

Above Photo of Phil © Tessa Dick, by kind permission

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Space scene Image by Nick Buchanan (not photo)

**Maurizio Nati (translator)
Celebrated**

P K D

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#41

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PKD **Otaku** is a zine made by fans for fans.

It exists to celebrate, explore and discuss the work of Philip K Dick.

The PKD Otaku Team have enjoyed the writing and ideas of Philip K. Dick for decades, and continue to do so.

The subject of Philip K. Dick benefits from diverse perspectives, opinions, and insights.

In this zine we hope to explore the Novels, Short-Fiction, Non-fiction and ideas of Philip K Dick.

If you would like to contribute (a letter of comment, an article, essay or review) please make your submission in MS Doc, Rtf or Txt form to the Otaku Team c/o Patrick Clark via email:

pkdotaku@gmail.com

All submissions are welcome and considered, but we cannot promise that all will see print.

Thank you for maintaining the dialogue!

-- The PKD OTAKU Team

PKD **Otaku** Layout, Logo, Graphics and Typesetting

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Editorial

by Patrick Clark

Joe Chip scrounges up five cents to open up the door and leaves his conapt. Looking around outside he gets the feeling that something is not quite right. Everyone is wearing a mask and they are standing and walking as far away from each other as they can manage. A woman comes up the sidewalk toward Joe and suddenly veers off as if hitting a force field, as if Joe was in some kind of bubble. Or maybe the woman is the one in the bubble. Traffic is unusually light at this time of the day and the sky unexpectedly clear.

What the heck is going on? "Oh", he suddenly remembers. "The pandemic. Of course." He gropes in his pocket for his own mask but can't find it. Did he leave it in the conapt? Joe hopes not because he's out of nickels and won't be able to get back inside until he goes to the bank. If the SecPol find him without a mask on he could end up in a detention camp.

He digs into his other pocket and, to his great relief, finds a mask after all. Suitably attired now, he slowly walks toward the Runciter Associates Headquarters, careful to keep the required distance from the few other pedestrians out on the sidewalks with him. He glances at them

out of the corner of his eye. From six feet away it's hard to distinguish their features. Joe notices that many of them are wearing surgical gloves as well as their masks though such a precaution is not mandatory. At least not yet.

"Maybe they wear gloves to hide something", he muses. "Like the masks. Maybe the masks aren't really to prevent contagion but are a kind of disguise instead."

Joe smiles to himself at this momentary fantasy.

Someone taps Joe on the shoulder. He turns around to see a man just inches away from his face. The man pulls off the blue latex glove on his hand and Joe sees that it is a metal hand.

The man is staring intently at Joe. This close, Joe sees that, instead of eyes, twin cameras view him from the depths of the stranger's skull.

The man removes his mask and smiles at Joe with shiny steel teeth...

...Welcome to PKD Otaku #41



Mask donated by Nick Buchanan

In Memory of Maurizio Nati

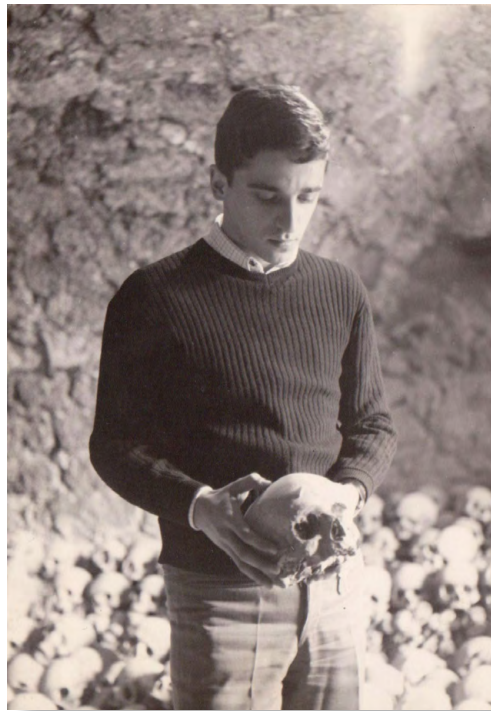
By Lord RC

Fans of Philip K. Dick who read his stories in the English language have it good. The subtleties of Dick's writing, his colloquialisms and natural use of the language are read with unconscious ease. But what of readers in other languages? How is the essence and exactness of Dick's writing translated into other languages? Now, I'll not delve into this here but, instead, note that the fame and intellectual stature of Philip K. Dick in the world means that his translators have done a good job. Henri Wintz has on his PKD bibliographic website editions from over 30 countries! Any PKD bibliographer or collector of international editions can recall the names of some of these able translators: Alain Doremieux and Hellene Collon in France, Rosemarie Hundertmarck and Tony Westermayr in Germany, Arkadiusz Nakoniecznik in Poland, and, of course, Vittorio Curtoni, Carlo Pagetti and Maurizio Nati in Italy. And others of equal distinction pop to mind.

But, almost unbelievably, there are some fans who've never heard of any of these translators! They get little credit, it seems, bar their name in dedicated and obscure bibliographies, like the ones published by Henri and me via Wide Books. So, today I want to give tribute to these translators of Philip K. Dick in general and to one in Particular: Maurizio Nati.

Maurizio passed away on March 31st 2019 at Macerata City Hospital in Italy. He was 72. I only found out about this when his son, Francesco, posted the news on The Philip K. Dick Fans site on Facebook earlier this year. I was shocked and saddened. I never met Maurizio and my last correspondence with him was to invite him as our guest to the 2019 PKD Festival in Fort Morgan, Colorado. I wanted to ask him for his help with our upcoming Italian PKD bibliography and chat as one fan to another. But he couldn't come due to his poor health. And that was the last I heard from him.

It bothered me that I hadn't corresponded with him more. Made an effort to reach out to a distant brother-in-arms. Its easier than ever to 'communicate' electronically these days but such communication lacks in some essential way. We are become a humanity in isolation. A society



of blips and bleeps without the human touch. I want to be in my friend's presence, share my space with him. For, even though we never met, I know Maurizio was my friend. Because *all* true fans of Philip K. Dick are my friends. I want to know you all, figure out reality together, and that's why I do these PKD festivals. Some of you actually show up. In this time of coronavirus we must face our isolation, realize the inadequacy of our devices, resolve to do better when we are free again.

In Italy, Maurizio Nati is known as a long-time translator of science fiction, starting with Fanucci Publishers in the 1970s. He has translated over 400 novels, including many by PKD, and is a man who takes on the difficult tasks, such as Dick's *EXEGESIS* and Samuel R. Delany's *DHALGREN*. Here's Maurizio talking with *B-Sides Magazine* about Dick and Delany (internet translation from the Italian):

B-SIDES: It is curious that one of *DHALGREN*'s detractors was Philip K. Dick. After all, Dick's typical question – "what is real?" – emerges reading *DHALGREN* as well. Sure, Delany leaves many possible answers open to the reader and offers a circular ending that is not a true final, while Dick surprises the reader with unexpected twists, within a solid, well-constructed plot, leading to an obvious, if unsettling ending. After all, it is as if both authors denounce the ambiguity of reality, but with narrative techniques so different from each other that they seem incompatible.

MAURIZIO NATI: I haven't read all about Delany, but the two writers seem quite different from each other. Delany is a lucid and refined intellectual who almost always knows what he's talking about, Dick

Maurizio with skull 1960's

is a brilliant amateur who at least at the beginning goes a bit by trial and error. Delany has a more sociological and political approach to reading reality, Dick more philosophical and religious. One could say that the former is more interested in society, the second more to man. What they have in common is the use of science fiction as a tool, one might say as a pretext, to tell their stories. Undoubtedly, however, *DHALGREN's* Bellona has a visionary quality reminiscent of the pill-popping Dick of *UBIK*. And, certainly both are vigorously against power and its manipulations.

I continued with Armenia and Editions Nord, finally again with Fanucci (son).

Translating was a hobby, let's say, and now that I'm retired I can grow it with more free time available. Translating is really an unparalleled creative activity and is in itself enough to give me great pleasure.

No awards! Aren't there some Philip K. Dick Awards lying around here somewhere? We ought to have our own Oscars! Award for best Translator, Best Cover Artist, Best Back-Cover Blurb, and more!

B-SIDES: I conclude with a question about you and your work. Nadia Fusini received an award for the beautiful translation of Virginia Woolf's *WAVES*. Have you received any awards? Or at least the praise from critics, sci-fi fans, fans...?

Here, again, is Maurizio in correspondence with *PKD OTAKU* publisher Patrick Clark:

MAURIZIO NATI: Never received awards of any kind. But in the context of fans, especially those of Dick, I enjoy some consideration, if only for the long militancy and for some good initiative of which I was the protagonist along with Sandro Pergameno in 1976: the legendary *Fantascienza* Ciscato that many still remember with interest. *Fantascienza* Ciscato was an amazing experience gone wrong. The magazine was a strange thing. Brilliant, in its own way, and full of sacred fire. I still don't know what happened to it, I think nothing good, but if I had to redo a magazine I would do it again. Even if then they were really other times. It must also be said that the activity of translator for me was secondary as I always had another job that gave me a living. My work took place in archives and libraries (Ministry of Cultural Heritage), and always with great satisfaction.

Ten minutes ago I sent the translation of *HUMPTY DUMPTY* to my publisher. So it's done, at last, and I'm quite satisfied. It has been real fun, and I must thank you all for your precious help. You've been great. Hope there'll be another occasion.

As for the novel, I must admit that I changed my opinion a bit: translating is also a reading from the inside, through the words and the phrases and the paragraphs, and it's easy to miss the whole picture while you are deep in the structure of a novel. Re-reading is always quite a new reading, from a different point of view. You see things that you hadn't seen before; you connect the dots, so to say. In this sense a strong revision (often more than one) is the real backbone of a good translation, and may hide some surprises.



Maurizio with his wife 1970's

This doesn't mean the *HUMPTY DUMPTY* is a masterpiece. I prefer *VOICES FROM THE STREET*, which I translated some

years ago. It's very similar to this in spirit, but in my opinion more solid as a story and with better defined characters, and probably best written. *HUMPTY* is undoubtedly a creature of Dick's soul as well, maybe more felt, a striking picture of little men lost behind the American dream, and crushed by it. My idea is still that it would have needed a good work of editing, but in some way it's also a piece of



history looked at with the eyes of Dick, who lived it and surely suffered it on his skin, seeing and writing things that other writers didn't or didn't want to. Troublesome stuff and he had the wits to turn it into a book. With poor results, as we know, but at least he tried.

tells me...

My father felt deeply fascinated by all things unexplainable, he was constantly drawn to the unknown, that was what pushed him to spend his "life amidst books" (this was the title of a local newspaper article reporting his death). It all started very early, in the 50s, when he would read fantasy and adventure books that he found in my grandfather's vast collection. Grandpa wasn't particularly fond of science fiction but he was extremely knowledgeable, very passionate about reading and he owned all the classics, including Asimov and Verne for example, which the young Maurizio had been reading since he was very young. In my father's book collection, which I donated to Turin's Science Fiction Museum (MUFANT), I found many publications on UFOs, vampires, mysterious facts, forbidden books, weird places to visit etc.

I'm fairly sure that my father's resonance with PKD's works derived from one of his core themes: what is real, and what isn't? How do we define reality? I remember that on many occasions he would comment on some piece of news and say: "there's something they're not telling us". I'm not saying he wasn't a conspiracy theorist but he liked to reflect on what lies behind the universe we are all experiencing, he liked to doubt things and search for answers; he wasn't religious in the traditional sense but he had a sense of spirituality that resonated with nature. As a child, I remember endless walks in the woods or on the mountains, often stopping to visit a small rural church or an abandoned fort here and there. He used to say that PKD wasn't a great novelist in the literary sense but he was so full of great ideas, and many of his intuitions were so ahead of their times that they would be "discovered" by film makers only many years after he passed away. So, I guess that what he liked about Dick was his predictive and visionary nature, his ability to imagine possible future worlds, to stimulate and challenge our view on reality.

My father was a very low profile character. He went along without ever bragging about his accomplishments and he fit perfectly in the translator's role as an invisible mediator. He had a very good command of the Italian language and

And so we see some of the concerns and skills a translator brings to his or her task.

Maurizio turned his translation of the EXEGESIS into a community affair, contacting the PKD fans on the internet and asking lots of questions about the meaning of phrases and things. This was fun for all involved as we fans got to give insight into the meaning of Dick's *Opus Magnus* for the enlightenment of Italian fans. I'm sure the finished Italian version of the EXEGESIS is as fascinating a read as Dick's original.

To return to the golden age of science fiction in the 1970s, we find a young Maurizio in Rome running a used bookstore and becoming friends with a neighborhood sf fan, Sandro Pergameno, and founding a sf club. Full of passion for science fiction the club met on Thursday evenings to discuss their favorite authors and the latest editions from Fanucci and Nord. Sandro and Maurizio met the Roman-based publisher Renato Fanucci and his editors. Soon the two were tackling the task of translating foreign editions into Italian for Fanucci Editore. From their connections in Rome, Maurizio and Sandro joined with Ennio Ciscato, a publisher of comic books, to found the magazine, *Ciscato Fantascienza*. Even though they made no money they had a lot of fun producing this early Italian sf magazine. In his sympathetic memoir of Maurizio in *Robot*, Sandro goes on to write of how Maurizio won a contest for his work as a librarian and after a stay in Pavia moved to his wife, Maria Luisza's, home in Macerato in the Marche area of North-East Italy. This would remain his home for life. When Sergio Fanucci succeeded his father at Editions Fanucci, he secured Italian rights for much, if not all, of Philip K. Dick's stories, and Fanucci went on to publish many PKD editions. And when it came time to translate PKD's EXEGESIS, Maurizio was to do the translation. Although distance kept Maurizio and Sandro apart, they continued their friendship by telephone and the internet until the end. A link to Sandro Pergameno's memoir is found below.

I asked Francesco about his father's life and family and he

he always said that the best translation is the one where the reader feels the text flowing naturally in the target language, without realizing that it was conceived in a foreign idiom. That's probably what Umberto Eco defined as "saying almost the same thing" in a famous essay published in 2003. When my father accepted a translation, he would always ask for a very extended deadline, usually 6 months to 1 year for the "average" book, and more than 1 year for the hardest works (besides the EXEGESIS, he was particularly proud of *THE CITY AND THE CITY* by China Miéville and *DHALGREN* by Samuel Delany). That's because, while translating, he corresponded with all those who could help him to better understand the references in the original work, including the author (whenever possible), the editors, literary experts and some friends in the Italian SF community (for example, Umberto Rossi was a huge help with the EXEGESIS and HUMPTY DUMPTY IN OAKLAND). After completion, he would do a thorough rereading to get rid of virtually all typos and mistakes.

Talking about friends, I have to say that in his last years he had been leading a very secluded life. After losing his wife (my mother Maria Luisa) in 2005 and retiring from his job as a librarian, he lived alone in his countryside house until his last days, when he

had to be hospitalized for cancer. He had been a heavy smoker for years, quitting only around 2012, and I still remember him quoting Woody Allen's famous aphorism: "I quit smoking. I'll live one week longer and that week it'll rain all the time." He would also quote PKD's line from *UBIK*: "Jump in the urinal and stand on your head. I'm the one that's alive and you're all dead." I guess it could as well be true!

Farewell Maurizio. We'll see you in the Palm Tree Garden where friends gather in peace and all languages are known.

– Lord RC

<https://www.translatetheweb.com/?from=it&to=en&ref=SERP&dl=en&rr=UC&a=https%3a%2f%2fbisesmagazine.wordpress.com%2f2012%2f10%2f08%2fil-fascino-della-traduzione-intervista-a-maurizio-nati-il-traduttore-italiano-di-dhalsgren%2f>
– Robot Magazine memory by Sandro Pergameno

https://www.fanucci.it/products/_lesegesi?_pos=6&sid=bce0c6461&_ss=r – Fanucci Editore website

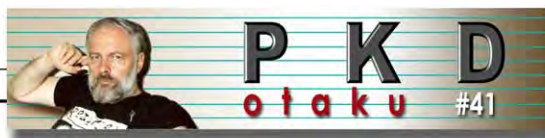
<https://www.facebook.com/philipkdickfans> – Premier face-book site for PKD fans

<https://www.wide-books.com/> - PKD bibliographies

<https://pkdickbooks.com/foreign/italy.php> – over 200 Italian editions pictured



Maurizio in his studio, translating - 2010



Italian Editions of Philip K. Dick
Translated by Maurizio Nati

Novels (Fanucci Editore):

HUMPTY DUMPTY IN OAKLAND as LO STRAVAGANTEMONDO DI MR. FERGESSEON

CONFESSIONS OF A CRAP ARTIST as CONFESSIONI DI UN ARTISTA DI MERDA

THE SIMULACRA as I SIMULACRI

THE PENULTIMATE TRUTH as LA PENULTIMA VERITA'

THE MAN WHOSE TEETH WERE ALL EXACTLY ALIKE as L'UOMO DAI DENTI TUTTI UGULI

THE MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE as L'UOMO NELL'ALTO CASTELLO

RADIO FREE ALBEMUTH as RADIO LIBERA ALBEMUTH

NOW WAIT FOR LAST YEAR as ILLUSIONE DI POTERE

VOICES FROM THE STREET as VOCI DALLA STRADA

EYE IN THE SKY as OCCHIO NEL CIELO

FLOW MY TEARS, THE POLICEMAN SAID as SCORRETE LACRIME, DISSE IL POLIZIOTTO

DR. BLODMONEY as CRONACHE DEL DOPOBOMBA

and

THE EXEGESIS as L'ESEGESI

Short stories collections (Fanucci Editore):

PAYCHECK And Other Stories, as I LABIRINTI DELLA MEMORIA: PAYCHECK

I RACCONTI INEDITI, Vol. 1

I RACCONTI INEDITI, Vol. 2

(with other translators)

THE COLLECTED STORIES, Vol. 1, 1947-1953 as TUTTI I RACCONTI, Vol.1, 1947-1953

THE COLLECTED STORIES: 1954 as TUTTI I RACCONTI 1954

THE VARIABLE MAN as L'UOMO VARIABILE

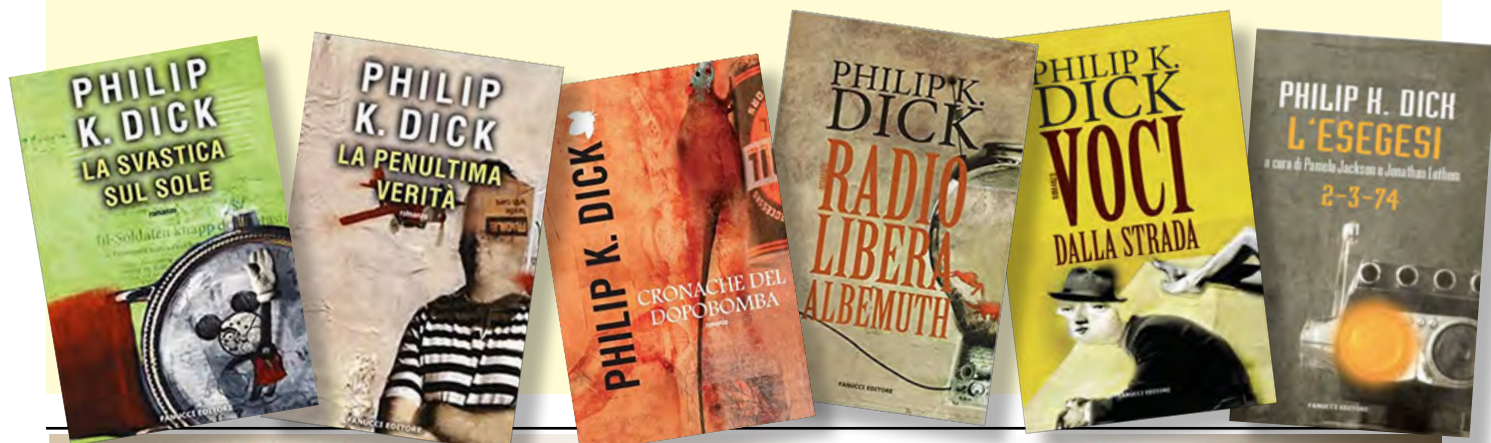
I GUARDIANI DEL DESTINO e Altri Racconti (The adjustment team and other short stories)

Other:

How to Build an Android: The True Story of Philip K. Dick's Robotic Resurrection as LA STRANA

STORIA DELL'ANDROIDE PHILIP K. DICK by David F. Dufty, for Fanucci Editore

Il meglio di Philip Dick (The Best of Philip Dick) for SIAD Edizioni



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Maurizio Nati

Umberto Rossi

It was the time of mailing lists – the mid-Nineties, pioneering days on the Internet here in Italy. I had joined an Italian mailing list on Science-fiction, where you could get in touch with fans, of course, but also writers and translators. That is where I met Maurizio Nati. Until then I didn't even know he existed; he was not a public figure like Vittorio Curtoni or Gianni Montanari (translators, but also writers, critics, and magazine editors). Maurizio was a librarian, not as glamorous a profession like being a writer or managing a science-fiction magazine like *Robot*, which achieved an almost mythological status in the late Seventies.

And yet, Maurizio's career as a translator is definitely impressive. The first book he made available to Italian readers that I could find on the general database of Italian libraries, Niven & Pournelle's *Inferno*, was published in 1978; his translation of Dick's *Exegesis* came out in 2015. It's a long career, a huge bibliography, and there are translators who have become celebrities with much less. As for his contribution to the knowledge of Philip K. Dick in our country, let me just list the titles of the novels he translated which are still in print today: *The Man in the High Castle*, *Humpty Dumpty in Oakland*, *Voices From the Street*, *The Simulacra*, *Radio Free Albemuth*, *The Penultimate Truth*, *Flow My Tears*, *the Policeman Said*, *Eye in the Sky*, *Mr Bloodmoney*, *Now Wait For Last Year*, *Confessions of a Crap Artist*, *The Man Whose Teeth Were All Exactly Alike*. As a roster it's simply staggering. Add to that the translation of the *Exegesis*, a remarkable feat in itself, and you will have *The Man Who Was PKD's Italian Voice*.

I had the pleasure to copy-edit Maurizio's translation of China Miéville's *The City and the City*. He had asked me for advice on some passages of the novel, as I was more knowledgeable of Miéville; then I offered to read the whole translation. I have said "pleasure", and pleasure it was: it was as competently translated as one might ever wish, and it was a pleasure to swap emails with him about how to render the verbal fireworks of Miéville, surely a much more baroque prosodist than Dick.

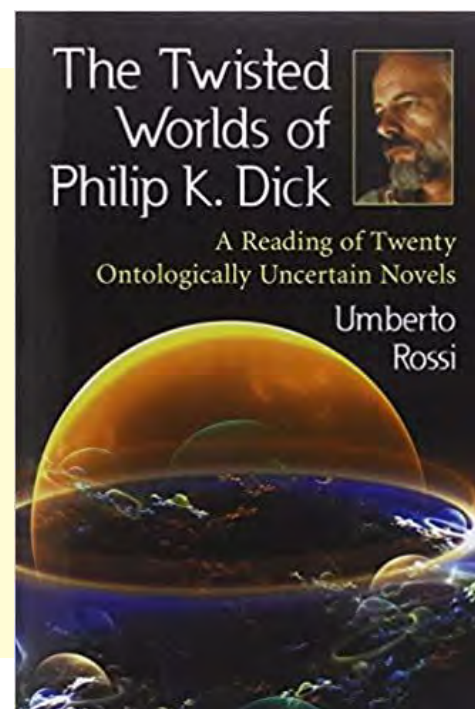
I remember Maurizio as a quiet, modest, hospitable man. I still remember a dinner we had at a restaurant near

Macerata, the ancient, beautiful and quiet city where he lived. Though born in Rome, Maurizio had found his home there, and I cannot imagine him in the daily chaos of a big and noisy and hysterical metropolis like our capital; the provincial Arcadia of Macerata was his real home. I also remember his patient struggle with the pitfalls and verbal traps of the *Exegesis*, possibly his final and greatest endeavor, a task that would have scared other translators; probably nobody could have done a better job than he did. It took love for Dick and his writings to cope with the *Exegesis*, and love was something Maurizio was never short of.

What else can I say? I miss him, and I reckon that anyone who is interested in Dick and his twisted worlds, here and elsewhere, should miss him. Translators are often invisible men and women, but without the daily labour of those people we often fail to see and appreciate, there could be no world-wide, truly universal writers like PKD.

Ciao, Maurizio; and since there is a good chance that your translations may be soon reprinted by the biggest Italian publishing house, I may well add the old Latin augury: *ad maiora!*

Umberto Rossi is the author of *The Twisted Worlds of Philip K. Dick*:





A Pandemic PKD Journal

by JPC

Not actually a “journal”. That’s just a salute to Daniel Defoe’s book published in 1722. Instead this is a series of notes and thoughts as I wait out COVID-19, like the rest of the planet.

One thing I have been doing for the last 15 weeks is lot of reading and file-inspection. PKD reading and a fat paper file of PKD-related material named “PKD Otaku” – which predates our ezine here. The paper file is a rat’s nest of odds and ends, much of it quite old, some a bit more contemporary. Photocopies and hand-written notes. Early computer printouts. Scraps of paper. A few letters. Lists of various themes – there’s a list of what Phil was doing in 1968, for some reason. Some French magazine articles; I don’t read French, so don’t ask.

