



**THE TRANSMIGRATION OF TIMOTHY ARCHER:
Science Fiction, Fantasy or Realism?
By David Hyde**

In June 1981 Philip K. Dick was waiting to hear from his agent on acceptance of THE TRANSMIGRATION OF TIMOTHY ARCHER. His agent at the Scott Meredith Literary Agency, Russ Galen, had read the novel and commented:

You know, in your science fiction they drive things called flobbles and quibbles, and in this one they drive Hondas -- but it's still essentially a science fiction novel. Although I can't explain exactly *how*.¹

So is the novel science fiction? Or fantasy? Or realism?

The answer depends on how you define these terms. The main distinction between them is that science fiction, to be defined as such, proceeds from a basis of consensual *possibility*. For example, it *is* possible that mankind will develop a gravity drive and go on to the stars. It's also possible that we will develop a time-machine or attain immortality. But it is not possible according to the consensus of Western thought that fairies will sprinkle one's St. Bernard with magic dust and the dog will rise into the air and fly. Or, more to the point, that ancient Zoroastrian deities will take over a town and conduct a cosmic battle in and above it.

Fantasy deals with the *impossible*. That's why ghost stories are considered fantasies and why THE COSMIC PUPPETS is fantasy.

Realism is all about the *actual*; the consensual world or *Koinos Kosmos* as PKD calls it. In this world the impossible doesn't happen and the possible happens only along accepted scientific lines.

To simplify the whole thing we can say that realism deals with the actual and *probable* whereas science fiction is about the *possible* and fantasy concerns the *impossible*.

So, then, is THE TRANSMIGRATION OF TIMOTHY ARCHER science fiction or fantasy; or is it neither and instead straight realist fiction?

The premise of THE TRANSMIGRATION OF TIMOTHY ARCHER is that ancient documents supposedly recently discovered in the Judean desert throw doubt upon the origins of Christianity. Is this actual, possible or impossible? Well, obviously the answer is that it *is* possible, ancient scrolls can be discovered at any time. Therefore TIMOTHY ARCHER is science fiction.

If the Zadokite scrolls in the novel had actually already been discovered then TIMOTHY ARCHER would be a straight mainstream realist novel. If the premise had been that the Zadokite scrolls were guarded by a giant dragon then it would be fantasy.

But what if they hadn't been discovered, which they *haven't* – the Zadokite scrolls are a fiction made up by Dick -- but the novel is written *as if they had*? What do we hold in our hands then as far as literary classifications? Do we have fake realism!?

I think that Philip K. Dick, perhaps unconsciously but at least with some idea of what he was trying to do, was attempting to blur these categories into one. He said about THE TRANSMIGRATION OF TIMOTHY ARCHER:

It really was necessary for me to do the novel, as a projection of thematic material going back years and years and years in my writing, in stuff even as early as EYE IN THE SKY and TIME OUT OF JOINT.²

And, talking about TIME OUT OF JOINT he says:

What I was trying to do in that book was account for the diversity of worlds that people live in. I had not read Heraclitus then, I didn't know his concept of *idios kosmos*, the private world, versus *koinos kosmos*, which we all share. I didn't know that the pre-Socratics had begun to discern these things. [...] It reminded me of the idea that Van Vogt had dealt with, of artificial memory, as occurs in *THE WORLD OF NULL-A* where a person has false memories implanted. 3.

And, talking further on TIME OUT OF JOINT:

It was really a risky thing to do. But there again we are dealing with fake reality and I had become obsessed with the idea of fake reality. I was just fascinated with the idea. So that's a pivotal book in terms of my career. It was my first hardcover sale, and it was the first novel in which the entire world is fake. You find yourself in it when you pick up the book and turn to page one. The world that you are reading about does not exist. And this was to be essentially the premise of my entire corpus of writing, really. 4.

If we put this all together then we arrive at PKD's notion of 'fake reality.' And to this we apply our category test. Is a fake reality real, possible or impossible? To which PKD forces us to answer – as no doubt he nebulously intended – we don't know, we don't know, and no.

The idea is not fantasy, that we can decide. It's not impossible. As to actuality or possibility PKD in the extended body of his work writes in such a way that the line blurring science fiction and realism is dissolved.

The key to all this is, of course, Dick's pink beam experiences.

According to Dick these actually happened, were *real*. Which is fine except that now he writes a novel based on these experiences: VALIS. So is VALIS science fiction, fantasy or realism?

