This article originally appeared in *Extraploation, Vol. 33, No. 3*, The Kent State University Press, Kent, Ohio.

Dickian Time in *The Man in the High Castle*

Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle,* an alternate history, seems to proceed in an orderly fashion from its opening moment outside Robert Childan's shop to its closing scene at Abendsen's house. The narrative, once the basic premise of an Axis victory in World War II has been established, is essentially in the realistic style. The major themes seem obvious: the dangers of fascism, the clash between a fascist world-view and a Taoist one, and the importance and difficulties of personal choice. Dick, in his inimitable way, however, does more than what is easily perceivable. In this case he subtly takes us through an exploration of time. He manages this journey by exploiting different perceptions of time, by distorting time within the apparently linear plot structure, and, in some ways, by redefining time.

All page numbers for quotes from TMITHC refer to the 1988 Ace-Berkeley edition.

Dick, as he most often does, uses multiple focal characters to tell us this story. With only one exception–when Tagomi shoots the men the Reich's consul Reiss sends to capture Baynes–each change in the focal character is marked by the beginning of a new section. He also follows his accustomed style in which, as explained by Darko Suvin, he give us "an introductory sentence or clause which sets up the time and place of the new section" (Suvin). For example, the novel begins:

Suvin, Darko, "Artifice as Refuge and World View: Philip K. Dick's Foci." *Philip K. Dick*. Ed. Martin Harry Greenberg and Joseph D. Olander. New York, Taplinger, 1983, p 75.

> For a week Mr. R Childan had been anxiously watching the mail . . . As he opened up his store on Friday morning and saw only letters on the floor by the mail slot he thought, I'm going to have an angry customer. (1)

In the same vein, the next section begins: "in his room on Hayes Street, Frank Frink lay in bed wondering how to get up . . . Time? The clock on the dresser. Eleven-thirty!" (6). Having the specifics of time, place, and person before us in each section gives us the impression that we understand exactly where we are and when the events of a section are happening. These specifics usually appear within the first

paragraph of a new segment.

The strong sense of grounding in the narrative present that the time and place indicators give us allows Dick to easily move into the period before the narrative and, through means of flashbacks, describe the events pivotal to and resulting from the Nazis winning World War II. These flashbacks, since they often contain different perceptions of the same incident, also help establish the personal milieu in which we find each character at the beginning of the novel.

The sense of grounding also lets us enjoy the relatively, for Dick, small twists of reality in *The Man in the High Castle*. For instance, in chapter five, we are told that a man named Hawthorne Abendsen has written a book called *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy*, in which the Allies have won World War II. We discover, however, that the world portrayed is not our world, for in Abendsen's fictional reality Rexford Tugwell becomes president in 1940, after Roosevelt. The destruction of U.S. ships in Pearl Harbor does not happen. Hitler is alive after the war and is tried by the Allies.

The second twist in reality–Tagomi's venture into another San Francisco where something called the Embarcadero Freeway exists–strains our sense of grounding a bit more than the aforementioned history in a fictional book. The moment is brief, however, and as Tagomi winds up physically where he began his journey, there can be some doubt in our minds as to whether or not it was an actual, not simply metaphorical, journey.

Throughout the narrative, despite these minor detours into other realities, we seem to be following a linear path as we meet, for example, Childan "as he opened his shop on Friday morning" (1) and then see him again "at one-thirty that afternoon" (19). We also meet Frank Frink in the morning while he is anticipating a showdown with his former employer, and then see him a few pages later confronting the man. We first find Juliana Frink in the evening when she meets and takes home a young truck driver, and then we see her the morning after.

