXPLANATORY POINTS FOLLOWING STORY:**

1. "I couldn't figure out if he thought I was nuts (giggling) you know, it's [his reaction was] just, kind of like patting me on the head..."
2. Laura stated that her father would not normally call her up with a problem, as he had in the dream.
3. She says that the phone conversation in her dream "scared her" because the "trouble" would have to be serious for him to call, being a "private man."
4. "...at first she [mother] thought I'd, totally lost my mind and then, when it came back she was like, 'How did you know that?' I said, 'Cause he told me.'"
5. "[My mother] was just like, 'Oh you always get all these feelings'...No, she believes. I mean she wasn't making fun, but it was just kind of like, wow...Because I've, even when I was a kid the phone would ring and I'd say, that's So-and-So. Or I'd say, Aunt Mary and Uncle Ray are coming over tonight. And then they'd show up" (and other dreams about friends' troubles or affairs came to pass).
6. "I think we probably all have that innate ability? And some of us are more sensitive than others?"
7. "And then, I consider myself a fairly spiritual person? And I think part of it is, um, God, kind of relating this stuff to me for, whatever reason, I don't know."
8. "I don't know [why experiences involve her and certain other people]. That's, that's what's weird, cause some of them I'm really close to, you know, and so it's real comforting. But some people I mean I don't even know, or, barely know."
9. "Every psychic I've ever been to, tells me I'm like, extremely psychic but I'm afraid of it...a little bit. I mean do you really want to know like terrible things that are going to happen, or?"
10. "I'm adopted so, I mean it's not like [this sort of experience] runs in the family...[E: ...then as far as like, being tied to your father, it's not like he's biologically tied"] Right. Right. More, spiritual bonding kind of thing."

### 13-16. Grace's Stories (1993)

#### Story A

*Well the main one, I guess was, first thing I thought about was, this summer. My father died. And two weeks before, from about, it was just after my birthday, I started saying to my friends, there's a storm coming and they were, "What do you mean there's a storm coming?" and I said I don't know, but if I closed my eyes I could actually, see, the clouds. I could just imagine it. And ah, it was just rolling, in. And they said, "Well what do you mean, we're going to have bad weather?" I said, "No," I said, "there's just something bad is going to happen in the next two weeks. So I kept saying it and kept saying it and I, I didn't really know what it was, just had this really bad feeling. And I was supposed to go to camp. And I went away to camp on Friday morning, and, must have been Saturday night, no sorry, I went Saturday morning, and that night it started to rain while I was at camp. And I was thinking, well, gee, maybe this is the storm, and I started thinking about it about one o'clock in the morning, just after it started raining really hard. It wasn't a storm, that's just what came into my mind. And the next morning I uh, I was called out to speak to the camp director after breakfast and he told me that my father had died. About one o'clock in the morning, roughly. And it just struck me like, finally I knew what the storm was, I knew what this bad thing that had happened was supposed to be. It was pretty much stormy afterwards too, cause um, all the arrangements and, you know it's just been a lot of problems, like uh, coming back to school. That's why I'm not in school this term. I couldn't, couldn't focus on anything.*

#### Story B (Generalized Examples)

*But it was just, really strange, and it's not the only thing like that...my sister, now, she gets sick. Like, she can be in Halifax, that's where she's living now, she'll get sick and I'll get the same thing at the same time, roughly, but not quite as bad? So usually now when I get sick I start to worry, "Oh my gosh, is Diane OK, is she--" if I, one time I was in here visiting a friend of mine, and I had to go to the hospital because I started having a really bad headache. I'd had headaches before, bad headaches, but never like that. And the doctor said it was migraines, and I thought that was strange because I'd never had them before. So when I got back to my friend's house I called back home to Bonavista and I said, "Mom," I said, "you'll never guess where I just was." And she said, "Where?" I said, "I was down to the Grace, they said I had migraine headaches. I don't know what happened." She goes, "That's really weird," and I said, "Why" and she goes, "I just got off the phone with your sister Diane. She's in the hospital for migraines!" So she kept having her migraines, hers were really bad. She has to be careful what she eats, she has to stay away from all these different things, and mine eased up after a while.*



*But it's just, it's not like, it's not just that, she ahm, one time she started having really bad pains in her side. And it was going on for a couple of days. And the next day or, one day she had to go in the hospital. The night before that, I started having pains in my side as well. And I didn't know why. But I was thinking, "My gosh, great, appendicitis, and the two of us get it at the same time." So she went to the hospital and they took out her appendix, but while they were operating they found that it wasn't her appendix really, it was just, it was a cyst that had, burst? And ah, I kept having the pain for so long. After a while it went away, and the doctor thought it might have been a cyst. They don't know. It's just ah, just these little things. If she gets sick, I'll get sick too. She had to have surgery on her jaw recently and I've always had problems with my jaw, it's not straight. But lately there's been a lot of pain in the same side that she had to have surgery on...*

*E: ...is this a twin sister?*

*Grace: No, she's not. She's eight years older than I am. But she's the one, the one, I have two sisters and two brothers and she's the one I'm closest to...*

### **Story C**

*...I think my Mom thinks I'm crazy. One of the worst things was ah, well, besides Dad of course, even though that wasn't such a strong, like I didn't really know what was going to happen, I ah, when I was oh, gosh, sixteen, so that was 1990, the fall of 1990, I was after getting out of the hospital for depression. And I was in class and I started daydreaming. And I, it was like I was ah, in the woods, and I was walking up to this tree and all of a sudden it wasn't me in the daydream anymore it was ah, a young guy? And he took a, he took like a rope, or something that looked like a rope, and tied it around the tree and he hung himself. And I just shocked myself out of it, I went back to class, or went back to working in class and I just tried to forget about it, but it was still on my mind. And a couple of days later Mom told me that um, a young guy from here, in St. John's was after hanging himself in the forest. He ran away. And ah, they couldn't find him. I think it was an extension cord that he used. I just couldn't believe that. I told my mother. They took me back to see my psychiatrist. I, I didn't get over it, I just ended up back in hospital, I just couldn't deal with that. That just—*

*E: Frightening.*

*Grace: Yeah, it was really frightening. Cause I hadn't had anything that strong before, especially waking. Dreams didn't bother me that much, but never a daydream like that. And like, even if it was coincidence, it was still just too weird to handle.*

**Story D**

*I have another friend who, she's from...Clarenville I believe, and she's a bit older than me. She's about 30. And one of her children, ah, she was sitting down watching TV one day, this was in the middle of winter, and all of a sudden she got up, grabbed her husband, said, "Come on...Walter's in trouble, he's drowning." And he, "What do you mean, he's drowning?" "He's drowning, he was out skating on the pond and he's drowning!" And she took him right to the pond, and here was her son after falling through the ice. She just, sitting watching TV all of a sudden she just knew. And I was talking to her about this this summer, the second time I was at camp, this was a couple of weeks after my Dad died, and we got into this subject about the storm and everything. And she told me, she said, "Look," she said, "I, first when I, this happened to me I prayed for God to take it away." She said, "Now I don't think it's a curse anymore, I think it's a gift from God," she said, "that's probably what it is." So, I'm trying to hold onto that and not be so scared anymore.*

**CENTRAL DESCRIPTIVE ELEMENTS - Stories A, C and D**

- A**
- Two weeks before her father's death in summer 1993, Grace begins telling her friends "a storm is coming." She can imagine this and can see storm clouds, rolling in, when she closes her eyes.
  - When asked to explain, Grace says that something bad will happen within the next two weeks. She says this repeatedly.
  - She goes away to camp on Saturday morning and it starts to rain that night.
  - After it starts raining hard, but not storming, about 1 o'clock in the morning, Grace wonders whether this might be the "storm" she was anticipating.
  - The next morning after breakfast, the camp director informs her her father had died, at about one o'clock in the morning.
  - Grace feels that at last she knows what the "storm" was she was anticipating.
  - She describes the period immediately after her father's death as stormy.
- C**
- After getting out of the hospital for depression in 1990, Grace has a vivid daydream in class.
  - In the daydream, she walks up to a tree in the woods. She is replaced in the daydream then by a young man, who ties something like a rope around a tree and hangs himself.
  - Grace "shocks herself" out of this daydream and gets back to work in class.
  - She tries to forget about this daydream but it remains on her mind.

5. A few days later her mother tells her of a young man from St. John's who had run away and hanged himself with an extension cord in the forest.
  6. Grace tells her mother about the dream and is taken back to her psychiatrist.
  7. She does not get over this, is unable to deal with it, and is re-hospitalized.
- D**
1. Grace's friend, about age 30, from Clarendville, Newfoundland, is sitting at home watching television one winter day.
  2. Suddenly she declares her son Walter is drowning after skating on the pond. Her husband is puzzled.
  3. She takes her husband to the pond and finds the son has fallen through the ice.
  4. The son is rescued/injured/dies (information left out)
  5. In speaking with Grace about such experiences, this woman tells Grace she has come to believe this ability is a gift from God.

#### **INTERPRETIVE FEATURES WITHIN STORY:**

- A**
1. Grace emphasizes her repetition of her prediction.
  2. She describes her feeling of anticipation as a "really bad feeling" although she did not know what bad thing she was anticipating.
  3. She conveys the upset about her father's death by pointing out that she could not focus on or attend school.
- C**
1. "I think my Mom thinks I'm crazy."
  2. Grace describes this experience as "one of the worst things."
  3. Grace says she "couldn't believe that" when her mother told her about the suicide.
  4. She calls the experience "really frightening," especially because it was strong and it occurred while she was awake.
  5. "...even if it was coincidence, it was still just too weird to handle."
- D**
1. This woman's initial reaction is to pray for God to take such an ability away.
  2. Later, her reaction is positive; she tells Grace she has come to believe the ability is a gift from God.
  3. Grace affirms that she is trying to see her own experiences as a gift from God, rather than being "so scared."