Dick, with the veracity of his pink beam experiences affirmed, does in VALIS something that pretty much abolishes these categories. Despite the accidents in VALIS which are science fictional, the essence of the novel is that VALIS is

true, it is real, hence VALIS is a realist novel. But in fact it is the *opposite* of a realist novel, it is an anti-realist novel because it doesn't take the consensual world as real for its basis but affirms this world as false.

To Dick VALIS is real but to the real world it is fantasy, yet since it is possible that a man may be visited by God -- whole religions are based on this - - then VALIS becomes science fiction.

Fake reality... a notion that has shaken up the literary world. The academics call it post-modernism. For Western literature it means abolishment of categories and a literature in which fantasy, science fiction and realism are all blurred together.

All his life PKD wanted to write mainstream or realist novels. He indeed wrote several but he doubted the truth of reality itself, its realism, and came to understand that a dubious reality cannot be expressed as if it was real. Perhaps this is why his mainstream novels are unconvincing. But the obverse of this: that a true reality can be expressed as if it was fake is exactly where PKD ended up in novels like *THE MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE*; *FLOW MY TEARS*, *THE POLICEMAN SAID* and *VALIS*.

Which brings us full circle to the categorization of *THE TRANSMIGRATION OF TIMOTHY ARCHER*. Is it science fiction, fantasy or realism?

And now we have our answer: it is all of them at once because with the advent of VALIS all subsequent literature is post-modernist in nature. And a main tenet of post-modernism is that reality itself is brought into question and the literary category of realism is abolished. In a sense with VALIS Philip K. Dick, continuing on from A. E. Van Vogt, is doing a scientific task: the advancement of human knowledge. For with VALIS he brings out into the open that which he has only hinted at before; the recognition that accepted literary categories are redundant. Such artificialities as fantasy, science fiction and realism are meaningless in other than superficial ways when the nature of reality itself *is not known*. Categories collapse and the basis for a new understanding of 'reality' is established.

Now if that accomplishment isn't a landmark in Western literature what is?

1. *Twilight Zone*, Vol. 2, No. 3, June 1982, John Boonstra, interviewer.

2. *The Patchin Review*, No. 5, Oct/Dec 1982, pp. 2-6. Interview by John Boonstra
3. *The Dream Makers*, p150, interview with PKD by Charles Platt.
4. *In His Own Words*, by Gregg Rickman, 9-30-81

PKD & JOHN BRUNNER: 1968

To: TERRY CARR

November 11, 1968

Dear Terry,

Thank you for sending me JAGGED ORBIT by John Brunner, whom I dearly love. It is a fine novel. Here is my reaction:

This big, sprawling novel with its wealth of characters, its massive interacting parts, grips you rapidly. It is a superb work, created by a craftsman, plotted with amazing skill, and showing, finally, a magnetic artistry much above anything Brunner has previously shown. This is a major epic; many characters move about in its multi-faceted world, powerfully interlocking with one another, and the author has a firm grip -- and understanding - - of all of them. In the climax lies a revelation, which I won't hint at, but if it strikes you as it did me, and it struck me very hard, and as a complete surprise, you will find this book worth three times its price. No one should miss this strong, vigorous novel with its sparkling range of bizarre, convincing details of tomorrow, its crawling, busy bits of sheer inventive genius, its own huge inventory of terminology, some puzzling, all exciting. I can't forget the stunning world which Brunner has created, here, and neither will you. And you, like me, will probably read it in one long, fascinated sitting; it's that good. For me it tended to dwindle a bit into mere politics toward the final resolution, but the total impact remains enormous. And the book is worthy material for a possible Hugo nomination.

Will the above serve? By the way -- pages 356, 357, 358 are printed in the wrong sequence; better

fix it. Lots of love, and send John a Xerox of the above. Say hello to Carol, and yes, I did mean it when I said I'd love to do a novel for Ace. Very much so!

Cordially,
Philip K. Dick

[[What actually appeared as a blurb on the back cover of *The Jagged Orbit*: "This big sprawling novel with its wealth of characters grips you rapidly. It is a superb work, plotted with amazing skill, and showing a magnetic artistry much above anything Brunner has previously shown. This is a major epic, with a sparkling range of bizarre, convincing details of tomorrow, and if its climax strikes you as strongly as it did me, you'll find this book worth three times its price."]

From JOHN BRUNNER

21st November 1968

Dear Phil,

Terry Carr sent me a photocopy of your very kind comments on THE JAGGED ORBIT. I love you madly, too -- and not merely because of the extravagant praise you heaped on that novel, but because of all the enjoyment you've given me in the past (and will I hope continue to give me in the future) with your own outstanding novels.

