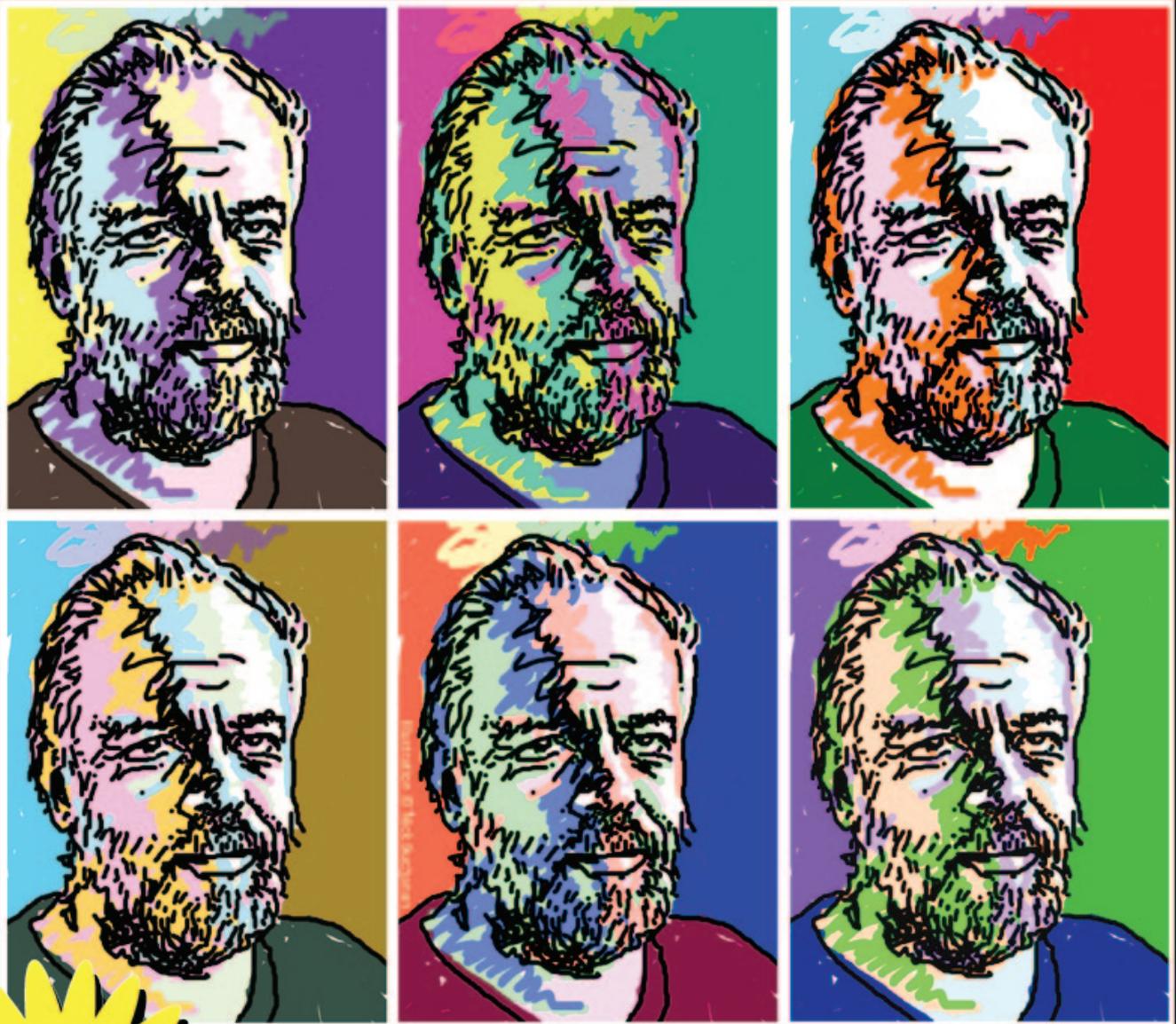


Photo of Phil © Tessa Dick, by kind permission

April 2012



**NOW WITH ADDED UBIK!!**

**g r i p h i c s**



**FREE 'SCHOL-O-MATIC' WITH THIS ISSUE SEE BACK COVER FOR DETAILS!!**

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Background Illustration from Chris Moore's wraparound cover for UBIK

**Otaku** is a zine made by fans for fans.  
 It exists to celebrate, explore and discuss the work of Philip K Dick.  
 The 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  
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[pkdotaku@gmail.com](mailto: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

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## Editorial

by Patrick Clark

*"You know, of course, that this is going to shoot down my professional probity."*

*"What probity?" Kevin said, characteristically.*

-- Valis Chapter 10

**E**XEGESIS mania seems to have dropped off considerably since our last issue of PKD Otaku. At least it appears to be so in the mainstream press which has moved on to other cultural phenomenon, like The Hunger Games. No doubt the academic press is still gearing up for a range of scholarly articles to come. It takes a while for those to see the light of day. For all I know the topic is still white hot on various blogs and specialized web sites. I don't follow those so it's impossible for me to say. But for your average citizen the clamor -- the book reviews and articles in newspapers, the inter-

views with editors and publicity tours -- have died down and are over. On the one hand I'm fine with this. Perhaps best to let the **EXEGESIS** fade from view for a while. It is an exceedingly strange book. To tell you the truth I have read very little of it, Phil's most ambitious and frustrating final work. The endless and mostly fruitless exploration of what really happened on 2-3-74 was, for me, exhausting and this, mind you, was only from dipping at random in its hundreds and hundreds of pages. I kept wondering what in the world Phil thought he was doing beating his head against a metaphysical brick wall, night after night, constructing one esoteric theory in elaborate detail, a Faberge Egg of a theory, only to refute it the next night with a different equally elaborate concept. Okay, maybe he was visited by God back in 1974 but even so couldn't he just accept that and move on? Apparently not. He just kept at it, year after year for eight years and, really, had he survived his strokes in 1982 does anyone doubt he'd be back to it once he got out of the hospital. I'm inclined to believe Tessa Dick who suggested that Phil was essentially going to write a dissertation and that the **EXEGESIS** is a series of research notes that, one day, would have been condensed down into a coherent, single book. Phil just

couldn't stop taking notes. Maybe **VALIS** is that dissertation Phil was working on -- except if that were true than the **EXEGESIS** would have ended in early December 1978 when Phil sent the manuscript to his agent in New York. As we know Phil kept at it almost until the day he died.

There are certainly aspects of the **EXEGESIS I** do admire, particularly how well it is edited. The inclusion of the Claudia Bush letters, by way of an introduction, was inspired. The commentary notes are brilliant; in some ways I prefer them to the actual entries and taken together they are a sort of biography of Phil and his times. I have to say I very much enjoy Phil's self-exploration of his oeuvre, parsing his novels and short stories, searching for clues as to their true meaning (of which, I guess, he was unaware when actually writing them originally), sort-

ing them into categories, scuffling them around from entry to entry, such as he did circa 1977:

The info conveyed chronologically in the sequence of books is interesting.

- 1) **EYE** plural & subjective worlds
- 2) **JOINT** world as simulated deliberately
- 3) **STIGMATA** plural hallucinated worlds concocted by an evil magician-like deity

4) **UBIK** messages of assistance penetrating the simulated world(s) "from the other side" by/from a salvific true deity

5) **MAZE** simulated world fabricated by us, to escape an intolerable actuality

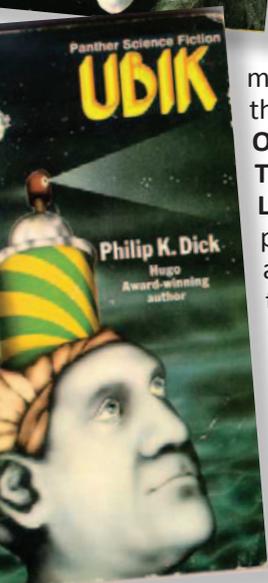
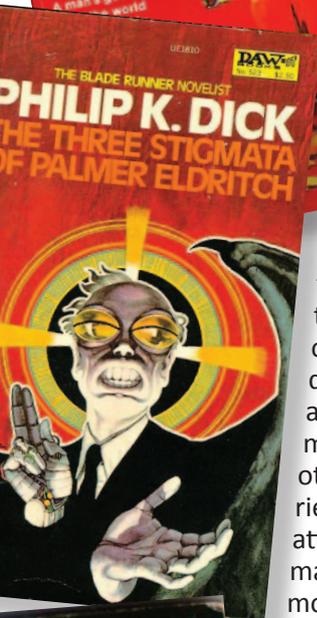
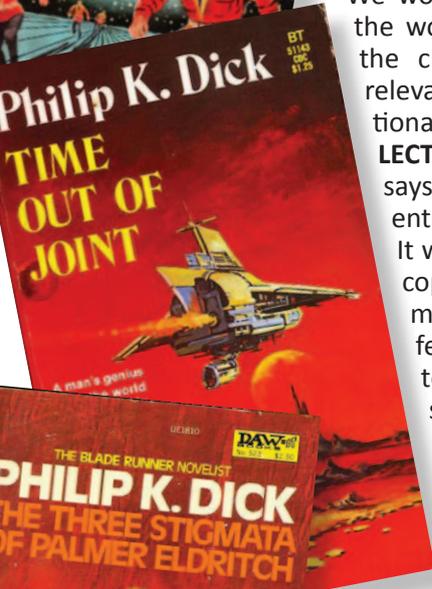
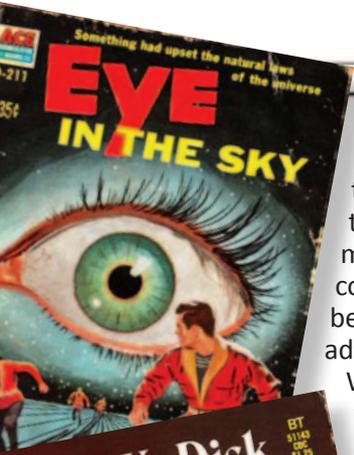
6) **TEARS** the nature specifically of the actuality (an intolerable one -- the BIP Acts)

7) **SCANNER** buried memories connected with lost identity; & protospeech breaking through, not into world as in **UBIK** but inside a person's head. Two psychoi one in each brain hemisphere, each with its own name & characteristics.

Plus such stories as "Imposter," "Retreat Syndrome," "Electric Ant," "Human Is" & "Precious Artifact," a very good one. & related themes in **TIME-SLIP**, **MITHC**, **PENULTIMATE TRUTH**, **GAME-PLAYERS**, also even **UNTELEPORTED MAN**, (**ANDROIDS DREAM** treats memory-identity theme).

I do find this sort of stuff fascinating. Phil speaks of these titles as composing a single work, what he refers to as "one unfolding true narrative" and later on as a "metanovel." I half expect someone to publish all of





these books and stories as one continuous volume someday. For that matter, with e-text, any one of us could do such a volume, and it could be a unique, personalized narrative addressing our own particular needs. We wouldn't even have to include the works in toto but instead just the chunks that are particularly relevant to us perhaps with additional bits and pieces of the **SELECTED LETTERS**, interviews, essays and speeches and, naturally, entries from the **EXEGESIS** itself. It would have a print run of one copy – but there would be as many versions as there are different individuals willing to go to the trouble of compiling such a collection.

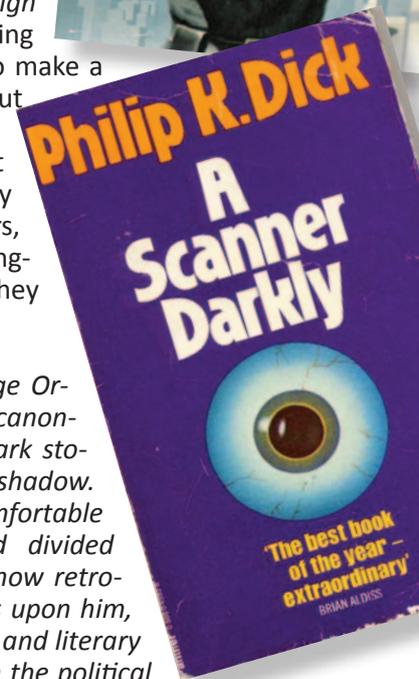
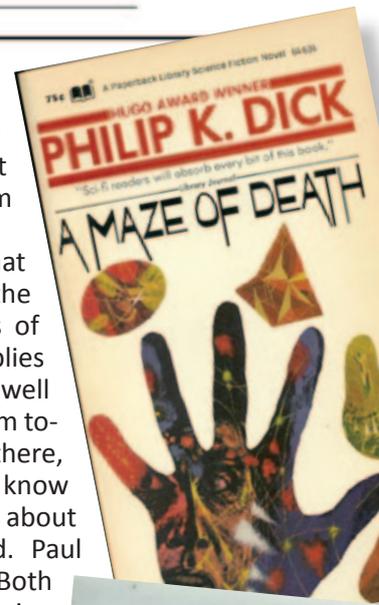
Of course, that way lies madness, which is what the **EXEGESIS** more or less encourages. You can't read too much of it without getting caught up in it like the game at the end of **THE ZAP GUN** that traps the alien invaders. You may consider the previous paragraph as an example of this effect, ricocheting off a random entry into some wild concept of a private PKD novel, one made only for me. But the **EXEGESIS** is mostly about other issues than Phil's books and stories. Those issues, frankly, have little attraction for me. Things like homoplasmate, acosmism, orthogonal time, the morphological realm – the "crazy parts" one might say – have no resonance with me at all. I don't believe in them in the way that I do believe in, you know, **UBIK**, **TIME OUT OF JOINT**, **THREE STIGMATA**, **MARTIAN TIME SLIP**, and **TIMOTHY ARCHER**. And **VALIS**, too, I have to admit even though most people would wonder why I can accept in a novel the very concepts I cannot abide in the **EXEGESIS**. Good point and one I am not sure how to answer except to say that, to me, **VALIS** is ultimately sane and the **EXEGESIS** is...not so sane. The **EXEGESIS** we have, all 900-plus pages of it, is reportedly only half of the total manuscript. What in the world can the other 900 pages have to say? Why would anyone compose such a

thing? Can we fairly say that Phil couldn't stop himself? And isn't the inability to stop yourself a form of madness?

I said at the beginning that "on the one hand" I'm fine with the **EXEGESIS** fading from the pages of the mainstream press. That implies an "on the other hand" belief as well and, indeed, on that other hand I'm totally glad the **EXEGESIS** is still out there, disturbing people. You probably know that the Estate was a little nervous about letting the **EXEGESIS** be published. Paul Williams was likewise hesitant. Both thought that bringing Phil's obsessive investigations into 3-4-74 would do his reputation no good at all. They were right. A passing remark in the Wall Street Journal (March 24, 2012 page C5) refers to "the lunatic outsider sci-fi writer Philip K. Dick." "Lunatic outsider" is a new descriptor for Phil in my experience and not a happy one. I think it likely that this designation come directly from the publicity surrounding the **EXEGESIS**. As David Gill pointed out at his Total Dickhead site: "the *Exegesis* is hardcore theological speculation, an endeavor that many in our current milieu feel to be pointless, and what's worse, the sign of a degraded mind." That being true, the **EXEGESIS** is going to make a lot of people think twice about Phil.

