

Foreword by John Robert Colombo

My favourite book when I was a youngster was *Ripley's Believe It or Not*. I did not have many books but that one I did have and I loved it. I remember spending hours turning its paperback pages and marvelling at the outrageous statements made by Robert L. Ripley, the Manhattan-based journalist and cartoonist. He was dubbed "the modern Marco Polo" because he visited country after country in search of incredible artifacts for his collections (stuff like shrunken heads now displayed in his BION museums) and for his daily and weekly newspaper columns in hundreds of newspapers around the world. Today Ripley is less popular in print than he was in the days of my youth, but more popular on television, and there are those "odditoriums" (more than forty-six of them in ten countries).

The audacity of Ripley was such that he once drew a cartoon that featured Charles Lindbergh piloting the "Spirit of St. Louis." It was captioned, "Lindbergh was the sixty-seventh man to make a non-stop flight over the Atlantic." Thousands of readers thought they had caught him in error. "Surely Lindbergh was the *first* pilot to make such a daring flight!" "No," replied Ripley, delighted with the response. "Lindbergh was the sixty-seventh. But he was the first to make that flight *solo*."

On another occasion Ripley wrote, "If all the Chinese in the world were to march – four abreast – past a given point they would never finish passing, though they marched forever and ever." He illustrated this statement with a memorable pencil sketch of an endless stream of Chinese wearing coolie hats and marching four abreast seemingly around the globe. He proved the Chinese would never stop marching by taking the most recent census figures for China that he could find. These happened to be for the years 1402 and 1403, and he read into them a population gain of nineteen per cent per annum. In computing China's birth and death rates, he ignored, strangely, war, famine, flood and pestilence. At U.S. Army marching regulations – three miles an hour, fifteen miles a day – it would take the six hundred million Chinese

(China's population at the time) twenty-two years and 302 days to pass a given point. This would be ample time for a whole new generation of Chinese to be born and begin again the long, unending march. Ingenious!

Robert L. Ripley was my hero for three reasons. He was a lively journalist, he was a stylish cartoonist, and he was a popular artist who could see what others could not see. He saw Lindbergh in a new light, and the same applies to the notion of the size and maybe the threat of the Chinese population. I saw Ripley in a new light, too: as an artist of the outrageous.

In much the same way do I see Michael Bradley. I did not ask if Ripley was right or wrong. I was astonished at what he said and drew. Similarly, one does not ask if Bradley is right or wrong. This is not the question to ask. If you want to ask questions about him or about his work, the ones you should be asking are the following: Could he *possibly* be right? If he is *possibly right*, why are his ideas so *irritating*? These are the questions to be asked, and in an attempt to deal with them I have agreed to contribute this foreword.

I contributed the foreword to an earlier book of his titled *Holy Grail Across the Atlantic*. It was published in 1988 and was deemed to be quite controversial at the time (though it seems less so in light of all the books on the Grail legend that have appeared since then). I was not asked to write a foreword to its 1998 successor, *Grail Knights of North America*; it did not need a foreword.

But I agreed to contribute one to the third volume in this series, *Swords at Sunset*; I think it requires one or benefits from one, if only to suggest to the unwary reader that there are different ways to approach a book like this one, different ways to interpret the author's argument and intention, than to regard them as expressions of some "gospel truth."

I find *Swords at Sunset* to be an astonishing work of speculative non-fiction. I think it is wrong in some particulars, possibly right in a number of ways, but always suggestive of broader perspectives and horizons. The picture of civilization and human nature painted in its pages is a panorama of crime and aggression, creativity and caring, conspiracy and compassion, so much so that readers will take from it what they like (if they find something they like in it) and reject what they do not like (if they

are willing to do so). So let me tell you what I like and then what I dislike about this book.