There's been, in fact, such a surprising response to TJO that I've been emboldened to try something I've never done before, and which of all the people I know in SF only Harlan, probably, could carry off with aplomb. I've decided I'm going to do some politicking in search of an award -- not because I especially hanker after a chunk of lucite or a rocketship on the mantel, but because it'd look pretty on future book-jackets...

Not, however, an award for THE JAGGED ORBIT! I drew one definite conclusion from what you said about that, apart from the obvious one that you enjoyed the book a whole lot (which delights me): said conclusion being that if you could say the artistry of this was far above anything I'd previously shown, you hadn't read STAND ON ZANZIBAR.

Terry knows, because I told him repeatedly in letters while I was working on TJO, that I wrote the book for him in the shadow of STAND ON ZANZIBAR. That was the breakthrough to a new plateau of achievement for me, to employ Damon's

terminology, and TJO was a work of consolidation thereafter. And I've recently heard comments from various people, including some unlikely bedfellows, to the effect that it could be a winner for its year.

I'm sitting here not knowing whether to blush at my own arrogance or pat myself on the back for showing sound commercial sense at last, but regardless of that, let me ask you a favor.

Would you read *STAND ON ZANZIBAR*, and if you like it would you tell a few people in places where a plug would do me good? And if you don't, would you tell me why not? I've already learned a lot about the right and wrong ways to depict a future world from it, and I damned well ought to learn much more.

After which, I literally have the brashness to say anything else, except give my regards to Nancy and everyone else who knows me out your way.

Best --
John

What I mean is, coming right out in the open: if you like it that much (and for Christ's sake if you don't, then don't perjure yourself!!!) turn in a Nebula nomination for it, huh?

[Brunner's *Stand On Zanzibar* won the 1969 Hugo Award but not the Nebula.]

To JOHN BRUNNER

December 7, 1968

Dear John,

Yes, I would be very glad to read *STAND ON ZANZIBAR*, but I'll need to know who published it, And, if a paperback, the number or identifying code, so that I can order it by mail (where I live there is no place to buy s-f books, either paperback or hardcover). Obviously I will like it, if, as you say, TJO is a spinoff from it, or something of that sort.

Or could you mail me a copy of it? Autographed?

And, if I like it as much as I'm sure I will, I'll be very happy to nominate it for a Nebula award. And I will tell everyone I can think of to do so, too...or at least to read it and make up their own minds. Kris Neville might be one who could do that; he and I tend to think the same as to the value of a sf novel.

Do you know him? Are you familiar with his writing?

I really did enjoy TJO. It was a fine book. I had an off experience while reading it...I got about one third of the way through, and then I had a terrible sense of loneliness, as if someone six thousand miles away was talking to me, someone I dearly enjoyed and liked, and here I was so far away, and reading this message from him which, it seemed to me at that moment, had been written for me alone. It was a dreadful feeling, full of emptiness and despair, and an awful sense that no one closer to me physically than John Brunner could or would talk to me in the powerful and compelling manner that the novel did.

By the way -- Terry wrote to me for what he called my "fulsome" remarks about TJO. Since fulsome means "Offensive, disgusting, esp. offensively excessive or insincere," one of us ought to write to him and complain (or maybe he just doesn't know what the word means). (I never seem to be able to communicate Terry. Evidently it will always be so.)

As far as my own work goes, I have sold a story collection to Ace for a special, then an outline and 3 sample chapters at \$2,5000, then my latest novel to Doubleday...so I have made three book-length sales in less than a month. Now I can pay off all my enormous debts.

Love to you, and please help me get a copy of *STAND ON ZANZIBAR*, so that I can nominate it.

Cordially
Philip K. Dick

From: JOHN BRUNNER

12th December 1968

Dear Phil,

A copy of *STAND ON ZANZIBAR* will be on its way to you shortly direct from Doubleday, compliments of the author. (It's a big heavy book; signing one of my few remaining complimentary copies to you and mailing from London would have been a trifle on the costly side, I'm afraid... Never mind; here's a label you can paste on the flyleaf!)

What's happened to "fulsome", I think, must have worked like this: the cliché term "fulsome flattery" (meaning the flattery was laid on with a shovel and done for ulterior motives, hence insincere) survived when virtually all other uses of the word became

obsolete, and in consequence simple association of ideas as resulted in the term becoming innocuous, taken to mean merely extravagantly complimentary without overtones of offensiveness. It's always a shame when a perfectly good word has its meaning debased, but one can't legislate against it, I'm afraid.