4. Grace describes the woman's experience as immediate and certain, as in saying she "just *knew*."

**EXPLANATORY POINTS FOLLOWING STORY (all stories):**

1. "It's coincidence, has to be coincidence." "I've been told that it was all coincidence."
2. "When it started happening...more and more, I said, 'Well, maybe it's, I'm just crazy.'" "I've been told I was crazy."
3. "Then I started finding other people that, could do it too, and I said, 'Well, you know, maybe it's real.'"
4. "I've been called a liar."
5. "I was actually told [by a friend who was "supposed to be" a born-again Christian] I was possessed by the Devil...and I started thinking well, were the prophets possessed by the Devil? I mean, they knew things, people in the Bible lots of times had dreams that came true and, well, maybe I'm just, like that."
6. "And I was also told that it was a gift from God. I like the last one best, I prefer that. I prefer that explanation."
17. **Ben's "Non-Story" (Generalization Narratives with Explanations, including the "Aunt Matilda" model, the "Oh Poor Billy" model, the "No Ship Sank" model, the "Pass Me the Bananas" model, and the "Oh God, Jack" model, 1995)**

*If there's phenomena now that we can't explain, we needn't necessarily assign it to the mystical, or to the realm of ESP or telepathy, or whatever. We need only perhaps say that these are problems that science hasn't gotten around to solve yet. And I mean, some people would say certainly that these problems are unsolvable by science but I'm sure that not long ago, as far as the spread of history goes, flight was a problem which was unsolvable by science...I admit to a certain amount of anger with this, ESP and things, it's that I sit a lot of the time and I watch American television and I see these "psychics" coming on, you know, "Got," you know, "money problems," all this stuff, "Call us: \$3.99 a minute," as if that's going to solve your money problems, that's going to get you into deeper trouble (laughing)...I'm sure there are people who believe in ESP and believe in ah, paranormal phenomena, who are quite legitimate and quite honest and so on, and would never think about taking another person, but I mean at the same time it presents such an opportunity for the people who aren't so ethical to really, like, mine the fears and anxieties of others. It's almost like a witch doctor demanding six kettles [quintals?] of fish so he can come by your hut and dance around your daughter and shake his beads, so she'll recover from tuberculosis. I got a problem with that too.*

E: ...Would you say you have ever had an experience of knowing something about somebody else's experience that you couldn't quite explain...let's say, knowing that a relative or friend was in some kind of trouble, having a strong feeling, have you ever had that kind of experience?

B: Well I think we all have, but I think it's, not necessarily based on some kind of, you know, third eye or something or a telepathic ability. I think it's, it's, if your uncle goes out driving and there's a snowstorm, and you all of sudden, "Wow, my uncle may have bashed into a tree"—well of course he may have bashed into a tree—there's a bloody snowstorm! If, if your aunt goes out and it's a beautiful, sunny day, but you know that your aunt drives like Mario Andretti, and you get this premonition that, "Oh my, what happened to my aunt?" you know, "I have a feeling something happened to my Aunt Matilda"—well of course that's a possibility. And I mean we all have anxieties about losing people we care about. Losing, ah, you know, relations, or sons or daughters, or lovers or wives or husbands. And sometimes those anxieties translate themselves into so-called "premonitions," that, you know, something has happened to them. But I think the only time we talk about the anxieties, is when something actually happens. I mean, if we're worried about, "Oh, poor little Billy," I mean, "he might never make it home from school" and Billy shows up at the door safe and sound, we think nothing of it. But if, if we're worried, we're, "Oh, oh Billy," you know, and next thing you know Billy crawls in with a cast on his arm and he'd fallen on the ice or something. Then you know, "Boop, I had a premonition!" right? So I don't necessarily think that, I think that premonitions are probably based on anxieties and the anxieties sometimes arise out of, out of informed judgments about a person's abilities, or about a specific situation. Or, they can just be anxieties. Cause some people, I'm one of these people who just, I'm one of them actually, who worry for no reason. One of these people who have to go out and check the stove every night before I go to sleep, to keep sure I didn't leave the oven on 350 degrees.

E: Let's just say that somebody told you a story that started this way. They said that, that they had had a dream, and during the dream they saw such and such an experience, usually a crisis thing, happening to a friend or relative of theirs. And at the time they woke up they checked the clock, let's say it was three o'clock in the morning. And then they sort of wondered vaguely about how this person was doing or whatever, had no apparent reason to think this person was in trouble and then, found out by chance the next day that this person had maybe passed away. And this is not someone they were in contact with, this is someone at maybe some distance, or whatever. Um, how would you explain that, or have you run across stories like that?

B: Oh I've run across stories like that all the time. Supposedly the person who dreams about the airline crash, and the next day the airplane actually crashes. And I

mean, I dismiss them as coincidence. Maybe I shouldn't, maybe I, I don't know. But I do. I mean, there are 240 million people in the United States. If a plane takes off and crashes, chances are that somebody dreamed of a plane crash that night. You will find somebody who dreamt of a plane crash that night. I mean, if it's, how many times do people dream of their relatives getting killed and bumped off, or a plane crashes, and nothing happens. We don't hear about them, because it wouldn't be, ah, proper for the people who support, paranormal activity to report them, because it wouldn't support their, their ah, beliefs. But I mean if a plane crashes somewhere, like I said, in the United States, chances are that somebody dreamed about it. I've dreamed about being on a ship that sank. No ship sank. Traveled on ships several times, never had trouble on ships. I mean, I would just say, tend to say that they're coincidences, or, as earlier that they're, cause dreams are supposed to bring out your anxieties, that you're letting your anxiety about this person come out in the dream, sort of thing.

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There seems to be, especially with identical twins, there seems to be some kind of communication, above the level of what we normally communicate, as, as human beings, as unrelated human beings. With identical twins there seems to be some special kind of communication. And there may be something to that, it seems you hear a lot of very odd stories, and so on. But what's, I mean that's something for scientific investigation. I mean just cause we don't understand it don't mean it's got something to do with paranormal activity, or so on...you have to get the paranormal people out of it, and you have to take an unbiased, scientific view of it. As just a, probably from the biological standpoint...the way we investigate paranormal phenomena now, I don't know if this is a correct stereotype but you have these crackpot professors who like, hold (giggles) chairs at the University of Southern California, who come by your house and photograph corners and take (giggling) take measurements, of temperature in your house. And they're looking for something like that, they're looking for paranormal, instead of sending a carpenter in and well, the creaking is cause that board is loose. You know? They won't, they don't start off by, even looking at possibilities other than the paranormal.

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Well the mind, I suppose, is the consciousness contained in the brain. Ah, ahm. A consciousness that that, I don't think that we--we tend to think that we're the only creatures that really have it, but I think probably we share it with most other creatures on the earth. I know I've got a--we're told constantly that [adopting grave voice of authority] "Well, maybe chimpanzees have some ability to cognate, maybe dolphins, but all the other animals just run purely on instinct." [talking in his

*normal voice*] Well, I've always owned housecats, and I can bloody well tell you that housecats are as smart, or smarter than people sometimes [*laughing*]. I've seen them do some uh, pretty—so I don't think it's something that, that we have exclusively.

*And that's another thing, I mean if we have ESP—if, if ESP exists—and we have ESP, why are we the only ones that have ESP? Have you ever walked by a chimpanzee cage and gotten this certain [pauses, clutches head] “Oh my God, I'm being communicated with!” right? [hypnotic monotone] PASS ME ALL THE BANANAS. PASS ME ALL THE BANANAS [E chokes laughing, B's voice goes on, nearly breaking:] GIVE ME YOUR PEANUTS. NOW. [B takes breath, continues, barely retaining ability to speak] I mean it's, it's a logical question, I mean, if, if we [*laughing*] if we have ESP, why don't other animals have ESP, because, conceivably other animals also have minds. They're capable of making decisions, especially chimpanzees. Chimpanzees use and make tools. They uh, they uh, they have a long childhood just like we do, in which they have to acquire a lot of information. So it, they're very, very similar to us, biologically and behaviorally, to us. So I mean if we have ESP, if ESP exists, why don't they? I mean, what? what?—do chimpanzees like— [B pauses; E giggles, sensing another model coming on] I'm sure if a chimpanzee could see, you know, [*clutching head, tone of horrified panic*] “Oh God, Jack's going to be eaten by a lion” when he goes somewhere [E chokes laughing again; B continues in shaky voice] I'm sure there'd be a hell of a lot less chimpanzees eaten by lions than there are presently.*

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*I think our world is complicated enough you know, without trying to make it more complex. By adding in “paranormal” and so on. I think our world is a, is a wonderful complex place. But I can see why people do it. I mean, you're born, you pay taxes, you die, right? (laughter) I mean, people want more than that, people want more than that right? I mean they want to know that there's an afterlife...they want to pretend that we're special in the eyes of some Supreme Being, and that we're not just, you know, big, large hairless primates, who, you know, whose reproductive system somehow got screwed up in the process of evolution so that we mate year round, instead of having one sensible mating period like every other animal. They don't want to admit that, they don't want to admit that...they want to pretend that we're something special, that we're the apple of God's eye, somehow. And ah, this paranormal stuff, really goes towards that. As much as it might seem opposed to religion, like, you, normally think of ESP and religion as being on two opposite sides of poles. When you believe in ESP and paranormal activity and so on, you're saying that there's a spiritual side to humanity, that humanity just isn't the big, omnivorous primate. So you're reinforcing the spiritual side of humanity, and that's what people want. A lot of people want, anyway. They don't want to know that when you die,*

*you're basically 150 to 300 pounds of fertilizer for--which, which (laughs) I'm beginning increasingly to believe that you are. I mean we, I think we have a fixed life span, like every other creature on earth, and when we die, that's our share. But people are afraid of that...it often fascinates me to look out on the world, and see all the activity, go into a crowded mall, look around, and think that in 120 years, everyone on the face of the earth will be dead. Everyone now on the face of the planet will be dead. Even babies--that are in women's wombs, will more than likely be dead. And that's a scary thought, I mean especially if there's nothing afterwards. And believing in paranormal activity and believing in ghosts and so on, lets you think that maybe there is something afterwards. Maybe this is just one aspect of our existence. Maybe there's another aspect where we, you know, walk around big, falling down houses in New England and scare adventurous schoolboys or something (laughs wildly).*

*E: Then again, maybe not.*

*Ben: Then again, maybe not. Yeah.*

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#### **CENTRAL DESCRIPTIVE ELEMENTS:**

Miscellaneous generalized (and animated) examples. Explanations refer not to a story but to principles and concepts in the generalized examples, namely "ESP," "telepathy," and "paranormal phenomena" and "communication between identical twins," "coincidence," etc.