But consider this point by Daniel Silliman in his essay "Cyberpunk, Orwellian Fears, and the Faces of Tyranny: Changes in the Future, and What They Tell Us about What We Fear:"

*In recent years, George Orwell has received the rites of canonization. Anyone who writes dark stories of the future does so in his shadow. All the groups he made uncomfortable during the complicated and divided times in which he wrote are now retroactively conferring high status upon him, bestowing on him full political and literary rank. He has gained stature in the political*



dialogue, being invoked directly and indirectly on matters of tyranny and its outworks in the details of information, technology, and society. He holds a place in great literature and is counted among our secular saints. But this should give us pause, for a prophet honoured, a prophet recognized, is a prophet tamed. The respected prophet is a prophet whose time has passed. This is especially true of those who write of and from paranoia, stigma, and isolation.

I believe we can all see how simple it is to replace “George Orwell” with “Philip K. Dick” with exactly the same results. Phil’s books are deeply subversive of “consensual reality.” That’s what makes them so remarkable and so continually relevant to our lives here in the 21st Century. Too late to ignore or consign to the trash heap of pulp science fiction, the powers-that-be have turned Phil into a simple commodity: raw material for some forgettable movie or the subject of some dense, post-modern journal article. In both instances the point is to get away from what Phil wrote about to, instead, some interpretation that neutralizes the message. Oh, they are in it to make a buck or make a reputation of course. I don’t believe in a conscious conspiracy to neutralize Phil’s disturbing depiction of our real world. It’s funny, though, that the aspects of his work we almost always identify as peculiarly “phildickian” – unstable reality, conspiracy, inauthentic humans, suspicious machines, altered perception – are now comfortably ensconced in our culture. They hardly raise an eyebrow when they are acknowledged at all. They have, become, in fact, mere forms of entertainment and for that I think we can thank Hollywood. On the printed page where they are so richly detailed and enmeshed in the lives of fully realized

characters they are instead still quite unnerving.

Which is why the **EXEGESIS** is such a wild card. The standard messed-up-reality tropes are still there but mixed within hundreds and hundreds of pages of dense theology: frustrating, idiosyncratic, often unintelligible, agonizingly repetitive, funny, profound, heart-breaking and, finally disturbing. I can attest to this even having sampled only a small portion. It’s discouraging to read but heartening to realize that here is Phil once again upsetting the universe.

Actually we don’t have to reference Orwell at all in this regard. Michael Swanwick summed up the situation precisely years ago in the pages of the New York Review of Science Fiction (no. 70, June 1994):

## The New York Review of Science Fiction

**“The lunatic outsider sci-fi writer Philip K. Dick.”**

*His career did indeed takeoff after his death, and this fact is not coincidental. A dead PKD is a manageable commodity, where alive he was a loose canon. He remembered (and published) versions of business and personal relationships wildly at variance with what actually happened. He denounced people the FBI. He appeared at friends’ homes high on drugs or maybe aberrant visions of the truth, and made terrible scenes. In short, he was uncannily like the heroine of George Bernard Shaw’s Saint Joan, a wild card from God, someone whose business it was to trash the status quo, somebody who has a better purpose for your life than the smug quotidian ends to which you have put it. Somebody you don’t really want back.*

The **EXEGESIS** is the “wild card from God” come back to life.



## THE COSMIC PUPPETS: An Exploration by Barbara Hyde

© July 1992

When I first read **The Cosmic Puppets** a few years ago I thought it lacked the depth of PKD's later novels. Being his first novel I thought it natural that it would contain less intellectual diversions and hidden symbolism than his later works. I was wrong. It turned out to be a philosophical maze. The story depicts the history of Western dualist thought from its origins in ancient Zoroastrianism to the modern day dialectical theories. Dick created a story that reflects the religions and ideologies of our society, a story of our reality as it would be if these ideologies were taken literally and objectively.

Structurally, the story is hinged on the Zoroastrian myth of two archetypal beings, one good and the other evil. This myth expresses the dual nature of human perception and includes our persistent hope for a Savior who will abolish evil and make a heaven on earth. I believe Dick felt Zoroastrianism to be the origin of dualistic ideology because **The Cosmic Puppets**, being the effigy of dualism, is rooted in this myth.

We know that Dick meant for us to compare the story with the myth because he had the character of Dr. Meade give a brief summary of the myth when he described his interpretation and understanding of the situation in Millgate. According to Dr. Meade there are two opposing spirits: Ormazd is the spirit of light and good - the builder. Ahriman is the spirit of darkness and evil - the wrecker. Ormazd creates and Ahriman distorts. These two entities have agreed to spend thousands of years fighting each other for control of Creation.

At some point in their struggle Ahriman rent the sky and came to earth. The sky closed and he found himself trapped in the material universe until the end of time. Ormazd, arriving later, then cast Ahriman and his demons

into a hell in the center of the earth. But it was too late. Creation was already corrupt and distorted by Ahriman and he remains within the material realm to continue his abominable work until the resurrection of the Final Body when all is made good once more. This myth, which is similar to the Christian Armageddon, is the basic plot of **The Cosmic Puppets**.

The Creation myth is allegorized at the beginning of the story where Mary, the daughter of Dr. Meade, creates animals out of clay. Then Peter Trilling comes along and distorts her creation. This is how the Zoroastrian myth starts, with the Creator creating and the Destroyer destroying.

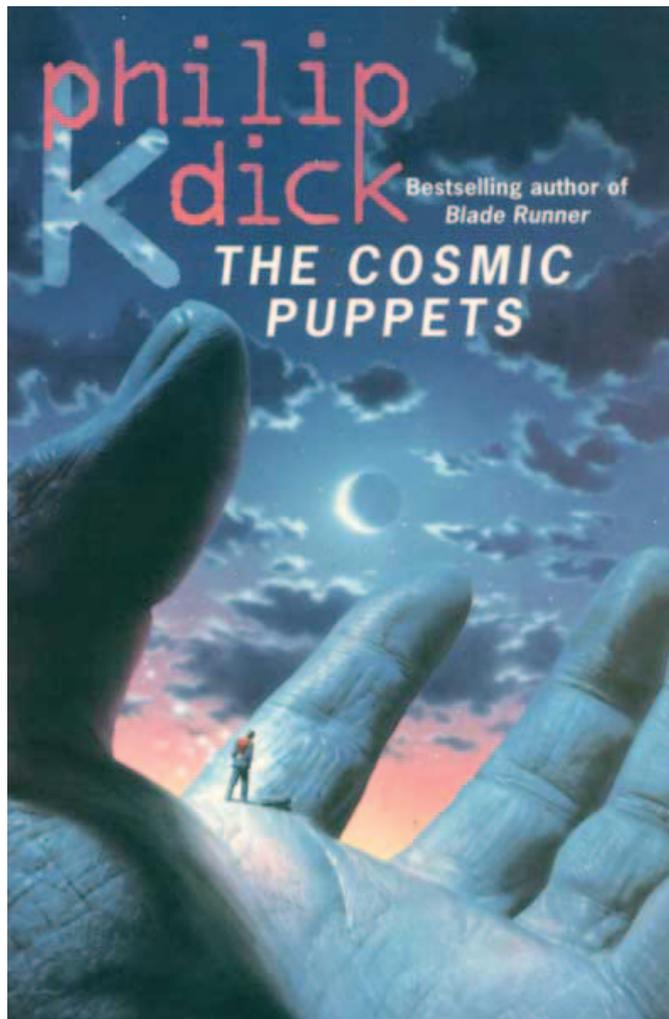
There is a daughter in the myth, but this daughter doesn't match the character of Mary. Another female character in the myth, Spand-Armatis, is Ormazd's wife. She has the multi-faceted role of wife, mother, and daughter. Spand-Armatis, or Mary, represents the typical feminine attributes of nature or Mother Earth, the regenerative force.

Mary is versatile. In the end she becomes fluid and everlasting. Dick gave much to this character, making her encompass all facets of the female essence. He eliminated any negative connotations completely. He was kind to woman, giving her image respect.

The myth tells of the whore who lures Ahriman into the final battle with Ormazd. In their appropriation of the myth, the Jews and Christians gave the term a negative connotation. This led to woman being blamed

for starting the battle between good and evil. Instead of questioning the existence of evil, they stopped short at the translation of the word "whore" and made Eve guilty of the fall of man. They did not go on to acknowledge the outcome of the cosmic battle which brought about the resurrection of the Final Body, the heaven on earth.

Dick, with the character of Mary, changes this image of woman, going beyond the biases of the predominant Western ideals. He saw that although the woman



was called whore in the Zoroastrian myth, she was a positive force for humanity. Without her Ahriman never would have been defeated. He would have remained in the material realm and continued to distort everything. In realizing this, Dick removed the burden placed on woman by the Judeo-Christian ideology which blames her for the fall. Dick set woman free from original sin and put her in a more proper perspective.

Ted Barton, the protagonist in the story, is Gayomart, the Blessed Man, Christ. He is also something else. He is the natural man, the man who is not contaminated by the change that reified Millgate. He is man before the fall, the non-reified man who was not present when the change or reification took place. He is free from the original assumptions and biases of those who are distorted.

Dick expressed other philosophical and sociological ideas in this story. The main theme is the history of the dualistic concept. The Zoroastrian myth is used as the basic skeleton of the book and expresses the dualistic ideology of Western religions. The philosophical dualism, the dialectic theories, emerge with the interactions in the story. Just as our philosophical thought has expanded from its origins, the storyline changes to encompass and address the dualism of today.

There are many dualist and dialectic theories. Dick probably studied them all. I have chosen Hegel as my reference because he is the one with whom I am most familiar.

Hegel developed a method which he applied to the mind, whereby consciousness in realizing itself abolishes itself by creating its own negation, and as a result passes into a higher mode of unity with its opposite. Eventually the human spirit and the world spirit, out of the act of definite negation, will evolve to a state of absolute knowledge or pure truth.

The dialectic method by which an idea (thesis) is challenged by its opposite (antithesis), then reconciled into a new idea (synthesis) was applied by Hegel to both the human spirit and the world spirit. Hegel believed the human spirit and the world spirit have evolved together through a dialectical history of conflict and synthesis to become refined as an existence of absolute knowledge.

## “Ted Barton... is man before the fall”

In essence, this is the same as the Zoroastrian and Judeo-Christian beliefs in two opposing forces battling until a new and better world evolves.

**The Cosmic Puppets** symbolizes this process of dialectic history. It represents the struggle of consciousness as it tries to transcend the objective false reality and replace it with the ideal subjective reality. Ormazd

is the thesis, Ahriman the antithesis, and the Millgate Ted Barton remembers the synthesis. The definite negation is all the action in Millgate which leads to the realization of the pure truth when Dr. Meade transforms into the symbol of absolute knowledge, Ormazd. When Dick describes this transformation, he mentions the husk of

Meade’s human form left behind. Meade has transformed into the God of Light. By having Ormazd taking Barton up with him, he takes our consciousness into this realm of pure thought where it dangles in the ultimate creative space.

At this point, held by his heel in space, Barton experiences Christ consciousness. He is become the Hanged Man of the tarot, the crucified Christ. He is made aware of the sacred energy that pulses through all existence. The unconscious is now made conscious. Dick has awakened both the human spirit and the world spirit to true consciousness.

He has turned around society’s values and brought equilibrium to the duality in reality. Out of the negation came the true reality, undistorted.

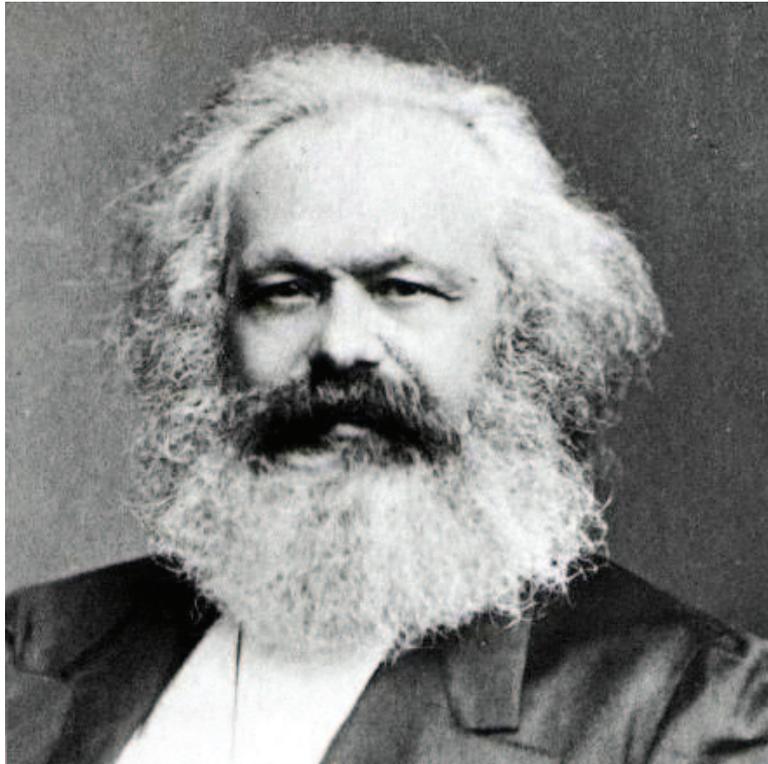
Dick depicts the conflict we experience between subjective and objective reality most clearly when Ted Barton first enters Millgate and finds his subjective memory is different from the Millgate he experienced in objective reality. The characters are continually faced with this dilemma, especially the Wanderers. They are outcasts from Ahriman’s distortion and spend their lives trying to bring back the memory of their objective reality. They have a lot of trouble living in the distortion. They must close their eyes to blot it out and count their steps. The Wanderers represent

the thought processes of our mind. They are lost, confused, and distorted. They search in a blind void for absolute knowledge, the true reality, but they can’t remember it.



The philosophy of Marx is the next step in the history of dualist thought. A resemblance to Marxism in **The Cosmic Puppets** is apparent. Dick went beyond Marxism. Although Dick does not address the socio-economic class conflict as the dialectic force at work in our reality, he doesn't ignore the economic factor altogether. He uses it as part of the distortion.

The part of the real Millgate Barton misses most is the park. This has significance, as the park is a symbol of the Garden of Eden, the paradise before the fall. In the distorted Millgate the park is replaced by old, rotting and deserted stores, the symbols of the old structure of capitalism. To bring back the park was an important step in bringing back the true reality. It was the first step. Dick felt we should replace the old rotting capitalist structure with something natural. With this symbolic transformation he acknowledges the part capitalism plays in distorting reality, and



the importance of replacing it. He knows that the larger conflict is between our idea of what reality should be and the objective reality we experience.

What Dick did with Zoroastrianism, Marx did with Hegel. He brought the myth into reality. Where Hegel used abstract and historical ideas to support his dialectic method, Marx applied the method to the reality of capitalist industrialization. He turned Hegel's ideological theory from abstract concepts of spirit and thought into the experienced reality of capitalism.

When Dick made the gods human and alive, he brought the Zoroastrian myth into the reality of the story. When the gods became real, the subjective united with the objective. The myth now existed. It was real. This is where Dick was exceptionally creative with his scenario. The gods exist on one level as omnipotent deities and on another level as humans.

The deity Ahriman is Peter Trilling, a small boy.

He is afraid. He creates things that harm others. He has no self-realization. He is just there to distort. Although he seems harmless and vulnerable, he is very powerful. This character represents the existing social structure. He is the monster that nips at our heels while we are fighting to free ourselves from its domain. He is humanity not yet aware of absolute knowledge or true consciousness. The distortion he created is the false reality of false consciousness. The people of Millgate whose reality is this distortion are the bourgeois who perpetuate the illusion of false consciousness.

