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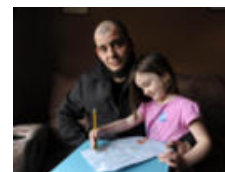
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## Review: The exegesis of Philip K. Dick, edited by Pamela Jackson and Jonathan Lethem

Article

Published On Sat Jan 07 2012

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Alex Good

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Philip K. Dick is that rarest of writers, having enjoyed a posthumous transformation from genre hack and marginal cult figure to established star in the literary pantheon. What were once drug-store SF paperbacks with lurid covers are now published in the prestigious Library of America series, while selections from a massive trove of unpublished jottings have been collected in a new, annotated and illustrated scholarly edition called *The Exegesis of Philip K. Dick*.

"Exegesis" is a Greek word for critical explanation or interpretation, and it's the name that the hypergraphic Dick himself gave to a project that amounted to a pile of some 8 million words of handwritten and typewritten text (diaries, notebooks, letters) that he left behind when he died in 1982. Sorting through this must have been a Herculean labour, for which Dick's legions of fans owe the editors a great deal of thanks.

What Dick was interpreting was his own fiction and dreams, by light of a revelation he received in February and March of 1974 (a totemic date that he usually rendered, a bit confusingly, as 2-3-74). Out of this revelation — that came, naturally enough, by way of a delivery woman — he constructed a jerry-built personal mythology that he then proceeded to plug all of reality into.

Even those of us who love his work have to admit that while Dick had a brilliant and original imagination he could be a baffling, repetitive, and downright sloppy writer. The Exegesis takes these qualities and multiplies them exponentially. One can't even explain Dick's explanation in a nutshell, though it has something to do with the falseness of what we take as everyday reality

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and the higher consciousness or vision that some of us can enter into by being hit with pink laser beams of information from other planets. So awakened, we become aware of special states of being that lie beyond the black iron prison of this mundane world.

Hardcore followers of Dick will enjoy it all immensely, and it is in fact a lively and wildly entertaining journey that can even be very funny at times. As exhilarating as most of it is, however, it is also a sad book, the product of a troubled and suffering mind. Dick did not enjoy robust mental health, a condition not helped by his epic consumption of drugs, and despite the best exculpatory efforts of the editors the results are pretty obviously on display here.

Take the matter of Dick's paranoia. Underlying the Exegesis is a vision of secret connections everywhere, between the Gospels, Zoroastrianism, particle physics, neurophysiology, and the workings of an oppressive and eternal One World Government (the Roman Empire, as one of his famous phrases has it, never ended).

Of course no such connections exist. As one footnote suggests, Dick "often appears, well, crazy," and there is no denying this is a mad performance, beside which even the later prophecies of Blake (the closest literary analogy) seem lucid and level-headed.

Finally, it's important to note that The Exegesis is not essential as a primer for the rest of Dick's work, most of which can be fully appreciated without this manic gloss. As a mental memoir though it has few parallels, and for those up to the challenge it provides fascinating insights into one of twentieth-century literature's strangest and most creative personalities.


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
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