#### **INTERPRETIVE FEATURES WITHIN STORY:**

Interpretations given variously alongside principles and concepts of generalized examples.

#### **EXPLANATORY POINTS (see also full summary of Ben's testimony in Appendix A, the Narrative Inventory):**

1. (Stated generally, at the beginning of interview) "I hold these views very strongly...that ESP and telepathy are, really don't exist, or are a bunch of baloney, to use your term."
2. Occurrences that cannot currently be explained are better regarded as mysteries that science has not yet explained, rather than as mystical, ESP or telepathy experiences.



3. The notions of ESP and telepathy create opportunities for some people to profit by promoting themselves as psychics who can solve financial and other problems for people. This makes Ben angry.
4. Some people who believe in ESP and telepathy are honest and legitimate.
5. Unethical people use such concepts to mine the fears and anxieties of others.
6. Psychics are comparable to witch doctors who charge a fee for enacting "cures" which do no good.
7. All people, Ben thinks, experience unexplainable, strong feelings that other people are in trouble, but the explanation is not telepathy.
8. All people have reasonable anxieties about losing people they care about, which sometimes are translated into so-called "premonitions."
9. Anxieties which are linked to actual mishaps are talked about.
10. Anxieties which are not linked to a mishap are not talked about.
11. Reasonable anxieties arise out of "informed judgments about a person's abilities, or about a specific situation."
12. Some anxieties arise for no reason, anticipating trouble that does not exist or occur.
13. Ben dismisses stories of simultaneous experiences as coincidence.
14. Ben understands coincidence to relate to the number of chances there are for events to occur which might be said to correspond: such as, the number of people in the United States dreaming, and dreaming of plane crashes at the time of an actual plane crash.
15. Dreams can be expressions of anxieties.
16. Identical twins' communications may be different than communication between unrelated persons, and should be investigated by science, from a biological standpoint.
17. Researchers into the "paranormal" exclude possible explanations other than paranormal ones, including simple and mundane explanations.
18. The "paranormal" allows people to pretend that a) there is an afterlife, b) they are not mortal, c) humans are not primates and are unlike other animals, d) humans are special in the eyes of a Supreme Being.

#### 18. Maureen's Story (1993)

*It's always been there for me, these—it's either a dream, or a feeling, or sometimes a smell, will trigger something. [sighs] And I was, I don't even know if I was conscious of it when I was younger, but it wasn't until I was about, eight years old that I realized that uh, it wasn't a natural thing. I still don't think it's a really natural thing. And it wasn't something I wanted. Like, I used to have dreams, I knew my mother was going to have her baby before she had a baby and like, I think it never bothered me and it was never something that ah, I considered abnormal until, I had a bad experience. And it was a, I was living in Halifax at the time. My father*

*was going to, dental school, and I had a dream about people I, I still don't know who they are. It was about a fire. And um, a woman, they were in a townhouse, I suppose, assume, downtown Halifax, and uh. A woman was trying to get to her baby but she [pauses, sounding more and more upset remembering] she couldn't make it. [pause] And I woke up, crying. And ah, the next morning my father was reading a paper before he went to classes, about this fire that was downtown and ah, fatalities including a young child and single mother. And ah, I never told my parents that because it seemed so ah, it was a bad thing? It was not something that sat comfortably with me at all. So from that day on, I was conscious of, these feelings and that they were different from what other people were experiencing. Up until then I thought, everyone has the same thing...I think mostly the reason why it was frightening was because I was young, when I realized that uh, like, it's not normal, you know? And it wasn't a good experience that led me to believe that it was you know, kind of a different thing, it was bad. [breathes deeply, fighting back tears]*

#### **CENTRAL DESCRIPTIVE ELEMENTS:**

1. When Maureen is about eight, she has a dream about people she does not know, and wakes up crying.
2. In the dream, a woman in a townhouse is trying to save her baby during a fire, but does not "make it."
3. In the morning, Maureen's father reads a paper about a downtown fire in which a single mother and a young child died.
4. Maureen is frightened, and does not tell her parents about the dream.

#### **INTERPRETIVE FEATURES WITHIN STORY:**

1. Maureen says her unusual experiences may start with a dream, a feeling, or a smell.
2. At eight years old, after this experience, Maureen realized her experiences were not a "natural" thing, and began to consider them "abnormal."
3. Maureen describes feeling uncomfortable and frightened by the experience, and describes the experience as "different," "not normal," and "a bad thing."
4. Although her narration is comparatively short and somewhat generalized, Maureen becomes visibly and audibly upset by recounting the experience.

#### **EXPLANATORY POINTS FOLLOWING STORY:**

1. "With what I tell her [mother], it's very easy for me to say it's coincidence, like, and pass it off."
2. "At first he [my boyfriend] was a little skeptical, like, 'It's coincidence, Maureen, try and relax' because sometimes it really does upset me. But he's

been there at times when I've known things or I've said things to him. I think it's starting to creep him out a bit too."

3. "The way that I have these experiences...you can't sit me down with a bunch of electrodes and monitor brain waves, because, it happens when it happens and I have no control over it."
4. "I don't think that we've fully come to terms with what our mind can do, what exactly the mind can pick up from another person. You know, we're always picking up cues from other people that we, decipher."
5. Boyfriend's experience with bad headaches and, later in life, a brain aneurysm gave her a new perspective on her dreams and feelings: maybe there is something humans used to have and as part of the "survival instinct" it got "blocked off" in the brain somehow. Her own abilities might come from her own "mind" being "unblocked" somehow. Maureen suffers from migraines, as does Grace (see "Grace's Story," above).

## 19. Irina's Story (1993, 1996)

### Version 1 (1993)

*I was working in the coronary care unit, and ah, we had a, fairly young man admitted. He was about 44. He was ah, blind. Very prominent in his, his ah, profession, that he had chosen. His wife was also blind. And he had had a really massive heart attack. And he was in the first bed in the coronary care unit. Actually, I think I was the supervisor at this time. Because I went from a staff nurse to a supervisor. Not clinical, but the administrative supervisor. And ah, so, he was admitted on the day shift that I was there. And I can remember, there was something about him that just, normally I would just, in that position, I would just briefly see each patient. I wouldn't you know, tread on the toes of the nurses who were looking after him, unless they asked me for something, or, you know, wanted to consult, or, ah, really wanted some information. But I would try to see each patient as they were admitted and get my own feeling for what was going on with them, with their care and, you know, look at it that way. So when he came in, I ahm, I made a point of going to see him and ah, when I did, he just, I don't remember exactly what we, what we talked about, but, I knew that he was very sick and ah, but they were expecting him, he was young and, fairly young, and they, it was his first ah, heart attack and they were kind of expecting everything to be OK. And ah, I mean he wasn't on a ventilator, anything like that, he was just being monitored on the cardiac monitor and, some intravenous medication. And he was stable. And ah, I don't remember what we spoke about but, he, started to talk to me and I talked to him, and you know, I just kind of lingered there for a little while cause I knew the nurses were busy and he seemed like he wanted to talk. So I think he told me about his family and you know, some general things like that. And ah, actually came out just at the end, when*

*I was just about to go home, so I saw him just before I went home. And, you know, everything seemed to be OK.*

*I went home that night and I guess I must have been thinking about him. You know, because, quite often, like you see young people, or, you know, [someone] that's young, and, fairly young, and, you know, you think about, you're concerned about them, and I guess you just sometimes can't detach, or, you know, separate from what they said or how you might have gotten attached to them, even in a short period of time. And I guess I must have been thinking about him, because that night I had a dream. And this is really weird, but I had a dream that, I was in his room. I was actually floating over his bed, with him [laughs] and his ah, family were all around the edge of the bed. I mean I saw everything in the room. And he was, so he was with me. And he ah, he didn't want to leave. And I just, you know, I just said, "No, you have to leave." Ah, I almost, like I was just kind of, I was pushing him out through the roof of the room or something like that. I wasn't pushing him, but I was just kind of trying to gently nudge him out. And ah, he said, "No, I can't leave my family." And I said, "Well, you know, they're OK" and, I felt like, the kind of, I was saying the kind of things that I would say, like if I was standing there and that was happening? And how I would be, but I would be comforting the family, not comforting him. And anyway, so, you know, finally, he went, he went on, or whatever.*

*And I, I mean I woke up with a start and I can even remember looking at the ah, alarm clock, and it was exactly 20 minutes after three. And, I thought, "Wow, you know. That's pretty, weird." And I thought, I wonder did he, did something happen, you know? So anyway, I finally got back to sleep. And the first thing ah, when I came in the next morning I went right to his room and of course the room was empty. So I asked the nurses, I said, "Well what happened." And they said, "Well he died last night." And I said, "He died," that he died, and they said, "Yeah, we couldn't believe it, you know, we really don't know what happened and we couldn't ventilate him, we couldn't do anything." And then I was kind of getting pins and needles and I said, "Well, what time did he die?" [laughs] And she said, "Well he was pronounced dead about ten minutes to three." And I thought, [clowning] "OK, I'm losing my mind, I have to get out of here now!" [laughing] "This is it, I'm gone now."*