Dick shows two types of reified consciousness in the story. Dr. Meade, the rest of the distortions, Will Christopher, and the Wanderers are crude empiricists trying to live and adjust to the distortion. Peter is the abstract utopian. He, along with his golems, rats, spiders, and snakes represents the capitalists of Big Business, their politicians and their enforcers. Strangely enough, Mary, too, is an abstract utopian; only her power to master the motion of objects is not meaningless. This reveals a quality in the nature of abstract utopianism that others have missed.

Will Christopher represents both the will of the workers and the lumpen proletariat - Marx's "refuse of all classes," the unemployed, the displaced and dispossessed. Will used to have his own business before the change and is, then, one of the petty bourgeoisie who have lost their small businesses due to Big Business predation. He was also an electrician, a skilled worker, and represents all the unemployed workers. He then becomes one of the homeless, degenerating as he tries to live in

the distorted society.

Will, although a drunken bum living in a cardboard box, knows that his world is distorted and that he is too. He has class consciousness. He lives within the false

## "The Wanderers are crude empiricists"

reality of false consciousness. Conscious of the distortion, he is unable to create the true reality. He develops the "Spell Remover," a device to bring back the true reality, then finds that it doesn't work either. With this example Dick is telling us that our technologies are useless in effecting the change.

Ted Barton had to work with Will Christopher before he could bring back a substantial part of the old, non-reified reality. Together they brought back the park. The symbol of the working force and the lumpen proletariat, Will Christopher must unite with true consciousness, Ted Barton, before he can turn back capitalism. Will had the desire to bring back Millgate; he just needed the true consciousness to help him do it.

Dr. Meade represents the intelligentsia. He knows about the change but does nothing to turn it back. He recognizes the contradiction and he tries to help the victims of the false reality, the Wanderers, but he does not want to change the social structure which created the Wanderers in the first place. He accepts the false reality because he lives comfortably within it.

Dick shows us that the intelligentsia are the most important agent of the change. He makes them the god of light. He places human destiny in their hands. There comes a point in the story where everything was failing. Even Ted Barton, the non-reified man, was losing control of reality. They were all being defeated. Their only hope was that Dr. Meade would realize who he really was; otherwise the battle was lost. But Meade did not want to become aware of his true identity because it meant his own demise. The intelligentsia do not want to realize their role in bringing about a new reality because they fear a loss of status. The catalyst that makes Meade realize that he must give up the false reality is the death of Mary - Mother Earth. When Ted Barton confronts him with his true identity he cannot deny it. When the intelligentsia are confronted with true consciousness, they will no longer be able to cling to the false reality.

When the true reality is realized and the old distortion abolished, things change to the way they would have been if the reification had not taken place. Will Christopher does not remember Ted at the end of the story. Consciousness, in eliminating Ahriman or evil, has no memory of it having existed. Evil is no longer conscious to us.

**The Cosmic Puppets** was written to show historical dialectics in action. In a sense our ideology is a definite negation of our civilization. Our reality contradicts the democratic ideals of freedom and equality. In essence Dick shows how philosophical ideologies fit in with our

modern reality. The battle between good and evil occurs in human and abstract forms. Although socio-economic conflict theory is similar, Dick depicts the conflict as being between a distorted social structure and true consciousness. The battle is fought for control of the earth. When

the battle is won, the earth will be rejuvenated and society reconstructed.

*(This essay originally appeared in #3 of For Dickheads Only and is reproduced by kind permission of the Author and Editor).*

## ***"What Dick did with Zoroastrianism, Marx did with Hegel."***



Illustration by Perry Kinman © 2012

## ***"Everyone loves the Papoola"*** *by Perry Kinman*

## DO ARTISTS DREAM OF A PHILIP K. DICK MOMENT?

By Robert Jiménez

© March 2012

As I took the print of my painting A PHILIP K. DICK MOMENT to the framers, I was hit yet again with the strangest feeling. A mix of surreality and delight. Here I was dropping off a canvas print to be framed and sent off to Tessa Dick, Phil's 5th wife. The very one who shared his life as V.A.L.I.S. gave up its information...

I'd been reading Phil's work since my early teens. I was at a local Waldenbooks and was intrigued by the cover of **The Man In The High Castle**. I picked it up, read it and shortly after had my first viewing of *Blade Runner*. From that point I read all I could by Phil. If I recall correctly, that was a point in Phil's literary life where there weren't many of his books in print, the Vintage reissues a few years away. But, I read what I could find, ordered the PKD Society Newsletter back issues, later bought and read those Vintage reissues, the collected Letters and then Lawrence Sutin's biography. His work, his life, and the Phil I knew from his letters moved me and influenced me in many ways and all this then came to influence my painting.

I had plans to paint a portrait of Phil for some time. I suppose like many artists who incorporate pop culture elements in their work, there is a litany of images and references from my youth that stream through my conscious and sub-conscious mind and inform my art. In my case along with comic book images, lyrical and film references, there has been the occasional image of an author that grabs hold of my attention and then may work its way into my art. Among Kafka, Paul Auster and others there was Phil...I had done a digital illustration of Paul Auster and wanted to do one of Phil but that was around the time that my medium would change. I had gotten into Tiki art

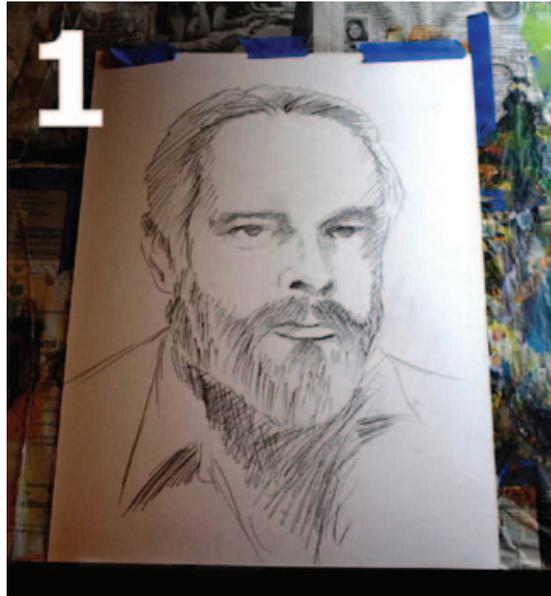
right around the time my second daughter was born and my art had progressed to more complex digital paintings, primarily humorous ones of Tiki's and Fez wearing chimps. Encouraged by a few painter friends I picked up acrylics and began working on paintings. In between some Pulp styled art and a chimp painting I decided to finally tackle the images of Phil that had been lingering (loitering?) in the back of my mind.

I knew the painting would incorporate surreal elements. Although my work falls into what is called Pop Surrealism, due to the inclusion of the aforementioned Tikis and chimps, outlandish settings and sarcastic humor, I had never really worked on a painting that was made up of multiple surrealistic elements. I thought that the nature of Phil's work and many of the events of his life could be best represented in a painting by working with surrealism.

I searched Google for as many pictures as I could find of him to aid in achieving his likeness, which is an area of my art I sometimes struggle with, and began sketching out the painting. I tend not to do much sketch work so I quickly settled on one (Fig. 1) and began the painting. I knew I wanted to incorporate sheep, but didn't want to fall into images of robotic or android sheep which I often find border on the cliché. I had the thought of sheep being counted, as insomniacs may do to bring on sleep, and envisioned them jumping a fence...then the idea of the sheep running and jumping over his shoulders came to me. To add to the surrealistic quality I thought I'd have the sheep jumping and disappearing into his goatee.

Of all the pictures I found of Phil, I thought the look of the full shaggy goatee to be his most interesting and felt it'd be humorous to have sheep jumping into it and have another peeking out of it. Also, I used the sheep and his goatee to incorporate "2-3-74". (Fig.2)

I thought that the presence of Phil's words would be an important visual element to the work so I scanned pages of my copies of his books and pasted them in col-



lage around his head and in the pink beam. I purposely blurred some pages and left certain words readable (Fig.3 and 4)



I also wanted to add Phil's friend, Bishop James Pike to the portrait and wanted to give him a mysterious vibe (which I guess directly relates to how I see him) by obscuring his face under the collar of Phil's shirt. (Fig.5)

The encompassing swirls that surround Phil's head are a direct result of the line work I implemented to portray the pink beam. These swirls branch off in different directions, ricocheting of Phil's head. They are basically abstract but I



did decide to loosely include the face of an owl, referencing his unfinished work. (Fig.6)

When I completed the painting, and was already into another, I suddenly had the thought to contact Tessa Dick. I had come across her blog when googling pictures of Phil. I wrote her a short email, telling her of my painting and directing her to my Zerostreet facebook page so she could see it. It was a great surprise to see her response in

my inbox later that day and a thrill to read that she loved the painting. She shared it on her facebook page and the work received favorable reviews by her friends. However, it was pointed out to me that his eye color was wrong. Tessa said they were a sky blue. I went back and made that last change to the painting.



I am so grateful for Tessa's response to the piece. As I mentioned here and to Tessa via emails, there was and still

is a sense of surrealism to my exchanges with her. That time of Phil's and Tessa's life, married and living with their son Christopher, and their experiences and the actual (and fictional accounts) of those moments, and the many letters Phil wrote....I lived that over many times through



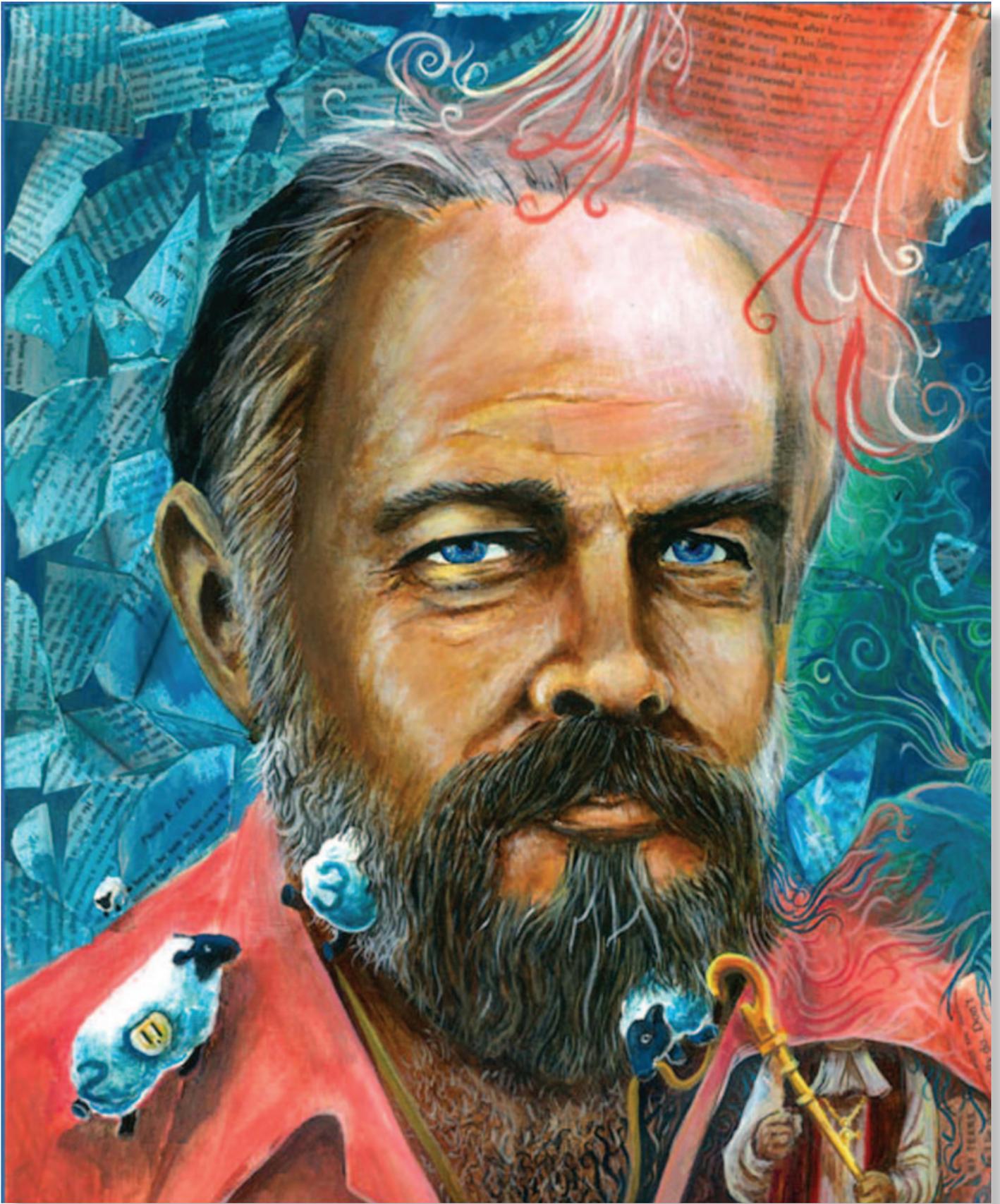
the reading of his letters, **VALLIS**, **Radio Free Albeuth**, and **The Transmigration of Timothy Archer** among others. It is such a thrill to me to know that she has experienced my work of Phil. And that she will be receiving

a print of this painting and that it may hang in her home.

More examples of **Robert Jiménez'** work can be found at:

Tiki Tower <http://www.tikitower.com>  
& Zerostreet <http://www.zerostreet.com>

**Full Portrait on Next page →**



A Philip K. Dick Moment by Robert Jiménez

**CONFESSIONS OF A CRAP COVER ARTIST:**

A review of the Houghton Mifflin Harcourt covers

By Nick Buchanan

© March 2012

The cover of a favourite book is the face of a good friend. It embodies all your happy memories and represents the character of the whole thing. Some of my Philip K. Dick books have been with me for over thirty years. Constant companions: the good, the bad and the ugly. All are treasured for the inner beauty of their rich texts. They have pride of place on my bookshelves. There are lurid pulps with beautiful illustrations which hint at dramatic scenes not found in the text. Others offer space landscapes; breathtaking in the scope of their visual imagination. There are cheap movie tie-ins and stunning wraparound illustrations by artists like Chris Moore. Then, sadly there are covers which relate to nothing and which mean nothing.

You can't judge a book by its cover but you can judge a publisher by its covers. Are they making an effort or not? Too many Philip K. Dick publishers look like they just don't care or aren't trying. Even worse, some defend poor efforts (which lack thought or commitment). How many times has something substandard been fortified with claims that it is 'ironic,' 'cool' or 'post-modern' - the last refuge of the inept and the unqualified. Small circles of unskilled critics champion those with no sense of design as the *designers of tomorrow* when they never even made it to *today*. Their lack of understanding of layout, illustration and typography are glaringly obvious to anyone who has studied and worked in these areas.

Let me make it clear that I am not against abstraction, experimentation or play, nor have I ever been conservative in my tastes. However, to play great Jazz you need to know your scales; to be a good lead guitarist you must first learn the patterns on the fret-board. You learn them so that

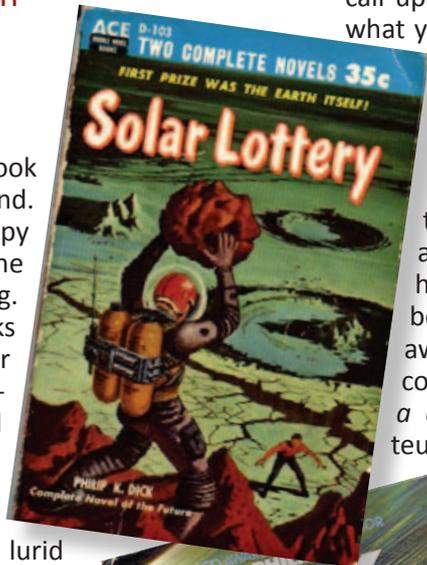
they become unconscious possibilities; options you may call upon depending on mood, direction and key. Then, what you play becomes a free, creative distillation of all that you have learned. Without such understanding (of any craft) one is destined only to make jangling 'noise' - reduced to mimicking the motifs of others. Ventriloquy instead of Art.

