

THE EYE OF THE SIBYL

Introduction

Jay Kinney

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In the twenty-five years since his untimely death in 1982 at age fifty-three, interest in Philip K. Dick's writings has continued to expand at an ever-accelerating rate. A prolific science fiction author with some forty novels to his credit, Dick is probably best known to the general public for the movie *Blade Runner*, which was based on his novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and the more recent film, *A Scanner Darkly*, directed by Richard Linklater.

Although Dick did delve into religious and metaphysical topics in his novels over the years, he would probably not be of more than minor interest to readers of the *Rosicrucian Digest* if he hadn't undergone an extended period of mystical insight in the mid-1970s. This stretch of epiphany and inquiry began in February 1974, continued most intensely into 1975, and was still an influential factor in Dick's work right up until the time of his death following a stroke in 1982.

Dick's mystical experiences were initiated with a burst of pink light, and a night of nonstop color imagery. Voices began to resound in his mind and, for a while, he had the sense of another entity from Ancient Rome co-existing within his consciousness. Dick developed an intuitive perception that the ancient struggle between the early Christians and the Roman Empire was still very much alive in the present as a subtext to current events. As such, Dick saw Watergate, Cointelpro, even JFK's assassination, as manifestations of the cosmic battle between Light and Darkness. Often, while dropping off to sleep at night Dick heard cryptic messages and inner voices

seemingly originating from an ageless source of divine wisdom which he variously designated as Thomas, an early disciple of Christ, St. Sophia, the Holy Spirit, Elijah, an oracular Sybil of ancient times, and an A.I. voice (artificial intelligence) which he called VALIS (Vast Active Living Intelligence System).

Because some aspects of his mystical experiences could also be interpreted as symptoms of a psychosis, Dick was understandably reticent about directly discussing them. However, as a writer of science fiction, Dick could indirectly present his musings on the subject in the form of speculative metaphors.

"The Eye of the Sibyl" represents his first attempt to spin a story around his own extraordinary perceptions, and therefore gives a privileged glimpse of Dick the writer trying to wrestle with the confusing notions of Dick the visionary. Armed with this hindsight, today we can read "The Eye of the Sibyl" and see the hidden depths. Yet, in 1975, when the story was written, approaching "Sibyl" as a straight fantasy/S.F. story must have been much more confusing for editors and readers. And therein lies a tale.

Philip K. Dick originally wrote "Sibyl" in March, 1975, for *Arcade*, a high-quality magazine of underground comic art and writing, edited by Art Spiegelman (later to win a Pulitzer for the graphic history, *Maus*) and Bill Griffith (creator of "Zippy"). Spiegelman was a friend and fan of Dick's, and getting Dick to write for the low-budget *Arcade* was a pleasant coup.

In keeping with *Arcade's* emphasis on comics, the fiction and non-fiction pieces that appeared there always had several illustrations by cartoonists accompanying them. In his letter of March 30, 1975, accompanying the finished story, Dick mentioned to Spiegelman his intention for "Sibyl" to be thoroughly illustrated. As it turned out, I was the artist assigned to the job. This delighted me as I was also a big fan of Dick's work.