*E: Oh my.*

*S: But ah, you know, I don't know what it was. Really, I can't explain that at all. I mean I don't know what that was. And ah, you know, so it was a real shock that he died. And I can remember, I even followed it up. I mean, I just had such a short contact with him and I seemed to have gotten so attached, you know. So I followed it up, up with the, he certainly had an autopsy because it was, a really, an unexplained*

*death. And ah, the pathologist said that he had had just a massive infarct, not only of his heart but of his, all of his chest wall? All of his, major muscles there? And that was why, that they couldn't even intubate him and ventilate him. So that's why they couldn't ah, do anything to save him. So she, she had never seen anything like it before either. It was something really, you know, different, unusual. And I had never, and never still, to this day, have never heard of any kind of a case like that. And ah, I don't even really know, you know, still don't really know what that meant. I guess, I don't know how it could even happen. But anyway. That's what happened to him. So that was a really weird one that, you certainly can't explain, anyway. Unless I ate, something bad for supper, I don't know. But it just seems such a, coincidence you know. It's like there was some kind of connection or something.*

#### **CENTRAL DESCRIPTIVE ELEMENTS:**

1. While Irina is on day shift, working as administrative supervisor, a fairly young, blind man, about 44, is admitted to coronary critical care after a massive heart attack.
2. Irina talks with the man and notes that he seemed to be stable, was on a cardiac monitor and IV medication, but was not on a ventilator.
3. Irina sees the man once more before she leaves work and goes home thinking about him.
4. That night she has a clear, detailed dream in which she and the man are floating above his hospital bed. His relatives are around the edge of the bed. The man does not wish to leave his family but she comforts him and encourages him to move on. He does so.
5. She awakens and notes the time on the clock is "exactly twenty minutes after three."
6. At work the next day, the nurses tell Irina the man was pronounced dead at ten minutes to three, and they had been unable to ventilate him or do anything to save him.
7. Irina follows up by asking the pathologist for more details on the cause of death. She finds out the patient had had a massive infarct of the chest wall.

#### **INTERPRETIVE FEATURES WITHIN STORY:**

1. Irina points out that she formed a strong attachment to the patient in the short time she knew him, possibly due to his being fairly young.
2. She states that she went home thinking about him.
3. The death seems both unpredictable (young man with a first heart attack, who was stable, not critical, when she left) and unexplained (routine resuscitation efforts such as ventilation did not work).

4. She describes awakening with a "start," having some trouble getting back to sleep, and then feeling "shock" to find out the patient had died.
5. Upon learning of the apparent correspondence in time, she (jokingly?) wonders if she could be "losing her mind."
6. She remarks in closing her story that her experience, might have been caused by something she ate, but "seems such a coincidence," as if there had been a "connection."

#### EXPLANATORY POINTS FOLLOWING STORY:

1. "I guess when it happened I was kind of shocked and I wasn't sure what it was. I didn't know what it was."
2. "I think it just reinforced my own beliefs, my own spiritual belief."
3. "Maybe there was some kind of a, you know, if you really believe there's a soul and you can have these out-of-body experiences and that sort of thing, that maybe there really was something like that...that's the only way that I could explain it, you know, because I don't know how it could have happened all around the same time."
4. "I do, tend to believe those things although I know, I still can be skeptical."
7. Sometimes I explain it to myself, and it's "Well, that was just a dream," and, you know, "you had just gotten too attached, really attached to the patient, and somehow connected, and then you dreamt about him, and maybe you saw something or thought that he was going to arrest," and plus I had met all the family, so I knew what they all looked like.
8. I knew what the wife looked like. And maybe it was...probably because he was blind and, I guess, people who are...in that situation with all their senses about them, ah, you know, can really see what's going, but someone who's blind or a patient who is deaf, quite often they feel very insecure, and I guess you feel more, um, of a sense that you want to take care of them, you know, and, and comfort them, and explain things to them because it's such a, threatening environment. And so maybe, you know, that might have been it.
7. I've seen the scene before, with other patients. Of, you know, once, when the patient dies...if the family wanted to, you would give them time alone with the patient so you'd more or less kind of go in and straighten everything up and then let the family go in and close the door so the nurses would leave. And it was at that point that, I felt, you know, that I dreamt about it. So, I probably would have been familiar with the kind of scene that would have happened too.

#### Version 2 (1996)

*This was when I was working in the coronary care unit, critical care, and a patient had come in, in the afternoon on my shift. And he was, in his mid-forties and, but*

very large, very large man, and he was blind, and um, a very heavy smoker and he had a lot of risk factors. Anyway, he had a really bad heart attack. Really severe. Very sick. And uh, so when I went off my shift that afternoon, I guess I was, you know, thinking about him, and I knew how sick he was. Went home that night, and had a, had a dream, that I was hovering over his bed, with him—he and I were sort of up in the air over his bed, and we were looking down at these people, who were standing right at the foot of his bed and also looking at his body. And he was ah, there wasn't really anything said, we didn't really say very much, but I had a feeling, you know, that he wanted to go with those, with the people who were there in his room. And I was more or less saying to him, "No, I think it's time for you to go this way," and you know, turn to go this way, so I was more or less trying to, in my dream, I was trying to guide him away and you know say to go, well actually it was towards a light or towards a bright, a bright ahm, light. So, when he eventually did, when he did eventually turn and go, and then I remember you know, he sort of floated away I guess, I don't know if he actually walked or anything. And uh, and then I woke up.

And I remember it was really disturbing, you know, it was very disturbing, and uh. So I took the time to look at my clock to see what time it was, it was something like, 3:04 or, you know, some time like that. So I thought, "Now it would be really interesting—I'm going to remember that time, because when I go in tomorrow, I'll ask and see if anything happened during that time." And I thought well maybe, you know, if he took a turn, or you know if he arrested, or something like that. So when I went in the next morning the first thing I did was go right to his bed, and he wasn't there, so I knew right away that he had died, and I asked the girls when he had died, what time. And they said it was around 3:10. And I was like [joking] "OO-kay! (laughs) I'm going insane! (laughs)"—no but, so it was, it was really strange and you know, even after all these years, I still, there's certain little things and that's one of the stories I always, one of the things I always remember.

And it was, like it was so clear in the dream, I could see, I could see the faces of the people who were at the foot of his bed, and I hadn't met his family because at the time that I had gone off there was nobody who had come to see him at that time, he was so sick, so I don't know if—I could remember the faces but I don't know if they were the same faces, 'cause I never did see his family. And I could see him in the bed and we were, you know we were in this, I could see all the details of the small room that we were in and we were sort of, we were hovering over him and he and I were together. And uh, but there was no, like as far as the feelings of, there was no fear or no, worry, it just seemed like, this is the natural thing to do, this is, what you have to do, and, I'm just helping you to do this, and. But he really didn't want to go. And at the time when we were there, they must have, you know, it did reflect what real life was, that there was, they had actually called the arrest, and uh, what happens then is they let the family come in and they come in, they do come in and visit the pa—or see

*the patient's, body. And um, you know then they prepare them for autopsy and that type of thing. But it was very clear, like he was there, you the clothes were all smoothed over his bed, like the same way we would do, I guess from, thinking back from my experience of how you'd prepare. And the family were standing there and they were, they weren't rushing to him or anything, which is sort of what, the natural response that I would have seen in my other experience, they were just sort of standing and comforting each other. And just more or less looking at him. And uh, so that was, you know, that was really, sort of ah, startling, for me.*

*And I must have had a real, keen interest in him anyway, because even afterwards, uh, they had, I asked the nurses, my colleagues, what had happened. And they said he had arrested but there was just no way they could bring him back. They couldn't get any, they couldn't even do any compressions on his chest because his chest had, seized up, had tightened up or something? So I remember even afterwards I went down to the um, down to ask about his autopsy, to the pathologist and she told me it was a really unusual case and what had actually happened was, all the muscles in his chest including his chest muscles, had infarcted, like, the same way you have a heart attack. And uh, they think it was due to the fact that he was such a heavy smoker, had such extensive cardiovascular disease that, not only did his heart muscle um, infarct but the chest wall, infarcted. And then it all spasmed and tightened up and that's why they couldn't do any compressions on him. So it was sort of an unusual patient case anyway. And uh, that's really about all I can remember of the actual dream and you know, the sort of, things around it.*

#### **CENTRAL DESCRIPTIVE ELEMENTS:**

1. During Irina's shift in the afternoon, a blind man in his mid-forties is admitted to critical care after a severe heart attack.
2. At home that night, Irina has an exceptionally clear and realistic dream in which she and the man are floating above his body in his hospital room, where relatives have gathered and are comforting each other. She encourages him to go toward a bright light, although he seems to want to return to his family, and he does so, in the dream.
3. Irina awakens at 3:04 a.m. or thereabouts, and notes the time on the clock.
4. The next day her colleagues tell her that the man died at 3:10 (the time the arrest was called) and that there was nothing they could do to save him.
5. Irina asks fellow nurses and the hospital pathologist for further details. She finds out the nurses were unable to do chest compressions, and that the patient had had a massive infarct of the chest wall.



### INTERPRETIVE FEATURES WITHIN STORY:

1. Irina points out that she was thinking of the patient after she returned home from her shift, and before she went to sleep.
2. She describes the feeling of the dream as being "natural" and free from worry or fear.
3. Upon discovering the time of the patient's death seems to correspond with the time of her dream, Irina is "startled" and (jokingly?) she wonders if she could be "going insane."
4. The patient's death seems both predictable (many risk factors, heavy smoker, severe attack) and surprising (infarcted chest wall, did not respond to compressions).
5. In retrospect, Irina views her questioning nurses and pathologist after the death as signs of having had an especially "keen interest" in this patient.