Compare what's happened to words like "discomfited" (routed, put to flight, overwhelmed) through confusion with "discomforted" -- or "scotch" (we have scotched the snake, but not killed it) -- or "decimate" (kill one man in ten pour encourager les autres) now used to mean "kill all but one man in ten", the next step below annihilation...

Congratulations on your excellent sales record lately; I look forward to seeing the new Doubleday item and the Ace Specials novel.

By the way, you'll have received something from me recently about the Nebula nomination system -- disregard it. I had visions (due I think partly to fever; I had a violent bout of the 'flu!) of SFWA members in general making the same mistake as the guy in LA who got his October mailing late, and of course in the upshot this has proved impossible, with the circulation of the late-nominations ballot. Apologies.

Meanwhile, I'm struggling under conditions of appalling difficulty (like not being able to use my study owing to the landlord's builders having taken out the window and part of the ceiling and wall) to complete the first draft of a novel (not SF, straight contemporary with fantasy overtones) which Norton has commissioned, called THE DEVIL'S WORK. It seems to be setting some kind of record for slow progress; only 228 pages in over two months. But then I have to admit that the first 100-odd went through four drafts of their own before they were good enough for me to consider pushing on to the end...

I was greatly touched by the description of your experience while reading THE JAGGED ORBIT. It's always been clear from your writing that you have exceptional sensitivity to people and situations indeed I suspect it may sometimes become excessive, as it often does in people with extremely vivid imaginations, and may induce the phenomenon I tried to portray Paul Fidler as suffering in QUICKSAND: a sense that unrealized alternative possibilities are as "real" as what's actually happening, which must lead to terrible frustration, (especially if they are envisaged as

disastrous), and -- as you doubtless gathered from reading TJO -- there is something about contemporary America as a whole which makes my spine crawl with apprehension. I can't help wondering whether what induced that feeling you described (that someone 600 miles away was the only person who could talk to you) might not have been the fact that as an outsider I can perhaps see certain trends a little more clearly than native residents, and isolate for the purposes of a novel a number of them which are particularly pregnant with foreboding.

But, on the other hand, even under Governor (ha-ha) Reagan, the Bay Area remains one of my favorite places and seems to me to be full of people with whom I have enormous mutual sympathy and an excellent degree of communication. I hope very much that your fit of loneliness is over and that you've rediscovered this fact for yourself.

Best --
John

LETTERS OF COMMENT

Paul Di Filippo:

...I loved PKD's letters. He reveals that he never lost a true sense of his own predicament: neither as dire nor as spacey as others viewed him. Also glad to get full scoop on famous incident of "novelization" of Blade Runner.

Maurizio Nati:

...There's a very interesting letter by Phil to David Hartwell with the outline of a new novel to write. He never wrote it, of course, but the plot is a real surprise (I'd never known about it): in line with the last things he wrote (religious & philosophical worries), but seemingly inspired to his first, vanvogtian period (man trapped in a mad universe, this time generated by a computer). And then Disneyland, Dante's Divina Commedia, Goethe's Faust & so on.

Alas, all of this remains unrealized, but it's a clear sign that he had not lost his brilliancy, and that he hadn't the least intention to abandon sf. At least, this is what I read in this letter.

“Free Association: Pastrami, Sex and Death”
by Jon Carroll
San Francisco Chronicle October 4, 2002, p.
D18

Alert readers may remember a column about the divine pastrami of Schwartz's of Montreal, only it's not called pastrami up there, it's called smoked meat. That column brought me an e-mail ode to the wonders of pastrami from a friend of mine, plus an invitation to break rye bread together.

She will have to remain anonymous, this friend, because she does a convincing imitation of a sedate woman of mature years, and I would not want to blow her cover. She recently retired from a job that involved neither white slavery, rum running nor the writing of short stories about people living on Mars.

But in earlier times, she ran with the local science-fiction crowd, writers and editors mostly, and "sedate" was not a word that came up much. It was a wild time and a wild bunch and some people died and the rest carried memories. She invited me up to her house to sample the pastrami she had imported at great expense from Cantor's in Los Angeles. (I regret to say that the Montreal variety is superior, because the Quebecois do not fear fat, resulting in smoked meat so juicy you think you have found a slice of heaven right here on earth. Make that 10 slices of heaven.)

After lunch she brought out some snapshots of her previous life, and there, in all his glory, was Philip K. Dick. He was standing in a backyard wearing a white T-shirt. He was perhaps 35 and completely gorgeous; he looked like Jack Kerouac should have looked.