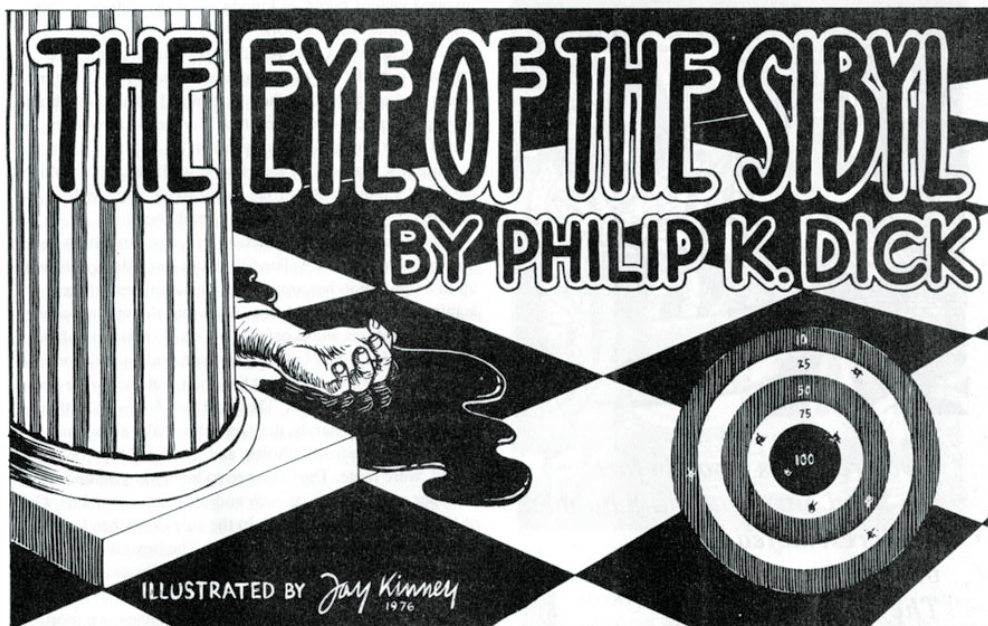
The manuscript was set into type, the illustrations were done, layouts were made, and then at the eleventh hour, the editors decided against running "Sibyl." Without a clue to the deeper significance and context of the story—which they couldn't have known at that time and place—they found it just too oblique for *Arcade*. "Sibyl" and its illustrations

were returned to their respective creators, and the story languished in obscurity.

However, the later publication in the 80s of *VALIS*, *The Divine Invasion*, and *Radio Free Albemuth*, helped make Dick's transmutation of his visions into fiction into more familiar ground. "The Eye of the Sibyl" is perhaps best appreciated as a piece of a puzzle that Dick was trying to solve, right up to the time of his fatal stroke in 1982.

I'm pleased that the *Rosicrucian Digest* has decided to reprint Dick's story as it was originally conceived. I'm sure that Philip K. Dick would approve.

(This illustrated version of "The Eye of the Sibyl" previously appeared in *Gnosis Magazine* #5. For further information on *Gnosis*, see www.gnosismagazine.com.)

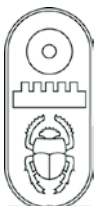


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How is it that our ancient Roman Republic guards itself against those who would destroy it? We Romans, although only mortals like other mortals, draw on the help of beings enormously superior to ourselves. These wise and kind entities, who originate from worlds unknown to us, are ready to assist

the Republic when it is in peril. When it is not in peril, they sink back out of sight—to return when we need them.

Take the case of the assassination of Julius Caesar: a case which apparently was closed when those who conspired to murder him were themselves murdered. But how did we Romans determine who had done



this foul deed? And, more important, how did we bring these conspirators to justice? We had outside help; we had the assistance of the Cumaean Sibyl who knows a thousand years ahead what will happen, and who gives us, in written form, her advice. All Romans are aware of the existence of the Sibylline Books. We open them whenever the need arises.

I myself, Philos Diktos of Tyana, have seen the Sibylline Books. Many leading Roman citizens, members of the Senate especially, have consulted them. But I have seen the Sibyl herself, and I of my own experience know something about her which few men know. Now that I am old—regretfully, but of the necessity which binds all mortal men—I am willing to confess that once, quite by accident I suppose, I in the course of my priestly duties saw how the Sibyl is capable of seeing down the corridors of time; I know what permits her to do this, as she developed out of the prior Greek Sibyl at Delphi, in that so highly venerated land, Greece.

Few men know this, and perhaps the Sibyl, reaching out through time to strike at me for speaking aloud, will silence me forever. It is quite possible, therefore, that before I can finish this scroll I will be found dead, my head split like one of those overripe melons from the Levant which we Romans prize so. In any case, being old, I will boldly say.

I had been quarreling with my wife that morning—I was not old then, and the dreadful murder of Julius Caesar had just taken place. At that time no one was sure who had done it. Treason against the State! Murder most ugly—a thousand knife wounds in the body of the man who had come to stabilize our quaking society . . . with the approval of the Sibyl, in her temple; we had seen the texts she had written to that effect. We knew that she had expected Caesar to bring his army across the river and into Rome, and to accept the crown of caesar.



*Two creatures stood before the
Sybil, inside a round bubble.
They resembled . . .
but they were not mortals.
They were gods.*

“You witless fool,” my wife was saying to me that morning. “If the Sibyl were so wise as you think, she would have anticipated this assassination.”