Yet time other than the strictly linear also exists within the novel, one example being the *I Ching or Book of Changes*. At important junctures in their lives, three out of four main characters–Tagomi, Frank, and Julian–consult the *I Ching*. To do so, he or she must build a hexagram, either by manipulating yarrow stalks, or by throwing coins. Although the *I Ching* is sometimes referred to as "the Oracle," the purpose of using it is not to "tell the future," but rather, as Frank Frink thinks of it, to discover "the tenor of the Moment" (13):

> He, Juliana, the factory on Gough Street, the Trade Missions that ruled, the exploration of the planets, the billion chemical heaps in Africa that were not now even corpses, the aspirations of the thousands around him in the shanty warrens of San Francisco, the mad creatures in Berlin with their clam faces and manic plans–all connected in this moment of yarrow stalks to select the exact wisdom appropriate . . . (11)

In these instances, time is based on synchronicity–the sum of all aspects of that particular instant. Or a Frank Frink puts it, "[in] that synchronicity theory, every particle being connected with every other, you can't fart without changing the balance of the universe" (47).

The novel thus consists of linear plots lines that are interrupted now and then by assessment–through consulting the *I Ching*–of all that is bound together to make the Moment. In other words, both linear and synchronistic times exist and are accepted within the narrative.

The combination of linearity and synchronicity is reflected by events in the narrative. In general, the three main San Francisco plot lines–Tagomi, Frink, and Childan–tend not to overlap. The few intentional meetings between these characters serve the linear devices within the novel. Childan meets with Tagomi to sell him a gift. Tagomi intends to give the gift to an important visitor from Europe whose presence turns out to have a major impact on Tagomi's life. Frank Frink goes to Childan's shop to set in motion a scheme to provoke Childan into questioning the authenticity of his supposedly antique stock and thus opens the way for Frink and his partner to sell Childan their newly made jewelry. Tagomi and Frink never meet.

Yet Tagomi and Frink are connected with one another. The connection is not deliberate on either part. It also lacks the clear linearity of the interactions between Childan and Tagomi and Childan and Frink. The relationship between them tends toward the synchronistic, that is, more toward a response to the moment. Tagomi, for instance, is not at first interested in the jewelry Childan shows him when he has come to the shop to return the gun with which he had killed Reiss's men. He leaves. Yet, although he states he is "grasping at straws" (217), he turns back and allows Childan to select an item for him.

Tagomi, still "grasping at straws," goes to sit in a park, meditating upon the metal object. He has an experience–perhaps he has even crossed from one reality to another–but his perception is that the triangle has broken him from his "moorings" (223). When he returns to work, he is still feeling "unmoored." There, during a interchange with the German consul, Hugo Reiss, he not only refuses to cooperate on a "routine matter having to do with [Reiss's] functionality" (229)–the signing of an extradition paper for an American Jew–but he also impulsively grabs the paper back and scribbles "release" (229). The Jew is Frank Frink, saved by the impulse of a moment by a man he knows nothing about and who knows nothing directly about him.

There are further deviations from strict linearity in *The Man in the High Castle*. These deviations are best seen by charting the plot lines within the narrative (see Plotlines). Once the narrative events have been laid out, it is clear that the grounding offered by the apparent time and place indicators is not as firm as it seems to be. Indeed, there are multiple plotlines, each with its own sense of time, within the

narrative timeline of the novel.

The most obvious deviation from the main timeline centers around Childan's visit to Tagomi. We know that these two have a two o'clock appointment with each other (2, 13). We see Childan begin the journey to Tagomi's office at 1:40 p.m. (19). We never see the meeting, but we do see Childan grousing about it afterward: "Two hours showing. Much too long. Almost four hours in all; too late to reopen the store . . . but–he unlocked the store door, propped it open, went to hang up his coat in the rear" (50). We already know he has gone to lunch, too (but spent only twenty minutes, instead of his usual half hour) (49-50). Shortly after he reopens the store, however, he waits on a customer. During this interaction he learns he may have a fraudulent antique gun (50-52), so he sends the gun to the lab at the University of California. The University calls back at three o'clock. While waiting for the answer, "Childan began pacing about his store" (53). As it is not likely he paced until the next day, there seems to be an error here. Childan and Tagomi could not have met at two o'clock for "two hours," with enough time afterward for Childan to eat lunch and wait on a customer, send a parcel, have it examined, and then there be a call from the University at three. Dick could certainly have not been paying attention to details here and messed up his own timeline. However, the connection between a fraudulent antique item and a fraudulent sense of time in this section is simply too obvious to miss.