He looked like a home wrecker, and probably he was. In addition to being gorgeous, he was crazy, both good crazy and bad crazy. His spare and deeply paranoid stories have inspired movies from "Blade Runner" to "Minority Report." He was a trial to his friends and an inspiration to a thousand strangers.

As I looked at the snapshots, I was reminded of a story told by another friend of mine, a man who must also remain anonymous.

He said that before his parents got married, his mother made his father promise that, if she ever had the chance to sleep with Frank Sinatra, he would raise no protest. She was entirely serious.

His reluctant agreement was never tested, but it seemed to me an interesting idea for a prenup.

Philip K. Dick had the look of a guy who might have been mentioned in a few conversations like that. His eyes were slightly hooded, his mouth seemed to be just about to grin. Frank Sinatra for the people-from-Mars set. I had had a mental picture of Dick as a bearded, unkempt wild man, sort of Allen Ginsberg plus Jerry Garcia with a little Che Guevara thrown in. The photo made me think about him in a whole new light.

Book Reviews

Theodore Sturgeon: *Venture Science Fiction*
September 1957, pp. 50-51

Sturgeon says it has, and cites EYE IN THE SKY, by Philip K. Dick (Ace no. 211, 255 pp, 35 cents) saying here is a heady jest, the first book since Fredric Brown's WHAT MAD UNIVERSE in which, within the plot's stated and legitimate framework, anything -- but *anything* -- can happen. It is a book harmonious to this discussion of revelation because it is full of revelations -- just how many, and of what kind, being a function of the eye of the beholder and dependent upon its depth of function.

This glorious jape is, briefly, the story of an accident to a bevatron, in which eight people, in falling a considerable distance, pass through the highly energized beam. They recover and return home, sharing the feeling that something is vaguely amiss; but when an irreverence gets you a mysterious nip in the leg, and a lie brings a plague of locust, the feeling gets less vague. From there it takes off madly, in wild hyperbolic sweeps of unabashed imagination. Two guys ride to heaven on an umbrella, and there is a house that eats people. Characters are killed, and restored for the next go-around to try it over. The earth comes to an end more than once. How this happens is Mr. Dick's business -- and he makes it yours. And what happens to you is worth eleven times the price and all your rereading time. Oh yes, you have to read it over again.

The thinking, the thinking -- that's what's so special about this book. It's great fun, mind you, a donnybrook, a brawl. But it's the deft fun of a shrewd observer, a good man with a telescope,

microscope, scalpel. Here's a man who knows what he thinks about the witch-hunting aspects of national security, about marriage and religion and paranoia and beer, about whether or not cows should wear trousers in public, and the machine age, and race and Communism. If you want to see the workings of the lay mind that guards and defends Science from us, read as a fable the guardianship and defense of the particular Deity herein.

And if it appears to you, as it did to Sturgeon, that Dick presents some of these things in extreme terms, think it over the next day. You may find yourself, too, granting the author the extremities, the occasional black-and-white characterizations, and even the incredible unmasking of the unbelievably villainous villain at the end; he has a story to tell and a point to make, and like the man who was asked why he never peeled them, he can answer, "When I eats a banana I eats it, I don't mess with it."

And so, *phil k dixi*, which means, I like it and that's all I have to say.

Theodore Sturgeon: *Venture Science Fiction* May 1958, p. 58

[*The Variable Man and Other Stories*] BUY IT - for *Second Variety*, a marvelous concept handled with vividness and economy. The others, excellent to good. The title story, killed dead by clumsiness.

James Colvin: *New Worlds* no. 160 (March 1966), p. 157

I believe that a long article on Philip K. Dick is in preparation, too, so I will only briefly recommend an sf author who has appeared far too infrequently in this country. Try *Dr. Bloodmoney (Or How We Got Along After The Bomb)* (Ace, 40c), which utilizes many of the standard devices of an sf story to make a number of satirical digs at current institutions and kinds of people. The 'Hugo' winning *The Man in the High Castle* (Popular Library, 50c) studies an America subjugated by Japan and Germany who are victors in a World War II that went their way. *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldrich* (Doubleday, \$4.95) takes another dig at the American Way of Life but also questions the nature of reality. Satirical, philosophical, slightly cranky, this is an

uneven book, but much, much better than most of the sf published recently.