“Maybe she did,” I answered.

“I think she’s a fake,” my wife Xantipe said to me, grimacing in that way she has, which is so repulsive. She is—I should say was—of a higher social class than I, and always made me conscious of it. “You priests make up those texts; you write them yourselves—you say what you think in such a vague way that any interpretation can be made of it. You’re bilking the citizens, especially the well-to-do.” By that she meant her own family.

I said hotly, leaping up from the breakfast table, “She is inspired; she is a prophetess—she knows the future. Evidently there was no way the assassination of our great leader, whom the people loved so, could be averted.”

“The Sibyl is a hoax,” my wife said, and started buttering another roll, in her usual greedy fashion.

“I have seen the great books—”

“How does she know the future?” my wife demanded.

At that I had to admit I didn't know; I was crestfallen—I, a priest at Cumae, an employee of the Roman State. I felt humiliated.

“It's a money game,” my wife was saying as I strode out the door.

Even though it was only dawn—fair Aurora, the goddess of Dawn was showing that white light over the world, the light we regard as sacred, from which many of our inspired visions come—I made my way, on foot, to the lovely temple where I work.

No one else had arrived yet, except the armed guards loitering outside; they glanced at me in surprise to see me so early, then nodded as they recognized me. No one but a recognized priest of the temple at Cumae is allowed in; even Caesar himself must depend on us.

Entering, I passed by the great gas-filled vault in which the Sibyl's huge stone throne shone wetly in the half-gloom; only a few meager torches had been lit

I halted and froze into silence, as I saw something never disclosed to me before. The Sibyl, her long black hair tied up in a tight knot, her arms covered, sat on her throne, leaning forward—and I saw, then, that she was not alone.

Two creatures stood before her, inside a round bubble. They resembled men but each of them had an additional—I am not sure even now what they had, but they were not mortals. They were gods. They had slits for eyes, without pupils. Instead of hands, they had claws like a crab has. Their mouths were only holes, and I realized that they, god forbid, were mute. They seemed to be talking to the Sibyl but over a long string, at each end of which was a box. One of the creatures held the box to the side of his head, and the Sibyl listened to the box at her end.

The box had numbers on it and buttons, and the string was in rolls and heaps, so that it could be extended.

These were the Immortals. But we Romans, we mortals, had believed that all the Immortals had left the world, a long time ago. That was what we had been told. Evidently they had returned—at least for a short while, and to give information to the Sibyl.

The Sibyl turned toward me, and, incredibly, her head came across that whole gas-filled chamber until it was close to mine. She was smiling, but she had found me out. Now I could hear the conversation between her and the Immortals; she graciously made it audible to me.

“. . . only one of man,” the larger of the two Immortals was saying. “More will follow, but not for some time. The darkness of ignorance is coming, after a golden period.”

“There is no way it can be averted?” the Sibyl asked, in that melodious voice of hers which we treasure so.

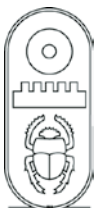
“Augustus will reign well,” the larger Immortal said, “but following him evil and deranged men will come.”

The other Immortal said, “You must understand that a new cult will arise around a Light Creature. The cult will grow, but their true texts will be encoded, and the actual messages lost. We foresee failure for the mission of the Light Creature; he will be tortured and murdered, as was Julius. And after that”

“Long after that,” the larger Immortal said, “civilization will draw itself up out of the ignorance once more, after two thousand years, and then”

The Sibyl gasped and said, “That long, Fathers?”

“That long. And then as they begin to question and to seek to learn their true origins, their divinity, the murders will



begin again, the repression and cruelty, and another dark age will begin.”

“It might be averted,” the other Immortal said.

“Can I assist?” The Sibyl asked.

Gently, both Immortals said, “You will be dead by then.”

“There will be no sibyl to take my place?”

“None. No one will guard the Republic two thousand years from now. And filthy men with small ideas will scamper and scabble about like rats; their footprints will crisscross the world as they seek power and vie with one another for false honors.” To the Sibyl both Immortals said, “You will not be able to help the people, then.”