### EXPLANATORY POINTS FOLLOWING STORY:

1. "If you were to look at it as if it was a real, kind of, spiritual, near-death experience then, it would, logically be around that time that--if that's what you believe in, that the spirit leaves the body--that it would have been around that time that that would have actually happened, because the extra few minutes that the team would have been working on him would have just been, futile efforts really. He would have been dead."
2. "The fact that I was so involved with him, and so caught up with what was happening with him, that it's sort of natural that I would have been thinking about him when I went to sleep that night. And then you do tend to dream about the things you think about."
3. "Probably knowing that he was going to die...maybe in my way of trying to deal with it I was thinking through how, sort of how I would envision a peaceful death for him and how I could help him, with that...me trying to, in one sense, accept what was going to happen, and work through it, myself. And then work through it in a way that I could be, I guess, comforted in the fact that, I knew that there was, you know, he was going on to something else, cause that is my own [Christian] spiritual belief."
4. "The only thing I can't explain is the times. You know, the fact that the times were so close?...I believe in out-of-body experiences and I think that people do experience those things and I think the spirit is something that's not, confined to the body...I'm not 100% sure of that, but I sort of think that it works that way. And I guess my Christian belief would have me believe that too...maybe something like it really did happen, that there was a real connection between us...because I had thought so much about him...maybe my spirit was ah, you know, actually met his spirit, and was there at the very, last few minutes of his,

of his physical body, his life...and I think I believe that a little bit. You know, part of me says I should really believe it, if I have a strong, Christian spiritual belief, but then part of me says, 'You're crazy!'" (laughs heartily)

## 20. Aurora's Story (1995)

*She's still alive, and I forget—I forget, I forget, I forget her name, but she's from Milburn. But she claims to have been, misled by the fairies. And taken off. And she was lost in the woods for, a week. And ah, you know, everybody's out—she was five years old or something—everybody's out looking for her for the longest time, you know, it was like about, it was a fairy story [laughs]. Everybody was out looking for her the longest time, and they couldn't find her and you know they basically, after searching for a week they basically had given up the search. And a fellow over in uh, Lower Island Cove had a dream about, about her. And now, he probably heard there was a little girl lost or something, right? But he had a dream about her. And so he went over the next day and went in the woods and went to the spot, went to the spot she was hiding. Now it turned out people were passing, walking past her, all the time, you know, really close, she hadn't gone that far. But ah, she, she was afraid of the fairies, so she didn't want to make herself seen by anybody? And he went right to the spot where she was. And found her. He, he, you know, he dreamt about where she was. That was about 40 years ago, she's about Dad's age now...She definitely was lost. She claims to have been misled by the fairies and ah, she was ah, I think she had to have either one of her, or both of her feet amputated. You know she was gone for a while...it was cold, I can't remember exactly what time of the year it was, it was probably fall, everybody was busy with their fish and stuff, and they had to take time off, you know, to go and look for her, that's true...that's, that's the story, except I don't, except I can't remember her name, and I've told Matthew her name, I just can't remember yet, I just can't remember it now, I mean she's an actual girl who did get lost and this is what she, she firmly believes to this day that she was, that she was, led astray...right now she'd probably be older than that, she may be 55. She's around that age. She's not younger than Mom, she's my Dad's age, so she's 50, 55.*

*E: And the man who would have had the dream is now?*

*Aurora: Dead I would say. He was probably—*

*Matthew: He was nothing to her though, was he?*

*Aurora: He was nothing to her, no, no, no. He, you know, and he wouldn't know anything about her, I mean, you know this was 45, 40-45 years ago, whatever, 50 years ago. So it was very little communication, we didn't get paved roads till in the 60's, right? So he, he had a dream that was strong enough, you know, to make him want to come over and take a poke at looking for her, looking for her himself.*

#### **CENTRAL DESCRIPTIVE ELEMENTS:**

1. A small girl from Milburn gets lost in the woods, later claiming she was led astray by fairies and had hidden herself so as not to be seen, being afraid of them.
2. The community searches for her for about a week.
3. As the search party is giving up, a man from Lower Island Cove joins the search because he has had a dream about where she is.
4. He goes to the woods and goes to the spot where she is hiding.
5. The little girl, now a forty-five to fifty-five year old woman known to the narrator, has one or two feet amputated.

#### **INTERPRETIVE FEATURES WITHIN STORY:**

1. Aurora points out that although she has forgotten this woman's name she is an actual person, known to her, and is still alive.
2. Aurora adds that the man "probably" would have heard about a little girl being lost before he had his dream.
3. Aurora points out that the dream must have been "strong enough" to push this man to join the search.
4. She states that there would have been "little" communication between these communities at that time because roads were not paved, making it likely that the man would not have known the girl he was looking for.

#### **EXPLANATORY POINTS FOLLOWING STORY:**

1. "I believe that it happens; I don't necessarily believe the stories that I hear...it doesn't matter whether or not you believe in it, you're always going to look at stories, that somebody tells, with a skeptical eye...unless you're a little bit weak [laughs] you're gonna take everything that you hear and say, oh my goodness yes."
2. "You probably process it for a while and maybe if it sounds half reasonable, if it comes from somebody respectable, you know that you can, trust."
3. "I believe in telepathy, I believe in energy, yeah. I believe that it happens, yeah, well there's definitely something else going on."

4. "I don't believe that we expend all the energy that we have, and uh, and I don't think that we're that individual, that we're that alone."
5. "The energy, I believe in energy and everything is caused--if you think of thought, then that thought is energy, as far as I'm concerned. I mean there's mechanical reactions, and biological and psychological--everything that creates this you know, this thought, this image that you have in your head and if it exists, even in your head, then it exists, and it's there. And it's just, I don't know if we'd be able to sit down and have a coherent conversation through something like that, but people I mean, you have senses other than this."
6. "It's just, sensitive people...some people are more sensitive than others, they can pick up on your mood and it doesn't necessarily have to be overt."
7. "You could walk into a room and feel a mood without even seeing anybody, you know? And a lot of people have that power and I think that that has to do with energy and I think that's the way that it works. You know I mean it's not a fully formed idea or anything."
9. "Chemicals, you know, energy, you know, everything...could be anything. Could be anything. Yeah, doesn't, doesn't have to be supernatural, maybe."

**APPENDIX C - STATISTICS ON SAMPLING AND INTERVIEWS IN  
FOLKLORE DOCTORAL THESES,  
MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY OF NEWFOUNDLAND  
(COMPILED BY NIKO SILVESTER FOR THE AUTHOR, 1998)**

Note: Spelling in the following e-mail texts has been corrected; any deletions are indicated in the text.

PINE 3.96 MESSAGE TEXT Folder: fieldwork Message 12 of 30 7% ANS  
 Date: Fri, 21 Aug 1998 18:56:45 -0230  
 From: Niko Silvester <s64ns@morgan.ucs.mun.ca>  
 To: eileenc@javanet.com  
 Subject: PhD thesis info

Philip passed on your request for info on MUN Folklore PhD theses to me. After about six hours [misc. comments deleted] I had looked at almost all of them and got about as much information as I could out of them. So here they are, in chronological order...

1. John David Allison Widdowson  
Aspects of Traditional Verbal Control: Threats and Threatening Figures  
in Newfoundland Folklore.  
1972, x + 605 pp. (2 vols)  
--no indication of how many interviews were done, or what proportion  
were taped (I think most, if not all, were taped, but that does not  
help with actual numbers  
--appears to be a combination of archival and field research.
2. Richard Sensor Tallman  
The Tall Tale Tradition and the Teller: A Biographical-Contextual  
Study of a Storyteller, Robert Coffil of Blomidon, Nova Scotia.  
1974, vi + 552 pp. (2 vols)  
--10 informants (not counting participant observation); 4 were taped,  
6 not taped  
--23 interviews; 9 were taped, 14 not taped  
--primarily a field research project
3. Joyce Ione Harrington Coldwell  
Treasure Stories and Beliefs in Atlantic Canada.  
1977, vii + 302 pp.  
--some interviews were conducted, and presumably some were taped,  
but no indication of numbers is given  
--primarily a library/archival research project
4. Michael Ernest Taft  
The Lyrics of Race Record Blues, 1920-1942: A Semantic Approach to the  
Structural Analysis of a Formulaic System.  
1977, iv + 593 pp.  
--as far as I can tell... 0 informants  
--0 interviews  
--primarily an archival research project

5. Gerald Thomas  
 Stories, Storytelling and Storytellers in Newfoundland's French Tradition: A Study of the Narrative Art of four French Newfoundlanders.  
 1977, xxii + 823 pp.  
 --30+ informants, although only 4 were focussed on (not clear if the others were actually used in thesis or not); of the four primary informants, all four were taped  
 --no indication of total number of interviews  
 --primarily field research, though comparative material was drawn from library/archive
6. Robert Smith McCarl  
 Occupational Folklife: An Examination of the Expressive Aspects of Work Culture with Particular Reference to Firefighters.  
 1980, 270 pp.  
 --no indication of how many informants, but all or most were taped  
 --no indication of total number of interviews, except he had 200+ hours of tape  
 --primarily a field research project
7. Christine A. Cartwright  
 Charismatic Culture in St. John's, Newfoundland: A Cross Denominational Study of Religious Folklife in Three Groups.  
 Charismatic Culture in St. John's, Newfoundland: A Cross Denominational Study of Religious Folklife in Three Groups.  
 1983, xviii + 669 pp. (2 vols)  
 --35 (?) informants; 31 taped, 4 (?) not taped  
 --29 (?) interviews; 25 taped, 4 (?) not taped
8. Martin Laba  
 Narrative and Talk: A Study in the Folkloric Communication of Everyday Conversational Exchange.  
 1983, ix + 260 pp.  
 --no indication of numbers of informants or interviews  
 --combination field and archival/library research
9. Martin John Lovelace  
 The Presentation of Folklife in the Biographies and Autobiographies of English Rural Workers.  
 1983, viii + 652 pp. (2 vols)  
 --0 informants  
 --0 interviews  
 --primarily a library/archival research project
10. John Roper Scott  
 Personal Experience Narratives Among Professional Sailors: Generic Keys to the Study of an Occupation.  
 1985, v + 330 pp.  
 --(I think...) 27 informants; 27 taped  
 --18 interviews, all taped