Frank Frink's narrative also deviates from the main narrative line. The reader first meets Frink at 11:30 a.m. (6), then follows him until noon (8) when he is supposedly on his way to meet his former employer, Wyndam-Matson. In between his preparation and his arrival, however, are two sections; one where we see Juliana "at sunset" (27) and the other where we see Baynes in a rocket that we know from Tagomi's section is landing some time late in the day. In Frink's next section we see him at Wyndam-Matson's plant. Just as he had referred, in the first section, to his misconduct "yesterday" (6), that is, the day before the novel begins, his friend McCarthy now also refers to Frink's actions "yesterday" (42). Then McCarthy invites Frink to his apartment "after work tonight" (48) so that we know that it still must be afternoon. Therefore, a day has ended for Juliana in her own section and for Baynes and Tagomi in Baynes's section, while it is still daytime for Frink. Frink has left the main narrative timeline (see Plotlines).

Frink remains on his own timeline for a while. His next section occurs an indeterminate time later, though it seems as if we should know when it's happening: "At three o'clock that afternoon . . ." (96). We don't *which* afternoon it is, however. Tagomi's section precedes Frink's and includes the death of Martin Bormann. Bormann's death is important to Tagomi and the other Trade Missions in the Pacific States of America (PSA) and to Juliana and Joe in the Buffer Zone. It seems strange that Frink would make no mention of it if his afternoon were on the same day as Bormann's death.

We discover three chapters later that Frink has pulled Childan off the main timeline as well. The next two times we see Frink it is on the same day two weeks later (124) when he drives his partner, McCarthy, to Childan's shop. This time period jibes with Childan's, who has been examining his guns for authenticity "the last couple of weeks" (136). Yet, Baynes–and therefore Tagomi's–"two weeks" seems to have been a bit longer: "From his room he had called the Trade Missions every day at noon . . . As Mr. Baynes prepared to make his sixteenth call . . . (143). We pick up Tagomi again on the seventeenth day: "At seven o'clock the following morning" (157). The next time we see Frink, he and McCarthy had visited five other shops and "jewelry was piling up" (184). In Childan's section, which occurred in between, Paul Kasouras indicates that he had hung on to the pin Childan had sent (on the day McCarthy had visited his shop) for "several days" (167). Both these sections seem to point to a few days having passed, while only one day passes for Tagomi and Baynes. Now, we discover from subsequent sections, that from this point on, everyone in the PSA is on the same track, *i.e.*, about seventeen days from point [B] on the plotlines. Frink and Childan have reentered the main narrative line.

While it certainly could be that the above deviations from the main narrative timeline are the result of Dick being careless or uninterested in small discrepancies in counting time, there is no question that the fact that Juliana has her own plotline was intentional. The main plotline, taking place in the PSA, begins with Childan and Tagomi the morning of the day before Bormann's death and follows Tagomi, Frink, Childan, and Baynes for twenty-three to twenty-four days. In contrast, Juliana's story, taking place entirely in the Buffer Zone, covers four days, beginning the evening of the day before Bormann's death and ending two days later at Abendsen's house. Juliana never interacts with any of the focal characters in the PSA, though Frink reminisces about her occasionally. Yet, Juliana's story line is stretched throughout the book, making its first appearance early (26) and reappearing periodically throughout, taking the final part of the last chapter.

The use of this kind of atemporal juxtaposition between the various narrative lines in not unknown to Dick. For instance, Kim Stanley Robinson has noted that in The Simulacra "the main plot . . . should take a month at the very least . . . and the events in it [the subplot] take, as far as we can tell, about three days" (Robinson). The use of atemporally juxtaposed narrative lines distorts the perceived linearity of time within *The Man in the High Castle*. Dick manages this distortion without confusing the reader by making consistent use of the time and place indicators discussed earlier. The information indicating that the various narrative lines exist atemporarily with one another, therefore, is in the text. The reader, however, tends to perceive the specific indicators as comprising a consistent whole, much as one's eyes perceive certain inclusive patterns in optical illusions.

Robinson, Kim Stanley. *The Novels of Philip K. Dick*. Ann Arbor:UMI Research Press. 1982. p. 70.