Abruptly both Immortals vanished, along with their rolls of string and the boxes with numbers which talked and were talked into, as if by mind alone. The Sibyl sat for a moment, and then lifted her hands so that by means of the mechanism which the Egyptians taught us, one of the blank pages lifted toward her, that she might write. But then she did a curious thing, and it is this which I tell you with fear, more fear than what I have told already.

Reaching into the folds of her robe she brought out an Eye. She placed the eye in the center of her forehead, and it was not an eye at all such as ours, with a pupil, but like that, the slit-like eye of the Immortals, and yet not. It had sideways bands which moved toward one another, like rows . . . I have no words for this, being only a priest by formal training and class, but the Sibyl did turn toward me and look *past* me with that Eye, and she did then cry out so loud that it shook the walls of the temple; stones fell and the snakes far down in the slots of rock hissed. She cried in dismay and horror at what she saw, past me, and yet her strange third eye remained; she continued to look.

And then she fell, as if faint. I ran forward to lend a hand; I touched the Sibyl,

my friend, that great lovely friend of the Republic as she fell faint and forward in dismay at what she saw ahead, down the tunnels and corridors of time. For it was this Eye by which the Sibyl saw what she needed to see, to instruct and warn us. And it was evident to me that sometimes she saw things too dreadful for her to bear, and for us to handle, try as we might.

As I held the Sibyl, a strange thing happened. I saw, amid the swirling gasses, forms take shape.

“You must not take them as real,” the Sibyl said; I heard her voice, and yet although I understood her words I knew that the shapes were indeed real. I saw a giant ship, without sails or oars . . . I saw a city of thin, high buildings, crowded with vehicles unlike anything I had ever seen. And still I moved toward them and they toward me, until at last the shapes swirled behind me, cutting me off from the Sibyl. “I see this with the Gorgon’s Eye,” the Sibyl called after me. “It is the Eye which Medusa passed back and forth, the eye of the fates—you have fallen into . . .” And then her words were gone.



I played in the grass with a puppy, wondering about a broken Coca-Cola bottle which had been left in our backyard; I didn't know by whom.

"Philip, you come in for dinner!" my grandmother called from the back porch. I saw that the sun was setting.

"Okay!" I called back. But I continued to play.

I had found a great spider web, and in it was a bee wrapped up in web, stung by the spider. I began to unwrap it, and it stung me.

My next memory was reading the comic pages in the *Berkeley Daily Gazette*. I read about Brick Bradford and how he found a lost civilization from thousands of years ago.

"Hey, Mom," I said to my mother. "Look at this; it's swell. Brick walks down this ledge, see, and at the bottom" I kept staring at the olden-times helmets the people wore, and a strange feeling filled me; I didn't know why.

"He certainly gets a lot out of the funnies," my grandfather said in a disgusted voice. "He should read something worthwhile. Those comics are garbage."

The next I remember I was in school, sitting watching a girl dance. Her name was Jill and she was from the grade above ours, the sixth; she wore a belly dancer's costume and her veil covered the bottom part of her face. But I could see lovely kind eyes, eyes filled with wisdom. They reminded me of someone else's eyes I had once known, but who has a kid ever known? Later, Mrs. Redman had us write a composition, and I wrote about Jill. I wrote about strange lands where Jill lived where she danced with nothing on above her waist. Later, Mrs. Redman talked to my mother on the phone and I was bawled out, but in obscure terms that had to do with a bra or something. I never understood it then; there was a lot I didn't understand. I seemed to have memories, and yet they had nothing to do with growing up in Berkeley at the Hillside

Grammar School, or my family, or the house we lived in . . . they had to do with snakes. I know now why I dreamed of snakes: wise snakes, not evil snakes but those which whisper wisdom.

Anyhow, my composition was considered very good by the principal of the school, Mr. Bill Gaines, *after* I wrote in that Jill wore something above her waist at all times, and later I decided to be a writer.

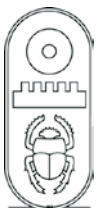
One night I had an odd dream. I was maybe in junior high school, getting ready to go to Berkeley High next year. I dreamed that in the deep of night—and it was like a regular dream, it was really real—I saw this person from outer space behind glass in a satellite of some kind they'd come here in. And he couldn't talk; he just looked at me, with funny eyes.

Two weeks or so later I had to fill out what I wanted to be when I grew up and I thought of my dream about the man from another universe, so I wrote: I AM GOING TO BE A SCIENCE FICTION WRITER.