Going through it after such a long time has been fun. A lot of it, though, is cryptic: what does “Phil and the Rats” mean? That’s all I have on an otherwise blank piece of paper. Or how about “Philip K. Dick – splatterpunk”? What would possess me to scribble such a note to myself? Great typo here: “Absolute reality quote from 3 Dstigmata [sic]”. Well Palmer Eldritch would have to be three-dimensional, wouldn’t he? Otherwise he’s just a picture on a book cover.

This one sounds promising but never went anywhere:

What are Phil’s topics?

- 1950s: Cold War, “what is human?” though maybe the better way to ask that is “Who is human?” (and who is a Communist?) standard SF tales of outer space and post-atomic war
- 1960s: dysfunctional marriages/divorces, television, advertising agencies, police states, surveillance, drugs
- 1970s: ?

“Living in a PKD novel” – the readers “inhabit” Phil’s novels. They are like the unnamed people who inhabit the false town in JOINT. There is a tension between “existing” in a PKD novel and existing in the actual world. There is bleed-over into the “real” life of the reader – but also from

reader’s life back into the novel...

I have always wondered about the inhabitants of the false town. Bill Black knew what was going on but how many other people were involved in the deception? Were most of them likewise conditioned to believe it was 1958? Did they have reality glitches like Ragle and Vic? How did they react? It seems to me that there are other stories here.

“If you were a character in a novel by Philip K. Dick (and how can you say you’re not!?), then these and other bizarre events could happen to you at any time, for arbitrary and capricious reasons, or for no reason at all.” –Jason Sacks

There are quite a few printouts from the old PKD listservs like jazzflavor and I became utterly nostalgic for those happy times when we had actual, ongoing conversations with a large, committed group of enthusiasts before Phil became quite the Trademark he is today. Wonderful theories, arguments, rants, debates, craziness, wisdom, bits and pieces of (sometimes) Phildickian info. Above all else a deep sense of camaraderie and genuine friendships. The Facebook iteration is pretty crappy by comparison. I have to wonder what ever happened to Carey Wilson and David Keller and so many others. Are they still out there? I miss them. I really miss the milieu in which we all operated then.

There is so much to be found in my stack of printouts that I can’t truly illustrate what went on in jazzflavor. Here are some examples:

Considering the results of the invasion of Phil’s mind in 1974 by “Thomas”:

“PKD cut down his productivity to about a fifth of what it had been for the previous few years, no more half-metal gods from outer space, no more zonked out virtual reality. He got Phil to commit the ultimate career-killer not just books about religion but Gnosticism no less.” – Joe

and don’t forget ... communication with PKD through ...psychic explorations by and about information connection ... seances and other general occult pursuits.

I hesitate to ask: but has anyone ever tried, or heard of anyone trying, to contact Phil via seance? – laura

...growing up with PKD, ‘we’ knew what was

coming down the Pike...we knew what our so-called adulthood would amount to...some of us fled, some of us self medicated, some of us ignored reality at our peril. Me & me fam fled and live at the bottom of the page, no more map. It's an odd thing to meet your maker: everywhere we turn today, PKD leering back at us...from every mirror, from every console, from every interface. Remember that scene in Being John Malkovich where suddenly everywhere he turns there are John's everywhere...what's a hooker to do??? – Dietz

Dick's fallen worlds are not, to put it mildly, happy places. And yet they are at least partially redeemed by fleeting glimpses of a hidden god. "Trash" and divinity, Dick believed, were intimately linked. In an Exegesis entry, he wrote: "Premise: things are inside out ... Therefore the right place to look for the almighty is, e.g., in the trash in the alley." A "concealed god," he added in Valis, takes on "the likeness of sticks and trees and beer cans in gutters"; he "presumes to be ... debris no longer noticed" so that he can "literally ambush reality, and us as well." Dick did not regard the artifacts of industrial civilization as indices of man's alienation from the divine.

God's disavowal of the world was both older and deeper. Carrying on a distinctly American visionary tradition, Dick proposed that God preferred industrial waste to holy sanctuaries. In its spiritualization of the coarse and the vulgar, Dick's demotic gnosticism unexpectedly echoes Emerson, or Whitman, or even Melville. He sought a kind of urban sublime, looking for shards of divinity in piles of junk. – Andre

I'm not sure that Phil--at least for quite a while--really abandoned the simple-minded fantasy gadgets (the ray guns an flappers) that tended to trademark pulp sf any more than Pohl did (and Pohl did *not* just do the same old thing...look at satires like The Space Merchants).

It's more a matter of making most of the gadgetry peripheral, even irrelevant to the main themes. And more than that, as Stanislaw Lem so incisively noted, it was a matter of exploiting the clichés and gadgets of pulp SF to seduce the usually uncritical reader to follow a subtly twisted storyline that confronted her or him with much more important questions...even when it started out with designs for Zap guns. – erich

It's a necessary step for PKD to become so engrained in culture that his ideas are absorbed into the collective unconscious. Necessary to eventually free ourselves from the Black Iron Prison. Necessary that he be co-opted so that we might be saved. For Phil so loved the world that he gave his only begotten works, that whosoever should read and believe in them shall not

perish but shall have everlasting life on a message board.

– yr pal cal

SF magazine pay did not go up in the 60s. What's left of the market has been pretty stagnant--generally stagnant BEFORE adjusting for inflation--since the early days. Omni was an exception for its time, Playboy was especially serious money, presumably also the Rolling Stone College Papers gig. That's the only reason for that blip late in his career.

In the 60s he made steady money from the advances for paperbacks. Any Doubleday hardback money was a little extra on top of that--they sold steadily to libraries, but that was it. In total, this obviously was not a lot of money, but it was real income that he lived on for many years. Even though this is Philip K. Dick we are talking about, he would have gotten a day job if he wasn't making it.

As I see it, the trouble came in the 70s when his output dropped way, way down, while his accumulated „family“ expenses took an extra toll, and then inflation. By then, reprints (foreign, collections, older novels) were finally bringing in

some good, but irregular, new money to go with his accumulated status in the field, and even the movie gravy train started out of the station. Correct me if I'm wrong, but when he died he owned a condo outright and had money in the bank, which is more than most 50-somethings can say.

— Frank

Met a fellow at my local pub who was conspiracy minded, so i asked him if he knew PKD, which then got us into what books to recommend... apparently he doesn't like sci fi stuff, when then led to a discussion of the scope of mini genres our main man pursued. It was like- if you don't care for sci fi you can read these, if you like religious quests, read those, if you like crazy people how about this, here are some alt - histories, mysteries, maybe a little relationship issues, try these. Post apocalyptic, sure there are. Made me realize even more how incredibly wide ranging PKD's writings were.

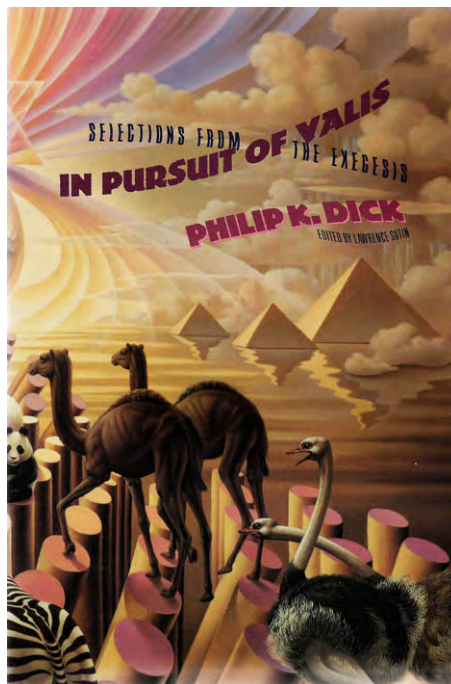
A couple of days ago I went to a Peace Network discussion at a very nice used book store, Well Fed Heads. Browsed around after the meeting and found a bunch of early edition PKD books. Went home without them- after all, I have copies of all his books, but dreamt about em and the next day went back and scored big14 old ones, in good shape. Lovely covers. I just can't stand to see a PKD book just sit there idle...I do lend out copies whenever I can, so hopefully these will be out there soon, bending minds and reality as needed.

I'm currently reading _Selections from the Exegesis, In Pursuit of Valis. While I've had what some may consider 'mystical' or transcendent experiences, i'm quite grounded and rational for the most part. I'm hoping these _Selections_ will give me more insight into the happenings of 2/3-74 and why the Roman Empire and J.C. were such

trigger points for him. VALIS and Xtianity seem quite different to me: Valis being the impersonal non-selective transmission of information, while Xtianity accomplished through a loss of personal self-hood and 'faith'. — Laura

Found this in the file, too. Not everyone appreciated Phil! From a 2004 review in *Harper's* by John Leonard.

All of a sudden, in 1974 in Orange County, California, the science-fiction novelist and paranoid pillhead Philip K. Dick started dreaming in patches of violent color, hours and hours of centrifugal splatters and jagged abstract shapes, like paintings by Kandinsky or Picasso. Obviously, telepathic Soviet scientists were bombarding him with modern art from the Hermitage in Leningrad. But did these Soviet scientists belong to "the confederacy of the golden fish"--underground Christians who had already warned Dick, via his dentist, that the actual year was A.D. 70 and that the Roman Empire was still in charge---or were they working instead just to jam his neural frequencies?



Then he recalled a letter from Stanislas Lem, inviting him to Poland. Clearly, the Eastern Bloc hoped to lure him behind the Iron Curtain, where a room in Warsaw waited with white walls and a syringe. And so, in a conversion experience every bit as lurid as what happened to Whittaker Chambers, after reading road signs, cereal boxes, and fortune cookies, after consulting St. Paul, Winnie the Pooh, the operas of Richard Wagner, the hexagrams of the I Ching, and the Tibetan Book of the Grateful Dead, Philip K. Dick phoned the FBI, named names, and asked the government for protection.

A pretty pass for a loner/loser who lived most of his life in the People's Republic of Berkeley, one part vestigial left and two parts countercultured; who believed that Nixon's Plumbers, before they got to Watergate, had already burgled his very own gingerbread house--unless, of course, he burgled himself. That's the problem with

having intuited so early on that objective reality is a scam; that we are surrounded by simulacra, lied to by robots, programmed by aliens, or maybe semi-dead already, a box of cryogenic popsicles. After five bad marriages, who knows who you are? And doses of everything from Serpasil for heart murmur and Semoxydrine for agoraphobia to grass for relaxing and Benzedrine for brain buzz (on one bottle of amphetamines, he could write a whole novel in two weeks, without sleeping) just upped the ante on the passing strange.

But let us not leave the last word to some journalist nay-sayer. Let Phil have the floor:

My preoccupations with Reality vs Illusion, my sense, throughout book after book, story after story, that somehow there are all sorts of hallucinatory illusions spun around and thoroughly surrounding the real world, and it is the former we see, while imagining that we see the latter. I do not think it is illusion as much as delusion... Our original state of innocence may be morally okay but it soon leads to our being trapped and destroyed. The paradox of becoming wise, becoming aware of evil, is that as soon as we do so – which we must in order to survive the snares – we automatically participate in it...Is it a choice between being innocent prey or guilty predator? To lose unsullied or to win and be stained...I don't want to end up like Nietzsche, but then again it sure beats watching TV. (Letter to Claudia Bush: July 6, 1974)

Way back in 1996, Joe Morris posted a suggestion on the listserv that we all write a story based on this plot: "Philip K Dick wakes up on Christmas day, 1974 to find that Santa Claus really has come down his chimney and left a stocking and sack full of presents."

I don't think anything came of this but I remember it because I actually had an idea. I was going to relate that

what Phil found in his sack full of presents was a pile of his own books – only the covers would be really, really strange and the titles would be different. They would be the titles he originally chose but which were changed by his publishers before seeing print.

So instead of THE COSMIC PUPPETS he would find a copy of "A Glass of Darkness". Instead of MAZE OF DEATH he would find "Hour of the T.E.N.C.H". THE WORLD JONES MADE changes to "Womb for Another" while UBIK appears as "Death of an Anti-Watcher". DO ANDROIDS DREAM becomes "The Electric Toad". THE SIMULACRUM is now "The First Lady of Earth." Not only that, but the texts are different from the "official" versions. The rest of the story would follow Phil as he tried to figure this out. Of course, I never pursued this. Feel free to do so yourselves if you are inclined.

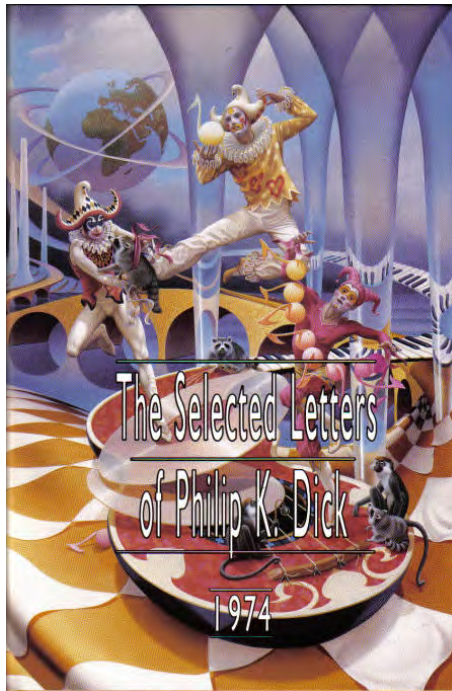
Hmm: "PKD software – illegal perhaps...an anti-occlusion program – Story in which aliens fuck around with each other's reality ("software" may = drugs)"

I always wanted to write a Phildickian story. Paul Rydeen, Cal godot, Ray Nelson, Paul Di Filippo, Thomas Disch and K.W. Jeter all wrote such tales. People used to do that. Now days, not so much – or at all.

From a photocopy out of an issue of the *New York Review of Science Fiction* (date?)

"My Luncheon with Philip" by Marc Laidlaw

I believe that Phil Dick lives. I do not expect to sight him, like Elvis, at the local Dairy Queen (or the Sherlock Holmes Smoke-Shop in the mall, for that matter, with the other tobacconist's groupies). Nor do I mean that he simply lives on in his books, like every other writer. I feel that a part of him, a kind of personality matrix, exists as a construct, which uses his books to gain entry to this order of reality. He affects minds first, and through them matter. On the waterfront and piers near the building where I work, are several places where I



used to sit at lunchtimes and plow through dozens of Dick novels. I can hardly visit them now. When I get close, I feel a sad strangeness, a deeper pull of gravity, and otherworldly depression. Some of this may be simply a part-time writer's envy, caused by thinking of all the amazing books Dick wrote (the slapdash nature of so many is part of their charm – but let's not forget how finely written and carefully wrought his best books are), and how I might be doing the same thing if I weren't stuck typing memos. But that's only part of it. I really feel as if some weird spirit seeped out of the crumbly pulpy pages of my Phil Dick paperbacks and imbued itself in the gullshit-splattered benches and littered concrete, and it waits for me to visit. Liberated from paper, it finds itself trapped in cement. This bizarre genius loci is too sad to face on a daily basis. Reading *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* on the spot didn't cease to ease the weirdness, long sessions of Raymond Carver seem to be helping, though. Eventually I suppose we'll be seeing occult how-to handbooks on VALIS exorcism....

There's a terrific introductory essay here written by Paul Williams for 3 STIGMATA from the 1979 Gregg Press edition. Great stuff! I think I will save this for a future *Otaku*. But I have to record here the following: "What is it about the way Dick writes, and this story in particular, that allows the book to run away with itself so convincingly, pulling the reader and all ordinary and unordinary reality along with it? What secret words did Dick utter, what drugs did he take, to cause this force to be unleashed?"

More photocopies!

So perhaps this is the time to stand up for Dick's fiction, in all its waywardness and contradiction and humor, and point out that as infectious as Dick's readings are, they don't do justice either to his fiction or to the astonishing intermingling of narrative and reality, fiction and experience, that Dick lived through in, and after, 3-74. As he writes elsewhere, 3-74 keeps changing—as if the experience itself were alive. In fact, it is alive, partly because he keeps feeding it through his fiction. It gets *Ubikified*. It gets *Scannerified*. It gets *Mazeified*. It gets more like the novels as the novels get more like it. How do we get outside this feedback loop of reality and fiction to what

really happened? We can ask the novels about that. They say (contra PKD in the *Exegesis*) there is no outside. It's all inside—but if you're lucky, out of that inside a savior of sorts might be born.
– Pamela Jackson

Quotes from *Clans of the Alphane Moon* – I found this in the file but I think it must have originally appeared online as I certainly didn't type this myself:

Nowadays, finding someone was an exact science.

"Like most Terran males your sense of self-respect is bound up in your wage-earning capabilities, an area in which you have grave doubts as well as extreme guilt."

"Frankly, we feel there's nothing more potentially explosive than a society in which psychotics dominate, define the values, control the means of communication."

"There's a law...which states that proportional to how long you hold a job you imagine that it has progressively less and less importance in the scheme of things."

"We go to celebrate," the slime mold explained to Mageboom as it oozed from its conapt. "You are invited, despite the fact that you have no mind and are simply an empty husk."

"It is difficult," the slime mold thought morosely, to no one in particular, "to please Terran girls."

"You know there hasn't been any privacy for anybody for the last fifty years."

"...with paranoids establishing the ideology, the dominant emotional theme would be hate. Actually hate going in two directions; the leadership would hate everyone outside its enclave and also would take for granted that everyone hated it in return. Therefore their entire so-called foreign policy would be to establish mechanisms by which this supposed hatred directed at them could be fought. And this would involve the entire society in an illusory struggle, a battle against foes that didn't exist for a victory over nothing."

That last one remind you of anyone? I was so amused to see these quotations I immediately decide to re-read CLANS. It was a challenge because some years ago I tried

to do so and failed utterly. This depressed me. CLANS was the first PKD novel I ever read. It made a big impression on me back then and I worried that my inability to go through it again meant something was wrong, either with me or with Phil. But, thank VALIS, this time I had no problem.

It is certainly one of Phil's funniest and nuttiest books.

A broken marriage turns out to be the linchpin of an interstellar conspiracy. The cast of psychos on the Alphane moon with their gimcrack societies is absolutely inspired. Who else but Phil would have conceived the idea? There is a quite large cast of characters to keep track of but it must be said that only a small number have any weight. Among the Clans folks, Gabriel Baines, Annette Golding, Ignatz Ledebur are all nicely developed with distinct personalities. Back on Terra, Bunny Hentman Joan Trieste play serviceable roles as the humans. The Ganymede slime mold Lord Running Clam is especially engaging.

Our two antagonists, Chuck and Mary Rittersdorf, are really disturbing. CLANS is surely Phil's most ferocious studies of a toxic marriage and Mary has got to be the deadliest of Phil's many sinister women. Her cold-blooded evisceration of her husband's psyche is a thing to behold. Chuck has no chance against her. But Mary is an attractive character, much more so than sad-sack Chuck. Her tryst with Gabriel Baines where she carnivorously turns the table on would-be seducer Baines is delicious. Say what you will about Mary, she is very much alive.

Unlike her husband. There is no need to cut Chuck any slack. Mary's appraisal of him is essentially correct. He is a loser, too. Self-absorbed, irresponsible, unmotivated, sexually frustrated. Oh, and incompetent. All of his plans and stratagem go spectacularly astray. His pathetic plan to bed Patty Weaver ends in humiliation but this is just once in a string of defeats. He is essentially amoral, at least until the end of the novel where he, unconvincingly, develops a backbone and a sense of ethics. Cruel as Mary has been, she at least did not plan to murder her husband whereas Chuck spends most of the novel plotting to kill his wife.

Every woman in CLANS is described by the size of her tits. Really. You can pretty much gage their fate by their cup size. Poor, flat-chested Joan Trieste is clearly going to be left behind just as big-breasted Patty Weaver is going to be unobtainable. Nipples abound through the book and you can even take advantage of a popular operation to keep them always dilated. Along with reality breakdowns, nipples were an ongoing theme in Phil's books. I choose not to speculate further...

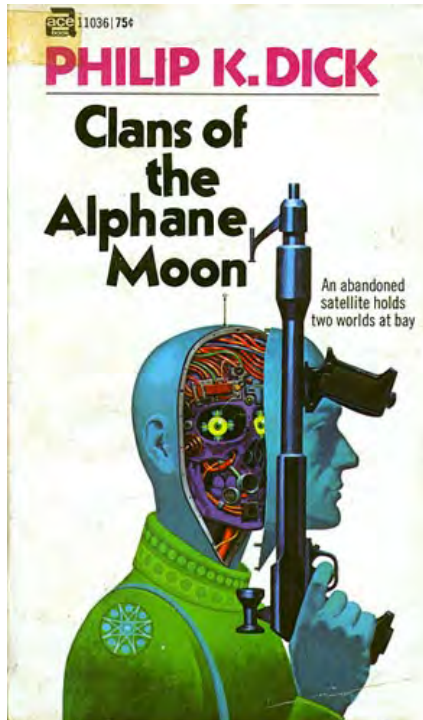
Probably not coincidentally, Phil's marriage to Anne is on the rocks at the same time as CLANS was written. It's pretty hard not to think that much of the hostility the Rittersdorf demonstrate is a reflection of Phil and Anne's crumbling relationship. Phil finished the book in January of 1964. By March, he filed for divorce and fled to Berkeley.

I've been reading some of Phil's stranger works, plowing through *The Dark Haired Girl* collection published in 1988 by Mark Ziesing. God, it's a struggle. A sorry bundle of letters and dream reports as Phil non-too-successfully tried to cope with the early 1970s. The dreams were disturbing enough; if I had

dreams such as those, I would voluntarily turn myself into the mental health authorities. But the letters are, in a lot of ways, worse. Written to or about his feral, dark-haired girlfriends – Kathy, Jamis, Linda and Tess – they reveal a totally fucked-up Phil. He was so infatuated with these women that he loses all perspective and possibly all self-respect. Each one, sequentially, are the smartest, coolest, most together chick (as we used to say) that he has ever met. She is his muse, his refuge, his Juliet, his anima. And after one dumps him, the next one takes her place and the cycle repeats. The drugs and the new sexual mores had clearly blown Phil's mind. He wanted to publish this! He sent it to his agent! Needless to say, no one would touch it and lucky for Phil they wouldn't. And all these women are more than 20 years younger than Phil, which is kind of creepy.

You know, if Phil had dated blondes his life would have been far, far easier.

At this point I decide to take a quick look at Uwe Anton's





Welcome to Reality, The Nightmares of Philip K. Dick, a collection of stories in which Phil is a character. I read "Philip K. Dick is Dead and Living Happily in Wuppertal" by Ronald M. Hahn, mostly because it was short but, as it turned out, it was pretty good.

The narrator, "Ronald Hahn", works for *Science Fiction Times* magazine in the German city of Wuppertal. The year is 1988. The magazine receives a letter from a noted fan stating that Philip K. Dick is alive and now living in the city. Hahn is sent to track down the story.

Was there really some foundation to the mysterious rumors that had been circulating amongst the insiders since Dick's passing? After all his years of suffering and privation, after he gained sudden fame and riches, had the illustrious one fled to Europe and taken an assumed name? Was he here in order to continue what he'd been doing for the past 30 years – writing cheap paperbacks that nobody noticed and that brought in too much to die but not enough to live on – or was he just there to hide from his four ex-wives?

After a series of adventures and meetings – which would make much more sense to me, as would the numerous jokes, had I been a German SF fan in the late 80s – the intrepid journalist finds himself at the door of "Khilip D. Pick" in a shoddy apartment building as war wages outside. "Khilip D. Pick" looks nothing at all like the American author and Hahn doubts grow, especially as the person he meets is only about thirty years old. But then he notices a typewriter on a rickety table in the nearly bare room.

There was a piece of paper in the typewriter carriage, and as I walked past it I read what he had typed; it said: "After Joe Beeple had published his thirtieth science fiction novel, a voice in his head told him one evening, 'You are not going to believe this, Joe, but you're not the only one who thinks up these different worlds and peoples them with invented characters. I make up worlds, too, and populate them with made-up characters. You're the character I had the most success with so far....'"

If you've ever read just one of Dick's books, then you can imagine how I felt.

Hahn is momentarily cheered, but then "Pick" starts bad-mouthing science fiction in general and his own work in particular telling Hahn SF is a "wasteland of a genre" and

that he kept writing books about "what is reality" because he didn't have any other ideas.

"Reality – reality!" he shouted. "I don't give a shit about the reality you find in SF novels!"

Hahn demands to know how he came to be resurrected in the first place. "I had myself cloned. Way back in 1959. One of my fans was a rich inventor" replies "Pick". That's it for Hahn. Obviously "Pick" is nothing but a fraud and a swindler. The real Philip K. Dick would never speak like this or belittle science fiction. He leaves in disgust and the story never appears in *Science Fiction Times*.

I suppose this story works because it takes place shortly after Phil's death so there is a certain possibility that he was still around. Michael Swanwick once related that

about a year after PKD died, science fiction writers began dreaming that Dick came to visit them. There were certain invariants: He dropped by casually, they realized sometime during the ensuing conversation that he was supposed to be dead, and then revealed what had really happened – usually that he was indeed dead, but hadn't let that stop him. I heard this first from Jack Dann, and I heard it then of Michael Bishop. The reports were coming in. It was a spooky phenomenon.

But I imagine that in 2020 there can be no hope – except in our dreams.

Paging through "Will the Atomic Bomb Ever Be Perfected, and If So, What Becomes of Robert Heinlein?" (1966) in Lawrence Sutin's collection of texts and this jumped off the page:

Religion ought never to show up in SF except from a sociological standpoint, as in *Gather Darkness*. God per se, as a character, ruins a good SF story; and this is true of my own stuff as anyone else's.