The most straightforward use of the atemporally juxtaposed narrative is to modify the reader's perceptions of time within the novel. When it becomes sunset for Juliana, Baynes, and Tagomi at the beginning of the book, Frink still has to meet with his ex-employer. The effect here is to draw out the anticipation of what he assumes

will be an unpleasant meeting. When Frink has passed several days making jewelry and visiting other shops, Tagomi waits for Reiss's men to arrive in his office. It is a wait of a few hours, but interrupted as it is by Frink's wait of several days, it seems very long indeed.

Distortion of the reader's perception of time is done on a grander scale as well. The swift movement of action compressed into four days of Juliana's sections adds a feeling of speed to the slow-going portions of the novel that often contain a large number of reminiscences of *The Man in the High Castle*'s historic past or of contrasting excerpts from Abendsen's *Grasshopper*. Juliana's sections, in turn, do not seem as swift as they are. We are given time to digest information contained in other sections so that we can understand the events that happen so quickly in the Buffer Zone.

The distorted temporality also reflects on what Patricia S. Warrick sees as one of the minor themes of *The Man in the High Castle*: "persons and events give a first impression which turns out to be only an illusion masking reality" (Warrick). For example, we have seen that the time indicators for the period in which Childan is working in his store after his visit with Tagomi cannot be correct. They are in essence fraudulent. During this period of time, Childan is given cause to question the authenticity of the antique guns he had been selling. Here is another instance when the nature of time in a portion of the novel mirrors a portion of the action: the seemingly well-defined (e.g., "at lunchtime," "at three o'clock") but fraudulent time reflects on the fraudulent nature of what had appeared to Childan and prospective buyers to be guns with authentic "historicity."

Warrick, Patricia. *Mind in Motion: The Fiction of Philip K. Dick*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1987. p. 56

Juliana's plot line serves purposes other than simply distorting our perceptions. Although she never interacts with anyone in the PSA, her storyline reflects the events in Tagomi's. Early on they both meet Germans disguised as other nationalities; news of Bormann's death binds the two together temporally for a short time; and, finally, both kill people in order to protect others–Tagomi shoots Reiss's men (190) and Juliana slit's Joe's throat (204).

Their reactions are quite different, however. Tagomi cannot deal with the fact that he has taken two lives. He plunges himself into the Oracle. Finding no answer, he tries to return the gun with which he killed the men and even tries to meditate on a small pin in which, he has been assured, "the law of Tao is borne out" (216). Juliana, on the other hand, seems to slit Joe's throat almost casually. In fact, she forgets about him in the excitement of getting her packages to the car. It is only later that she has a fit of shakes.

Yet both Tagomi and Juliana find the answer to their own personal questions in the same hexagram: sixty-one, Inner Truth. For Tagomi the meaning of the answer does not come immediately. In fact, for a while, he feels that "the oracle [is] enigmatic. Perhaps it has withdrawn from the world of man in sorrow" (213). Juliana's response is much more unhesitating: Abendsen's "book is true" (247). In the

end, their views come closer to one another's. Tagomi thinks, while he is experiencing a heart attack:

> It is I. The book [*I Ching*] means me. I will never fully understand; that is the nature of such creatures. Or is this Inner Truth now, this that is happening to me?
> I will wait. I will see. Which it is.
> Perhaps it is both. (231)

In the end, just as Tagomi has decided to wait to see how what he has learned turns out, Juliana decides, "Maybe I'll go back to my husband, Frank. I tried to phone him tonight; I might try again. I'll see how I feel later on" (248).

The Taoist view of the constant change from yin to yang does not suffice to explain the whole of the picture either. Tagomi recognizes this first when he must listen to the rundown of possible new rulers in Germany: "There is evil. It is actual like cement . . . I can't stand it. Evil is not a view" (90). He is faced with the loss of this Taoist Way after the shooting as well: "There is no answer. No understanding. Not even in the oracle" (212). Juliana's story can be seen in non-Taoist terms too.