James Colvin: *New Worlds* no. 163 (June 1966), p. 144

Philip K. Dick's *The Crack In Space* (Ace, 40c) is very disappointing Dick indeed. It's hard to believe that this is the author of *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldrich* (Cape 21s). The world is overcrowded, large sections of the population are being put into suspended animation, a strange parallel Earth is discovered through a "crack in space", plans are afoot to shift the overflow there -- but the world is already populated by a "Peking man" civilization who decide they want to invade our earth.

"It's Philip Dick's World, We Only Live In It"
By Laura Miller
New York Times Book Review Nov 24, 2002
p. 39

Predicting the future is not a risky line of work. Whether you are a supermarket tabloid psychic, the leader of a doomsday cult or an expert in a think tank, whether you predict the divorce of a movie star, the end of the world or merely the end of history, acolytes and book publishers will be remarkably forgiving if you get it totally wrong.

Getting it right is another matter entirely. The year 1984 has come and gone, and George Orwell's 1949 novel remains, as high school students are taught every year, a powerful cautionary tale about the dangers of totalitarian society. But no matter what critics of law enforcement officials may say, we aren't currently struggling under Big Brother's boot. Where is the powerful cautionary fiction about the society we did wind up living in? Those with a robust tolerance for dislocation, for the vertiginous sensation of reality disintegrating underfoot and for the occasional streak of slapdash prose can find it in the work of Philip K. Dick.

A writer who pounded out dozens of novels and scores of stories in California between the 1950's and his death in 1982, Dick has his share of champions, ranging from rock musicians to French postmodernists. Since his best work was published

as pulp science fiction, they've had their hands full just trying to win him a little credibility. Meanwhile, almost unremarked, Dick's sensibility has seeped wide and deep into contemporary life.

At its best, Dick's fiction captures the depredations of what he called, in his great 1965 novel *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*, "the evil, negative trinity of alienation, blurred reality and despair" embodied in the book's title character. Dick described the two central questions posed by his writing as "What is human?" and "What is real?," though he never quite nailed down an answer to the latter. Humanity, he felt, was distilled in kindness, compassion, empathy - the only way to fend off Eldritch's evil trinity.

The signature moments in Dick's fiction occur when a character's seemingly stable reality turns inside out, revealing itself to be false. A man discovers that he's not a human being but a sophisticated robot. A television star finds himself in an alternate world where he's literally nobody; there's no record of his existence. An ordinary guy is told that the memory and identity he's had all his life were actually implanted not long ago and that he's really another man altogether. A man living in a sweet 1950's small town realizes that it is entirely artificial.

If some of those scenarios sound familiar, it's not surprising; filmmakers have based such movies as *Blade Runner*, *Total Recall* and *Minority Report* on Dick's fiction. But acknowledged adaptations aren't the only cinematic manifestations of Dick's obsessions. *The Truman Show* bears a suspicious resemblance to the novel *Time Out of Joint*, and some of the most arresting independent films of recent years involve characters whose realities collapse, stutter or slip from their fingers. Perhaps the writer-director Christopher Nolan never thought of Dick while creating *Memento*, but his hero's struggle to function with almost no short-term memory is quintessentially Dickian. The muddled boundaries between fantasy and fact in *Mulholland Drive*, the looped fate in the underrated *Donnie Darko*, the easy access sought to some other, better identity in *Being John Malkovich* all constitute territory that Dick knew well. The hugely popular movie *The Matrix* is classic Dick without actually being based on one of his works, and, really, who is Freddy Krueger of the *Nightmare on Elm Street* films if not a cruder manifestation of the ubiquitous and demonic Palmer Eldritch?

Dickian devices and themes - implanted memories, commodified identities, simulacra - haunt contemporary literary fiction as well. The naming of years after corporate sponsors in David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*; the downtrodden, stigmatized souls in George Saunders's futuristic short stories, with their degrading theme park jobs; the dream worlds Haruki Murakami's characters tumble into and out of - all partake of Dick's peculiar mixture of wrenched ontology and underdog sympathies.

Of course these writers could as easily have been inspired by the world around them as by Dick's stories and novels; a great speculative writer always extrapolates from the material at hand. What's striking is how early Dick zeroed in on those ideas. In 1968 (1968!) he opened the novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* with a husband and wife bickering over the proper use of their "Penfield mood organs," gizmos that allow them to fine-tune their personalities. "My schedule for today lists a six-hour self-- accusatory depression," the wife announces, much to her husband's annoyance. He suggests she set the mood organ to 888, "the desire to watch TV, no matter what's on it."