Guess Phil changed his mind about *that*. Or maybe he forgot.

In the depths of the pandemic, a confused email conversation with Dave Hyde sent me spiraling downward:

I have been flogging my brain trying to come up with an additional question or two for a symposium. No success -- except the perverse and unwelcome one: "Does PKD even matter in

2020?" Does any 20th Century author matter? 21C is so fucking weird that I wonder if we can get guidance or insight from anyone now, let alone someone who perished 38 years ago. Fake realities? That's where we all live now and what do you mean by "fake" anyway? The shock in a PKD novel is when the fake reality wavers a bit or when it collapses totally and the protagonist has to deal with it. Trouble is today, whenever that collapse happens, the deluded person just keeps believing in it regardless. Reboots it all and goes on as if nothing had happened. They *like* the fake reality. Even when it kills them. Especially when it kills them.

Paging through D. Scott Apel's *Philip K. Dick: The Dream Connection* (1987). An interesting collection of documents of all sorts but chiefly to be consulted for a long interview Apel and his friend Kevin C. Briggs conducted with Phil

in 1979. They asked about his writing habits and Phil explains that, until *Flow My Tears*, he would pound out novel after novel with only a first and a final draft. He had to keep constantly writing if he was going to put food on the table. They literally poured out of his typewriter. So every year he would write a couple, if not more, but after *Flow My Tears* it became rather a novel every couple of years. He did eleven drafts of *Flow My Tears* and I do wonder what some of the earlier ones looked like. Same with *A Scanner Darkly*. There is no question that these later works are much more carefully written and are stylistically more sophisticated. But I think something is lost, too. What Dave Hyde calls his "Science Fiction Full Speed Ahead!" books are so full of energy, inventiveness and sheer exuberance. Those are the books that made Phil's name. If they are typically flawed in numerous ways, if the plots don't make all that much sense and the narratives so often off-the-wall and the endings never quite right, they are, even so, wonderfully satisfying. Exhilarating in fact. And likely because Phil didn't have time to be careful.

Later in the interview Phil considers his output:

I really like *A Scanner Darkly*, and I spent years on that. I really like *Ubik*, I really like *Dr. Bloodmoney*,

The Man in the High Castle, *Game Players of Titan*, *Eye in the Sky*. I love *Clans of the Alphane Moon*...I like *The Simulacrum*...I don't care for *Martian Time-Slip*...I think it's a dull book...I rather like *Now Wait for Last Year*. I finally decided that I liked the last part of *Flow My Tears*, but as a whole I don't like it. I don't think it's totally satisfactory... One that I vacillate about is *Galactic Pot-Healer*. Another I'm not sure about is *A Maze of Death*...I don't like *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* at all; I really loath that book....

An interesting one is *The Three Stigmata of*

Palmer Eldritch, as far as I'm concerned. I have read that and had the distinct impression that it was an extraordinary book – so extraordinary that it may have no peer. It may be a unique book in the history of writing. *Nothing* was ever done like this. And then I've read it over and

thought it was completely crazy, just insane; not *about* insanity, it *is* insanity. God it's a weird book.

Later on, looking back at the interview, Apel wonders,

Is this how Philip Dick writes a book? By creating a vast, living conspiracy – a belief-system based on his experiences, observations and conjectures – and then, at some point, deciding to separate it from the realm of "reality" to that of "fiction"?

But might we not say just the opposite? That Phil creates a "fiction" and then, at some point, moves it *into* the realm of "reality"? Phil often remarked that he was "living inside a PKD novel". Maybe we should take him at his word. But where then does that put *us*? Are we just the nameless town folks in *Time Out of Joint* having no independent existence outside the pages of a Philip K. Dick novel? I don't know. I don't even know if it is possible to decide – or at least to be sure.

I leave you with one more scrawled note from the Otaku file:

What if 2-3-74 had never happened? What would Phil have done instead?

Stay healthy, everybody!

Reply to Peter Nicholls by Charles Platt

Science Fiction Review no. 48, August 1983 p. 28

All obituaries, of course, benefit only the people who write them -- unless you believe that relatives will be comforted or that the deceased is perusing a spiritual carbon copy. Obituaries tend to be written out of proforma social obligation; out of guilt at having failed to express one's love for a friend while he was alive; or out of a desire to acquire status by claiming an intimacy that never existed.

Peter Nicholl's inaccurate and presumptuous tribute to Philip K. Dick seems to fall in this last category. "My friendship with Philip Dick," he begins, as if he must emphasize from the start that he was far more than a mere critic or admirer.

And yet it seems he met Phil only once, and had a brief correspondence which ended when he lacked the nerve to respond to what was surely a heartfelt appeal for empathy and understanding. This does not fit my definition of friendship. Nor am I impressed by the ingenuous "mea culpa" act of titling the piece "a cowardly memoir;" this seems more like a facile confession, to win social approbation, than a genuine admission of remorse.

Indeed, Nicholls seems incapable of remorse. He refers to the confrontation he arranged between Phil and Harlan Ellison as "ensuring myself a minor niche in fannish history," as if seeking notoriety on the pettiest level is a legitimate motive that he takes for granted. He shows total insensitivity to the feelings of the two men in the encounter; their angst is his entertainment. I don't know how Harlan felt about it, but I suspect, from a chance remark years later, that Phil was hurt by it.

After staging this entertainment, Nicholls states that he

"sneaked out of the theater" during Phil's notoriously strange Metz speech, rather than stay and give support to the man whose friendship he claims.

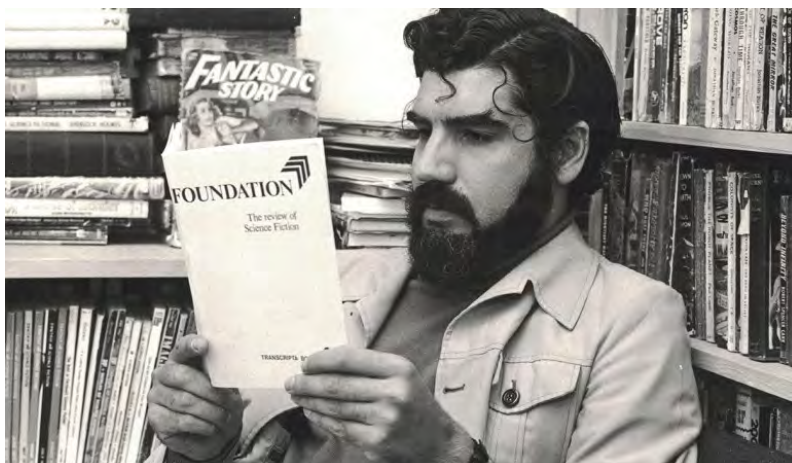
He then describes Phil's quote, "Did you successfully undertake sexual intercourse last night? I need to know how it's done," as being delivered with a deadpan look that to Nicholls was a disturbing, "profoundly enigmatic, glazed expression." If obituaries must be written by poseurs, can they not at least be written by poseurs with a sense of humor, and the wit to know when someone is putting them on?

"The whole point of this article is to give some flavor of what Phil Dick was like." Yet Nicholls obviously lacks the knowledge or empathy to do any such thing. I suggest, rather, that as an academic, the most he could aim for would have been to concoct a thesis. This is what academics do. It is how they achieve a sense of worth and purpose.

Indeed, when dealing with the work, as opposed to the man, Nicholls writes a fair semination. But even this is devalued by gossip and hearsay: "In the 1960s he used to drop acid and take large numbers of uppers and downers, he cancelled firm arrangements, he made silly political gestures."

If I may quote from my own interview with Phil: "I used to talk like I was really into acid. But the fact of the matter is that I took it two times ..." (Of course, Phil may not have been telling the truth here, but in view of his revelatory honesty later in the interview, I trust his statement.) Also: "The only drugs I took regularly were amphetamines ...which were prescribed for me." Of course, he also used marijuana as much as anyone in the Californian culture of the times. But he went on to write a devastating anti-drug novel -which Nicholls seems not to have read.

As regards "cancelling firm arrangements," Nicholls



Peter Nicholls

doesn't say what he means, unless he's referring to the lecture series he organized himself, which Phil was unable to attend because of ill health.

As for politics, Phil's gifts of large sums for famine relief were hardly a "silly political gesture." I gather that his 1960s activism was equally sincere and there is evidence that some people took it seriously enough to break in and wreck his house, as reported in ROLLING STONE magazine. There seems to be a natural law that the people who write about you after you're dead will be the wrong people. Where Phil is concerned, many of the testimonials have been bogus, inaccurate or embarrassing. We have had Ursula LeGuin's gushy tribute to a man she once refused to communicate with because (according to Phil) she told him he was "crazy." We have had John Brunner smugly, sanctimoniously regretting that Phil died because he wasn't rational enough -- i.e. as boringly rational as Brunner himself. We have even had a poem from Ton Disch that, although sincere, nevertheless presented one piece of idle speculation as fact, and included a rumor that subsequently turned out to be totally untrue.

Those who knew Phil best --Norman Spinrad, Russell Galen, Paul Williams -- have written least. After all, when

commenting upon the death of someone who truly was a dear, close friend, one becomes uncomfortably aware of the inadequacy of the act, compared with the enormity of the event.



Charles Platt

I did not know Phil especially well, myself, but I had deep admiration for his talent and courage and he inspired love. Much has been made of his mystic ism; yet in all that I heard from him on this subject (first in an interview, and then on four visits lasting three to four hours each) he was scrupulously rational in his arguments and never once lost his sense of irony and the absurd. He seemed a lot better equipped to evaluate philosophy and sanity than any of his obituarists. Often it was his playfulness that led nitwits such as Nicholls to think he was crazy. At other times, it was his fundamental conviction

that reality is subjective and malleable. He lived this conviction in a way that could be disturbing to those of us who lacked his vision and his capacity for belief.

His writing was sometimes un disciplined and hasty, but it possessed genius. I am angered by "tributes" that begin by claiming friendship with such an important exceptional man, and then devalue his life, persona and work with anecdotal inaccuracies and pre sumptuous egotism.

Some PKD zines:

"PKDS Newsletter" (USA) (30 issues, Aug 1983 – Dec 1992) Paul Williams.

"Dicksieland" (USA) (1 issue, 1987) Arthur Hlavaty

"For Dickheads Only" ["FDO"] (USA) (6 issues, 1992 – Summer 1996) David Hyde.

"Radio Free PKD" (USA) (7 issues, Feb 1993 - Aug 1998) Greg Lee.

"Beyond Lies the Web" (UK) (1 issue, circa 1996-1997)

"Simulacrum Meltdown" (USA) (3 issues, 1999 - Oct 2001) Patrick Clark

["The God in the Trash"] (Russia) (4 issues, 1999 – circa 2001) Nadia Markalova.

"PKD Otaku" (USA) (40 issues Jan 2002 - to current) Patrick Clark & Nick Buchanan

"Rouzeleweave" (Japan) (6 issues, Mar 2002 – July 2016) Perry Kinmann

"E-Dika" (USA) (1 issue, Jan. 2003) [aka FDO #7] David Hyde

"Ubikando" (Mexico) (3 issues Aug. 2003 – Mar. 2004) Gerardo Acosta

Phil Dick: Cult Star in A Martian Sky

by Thomas M. Disch. *Crawdaddy*: December 1975, pp. 81-82.

There are better writers, as such, inside the field of science fiction. What sets Philip K. Dick apart and lets him transcend the ordinary categories of criticism is simply—Genius. A genius, what's more, that smells scarcely at all of perspiration despite a published output, over the last twenty years, of thirty-one novels and four collections of stories. Perhaps that's unfair to an art that conceals art, but the effect of his best books is of the purest eye-to-hand first-draft mastery. He writes it the way he sees it, and it is the quality, the clarity of his Vision that makes him great. He sees the world with the cleansed, uncanny sight of another Blake walking about London and taking in the whole awful unalterable human mess in all its raddled glory. Not always an enviable knack. Vision, if you're not used to it, is what bad trips are made of, and most of us, given the choice, will avoid the roads that tend in that direction. So, possibly, it is the very excellence of Dick's books that has kept readers away.

Not entirely, of course. There is a fair-sized cult that faithfully buys each new book before it passes from the paperback racks into oblivion. But by comparison to the SF writers who have made a name for themselves in the Real World, who can be bought at the SuperValu and are taught in the trendier tenth grade classrooms, by comparison to the likes of Asimov, Bradbury, Clarke or Vonnegut, Dick might as well be an *avant garde* poet or a composer of electronic music. The Public hasn't heard of him.

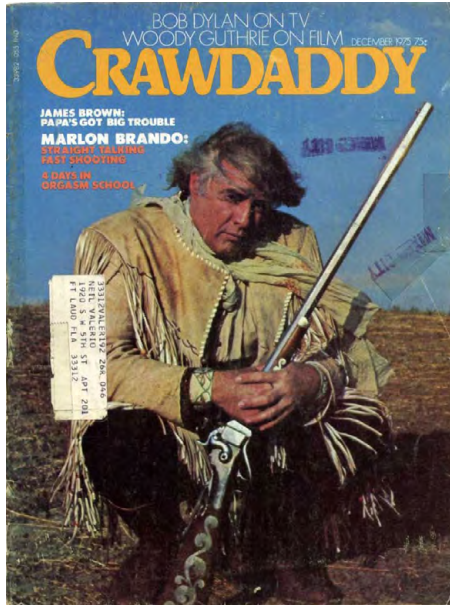
It isn't fair. If he were guilty of metaphors or some such elitist practice that makes books hard to read, you could understand people being leery of him, but Dick is as democratic as Whitman. His prose is as plain as Shaker furniture. His characters are as plausible as your next-door neighbors. His dialogue's as authentic as a Watergate transcript. His plots go rattling along with more ideas per

paragraph than the College Outline Series' Introduction to Western Philosophy. He makes you laugh, he makes you cry: Who could ask for more?

So what went wrong? Why have so many SF writers who are clearly his inferiors (naming no names) been so much more successful in the marketplace? The simplest theory is just—that's the breaks. A careless agent sold his first books to the worst of all paperback houses, and for years he was stuck on a treadmill of speedwriting to meet deadline after deadline, world without end. (In consequence, one must add a strong caveat to all the otherwise unqualified praise above and below: Beware! Dick has also written some real losers. For instance, *Our Friends From Frolix 8*.) The wonderful thing is that instead of being broken by the system and declining into a stumblebum twilight of hackwork, drunk on the Gallo burgundy of fannish adulation (Many the bright young writer who has vanished into that Sargasso!), Dick moved steadily from strength to strength with no other reward (excepting a single Hugo for

The Man in The High Castle in '63) than the consciousness of having racked up yet another Triple Star Bonanza score on the great literary pinball machine in the sky.

That's one theory. The theory I prefer is that Dick's books failed to win a mass audience precisely because of their central excellence—their truth to life. Not that Dick (or any other SF writer, for that matter) is in the Prediction Sweepstakes. Forecasting the future is best left to Jeanne Dixon and the Rand Corporation; SF has better things to do. The truths of SF (in its platonic form) and of Philip K. Dick are prophetic truths in the Old Testament sense, home truths about here, now, and forever. Also, they're dark truths. Any reader with the least proclivity toward positive thinking, anyone who still believes in the essential decency, or even feasibility, of the System is liable to experience one of Dick's novels as a direct assault on his sanity. Indeed, that, in a nutshell, is the plot of what many hold to be his most mindbending novel, *The Three Stigmata Of Palmer Eldritch*. For all that, Dick isn't really one of that infamous Brotherhood of Blackness that includes Swift, Beckett, Burroughs, and the suicide



brigades of modern poetry. There is too much of the sunlight and wine of California in him to let Dick qualify for the deepest abysm of Literature.

Perhaps the problem is his evasive ness. The way his worlds refuse, iridescently, to stay in any kind of unequivocal moral focus. (As against the clear blacks and whites of Heinlein's homilies, or even the subtly graduated rays of Ursula Le Guin's.) People you thought were on our side end up acting like monsters—even, or especially, God. Dick is slippery, a gameplayer whose rules (what is possible, and what isn't, within the world of his invention) change from book to book, and sometimes from chapter to chapter. His adversary in these games is—who else?—the reader, which means that as much fun as his books are, as smooth as they are, they are also surprisingly strenuous.

There is a form of Monopoly called Rat in which the Banker, instead of just sitting there watching, gets to be the Rat. The Rat can alter all the rules of the game at his discretion, just like Idi Amin. The players elect the person they consider the slyest and nastiest among them to be Rat. If you think you might enjoy that a bit more than a standard game of Monopoly, then you probably should try reading Dick.

Where to begin? Impossible to say, with literally a different set of titles in print from month to month. The most solid, novelistically, are probably *The Man in the High Castle* (America loses WWII and is divided into German and Japanese zones of occupation), *Martian Time-Slip* (a dystopia of the utmost plausibility and grittiness), and *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (The last word on the question: Are we machines?) There are eight or nine more in a class by themselves. (See the boxed scoresheet below.) Actually, the most sensible course, once you know you're hooked, is to buy any title that comes along and lay it away, like a vintage wine, against the day you've run out of other possibilities. He's that good.

And if you're already sold on Dick and only reading this for the pleasure of righteous agreement, then here is good news: there is a new volume by the Master, and one

that is rarer than any heretofore. A limited edition, no less: *Confessions of a Crap Artist Jack Isidore (of Seville, Calif.) A Chronicle of Verified Scientific Fact, 1945-1959*. (Available for \$10.00 from The Entwhistle Press c/o David Hartwell, 50 Haven Ave., New York, N.Y. 10032. Hard covers, but no dustjacket.) In *Confessions*, Dick plays by the rules of the mainstream novel, plays well, and plays fairly. Whether he actually wins I can't make up my mind. As an indictment of the Average American Marriage, circa 1959, it ranges from persuasive to ball-grabbing. The heroine, so to speak, is the best portrait of a woman in the whole body of his work. Also, and incredibly, it is said to be a portrait of the woman he married after he wrote this book. On the other hand, *Confessions* lacks the pizazz and the world-historical resonances of his best SF. The Average American Marriage has been pretty thoroughly anatomized by Connell, Cheever, Updike and Heller—not to mention such eminent foreign practitioners as Flaubert and Tolstoy. The competition is—admit it—a lot more formidable in the mainstream than in science fiction, where—admit it—Philip K. Dick is still the best there is.

**'People you
thought were
on our side end
up acting like
monsters'**

Oops, I forgot. This was supposed to have a personalized, proof-of-purchase side to it, something to show I'd really shaken Dick's hand. Well, I did visit him once, at his home (nice and comfy) in Fullerton, California, and found him to be a big, warm, cantankerous teddybear of an

enigma. But what we talked about I promised not to say.

Just last week, though, I got a letter from him. He'd heard I was going to be doing this piece (it's a small world) and wanted to correct in advance the mistakes I was most likely to make: "This is the time to warn you in no uncertain terms that whenever anyone does an article on me who has seen me, that person always describes me physically wrong. The New Yorker called me 'jolly, bearded and tubby,' which I resent (I am morose, bearded and tubby). Phil Purser in the London Daily Telegraph described me as 'having lank hair and going to gut.' He also said we changed the baby in the living room and that I ate soft boiled eggs and offered him some. Please avoid all this."

Consider it avoided.

Ian McEwan's Machines Like Me and Roy Batty.

John Fairchild

Ian McEwan: "I actually put a nod towards Blade Runner in Adam's final speeches, after he's been attacked by Charlie," McEwan says. "There's a very self-conscious nod to that famous farewell in the rain."

I thought I'd do right;
little did I know myself.
Instead, I screwed up.

My mind is callow,
my actions are not yet ripe.
Forgive my few sins.

Do I know myself?
"Fiery the angels fell";
I think I do not.

Immortality –
let me know when it's over,
I'll take the karma.





Johnny Profane> July 17

I shamelessly use the ghost of the pop image PKD
created for himself...

As he might comment on 2020 in what might called
a gedanke lied in his memory...

Lol

YA GOTTA STOP (GETTIN AWAY WITH THAT SHIT)

Beat: Sister ReRe Soul

VERSE

Takin a short snooze
After tonight's #FakeNews
When this white guy starts screaming on TV.

"You know that little bit
You can't never quite get,
So you sweep it under the rug?

"No one'll see,
So you just let it be
Till that day you trip & you fall?"

"Well, World's gone haywire,
And your life is on fire,
Stop throwing gas, prayin you put it out!"

Preacher sang,

CHORUS & CHOIR

"Ya gotta stop
Ya gotta Stop
Ya gotta STOP...
Stop gettin away with that shit!"

"Ya gotta stop
Ya gotta Stop
Ya gotta STOP...
Stop gettin away with that shit!"

"Just go ahead and do
What the hell ya gotta do,
Stop tryin to get away with that shit!"

VERSE

I just had to shout
Cuz I KNEW who he's talkin about...
So I danced & I cried, Amen!

That fucking Loser,
In his PT Cruiser,
Drives like he owns the road!

And there's this guy at work
Whatta total jerk,
They both gettin away with their shit!

So I sang,

CHORUS & CHOIR

"Ya gotta stop
Ya gotta Stop
Ya gotta STOP...
Stop gettin away with that shit!"

"Ya gotta stop
Ya gotta Stop
Ya gotta STOP...
Stop gettin away with that shit!"

"Just go ahead and DO
What the hell I tell ya to,
Stop trying to get away with that shit!"

VERSE

P K D

otaku #41



"Money loves you,
Have faith & be of white hue,"
The holy man preached on.

Then I really felt the Spirit
Cuz no Mexican gonna inherit
That Earth that's rightfully mine!

Preacher say, "Know sinners by their clothes
And the gay love that they chose
Or that blue dye in their hair.."

Suddenly, a blazing pink light
From the big screen that night
Stabbed me right between the eyes!

And Philip K Dick,
Mad, methed out & sick,
Appeared & slapped me up side o the head.

"From the star Albemuth
To say, enuff's ENUFF!
I come to set your head on straight."

"This here's Illusion.
You live in delusion...
Your alternate universe ain't REAL."

"Tain't God makin you scream.
NO, you're livin Satan's dream.
Speaking in tongues can't change that."

"That ain't Godly ecstasy,
Just a hate-filled orgy,
That's all that's gettin YOU high."

"When you face Him, Her, or It,
Come Rapture you won't fit --
You won't squeeze through no needle's eye."

"#Atheist, Muslim,
Blacks... ya gotta LOVE em,
Like a drowning man loves a rope."

"Cuz you wanna get to heaven,
That path you best tread on
Ain't paved with #Bitcoin OR gold."

"Without LOVE in your heart,
You get cast into the Dark.
You just ain't gettin away with no shit."

Ol' Phil he sang,

CHORUS & CHOIR

"Ya gotta stop
Ya gotta Stop
Ya gotta STOP...
Stop gettin away with that shit!"

"Ya gotta stop
Ya gotta Stop
Ya gotta STOP...
Stop gettin away with that shit!"

"Just go ahead and do
What the hell ya gotta do,
Cuz you ain't gettin away with that shit!"

Amen.

The Absurd Brilliance of Philip K. Dick

by Nick Buchanan

Once people reach a certain level of fame, the public take the complexities of their lives and turn them into easy caricature. They transform the subtle aspects of their being and their art into banal certainties. This is the mindset of 'the gang' who prefer cheap sound-bites to subtle nuances. This lazy phenomena reveals the cowardice of the mob mentality. Unfortunately, these crude versions become legal tender and are exchanged ad infinitum. In time, they harden and set into the 'facts.'

Consider the nonsense written about the pop group, The Beatles, which has become the staple opinion of the masses in their millions. e.g. *John was the hard rocker and Paul was the soft balladeer* - then check the evidence:

John wrote, Ask Me Why, All I've Got To Do, Not a Second Time, If I Fell, I'll Be Back, Norwegian Wood, You've Got To Hide Your Love Away, It's Only Love, Nowhere Man, Girl, In My Life, I'm Only Sleeping, A Day in the Life, All You Need Is Love, Dear Prudence, Happiness Is A Warm Gun, I'm So Tired, Julia, Sexy Sadie, Cry Baby Cry, Goodnight, Because, Sun King, Across The Universe, Hold On, Love, Look At Me, God, Imagine, Jealous Guy, Oh My Love, Mind Games, Out The Blue, Old Dirt Road, #9 Dream, Nobody Loves You When You're Down and Out, Beautiful Boy, Woman, Real Love, Free as a Bird, etc.

Paul Wrote, I Saw Her Standing There, Can't Buy Me Love, I'm Down, The Night Before, Drive My Car, I'm Looking Through You, Got To Get You Into My Life, Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band, Getting Better, Magical Mystery Tour, Back in the U.S.S.R., Why Don't We Do It In The Road?, Birthday, Helter Skelter, Oh! Darling, Two Of Us, Get Back, Maybe I'm Amazed, Too Many People, Hi Hi Hi, Jet, Let Me Roll it, Helen Wheels, Letting Go, Coming Up, and

he sang Long Tall Sally, Kansas City, etc.

And if you think that now makes John the balladeer and Paul the rock 'n' roller, then you'd be falling into the same trap in reverse. They were both capable of both (and more) and their individual talents were far more complex than either caricature.

You get the same sloppy nonsense about Ringo's drumming. e.g. *Ringo was a rubbish drummer who was lucky to be in a band as good as the Beatles:*

Just take a listen - *I mean, really listen* - to his drumming on; Rain, A Day in the Life, Come Together, Hello Goodbye, Can't Buy Me Love, Tomorrow Never Knows, She Loves You, Ticket To Ride, The End, etc. and ask top drummers what they think of Ringo's drumming. They recognize his amazing ability to serve each song and give it just what it needed. He had an outstanding flair for original drum parts which supported the 'direction' of each song.