The ends of Tagomi's and Juliana's story lines are similar in that they both consider the future. Tagomi consider his "work done. As far as I can, my part. The rest is up to Tokyo and factions in Germany. Struggle beyond me in any case" (230). Indeed, we see no more of Tagomi, as we have come almost to the end of the novel and to the end of the main narrative line. We do see, however, the result of his actions. In the next section Frink is released from jail.

Juliana, as sure as she was about the meaning of Abendsen's book, is much less sure about the future. She says she *might phone her husband* (248: emphasis added). She says this in a section that lies near the end of the novel, but which happens early in the narrative line. Indeed the main narrative line continues on for several more weeks and not once during this time does she actually contact her ex-husband.

Up until this time she has acted impulsively at every turn: she picks up Joe; goes on a trip to Cheyenne with him; impulsively–even though she is being guided by Joe–decides to visit Abendsen; and slits Joe's carotid artery in a swift move to get out the door. She wavers about getting a doctor for him, then, in dealing with her packages and her car, never gets around to it. After two weeks, it does not seem likely that she will take the time to call Frink, or even consider it further, some time "later on" (248).

Taking a non-Taoist view in which change from yin to yang and back is not accepted as a given and that there are absolutes such as "evil," it may not be possible to Juliana to return to the narrative line once she has discovered, as Robinson puts it, "that the *I Ching* declares [her] world a fiction" (Robinson). With no reality in which to function and therefore no time within this reality any longer, she can hardly go on

Robinson, p. 49.

as a character. Perhaps this is one of the reasons her final scene is the final scene in the novel.

These two views of Juliana–as the embodiment of the Tao and as a character who, upon finding her world lacks reality, must disappear–need not be considered mutually exclusive. Just as Dick has interwoven linear and synchronistic time, he has also interwoven the Taoist view of constant change and the Western idea of absolutes. Juliana can exist in both worlds. She does mirror and therefore give perspective to Tagomi's story, her actions following a linear pattern just as Tagomi's do. Yet she is the first to assume a moral stance and take action, killing Joe and confronting Abendsen long before Tagomi shoots Reiss's men, before Childan decides not to trivialize Frank Frink's work, and before Tagomi's impulsive decision not to cooperate with Reiss over the extradition of a Jew. It is as if her actions begin a cascade. As Warrick explains, "the vibrations of an event occurring in one part of the narrative will be felt by the whole" (Warrick). Therefore, to work within the frame of Western absolutes, the end of the book may have to coincide with the end of Juliana's story; yet, taking the synchronistic view of time, the narrative timeline can continue after the end of her timeline, reverberating from the consequences of her actions.

Warrick, p. 52.

Philip Dick not only wrote an alternate history with *The Man in the High Castle*, but in it develops an alternate view of time. He takes the usual Western linear view that one event moves into another and combines it with the Taoist idea of synchronicity, in which any part of the whole can affect any other part of the whole. While constantly telling us when events happen, he manages to distort our views of time, depending on our habits of perception to string the events together in predictable ways. It would be easy to say that this work informs us that there is no one view of time, but Dick never goes only for the easy answer. When we dissect the novel and compare the presumptive narrative realit(ies) with the chartable narrative plotlines, we find that the view within the novel must be that one cannot predict which events will affect other events in time and through what means. Our *perception* of time must necessarily be local, yet, in actuality, its true nature is not so restricted.

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NOTE: In constructing the narrative plotlines for the web, I discovered a complication I missed the first time. Tagomi meets with Baynes as he disembarks from the plane. That seems straightforward. Shortly before, Juliana, in the Buffer Zone, looks up and sees Baynes's rocket flying over, heading toward the PSA. This moment seems to makes narrative sense in that it ties the two locations together. However, Tagomi meets Baynes at the airport *before Childan has lunch and reopens his shop*. So for brief moment Tagomi and Baynes exist in this nether-time between narrative timelines. By late evening, however, Tagomi and Baynes appear to be on the main narrative timeline again, meshing with the time of Wyndam-Matson's 11:30 p.m. phone call.

As with the total picture of the novel summed up in the last paragraph of the novel, it truly appears that local time can seem functional and correct in the novel, but that the bigger picture is never perceived by the protagonists and is certainly less than obvious to the reader.

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