11. Gary Reginald Butler  
Supernatural Folk Belief Expression in a French Newfoundland Community: A Study of Expressive Form, Communicative Process, and Social Function in L'Anse-a-Canards.  
1985, xxv + 433 pp.  
--20 or 22 (different numbers given in different places) informants, all taped  
--no indication of number of interviews, except he had ca. 50 hrs of tape  
--primarily field research
12. Laurel Catherine Doucette  
The Emergence of New Expressive Skills in Retirement and Later Life in Contemporary Newfoundland.  
1986, 347 pp.  
--10 interviews, all taped  
--mainly field research
13. John Ashton  
A Study of the Lumbercamp Song Tradition in Newfoundland.  
1985, viii + 228 pp.  
--no indication of numbers of informants or interviews  
--combination archival/library and field research
14. Diane Tye  
Local Characters and the Community: A Case Study of Tradition and Individual Nonconformity in the Maritimes.  
1988, vi + 346 pp.  
--unknown number of informants; 29 taped (that may be all of them)  
--unknown total number of interviews; 39 taped (again, there may not be any untaped)  
--primarily field research
15. David Alan Taylor  
A Survey of Traditional Systems of Boat Design used in the Vicinity of Trinity Bay, Newfoundland, and Hardangerfjord, Norway.  
1989, xlii + 450 pp. + 45 plates.  
--(I counted...) 26 informants; 24 taped, 2 not taped  
--28 interviews; 26 taped, 2 not taped  
--mainly field research
16. Janet Elizabeth McNaughton  
The Role of the Newfoundland Midwife in Traditional Health Care, 1900 to 1970.  
1990, x + 356 pp.  
--30 informants; unknown how many were taped, maybe all  
--33 interviews; unknown number taped, maybe all  
--seems to be primarily archival-- interviews were to back up and verify archival research (maybe this would be considered a combination of the two)

17. Barbara Gaye Rieti  
Newfoundland Fairy Traditions: A Study in Narrative and Belief.  
1990, ix + 605 pp.  
--no indication of how many informants or interviews  
--combination of field and archival research
18. Richard Paul MacKinnon  
Vernacular Architecture in the Codroy Valley: Local and External Influences on the Development of a Building Tradition.  
Vernacular Architecture in the Codroy Valley: Local and External Influences on the Development of a Building Tradition.  
1990, xvii + 478 pp. + 186 plates  
--unable to determine how many informants or interviews, but he did both informal, untaped interviews, and formal, taped ones  
--combination of archival/library and field research (but perhaps mostly field)
19. Marie-Annick Desplanques  
Women, Folklore and Communication: Informal Social Gatherings in a Franco-Newfoundland Context.  
1991, viii + 363 pp.  
--unknown how many informants or interviews, but she got ca. 70 hours of tape, including individuals, group sessions, and public addresses  
--primarily field research
20. Isabelle Marie Peere  
Death and Worldview in a Ballad Culture: The Evidence of Newfoundland.  
1992, 391 pp.  
\*I was unable to get more information on this one, as the CNS was closed when I got there-- I can go look at it first thing Monday if necessary.
21. Julia C. Bishop  
The Song Complex of "The Moonshine Can": An Integrated Approach to the Study of Words and Music in Traditional Song.  
1992, xxviii + 848 pp. (2 vols)  
--(without spending ages, I counted...) 62 informants; 19 taped, 42 not taped  
--99 interviews; 18 taped, 81 not taped  
--combination of archival and field research, though probably mainly field
22. Elke Dettmer  
An Analysis of the Concept of Folklorism with Specific Reference to the Folk Culture of Newfoundland.  
1993, iv + 258 pp.  
--no indication of numbers of informants or interviews  
1993, iv + 258 pp.  
--no indication of numbers of informants or interviews  
--combination of field and library/archive research



## 23. Melissa Ruth Ladenheim

The Making of a Collection of Carved Birds by Andrew Zergenyi, a Hungarian Immigrant to the United States: A Bio-Ethnographic Study. 1993, xvii + 347 pp. + 84 plates

--5 informants (not including informal conversations); I think all were taped

--5 interviews; again, I think she taped them all

## 24. Pat Byrne

Folk Tradition, Literature, and a Society in Transition: Newfoundland. 1994, vii + 528 pp.

--0 informants

--0 interviews (?)

--primarily library/archive research

## 25. Philip Hiscock

The Barrelman Radio Programme, 1937-1943: The Mediation and Use of Folklore in Newfoundland.

1994, viii + 357 pp.

\*this one was also not in the archive-- as I said before, I can go to CNS Monday, or you could try e-mailing Philip himself.

## 26. John Wisdom Mackay

Country Music Performance in Northern Nova Scotia: An Occupational Study of Art Fitt, Vernacular Craftsman.

1995, ix + 270 pp.

--2 informants; both taped (there may have been other informants who were not taped)

--8 taped interviews; no indication of whether or not there were any untaped

--primarily field research

## 27. James Henry Moreira

Ballad Worlds: Structure, Meaning, and the Fictional Landscapes in Classical and Broadside Ballads in Oral Tradition.

1995, vi + 343 pp.

--0 informants

--0 interviews (?)

--primarily archive/library research

## 28. David Neale

\*neither MUNFLA or CNS has this yet, so I have no idea where to look. Would it be possible to e-mail the author directly?

## 29. Seana Kozar

\*see 28.

I hope this is what you needed. let me know if you need me to attempt to find info that I was so far unable to get.

-Niko

PINE 3.96 MESSAGE TEXT Folder: fieldwork Message 14 of 30 20% ANS  
 Date: Mon, 24 Aug 1998 10:58:24 -0230 (NDT)  
 From: Nicole Silvester <s64ns@morgan.ucs.mun.ca>  
 To: "Eileen M. Condon" <eileenc@javanet.com>  
 Subject: Re: PhD thesis info

On Fri, 21 Aug 1998, Eileen M. Condon wrote:

> Niko: First, thank you SO much for amassing this amount of  
 > information. I would definitely appreciate your filling in the CNS  
 > thesis gaps, if you wouldn't mind, on Monday.

Philip Hiscock

The Barrelman Radio Programme, 1937-1943: The Mediation and Use of  
 Folklore in Newfoundland.

1994, viii + 357 pp.

--no indication of number of informants or interviews (he used some of  
 the material collected for his MA)

--primarily archival (based on Barrelman collection at CNS)

Isabelle Marie Peere

Death and Worldview in a Ballad Culture: The Evidence of Newfoundland.  
 1992, iv + 391 pp.

--no indication of numbers of informants or interviews

--combination of archival and field research

> Also, would you kindly check the total # of Ph.D. theses against  
 > that list they have in the dept. office, to make sure there aren't  
 > any others missing from the archive shelf? Thanks.

I got a list of completed PhDs in the Folklore dept-- it is the same  
 as what I sent, except it doesn't include Neale-- I guess it hasn't  
 passed yet. Seana Kozar's thesis is called "Deliberations Between the  
 Covers: An Audience-Centred Ethnography of Chinese Popular Fiction  
 Readers", the date is 1998, and I suspect, from the title, that it is  
 primarily field (i.e. interview) based. I asked at the CNS on the off  
 chance that they had it, but hadn't entered it into the catalog yet.  
 They even checked their list of stuff in the bindery for me, but they  
 don't have it yet.

[comments deleted]

The one[s] where I put stuff like "I think..." in brackets were where  
 there was a list of some kind, and I had to go through it and try to  
 figure out how many separate interviews. They often had several  
 informants per interview as well, and I tried not to duplicate any  
 when counting (it got really hard when the list was incorporated into  
 a bibliography as well ;)

[comments deleted]

I hope I got enough stuff for you.

-Niko

**APPENDIX D - ADDITIONAL STORY VERSIONS COLLECTED IN  
SUPPLEMENTARY FIELDWORK, SUMMER 1998**

Note: Spelling errors in text have been corrected; any and all deletions are as indicated in text.

```
PINE 3.95 MESSAGE TEXT <mail/[ ]> fieldwork Msg 1 of 13 20% ANS  
Date: Wed, 19 Aug 1998 12:30:44 -0230 (NDT)  
From: "Clara A. Byrne" <h69cab@morgan.ucs.mun.ca>  
To: econdon@morgan.ucs.mun.ca  
Subject: "Psychedelic Experiences"
```

Hi Eileen!

It was great to hear from you last night and I hope this is of some help. Let me take you back about six or seven years ago and I will tell you a story about an experience that I had which still gives me a knot in my stomach when I remember it. My 19 year old son was home for the summer from university and I was working at a local shelter for battered women.

My coworker was celebrating her 25th wedding anniversary and her grown children gave her a surprise party to which we were invited. My husband and I arrived at their house around 7:30 p.m. and joined in the fun. My husband does not drink and is always the driver. My son and my 16 year old daughter were not with us.

The party was a great time with lots of food and drink. Music and dancing went on all evening and I was having a wonderful time as anyone who knows me can verify (You should know, Eileen). I was dancing with one of the male guests and my husband was being his usual quiet self when for some STRANGE reason I was struck by the urge to stop dancing and rush to where my husband was sitting and tell him I wanted to go home NOW. He was taking his time but my sense of panic was making me insist that he hurry. I insisted all the way home - a drive of about 7-8 minutes - that he hurry. I had no way of knowing why I was behaving like this and because my husband knows me so well he never questions anything I want to do. We arrived home around midnight and our daughter was in her upstairs bedroom. She called out that Paul (our son) was home and that he seemed to be drunk although she said that he did not appear to be drunk when he arrived home an hour or so before.

