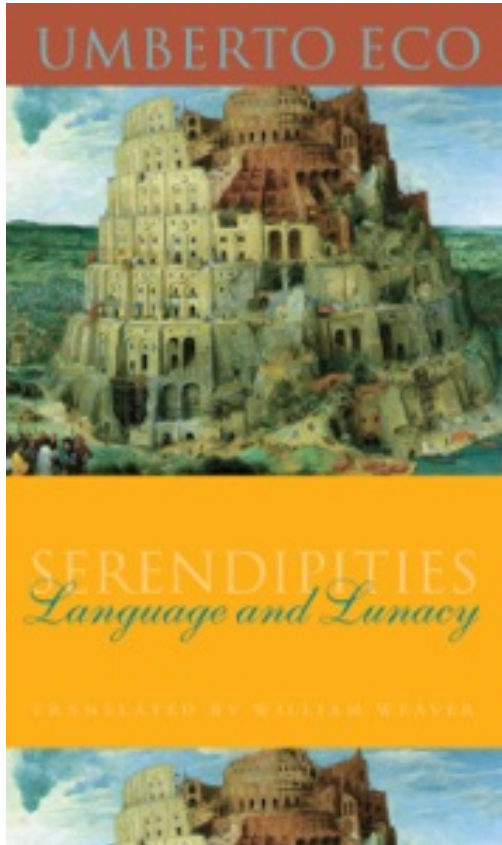


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In a careful unraveling of the fabulous and the false, Eco shows us how serendipities—unanticipated truths—often spring from mistaken ideas. From Leibniz's belief that the I Ching illustrated the principles of calculus to Marco Polo's mistaking a rhinoceros for a unicorn, Eco tours the labyrinth of intellectual history, illuminating the ways in which we project the familiar onto the strange.

Eco uncovers a rich history of linguistic endeavor—much of it ill-conceived—that sought to "heal the wound of Babel." Through the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, Greek, Hebrew, Chinese, and Egyptian were alternately proclaimed as the first language that God gave to Adam, while—in keeping with the colonial climate of the time—the complex language of the Amerindians in Mexico was viewed as crude and diabolical. In closing, Eco considers the erroneous notion of linguistic perfection and shrewdly observes that the dangers we face lie not in the rules we use to interpret other cultures but in our insistence on making these rules absolute.

With the startling combination of erudition and wit, bewildering anecdotes and scholarly rigor that are Eco's hallmarks, *Serendipities* is sure to entertain and enlighten any reader with a passion for the curious history of languages and ideas.

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