I really enjoy some of the author's insights and statements. They are worthy of Ripley, and I quote them without comment because they illustrate major themes of the book:

- * "Who else but a romantic would have answered the December 1981 letter from a highly articulate Englishwoman who described with eccentric charm part of a ruined castle in her backyard in the middle of Nova Scotia?"
- * "The truth is that our conventionally woven carpet of Canada's history is so threadbare and so worn with holes where awkward evidence lurks under the rug that it simply isn't acceptable for informed, urbane, and sophisticated believers of our historical self-conceptions."
- * "For some time I had been starting to suspect that the Book of Mormon wasn't just the ridiculous blasphemy that most non-Mormons thought it was, if and when they thought about it at all."
- * "As we will see, the Holy Grail heresy was the dominant belief in much of Europe and some of the Middle East. It certainly affected all of Christendom. And it still does."
- * "The greatest story ever told is a tale of unbelievable courage and supreme sacrifice, but it is also a chronicle of implacable hatred and inhuman cruelty."
- * "So, the names Issa, Y'shua, Joshua, or Jesus had been applied to the Messiah as early as about 1350 BC."
- * "I have always found it a bit curious that two of the most dominant personalities of the early Christian Era, the near-contemporaries Cleopatra and Jesus, are almost never mentioned in the same breath or sentence by historians."
- * "If there was a European community in the Memphremagog region from about AD 1400 to 1550, what happened to it?"
- * "So we see that the religion of the Holy Grail is really the same as the religion of true and original

Christianity, reverence for the Great Goddess and her Good Shepherd husband-son consort."

I find I am distrustful of a number of the author's generalizations and hope they will not harm or hurt. The place for political correctness lies in human rights legislation and in the nation's classrooms—it seems; it should not appear between the covers of every book on every shelf in every bookstore, in every book in every public or personal library. *Swords at Sunset* is politically incorrect; other charges could be directed against it too. Still, there has to be room to air unorthodox views and unpopular opinions. Bradley has taken leave to do that. It is a brave, if foolhardy, act. Anyway, the mainstream press ought to observe that and grit its teeth.

Here are some statements I find hard to swallow:

- * "Christianity had apparently originated on the Atlantic Coast of Europe, perhaps today's Brittany, or else had been brought there from islands out in the Atlantic of which only remnants still exist – Lyonesse and Atlantis have been names for this Atlantic civilization and its outposts."
- * "The Caucasus Mountains were the last refuge of the Neanderthal genetic strain, or 'race', of people because the glacial climate to which the Neanderthals had adapted lingered in the Caucasus region after the last Ice Age had ended elsewhere in Europe and Western Asia."
- * "The Old Testament also records the fact that many early Hebrews retained marked Neanderthal physical traits from their Caucasus Mountains origin."
- * "I have suggested, therefore, that Neanderthal and 'highly Neanderthaloid' people had an 'inbred' or genetic tendency toward monotheism, the conception of just one God who created 'Everything.'"
- * "Both Judaism and Islam were conceived and developed originally by very closely related Caucasus-steppe people."

I could continue but I believe the point has been made.

Elsewhere (in the foreword to *Holy Grail Across the Atlantic* and in the columns of *Mysterious Canada*), I have described Michael Bradley in a new way. I depicted him as a rehistorian, not as an historian, not even the historian as theorist – a systematizer

like a Spengler, a Toynbee, or a Huntington. The word *rehistorian* is my coinage for someone who is a revisionist of the historical record, based on new readings of that record which has been augmented by myths, legends, folklore, urban lore, rumour, and a conception of human nature and social history decidedly at odds with conventional interpretations. The rehistorian thrives on supposition, association, and conjecture. The texts he writes are frankly speculative and often resemble pairs of socks in department stores that are labelled "fit-all." These speculations are nonetheless interesting for what they tell us about mankind, history, and the human desire to understand fate or destiny in broad but often mutually exclusive ways.

At the beginning of this foreword I referred to the cartoon features of Robert L. Ripley. Michael Bradley is no Ripley; he is a book writer, not a cartoonist, but I think he would enjoy reading my copy of *Ripley's Believe It or Not!* Ripley famously wrote (quoting Napoleon) that "The Holy Roman Empire was not holy – nor Roman – nor an empire." I agree. Bradley writes:

Armed with love, compassion and knowledge, one can cast off the cumbersome and crippling armour of religious dogma or political economic dialectics to carve out, with supple and determined strokes, more appropriate social structures and a more rewarding human environment, using equally sharp edges of intellect and heart. That is what knights and heroines of the Grail have always done.

Here I can wholeheartedly concur!

John Robert Colombo, author and anthologist, is known across Canada as "the Master Gatherer." He is the author of books of lore and literature, including *True Canadian Ghost Stories*, *True Canadian UFO Stories*, and *The Midnight Hour*.