I rushed down to his downstairs bedroom where I found him on his bed in a state of what appeared to be drunkenness. I called out to my husband and we dragged him off the bed and got him upstairs to the bathroom where I proceeded to wash him with cold cloths and I asked my husband to make coffee. I really did not feel that he was drunk so I tried to question him. He was very upset and kept insisting that he did not want to die. I called the hospital but they just said to keep an eye on him and that many teenagers got drunk. I WAS TERRIFIED during his time.

We put him on the couch and kept asking him what he drank. He said that he and a friend had drank the small drop of rum that was in a bottle in our cabinet. I knew it was only about two drinks and that would not have hurt him. This was not his first drinking experience and he would not have been afraid to tell me what he drank. His breathing was not normal and I would not leave him alone. My husband and I sat and watched him for about an hour when he started to breathe more normally so I went to bed and my husband sat and watched him until morning. He woke up at his usual time and I quizzed him about what he had been drinking. He had had a beer (or maybe 2) earlier in the evening and he and his friend had come back to our house to watch a TV or play music and had the rum he had told me about. The friend had been there when we got home and had not seemed perturbed about Paul's state and insisted that he had not been drinking heavily. I was angry at him and sent him packing but believed that he might have spiked the drink.

Jump to the following evening when I went down to Paul's quarters. There was a room (sort of storage) off his bedroom which had no doors. He had turned it into a kind of sitting room where he had his TV, a couch, stereo but the walls only had gyproc (not finished) and lots of poster. I went into the room and discovered symbols of various sorts painted on the wall. I called out and asked him when he had painted his walls and where he had gotten the paint. The mystery of his illness was solved when he informed me that he and his friend had painted the walls the previous night and had used the leftover stain from the patio. The warnings on the can of stain stated that this paint was highly toxic and not to be used indoors. I believe that my son had been overcome by the fumes and might have died if I had not come home when I did.

I believe that he somehow communicated to me that he was in trouble and my "mother antennae" were in tune with the "child message" that he sent. It was not a premonition that something would happen in the future but a sense that I was needed at home AT THAT MOMENT. I could never find words to describe the feeling that I had but it was one of sheer terror and panic as I tried to get my husband to drive as fast as he could to get us home. I did not know if it was a fire at the house or if one of the kids were in trouble (they were not even home when I went out) but some sort of message got to me that night.

I am a practicing Roman Catholic and I do believe in miracles (while not believing half of what my church teaches) ~ Was this a miracle? Was it E.S.P.? Or, as I joke to my friends - Am I "psychedelic?"

Eileen, I hope this serves the purpose. I realize there may be slight differences in my original story but time does alter memory. But all folklorists know that, right?

Regards!  
Clara

PINE 3.95 MESSAGE TEXT <mail/[ ]> fieldwork Msg 9 of 13 318  
 Date: Tue, 25 Aug 1998 11:25:04 -0230 (NDT)  
 From: Mark Ferguson <ferguson@morgan.ucs.mun.ca>  
 To: "Eileen M. Condon" <econdon@morgan.ucs.mun.ca>  
 Cc: eileenc@javanet.com  
 Subject: Re: Dude!

Gel, sending this to 2 locations to double the chances of you  
 receiving all the sooner...

Here is Susan's version of story, still working on Brenda [comments  
 deleted] \*\*\*\*\*

Eileen! I'm delighted to help out in any way I can. I don't  
 Actually have a name for this story but if I've ever called it  
 anything it most likely would have been "my twin story".

In the fall of 1979 I was living in London, England but Brenda was in  
 Newfoundland. She was supposed to have had open-heart surgery the  
 previous summer but the hospital repeatedly postponed it for a variety  
 of reasons. When I flew to London in early September all we knew was  
 that she would have the surgery some time that fall. During the  
 following five or six weeks I received a couple of letters from Brenda  
 and knew that she was still waiting but I had not been told of any  
 likely date for the surgery to take place. On the morning of October  
 15 I went to the refectory in my residence for breakfast at about  
 8:00. As I was eating I panicked. I began to run up the stairs to  
 the phones. I was crying, almost hyperventilating. I called home.  
 My stepmother, Margaret, answered the phone. I said "Where's Brenda?"  
 She asked if it was me on the phone. Again I asked where Brenda was  
 and repeated it a couple of times. She eventually got me to calm down  
 enough to listen to her and she told me that Brenda was in hospital  
 and was going to have surgery that morning. She said that it was 5:00  
 and the surgery wouldn't take place for a couple of hours but that  
 someone would call me that night to tell me how it had gone. In the  
 meantime, she said that Brenda was perfectly fine and was calm about  
 the surgery so not to worry.

If you need anything more just let me know. Hope all is going well.

Take care,  
 Susan

\*\*\*\*\*

PINE 3.96 MESSAGE TEXT Folder: fieldwork Message 9 of 30 268 ANS

#####  
Date: Mon 10 Jul 1995 00:00:00

Date: Wed, 19 Aug 1998 23:03:25 -0230 (NDT)  
From: Mark Ferguson <ferguson@morgan.ucs.mun.ca>

To: "Eileen M. Condon" <eileenc@javanet.com>

Subject: Re: Hey Dude

Hey Eileen.

Story one:

When I was 17 or 18, I lived downtown Toronto in a 3 story townhouse w/ my folks. One weekend afternoon I was up on the third floor doing my schoolwork/homework in my bedroom w/ my door closed. At a certain point the doorbell rang. I believe that before my mother even opened the door (I would have heard the bell) that I knew a) who was at the door and b) what had happened to her.

It was in fact a good friend of my mother's who had just that afternoon left her husband of many years to live her own life, i.e., get divorced, but this was the moment of truth, the actual leaving and the first place she came to was my mom's. But even if my mother did answer and this woman stepped in, I could only have heard muffled voices from 3 floors up behind a closed door. I remember sitting there knowing this, being slightly taken aback but more feeling sorry for the woman. I decided to stay in the room. I did not go and check it out w/ my mother that day or for many days, and in fact I only found out by listening to her and my father talk one day a few weeks later about the split up. I believe that I was picking up on the woman's great distress and being transmitted the message...

The last time I was home in 1997-98, I asked her about this time, if I had ever told her about it or asked if they split up directly and she could not recall me doing so, but that yes in fact her friend had come that day to the house having left her hubbie. I had not told her the story before.

## Story 2.

Brenda and Susan were twins. Brenda had a bad heart defect that needed repair, but the medical crowd waited till she was in her late teens, early 20s to do it. The year it was going to be done, Susan went off to England to attend a semester of university in London, knowing before she left that Brenda would likely have the operation while she was away. Susan was expecting to be kept posted, but the family back home, including Brenda decided that they would not tell her until after the surgery, to save her from worrying too much. Anyway, the appointed morning came for the surgery and that morning over in England Susan was eating breakfast in a cafeteria when suddenly without warning even to herself, she found herself rushing away back to her floor in residence in the middle of a panic attack, in tears, knowing that she must call home. Not knowing why I don't think, but maybe thinking it had something to do w/ the surgery or Brenda in trouble. Hazy on this detail. Anyway she called home to Nfld where it was still very early (6 or 7 in the am) and woke up her stepmother) and inquired very hysterically after Brenda. and her step mom tried to calm her but sure enough this was the am of Brenda's operation. Neither of them I don't think thought of this, but I always wondered if Brenda was awake at the time and thinking about the operation when Susan had her attack in Eng.... Brenda did recall being awake fairly early that am to prepare etc. so I wonder if it again was waking stress/distress on her mind that was "transmitted" across 1000s of miles... though Brenda reports not feeling particularly stressed that day.

Anyway those are my stories and I'm sticking to them. he he. I told them almost without going back over them though I did once or twice , but only to make clearer points I thought might be a bit obscure.

Yours in perpetuity, infinitely wizened.

M.

## APPENDIX E - RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

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### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE - INITIAL INFORMANT GROUP

**Part I:** Please tell your story or stories, in response to advertisement.

**Part II:** Questions

1. Description: Describe the context of your experience: time, place, season, location, weather, age at time, witnesses, feelings at the time, conscious state, physical state (including any drug or alcohol use at time), what you did about your experience at the time.
2. Interpretation: How do you feel now about the experience? What have you done about it since it happened? How have others reacted to your story? How do you explain your experience and understand it? How and why do you think you knew what you knew? What does this experience mean? Do you have more than one explanation or way of understanding the experience?
3. Whom have you spoken to about your experience?
4. Has anyone in your family or community had similar experiences? Have you read about or heard about such experiences anywhere else?
5. Do you have any religious beliefs or feelings about your experience? What is your religious background (if any)?
6. How would you define "mind" versus "brain"? What role do you think your mind or brain played in your experience?
7. Have you ever had a head or brain injury or a neurological illness of any kind?
8. Have you ever worked as a folk healer or a psychic?

**Part III:** Demographics (alternately, use MUNFLA Informant Bio Sheet)

Age, DOB, occupation, education, residence, hometown, personal data.



### Participant Information/Consent Form

Thank you for volunteering to be interviewed for a pilot study on narratives about crisis telepathy. This is to inform you that your participation in this pilot study is optional, which means that you can withdraw from the study at any time for any reason.

The materials you contribute through your participation may be used in a Memorial University doctoral dissertation on this subject, and as such, may eventually be published in the form of a book or an article. In addition, your contributions may be deposited in Memorial's Folklore and Language Archive, where students and professional researchers might have supervised access to it. Please circle your preference in regard to the use of the information you provide:

Please present my stories:      ANONYMOUSLY (with  
(CIRCLE ONE)                      revealing my name or other  
   identifying personal details)

   OPENLY (researcher may use  
   my real name and any details)

Please DO / DO NOT deposit a transcript of my interview in the folklore archive.

Any other specifications/restrictions you would like:

Should you have any questions about this study or additional specifications or concerns about the use of your information, please do not hesitate to contact the researcher, Eileen Condon, through the Folklore Department at Memorial University (709-737-8403) or at (709-745-0763). Thank you again for your participation.