Picasso's abstracts were robust and interesting because he had first learned to paint in a representational way. In so doing, he familiarised himself with the complexities of reality, which then became a currency for his abstract work (i.e. an awareness of lines, angles, shapes, tones, textures, colours, etc.) As John Lassiter once said, "*Reality is a convenient measure of complexity.*" Many amateurs looking at a Picasso abstract say things like

'I could do that!' Yet, if you offer them a brush and paint, their efforts betray them and it is clear that they simply *can't do that*. Their results don't carry the learning and their marks are not invested with any level of understanding or visual awareness. They lack a sense of colour and they don't know how to relate forms in space.

In April 2010, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt acquired the North American publishing rights to Philip K. Dick. I always wait with keen anticipation when a designer has the task of providing fresh new covers for the Dick catalogue. It is always exciting. For each title, one wonders what they will do. Perhaps they will illustrate a key scene from the book? Or perhaps they will attempt to express the atmosphere of the story? Or a central idea (e.g. seeing behind the veil). Perhaps they will ignore the text altogether but will nevertheless delight us with their invention and skill. Perhaps they will try to convey the psychological atmosphere (menace, paranoia, uncertainty, etc.) Perhaps the typography itself can be used to convey something to do with each story?

In the case of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, the results were disappointing, though colourful. The cover for **The Man in the High**





Castle was typical of their new house style. It used bold colours and a white text box containing the book title in the (old typewriter) font 'courier' (or similar) with the over-sized initials of the author in caps buttressed up against the lower left corner of the book face. The text box outline drew attention to itself by being erratic; it is sometimes broken, sometimes closed and sometimes has notches at right angles (see **The Transmigration of Timothy Archer**). Such motifs invite you to look for patterns only to find they are purely arbitrary lacking decorative value or meaning.

These book jackets look like the product of ad-hoc decisions; **Lies Inc.** has an image of a portion of sky tinted red whereas **The Transmigration of Timothy Archer** has what appears to be a slice of polished gemstone or shell. **The Man in the High Castle** shows us a red liquid in close up (with some bubbles near the bottom) and **The Zap Gun** has what appears to be a bank of neon lights. These images all look suspiciously like they were culled from stock image photos in a very slap-dash fashion. There's nothing wrong with using stock images, except of course *if you use them mindlessly*. This is design on the cheap and Houghton Mifflin Harcourt should know better.

The cover image for **VALIS** has at least a tentative link with the book's content in that it has radiating lines of light (which might suggest a Godly presence), and part of the cover is pink (perhaps relating to the pink beam?) **Eye in the Sky** has an image of locusts on the cover - which at least feature in the story; likewise, the cover of **The Crack in Space** features a mantle of ice (which might be a metaphor for cracking?). Then there's

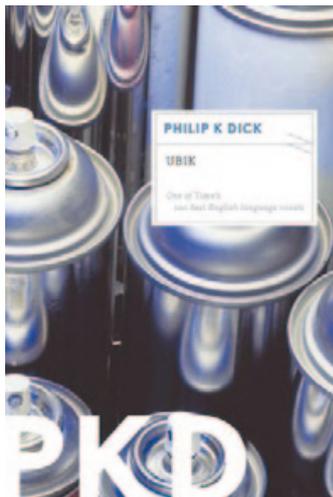
**Counter Clock World** with its very literal clock mechanism and cogs. **UBIK** has a view of unbranded aerosol cans, which comes some way toward the books content - but why couldn't they turn them into the proper **UBIK** 'brand'?

As a Designer, one wonders what the brief was... 'Do some Philip K Dick Covers which don't relate to the books contents and then do some others which do.' Their thematic inconsistency suggests erratic sloppiness rather than artistic planning.

Then there's the typography. Now this is definitely done by someone who hasn't a clue what to do with type (I am sorry but there is no other way to put it). When it is done well, typography is one of the purest forms of design. The alphabet is a wonderful set of abstract shapes

which, arranged well, make a kind of music - and just as with music, the spaces are as important as the 'notes.' In the hands of a skilled typographer *it positively sings!* There is a beauty in the way the type relates letterforms to the spaces around them (as well as to the borders of any given design). I use the word 'letterforms' because that is the way the best typographers think of them - as shapes which emerge from groups of letters. Incidentally this is why many typographers are renowned for not noticing spelling mistakes - they are so tuned to seeing the shapes they are organising that they no longer 'read' the words.

Some might think it is simply a matter of getting



the words in the right order, but good typographers know the huge impact of their choices - the colour of the font, its size, character, kerning, leading, italic or emboldened, etc.

For example consider the huge impact it would make if Burger King changed it's font and colours from its usual (right) to this:



It is obvious that these fonts and colours represent a very different proposition. The shape of the letters encourage us to 'feel' something different when we read the words. This is reinforced by the dark green blend which suggests sophistication (the opposite of the brash primary colours in the original). The thin white pinstripes further the elegance and a sense of refinement. The point here is NOT that Burger King should change their logo (they shouldn't - it works and it communicates well to its target audience - it shouts, and it especially attracts children which is what it is meant to do [start 'em young] - there is a sense of fun about it and it is legible from a long way away etc.) Of course there are ethical concerns here too which are worth exploring. But this piece is not about morality, it's about semiotics. The point is that graphic design and typography *play a huge part* in communicating something to the 'reader.'

So, why am I so disappointed in the typography on the Houghton Mifflin Harcourt covers? Take a look at those white text boxes which contain the book titles and the authors name. Now look at the white spaces around the text. See how ugly and haphazard they are? There is nothing 'organized' or designed here, they are simply random and left to chance. Some are left-justified (like **Eye in the Sky**) others have no justification (like **The Crack in Space**).

The 'courier' font used is so 'thin' it is bullied off the page by the huge and muscular 'PKD.' Surely the titles should be more important than this? They are very weak. And with **UBIK** the Authors name and Title now share a space with a positive review 'One of Time's 100 best English Language novels.' (*it was number 94 by the way and the only one of Dick's books to make it!*) Quoted reviews don't feature on any other books in the Houghton Mifflin

Harcourt series featured here.

**UBIK**, being just four letters, looks positively lost in its text box (perhaps that's why they put the review quote in there to bolster it a little)? The results are so ugly and ill-considered. The size of the font is obviously so wrong being so easily intimidated by the bold use of colour in the overall imagery. There are pretensions of design here as if this were all done knowingly - however there is a genuine difference between violin sounds from someone who can play the instrument and sounds from someone who can't.

And that's the essence of my complaint - there is no craft. It is as if in the land of post-modernism you don't need the craft, the skills or to understand the language - it's easy, anyone can do it! But as I said at the start, Picasso had first to learn the craft before he could distill it into abstraction and visual decisions. Making random noises is not the same as playing an instrument. Blind chance is no artist. As Josef Albers once said:

**"To design is to plan and organize, to order, to relate and to control. In short it embraces all means opposing disorder and accident."**

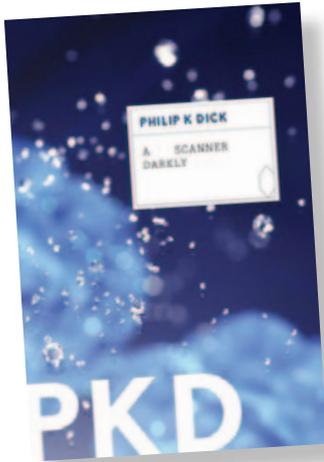
Design involves decisions - even the font you are reading now has been deliberately chosen; selected because it feels more modern than **Times New Roman**; it has a certain formality about it because it wants to be taken seriously (it is neither throwaway like **Comic Sans**,

nor is it elegant or too formal like *Monotype Corsiva*); if you magnify this page (or look closely at the Albers quote above) you will see that the font's corners are slightly rounded which gives it a friendly feel and stops it being cold or clinical. In other words, there's a reason for my choice of the font **Calibri**. A deliberate attempt at communication - some level of understanding that *it will communicate something whether I am aware of it or not*. In this sense

fonts are neither good nor bad, they are simply appropriate or inappropriate.

Other covers (see next page) in the Houghton Mifflin Harcourt series are equally arbitrary; featuring a bronze bust (**The Man Who Japed**), a child's face in marble (**The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch**), concentric circles of light (**The Penultimate Truth**) and close ups of fibres (**The Simulacra**). It's a garage-sale of odds and ends

**"They have delivered a set of covers which would better serve IKEA"**

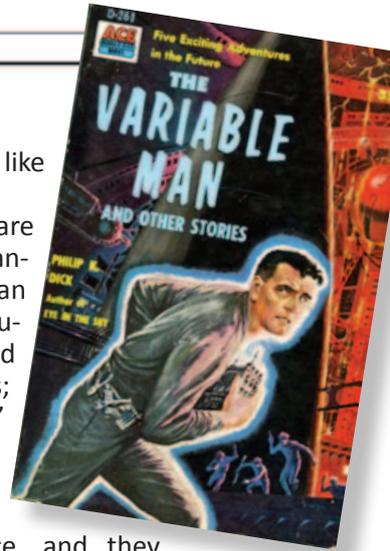


- so disparate it makes one wonder whether any criteria was used to inform such choices. Phil deserves better. Much better. Unless of course you think 'colourful and striking' is as good as it gets? The typography is hopeless on all of them.



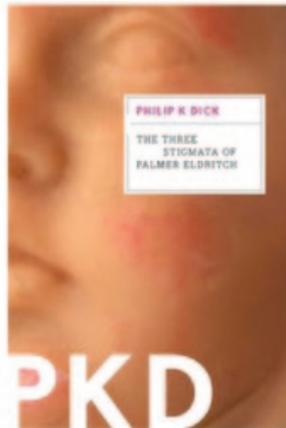
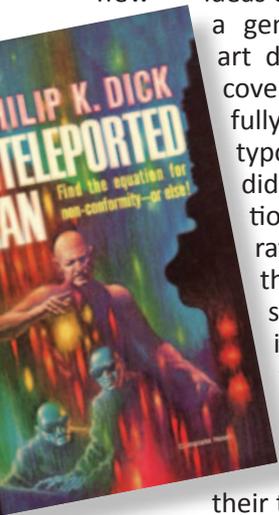
your bank shouldn't look like your hairdressers.

These Harcourt covers are self-important, overly mannered, and could be an equal solution to any author. They refer instead only to themselves; they are 'design' talking to design. A monologue dressed up as a dialogue. They should instead speak to their target audience, and they should have *something to say* (either about the writer, his themes, his ideas, the text of each particular book, the wonder of other worlds, people and places, etc.) Instead, these covers signify nothing (in both the Shakespearean and the semiotic sense).



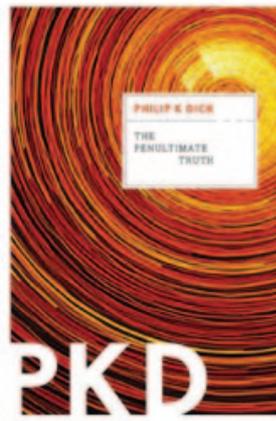
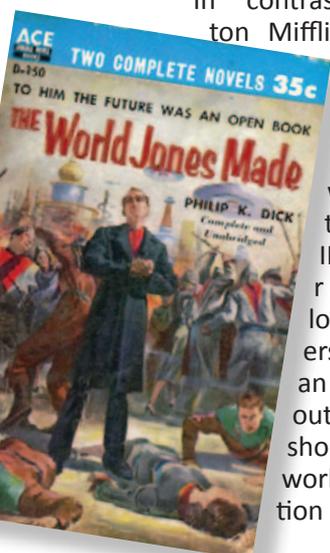
the text within. However they were all closer in spirit to the wonder and mystery of text inside than Harcourt's cold covers. They presented new vistas, new modes of travel, new species, new ideas even!

There was a generosity to the art direction - most covers were beautifully painted - with typography that didn't draw attention to itself, but rather, served the overall design. Despite being regarded as throwaway or trashy, these items are now prized for their true worth. *God indeed was in the trash.*



Some may feel that the stark austerity of the 'elements' of these covers shows a seriousness which might serve Dick's standing in the literary world. However there is a pomposity about these designs which is so self-conscious (look, I've been 'designed'). And as regards Dick's need to be taken 'seriously,' I think he allied himself much more with *popular* rather than *literary* circles. This is clear in a 1978 interview in *Aquarian Magazine*:

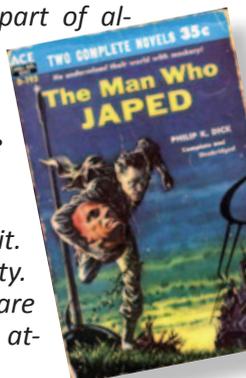
In contrast, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt have delivered a set of covers which would better serve IKEA (seriously,



**AQUARIAN:** "In terms of broad acceptance, science fiction has undergone quite a change in the last few years. Always considered a popular, inferior brand of writing, it has now been accepted, not only by the masses but by the academic community. Science fiction courses are now part of almost every English department, people are doing

theses and doctoral dissertations on science fiction. What do you think of all this?"

**DICK:** "I hate it. I just hope we can survive it. You know, we've survived complete obscurity. We survived complete condescension, the 'are you people really doing anything serious?' at-



titude. I hope we can survive acceptance. It's really the most dangerous thing.

You know, sometimes I think it's all a plot, to praise you and accept you and treat you like a serious literary form. Because in that way they can guarantee your demise.

The only thing that's worse than being treated as 'not serious' is being treated as 'serious.' I'd much rather be ignored. And this 'scholarly' science fiction criticism is the worst.

You know, if they can't

d e -  
s t r o y  
y o u

ignoring you, they can destroy you by annexing you.

They, the literary critics, write these incredibly turgid articles which see all this 'meaning' in your writing. The end result, I guess, is to drive all your readers away screaming." -- "An Interview with America's Most Brilliant Science-Fiction writer" by Joe Vitale. **The Aquarian**: October 11-18, 1978 (see PKD-OTAKU #4)

In November 2011 Harcourt published **The Exegesis of Philip K. Dick**. This would

provide any designer with a challenge. For here is a book whose scope embraces God, Identity, the nature of time and Consciousness; A book which documents an obsessive struggle to solve a problem (which ultimately cannot be solved). How does one provide a visual counterpart for the task of Sisyphus or the mystery of a numinous experience? Houghton Mifflin Harcourt's solution was much more satisfying than their aforementioned fiction covers. Right away we can see that the Typography has been skillfully prioritised by virtue of the different type sizes (a practice largely abandoned for the spine).

The mysterious nature of the book's content and the author's quest is echoed by the deformed soap bubbles which collide in the darkness. The fleeting beauty of their colours is but a moment

in time and will soon be lost - a great metaphor for the authors incredible experiences in February and March of 1974. The almond eye-shaped motif on the cover is part of

the christian fish symbol (beloved by devout car bumpers the world over). It continues on the spine and the back, and relates to Dick's pivotal doorstep experience when a woman with a fish symbol necklace called at Phil's house with some dental medication.

Dickheads everywhere know the significance; a guy (probably) looking at cleavage got a lot more than he bargained for.