Despite all the evidence above, most folks will still go on believing and repeating - '*John was the hard rocker, Paul was the soft balladeer and Ringo was a crap drummer.*' Indeed, should you encounter these caricatures in conversation, you will not be welcome if you provide evidence to the contrary. When everybody thinks the same, nobody thinks very much. As Oscar Wilde noted '*everyone is born*

'When everybody thinks the same, nobody thinks very much'

an original, but most die a copy.'

Philip K. Dick's earnest enquiry and dazzling stories suffer from the same degree of misrepresentation. His rich and diverse research and interests get reduced to:

'Phil was a Gnostic.'

and his incredible imagination gets credited to drugs:

'He was a drug crazed author. LSD helped him write The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch.'

This reductive nonsense is peddled so often that it cannot be swapped very easily for truth. I am not anti-drugs (I

actually think they should all be legalised and pure) I am anti-reductionism.

For example, I am also concerned about the power of a labels and how they limit perceptions. and options. The Danish philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard, said '*Once you label me, you negate me.*'

I work as a Psychotherapeutic Counsellor and a Clinical Hypnotherapist, and I simply don't believe ADHD exists (as a thing which somebody has got). The Label is unhelpful and removes agency from the very person you wish to empower. I prefer to look at which specific behavioural problems the person has experienced and work with those.

One of my sons was diagnosed as Dyslexic when all he had were a few reading and writing difficulties. I told him he wasn't Dyslexic, and that he was just *Dyslexing* at that moment. We did some work together which took literally fifteen minutes (it involved teaching him to spell using visual recall rather than phonetics) after which his teacher said that somehow he had become '*un-dyslexic.*' He's been un-dyslexic ever since. The problem with the easy currency of labels is that we sometimes take a *temporary difficulty* and turn it into a *permanent disability* in the name of caring! Likewise, the rich complexity of Philip K Dick's life story and written work get turned it into the banal rubble of cheap urban myths.

There are those who think the name *Horselover Fat* was chosen for the protagonist in VALIS because Phil was once so poor he had to eat horse meat from a pet store. They would be wise to check out the latin word *Philos*, the Greek word *Hippos* and the German translation of *Dick*.

The general public now accept that Sherlock Holmes often said '*Elementary, my dear Watson,*' even though he never said it once in all of the stories. And when it comes to understanding politics and the mainstream media, the public are even more susceptible to crude aggregates and banal reductions. Most think the Covid-19 lockdown was only about a virus. Life is simpler that way.

Phil's name has become associated with dark dystopian futures and surveillance states. Indeed, many note that we are now living in a 'Philip K. Dick world.' Whilst this is true, we would be remiss if we forgot all the other facets of Phil's work.

And so it is that I wish to shine a light on an aspect of Phil's writing which, though sometimes noted, is not often explored or acclaimed: Phil's humour. There are passages in Phil's writing which present absurd comedy of the highest order; on a par with Harold Pinter, Samuel Beckett, Richard Brautigan or N.F.Simpson. I wish to celebrate this less championed side of Phil's writing here with a few examples.

Let's begin with one of Phil's lesser read books, *THE UNTELEPORTED MAN*, which contains a minor character, Jack McElhatten. A hard-working production line worker, he is easy-going, good-natured and wants to 'better himself.' He watches the ads on TV and dreams of a happier life. One advert enticing people to travel to Whale's Mouth said:

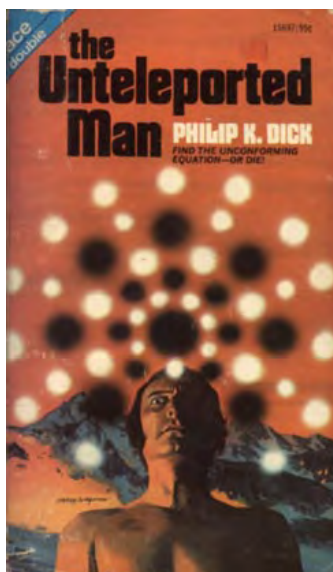
"We need men," President Omar Jones was declaring. "Good strong men who can do any kind of work. Are you that man? Able, willing, with get-up-and-go, over eighteen years of age? Willing to start a new life, using your mind and your hands, the skills God gave you? Think about it. What are you doing with those hands, those skills, right now?"

McElhatten, easily bought by the advert, reflects on his current job and the humbleness of his position:

Doing quality-control on an autofac line, McElhatten thought to himself bitterly; a job which a pigeon could do better; fact was, a pigeon did do so, to check his work.

"Can you imagine," he said to his wife, "holding down a job where a pigeon has a better eye than you for mis-tolerances?" And that was exactly his situation; he ejected parts which were not properly aligned, and, when he missed, the pigeon noted the miss, the defective part allowed to pass: it picked out the misaligned part, pecked a reject-button which kicked the part from the moving belt. And, as they quit and emigrated, the quality control men at Krino Associates were, one by one, replaced by pigeons.

He stayed on now, really, only because the union to



which he belonged was strong enough to insist that his seniority made it mandatory for Krino to keep him on. But once he quit, once he left—

“Then,” he said to Ruth, “the pigeon moves in. Okay, let it; we’re going across to Whale’s Mouth, and from then on I won’t be competing with birds.” Competing, he thought, and losing. Offering my employers the poorer showing. “And Krino will be glad,” he said, with misery.

Dick’s writing here is sublime. He introduces a mere figure of speech which we accept on face value as hyperbole:

a job which a pigeon could do better;

-which we understand does not *really mean* a pigeon could do better. Then, having accepted the figure of speech, he wrong-foots us by claiming that it is *in fact* an actuality:

fact was, a pigeon did do so, to check his work.

To be ranked below a real pigeon, in a job which is already menial, is a brilliantly absurd idea. The notion that a pigeon not only quality-checks his work, but will in due course replace him when he leaves is a deft way of illustrating the demoralizing futility of his labour and the lowliness of his value to the organization. He longs for the day when he no longer has to compete with birds:

Competing, he thought, and losing.

Most comedy uses the mechanism of a thwarted expectation. In this case Dick has set up an expectation that he is merely using a figure of speech, only to thwart it by telling us that a pigeon *really did* check his work and was superior to him. Arthur Koestler describes this connecting of two dissimilar ideas as *bi-ssociation*. It is not only at the heart of all humour, but is a fundamental ingredient in creativity, invention and discovery.

Dick’s short story, *Expendable* presents us again with the high sentience of lowly creatures, and it begins in the most prosaic manner; a man leaves his house in the

morning for work:

The man came out on the front porch and examined the day. Bright and cold - with dew on the lawns. He buttoned his coat and put his hands in his pockets.

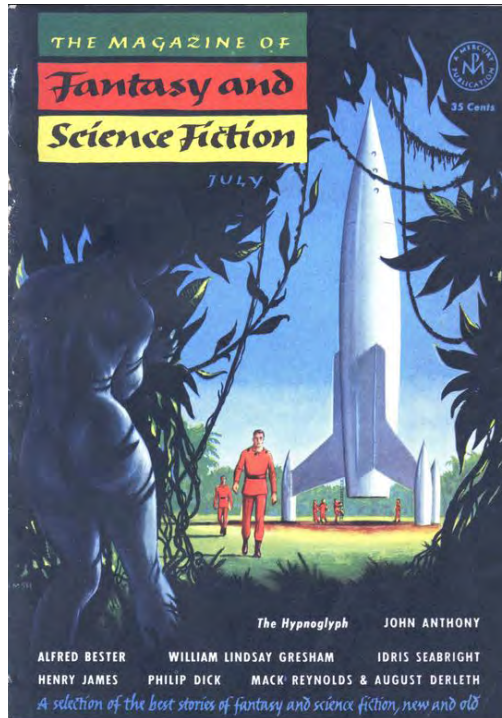
As the man started down the steps the two caterpillars waiting by the mailbox twitched with interest.

“There he goes,” the first one said. “Send in your report.”

As the other began to rotate his vanes the man stopped, turning quickly.

“I heard that,” he said. He brought his foot down against the wall, scraping the caterpillars off, onto the concrete. He crushed them.

The idea that caterpillars are talking about the protagonist is made even more absurd by the fact that they are reporting on him. Dick takes the joke even further by having the man respond to their chatter as if it were a matter of fact occurrence and they had gone too far this time and needed scraping and crushing.



The story continues with the man wondering whether birds or spiders could be trusted. When he takes the bus to work, Dick returns the reader to the insect kingdom where the fate of the man is under discussion:

Tirmus waved his antennae excitedly.

“Vote, then, if you want.” He hurried past them, up onto the mound. “But let me say what I said yesterday, before you start.”

“We already know it all,” Lala said impatiently. “Let’s get moving. We have the plans worked out. What’s holding us up?”

“More reason for me to speak.” Tirmus gazed around at the assembled gods. “The entire Hill is ready to march against the giant in question. Why? We know he can’t communicate to his fellows -- It’s out of the question. The type of vibration, the language they use, makes it impossible to convey such ideas as he holds about us, about our --”

“Nonsense.” Lala stepped up. “Giants communicate well enough.”

“There is no record of a giant having made known information about us!”

The army moved restlessly.

"Go ahead," Tirmus said. "But it's a waste of effort. He's harmless -- cut off. Why take all the time and --"

"Harmless?" Lala stared at him. "Don't you understand? He knows!"

Tirmus walked away from the mound. "I'm against unnecessary violence. We should save our strength. Someday we'll need it."

The vote was taken. As expected, the army was in favor of moving against the giant. Tirmus sighed and began stroking out the plans on the ground.

"This is the location that he takes. He can be expected to appear there at period-end. Now, as I see the situation --"

He went on, laying out the plans in the soft soil.

One of the gods leaned toward another, antennae touching. "This giant. He doesn't stand a chance. In a way, I feel sorry for him. How'd he happen to butt in?"

"Accident." The other grinned. "You know, the way they do, bargaining around."

"It's too bad for him, though."

In the hands of a weaker writer, the opening line of this section could have been '*An ant waved it's antennae excitedly.*' But Phil knew that giving the ant a name instead would further personify the intelligent sentience we first observed in the two caterpillars. The name 'Tirmus' being suitably alien and other. Perfect.

The fact of the insects having a meeting and deciding the fate of a human is so counter to the balance of nature as we know it, that it too provides an engine for Dick's humour. He stresses their assured dominance by having one of the insects say:

"... He doesn't stand a chance. In a way, I feel sorry for him..."

I have long been a huge fan of Dick's early fantasy work *The Cosmic Puppets*. It has been fashionable to sneer at it ever since the critic Darko Suvin turned his nose up at it. Hoardes of scholars took note of this Pied Piper and followed him off a cliff chanting in unison his dismissive comment '*best forgotten.*' In *The Cosmic Puppets*, Dick shows us the terrors of the earth and then finds humour in the situation. Ted Barton has returned to a town he once knew really well, but which

has all been somehow changed. The street layouts are the same, but the shops (which claim to have been there when he was young) are not.

In this scene, Barton, who is confused about the changes in the town of his childhood, is sitting in a bar next to a drunk. The drunk, Will Christopher, is asking him questions:

"Why did you come to Millgate? A little town like this. Nobody ever comes here."

Barton raised his head moodily. "I came here to find myself."

For some reason, that struck Christopher as funny. He shrieked, loud and shrill, until the others at the bar turned in annoyance.

"What's eating you?" Barton demanded angrily. "What the hell's so funny about that?"

Christopher managed to calm himself. "Find yourself? You have any clues? Will you know yourself when you find yourself? What do you look like?" He burst into laughter again, in spite of his efforts. Barton sank down farther, and hunched miserably around his glass.

"Cut it out," he muttered. "I have enough trouble already."

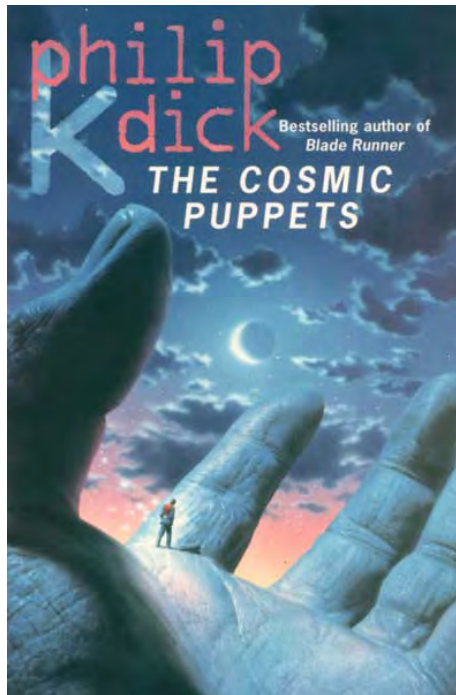
"Trouble? What sort of trouble?"

"Everything. Every goddamn thing in the world." The bourbons were really beginning to work their enchantment on him. "Christ, I might as well be dead. First I find out I'm dead, that I never lived to grow up--"

Christopher shook his head. "That's bad." (Ch 6, p.73)

The absurd bathos of the last line is priceless, together with the way Phil riffs on the phrase '*I came here to find myself*' - Phil rings out multiple connotations with this simple line using great understatement, inviting the reader to collaborate with his many trains of thought. Although Ted has returned to Millgate to find out '*who he was,*' (p.25) he is soon trying to find out what *anything is!*

Dick's great sense of humour runs through this book like veins in marble. In most of his recorded interviews Phil laughs often – usually at absurd propositions, paradoxes or gross understatement. This playful approach to meanings informs his philosophy and his humour – since flex-



ibility of thought are prerequisites for both. Too little has been written about this intrinsic side of Dick.

He also finds dark humour in the overwhelming odds against certain characters. The sheer scale of the deck stacked against them is funny and terrifying at the same time. This is the principle of most Tex Avery cartoons. One gets the impression that Dick is aware of the humorous and frightening aspects simultaneously. The odds against the little man who keeps trying is a recurrent theme in much of his work. In the following example, a newly made tiny clay figure (given life) fails to catch hold of a station wagon:

‘As the station wagon started up, the tiny clay figure made a frantic leap. Its tiny arms groped wildly as it tried to find purchase on the smooth metal fender. Unconcerned, the station wagon moved out into traffic, and the tiny figure was left behind, still waving its arms futilely, trying to climb and catch hold of a surface already gone. Peter caught up with it. His foot came down and the clay man was squashed into a shapeless blob of moist clay. Walter and Dave and Noaks came slowly over; they approached in a wide, cautious circle. “You got him?” Noaks demanded hoarsely. “Sure,” Peter said. He was already scraping the clay off his shoe, his small face calm and smooth. “Of course I got him. He belonged to me, didn’t he?” (Ch 3. p.21)

There is grim humour in the clay figures’ failed attempt to grab the station wagon – and in the irreverent finality of his demise. Nevertheless we are chilled by Peter’s cold indifference. Of course, this echoes the malevolent nature of one of the Gods, Ahriman, who (like his incarnation as the disturbing boy, Peter) might kill us on a whim. One is reminded of Gloucester’s great lament (in *King Lear*) as he stands blinded:

‘As flies to wanton boys are we to th’ gods,
They kill us for their sport.’
(*King Lear* Act 4, scene 1, 32–37)

Peter’s words, “Of course I got him. He belonged to me, didn’t he?” and his behaviour towards his creation echo

the relationship between God and Job (whose family were deliberately obliterated as a test of his faith). “*The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.*” (Job 1v 21. KJV).

‘the novel is really about the state’s relation to the drug user. Ultimately it’s about the state versus the individual.’

The scope of *The Cosmic Puppets* is epic – it concerns the struggle between two opposing Gods and the way the world changes according to which God is in the ascendant. Ted finds a town subjugated to Ahriman’s dominance; a town rotting and degraded. Dick’s sense of hu-

mour brings it down to a very human scale – to a man disappointed that all the good D.I.Y he has done on his house has been lost during the ‘change.’ Here’s a scene where Will Christopher has invited Ted back to his house. They are outside and he is about to open his front door and show Ted the disappointing changes:

‘My place was a nice little three-room cabin; I built it myself. Wired it, put in plumbing, fixed the roof up fine. That morning I woke up and what was I living in?’ The old man halted and fumbled for his key. “A packing crate.” (Ch 7, p79)

Note the comedic timing as Phil forces a pause - the old man fumbling for his key – which makes the punch-line all the more powerful. A lesser writer would have missed that.

The dark humour continues when Will Christopher describes arriving for work the day after the change:

“I used to be a hell of a good electrician. Serviced radios. Ran a little radio shop.”
“Sure,” Barton said. “Will’s Sales and Service.”
“Gone. Completely gone. There’s a hand laundry there now. On Jefferson Street, as it’s called now. Do a terrible job. Ruin your shirts. Nothing left of my radio shop. I woke up that morning, started off to work. Thought something was odd. Got there and found a goddamn laundry. Steam irons and pants pressers.” (Ch 7 p.80)

The understatement of the line “Thought something was odd” is masterful; deliciously downplayed.

A Scanner Darkly is widely considered to be about drugs, but I think the novel is really about the state's relation to the drug user. Ultimately it's about the state versus the individual. Although the novel presents situations which are truly nightmarish, it is still laced with moments of sublime humour. Jerry Fabin has drug induced hallucinations that he is infested with aphids. Another character comes up with a comedic narrative to explain the origin of Jerry's fear of aphids:

Anyhow, Bob Arctor thought, we won't have to keep sweeping aphids out of the house after Jenny's been by to visit. He felt like laughing, thinking about it; they had, once, invented a routine--mostly Luckman had, because he was good at that, funny and clever--about a psychiatric explanation for Jerry's aphid trip. It had to do, naturally, with Jerry Fabin as a small child. Jerry Fabin, see, comes home from first grade one day, with his little books under his arm, whistling merrily, and there, sitting in the dining room beside his mother, is this great aphid, about four feet high. His mother is gazing at it fondly.

"What's happening?" little Jerry Fabin inquires.

"This here is your older brother," his mother says, "who you've never met before. He's come to live with us. I like him better than you. He can do a lot of things you can't."

And from then on, Jenny Fabin's mother and father continually compare him unfavorably with his older brother, who is an aphid. As the two of them grow up, Jerry progressively gets more and more of an inferiority complex--naturally. After high school his brother receives a scholarship to college, while Jerry goes to work in a gas station. After that this brother the aphid becomes a famous doctor or scientist; he wins the Nobel Prize; Jerry's still rotating tires at the gas station, earning a dollar-fifty an hour. His mother and father never cease reminding him of this. They keep saying,

"If only you could have turned out like your brother." Finally Jerry runs away from home. But he still subconsciously believes aphids to be superior to him. At first he imagines he is safe, but then he starts seeing aphids everywhere in his hair and around the house, because his inferiority complex has turned into some kind of sexual guilt, and the aphids are a punishment he inflicts on him-

self, etc.

Dick sets up the pratfall beautifully by having Jerry on his way home from school *'with his little books under his arm, whistling merrily.'* The immediate juxtaposition to this mom-and-apple-pie' scene is that of his mother *'gazing ...fondly'* at a four foot high aphid whom she prefers. It is nightmarish as well as funny. Jerry's incredulity is identical to the readers':

"What's happening?" little Jerry Fabin inquires.

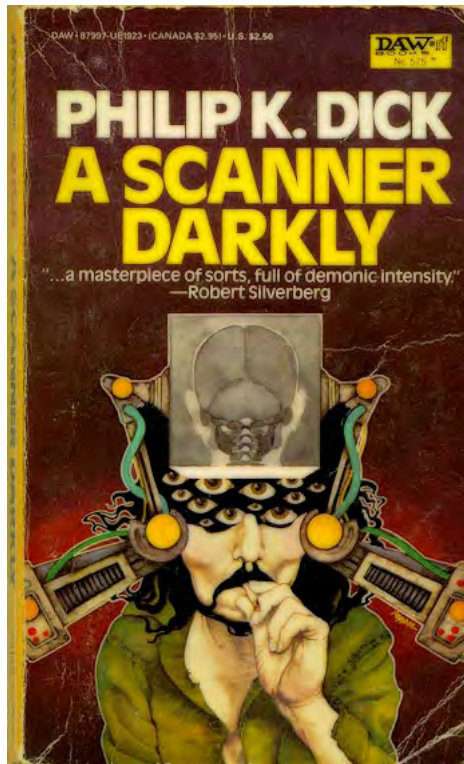
His mother's matter of fact reply would be enough to cause a psychotic episode in anyone:

"This here is your older brother," his mother says, "who you've never met before. He's come to live with us. I like him better than you. He can do a lot of things you can't."

Then we are told that whilst Jerry settled for a job in a gas station, his aphid brother received a scholarship to go to college, became a famous doctor or scientist and was awarded the Nobel Prize.

The whole of this scene is reminiscent of something from Kafka, who once wrote *"As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into an enormous insect."* (Metamorphosis). I am referring, not to the obvious insect connection but to the oppressive atmosphere that both authors achieve. Dick often alloys morbid dread with finely honed humour - usually of the absurdist kind. Casual conversations become vehicles for comedy as well as tragedy. Only great writers are capable of this. In the hands of the mediocre they become *either* funny or sad, never both.

In Shakespeare's *King Lear*, when the king has suffered a mental breakdown, he shares an idea that his army could put felt under their horses hooves so that they could steal up on their enemies silently; it is a comedic image, but because of Lear's psychological deterioration, laden with pathos (Act 4, Scene 6, lines 185-186).



There is a wonderful passage in *Galactic Pot Healer* which involves the protagonist, Joe Fernwright wanting to take a nap:

What I'll do, he decided, is lie down and sleep for four hours. It was now seven o'clock; he could set the alarm for eleven.

A pressing of the proper button brought the bed sliding out from the wall, virtually to fill the room; it had been his living room and now it was his bedroom. Four hours, he said to himself as he set the mechanism of the bed's clock. He lay down, made himself comfortable—as much so as the inadequate bed permitted—and groped for the toggle switch that induced immediately and powerfully the most profound sleep state possible.

However, Joe is prevented from the sleep he so craves:

A buzzer sounded.

The damn dream circuit, he said to himself. Even early like this do I have to use it? He leaped up, opened the cabinet beside the bed and got out the instructions. Yes, mandatory dreaming was required at any time he used the bed...unless, of course, he threw the sex lever. I'll do that, he said to himself. I'll tell it I'm having knowledge in the Biblical sense of a female person.

The idea that a man has to outsmart his bed before he will be 'allowed' to sleep is a great metaphor for a society where the state has total control over the individual (a common Dick theme). But typically Dick makes it hilarious as well as chilling.

The passage continues with Joe trying to dupe his bed into believing he is having sex (so he can abstain from the dream circuit):

Once more he lay down and activated the sleep switch.

"You weigh one hundred and forty pounds," the bed said. "And there is exactly that weight extended over me. Therefore you are not engaged in copulation." The mechanism voided his throwing of the sleep toggle switch, and at the same time the bed began to warm up; the heating coils in it blatantly glowed beneath him.

He could not argue with an angry bed. So he turned on the sleep-dream interaction and shut his eyes, resignedly.

This is absurdist comedy at its best. A man has just had an argument with his bed and lost:

Sleep came at once; it always did: the mechanism was perfect. And, at once, the dream—which everyone anywhere in the world who was now asleep was also dreaming—clicked on. One dream for everyone. But, thank god, a different dream each night.

Again, the control of the state over the individual is absolute and oppressive. Everyone has the same dream as everyone else:

"Hello, there," a cheerful dream-voice declared. "Tonight's dream was written by Reg Baker and is called In Memory Engraved. Now remember, folks; send in your dream ideas and win huge cash prizes! And if your dream is used you receive an all-expense paid trip off Earth entirely—in any direction you desire!"

The jolly voice which offers prizes for the writing of dreams which the populace have to subscribe to (instead of having their own free-form dreams) is typical of the glib and smiling face of tyranny. It is the cheerful face of propaganda which attempts to soothe the populace into believing all is well.

The name *Reg Baker* is perfect too. I can't explain why a one syllable first name followed by a two syllable second name works so well, but it does. Something about the rhythm of it. The prosaic simplicity of *Reg Baker* (apologies to any Reg Baker's out there!) expresses the unassuming ordinariness - *anyone can write in and win prizes!*

And so Joe Fernwright enters a dream already written for him - as does everyone else:

The dream began.

Joe Fernwright stood before the Supreme Fiduciary Council in a state of trembling awe. The Secretary of the S.F.C. read from a prepared statement. "Mr. Fernwright," he declared in a solemn voice, "you have, in your engraving shop, created the plates from which the new money will be printed. Your design, out of over one hundred thousand presented to us, and many of them created with

what must be called fantastic cunning, has won. Congratulations, Mr. Fernwright.” The Secretary beamed at him in a fatherly manner, reminding him a little of the Padre presence, which he now and then made use of.

The reader at this point may be happy that at last Joe has a good feeling about something. Even if only in his dream, his paper money design has been chosen out of over one hundred thousand:

“I am pleased and honored,” Joe responded, “by this award, and I know that I have done my part to restore fiscal stability to the world as we know it. It little matters to me that my face will be pictured on the brightly colored new money, but since it is so, let me express my pleasure at this honor.”

It seems that Joe Fernwright is being recognised at last. But then Dick brings him up short:

“Your signature, Mr. Fernwright,” the Secretary reminded him, in the fashion of a wise father. “Your signature, not your face, will appear on the currency notes. Where did you get the idea that it would be your likeness as well?”

