



The Exegesis of Philip K. Dick

There can be no more dependable indicator that we now all inhabit (or delude ourselves into believing we inhabit) a Philip K. Dick universe (or the shoddy simulacrum thereof) than the appearance of this mammoth volume of Dick's journals, letters, and private stream-of-consciousness essays, *The Exegesis of Philip K. Dick*, which he voluminously generated for a full eight years following his infamous mind-blasting, soul-shattering, paradigm-upsetting cosmic epiphany of 1974. Only waves of patented PKD-style reality distortion could have landed us in our contemporary situation.

Any science fiction fan alive in 1974, told that nearly forty years later the writer of such lowbrow paperback originals as *Clans of the Alphane Moon* and *The Unteleported Man* would be included in the prestigious Library of America series and also have his philosophical diaries appear from a major publisher, would have regarded such a situation as proof positive of alien invasion, space-time warpage, or engineered drugs dumped into the global water supplies. And yet, these honors are well deserved, for Dick nowadays has only one rival as predictor and shaper of the zeitgeist: his contemporary pulpster J. G. Ballard, who escaped to the mainstream a bit sooner than Dick. And the *Exegesis* is a briary, twisted, haunted path to the very heart of Dick's accomplishments.

Editors Pamela Jackson and Jonathan Lethem have performed a heroic task in redacting and sorting the 8,000 manuscript pages left behind at Dick's death into the present book. (They and a host of Dickian savants also provide copious footnotes along the way.) And right upfront they deliver a robust defense for the book's very existence, given its ideational density which trumps William Vollmann's 3,000-page *Rising Up & Rising Down* in one-third the space.

First, the *Exegesis* offers unique insights into Dick's own fiction, a body of work as worthy of examination as that of "Dostoyevsky or Henry James." It offers novel perspectives on eternally debated spiritual, philosophical, epistemological and ontological issues. It captures a slice of history (1974-1982) and a chunk of autobiography. It is a prime document of delusional mental states. And, finally, it is simply a unique aesthetic reading experience, a constructed world that will swallow one whole as surely as any of Dick's novels.

This last defense of the *Exegesis* is perhaps the most vivid hook for the average reader, whom I imagine to be a typical fan moderately conversant with Dick's novels and perhaps a bit of his life story, curious to learn more. Whereas we are not all equally keen on high-flown theorizing, especially from the paranoid visionary school of supralogic, we all love a drama, and the *Exegesis* provides that in spades. It's like the greatest Spalding Gray

staged monologue ever conceived, emotionally rich and fraught with dynamic cycles of tension and relief. There's one character -- PKD -- before your eyes the whole time, deconstructing and reconstructing his life and the universe with not only his sanity on the line, but also, if we are to accept his premises, the entire salvation of creation at stake. How could you not be enraptured?

Beside all the multiplex, circuitous philosophizing, the book is full of mini-narratives pertaining to Dick's own life; insightful, critical examinations of what his *oeuvre* is all about; stoner aphorisms ("It is just as easy to think of the future pushing the present into the past as to think of the past generating the present and moving toward the future..."); Jungian dream adventures like Lovecraft's *The Quest of Unknown Kadath*; and plaintive cries from the heart, a voice echoing in the spiritual wilderness, longing for one true companion and guide. Arriving, exhausted and drenched in cosmological flop sweat, on page 827, written not long before Dick's premature death from stroke in 1982, we encounter his temporary elation, and it cuts like a knife. "Why am I so joyful? I am celebrating a victory and can now stop work -- finally -- and relax. Why? Because I did my job and I know it." But of course more hard work followed, and only death stopped him.

Philip K. Dick was our William Blake. And, like Blake, he saw that "Eternity is in love with the productions of time." Dick could never let the *Exegesis* end, because through him Eternity was so heartily enjoying the lovely, lively, cerebral, pathetic, and emotional show.



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