The overall feel of this cover is much more accomplished than those in the fictional line. There is something appropriate about it. Something that 'works' for the **Exegesis**. The cover serves the book well. It fits.

As to the origins of the covers' main image - soap bubbles; they are part of a 'bubbles desktop' theme for Windows 7 (below). The fact that Houghton Mifflin Harcourt may have got their image 'cheap' does not necessarily mean that their design is flawed. The real measure is in what is done with what is found. In this case I think it has been used well and complements the mysterious, elusive themes of the **Exegesis**.

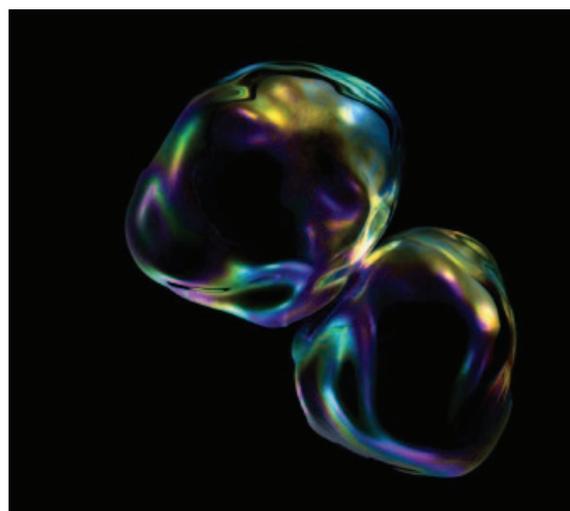
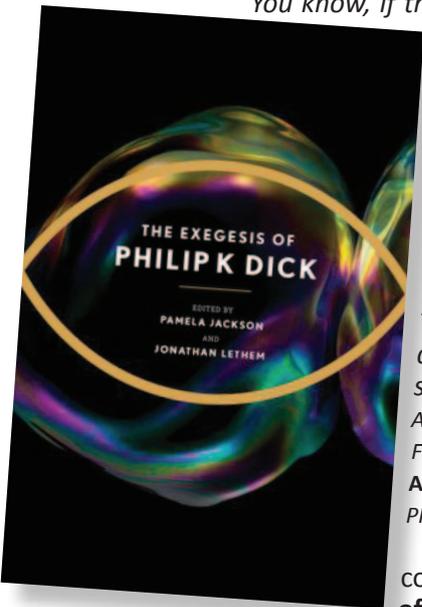
So, apart from the **The Exegesis of Philip K. Dick** cover, I think Harcourt have let us down; especially when

one considers the immense scope available with one of the most exciting authors (one ripe with so many ideas and fresh perceptions). What they have done is resort to cheap stock images and apply them in an altogether arbitrary fashion. This is publishing on the cheap. Where the old pulp style covers at least offered us *food for thought*, Harcourt have given us candy-floss and lemonade.

Isn't it sad when you get talking with someone really attractive only to find that they are immensely under-developed and have nothing to say. Their face will never be remembered as that of a good friend.

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## "And this 'scholarly' science fiction criticism is the worst"



**SIXTEEN FRAGMENTS OF A CHRONOLOGY OF CHANCE - 1 - The maze of Delmak-O**

by Andre Welling

© April 2012

**A Maze of Meaning**

The strange chapter “titles” in PKD’s novel **A Maze of Death** are known as a unique and baroque Dickensian oddity and have prompted the question if they have anything to do with the plot and overall content of the novel. They obviously don’t describe (or give a catch phrase or summary for) what’s going on in the corresponding chapters.

Or so it seemed to most observers and commenter I encountered: One popular theory is that these headings comment on some other polyencephalic dream-world adventure the Perseus-9 crew had lived through. So refer to anything, i.e. nothing.

For me it’s strange that a large number of them do seem to describe - in a more or less metaphoric way - what’s happening in the corresponding chapters, but the rest (basically fifty-fifty) completely fails (my) understanding (or rabid pattern-matching). That’s odd, too: You would expect either to find a “key” to the meaning of them all or that they all (or at least most of them) remain enigmatically impenetrable.

Was PKD just stoned when writing these? Playing ‘the Game’?

Did he ever comment on them?

Or where they written by his unknown intern?

Here’s my match-making:

**1 IN WHICH BEN TALLCHIEF WINS A PET RABBIT IN A RUFFLE**

That chapter deals exclusively with Ben Tallchief (highly significant; it is actually the only chapter where only a single crew member is portrayed) and he too wins out: His prayers have been heard and he’d ‘won’ a transfer to Delmak-O. That’s more like a lemon than a rabbit but even so: Match.

**2 SETH MORLEY FINDS OUT THAT HIS LANDLORD**

**HAS REPAIRED THAT WHICH SYMBOLIZES ALL MORLEY BELIEVES IN**

Clear match: The Walker-On-Earth appears to inform Morley that he had chosen a faulty noser (which would have killed him and his wife on the way to Delmak-O) and advises him to take another. The deity repairs Seth’s life. Say no more.

**3 A GROUP OF FRIENDS GATHER TOGETHER, AND SUE SMART RECOVERS HER FACULTIES**

Big introducing get-together on Delmak-O when the Morleys arrive (safely, thanks to the deity). Big Babbling. Sue Smart is introduced too, complaining that the others like to name her ‘dumb’ (but she ain’t, it’s explicitly said). Match.

**4 MARY MORLEY DISCOVERS THAT SHE IS PREGNANT, WITH UNFORESEEN RESULTS**

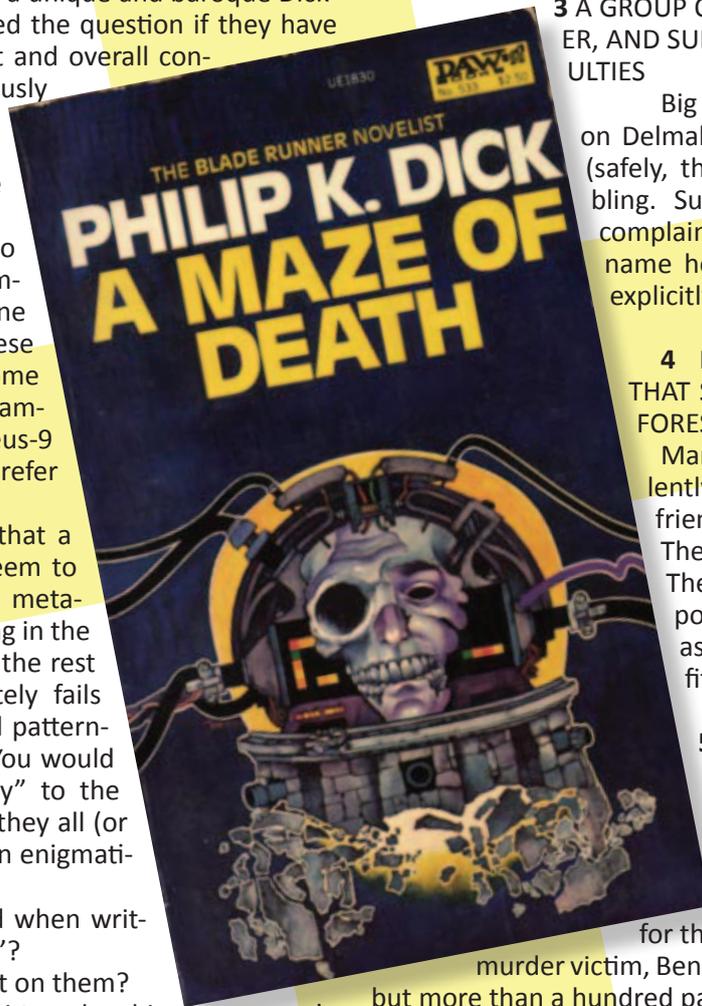
Mary Morley nudges Seth ‘violently’ in the ribs because he is friendly to pretty Suzie Smart. Then no more mention of her. The big belly of Seth Morley is pondered by Dr Babble. Mere associations. Nothing seems to fit. No match.

**5 THE CHAOS OF DR. BABBLE’S FISCAL LIFE BECOMES TOO MUCH FOR HIM**

Not much Babble activity during the chapter. Then, at the end, he is appointed for the autopsy of the colony’s first murder victim, Ben Tallchief. Too much? Not here but more than a hundred pages later we learn that it was Dr. Babble who killed Ben Tallchief with the tranquilizing gun. Babble was the colony’s first member who lost it and killed. Then almost all others followed him into the maze of death they formed as a polyencephalic unity. Match.

**6 FOR THE FIRST TIME IGNATZ THUGG IS UP AGAINST A FORCE BEYOND HIS CAPACITY**

Ignatz stands up against Wade Frazer but actually he is referred to in this chapter only once and briefly when he remarks while Frazer is organizing the vote: “You won’t get it, Frazer. No matter how badly you want it.” He then goes on smoking a “tobacco” cigarette and that is that for him during this chapter. Frazer, of course, didn’t “get it” so no force beyond capacity. Not really a match.



**7 OUT OF MANY INVESTMENTS SETH MORLEY REALIZES ONLY A DISSAPOINTING GAIN - MEASURED IN PENNIES**

Much Seth activity in the first half of the chapter (the latter deals exclusively with Tony and Suzie's death), he discovers that the "enemy" is not at all alien: "MADE AT TERRA35082R" is imprinted in the sharp-shooting mini-Building which attacked his wife. Later, when unexpectedly Russell arrives, he muses "Something to save us, something to doom us. It - the equation of everything - could go either way." The gain/loss situation is stochastically balanced by an overdose of uncertainty. Nothing gained but the pennies of his knowledge about this. Match.

**8 GLEN BELSNOR IGNORES THE WARNINGS OF HIS PARENTS AND EMBARKS ON A BOLD SEA ADVENTURE**

Now that's strange, an anti-match: Morley's "explorer" group in search of the Building ignores Belsnor's (their elected leader, i.e. their providing and caring father figure like Belsnor experiences himself in the dream which opens the chapter) warnings and embarks on a bold expedition into the unknown open. Belsnor very much doubts seeing them (all) back alive. He's right in this. One of his "children," poor Betty Jo Berm, will drown in the river from nowhere. But then why Glen Belsnor as child in the title, not Seth Morley or Betty Jo? I don't get it! Anti-Match!

**9 WE FIND TONY DUNKELWELT WORRYING OVER ONE OF MANKIND'S MOST ANCIENT PROBLEMS**

Sure we do! We find Tony deeply disturbed by the murder of Suzie Smart and pondering overall decay. He senses the vast malignity, and personal presence, of Man's age old enemy, the Form Destroyer. Then, in a bout of paranoid urgency, he worries himself into a state where he recognizes the Form Destroyer in old and harmless Bert Kosler and consequently stabs him to death. A mistake, he realizes, but then he is killed himself by grim Glen Belsnor. This sure is Tony's most worrisome chapter. Over and Out. Match.

**10 WADE FRAZER LEARNS THAT THOSE WHOSE ADVICE HE MOST TRUSTED HAVE TURNED AGAINST HIM**  
As part of a group out to question the Tench, Frazer's

part is only being suspicious of Russell and accordingly he asks the Tench which answers "Escape is out of the question." But it is Maggie Walsh who confronts the big issues by asking the Tench "Why are we alive?" and "Is there a god?" And it is Seth Morley who discovers that Russell is battle god Wotan and that the Goetterdaemmerung is on its way. Thus no Match.

**11 THE RABBIT WHICH BEN TALLCHIEF WON DEVELOPS THE MANGE**

What was that rabbit anyway? And developing the mange sounds pretty sick to me. Like open murder and mayhem as Ignatz Thugg now kills Maggie Walsh point-blank in broad daylight. Match, I claim. Too thin? OK, I don't get it, I admit. I would like to know the rabbit's color, white or hazy pink?

**12 ROBERTA ROCKINGHAM'S SPINSTER AUNT PAYS HER A VISIT**

Weird: Roberta Rockingham was visited and vanished in chapter 10. Here is no mention of her or any visiting. Morley gets shot. No match at all.

**13 IN AN UNFAMILIAR TRAIN STATION BETTY JO BERM LOSES A PRECIOUS PIECE OF LUGGAGE**

Come on, Betty Jo drowned herself back in chapter 9! Here Seth Morley discovers the vast ruin field of the dead city London. They are on Earth! No Delmak-O. No match either.

**14 NED RUSSELL GOES BROKE**

Boy, and how! From the shining heights of a know-it-all guard and big gun to the depth of lying on the floor, dead or dying, and getting his pockets and belongings ransacked by the "ginger" fingers of Mary Morley. Ideal Match.

**15 EMBITTERED, TONY DUNKELWELT LEAVES SCHOOL AND RETURNS TO THE TOWN IN WHICH HE WAS BORN**

For him more than for anyone else (it is related), Tony's "school" is the polyencephalic experience he is now forced to abort and return to the ship's reality which was his home for almost all of his life. (But he was not born on the ship.) But except for briskly approaching



the captain for having “killed him,” nothing much is said about him. A half-hearted match, I say, and do not claim it.

**16 AFTER THE DOCTOR EXAMINES HER X-RAYS, MAGGIE WALSH KNOWS THAT HER CONDITION IS INCURABLE**

Maggie Walsh is mentioned only once. When she wishes that the next fabricated world may be a warm aquatic world where they would be sea mammals, dolphin-like. There is a great need for deliverance in this wish, I felt. But what is important in this chapter is that the Intercessor delivers Seth Morley from evil and Mary Morley takes a noser to the Delmak-O colony on her own. Incurable yes, but no match.

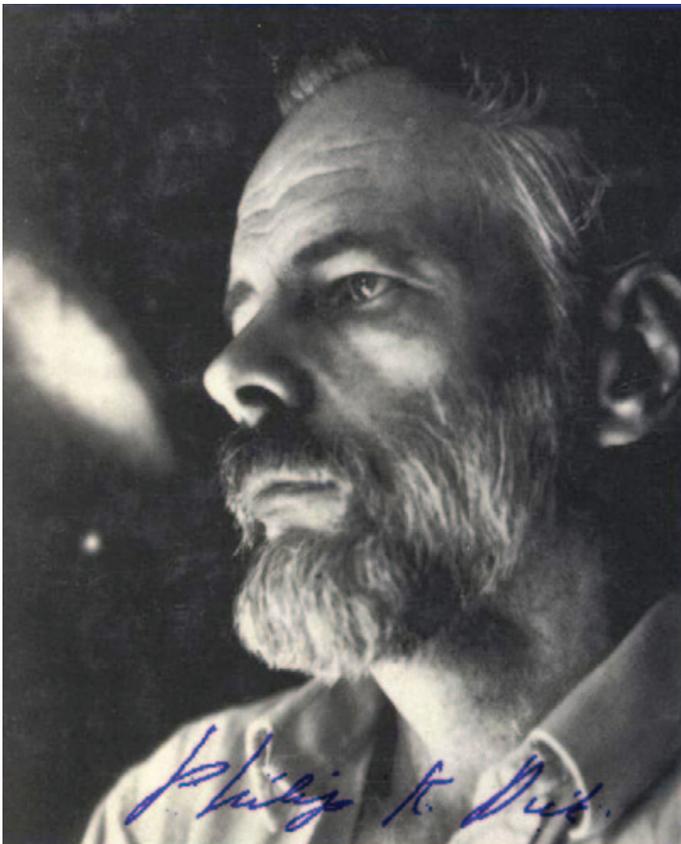
That are seven clear matches, and some more quite near.