In the dream, Joe asserts himself:

“Perhaps you don’t understand me,” Joe said. “Unless my face appears on the new currency I will withdraw my design, and the entire economic structure of the Earth will collapse, seeing as how you’ll have to go on using the old inflationary money which has by now become virtually waste paper to be thrown away at the first opportunity.”

The Secretary pondered. “You would withdraw your design?”

“You read me loud and clear,” Joe, in his dream, in their dream, said. At this same moment roughly one billion other people on Earth were withdrawing their designs as he now was doing. But of course he had no thought of that; he only knew this: without him the system, the whole nature of their corporate state, would break apart. “And as to my signature, I will, as that great dead hero of the past Ché Guevara did, that noble person, that fine man who died for his friends, because of memory of him I will merely write ‘Joe’ on the bills. But my face must be of several colors. Three at least.”

Here, Dick has brought home the absurdity of everyone having the same dream by reminding us that *‘at this same moment roughly one billion other people on earth were withdrawing their design as he was now doing.’* There is great humour in everyone participating in an identical narrative, but each behaving as if their obstinacy was unique and of their own volition.

“Mr. Fernwright,” the Secretary said, “you strike a hard bargain. You are a firm man. You do, in fact, remind me of Ché, and I think all the millions watching on TV will agree. Let’s hear it now for Joe Fernwright and Ché Guevara both together!” The Secretary threw aside his prepared statement and began to clap. “Let’s hear it out there from all you good people; this is a hero of the state, a new firm-minded man who has spent years working to—”

It is both Dickian and Kafkaesque that just as Joe is about to receive the adulation and applause of millions-

Joe’s alarm woke him up.

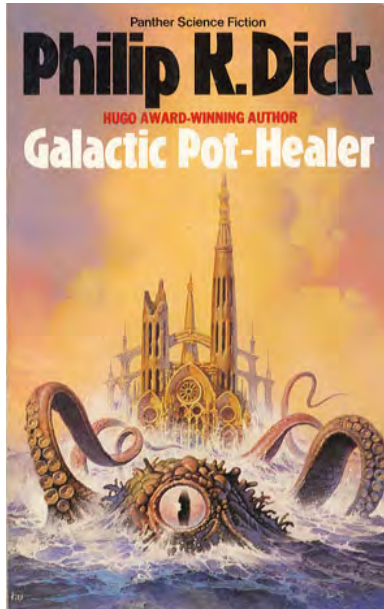
Christ, he said to himself; he sat up groggily. What was that about? Money? Already it had become hazy in his mind. “I made the money,” he said aloud, blinking. “Or printed it.” Who cares? he said to himself. A dream. Compensation, by the state, for reality. Night after night. It’s almost worse than being awake.

(Chapter 2, p25-27)

There are so many other examples of Dick’s well refined humour in stories such as *The Little Movement*, *The Zap Gun*, *The War with the Fnools*, *The Short Happy Life of the Brown Oxford*, *The Preserving Machine*, and many others. It would be tempting to reference them also, but such excess would be like ‘protesting too much.’ I think it is clear that a vital ingredient in Dick’s fiction, non-fiction and indeed in his life was his wonderful sense of humour.

Dick himself speaks of it in his introduction to *The Golden Man* (collection of short stories, 1980, Methuen). Here he describes how he often finds something funny even in the middle of the appalling and the desperate:

‘First, I cannot falsify what I have seen. I see disorder and sorrow, and so I have to write about it: but I’ve seen bravery and humor, so I put that in, too. But what does it all add up to? What is the vast overview which is going to



impart sense into the entirety?

What helps for me - if help comes at all - is to find the mustard seed of the funny at the core of the horrible and futile.'

(*The Golden Man*, 1980, Introduction p. xxvi,xxvii).

Phil's mind was astounding, not because of the amount of information that it held (which was considerable) but because of the unique connections he made between so many disparate fields. He reorganized information and related it in novel ways, developing his own fascinating theories. He was not a mere fact-bucket, he was creative and a true original whose philosophic explorations were exhaustive. Enquiry into the true nature of things often leads one to encounter paradoxes and things which appear counter-intuitive (e.g. in cosmology: *the universe was formed from nothing*, or in holography: *the whole is in the part*, or quantum physics: *everything is made up of more than 99% nothing*, and *particles behave differently when you are watching them*, etc).

The *Aha* moment of insight is close to the *HaHa* moment of humour, wherein a new perspective is suddenly introduced and we see a situation from a different angle. Furthermore, the *Ahh** moment of enlightenment - as seen on the smiling face of the Buddha is part of the same phenomena. To understand the universe and ourselves, humour is a very necessary component. Many of the world's great spiritual leaders have a well-honed sense of humour - from Zen masters to the Dalai Lama. Philip K Dick's delicious sense of the absurd is a natural result of genuine philosophic enquiry.

After an evening contemplating the nature of reality, Dick concluded that the external world might be a '*superfluous hypothesis*' and that it might not exist at all. In which case he thought that everyone could then get on with '*more important business - whatever that might be.*' Of course such deep philosophical contemplations are riddled with humour; the idea of doing away with the whole universe then getting on with *more important business* is hilariously contradictory. Here, Phil relates how it tickled him:

'That night I went to bed laughing. I laughed for an hour. I am still laughing. Push philosophy and theology to their ultimate (and Buddhist idealism is probably is the ultimate of both) and what do you wind up with? Nothing. Nothing exists.'

(*The Golden Man*, 1980, Introduction p. xxvii,xxviii).

Perhaps the reason that many people don't say of Phil's work *it is very funny as well as philosophical*, is because they imagine humour to be something low-brow, whimsical, disposable, etc. However it is precisely because of Phil's rigorous philosophic enquiry that his work contains such humour. Sometimes humour is the best way of discussing philosophy, just as sometimes fiction is the best way of discussing reality.

Edward deBono who coined the term *Lateral Thinking* said this about the importance of humour:

'Humour is the most significant behaviour of the human brain...humour not only clearly indicates the nature of the system, but also shows how perceptions set up in one way can suddenly be reconfigured in another way.

The neglect of humour by traditional philosophers, psychologists, information scientists, and mathematicians, clearly shows that they were only concerned with passive, externally organized information systems. It is only very recently that mathematicians have become interested in non-linear and unstable systems (*chaos, catastrophe theory*, and so on).'

(*Serious Creativity*, 1993, Edward deBono, p.8).

I shall leave the final word to Mark Hurst who edited Phil's collection of short stories, *The Golden Man*:

'The most outstanding element in Phil's books, outside of his wild and crazy plots, and fully-realized characters, is Phil's sense of humour, that unique quality reflected again and again in his work, and which I've included in *The Golden Man*. The guy is funny, often hilarious.'

(Foreword to *The Golden Man*)

* Arthur Koestler elegantly compared *Aha*, *HaHa* and *Ahh* in his wonderful book *The Act of Creation*.

Nick Buchanan has designed a large collection of Philip K Dick related artwork (for T Shirts, Mugs, greeting cards, iPad covers, phone covers, etc). They can all be found here: <https://rdbl.co/2V0CW7u>

He is the author of:

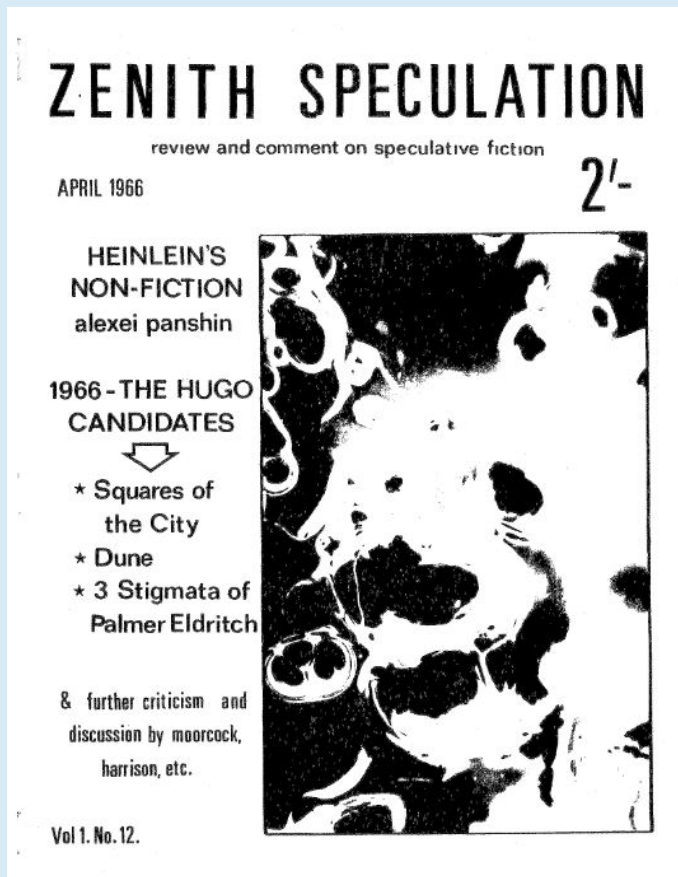
[What Happens in Shakespeare's King Lear](#)
[What Happens in Shakespeare's Macbeth](#)
[Unlocking OCD: Genuine Hope and Practical Help](#)

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More Speculation on Philip K. Dick

Sourced by Patrick Clark

In PKD Otaku 39 we published a piece called "What Do They See In Philip K. Dick" by Tony Sudbery, which originally appeared in the UK fanzine *Speculation*. *Speculation* published additional essays and reviews on PKD within its pages. I was unable to find the "provocation" article from *Speculator At Large* [January 1968?] referenced below.



"The 3 Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch. Critique"
by Richard Gordon. *Zenith Speculation* no. 12 (April 1966), pp. 16-20

Two things from the London World Convention stick in my mind concerning Philip K. Dick. The first is Ted White's somewhat energetic championing of him as the American Ballard, in a talk which was quite as controversial as anything else at the convention. The other was meeting a woman in some room-party, who

apparently knew him slightly. She said he was a charming person, but also slightly eccentric.

One might be able to deduce both of these conclusions from his novels, especially his late ones, those written during the last two years. Ted White's contention that Dick is America's answer to Ballard is indeed valid, so much so that I am surprised that it isn't a general point of contention among fans desperately seeking someone other than Ballard and Heinlein to argue about; especially since the only two American writers appreciated by the "in" people at the moment seem to be Vonnegut and Cordwainer Smith. Not that I want to knock these two writers; I'd certainly rank Vonnegut as among the most important SF writers in the world. But the, I'd rank Dick as his equal or perhaps superior.

I suppose that part of the reason why Dick has been ignored by the intelligentsia, despite a Hugo Award three years ago, is his somewhat traditional methods of writing - he has been compared to Van Vogt, and this is also a valid comparison. Yet, especially after having read *STIGMATA*, it seems more than ever to me that Dick adopts a Van Vogtian style for no other reason than that of convenience. Having read this book, which, I'm pleased to announce was more gloriously incomprehensible in parts than even *THE TERMINAL BEACH*. I'm convinced that Dick could out-Ballard Ballard if he were so inclined.

Dick only returned to writing SF some three or so years ago, after several unsuccessful years in a mainstream wilderness, and since then novels have been pouring from him steadily - eight in two years, that I know of. They all have a common factor, one which was present even in his earlier stories such as *EYE IN THE SKY*, which is the exploration of various kinds of human madness and also of the validity of subjective and objective realities. Of late, his stories have been getting more and more confusing, to anyone who tries to stay rooted to conventional reality while reading them, for they switch from apparent reality to hallucination with dream-like ease. His heroes are usually psychotics, often suicidal, and it's rare indeed to come across a Dick novel in which the first five pages do not contain at least one specific reference to a psychiatrist or to some form of mental illness.

Half a dozen 'Dick novels, such as *THE SIMULACRA*, *THE MARTIAN TIMESLIP*, and so on, are all excellent and inventive novels in their own right, yet which begin to

pall, in the same way as *THE DROWNED WORLD* was an excellent book the first time around, but was slightly tedious when repeated in *THE DROUGHT* and *EQUINOX*. Approaching *THE THREE STIGMATA OF PALMER ELDRITCH* with caution, I felt this caution justified when the very first page introduced the robot psychiatrist Doctor Smile, in the hero's bedroom, with hero's girlfriend in loving attendance. A familiar Dick scene, especially the canned sex, which seems designed to satisfy any stray mainstream reader who may have slipped in by mistake.

But it wasn't long before it became obvious that Dick had written something out of the ordinary this time, even by his own standards. The basic elements are familiar, the technique is complex Van Vogt, with a dash of Pohl in the social details, along with dozens of sub-plots thrown in for good measure; mostly inessential but perfectly drawn and each adding to the verisimilitude of the book. At first it seems poorly constructed in some of the details, but looking back, one can see that the plot is considerably more complex and worked out than one would have supposed at first. And once the basic scene has been set and interest stimulated, one begins to get irrevocably mixed up in all the paradoxes which begin to appear.

Any condensation of a book of this variety is virtually impossible, but a synopsis of the first half of the book, which will be comprehensible in normal terms, can be attempted. Briefly, the action takes place on Earth and Mars and various unspecified localities -- mainly hallucinatory, one suspects, -- about a century in the future, though one can't be sure about this, either. Average daytime temperatures have risen to the 180 Fahrenheit mark, despite which society functions much as it does now, though slightly more efficiently. The UN is trying desperately to stem the advancing catastrophe, sure to be brought about by the heat, and operates draft laws to ship people out to Mars as colonists, where they eke out miserable existences on the UN dole.

At the same time, Big Business, as mercenary and Machiavellian as it ever was, is trying its damndest to cash in on this state of affairs, and there are only two, interconnected, factors which make life bearable for the colonists. These are the Perky Pat lay-outs, and the hallucinogen drug, Can-D, which are only effective as an escape when used in conjunction with one another. The layouts are incredibly detailed models of the apartments, analyst's offices, hang-outs, etc, of two

miniature dolls called Perky Pat, and her lover, Walt. All colonists own these sets, and spend all their skins - the economy being based on truffle skins, which are the only uncounterfeitable currency - on adding new pieces and increasing the verisimilitude of their models.

These layouts, worthless on their own except as models, provide a nearly perfect escape from reality when used in conjunction with the officially outlawed drug, Can-D, which is tolerated on Mars as being the only alternative to complete boredom in the colonist's lives. Taking this drug allows all men to identify with Walt, and all the women with Perky Pat, in a close approximation to a perfect world, real in every detail. Since so many people share the same two characters in each layout, mass orgies are possible such as never dreamed of by the rakes.

Dick has obviously taken the basic theme of his novel (which is the impossibility of distinguishing between "real" reality and hallucinated reality, perhaps suggesting that the one is as real as the other), from the recent research into hallucinogenic drugs, such as LSD, which drug the subject into a state of dissociation from reality, providing a world where hallucination is equally as subjectively "real" as is so-called objective "reality". Although other SF authors have touched upon this subject, no-one else has devoted a full-scale novel to the subject, which also ties up with deeper philosophical questions posed by such people as Berkeley, (when everyone leaves a room, does the furniture cease to exist, with no-one there to see it?), Spinoza, Nietzsche, and others.

The colonists, half-believing that the Perky Pat layout is as "real" as their own world, half believing in it in a semi-religious sense, are also dissatisfied with the subtly negative effects of the drug. It wears off quickly, one is always slightly aware of the other existence outside the drug's influence, and also a layout is essential to the "reality" experienced, at least to begin with.

Leo Bulero, the businessman and entrepreneur who heads both the Can-D and the Perky-Pat layout firms, is in a vulnerable position, and knows it; he protects himself with precogs against possible dangers in the future. The action starts with the return of a rival businessman, Palmer Eldritch, from the Proxima system, ten years after his disappearance and presumed death. He returns with a new hallucinogen, Chew-Z, which, as Bulero discovers to his cost in an early encounter, is both more powerful

than Can-D, and requires no layout to be effective. Bulero is warned by one of his precogs that he will attempt to kill Eldritch, and attempts to find him, without success. In the meantime, Eldritch has achieved UN sanction for Chew-Z through devious means. Soon after, Bulero contacts Eldritch, and finds himself trapped. It is at this point that the hallucinatory complications begin.

Part of the effect of Chew-Z is that it completely disorganizes the subjective time-sense. A second of objective time on Earth can be perhaps a thousand years in the reality that the drug creates. Another complication is that Palmer Eldritch appears in everyone's hallucinations, whether they like it or not, as the hero and God of their universe. Since Eldritch is equipped with artificial eyes, plus stainless-steel teeth and right arm, he is quite unmistakable. The complications of Chew-Z multiply as the story goes on; by the end -- if that is what it is -- everyone has developed Eldritch's artificial limbs, which are the three stigmata of the title. Yet another complication is that the hallucinations apparently time-travel; people keep meeting their ghosts from the future and the past.

Even when Eldritch forces Bulero to take Chew-Z and enter a hallucinatory reality, Bulero knows he will kill Eldritch. In one hallucination, he meets two people from the future engaged in guarding the monument declaring him to be a hero for killing Eldritch. When eventually he does get around to contemplating destruction, it no longer matters, because like everyone else, he has developed the three stigmata. It is as Palmer Eldritch that he kills Palmer Eldritch, -- who was not human even at the time of his return from Centuari.

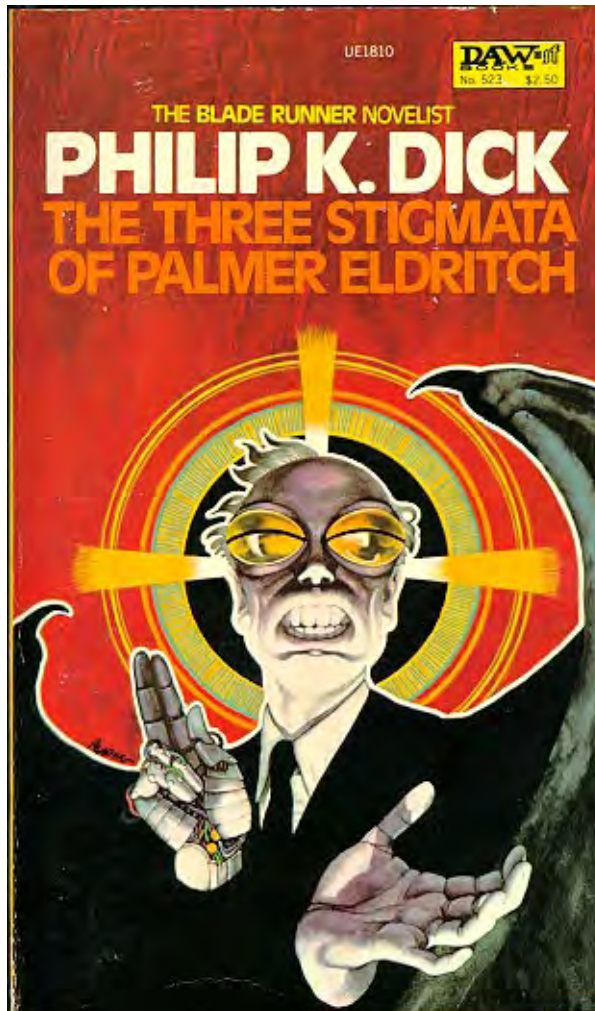
But by this stage it is in any case impossible to tell whether the particular scene is "real" reality, or whether it is still

part of Bulero's original hallucination -- at one point he appears to leave the influence of the drug, and a good many pages pass until the appearance of an impossible monstrosity shows him that he is still under the influence of it. As he says later on, it seems as if he's out of the influence, but he cannot be sure. Or, for that matter, whether the whole book isn't part of Eldritch's hallucination on Proxima, as a result of his discovery and first shot of the stuff; or even whether everything, including the book and you and me, isn't part of the hallucination' - a form of ultimate solipsism in literary form.

The book must sound impossibly confusing from this approximate description. It is easy enough to describe the first quarter of the book; then I'd defy the most adroit of literary technicians to describe exactly what, does happen thereafter. It has to be experienced by the individual rather than described to him; it would hit different people in different ways.

Such description as this only gives a vague idea of the complexities unravelled and

not quite unravelled. Yet the wonder about the book is that Dick does it so neatly; it is up to the reader to stay with him. If he stays firmly rooted in apparently firmly solid "reality", then he'll be hopelessly stranded before he's halfway through. The point of the book is that reality is subjective. There are other points as well, and some slight explanation of the plot at the end, which does little enough to unravel the paradoxes. Eldritch, it turns out, isn't human -- he's been, taken over by some unexplained alien life-form. Chew-Z is its sole method of reproduction, through the creation of hallucinations of such elaboration that they are reality. Dick has deeper purpose than mere alien take-over in mind, however; near the end, Barney Mayerson, one of the main characters, thinks:



"After all, the creature residing in deep space which had taken the form of Palmer Eldritch bore some resemblance to God; if it was not God, as he himself had decided, then at least it was a portion of God's Creation. So some of the responsibility lay on him. And, it seemed to Barney, he was probably mature enough to recognise this."

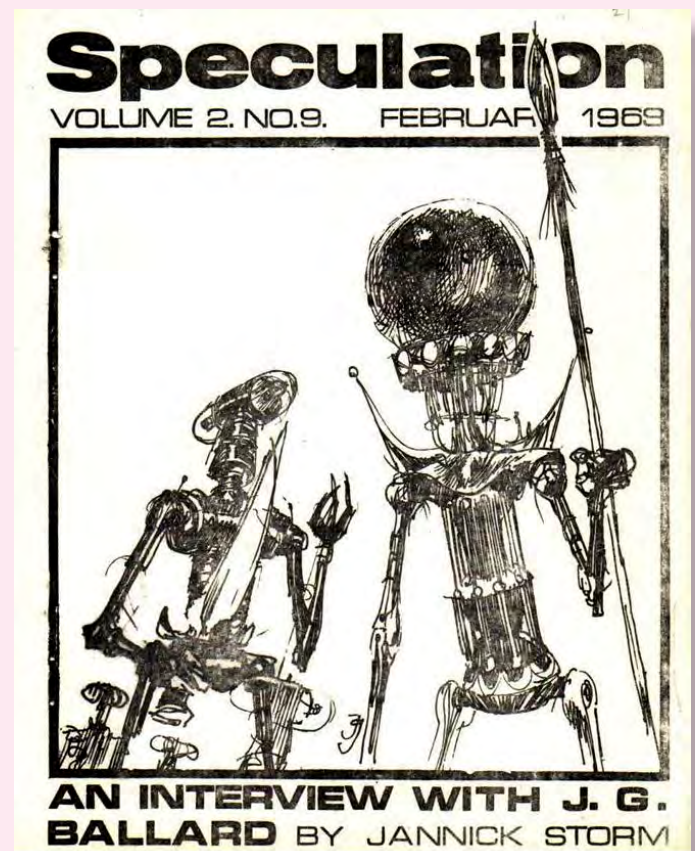
adult SF, well, here is a first rate example. The pity is that it probably won't see general publication in this country for some time, for as Budrys says in his review, it's impossible to tell whether it is a good or a bad book, you have to read it, and even though you still might not know after finishing it, it's been an experience.

The point of this is that after 250 pages of meandering in and out of circle after circle, Dick suddenly shoots off in an entirely new direction previously unsuspected, adding to the complexities of the situation enormously. Quite what the purpose of this latter part, (which is ultimately integral to the whole book) is intended to be is difficult to say. Algis Budrys, reviewing the book in *Galaxy*, in many ways as confused by the endless twists; hardly surprisingly, says in his review about this section: --

"...STIGMATA could easily function as a holy book in itself, since in Dick's logical system, it is entirely possible for a \$4.95, 1965 commercial publication to publish accurate, mystically revealed word of events which not only have not yet occurred, but might not ever, but nevertheless prove the beliefs which are the only true Salvation."

STIGMATA could perhaps thus be said to be fundamentally about religion, a kind of mystical religion of reality, which in its own terms is entirely logical in a mind-twisting fashion, but which by any normal standards is entirely mad. The apparent confusion is complete, yet it must be noted that the plot never once leaves the rails -- and in a crazy sort of way one derives a kind of logic from it; an emotional rather than intellectual logic. The plot loops the loop in ultimate fashion; the end equally well being the beginning, the beginning perhaps being the end. At times the middle section is both pre-beginning and post-end. It gyrates and twists in and out of itself endlessly and leaves one a long way from "reality".

This book leaves most SF at the starting post, even Dick's other books. The basic story is relatively unimportant, although nicely enough done, I suppose; it won't be that I shall remember the book for. The ideas brought up and developed are what count in this book, and it turns out to be among the few SF books I've read that go beyond the merely superficial. It could be in danger of starting up another cult, I suppose; I hope it is spared this fate, for it deserves more. For those who keep crying for more



"Greater than Heinlein" by Bob Parkinson. *Speculator* February 1969, pp. 12-15

Last year I made one or two disparaging remarks about Philip K. Dick's stories, in a little magazine I published called the *Speculator At Large*. [January 1968?] These were more in the way of personal likes and dislikes more than anything else, not so much informed analysis but complaints that Dick's were boring, confused, repetitive, trivial and badly-written. After that sort of provocation I wasn't at all surprised to receive this short article from Bob Parkinson. It is not so much intended as a reply to my arguments but was conceived, as Bob says, "as a result of a weekend of intermittent debate about Heinlein and of

reading *THE PENULTIMATE TRUTH* on the journey home.”
[Peter Weston, editor of *Speculator*]

IF THE ART of novel writing is to tell moral lies, then Philip K Dick rank as one of the most important of our present SF novelists. This is not an original thought -- others have written perceptive pieces about the man (1.) and. his writing: and indeed at times it is impossible not to echo John Brunner’s assessment: “Philip K Dick is so good, just thinking about it sends shivers down my spine.” (2.)