That made my family mad, but then, see, when they got mad, I got stubborn, and anyhow my girlfriend, Ysabel Lomax, told me I'd never be any good at it and it didn't earn any money anyhow and science fiction was dumb and only people with pimples read it. So I decided for sure to write it, because people with pimples should have someone writing for them; it's unfair otherwise, just to write for people with clear complexions. America is built on fairness; that is what Mr. Gaines taught us at Hillside Grammar School, and since he was able to fix my wristwatch that time when no one else could, I tend to admire him.

In high school I was a failure because I just sat writing and writing all day, and all my teachers screamed at me that I was a Communist because I didn't do what I was told.

"Oh yeah?" I used to say. That got me sent up before the Dean of Boys. He told





me off worse than my grandfather had, and warned me that if I didn't get better grades I'd be expelled.

That night I had another one of those vivid dreams. This time a woman was driving me in her car, only it was like an old-time Roman style chariot, and she was singing.

The next day when I had to go see Mr. Erlaud, the Dean of Boys, I wrote on his blackboard, in Latin:

UBI PECUNIA REGNET

When he came in he turned red in the face, since he teaches Latin and knows that means, "Where money rules."

"This is what a left-wing complainer would write," he said to me.

So I wrote something else as he sat looking over my papers; I wrote:

UBI CUNNUS REGNET

That seemed to perplex him. "Where . . . did you learn that particular Latin word?" he asked.

"I don't know," I said. I wasn't sure, but it seemed to me that in my dreams they were talking to me in Latin. Maybe it was just my own brain doing reruns of my Latin 1-A beginners class, where I was really very good, surprisingly, because I didn't study.

The next vivid dream like that came two nights before that freak or those freaks killed

President Kennedy. I saw the whole thing happening in my dream, two nights before, but more than anything else, even more vivid, I saw my girlfriend Ysabel Lomax watching the conspirators doing their evil deed, and Ysabel had a third eye.

My folks sent me to a psychologist later on, because after President Kennedy was assassinated I got really weird. I just sat and brooded and withdrew.

It was a neat lady they sent me to, a Carol Heims. She was very pretty and she didn't say I was nuts; she said I should get away from family, drop out of school—she said that the school system insulates you from reality and keeps you from learning techniques to handle actual situations—and for me to write science fiction.

I did so. I worked at a TV sales shop sweeping up and uncrating and setting up the new TV sets. I kept thinking that each set was like a huge eye, though; it bothered me. I told Carol Heims my dreams that I had been having all my life, about the space people, and being in Latin, and that I thought I'd had a lot more I'd never remembered when I woke up.

"Dreams aren't fully understood," Ms. Heims told me. I was sitting there wondering how she would look in a belly dancer costume, nude above the waist; I found that made the therapy hour go faster. "There's a new theory that it's part of your collective unconscious, reaching back perhaps thousands of years . . . and in dreams you get in touch with it. So, if that's true, dreams are valid and very valuable."

I was busy imagining her hips moving suggestively from side to side, but I did listen to what she said, it was something about the wise kindness of her eyes. Always I thought of those wise snakes, for some reason.

"I've been dreaming about books," I told her. "Open books, held up before me. Huge books, very valuable. Even holy, like the Bible."

“That has to do with your career as a writer,” Ms. Heims said.

“These are old. Thousands of years old. And they’re warning us about something. A dreadful murder, a lot of murders. And cops putting people into prison for their ideas, but doing it secretly—framing people. And I keep seeing this woman who looks like you, but seated on a vast stone throne.”

LATER ON Ms. Heims was transferred to another part of the county and I couldn’t see her any more. I felt really bad, and I buried myself in my writing. I sold a story to a magazine called *Invigorating Science Fact*, which told about superior races who had landed on Earth and were directing our affairs secretly. They never paid me.

I am old now, and I risk telling this, because what do I have to lose? One day I got a request to write a small article for *Love-Planet Adventure Yarns*, and they gave me a plot they wanted written up, and a black-and-white photo of the cover. I kept staring at the photo; it showed a Roman or Greek—anyhow he wore a toga—and he had on his wrist a caduceus, which is the medical sign: two coiled snakes, only actually it was olive branches originally.