So do they or don't they comment on the chapters? It appears to me that they do it half of the time which I find harder to explain than entirely or not at all. If they follow a previous polyencephalic dream-world adventure (meaning are random word-play with the novel's characters) shouldn't they be more off?

Maybe they are and I did not let them.

You are to judge, pilgrim. You re-enter the maze.

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# The Sea of Valis

by Perry Kinman

Joe Chip coins  
Empty Ubik cans  
Sun bleached and worn  
And new again  
Flickering change  
Over the steady roar  
Of undulating waves  
Upon the shore  
Of the sea of valis

Reams of paper  
Scattered about  
One word on each  
Bleeding out  
An item a place  
A person inscribed  
Inhaled and exhaled  
By the lumbering tides  
Of the sea of valis

Autonomic crabs  
Scavenge a flapple door  
Embedded in sand  
Dead cat dead no more  
A plastic head  
Rolls over a coral reef  
Dislodging the skull  
With the perfect teeth  
Of the sea of valis

By the risen cathedral  
Where land's end curls  
Staring out to sea  
A dark-haired girl  
False memories flashing  
In her steel eyes and teeth  
Chew-z never ends the  
Pain or the peace  
Of the sea of valis

**INSTEAD**

**by Lord Running Clam**

© April 2012

On this 30th anniversary of Philip K. Dick's death I think back to what I was doing on that sad day in March 1982. I remember other tragedies, of course, like being scared to death by the nuns in my convent school the day JFK was shot down in Dallas in 1963, and my beach vacation in the summer of 1969 when I fell in love with a pretty girl and Man landed on the moon, and that day Dale Earnhardt hit the wall at Daytona in 2001. But of 1982 I remember little; I was married and just had a baby and working the evening shift at a factory in Indiana. Don't remember much about it. I wasn't reading Philip K. Dick's stories at the time and now, 30 years later, the year is just gone. Like Philip K. Dick, gone. So, instead of distant memories I shall expand and adapt here something I wrote to Dickhead Marcin Stefanski in Poland during the run-up to the 2010 PKD Festival in Colorado.

As I write this (May 2010) I am in the middle of moving my household – boxes everywhere and all in disarray! But this computer is the last thing to go so picture me high in the Colorado Mountains at 0730 with the sun blazing in a dusty window and surrounded by boxes and a small pile of Philip K. Dick books which are essential to me as we prepare for the PKD Festival this summer. My last act before unplugging the computer is to write this article about what it is in the writing of Philip K. Dick that first interested me and that has maintained my interest for 28 years now. This is primarily his imagination, although I do like to read a story that speeds along – a good pot-boiler.

There's a quote by Philip K. Dick somewhere to the effect that *'He who defines the meaning of words defines the meaning of reality.'* When you think about it this is true. In English literature the prime example of this in action is George Orwell's 1984. But even back to Charles Dickens and before we have words deciding the fate of the people. In Poland (it just occurred to me) you have the famous freedom call Solidarnosc!

Solidarity! Which made it intact into the English-speaking world. I recall Lech Walesa well and we workers cheered him along in the factory I was then working in. Walesa was an industrial electrician, I, too, was an industrial electrician! At about that time our union, The United Auto Workers Union, was in a contract struggle with management. I believe the freedom movement in Poland at that time inspired us to risk a strike and we walked out of the factory rather than bow to management demands! So, my point is that even the definition of a single word has great power.

***"I just opened it to the word - Jiffi-scuttler"***

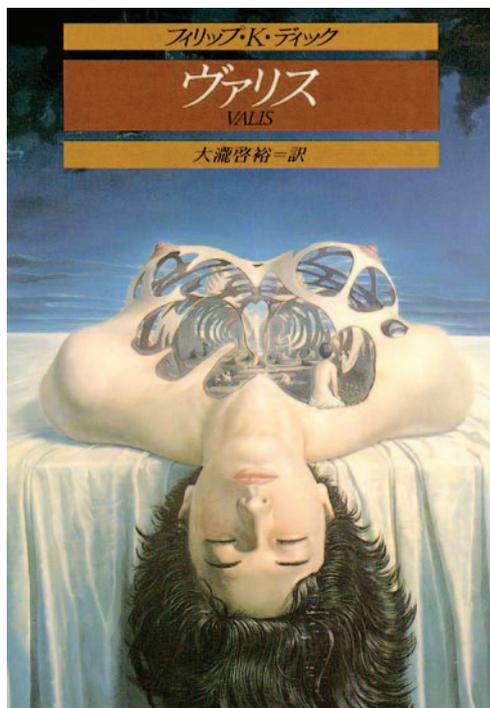
Orwell in 1984 made a fascinating attempt to reduce the number and meanings of words so that the Ingsoc government in his novel could control the thoughts of the populace by limiting their very ability to think beyond constrained lines. There's no such word as 'bad' it becomes 'ungood' and very bad becomes 'doubleungood'.

But Philip K. Dick goes in the other direction. Many science fiction writers make up words but they are usually some obvious coinage like 'televisor', a word that PKD would quickly abbreviate to 'visor'. You can open any PKD book and find this sort of thing. For instance, I have **THE CRACK IN SPACE** on my desk waiting to be packed in a box and then to a storage locker. I just opened it to the word 'Jiffi-scuttler', which is a device whereby the people in the novel can move instantaneously from one place to another - a teleportation device (a 'teleporter'). Dick quickly makes the transition from 'Jiffi-scuttler' to 'scuttler'. By doing this he makes the abbreviation 'scuttler' a word that is assumed to be so common everyone knows its meaning without requiring the expression of the term in full: Jiffi-scuttler.

This is one way PKD makes his stories seem familiar; his colloquialisms, his made-up words, abbreviations, even acronyms like VALIS.

VALIS is a word that is not yet defined in the English language. But it is about to become so. It's a word like "phildickian" which means 'far-out, imaginative, wacky, futuristic' etc. But what's interesting is if the word VALIS were to be accepted into the English language, that is,

defined, it would not have the definition it has now and which is found on the very first page of the novel, **VALIS**:



“VALIS: (acronym of Vast, Active, Living, Intelligence System, from an American film): A perturbation in the reality field in which a spontaneous self-monitoring negentropic vortex is formed, tending progressively to subsume and incorporate its environment into arrangements of information. Characterized by quasi-consciousness, purpose, intelligence, growth and an armillary coherence. - Great Soviet Dictionary, Sixth Edition, 1992”

Or would this indeed be the definition? And why is PKD giving us a definition at the very opening of the novel **VALIS**? There is food for thought here, but, you know what, neither VALIS nor ‘teleporter’, nor Jiffi-scuttler’ nor ‘ungood’ or even ‘phildickian’ are defined in the English language! Even my computer puts a red line beneath them to signify the word doesn’t exist in the computer’s built-in dictionary (with the exception of VALIS which I added to my computer dictionary but undefined!).

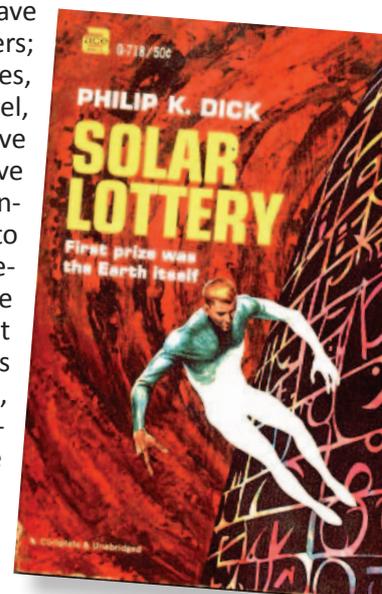
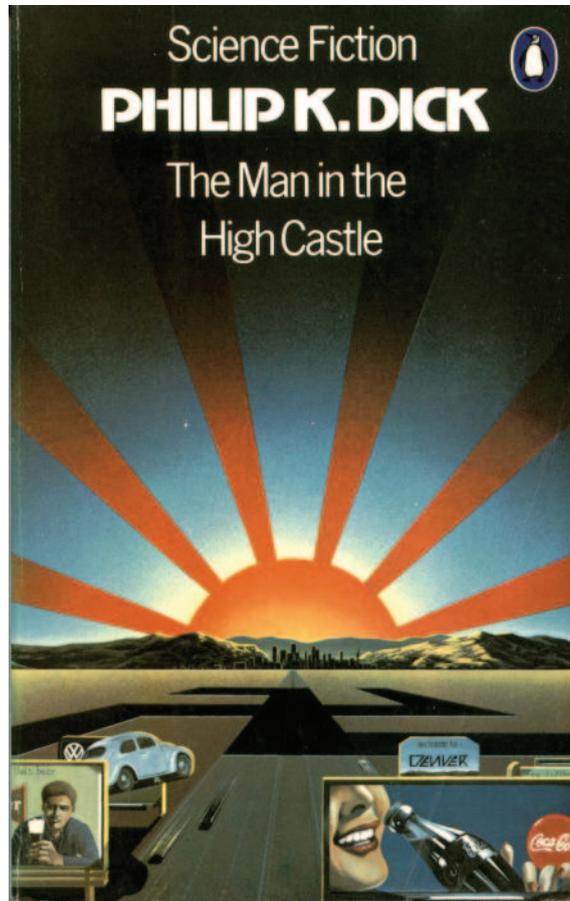
So, here we are discussing the meaning of words that are not yet defined! But which, perhaps, are gaining definition. And it is Philip K. Dick’s power with words, his facility with them that makes the expression of his imagination so natural. It’s as if he assumes that his coinages, his made-up words, already belong naturally in the world. Of course, in the worlds of his stories this is obviously the case. But I think Dick goes beyond that somehow and penetrates the real world.

We could say that definition moves to fixation and fixation in time gives us history. PKD moves into the arena of history as his writing illuminates the ways history is recorded. His quick coinages, like ‘scuttler’, contain an industrial lineage that needs little further description because PKD relies on our understanding of the way history is written, or rather, how it is solidified into History – the common understanding.

How is this? Let’s take the Spanish Inquisition as an example: We commonly now see the Spanish Inquisition as a period in Medieval times when the Roman Catholic Church went crazy torturing heretics and devil-worshippers and the like. And the reasons they did all this can be found with more research. But for my point here this doesn’t matter because the ‘more research’ is already

contained in my flip description above. All the research in the world has led us to such a modern definition of the Spanish Inquisition and all the “Yes, but...”’s of the Historians have little effect. So, what I’m attempting to say is that PKD’s style – and we’re talking science fiction here – expresses his knowledge of how History works. Scientific extrapolation, a la hard science fiction writers, is not what PKD is about and nor are future histories. Instead of moving history into the future he moves the future into history. Early fans who read **THE MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE** instinctively knew this and awarded Philip K. Dick his one and only Hugo Award for best science fiction novel of 1962. But, obviously, this notion needs more exploration; to say he moved the future into history means that there must be some truth in the scientific or social realms of his novels, that is, he must’ve written about the future in a true way. The futures in his stories are true - but not necessarily real. The truth perhaps lies in ‘essences’, to revive an Aristotelian idea, while reality is a multitude of ‘accidentals’.

We see this well-illustrated in **UBIK**. All of PKD’s novels are loaded with neologisms describing new devices and ideas of the future - as we would expect from any competent science fiction writer – but is this where history is found? Nowadays we don’t have scuttlers or even yet Jiffi-scuttlers; but we do have mobile telephones, or cellphones, and instant travel, in a way, via Skype. We don’t have the Stink of Shrink but we do have Swine Flu, and on and on. Accidentals all, which, when combined into a description of the present, somehow define that present. And one thing we know about the present is the instant it is here it becomes the past and, thus, history. Dick, then, describes how history becomes itself; it’s not a coterie of scholars deciding after much cogitation that such and such is important and, hence, worthy of



inclusion in History but, instead, History is a sort of commonly understood compression of the future into the present; things define themselves in a fast-moving world of social movements and gadgets. Just as in **SOLAR LOTTERY** and **THE ZAP GUN**.



The question of, What is reality? is one of Dick's major themes. He says, in another familiar quotation that "reality is that which, when you stop believing in it, it doesn't go away." But what, to stress the point, is it that doesn't go away? It is the things that are defined that don't go away. In **UBIK**, his famous novel (and here we have another coinage/abbreviation 'ubik') we have with the short chapter headings

definitions of what 'ubik' is – I don't have a copy of the book to hand but headings like "Ubik! The household cleaner that solves all your problems!" are what I mean here. These definitions of ubik are, for Joe Chip in the novel, unknown. He doesn't know what 'ubik' is. He doesn't know that he is dead and that all manifestations of reality – which to him and the others in half-life are ubiquitous – are not real.

Talk about defining reality! How about Philip K. Dick defining unreality!

With **UBIK** Dick knew what he was doing. He had to understand the notion of the modern physicists that 'dark matter' makes up the bulk of the mass of the universe. But we can't see it, we can't detect it except by inference at best. Dark matter is 'ubiquitous' in the universe. And in **UBIK** Dick actualized a world in which that which is ubiquitous – in the sense of undetectable – is made sensible. But he had to do it with reference to an external system – reality. In the novel the reality of Runciter is real and not that of Joe Chip and the others in half-life.

**UBIK** is a tour-de-force and literally blows your mind when you first read it. **UBIK** was not the first PKD I read that had this effect on me (that was **EYE IN THE SKY**) but **UBIK** is such a stunner. I've thought about this

novel for many years and think it gains part of its power from this idea of making something that is unknown become known. Or, the bringing into consciousness the idea - the principle even - that there are things around us of which we are not aware but they are there. It is the work of our scientists to discover these things. But it is the work of the writer to define them. And writing relies on imagination. Philip K. Dick wrote continuously all his life. His imagination began in wild ideas and gained in sophistication. Even his short stories are highly imaginative. One of my favorites is "**Explorer's We**". In this short story explorers are returning home to Earth from space. They are all excited to be coming home and looking forward to seeing their families, perhaps going fishing or spend a day at the beach. They land their spaceship and disembark, but their eager greetings are met with horror and the people flee! What's going on here? Then two black cars pull up and disgorge FBI agents who force the surprised explorers up against a wall and burn them to ashes with flame-throwers!



An unpleasant reception for sure! But what the explorers didn't know was that this was the twenty-second time they had returned to Earth! You cannot blame the FBI for burning them down because no matter what these explorers look like, they're not human.

This story, "**Explorer's We**" demonstrates Dick's imagination. I sometimes find myself at odd moments thinking about stories like this and others of Dick's and just letting my mind wander. I do not recommend this practice! One's world takes on an irreality and nothing seems fixed, one finds oneself one day surrounded by pine trees in the mountains, and the next day one is... where? Somewhere else, somewhere yet to be defined, somewhere with its own dictionary of unknown words. And the current place? Well, that's now history.



Ubik Graphic © Nick Buchanan

**IS THE WUB SATISFIED?**

by Frank C. Bertrand

© April 2012

I was recently re-reading Philip K. Dick's first-published short story, "Beyond Lies the Wub," (Planet Stories, Vol. 5, no. 7, July 1952; also available in The Collected Stories of Philip K. Dick, Vol. 1) and puzzling over just what is going on regards the Wub and Captain Franco. That is, does Franco commit an act of "exo-cannibalism" when he eats the Wub? And, does the Wub use metempsychosis to "escape" its predicament? Even more intriguing, I find, is the Wub's statement to Franco: "Rather you should discuss questions with me, philosophy, the arts -," and what this implies about the "contemplative life" versus the "active life." It is reminiscent of Thoreau's complaint that "the mass of men" waste their days on boring and routine jobs, rather than studying literature, philosophy and "the book of nature."