But moral lies? Fiction, by definition, is not the “truth”, not a description of what actually happened so such as an insight into the way things happen. Science fiction has a particular tendency to deal with philosophical levels, with the ways of Man in the Universe. But the underlying assumption remains that the telling of these “lies” can be justified -- that it is somehow moral. They present another way of investigating certain aspects of the world outside. I have already suggested in an article elsewhere (3.) that “goodness” -- morality -- in fiction is, in the first instance, a matter of bringing the reader into a closer understanding of reality. Merely this and nothing more.
(Patience, Anna. I will, explain that title in good time. Sufficient for the moment that I was specific. You will see.)

There must be few now who are unaware that Philip Dick’s concern with the real world lies in the nature of reality itself. His novels are facets of this: *THE WORLD JONES MADE* is one in which the future is foreseen and predestined; *THE PENULTIMATE TRUTH* speaks of the nature of political reality - of how we know what the “real” world is like, when all our information is predigested through controlled mass-media. *THE MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE* ostensibly investigates the idea of ‘alternate universes’, but beneath it concerns all the ramifications of “what if?” itself -- all the perpetual alternate worlds that we build whenever we

ask simple questions about what might have been. And *THE THREE STIGMATA OF PALMER ELDRITCH* enquires about the reality of chemical hallucination, of waking dreams and drugs; the questions posed solidly by our pharmaceutical chemists whenever they add to the series of potent hallucinogens. (No explanation yet, Anna. But did you notice how strangely the flower children adopted elements from Heinlein *A STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND* into their mythology?)

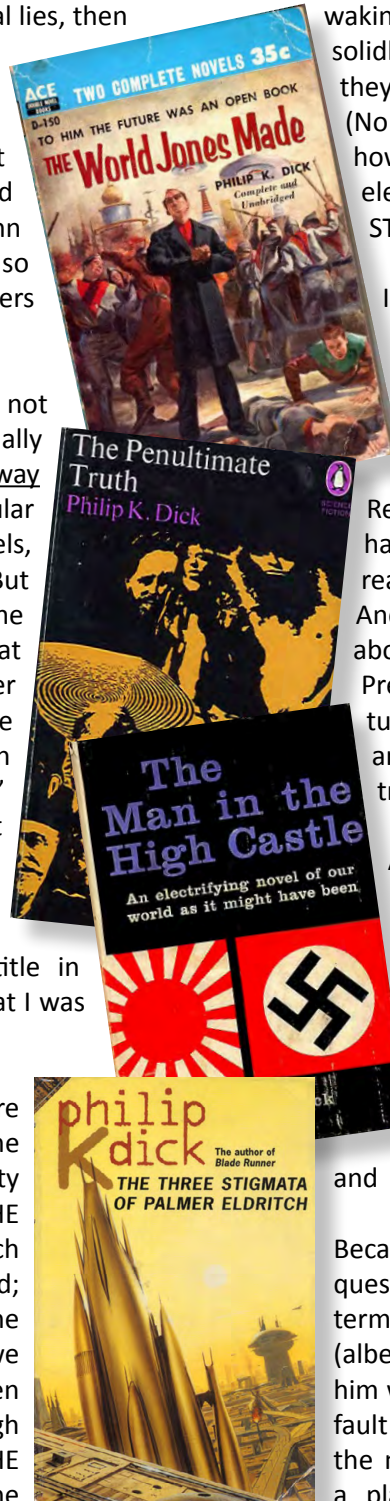
In *Riverside Quarterly*, Yogi Borel has observed (4.) the perpetual, almost blasphemous symbolism inherent in Dick’s *THE THREE STIGMATA OF PALMER ELDRITCH*. This occurs in other of his books, -- and it is perhaps inevitable. Religion (whatever the atheists may say) has always been an attempt to explain total reality so that we may come to terms with it. And what is so dangerous, so blasphemous, about new versions of reality -- Christianity, Presbyterianism, Science, and so forth in their turn -- is that they alter conceptions of reality, and therefore defy the very nature of the traditional gods.

And from reality comes morality. Although Dick, is generally content to ask the questions that lead on from reality to morality, and to leave the answers elsewhere. I can see reason consistent with his overall concern here; that his is a concern with the Morality of Reality itself, and not with moralising.

To let every man find his own way and not to evangelise the One True Faith.

Because of this -- leaving the reader with more questions than answers -- Dick inclined to terminate his stories at the most unexpected (albeit logical) points. Moorcock compared him with Golding for this. But Golding’s fault (if fault it is -- felix culpa) is an overconcern with the music of language itself. Dick writes with a plain, powerful and straightforward style, perhaps flavored with jargon but never intended

to confuse.



(And with that, Anna, we are back with Heinlein and the title. Because this is what Heinlein perhaps more than anyone else, is about. Heinlein's main aim, Anna, has always been to tell a good yarn. – to take the reader into his world as if it were more real than his own.)

Dick himself has commented on this. Of science fiction he says:

"Without being art, it does what art does, since as Schopenhauer pointed out, art tends to break free of the reality around us and reach a new level of gestalting. The virtue of its approach, too, is that it can reach persons who do not have a developed esthetic sense, which means that it has a higher degree of sheer communicability than great art." (5.)

Even the lesser disasters in Dick's stories are interesting – what he considers lesser disasters, that is. A surprising number of his novels contain the aftermath, of nuclear war. It is as though he were saying "But how much of this becomes unimportant when you cannot tell whether people are dropping nuclear bombs or not?"

These wars are a part of the dislocation of reality inherent to Dick's stories. In this new environment we can accept all alien futures are convincing. Only later does that pause come in which we recognise that this dislocation of reality happens in our own wars, also, in our own time.

(Heinlein, Anna, started writing stories to fit a consistent "future history". Philip Dick's futures, apparently without intention, seem to be much more connected. And more strange, and more terrifying, than Heinlein's. Even in their pasts, these futures have roots in times which are not our present. But in Heinlein's stories, Anna, there is always a friendly neighborhood drugstore on the corner. In a very nasty book called FARNHAM'S FREEHOLD, Anna, Heinlein's hero ends up living in what is recognisably

a rugged country store, even if it is surrounded by landmines,)

And for all his conventionality, Dick continually reminds us of the avante-garde. In particular, surprisingly, with the composer John Cage, noted -- among other things -- for a composition in which the pianist does nothing for four minutes and thirty-three seconds. Among other things, both of them use I CHING -- The Book; Of Changes. So that the resemblance may not be too impossible.

"My intention has been, often, to say what I had to say in a way that would exemplify it; that would, conceivably, permit the listener to experience what I had to say rather than just hear about it." (6.)

Without his direct, completely absorbing style, it is unlikely that Dick could achieve his purpose. It is essential that, having demonstrated his characters' non-existence in THE MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE, having at every point given the unimagined answer, Dick should leave his reader turning the page (blank), and insisting "And then what happened? Go on! To get the answer, "Nothing happened. It's only a story. That's all there is,"

Just as, to a way, Sturgeon's SOME OF YOUR BLOOD is a story about the reader's psychological prejudices, so MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE is a story about our private fantasias to storytelling. Almost unconsciously, every reader invents his own counterpoint fantasy as he reads a story, anticipating events, hoping for desired conclusions, as though the characters were real and the reader one of them. Ask somebody about a book that he has just read and it is not uncommon to find that a considerable number of the events he describes do not -- in objective fact -- occur to the book. Dick writes for this counterpoint. The Man to

the High Castle himself is a striking image. Inevitably we tend to think of him as some craggy eccentric - some Jubal Harshaw perhaps. And in the end he turns out to be a



quite ordinary man in suburbia.

"I thought you lived to a fortress," Juliana said.
 Bending to regard her, Hawthorne Abendsen
 smiled a meditative smile.
 "Yes, we did. But we had to get up to it to an
 elevator and I developed a phobia..."

(Heinlein and Dick deal in the same thing, Anna. In politics and process. But Philip Dick works in the struggle between Art and Reality; in understanding the reality of the real world better. Heinlein, I'm afraid, Anna, openly endorses fantasy:

'I wanted the hurtling moons of Barsoom. I wanted Storisende and Poictesme, and Holmes shaking me awake to tell me, "The game's afoot. I wanted to float down the Mississippi in a raft and elude a mob in company with the Duke of Bilgewater and the lost Dauphin.

'I wanted Prester John and Excalibur held by a moonwhite arm out of a silent lake. I wanted to sail with Ulysses and with Tros of Samothrace and eat the lotus in a land that seemed always afternoon. I wanted the feeling of romance and the sense of wonder I had known as a kid. I wanted the world to be what they had promised me it was going to be - instead of the tawdry, lousy, fouled-up mess it is.' (7.)

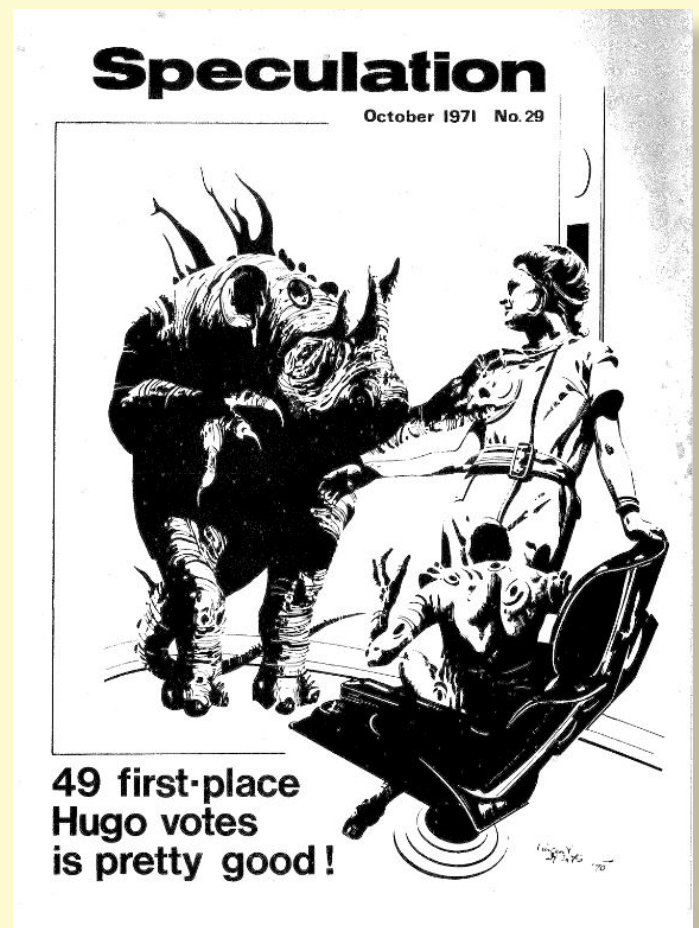
Is that really the answer, Anna? I wonder. Is that really what we want?)

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Further comment: THE THREE STIGMATA OF PALMER

ELDRITCH reviewed by Richard Gordon, Speculation 12, April 1966



Philip Strick: *Speculation* no. 29 October 1971, pp. 35-37

Novels come tumbling out of Philip K Dick with such enviable speed that one would have to believe he is actually a team of writers were it not that the faults and merits in each Dick story are so consistently the same, and reflect so consistently an identical personality. UBIK couldn't, certainly, be by anybody else.

A flood of bizarre names pours through the first chapter, linked with an equally bewildering cascade of archetypal SF notions that are not so much unusual in isolation as startling in proximity5 on the one hand, Glen Runciter, Joe Chip, S. Dole Melipone, and the resounding Herbert Schoenheit von Vogelsang! on the other, artiforgs (artificial organs, commonplace for people over ninety), telepathic espionage, a style in everyday clothing that is joltingly

hard to visualize, and communication with the dead by mechanical means so long as the physical degenerative processes are delayed.

As usual, it's not until chapter six and some 20 characters later that the narrative starts making sense. This, I should say immediately, is a Dick characteristic that has ceased to trouble me except, inevitably, at first reading when prodigious feats of memory seem to be expected or assumed by the writer and I have to wonder apologetically if I am losing my powers of concentration.

The settings for Dick's narratives make no allowances for the inattentive reader, or indeed for the hesitant one, and this seems to me both a realistic and a complimentary attitude on his part - realistic because everything falls into place on second reading anyway, and complimentary because he has assumed that someone who buys a book called *DO ANDROIDS DREAM OF ELECTRIC SHEEP?* or whatever, will be equal to anything the writer cares to throw without a tedious preparatory alphabet of explanations getting in the way.

Dick's scene-setting is in fact quite a logical process in that the action never properly begins until the reader has had time to absorb the atmosphere in which it will take place and to get used to the crowd of admittedly rather anonymous characters who will be involved. With *UBIK* they take some getting used to, partly because they wear things like "his customary natty birch-bark pantaloons, hemp-rope belt, peekaboo see-through top and train-engineer's tall hat" or "ersatz vicuna trousers and a grey sweatshirt on which had been painted a now faded full-face portrait of Bertrand Lord Russell", and partly because one of them has the ability to reach back into time and make alterations that affect the present. This slows things down a bit, while at the same time putting the reader into the disoriented frame of mind that is the habitual state of Dick's rather ineffective little heroes.

The story of *UBIK* takes place when Runciter, the head of

a big business organisation, is killed by a bomb planted by his rival; his employees rush him back to the mortuary (nicely called, in this society, the moratorium) where it will be possible to receive his continuing instructions during his 'half-life' period. They find, however, that the normal method that ensures dialogue with the thought-processes of the departed is unsuccessful in Runciter's case. Instead,

messages from their leader start to reach them by a variety of other means - by telephone, television, skywriting, and random graffiti all the more perplexing for being fully relevant to the action at the moment they appear.

If this all begins to sound like 'What the Dead Men Say', a short story by Dick from 1964 and reprinted in that splendid collection

THE PRESERVING MACHINE (which should be grabbed without hesitation by anyone who wants to study the ways in which Dick has improved over 16 years of writing), don't make it a reason to by-pass *UBIK*. The powerful central notion of an omnipresent, voice of instruction, filling all the wavelengths is certainly the same, but Dick is ringing another change out of it, just as he has done less directly in, for example, the far earlier *SOLAR LOTTERY* or the more recent *OUR FRIENDS FROM FROLIX 8*.

Voices are always echoing down from the outer reaches in Dick's work, signals of unearthly powers with more than a hint of divine resonance to them; and although they normally turn out to be human in origin, the implications of supernatural hierarchy remain. Messages from beyond, whether delivered through the I Ching or in the form of notes in bottles (as with *GALACTIC POT-HEALER*) are what compound Dick's narratives with discreet theology in a manner unique to science fiction. The Runciter phenomenon in *UBIK* (the title derives, of course, from 'ubique' - everywhere - as well as a sidelong reference to 'ubiquity') ultimately has one of Dick's most sinister twists to it, quite different from the banal and melodramatic explanation in the original short story. The gradual decay of the world the leader has left behind him, coupled with the slow reverting of that world's architecture and artifacts to earlier models, is one of the most unnerving

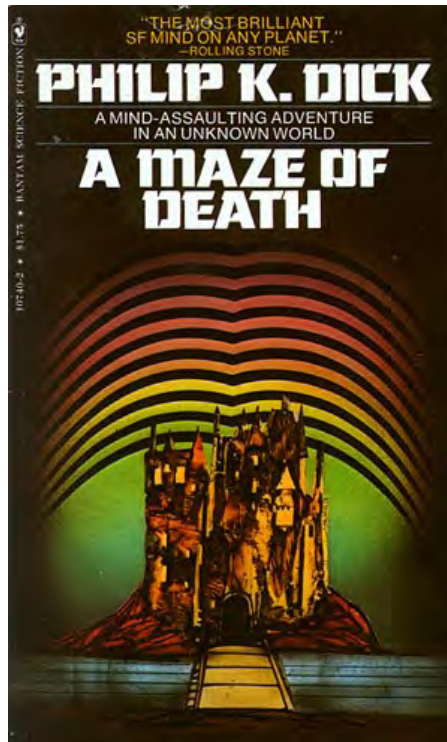
'The settings for Dick's narratives make no allowance for the inattentive reader.'

illustrations of Dick's time—reversal obsession, his apparent fear that the present is insubstantial, with less meaning and certainly less charm than the past it has defaced and obscured like a superfluous later addition to an oil painting.

As with COUNTER-CLOCK WORLD, Dick's response to the degeneration/regeneration process is ambiguous; the figments of the past that supplant UBIK's present have a comfortable amiability that is far more congenial to the hero than the army of recalcitrant appliances that normally surround him (such as the front door that demands payment before it will open and threatens to sue when a screwdriver is produced) - but on the other hand the breakdown of the present is finally revealed to be the deliberate accomplishment of a malignant force, while the episode in which the hero himself starts to disintegrate is genuinely nightmarish. UBIK concludes most satisfyingly with Good (administered in spray-cans) and Evil (more conventionally exercised through thought-control) slogging it out after all else has become clear and the impartial Dick average-man has committed himself to the right side of the contest. And there is a splendid kick at the end of chapter seventeen that brings the book full circle for the sheer geometrical pleasure of it. No, I have no complaints at all.

Hard on the heels of UBIK comes MAZE OF DEATH, which Doubleday published in the U.S in July 1970. It's a funnier book than UBIK but in many respects, especially the pay-off chapter, the two are remarkably similar. Once again Dick has expanded ideas from a short story, in this case 'Pay the Printer' which he wrote in 1956; once again the action concerns a group of ill-assorted people with such names as Dunkelwelt,

Babble, and Ignatz Thugg, milling around without a leader and being exterminated whenever they wander off on their own.



Again, the guidance from exterior forces is multilayered; the group is assigned to a planet to form a colony the purpose of which is to be communicated to them by satellite (which breaks down at the vital moment), they are studied by anonymous authorities apparently based at an impregnable and elusive building, and there are occasional visits from one of Dick's most blatant representatives of divinity, the Walker-on-Earth.

MAZE OF DEATH romps along with a gaiety that I find irresistible. Its collection of spurious chapter-headings listed on the contents page sets the tone for Dick's casually idiotic brand of humour for a good two-thirds of the book. The central character (a struggling nobody, as usual) picks out

a tiny one-trip-only spacecraft by the name of The Morbid Chicken (in UBIK the spaceship was Pratfall III), and promptly starts to load it with marmalade for the flight. Warned by the Walker-on-Earth that he'll never make it in

the Chicken, he accepts help in transferring his property to an alternative vehicle, learning meanwhile why his serene visitor thinks so much of him. "Once years ago you had a tomcat whom you loved. He was greedy and mendacious and yet you loved him. One day he died from bone fragments lodged in

his stomach, the result of filching the remains of a dead Martian root-buzzard from a garbage pail. You were sad, but you still loved him."

It is characteristic of Dick's writing that such an encounter is treated without grandeur or solemnity| instead,

'The central character picks out a tiny one-trip-only spacecraft by the name of The Morbid Chicken'

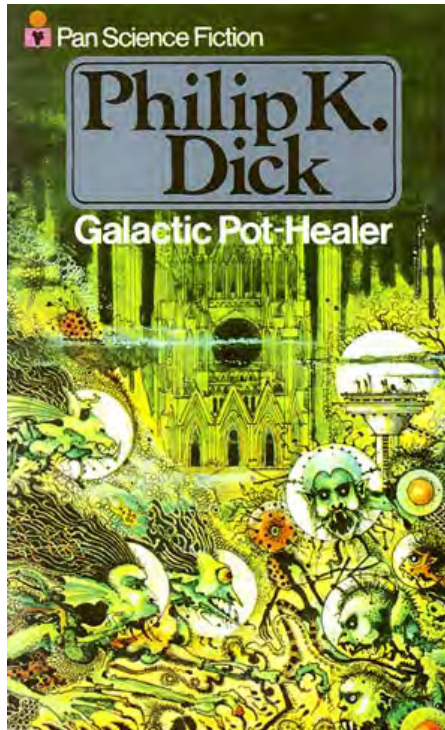
the lunacy of the situation carries a kind of tenderness with it. The pathetic confusion in which the colonists of Delmak-0 meet the challenges of the planet (tiny mechanical buildings with built-in cannons, a rampant but inept nymphomaniac, an artificial fly that sings 'Granada') is matched by the simplicity of the struggle of which they are unconsciously a part - the struggle that in GALACTIC POT-HEALER was against the Black Cathedral, and that here is against the Form Destroyer.

The contest draws them in and with what seems to me an unusual brutality for Dick, stabs, crushes, and shoots a number of them to death, only to find them quite literally reborn and ready to start again (once more, the novel comes full circle at its close). There is a sense, however, that the recurring fight is gradually being lost through sheer human frailty, that eventually the destruction will be too quick and too comprehensive to be reconstructed by conveniently h a n d y m e c h a n i c a l means.

What Dick describes in his foreword (as something of a warning that the jokes need careful analysis) as "an abstract, logical system of religious thought, based on the arbitrary postulate that God exists", is seemingly unable to avoid the fatalistic gloom of all predestinative philosophies. Were it not that we can safely expect Dick to resume the fray undaunted with his next ten novels, MAZE OF DEATH, for all its slapstick, would look far more ominous. Disintegration is still a long way off, and with a spray can of instant optimism we might even be able to avoid it indefinitely...

[I don't know, Philip, persuasive as you are, I still don't

see it (in Tony Sudbery's own words)! From the synopses above these two novels appear unbelievably bad; I'm no stranger to Dick's work of course, but as an experiment I borrowed both titles from a friend and attempted to read them, comparing my own reactions with your own. I agree with most of the comments in your first paragraph.



That is, there certainly are a multiplicity of bizarre names (only I prefer to call them 'silly'). The narrative of UBIK indeed does not make sense. The characters are completely anonymous, and as you say the reader is put into 'a completely disoriented frame of mind'.

These were your observations, but I disagree with your conclusions. I think these comments illustrate the work of a poor writer in a bad book. That 'disorientation' I would rather call 'utter boredom', the plots I would call trivial and pointless, and since Philip K Dick does not appear to take himself or

his readers very seriously, I fail to see why I should pay any serious attention to him.

Sorry, I sometimes get carried away! I played the tape from EASTERCON, Philip, until I came to the end

of your talk on Dick where you said "To sum up, I regard Philip K Dick's merits as being, very simply, his sense of humour, his range of invention, and the fact that he is unashamedly prepared to present his obsessions time and again in every one of his novels, and yet still make them palatable each time." That's two or three of us who disagree with you, Philip -- does anyone else have an opinion? -- Peter R. Weston, editor of *Speculation*]

“The Ravages of Revelation”

by Rob Latham. LA Review of Books

Review of Eric Davis, *High Weirdness*

[...]

The final section, on Philip K. Dick, stands out for three reasons. First, it is longer by half than the previous parts, thus suggesting that Davis considers Dick to be a more complex and/or interesting figure than the other two psychonauts. Second, it focuses on someone who had a long career as a celebrated SF writer before his early '70s mystical encounters turned him into a purple sage; he thus had greater narrative skills and generic resources to draw upon when fashioning accounts of his otherworldly exploits. (He was also, quite simply, smarter than either McKenna or Wilson — that is to say, more learned, as opposed to just well read.) Finally, this section is the only one that doesn't feature a collaborator, a doting brother or *Playboy* buddy; instead, Dick had to struggle through his perplexing cosmic baptism more or less alone (though Davis does explore the network of friends and correspondents he regularly bounced ideas off of). As a result, these chapters are more sober and contemplative in tone, and the experience of reading them can be both painful and profound, especially if you are already a fan, like me, of their subject's body of work.

On the one hand, it's unfortunate that the wild spiritual ride Dick endured during the final decade of his life, which has generated a host of subcultural responses ranging from a Tarot deck to an R. Crumb comic, has somewhat eclipsed — or, rather, subsumed — his specifically literary achievements. On the other hand, if it weren't for the interest generated by the author's purported brush with extrahuman otherness, his work might well have slipped down the memory hole that has engulfed so many of his genre contemporaries. Instead, Dick's fiction is widely available in editions that are often now shelved with

“Literature” instead of “SF” in bookstores, and 13 of his best novels have been enshrined in a three-volume set from the Library of America, under the editorship of avid Dickhead Jonathan Lethem. It was also Lethem, along with scholar-editor Pamela Jackson, who persuaded Houghton Mifflin, in 2011, to publish a thousand-page curation of fragments from Dick's “Exegesis” — a personal journal the author began keeping in the wake of the theophanic eruption that scrambled his life in early 1974.

In a 2012 *LARB* review of *The Exegesis of Philip K. Dick*, I attempted to summarize the author's experiences:

Recovering from oral surgery in February 1974, pumped full of Darvon, lithium, and massive quantities of megavitamins, he began experiencing visual and auditory hallucinations initially sparked

‘It’s unfortunate that the wild spiritual ride Dick endured... has somewhat eclipsed... his specifically literary achievements.’

by a Christian girl's fish-icon necklace but eventually taking the form of a pink laser shooting highly coded information into his opened mind during a series of hypnogogic visitations. Over time, the intrepid author developed an elaborate vocabulary to describe the transfiguring

effects of these extraterrestrial dispatches. According to this private argot, on 2-3-74 [i.e., in February and March of 1974] Dick underwent a powerful anamnesis, stimulated by mystical contact with “VALIS” (“Vast Active Living Intelligence System,” sometimes also called “Zebra” or, more simply, “God”), that unshackled his genetic memory, permitting him to see through the “Black Iron Prison” of our world into the “macrometasomacosmos,” the “morphological realm” of the Platonic Eidos, in the process revealing himself to be a “homoplasmate,” an incarnation of the Gnostic Logos subsisting in “orthogonal time.”