“How do you know that’s called a ‘caduceus?’” Ysabel asked me (we were living together now, and she was always telling me to make more money and to be like her family, which was well-to-do and classy).

“I don’t know,” I said, and I felt funny. And then I began to see violently agitated colored phosphene activity in both my eyes, like those modern abstract graphics which Paul Klee and others draw—in vivid color, and flash-cut in duration: very fast. “What’s the date?” I yelled at Ysabel, who was sitting drying her hair and reading the *Harvard Lampoon*.

“The date? It’s March 16,” she said.

“The year!” I yelled. “Pulchra puella, tempus . . .” And then I broke off, because



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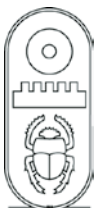
she was staring at me. And, worse, I couldn’t recall her name or who she was.

“It is 1974,” she answered.

“The tyranny is in power, then, if it is only 1974,” I said. “What?” she answered, astonished, staring at me. At once two beings appeared on each side of her, encapsulated in their inter-system vessels, two globes which hovered and maintained their atmosphere temperature. “Don’t say a further statement to her,” one of them warned me. “We will erase her memory; she will think she fell asleep and had a dream.”

“I remember,” I said, pressing my hands to my head. Anamnesis had taken place; I remembered that I was from ancient times, and, before that, from the star Albemuth, as were these two Immortals. “Why are you back?” I said. “To—”

“We shall work entirely through ordinary mortals,” J’Annis said. He was the wiser of the two Immortals. “There is no Sibyl now to help, to give advice to the Republic. In dreams we are inspiring people here and there to *wake up*; they are beginning to understand that the Price of Release is being paid by us to free them from the Liar, who rules them.”





“They’re not aware of you?” I said.

“They suspect. They see holograms of us projected in the sky, which we employ to divert them; they imagine that we are floating about there.”

I knew that these Immortals were in the minds of men, not in the skies of Earth, that by diverting attention outward, they were free once more to help inward, as they had always helped: the inner Word.

“We will bring the springtime to this winter world,” F’fr’am said, smiling. “We will raise the gates which imprison these people, who groan under a tyranny they dimly see. Did you see? Did you know of the comings-and-goings of the secret police, the quasi-military teams which destroyed all freedom of speech, all those who dissented?”

NOW, IN MY OLD AGE, I set forth this account for you, my Roman friends, here at Cumae, where the Sibyl lives. I passed either by chance or by design into the far future, into a world of tyranny, of winter, which you cannot imagine. And I saw the Immortals which assist us also assist those, two thousand years from now!

Although those mortals in the future are—listen to me—*blind*. Their sight has been taken away by a thousand years of repression; they have been tormented and limited, the way we limit animals. But the

Immortals are waking them up—will wake them up, I should say, in time to save them. And then the two thousand years of winter will end; they will open their eyes, because of dreams and secret inspirations; they will know—but I have told you all this, in my ancient rambling fashion.

Let me finish with this verse by our great poet Virgil, a good friend of the Sibyl, and you will know from it what lies ahead, for the Sibyl has said that although it will not apply to our time here in Rome, it will apply to those two thousand years from us, ahead in time, bringing them promise of relief:

*Ultima Cumaei venit iam carminis aetas;
magnus ab integro saeculorum nascitur ordo.
Iam redit et Virgo, redeunt Saturnia regna;
iam nova progenies, caelo demittitur alto.
Tu modo nascenti puero, quo ferrea primum
desinet, ac toto surget gens aurea mundo,
casta fave Lucina; tuus iam regnat Apollo.*

I will set this in the strange English language which I learned to speak during my time in the future, before the Immortals and Sibyl drew me back here, my work there at that time done:

*At last the Final Time announced by the
Sibyl will arrive:*

The procession of ages turns to its origin.

*The Virgin returns and Saturn reigns
as before;*

A new race from heaven on high descends.

*Goddess of Birth, smile on the
new-born baby,*

*In whose time the Iron Prison will fall
to ruin*

And a golden race arises everywhere.

Apollo, the rightful king, is restored!

Alas, you, my dear Roman friends, will not live to see this. But far along the corridors of time, in the United States (I use here words foreign to you) evil will fall, and this little prophecy of Virgil, which the Sibyl inspired in him will come true. The springtime is reborn!