

RAVENNA TAPES PROLOGUE

'Beauty in things exists in the mind which contemplates them,' So said the essayist David Hume, more than two hundred years ago; he could just as well have said everything exists in the mind which contemplates them, for without mind there is nothing.

Do we actually create our own reality, or is everything just a figment of our imagination? Each of us carries within our brain a conglomeration of concepts and beliefs, backed up by a self made archive of maps of the external world.

Our higher behaviour is determined by education, upbringing, and general background, in conjunction with a series of inner narratives or thought patterns. The nature of these patterns eventually creates our station in life. It is these inner narratives that make a serial killer, an Einstein, a company chief executive, or a prime minister.

The environment in which we find ourselves is a direct reflection of our collective inner thought patterns. By examining the modus operandi and physical evidence of a string of similar murders, the criminologist can peer into the mind of the serial killer and thus create a psychological profile.

If one reconstructs the killers basic inner narratives, determines his psychological concepts and assesses his internal maps of the environment, (obtained from geographic locations of the murder scenes) it is possible to deduce and predict an incredible range of behaviour.

It seems we are nothing more than educated ants whose volition is created by necessity after all. Physical build, basic appearance, place of abode, occupation, habits (sexual and otherwise), education and marital status can all be tentatively predicted with surprising accuracy from a good psychological profiling job. This in turn will expose the identity of the criminal, thus the case is solved...or is it? If only every case were that simple.

Profiling may be intellectually satisfying to the academically inclined criminologist, but it's a dead loss to the numerous victims whose abused bodies are necessary to create the data for a meaningful profile. Is the information required to get at the truth worth all the human sufferance and cadaverous corporeality? (possibly not.)

Chief Superintendent ¹ Vince McFadden MBE, made an interesting observation which he put into words, he said, *'What the police need is a net with smaller holes in it, so that the villains can't swim through.'*

He envisioned a sort of filtration system that allowed law abiding citizens to pass through, but which stopped the enterprising criminal. The police already have such a net, but it is far from ideal; in reality it is much more ragged and inconsistent; with fine weaving here and coarse knitting there, periodically punctuated by gaping holes. The gaps however are rapidly closing as year by year, ever more sophisticated forensic methods are evolved.

But suppose you have a criminal whose inner narratives are based on a vast knowledge of police procedures and criminal law. A man who has the knowledge and ability to cut and dissolve away the very fabric of the net itself. A virtuoso performer who is utterly convincing, with the natural innate acting capabilities of an Orson Wells or a Lawrence Olivier. Combine this with the ability to assess and control virtually unlimited technical and scientific know how, an insatiable ambition to be the best in the world, a twist in propensity in the direction of immorality, and you have an untouchable super criminal, the likes of which the world has never seen before. The hypothetical case seems highly improbable, yet it is not impossible; could such a precedent actually exist? Ravenna Tapes sets out to show that it could indeed exist. It is the fascinating story surrounding one man who actually had this capability. In the overall scheme of things humanity is very fortunate, since the vast majority of crime dealt with by the London Metropolitan Police follows a predictable run-of-the-mill sequence.

Every once in a while a case or apparent series of cases become unpredictable, intriguing, extraordinary, one might even say freakish!

¹Herridge Roy & Hillard Brian, *Believe No One*. Little Brown & Co., 1993.

The case of the Ravenna Tapes lends itself well to all of these adjectives in fact one could virtually go on turning out descriptive words in this vein ad-infinitum, without over stating this particular malfeasance.

It was exactly five minutes after six on a rainy afternoon in October, that New Scotland Yard Information Room received a message from the Italian police. It read: *'Justinian mosaic stolen from the church of Saint Vitale in Ravenna, details to follow...'*