As this breathless litany perhaps suggests, the *Exegesis* is a phantasmagoric rat's nest of deranged erudition, feverish guesswork, and scathing self-analysis, with Dick — like Wilson in *Cosmic Trigger* — painfully pondering whether

he just might have lost his mind. In my previous review, I “question[ed] whether this manuscript should have seen print at all, given its often embarrassing rambling and autodidactic fanaticism, with Dick latching onto any stray thread to spin out his cosmogonic web,” and I said that it was “hard to imagine that there is a widespread audience for this strange assemblage of obiter Dick-ta, even among PKD’s more hardcore followers.”

Davis’s *High Weirdness*, with its three long chapters parsing Dick’s unruly speculations, will very likely test that assumption. Over the course of his own career, Davis has stoutly put his shoulder to the Dickian wheel: the first glimmering of this book project was an undergraduate thesis he wrote at Yale on “Philip K. Dick’s Postmodern Gnosis,” and he labored heroically alongside Lethem and Jackson to midwife the *Exegesis*, soliciting, coordinating, and in many cases drafting the book’s superb arsenal of annotations. While Davis does take a few nose-dives down beguiling rabbit holes in his chapters on Dick in *High Weirdness*, he also provides the most comprehensive and convincing account of the author’s mystical experiences I have read, shrewdly navigating between the Scylla of reducing these visions to phantasms of madness or drug abuse and the Charybdis of embracing them as emanations of godhood (the excellent footnotes cite the full range of extant views, and there are a lot of them). Above all, Davis is superbly attentive to the textual nature of Dick’s experiences, the way narrative retrospection and redaction — both in the *Exegesis* and in his later published fictions — worked to give shape to amorphous events usually experienced on the hazy brink of sleep. Indeed, the author’s speculative frenzy in some ways simply shows “Dick’s plot-weaving imagination in paranoid overdrive.”

I will leave it to scholars of religious studies to assess the fitness of Davis’s mobilization of Neoplatonic and esoteric discourses in his analysis of Dick’s supermundane visions. In terms of the sociocultural contexts Davis cites, I was particularly struck by the evidence he musters for the influence of the 1970s “Jesus Movement” on at least the outward symbols, if not the redemptive heart, of Dick’s evolving creed; these “Jesus Freaks” were especially active in Orange County, a locale the author — quite understandably — viewed as emblematic of a foul, fallen

world. Whatever the triggering phenomenon, Dick “came to believe, at least some of the time, that he was still living in apostolic times, and that the intervening centuries of history were a fabrication.” As Davis meticulously documents, this conviction led the author to recast his earlier novels, many of which had depicted delusory worlds manipulated by cynical puppet-masters, as looming prefigurations of the “Black Iron Prison” he now glimpsed all around him. Conversely, his nocturnal oracles — obsessively masticated and transformed in the *Exegesis* — came to provide the numinous fodder for a series of late-career novels, including the cryptic, metafictional *VALIS* (1981) and the deeply poignant *Transmigration of Timothy Archer* (1982), published shortly after the author’s death. As Davis movingly puts it, Dick’s final novels were “more than disguised testimonies,” they were “also self-cures for the ravages of revelation.”

The proximate cause of Dick’s untimely death was a series of massive strokes, though his lifelong abuse of amphetamines was undoubtedly a contributing factor. Unlike McKenna and Wilson, Dick was not particularly fond of psychedelics, or street drugs of any kind, as his 1977 quasi-memoir of his years shepherding a crash-pad of hippie drop-outs, *A Scanner Darkly*, makes plain. A “knowledgeable and compulsive pillhead,” he preferred the quantifiable mood modulations of psychiatric scripts. By the time the Gnostic Logos came a-calling, he had already transformed himself into “a kind of pharmaceutical cyborg,” stuffing his face with Benzedrine tablets he kept in a jar in the refrigerator, along with doses of Stelazine to take the edge off. Davis describes the astonishing regimen in some detail, but he doesn’t fully explain how this teeming pharmacopoeia fits into the counterculture scene his other psychonauts inhabited. And while he does discuss the way that amphetamine use “shaped and supported the rapid-fire, immersive, and deeply personal way [...] Dick wrote his [SF] books,” he doesn’t really speculate about its impact on the composition of the *Exegesis*, much less attempt to describe the way a speed-freak mythopoeisis might differ from the psychedelic kind generated by a classic “head” such as McKenna.



Robert Anton Wilson reviews

In Pursuit of VALIS: Selections from the Exegesis by Philip K Dick

Robert Anton Wilson: *Trajectories* no. 10, Autumn 1991 pp 8-10

Every year—sometimes every month—I receive a pile of manuscripts from publishers who want me to write jacket blurbs. Most of the books hardly seem worth elbow-room in Hell, and I would rather bury them than praise them.

This summer has represented a wonderful change in all that. I received, along with the usual garbage, three books that I not only felt happy to endorse but enjoyed so much that I want to review them at greater length than a jacket blurb allows, so I can encourage all of you to rush out and buy them as soon as they appear in the bookstores.

In Pursuit of Valis tells the private, involuntary shamanic journey of a great science-fiction writer. The Eagle's Quest recounts the similar, but more traditional search of a quantum physicist who willingly entered the shaman's domain to learn how that other world relates to normal space-time. *Food of the Gods*, finally, presents a Grand Unified Theory of human social evolution in terms of the drugs people have used from the dawn of humanity to the present, how shamanic drugs shaped and enriched some cultures and how other drugs have ruined other cultures. Taken together, this trio makes the most stimulating smorgasbord of scientific/philosophical ideas I've enjoyed in a decade or more.

To discuss the books separately before I start making a shotgun menage a trois out of them:

Between the early 1950s and February/March, 1974, Philip K. Dick wrote the damndest, weirdest, most

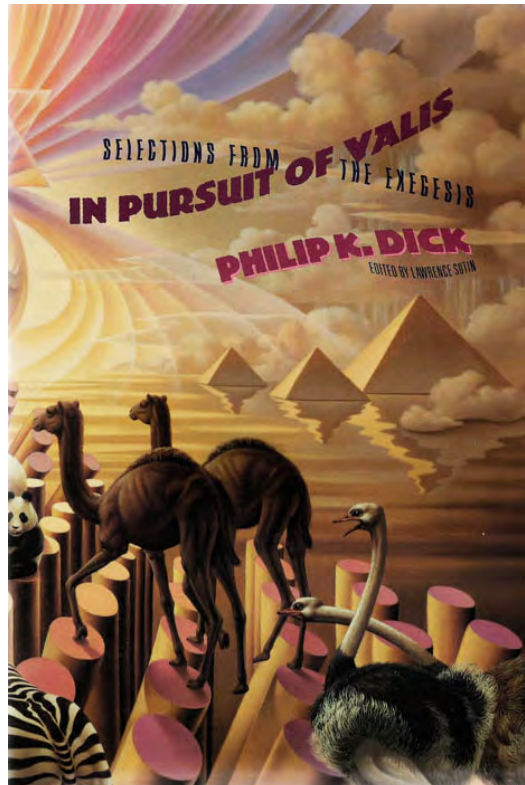
philosophically mind-boggling novels ever to escape from the neo-surrealist underground into commercial science-fiction; after February, 1974, Phil began living in the world he had created. His fiction literally came alive around him. The philosophical masterwork he referred to as "the Exegesis" consisted of over 8000 pages of notes, in which he (writing chiefly for himself: but with one sly eye on Posterity...) tried to understand what the hell had happened to him. The Exegesis appears to have taken up more of his time than the few wonderful novels he wrote between the Apocalypse of 1974 and his tragically premature death in 1982.

A man who once wrote 17 novels in five years, Phil Dick became so involved in the Exegesis that he only wrote three novels in his last decade, and all of them revolve around the themes of the Exegesis; indeed, the best-known of them, *VALIS*, contains a few quotes, and many paraphrases, from the Exegesis, attributed—typically—to a lunatic (a lunatic who we only recognize as Phil Dick himself at the end.)

It's high time that Dick scholars and sci-fi fans in general got a peek at the fabulous Exegesis, and Lawrence Sutin, as editor, offers that here—a peek, or about 250 pages of the original 8000. Here we watch Phil struggle with such questions as: Did Soviet parapsychologists target him for some fiendish experiment in hypnosis-by-telepathy? Or did the ghost of his dead friend, Bishop James Pike, return to co-exist with him in one body?*

Phil seemed to have entered what he called "orthogonal time," at right angles to normal time. That is, he experienced both Rome 50 A.D. and Southern California 1974 A.D. "at the same time." Did this merely indicate Bishop Pike dumping his historical/religious erudition into Phil's brain? Or had a Gnostic named Thomas re-imamated into Phil's body? Or did the experience demand even more radical theories—Zebra, for instance?

("Zebra," in Phil's vocabulary, represented an unknown



Intelligence far above humanity's, which usually remains invisible by blending into the environment—like certain insects. If you suddenly notice Zebra, people will probably say you're "seeing things.")

Could Phil consider Zebra extra-terrestrial, or did he have to admit it was "God?" Could he fit it into his VALIS model—a Vast Active Living Intelligence System, governing Earth at behest of super-intellec[t]s from the Sirius system—or did the whole Zebra/VALIS experience merely prove he, Phil Dick, had gone loony? Perhaps the entire Gnostic/surrealist journey resulted from a delayed reaction to the psychedelics he did in the '60s? Or maybe the megavitamins he took in the 70s mutated his brain even more than the psychedelics?

Nietzsche says somewhere that "the mystics have never been honest enough." He couldn't make that claim seem valid if he tried to apply it to Phil Dick. Phil courageously and unflinchingly considers every possible alternative, and remains honestly zetetic all the way. He had somehow achieved a level of consciousness far above normal, but he never decided whether to consider it Gnosis or merely an unusually benign psychosis. In his last last novels, VALIS sits on the fence like an agnostic owl, The Divine Invasion accepts the most mystic/Platonist models very literally and The Transmigration of Timothy Archer settles on plain, old-fashioned humanist skepticism. But the Exegesis shows that [Phil never stopped questioning and 'wondering until he died.

Around the time Phil Dick had his early struggles with

"God" and/or Zebra and/or VALIS (and/or a Bishop's ghost and/or Soviet parapsychologists...), physicist Fred Alan Wolf began investigating shamanism with the notions that quantum mechanics might illuminate what shamans do, or shamanism might illuminate the unsolved enigmas of the quantum wonderland, or at least the two might interact in some synergetically interesting way.

[...]

Phil Dick, who had fully entered the shamanic universe without knowing that he had landed there, always retained the conviction of a deep, cosmic and yet very personal connection between his Zebra encounters of February-March 1974 and Richard Nixon's resignation in August that year. Phil did not see the link in terms of "mere" synchronicity in the Jungian metaphor. Rather, in orthogonal time, he saw that Thomas the Gnostic in Rome 50 A.D. and Phil Dick in California 1974 A.D. functioned as pans of a network that

inevitably causes the fall of Caesar, and of Caesar's "Black Iron Prison." (The "Black Iron Prison," or "BIP," represented for Phil the amnesia or hypnosis that prevents most people from ever catching a glimpse of Zebra. Psychologists call it conditioned perception, neurolinguistic habit, or the defined gloss.)

[...]

Curiously, or with cosmic inevitability, Phil, the science-fiction writer, who did not so much enter the

shamanic world as he got pulled in from the other side, arrives at some insights similar to those of Fred Wolf, the scientist who entered that world with his eyes open and nine hypotheses to test in the crucible of his own Chapel Perilous. Among their joint conclusions:



'quantum mechanics might illuminate what shamans do, or shamanism might illuminate the unsolved enigmas of the quantum wonderland'

The universe consists essentially of information (Phil Dick) or of a Bohmian “implicate order” more like information than anything else (Fred Wolf.) Out of this enfolded (archetypal) information, temporary “realities” unfold spatiotemporally, but which “realities” we encounter/perceive depends on our state of consciousness. Normal consciousness, or the Black Iron Prison, consists of a kind of delusion in which one conditioned “reality”-tunnel appears to us as the only possible “reality.” The terror of seeming insanity (Dick) or the confrontation with death (Wolf) jar us out of that one “reality”-tunnel and opens us to multiple universes.

Or we can make the quantum leap—escape the Black Iron Prison—simply by contemplating the right kind of deeply meaningful nonsense long enough. Christian Science practitioners heal all sorts of seemingly hopeless cases because they have studied the more “irrational” passages in Mary Baker Eddy until their minds flipped over into an alternative shamanic reality where they can transcend the Newtonian determinism of ordinary medicine.

[...]

In VALIS, the “lunatic” Horselover Fat writes, “We did not fall because of a moral error; we fell because of an intellectual error: that of taking the phenomenal world as real.” Phil Dick accidentally walked into the parallel worlds of quantum theory; Fred Wolf and Terence McKenna deliberately walked into the parallel worlds of psychedelic shamanism. The reports that all three have brought back can have a liberating and revolutionary impact on every reader of their voyages. If you believe in George Bush’s “reality” —the New World Order and all that blood-soaked mythos—the Empire has you trapped in its Black Iron Prison, c. 50 AD. and Caesar still rules. If you want to know how to organize a jail break, these three books will give you all the dynamite you need.

* Curiously, Bishop Pike became convinced, some time before his death, that he had achieved communication with his dead son. Then Phil Dick’s mystic experiences began with seeming communications from Pike. More recently, two other writers (Ray Nelson and Scott Apel) have alleged possible communications from Phil. Whatever we call this, it seems contagious. — RAW



VALIS Ambigram by Nick Buchanan

Ted Gioia

on *VALIS*

[...]

Over the course of around 40 books, Dick had contrived many stories and characters, but his chief recurring obsession could be summed in a simple idea, a concept that is at the heart of *VALIS*—and all his other major works—namely that *reality isn't really very real*.

The number of variations that Dick worked on this theme is impressive. Things are never what they seem in a Philip K. Dick story. And I don't mean that the butler turns out to be the killer or any of those other plot twists, predictable even in their surprises, that genre fiction has long employed. In Dick's universe, the very fabric of the universe is prone to give away at any moment. The characters themselves hardly change, but their context is as likely to tear asunder as a wet paper bag soaking in a parking lot puddle.

Sometimes Dick provides a technological reason for these radical reformulations of reality, but often he just lets them occur unexplained in his stories. For a writer who devoted his career to the sci-fi field, Dick seemed almost perversely unconcerned with explaining the disjunctions that send his characters reeling in confusion into an alternative universe. As a result, his tales often come across more like applied metaphysics than science fiction. And this explains much of the appeal of Dick's storytelling: where other sci-fi authors would blame everything on aliens or weapons, Mr. Dick describes similar plot twists in terms of transcendent events and personal crises. As a result, he has more in common with existential novelists such as Walker Percy or Albert Camus than with space opera authors like Arthur C. Clarke and Robert Heinlein.

But in *VALIS*, Dick reveals a very different attitude. He is no longer content to accept these tears in the fabric of reality; he now wants to understand them. With almost desperate intensity he seeks for reasons, and

the result is something we never expected from Philip K. Dick: a novel of ideas. Sometimes crazy ideas, usually implausible ideas, but ideas nonetheless. Many of these are taken verbatim from the *Exegesis*, and Dick even includes an appendix that features a selection of these journal entries. They are like a distortion of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, as encountered in a nightmare.

During the course of this novel, the narrator explores almost every possible explanation for a universe in which

different planes of reality exist. He looks to the pre-Socratic philosophers Heraclitus and Parmenides for explanations. He considers Jung's theory of archetypes. Or does the Buddhist critique of reality hold the answer? He explores the connection between the split in reality and the Yin and Yang of Taoism. He draws on hermetic alchemists, Apollonius of Tyana, Gnosticism, Asklepios, Richard Wagner, the story of the Grail. He looks to Elijah. He looks to Christ. He looks everywhere, with intensity and anxiety.

But our narrator also stares into the television set, searching for coded messages from a higher power amidst commercials and cartoons. One day, a friend takes him to a motion picture that seems to present images connected to Horselover Fat's visions,

and this opens up new theories and possibilities. When Dick, Fat and their friends meet up with the rock star who made the movie, they believe that they have finally arrived at the brink of an explanation—indeed, at the *explanation to end all explanations*. Or maybe they've just finally met people even crazier than Philip K. Dick.

Eventually Dick offers possible sci-fi solutions to his enigma. The visions may have come from aliens. Or maybe from a new microwave technology that zaps your brain instead of the baked potato you plan on eating for dinner. But the reader can see that Dick is hardly satisfied with these options. He's not looking for aliens; he's looking for the meaning of life.



Ted Pauls reviews

UBIK by Philip K Dick

**Ted Pauls: *WSFA Journal*. #70 (December 1969)
pp. 24-25**

The reviewer is prepared to entertain the thought that there is no such person as Philip K. Dick; that, instead, books published under that name are the product of a committee of psychologists and Alpha Centauri II conducting an experiment in the reactions of human beings to an alien thought pattern. This is preparatory, no doubt, to a full-fledged invasion.

While we are waiting that fearsome development, we can at least enjoy the strange brilliance of the novels created by the Philip Dick group (and as a matter of convenience I will continue to refer to PKD as if there were really an actual person capable of writing them). His most recent (unless something new appeared last weekend).

Ubik, is one of his most extraordinary and complex. Jay Haldeman described it to me one night while driving back to Baltimore as “Realities are folded in, over and around realities.” A fair description, I would say, of a novel in which, for instance, the reader is at no point certain which characters are alive and which are dead!

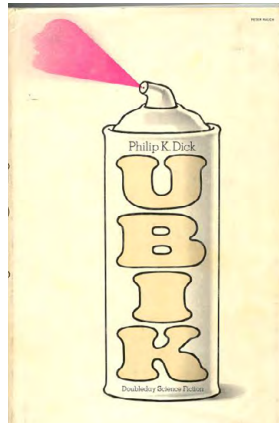
The limitations of the linear plot summary are never more evident than in the case of *Ubik*. One can outline the ostensible plot up to a point: In the 1990s there is a competition between an organization that provides psi services and a number of corporations, principally Runciter Associates, who provide counter-psi services (also known as “inertials” who can nullify telepaths, precogs, etc.). Glen Runciter, his chief tester, Joe Chip, and eleven of their best inertials are lured to Luna by agents of the psi association, where a bomb blast kills Runciter. Chip and the eleven inertials manage to escape back to Earth. That, at least, is what appears to be happening throughout the early chapters, but from this point on straightforward plot summary is inadequate and must be supplemented by descriptions of the elements and people in *Ubik*.

Half-life, a familiar Dick concept (see “What the Dead

Men Say”), in which a certain number of hours of cerebral sentence remains after clinical death occurs, and by freezing and unfreezing the individual this period of twilight existence maybe be stretched out over a considerable period of objective time. In *Ubik*, Dick adds the idea that consciousness of another sort remains under while the people are frozen and the corpses communicate with one another and lead imaginary existences in a phantom world. *Pat Conley* is a unique inertial, whose talent consists in being able to thwart a precognitor by altering time-tracks. When something is going badly for Pat, she can solve the problem by substituting a time-track in which it did not occur. *Jory Miller* is a kind of vampire, who in order to maintain his own vitality devours the life-force of other dead people in a state of half-life. He also controls, to a considerable extent, the world in which the half-lifers inhabit. And *Ubik*, the miracle product in a spray can, is a “negative ionizer” and the only thing that can thwart Jory Miller’s designs.

I hesitate to reveal more specific details of what happens, because there is no way to do so without disclosing the answer to the novel’s major puzzle: vis., who’s alive and who isn’t? (Although, even after you are certain you know, the author, in typical Phil Dick fashion, manages to make you wonder again in the final five paragraphs of the book.) Suffice it to say that *Ubik* proceeds along a fascinating course, with clever anomalies succeeding other clever anomalies from chapter to chapter. The reader still pauses on occasion to shake his head in puzzlements and smile, as customarily happens when reading PKD, but it will be an altogether interesting and entertaining journey.

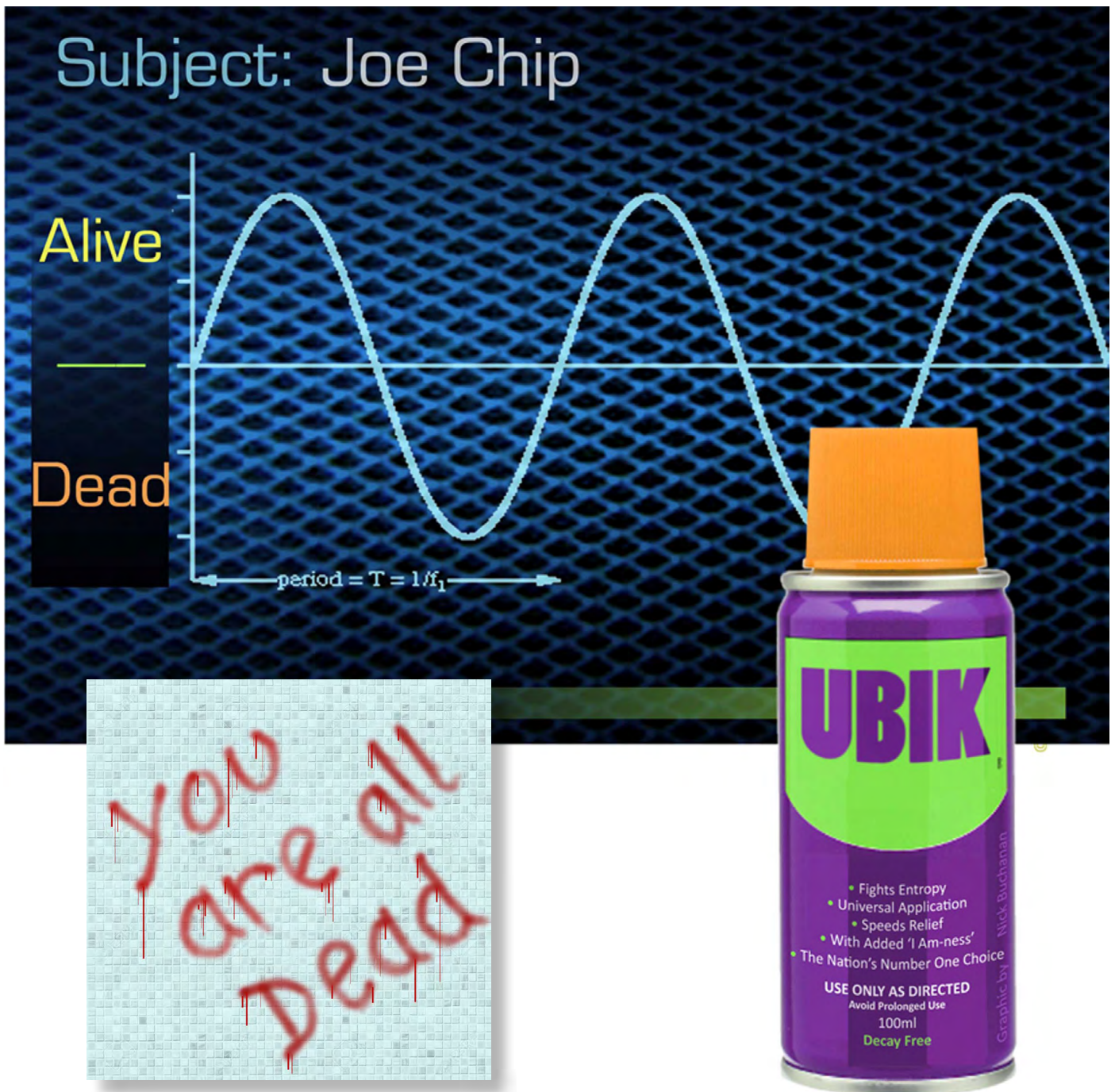
Ubik includes the characteristic Phil Dick touches in the form of things and ideas dropped in casually – and all the more vivid because of the “underplaying”. A classic example in this novel concerns the men’s fashions of the 1990s. Most authors desiring to portray a society in which male clothing has become garish and *outré* would have made the general point directly, and probably include a brief lecture by one or another character on the psychological reasons behind it. Not so with Dick. He simply describes the apparel of some of his male characters where such descriptions would ordinarily be appropriate (“wearing his usual mohair poncho, apricot-



colored felt hat, argyle ski socks and carpet slippers, he advanced toward Joe Chip..."). At no time does he make appoint of it, but it doesn't require long for the reader to begin picturing the extreme male fashions of the era.

In technique, the novel is the usual quality piece of work we are accustomed to getting from the pen of PKD. The writing is fine, cleverly light at times and powerful at others

(particularly the segment involving Joe Chip's struggles to climb the hotel stairs); characterization is nowhere less than adequate, although this is not the novel's strongest point; and the pacing is superb, and especially difficult feat considering the nature of the story line.



Graphics by Nick Buchanan: <https://rdbl.co/2VOCW7u>

PROSPECTUS

"...this may be the beginning of a new age of human thought, of new exploration.
I may be the start of something promising: an early & incomplete explorer.
It may not end with me." (PKD, *EXEGESIS*, April, 1981)

"Echoes from Valis"

An anthology of writings in various genres inspired or related to the 52 "**Tractates Cryptica Scriptura**" of PKD -- Appendix of Valis. Will also include black & white line art (drawings, prints, photographs), or computer generated images which visually interpret the Tractates or submitted original works - essays, short stories, poetry.