Aldous Huxley used the idea of chemical mood control even earlier, in *Brave New World*, but Dick took speculative fiction's rarefied thought experiments and integrated them into the humble fabric of everyday life. As weird as his Work can be, it's always grounded in the lives of Willy Lomanesque working stiffs - late on the rent, nagged by their wives and just trying to get by. In his own life, Dick alternated between the 1950's ideal of a nuclear family and a freer but chaotic demimonde; that tension between mid-century suburbia and our liberationist impulses preoccupies us still. Like Dick's characters, we take comfort in vicarious glamour. The bored and miserable Mars colonists in *Stigmata* spend all their time playing with Barbie-like dolls. Using a drug called Can-D, they can transport themselves into the dolls and briefly become gorgeous young people who drive Jaguars, revel in seaside trysts and otherwise savor a life in which it's "always Saturday."

The controlling powers in Dick's futuristic worlds are more often huge corporations than governments. *Stigmata* is essentially the story of a cosmic battle for market share; in *Ubik*, metaphysical salvation comes in a spray can.

Dick's most distinctive contribution to the literature of paranoia was his refusal of the conspiracy theorist's secret comfort: better a world manipulated by sinister agents than a universe governed by no intelligence at all. The great terror of Dick's books is entropy - the cold, dusty, random creep of decay and disorder, blindly devouring each insignificant human life. Anyone on the bad side of the free market can recognize this combination of pervasive power and utter mindlessness. Remember what the prophet said: kindness is our only hope.

KARA-BAKOS: Documents of Questionable Reality since 1974

Title: Schwer Liegt die Heuschrecke
Author: Abendsen, Hawthorne
Publisher: Konig Verlag 1974
Condition: Excellent
Features: None

Abendsen's most famous novel, *Schwer Liegt die Heuschrecke* (The Grasshopper Lies Heavy) deals primarily with a *Nebenwelt* (parallel-world) wherein the Allies defeated the Axis at the close of the Second World War. Abendsen has since gone missing from his Rocky Mountain compound, presumably abducted by authorities, which has sent the price of this text spiraling. We refuse to play the Murder-Game so many other booksellers seem to find no compunction in playing; our prices will not alter due to speculation and slander.

“A Difficult Gift” by Michael Moorcock
***The Guardian* March 15, 2003**

Next year SF celebrates a fairly significant anniversary. It will be 40 years since JG Ballard published *The Terminal Beach*, Brian Aldiss published *Greybeard*, William Burroughs published *Naked Lunch* in the UK, I took over *New Worlds* magazine and Philip K Dick published *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*. It was a watershed year, if you like, when SF rediscovered its visionary roots and began creating new conventions which rejected both modernism and American pulp traditions.

Perhaps best representing that cusp, Dick's work only rarely achieved the stylistic and

imaginative coherence of those other writers. His corporate future came from a common pool created by troubled left-wingers Pohl and Kornbluth (*The Space Merchants*, 1953) or Alfred Bester (*The Demolished Man*, 1953). His Mars is the harsh but habitable planet of Leigh Brackett (*Queen of the Martian Catacombs*, 1949) or Ray Bradbury (*The Martian Chronicles*, 1950). His style and characters are indistinguishable from those of a dozen other snappy pulpsters. Even his questioning of the fundamentals of identity and reality is largely unoriginal, preceded by the work of the less prolific but perhaps more profound Charles Harness, who wrote stories such as "Time Trap", "The Paradox Men" and "The Rose" in the 50s.

So how has Dick emerged as today's best-known and admired US SF writer? It's hard to judge from this book (which was promoted enthusiastically by me and many others when it first appeared). Palmer Eldritch's three stigmata are his artificial arm, steel teeth and electronic eyes. He is a merchant adventurer lately returned with something valuable from Proxima Centauri to a globally overheated Earth. The UN (a regulatory body replacing government as such) is protecting him like a state secret.

Corporate boss Leo Bulero is the head of the Perky Pat empire, which employs "precog" telepaths to read the future and design business strategy. Bulero's business is the Barbie and Ken-type Perky Pat dolls and accessories used by planetary colonists to ease their misery and remind them of a materially idyllic Earth. In conjunction with the Perky Pat toys, colonists chew Can-D, an illegal drug which allows them to imagine themselves as the main characters in the Perky Pat world. Bulero's company secretly controls Can-D and publicly sells endless accessories for the miniature twosome.