Then, I happened to be doing some reading in "moral philosophy," a subject/theme almost as important in Dick's work as "reality" and "human-ness," when I came across this quote by John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), from Utilitarianism(1861):

"It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. And if the fool, or the pig, are of a different opinion, it is because they only know their own side of the question."

Seven years earlier, in a March 23, 1854 diary entry, Mill wrote, "Quality as well as quantity of happiness is to be considered; less of a higher kind is preferable to more of a lower. Socrates would rather choose to be Socrates dissatisfied than to be a pig satisfied. The pig probably would not, but then the pig only knows one side of the question: Socrates knows both." Now, it so happens that in "Beyond Lies the Wub," the Wub is described, by Captain Franco, as "A huge pig. It must weigh four hundred pounds." A serendipitous coincidence or something else? To make it more problematic, consider that Dick once wrote, "Someone must come along & play the role of Plato to my Socrates" (In Pursuit Of Valis: Selections



**"This story is far more significant than we've been led to believe"**

From The Exegesis, 1991, p. 161). Why Phil's emphasis of the word "must" and his identifying with Socrates?

I would suggest that while these are indeed important questions, there are, equally, no "easy" answers to them. We also need to realize, I would argue, that this story is far more significant than we've been led to believe by various commentators and critics, to the extent that it's been noticed at all. It's nothing less than the first fictional/narrative manifestation of Dick's "moral imagination." That is, as Lionel Trilling has aptly written, "...the most effective agent of the moral imagination has been the novel of the past two hundred years...its greatness

and its practical usefulness lay in its unremitting work of involving the reader himself in the moral life, inviting him to put his own motives under examination, suggesting that reality is not as his conventional education has led him to see it" (The Moral Obligation to be Intelligent,

2000, p. 118).

One approach, and promising resolution, is the fact that while the Wub may “look” (according to Captain Franco) like a “pig” (the philosophical quandary of “form vs. content?”), it is very much a sentient being from a “*Very old and very ponderous*” race that is “*Tolerant, eclectic, catholic. We live and let live.*” And it’s the Martian natives who call it a “Wub;” they have their “own term.” In addition, the Wub can read minds, is telekinetic, has the ability to transfer its “life essence,” and is “addicted to various forms of relaxation.” I suspect the Wub would have a lot to discuss with Orwell’s infamous Old Major, Napoleon and Snowball, and prove a very formidable debating partner for J.S. Mill about the “moral” nature of questions, opinions and satisfaction. In this instance, according to the Wub, the salient question is “*Apparently your scientific hierarchy is not equipped to solve moral, ethical –*,” though it’s not clear who would know only their own side of the question, Mill or the Wub.

This fact dramatically changes the dynamics of the story, for not only can Captain Franco be accused of exo-cannibalism but xenophobic murder, and raises implicit (philosophical) issues about science and technology, the nature of “intelligence,” the Self, and fear of the “Other.” More important, I believe, is how we choose to characterize and interpret what the Wub actually does.

The salient moment in “**Beyond Lies the Wub**” occurs just before Captain Franco is going to shoot the Wub: “*It stopped, staring at the gun. “Can you look me in the eye and do it?” the Wub said. “Can you do that?”* Now, a 16th century proverb purports that eyes are the windows to the soul. If this is correct, then we know how the Wub transfers its psyche, its life essence into Captain Franco. What is not so clear is what happens to Franco’s psyche. When the Wub

transfers its “life-essence” to Captain Franco, is it committing murder as well? Is its means of surviving any less or more of an “appropriate” moral choice that what Franco does so he and his crew can survive?

In this regard I’d like to quote three statements by Philip K. Dick, the first from 9/73:

“...there is the fundamental philosophical dictum that goes: “I should behave in such a way that if everyone did it, good would come of it, rather than evil.” I believe this supersedes all other

## “It’s nothing less than the first fictional/narrative manifestation of Dick’s “moral imagination.”

wise saying...,” and, from 2/74:

“*Should I do the right thing or the expediate thing?.... Practical conduct and ethical conduct do not conflict, but actually reinforce each other, which is almost impossible to think of in our society.*”

Then, in 9/81:

“*Ethics may far more involve an abstraction from evil than a commission of good.... It may be actually more identifiable authentically with a balking and a refusal.... I define as human that organism that, which when perceiving a threat to its moral integrity, balks.*”

These can be meaningfully compared/contrasted with what Kant (1724-1804) writes in Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals (1785):

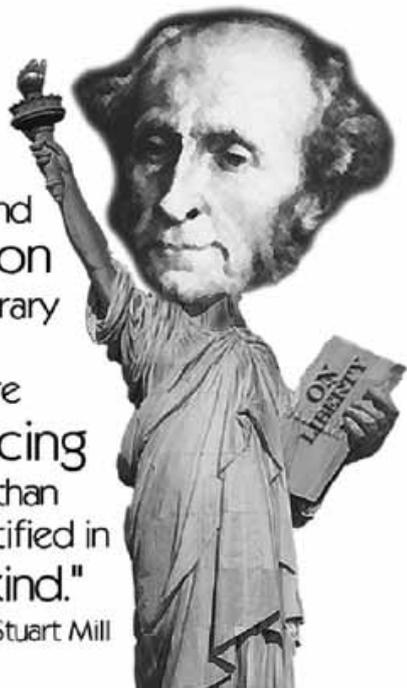
“*If the action would be good solely as a means to something else, the imperative is hypothetical; if the action is represented as good in itself and therefore as necessary, in virtue of its principle, for a will which of itself accords with reason, then the imperative is categorical.*”

Dick’s statements indicate, at least implicitly, that he believes the Wub’s “moral” actions/choices are justifiable, are right, expedient, practical and ethical in response to a threat to its moral integrity. As the Wub explains, “*I am against the idea of hurting. All I have done is*

*ishabriguez*  
04/07/2010

“If all mankind minus one, were of one opinion, and only one person were of the contrary opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person, than he... would be justified in silencing mankind.”

–John Stuart Mill



try to protect myself. Can you expect me to rush eagerly to my death? I am a sensible being like yourselves.” (Dick also features the Wub in his short story “**Not by Its Cover**” (1968) and alludes to it in his novels **The Penultimate Truth** (1964) and **The Zap Gun** (1967).



The operant word here would seem to be “sensible,” as in having appreciation or understanding, showing good sense or sound judgment. But the Wub’s claim to be against the idea of hurting makes me wonder how sound or sensible we can view what it does to Captain Franco. Its ideas and values are at odds with its “moral” actions.

Because of this I find it a bit disingenuous of Dick to claim, some 29 years after the fact that this story, “... has to do with empathy, or, as it was called in earlier times, caritas or agape.... I show empathy possessing a survival value; in terms of interspecies competition, empathy gives you the edge” (“Headnote” for “**Beyond Lies the Wub**” (1981), in: **The Shifting Realities of Philip K. Dick**, 1995, pp. 106-07).

I’m left, as usual when reading a Philip K. Dick short story, or novel, with more questions than answers and thinking, for now, it’s better to be a human being dissatisfied that a Wub satisfied, at least in Mill’s sense of it:

*“The main constituents of a satisfied life appear to be two, either of which by itself is often found sufficient for the purpose – tranquility and excitement.... Next to selfishness, the principal cause which makes life unsatisfactory is want of mental cultivation.”*

vation.”

This being so, problematically, Dick has certainly succeeded with this story in generating what he terms, in a May 14, 1981 letter, “*conceptual dislocation.*” That is, “...it must invade his [the reader’s] mind and wake it up to the possibility of something he had not up to then thought of,” or mental cultivation.

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## PUZZLE SCHMUZZLE

by Perry Kinman

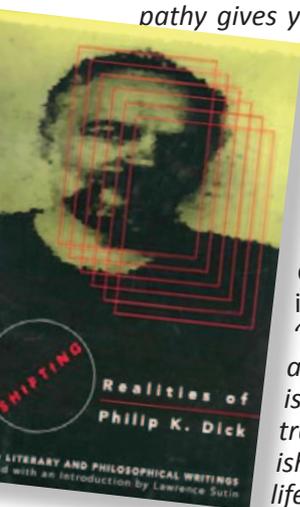
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Phil uses a number of what are called shm-reduplications in five of his novels. Shm-reduplication is a method of taking a word and repeating it immediately after the normal way, replacing the first consonants with the letters ‘shm’ or other similar variants. Examples would be ‘Joe Schmoe’ or ‘holiday schmoliday.’ There are other variations like ‘confusion conshmusion’ where shm is moved to another place, but the most common is the front.

The purpose of doing this is to down play or show derision of the topic word. By mangling the word itself one shows how little they care about the word and so also the topic. Joe in the above example is now nothing special. He’s just ordinary Joe. And the holiday, well, suppose your boss says “*I’ll give you two days off for your Summer holiday so you can go to the PKD Festival.*” And you know that’s not near enough time so you reply “*Holiday, schmoliday, there isn’t even enough time to get there and back let alone enjoy myself!*”

Shm-reduction is generally thought to come from Yiddish with all its many words with the “shm” sound and similar methods of use. It migrated into the American English language in the late 19th Century and came into common usage in the 1930s. It can be used on any subject, not necessarily Jewish related. With Phil’s interest in German and war and religion, invariably Judaism was included.

Here is one example of Phil’s usage. In **THE MAN WHOSE TEETH WERE ALL EXACTLY ALIKE**, Chap 3, Paul and Phyllis Wilby visit Leo and Janet Runcible for the evening to see about moving into a house in the area. Upon entering Paul asks if any blacks live in the area because he saw a black man down the hill at the Dombrosio’s house. This sets Leo off and he has a major meltdown, saying there are no blacks there nor Jews either, and asks Paul if he isn’t a Nazi. Paul gets upset and says he’s leaving and Leo says he can’t stay anyway because he’s in the house of a Jew. Phyllis counters with “*Jew, smew. Get off it Leo.*” And things go downhill from there. Phyllis is saying she





doesn't care if Leo is a Jew. This is the only shm-reduction written with 'sm.' The others are written with 'shm and schm.' So, here's the puzzle: Where are the other shm-reduplications Phil used? Novel, chapter, and scene.

Send in your answers via letters to the editor. The first person to find all of them will be awarded a full can of Ubik spray, and heralded as a true Dickhead in the pages of Otaku. Act fast. Not only a deodorant, Ubik restores lost manliness and banishes vapours of all kinds. Makes a delicious beer, salad dressing, great medical insurance, the perfect bra, electric appliance, and a million other uses.

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UBIK Graphic © Nick Buchanan

# The Week in Books

## The Guardian (UK Newspaper)

3 March 2012

### The long legacy of Philip K Dick

Fans of Philip K Dick (sometimes known as "Dick-heads") tend to show little respect for something as illusory as mere earthly calendar time, so it wasn't too surprising that yesterday's 30th anniversary of Dick's death passed with little ballyhoo. And anyway it's often difficult to think of the American sci-fi writer as dead, given how fecund his oeuvre continues to be. In film alone, Dick adaptations (some very free) include *Blade Runner*, *Total Recall*, *Minority Report*, *The Truman Show* and *The Adjustment Bureau*. To that list can be added a plethora of others recognised as more loosely indebted to his games with time, madness and multiple realities, ranging from *Being John Malkovich* to *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*.

If anything, the mining of his 44 novels and more than 100 short stories has increased in recent years, as is witnessed by the planned *Blade Runner* sequel and *Total Recall* remake, and a projected BBC mini-series (overseen by Ridley Scott) based on Dick's alternate history novel *The Man in the High Castle*, scripted by the playwright and *Spooks* writer Howard Brenton.

There is a lively debate about whether literary novelists such as Thomas Pynchon directly mimicked

his trademark tropes in their portrayals of 60s and 70s America. What's agreed is that his writing anticipates the media-shaped world of simulation associated with postmodernity. Among Dick's admirers are the cultural theorists Jean Baudrillard (who acclaims his evocation of the "hyper-real") and Slavoj Žižek, who cites Dick's work, along with *The Matrix* and *The Truman Show*, as vividly exemplifying the "ultimate American paranoid fantasy".

Among novelists, notable fans include Jonathan Lethem and William Gibson, who reacted to Dick's death with a heady piece comparing his fiction to both a drug ("a good hit of PKD shakes the scales from tired eyes") and "moments in rock when an improvised guitar line comes scything at you like a snapped cable". And the eve of the anniversary, by coincidence, saw the first appearance in English of a remarkable tribute from the late Roberto Bolaño.

The novelist's eulogistic essay, included in the collection *Between Parentheses*, sees Dick ("a kind of Kafka steeped in LSD and rage") as a pioneer in writing about "how mutable reality can be and therefore how mutable history can be". Bolaño calls Dick's novel *Ubik* "more brilliant than similar experiments by Pynchon and DeLillo", asserts he is "the American writer who in recent years has most influenced non-American poets, novelists and essayists", and notes that he is "possibly one of the most plagiarised writers of the 20th century" - though he declines to accept a friend's view that Martin Amis's *Time's Arrow* is a shameless rip-off of *Counter-Clock World*, as "I prefer to believe Amis is paying tribute to Dick or some precursor of Dick".

John Dugdale

#### On the web this week

- Video: a tour of Edward Thomas's Hampshire with the poet's Costa-winning biographer, Matthew Hollis
  - Podcast: we find the formula for a dazzling debut with first-time novelists Justin Torres and Patrick Flanery, and seasoned publishers Selina Walker and Leah Woodburn
  - Teen book club: join the discussion of Ally Kennen's *Bullet Boys*
- [guardian.co.uk/books](http://guardian.co.uk/books)

## The Sound of One Bong Hitting In An Empty Brain

by Lord Running Clam

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I want to start this article with two quotes from Philip K. Dick. The first is the definition of Valis as found at the front of the novel **VALIS**. Philip K. Dick fans will be familiar with this definition as it sets a tone going that vibrates throughout the novel; as if PKD hit a gong with one of those puffy-headed sticks that musicians use and a soft bong resonates through **VALIS** only fading into silence at the end.

*“VALIS (acronym of Vast Active Living Intelligence System, from an American film): A perturbation in the reality field in which a spontaneous self-monitoring negentropic vortex is formed, tending progressively to subsume and incorporate its environment into arrangements of information, characterized by quasi-consciousness, purpose, intelligence, growth and an armillary coherence.” – Great Soviet Dictionary, Sixth Edition, 1992.*

The second is from **UBIK**:

*“Friends, this is clean-up time and we’re discounting all our silent, electric Ubiks by this much money. Yes! We’re throwing away the bluebook. And remember: every Ubik on our lot has been used only as directed.”*

PKD also uses similar introductory devices in other novels, notably **THE THREE STIGMATA OF PALMER ELDRITCH**.

What is he doing with these extraneous statements? With PKD it often seems his novels are metaphorical or metaphysical or meta-something-othoer. So, what, then, is VALIS?

It begins with definition. But what is definition? It describes the known; when we know what something is we say it is defined and although they are open to interpretation definitions fix an object in time. What, for example, the Victorians understood by the definition of ‘marriage’ is different than how the word is being defined today. It currently retains its old meaning of ‘a union between a man and a woman’ but a battle

rages to broaden its meaning and replace the old definition with one that describes ‘any civil union.’ In the English language this sort of thing goes on all the time. So whatever Valis is - and it cannot be the definition given in the novel because that was written before 1992 and the Russian source is a fiction – it is defined at the very start of Dick’s most perturbing novel. Even though it cannot be defined! For how can a fictional object have a definition?

It’s fictional, a figment of the imagination and therefore not real.