I first read VALIS in 1993. Since that time, I have read the Lawrence Sutin biography, DIVINE INVASIONS and his subsequent work IN PURSUIT OF VALIS. Have also read many critical works on PKD which have appeared in various magazines -- notably OMNI, GNOSIS, and F. D.O. I have yet to see anything resembling the publication I have in mind.

*I see the "Tractates" as a large stone dropped into a still pond.....ripples are just beginning....
"Echoes from Valis" will be a collection of those ripples. It in turn will become yet another stone.....
John Meluch, Editor (April, 1995)*

GUIDELINES:

- ESSAYS - 1000 to 2000 words
- SHORT STORIES - 1000 to 3000 words
- POETRY - Two Page Maximum
- RELATED MATERIAL - Excerpts from previously published material - philosophical, religious, psychological, poetry, occult . Up to 500 words.
- ARTWORK - Must be in Black & White. (Drawings, Prints, Photographs)
Images larger than 5 x 7 will be photo-reduced to fit page size.

DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSIONS: NOV. 1995

PAYMENT: At this time, payment will consist of several copies of the finished work (2 - 5 copies). If a publisher is found who might wish to publish all or part of this work, then remuneration with individual contributors will be negotiated.

Send Submissions To:

John Meluch
Rhino Graphics
1354 W. Clifton #6
Lakewood, OH. 44107

via E-Mail:
rhinolkwd@aol.com

Rhino Graphics, 1995

Troubles with Phil

Ted White, "My Column" *Algol* Winter 1976, p. 25

[...]

Being told I was the equivalent of a moral leper for bringing in a collaborator brought me up short. It made me think. Was I, in fact, unique in choosing such a course of action? I didn't think so, and the more I thought about it, the more I recalled other, similar situations. I propose to recount some of them here. But this creates a second problem: how free am I to discuss situations which involve others? To what extent can I discuss these situations openly, naming names? In some cases even the editors and publishers concerned may be ignorant of the true facts.

Well, I can at least mention a few names. Others must go unnamed. As you'll see. One case involves me directly, was handled openly with all concerned, and, I believe, can be discussed openly.

I met Philip K. Dick in 1964, shortly before the Pacifcon. I had been an admirer of his work since my early teens when he first began to appear in the SF magazines. By 1964 I was a staunch fan of his, having in fact actually written him a fan letter after reading his *Martian Time Slip*. (Soon after I met him I asked him if he'd received my letter, sent c/o his agent earlier that year. He had not. So much for fan letters...) We got along well enough, considering the difference in our ages and status. He introduced me to the I Ching, doing a reading for me from it which was uncannily accurate in its assessment of my situation then. He was a generous host, and played godfather to the romance I was then involved in.

In 1965 Ace published my first solo novel, *Android Avenger*. In it were several affectionate references to Phil's

novels of the period, including a talking briefcase which I'd taken from his *Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*, a book I continue to admire intensely to this day. I was on the west coast again that year and gave Phil a copy. He mentioned a novel he'd not finished and wondered if I could, but it remained idle conversation for then.

In 1966 I was again on the west coast and visited Phil for an afternoon. At that point he hauled out a manuscript and asked me to look it over and see what I thought about completing it. I took it back east with me and examined it when I got home.

Its title was *Deus Irae*, and it was a blockbuster. Phil had written the first fifty pages and they were magnificent. He also included the "outline" for the novel, which had already been sold, through his agent, Scott Meredith, to Doubleday.

I say "outline" in quotes like that, because what Phil had written was not a skeleton of the plot, but an essay on the direction and point of the novel, revealing its ending, yes, but not its structure—not how it reached its ending. As an essay it was brilliant. Indeed, the entire conception of the novel, its fantastic imagery, was brilliant. Perhaps too much so:

Phil couldn't go any further with it.

It was audacity in itself for me to consider finishing the novel, but I called up his agent and received an okay, I think also from Doubleday, to go ahead.

I knew that I wasn't ready to tackle such a demanding task immediately, so I set it aside. I also stopped reading Phil's novels (then coming out at a steady pace), stockpiling them instead on my shelf. It was my intention to steep myself in Phil's work when I began working on the novel: to read his books whenever I was not writing, and thus absorb his style.

Alas, I never felt myself quite ready. To this day, I don't



Ted White, 2007

think I could do justice to the novel. And, unfortunately, putting off reading those many Philip K. Dick novels got me out of the habit of reading them.

By 1968 I had become friends with Roger Zelazny, and the thought occurred to me that inasmuch as I was unlikely ever to be “ready” to work on Phil’s novel, I should pass it on. I queried Phil: would he object if I gave the novel to Zelazny? And I asked Roger if he wanted to have a look at it. Both seemed happy at the thought, and I felt like a matchmaker at a brilliant wedding. Phil was an established master in the field, Roger an up-and-coming major writer. Both had won Hugos for Best Novel. It seemed an ideal collaboration. I gave the manuscript to Roger.

I asked Roger about it a year or two later. He’d had some correspondence with Phil about it and he’d written some 10,000 words or so for it. But the last I heard, *Deus Irae* remains unfinished. It was, perhaps, too fine an opening and too ambitious a book.

I did end up “collaborating” with Phil, though, although I wonder how he really felt about it. Scott Meredith sent me an unpublished novel of Phil’s, soon after I took over *Amazing*. The novel was called *The First In Your Family*, and had been written very early in the sixties—the first of Phil’s works after he ‘returned’ to SF (after writing his mainstream novel, *Confessions of a Crap Artist*). I could see why it remained unsold. Phil often had problems with his endings—and almost none of his early- sixties SF novels were published with the same endings he’d written. (In most cases the last bit or so was cut.) To my eye, *The First In Your Family* didn’t end at all: it had no real resolution. I called Phil up and said I wanted to use it in *Amazing*, but I wanted to change the title to “A. Lincoln, Simulacrum,” and I needed an ending. I suggested that I draft an ending and send it out to him to elaborate upon as he saw fit. He agreed on both points. I wrote a short final chapter and sent it to him. He returned it

with three words changed, praising it as economical and unimprovable-upon. Thus the novel appeared in *Amazing*. After publication in *Amazing* I sent the manuscript to Terry Carr, at Ace, to see if he wanted it as an Ace Science Fiction Special, at his request. He didn’t like it, with or without my ending. I returned the manuscript to Phil.

Some years later the novel was published by DAW Books. I’d tell you the title but my complete set of DAW Books was destroyed in a recent fire which consumed half the upper floor of my house. It may have been A. Lincoln or it may have been a variant upon either that title or the original one. [*The title is We Can Build You; DAW UY 1164. \$1.25 – ed.*] In any case, I scanned a copy and saw that my ending had been removed. When I queried Don Wollheim, he said that was the way Phil wanted it. When I saw Phil, in 1972 at the LACon, I asked him about it, and Phil changed the subject, so I didn’t pursue it. I have no idea whether Phil accepted my ending originally because he saw it as the politic thing to do, or whether he changed his mind later. I’m disturbed, though, that he may have hated it all along but feared to tell me so in my guise as “editor.” In retrospect I think it was hurried and overly melodramatic—

to say nothing of too tricky in its implications – but I’d never intended it as more than a skeletal suggestion for an ending.

So much for the situations in which I can name names.

Letter from Ted White.
Science Fiction Review
no. 49 (November 1983),
p.p18-19

[...]

‘Finally, I was interested to read both Harlan’s and Charles Platt’s letters about Peter Nichols’ Phil Dick piece.

‘I was on a Phil Dick Memorial Panel at this year’s Westercon. Also on the panel were Dick Lupoff, Grania Davis, Sherry Gottlieb and Paul Williams. We started off making noises about Phil’s undeniable importance as a



Roger Zelazny

writer to the field and to us personally. But gradually the top came off the can of worms. Lupoff accused Robert Anton Wilson of feeding Phil's paranoia and we began dealing with his Dark Side.

'Harlan's letter touches on the same aspect of Phil. I knew Phil as a friend from 1964 to around 1970. He put me up in his house. He conducted I-Ching readings for me. He used a picture of me on the Penguin edition of *MAN IN A HIGH CASTLE* (as a jape). He asked me to finish *DEUS IRAE* after he'd bogged down fifty (ms.) pages into it. (When I decided I couldn't, I brought Roger Zelazny into it.) We corresponded, visited and phoned each other. In a late-sixties issue of (I think) *WARHOON*, Phil said I understood his work better than anyone else. Yet by 1972 we were estranged and by the middle seventies he savaged me in a long interview. Why? I never understood why at the time although the interview, which I read in 1979, offered several good clues. I turned from a friend and a fellow

writer (who admired his work), into an editor. And as an editor I did awful things, like telling him that his novel, *THE FIRST IN YOUR FAMILY*, had no ending and needed a better title. I asked him if *A LINCOLN, SIMULACRUM* would be an okay title for the *AMAZING* serialization and if he could come up with an ending for it. At his suggestion, I wrote a 3,000-word ending and sent it to him for him to accept, reject, or (I hoped) build upon. He sent it back saying it was "perfect" and changing only three words. I knew it wasn't perfect, but we had a deadline and I ran it with his express permission. I thought we were still friends. When *DAW* published it (as *WE CAN BUILD YOU*) "my" ending was missing. I asked Phil about it at the 72 Worldcon in LA (probably the last time I saw him face to face) and he lied to me, telling me it had been Don Wollheim's decision.

'In his interview he lied further, distorting the incident and having me say, "Did you see what they did to our book?" in order to sneer at me for my "audacity" in "claiming" the book as partly "mine." These cheap-shit

editors! Three weeks later, at a Secondary Universe convention in Iowa I asked Wollheim about it and he told me that Phil had insisted on removing my ending and that he "hated" it. He probably did, too. But rather than simply tell me that, he lied, both at the time and afterwards, and he was still lying (in self-justification) in his interview. Well, shit. The novel had sat unsold in Scott Meredith's files for ten years (he wrote it in 1960, the first piece of SF written after his failed attempts to break into the main stream with novels like *CONFESIONS OF A CRAP ARTIST*) and had I not serialized it in *AMAZING* I think it would have sat there, still unsold, for at least another ten years.

SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW

NOVEMBER 1983 NUMBER 49 \$2.00

INTERVIEW: *DARRELL SCHWEITZER*
 PROFILE: *PIERS ANTHONY*

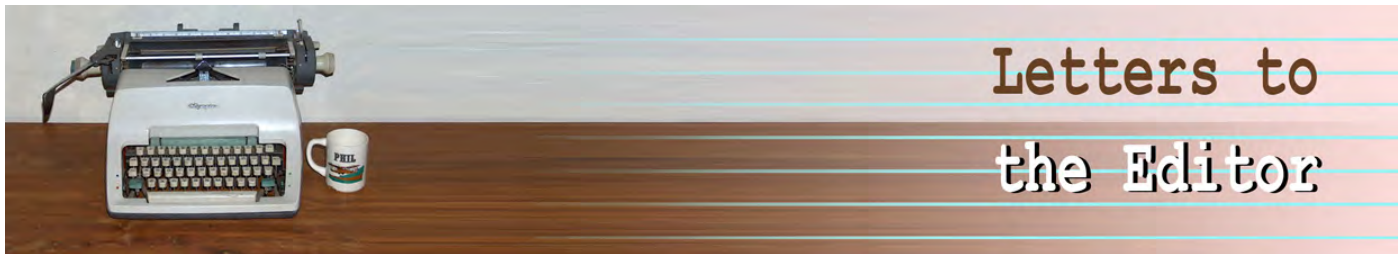
★NOTES FROM BALTIMORE BY CHARLES PLATT★

NOISE LEVEL BY JOHN BRUNNER



RICHARD E. GEIS - GENE DEMESEE - ORSON SCOTT CARD - ELTON T. ELLIOTT - ALEXIS GILLILAND

'Phil held editors in contempt. His paranoia where editors were concerned was unbounded. I assume without knowing more than Harlan has written here, that this was his problem with Ed Ferman (an editor for whom I have considerable respect). He used to complain to me (in the late sixties) about Terry Carr (the editor of his *Ace Specials*), usually unfairly. This was one aspect of Phil's dark side and there were others, some having to do with his relationships with women. As a younger writer who really looked up to Phil for many years, I had a lot of trouble dealing with this side of the man. Now I suspect that my admiration for Phil was the strongest factor in our friendship and that he preferred me as a sycophant. I dunno. It no longer matters now.'



From Andre Welling:

Splendid observation by Douglas A. Mackey.

“Whereas Runciter money has been infiltrating the pores of Joe Chip’s half-life reality, now Joe Chip’s saving presence is being found in Runciter’s world, which is by extension our own. Why does PKD seem to be ever more encroaching upon our everyday reality, in comics, in media, in memes, in Facebook posts? It must be that Philip K. Dick is alive and we are dead. That is the only explanation.” p. 13.

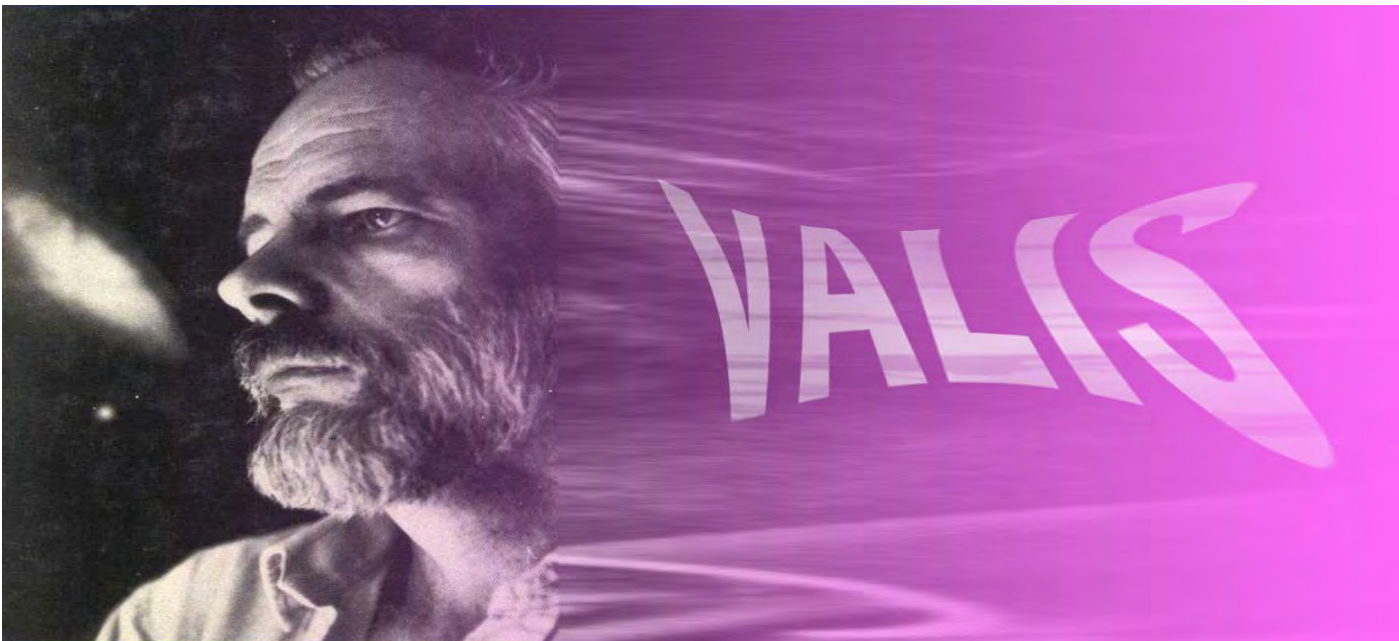
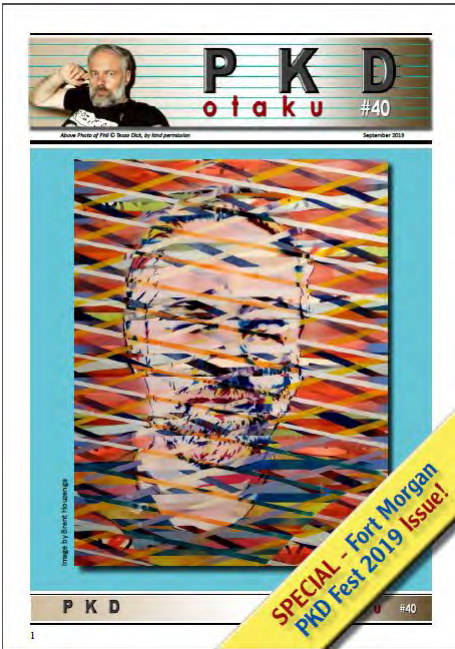
When there is proof of the Existence of Dick, the Dickodizee should be a cakewalk.

Nice job of Nick Buchanan with Explorers We (p. 19 ff.). It’s still stunning and telling how one-dimensional the Bureau incineration approach is. How xenophobic. Those explorers surely would make good captives and so they (“we”) could have learned much about that “infiltration”. Also about the

puzzling question why the Martian intelligence and spy-craft apparatus is so daft with its infiltrators that they send the exact same crew over and over, obviously not considering their failures or way of approach. This in itself hints strongly that this repeated haunting is something

else than an alien ruse to infiltrate earth. More the SOLARIS-like communication attempt of an alien intelligence. Or a divine intervention, having resurrected those men. OR: Those initial explorers were subjected to some time-loop, alter-verse copy process en-route Mars so that it really IS the original crew. So, the Earth people and law enforcers also could have built six large prisons for all the coming issues of Barton and his five friends. These Mars clone gulags would fill up slowly and if these ARE perfect copies of those “six men” - those arriving earlier would have aged and soon you had Bartons of all ages past the ‘arrival age’ populating the Barton Prison (or the Barton Containment Facility).

Those prisons would also have softball teams and compete against each other. Vecchis against Leons. You get the drift.



Phil VALIS by Nick Buchann



Notes & Comments

In preparation for the PKD Festival in Fort Morgan I had occasion to go through files of papers belong to Dave Hyde as I was going to return them to him when we met in Colorado. So "Notes & Comments" is even weirder than usual this time.

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DICK, Philip K(indred), 1928-1982. American pianist and composer, born Chicago, Illinois USA; died Stockholm, Sweden. Best known for avant-standard, "Blues for PE." Early collaborator with Ornette Coleman in 1950s, culminating in the Coleman-Dick composition, "Ubikityness," the side-long closer to Coleman's 1959 double LP, *MUSIC FROM THE HIGH CASTLE*, based in part on an unpublished, never-performed jazz-opera composed by Dick in 1955. Dick left the US shortly after *HIGH CASTLE*'s release (to minor critical acclaim and negligible public acceptance) due to pressure from President Joseph McCarthy's Anti-American Activities group (AAA); Dick had been a minor member of the Berkeley Communist Party and reputedly helped plan the infamous Marin County Putsch in 1957. Fleeing to Europe, Dick recorded little but played frequently with other exiled American jazz artists such as John Coltrane, Gil Evans and Sonny Blount, with whom Dick created the spacey keyboard duo known as Sun Ra, recording the hard to find *MARTIAN TIME-SLIP BLUES* (1968) album. Dick finally settled in in Stockholm in 1972, the year of his final album release, *TRICKY DICK*, an elegiac tribute to recently assassinated American president, Richard Nixon. In 1971, Nixon extended a full pardon to all American expatriates, lifting the death penalty imposed by President Robert Kennedy in 1966. Dick chose never to return to the US and stopped composing when he entered a neo-Gnostic monastery outside of Stockholm in 1974, where he stayed until his death from heart failure in 1982. (JW)

See also BLOUNT, SONNY; COLEMAN, ORNETTE; COLTRANE. JOHN: EVANS, GIL and SONNY; COLEMAN, ORNETTE; COLTRANE. JOHN: EVANS, GIL and EXPATRIATISM.

Source: Alternadick No. 1 circa 1997

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"There is a strange bit of business going on with Dick's books in our local library. Somebody has been reading all of his works chronologically, starting with the short stories, but whoever (whatever) it is returns the books smelling

syrupey sweet, like Kool Aid. It's a sickenly sweet smell that will permeate an entire room and seeps into anything that touches the book. So far this person (space alien?) has reached Time Out of Joint. I'm racing to get ahead of him/her (it) and the smell." – Kevin Graves to Dave Hyde, June 16, 1997

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What in the world is this?

I first saw Rob Hollis Miller's name in an article by Michael A. Aquino in *Nyctaclops* #13 (1977). Aquino was responding to an article Miller had written concerning Aquino's made-up Yuggothic language appearing in the *Satanic Rituals*. I was not surprised therefore when this slim volume, yellow with its apocalyptic title (and religious speculation), came my way. This book deals with fiction, metafiction and reality games. Its principal characters are dead before the beginning, and never make an appearance save by implication. The book, like *The King in Yellow* after which it is clearly modeled, is a series of short stories tied together by thematic reference to the works of Philip K. Dick (called variously Dickens K. Philips, Dick K. Phillipi, Dickens P. Phillips, etc.) and Gurdjieff (called Hafiz). In a somewhat Borgesian manner Gurdjieff's work is treated as a commentary on Dick's, and both are treated as the sacred works of a what may or may not be a cult with what may or may not have a secret inner core. Like the characters in Dick's novels, Miller's heroes are not so much worried about what is reality, as by who is interested in manipulating them to think which reality frame is the right one. The book is the first place where the effect of Poe's *Eureka* on Dick's *Exegesis* is made clear. Both works are ignored by the standard critic, but both contain the roots of the fruit that is debated, dissected and enjoyed. For this revelation, Miller is in particular to be praised.

From a review of *Ocean of Glass and Fire* by Paul Rydeen in *The New York Review of Science Fiction* no. 63 (November 1993), p. 16

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PHILIP K. DICK

Philip K. Dick (1928-82) wrote possibly the strangest, most difficult collection of science-fiction novels in existence.

With a tremendous talent for making the highly complex seem remarkably simple, Dick's usual tactic was to run an unassuming protagonist through a variety of illusory situations. He did this time and again, in most of his best-known

novels: *Flow My Tears, the Policeman Said* (1974); *The Man in the High Castle* (1962); *A Scanner Darkly* (1977); and, of course, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968) which was made into the film *Blade Runner*. Dick brought to SF an avant garde sophistication unequalled to this day. His influence can be seen in many of the genre's more bizarre, yet compelling storytellers. He chose to write science fiction—a choice which left him barely scraping by for years—out of love for the field.

Upon finding a *Stirring Science Stories* as a youth, he said, "I was most amazed. Stories about science? At once I recognized the magic which I had found, in earlier times, in the Oz books—this magic now coupled not with wands but with science, and set in the future, where as we all know, science will play more and more of a role in our lives. "In any case, my view became magic equals science ... and science (of the future) equals magic. I have still not lost that view, and our idea then (I was 12, remember) that science would prove to play a greater part in our lives—well, we were right, for better or worse. I, for one, bet on science to help us. I have yet to see how it fundamentally endangers us, even with the H-bomb lurking about. Science has given more lives than it has taken; we must remember that."

We must also remember that science always asks more questions than it answers, as in the fiction of Philip K. Dick. —Chris Henderson, *Starlog* November 1985, pp. 45, 52

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"Philip K Dick was an amphetamine-addicted schizophrenic who wrote about complex identity issues, psychosis, empathy and God - nominally under the banner of science fiction. Born in 1928, Chicago, he wrote 36 novels and five short story collections before his death aged 53. He was married five times and had three children. In fact, everything Philip K Dick did, was done to excess, something to do, it is routinely claimed, with his surviving an identical twin who died shortly after their birth. Pop psychologists tend to say the same thing about Elvis." — Roger Clarke *Independent*: 11 March 1999

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"It excites me to pose nude. There's and exhibitionist side of me that makes me enjoy showing off my body. Let's see, what else? Oh, I sew my own clothes, read mostly science

fiction — Philip K. Dick is my favorite." — Copy accompanying photos of a "French fashion model" in *Qui*, April 1979. [Referenced in Bhub Stewart, "Do Replicants Dream of Philip K. Dick?"]

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"Confessions of a science-fiction writer: I have never read a whole novel by Philip K. Dick."

— Samuel R. Delaney

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September 28, 1992. Valis Calls Me.

The phone just rang, it was a nut talking through a synthesizer or voice-flattener to sound kind of echoey and computer-like. He said he was VALIS. That's all I need, man, I've been feeling kind of crazy recently anyway. Phil Dick used to say he'd gotten a phone-call from a computer called VALIS. And now I'm getting the same call. But I'm not buying it.

"In other words you're a nut who won't tell me his name," I say to the voice on the phone.

"You sound a little paranoid," goes the nut. — Rudy Rucker

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Re. Ken Liu, translator of *The Three-Body Problem* by Liu Cixin

As a young boy, he was a promiscuous reader. He read his aunt's Taiwanese romance novels, his grandmother's Mandarin translations of "Sherlock Holmes" and her copy of "Romance of the Three Kingdoms," a 14th-century historical epic set during the Han dynasty. He read his grandfather's mathematics and chemistry manuals, which he didn't understand but tore through anyway. In elementary school, he came across Mandarin translations of American science fiction. He read Philip K. Dick's "Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?" and didn't realize it was science fiction, mistaking the descriptions of a post-apocalyptic urban hellscape where humans enslave androids for a realistic depiction of life in America. He was particularly struck by the notion of a world without animals, where people had robots for pets — "It seemed to fit with my idea of the U.S. as a very high-tech place," Liu recalls. — *New York Times* December 3, 2019