This certifies that I have read the above information, and consent to participate in the study under the conditions I have specified above.

---

Name (PRINT)

SIGNATURE

DATE

DO YOU SUSPECT ESP IS A LOT OF

## BALONEY?

Do you usually argue against the existence of phenomena such as "telepathy," "precognition," apparitions, ghosts, etcetera? Are you a fan of scientific debunkers of parapsychological claims?

If so, a folklore researcher would like your views for a project investigating folk beliefs.

For more information or to volunteer for an interview, please contact:

EILEEN CONDON (econdon@morgan.ucs.mun.ca)  
Department of Folklore, MUN  
754-3519 or 737-8403

Interviews may be conducted on-line or in person; your help would be very much appreciated. All participants qualify for a raffle cash compensation.

ESP - BALONEY?  
754-3519

ESP - BALONEY?  
754-3519

ESP - BALONEY?  
754-3519

ESP - BALONEY?  
754-3519

ESP - BALONEY?  
754-3519

ESP - BALONEY?  
754-3519

# DREAMCATCHERS QUESTIONNAIRE

489

By filling out this questionnaire on dreamcatchers you will assist in a folklore research project on dreams and related beliefs. Your participation is optional and your answers may be quoted (anonymously) in a published study. Please sign and date the questionnaire at the end to confirm you've read the introductory paragraph and you wish to participate. When finished, you may leave the questionnaire with the staff person at your local store, or staple and mail it back to the pre-stamped address. Thank you for your help!

## PERSONAL:

Name:

Date of birth:

Place of birth:

Place of current residence:

Sex:

Occupation:

Marital status:

Education:

Major or degree:

## QUESTIONS:

1. (CIRCLE ONE) IS YOUR DREAMCATCHER:

HANGING DECORATION      NECKLACE      EARRINGS      OTHER\_\_\_\_\_

2. HAVE YOU EVER PURCHASED A DREAMCATCHER BEFORE? IF SO, WHEN AND WHERE?

3. DO YOU BELIEVE OR HOPE THE DREAMCATCHER MAY AFFECT YOUR DREAMS? YES  
\_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_ MAYBE \_\_\_\_\_

--IF YES, EXPLAIN HOW YOU THINK IT MIGHT WORK:

--IF NO, PLEASE GIVE SOME REASONS YOU DON'T THINK SO.

4. HAVE YOU, FRIENDS OR RELATIVES HAD INTERESTING EXPERIENCES WITH  
DREAMCATCHERS? (PLEASE DESCRIBE WHO, WHEN, WHERE, AND HOW, GIVING AS  
MANY DETAILS AS POSSIBLE.)

5. WHERE DO YOU THINK THIS TRADITION MOST LIKELY STARTED?

6. HAVE YOU OR FRIENDS EVER HAD ANY DREAMS YOU WOULD CALL VERY UNUSUAL, COINCIDENTAL, "ESP," OR SUPERNATURAL? IF SO, PLEASE DESCRIBE.

I have read the introductory paragraph and I wish to contribute my questionnaire answers to this study:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

I would be interested in being contacted at some later date for a paid, taped interview on this subject (circle one): YES NO

If YES, local phone number at which you can be reached:  
\_\_\_\_\_

--THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING--

**NARRATIVE CATEGORIZATION EXPERIMENT AND SURVEY  
(ADMINISTERED TO ANITA MANNUR'S COMPARATIVE LITERATURE  
CLASS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS/AMHERST)**

**4 AUGUST 1998**

**Prior to Playing Tape:**

1. Introduction. (My name and e-mail address; exercise identified only as a "narrative study," in order to avoid bias; optional nature of study; purpose of study; general consent; preparation for written consent form).
2. You will be asked to read along/listen to a narrative example. You will then be asked (with no further prompts) to recall whether you have ever had an experience "very much like" this one, OR heard a story "very much like" this one. Please take a moment to decide whether the story you will write down IS or IS NOT "very much like" this story. Please be as specific and complete in telling your story as you can. If you can't think of any story, please write down what you are thinking. Distribute edited transcript; play tape; when students are finished writing go on to subsequent set of questions:

**After Playing Tape:**

3. How would you explain the story you have just written? (If you have written nothing, how would you explain the story you heard?) Please be specific in your explanations.
4. If you were to describe the kind of story you just wrote (or heard, if you wrote nothing), what would you call it? What name would you use for it?
- 5A. Yes or No (for story writers only): Does the story you wrote match the example given as a kind of story? (Are they the same "kind of story"?)
- 5B. If so, what kind of story would you call both of these stories? What name would you assign to them both? (If you wrote nothing, disregard these two questions.)
6. Where did you acquire the terms you used to categorize either the story you heard, or the story you wrote, or the two stories together? (Where did you get the idea for the label you used?)
7. Should your written story or Judith's Story be called a premonition? Why or why not?
8. Should this story be called an ESP story? Why or why not?

9. Demographics: Name, address, phone, e-mail address, willing to be interviewed?, DOB, POB, ethnic background, religious affiliations, educational level and major, occupation, and any other personal data you feel comfortable adding (marital status, children, other information).

THANK YOU!

### Judith's Story (1995)

*One particular incident that really reinforced my sense that there was more to this world than what we see and hear, was in the summer, August, of 1991, or 2. I'm not sure of that. I have to backtrack. It would have been '92. And, my husband and I had been invited to a friend's 25th anniversary party. Our son would have been 20 years old at the time and a daughter who was 15, were both at home. Or were out and in, for the evening, but we were out. It was quite the party. It was at the home of the couple, it was a surprise party. I drink—I drink beer, I get feeling pretty good, I love to dance, tell jokes, tell stories, and was having a really good time. My husband \*doesn't\* drink; he does all the driving.*

*And around 12, 12:15 in the night, in the middle of feeling really, drunk, really having a good time, it was like somebody hit me in the stomach and without any, warning or anything about what I was going to say, I said to my husband, "We have to go home NOW." And uh, telling this story is, very emotional because, it was so scary. He said, "Oh, why, what's wrong?" And I said, "Uh, nothing, I just, I just have to go home now." We didn't even stop to say goodnight to anybody. We left that house. It was about a 6-7 minute drive to our place. We were living in Gander, a small town at the time. We drove home. When we had gone out the kids were both out. But when we got home our daughter was in bed and she said, "I don't know what's wrong with Paul, he's downstairs." So I went down and his bedroom, he had two rooms downstairs. And uh, off the bedroom was a room that he used as a sitting room. And uh, a messy room, total state. But he was on his bed, looking like he was about to die.*

*I had seen him drunk—I knew he wasn't drunk. I'd seen him drunk before that, many times. I'd seen him sick, from drinking. So I said, "We got to get him upstairs." I got, we got him upstairs, we linked him up, he was in, a state—nothing worked on him. His legs were just swinging, his arms were just, nothing. We got him upstairs, I said to my husband, "Get him strong coffee, maybe it is a booze that I'm not familiar with, maybe he's into something." And he was looking at us—by this time we had him sitting in a chair in the living room. And he was, he was almost crying, he was saying, "Mom, I'm going to die." And I was saying, "No, you're not" and I phoned the hospital. So I phoned the hospital and I said, "I don't know what's wrong with him, I don't think he's drunk. But he could be. I do smell booze, but I, I really don't think he's drunk. It doesn't look like that." She said, "Oh, just keep an eye on him, you know, get some coffee into him, and watch him."*



*So I got him in the, we got him in the bathroom, and I filled up the sink with cold water and proceeded to bathe his face, and pour the coffee into him and he was really, really scared, he was crying by this time and saying, "I don't want to die, I'm going to die and I don't want to." So, and I was operating without thinking, these things were just going on, probably took no more than 10 minutes, all of it. So anyway we tried to get out of him, what were you drinking? And he wasn't afraid to tell us, because, I always knew when he went drinking, from the time he had a driver's license he would say, "No Mom, you know, we're going to someone's house tonight, I'm not going to drive, I'm not going to party, I won't take the car," or "I will take the car" so I knew he wasn't afraid of us, to tell if he was drinking cause this wasn't something that was done in secret. So, I got my daughter up, do you know? "No," she said, "he and Herb were downstairs," his friend, "and Herb left and went home." And she said, "I heard Paul come upstairs" and she said, "I went out and he looked really strange" but she said "I thought maybe he was drunk, because they were after coming home about an hour before that, she said, and [they?] went on downstairs.*

*So, we, we got—I started to notice he was improving and he was getting more, more rigidity in his legs and arms, he was starting to move normally. And about 3 o'clock in the morning he was, well enough that I went on to bed. But my husband stayed up, sat up, and watched him. And when he got up in the morning, we started to question, what were you doing, were you drinking? And he said, "Herb and I went up to the pool hall and we had a few games of pool," and he said, "I had a beer. We walked home," which was about half a mile. He said, "When we got home I poured each of us a rum and Coke. We went downstairs" and he said, "I don't know what happened to me." He said, "I don't know if Herb slipped something into my drink, thinking it was a joke or whatever" and, and I didn't, he didn't think Herb would do it, and I didn't. None of us thought that that was possible. So, a few days after that I went down in his room, went into the sitting room part of it, which you could only approach through his bedroom. So it had no ventilation. And on the wall were painted all kinds of symbols, peace signs and rolling—you know things like that—so I came out and I said, "When did you paint your room?" And he said, that night that you were out to Bernadette's anniversary party. He said, "When Herb and I came home," he said, "I decided I'd do some painting." I said, "What paint did you use?" He said, "I used the patio stain." (pause)*

*And the patio stain, when we read the side of the can, he had all the symptoms of being poisoned from inhaling the fumes of the patio stain. And I am convinced—cause he had stayed in his own bedroom, which just had an opening, it wasn't even a door between the two—that he would have died.*