Similarly, with the headings in **UBIK**, PKD creates something that is more real than the narrative – all Joe Chip’s peregrinations ultimately are, again, imaginings and not as real as the Ubik head-

ings because, in the novel, the over-arching truth of the matter is that Joe Chip is dead. And if we know one thing about reality it is that it does not apply to the dead.

When you collect all the definitions of words into one place you have a dictionary, which, by definition, contains all the words used in a particular language. But

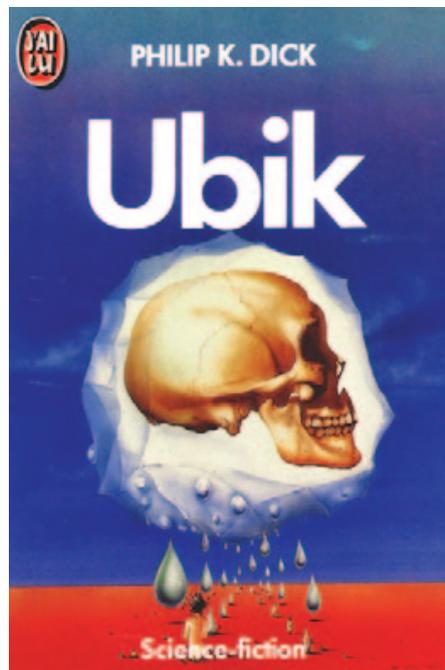
what have you got when you have a non-existent dictionary defining a non-existent word? In fiction this is not a problem. Science fiction novels are scattered with future objects that may or may not be defined in context. PKD was a great one for making up fantastic objects – and quickly abbreviating them for purposes of verisimilitude: the standard sf writer’s ‘televisor’ quickly becomes a ‘visor’ and even his own creations, like ‘Jiffi-scuttler’ from **THE CRACK IN SPACE**, swiftly reduce to ‘scuttler’. It is by such means that sf writers suspend our disbelief.

**VALIS**: a fictional word defined in a non-existent dictionary from a time in the future that is now in the past. There’s a definition for you! Use it in a sentence! A paragraph! A dissertation! “The valisization of the dominant reality of the early 21st century occurred

retroactively with the publication of **VALIS** in 1978. Critics of the time, little understanding the nature of the paradigmatical shift heralded by this novel, promulgated convoluted forms of post-modernism that which while indeed a step in the right direction failed to take into account...”

Now this is all jolly good fun and I’m tempted to

**“He doesn’t know that he is dead and that all manifestations of reality are not real.”**



continue forever, but you might notice that this jaunt is written as if it were from a future history book that includes a definition of Valis that is taken for granted by me as fictional narrator. Can this definition, after all, be the original one? The one quoted above? A perturbation in the reality field... From the definition, what is it that this Valis is doing? in which a spontaneous self-monitoring negentropic vortex is formed. Hmm. A spontaneous self-monitoring negentropic vortex... this might be something

that counters the action of entropy. But the only thing that counters entropy is reversal in time. Only when we look at things backwards does order ensue. To complete the definition: tending progressively to subsume and incorporate its environment into arrangements of information, characterized by quasi-consciousness, purpose, intelligence, growth and an armillary coherence. Again,

hmm. This seems to describe the creation of history, the doings of mankind as organized by none other than we ourselves as if seen from the point of view of an observer in the future explaining the mechanism of history. Order ensues because we've written it down. And the mechanism - Valis - is what does the writing. Valis is, then, ourselves - but operating from a different perspective than at present. Us, coming from the future, writing our past.

So, here we are discussing the meaning of words that are not yet defined! But which, perhaps, are gaining definition. And it is Philip K. Dick's power with words, his facility with them that makes the expression of his imagination so natural. It's as if he assumes that his coinages, his made-up words, already belong naturally in the world. Of course, in the worlds of his stories this is obviously the case. But I think Dick goes beyond that somehow and penetrates the real world.

We've suggested that definition moves to fixation and fixation in time gives us history. PKD moves into the arena of history as his writing illuminates the ways history is recorded. His quick coinages, like 'scuttler', contain an industrial lineage that needs little further description because PKD relies on our understanding of the way history is written, or rather, how it is solidified into the common understanding.

How is this? Let's take the Spanish Inquisition as an example: We commonly now see the Spanish Inquisition as a period in Medieval times when the Roman Catholic Church went crazy torturing heretics and devil-worshippers and the like. And the reasons they did all this can be found with more research. But for my point here this doesn't matter because the 'more research' is already contained in my flip description above. All the research in the world has led us to such a modern definition of the

Spanish Inquisition and all the "Yes, but..."s of the Historians have little effect. So, what I'm attempting to say is that PKD's style - and we're talking science fiction here - expresses his knowledge of how History works. Scientific extrapolation, a la hard science fiction writers, is not what PKD is about and nor are future histories. Instead of moving history into the future

he moves the future into history. Early fans who read **THE MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE** instinctively knew this and awarded Philip K. Dick his one and only Hugo Award for best science fiction novel of 1962. But, obviously, this notion needs more exploration; to say he moved the future into history means that there must be some truth in the scientific or social realms of his novels, that is, he must've written about the future in a true way. The futures in his stories are true - but not necessarily real. The truth perhaps lies in 'essences', to revive an Aristotelian idea, while reality is a multitude of 'accidentals'. We see this well-illustrated in **UBIK**. All of PKD's novels are loaded with neologisms describing new devices and ideas of the future - as we would expect from any competent science fiction writer - but is this where history is found? Nowadays we don't have scuttlers or even yet Jiffi-scuttlers; but we do have mobile telephones, or cellphones, and instant travel, in a way, via Skype. We don't have the Stink of Shrink but we do have Swine Flu, and on and on. Accidentals all, which, when combined into a description of the present, somehow define that present. And one thing we know about the present is the instant it is here it becomes the past and, thus, history. Dick, then, describes how history becomes itself; it's not a coterie of scholars deciding after much cogitation that such and such is important



and, hence, worthy of inclusion in History but, instead, History is a sort of commonly understood compression of the future into the past; things define themselves in a fast-moving world of social movements and gadgets. Just as in **SOLAR LOTTERY** and **THE ZAP GUN**. Masters of reality like Steve Jobs and the inventor of crack cocaine knew that to succeed you had to sell what was already there, and things get where they are because we squeeze them out of the future. iPhones and 8-balls, they're both examples of the same mechanism.

The question of, What is reality? is one of Dick's major themes. He says, in another familiar quotation that "reality is that which, when you stop believing in it, it doesn't go away." But what, to stress the point, is it that doesn't go away? It is the things that are defined that don't go away. In **UBIK**, his famous novel (and here we have another coinage/abbreviation 'ubik') we have with the short chapter headings definitions of what 'ubik' is. These definitions of ubik are, for Joe Chip in the novel, unknown. He doesn't know what 'ubik' is. He doesn't know that he is dead and that all manifestations of reality – which to him and the others in half-life are ubiquitous – are not real.

Talk about defining reality! How about Philip K. Dick defining unreality!

With **UBIK** Dick knew what he was doing. He had to understand the notion of the modern physicists that 'dark matter' makes up the bulk of the mass of the universe. But we can't see it; we can't detect it except by inference at best. Dark matter is 'ubiquitous' in the universe. And in **UBIK** Dick actualized a world in which that which is ubiquitous – in the sense of undetectable – is made sensible. But he had to do it with reference to an external system – reality. In the novel the reality or Runciter is real and not that of Joe Chip and the others in half-life.

**UBIK** is a tour-de-force and literally blows your mind when you first read it. **UBIK** was not the first PKD I read that had this effect on me (that was **EYE IN THE SKY**) but **UBIK** is such a stunner. I've thought about this novel for many years and think it gains part of its power from this idea of making something that is unknown become known. Or, the bringing into consciousness the idea - the principle even - that there are things around us of which we are not aware but they are there. It is the work of our scientists to discover these things. But it is the work of the writer to define them. And writing relies on imagination.

Philip K. Dick wrote continuously all his life. His imagination began in wild ideas and gained in sophistication. Even his short stories are highly imaginative. One of

my favorites is "**Explorer's We**". In this short story explorers are returning home to Earth from space. They are all excited to be coming home and looking forward to seeing their families, perhaps going fishing or spend a day at the beach. They land their spaceship and disembark, but their eager greetings are met with horror and the people flee! What's going on here? Then two black cars pull up and disgorge FBI agents who force the surprised explorers up against a wall and burn them to ashes with flamethrowers!

An unpleasant reception for sure! But what the explorers didn't know was that this was the twenty-second time they had returned to Earth! You cannot blame the FBI for burning them down because no matter what these explorers look like, they're not human.

To return to **VALIS**: The opening definition describes the mechanical operation of history; the compression of the future into order in the past. But what of the Tractates Cryptica Scriptura that occupy the appendix to **VALIS**?

The many cryptic statements that comprise the Tractates come from many places and times. Taken overall they appear to be the result of a layout or schematic that is not given but is assumed to be known; that of the nature of change in orthogonal or sideways time. I've just opened the Tractates and find, immediately, a statement apropos, perhaps, to what I've said above:

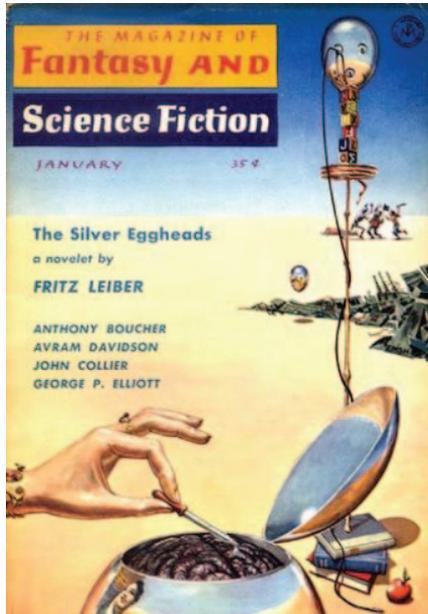
TCS 11: *The great secret known to Apollonius of Tyana, Paul of Tarsus, Simon Magus, Asklepios, Paracelsus, Boehme and Bruno is that: we are moving backward in time. The universe in fact is contracting into a unitary entity which is completing itself. Decay and disorder are seen by us in reverse, as increasing. These healers learned to move forward in time, which is retrograde to us.*

And here's another:

TCS 14: *The universe is information and we are stationary in it, not three-dimensional and not in space or time. The information fed to us we hypostatize into the phenomenal world.*

On that note and having hypostatized as much as I can into this short essay, I shall now revert to standby mode and hypostatize automatically while refueling. If the Empire comes calling tell them I'm out to lunch.

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# Letters to the Editor

## I Can Hear Music, Sweet, Sweet Music

Dear Patrick,  
 I am writing to congratulate you (and your team of regular contributors) on keeping Otaku going for so long. It has become a welcome conduit for intelligent discussion about the ideas, work and life of Philip K. Dick. I remember looking forward to every issue of the **Philip K. Dick Society Newsletter**, then **Radio Free PKD** and **For Dickheads Only** – I feel the same about **PKD-Otaku**. Indeed the writing in Otaku is of such quality and the information so useful, that I have printed them all out and keep them on one of my PKD shelves as a reference (I know other Otaku readers do the same). A recent piece in the Guardian Newspaper (UK) on the thirtieth anniversary of Phil's death, references material from Otaku (the William Gibson remark) without being brave enough to give a credit.

*“While so many are ‘counting the notes,’ Otaku is encouraging people to hear the music.”*

In a field fraught with intellectual competitiveness, and the ferocious desire to sit one seat higher at a very small ‘scholarly’ table, Otaku welcomes all. While so many are ‘counting the notes,’ Otaku is encouraging people to hear the music; to delight in the joy of Dick's stories and the wonderment of his ideas. As Richard Feynman once said *“Knowing the name of something is not the same as knowing something.”*

Here's to Otaku – may the rest of its life be the BEST of its life!

**Nick Buchanan**  
 Liverpool, UK

## Flow My Tears of Joy the EXEGESIS Recipient Cried!

Concerning the **EXEGESIS**: I'm glad it's here! I like having new source material. I'm glad even little bits are filtering out. It's not a novel, and - Yes! I'd rather have 10 more Philip K. Dick novels to dive into and absorb. But... we don't.

We have this massive pile of internal inquiry which consumed Phil's latter life. This view into his mind. It shows in action what Powers, and Jeter and others who spent time around him described how Phil was. His constantly changing theories and phone calls in the night.

I'm enjoying that now. I did get the same experience from **IN PURSUIT of VALIS**, but not to this degree. Now, the things that bother me are these: knowing this is only one tenth of the total. (Bummer! I want more!) Knowing that, probably some material that was cut out was journal/diary like comments that were considered to be too personal. (Bummer! That's what I'd like to see more of!) Believing that we probably aren't going to be seeing any more of the **EXEGESIS** in our lifetimes. (Unless someone stands to make Money. It's always about money!)

*“P.S. this is a hard lesson to learn- you keep thinking something more is at stake - and it's always just money”*  
 PKD Letter to Malcolm Edwards, May 5th, '74

Well, “Wacha gonna do?” as Tony always says. You make your own happiness. I choose to enjoy what we got.

*“Dream: I am Jerry Lewis, a contemptible clown, but admired by millions, especially in France.”* **EXEGESIS** P.515

**Perry Kinman**



**IMPORTANT APPEAL:**

For complicated reasons, Tessa Dick (Phil's wife 1973-1977) is close to becoming homeless and needs your support and help.

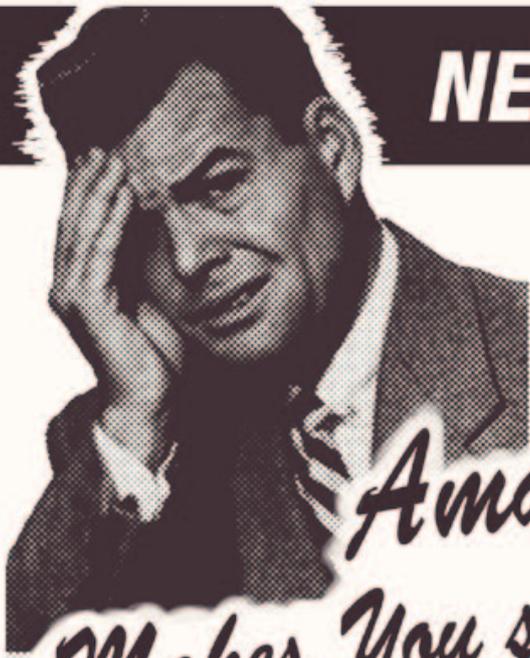
If you feel you can help her in any way, please send her something via her paypal account:

[tuffy777@gmail.com](mailto:tuffy777@gmail.com)

Thank you.

Phil and Tessa circa 1974

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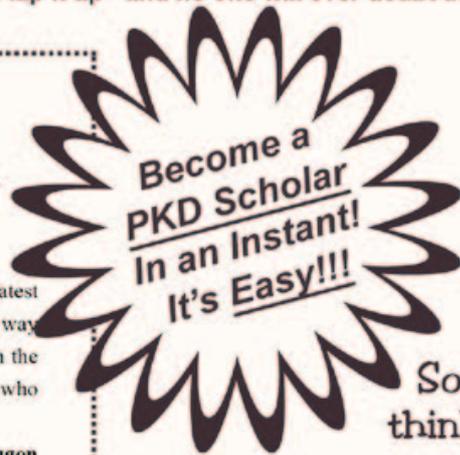
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