Barney Mayerson, a high-ranking precog, predicts that Bulero will murder Eldritch, who has discovered a drug more attractive and powerful than Can-D. In confronting Eldritch, hoping to kill him, Bulero is plunged into powerfully realistic hallucinatory worlds clearly controlled by his bionic rival. Gradually he suspects that his antagonist is not only God and the devil, but that he and everyone else is an aspect of Eldritch. The material world becomes optional. What is real? Can Eldritch be resisted? Are our souls our own? It is to Dick's credit that as his hasty standard English and

cardboard characters disintegrate in his wake, we are still left with sturdy philosophical questions.

Dick's speed-enhanced gift was to capture the illusion sometimes encountered by the deadline-conscious hack, hyped on adrenaline, playing with transcendental notions that creator and creations, illusions and reality are one. As with hallucinogens, the condition can cause obsession and psychosis, a distinct sense that the book is writing you. You become merely a medium. Common sense usually brings you back to shared reality. But in the case of Dick or L Ron Hubbard, inventor of Scientology, the experience formed the basis of a rough and ready belief system resembling Buddhism or Manichaeism. Does the mind control reality? Do good and evil emanate from the same source? What do we worship and why?

As he followed these themes, Dick's novels became increasingly incoherent and, for me, scarcely readable. Hacking out book after book, he gave himself no time to discover a more idiosyncratic structure or style, the search for which characterized the so-called SF New Wave and gave us sophisticated American visionaries such as Thomas M Disch, John Sladek and Samuel R Delany.

The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch ends with a question about identity. Unfortunately, I had to leaf back through the book before I could understand the question because the characters involved were so hard to tell apart. It could be true, as Dick so frequently suggested, that we are all actors playing out the dream of a great director in the sky. In this case, given the illusion of free will, I think I'd rather be in the movie.

More News from Italy

Salvatore Proietti sent along the following information on a recent book:

Paolo Bertetti & Carlos Scolari, eds. *Lo sguardo degli angeli: Intorno e oltre Blade Runner*. Turin: Testo & Immagine, 2002.

Contents:

- Alain Cohen, "*Blade Runner*. Una critica cinematografica del giudizio postmoderno" (tr. Carla Malerba e Luca Magnani)
- Silvio Alovio, "L'occhio scuro degli Eighties: Alterità e visione in *Blade Runner* e *The Thing*"

- Roy Menarini, "La catastrofe come luogo di fantasia: Visibilità, tecnologia e rappresentazione storica tra *Blade Runner* e *Titanic*"

- Fabrizio Denunzio, "Una vita indignata: Meditazioni sulla rivolta dei replicanti in *Blade Runner*"

- Gianni Sibilla, "La macchina narrativa di *Blade Runner*: Dal romanzo al Director's Cut"

- Marco Bertolino, "Fenomenologia della visione: *Blade Runner* e il cinema di Ridley Scott"

- Gian Paolo Caprettini, "Il sequestro delle emozioni: Da Philip K. Dick a *Blade Runner*"

- Salvatore Proietti, "Philip K. Dick, le barriere di *Blade Runner* e I superuomini che non sanno volare"

- Marisa Merlos, "Il mito dell'automa: Da Ma gli androidi sognano pecore elettriche? a *Blade Runner*" (tr. Katia Ciccuti)

- Philip K. Dick, "Tempi di magia: Lettere a Kristin Hummel" [actually, I am responsible for alerting Bertetti about the letters published in philipkdick.com]

- Carlos Scolari, "Come lacrime nella pioggia acida: Transtestualità, semiosi e postmodernismo nella Los Angeles del 2019"

- Paolo Bertetti, "Da Los Angeles a Everytown e ritorno: Immagini della città futura"

- Domenico Gallo, "Avvampando gli angeli caddero: *Blade Runner*, Philip K. Dick e il cyberpunk"

- Carlos Pérez Rasetti, "Epistemologia per sbirri" (tr. Katia Ciccuti) Daniele Barbieri, "Androidi e detective su carta"

- Paolo Bertetti and Carlos Scolari, eds. "Non cercano killer nelle inserzioni sui giornali": *Blade Runner* nei libri e nelle recensioni della stampa specializzata e dei giornali", [excerpts from reviews and criticism in Italian, English, French, and Spanish] (tr. from Spanish Katia Ciccuti, from French and English Roberto Marro)

- Bibliography by Paolo Bertetti with Salvatore Proietti

- Biblio. of web sites by Carlos Scolari

[Contributors are American (Cohen), Argentinian (Merlos, Rasetti), Spanish (Scolari), as well as Italian.]

Salvatore's "Philip K. Dick Arrives in Italy" in *Otaku* #8 originally appeared in English in the journal *Science-Fiction Studies*, March 2002, pp. 142-44.