

“Tripping On Acid, Speaking In Latin”

Before becoming famous as the author of books that became screenplays and, before that, as a Gnostic philosopher, Philip K. Dick’s reputation was primarily that of “acidhead SF writer.” This was based both on his hallucinogenic novels and short stories, with their graphic reality meltdowns, and on his lifestyle. Phil often spoke of his experiences of, and theories, about LSD. Though he later repudiated his drug experiments he never quite let them go. In any case, the paper trail he left behind in his letters and interviews remain.

The most detailed account of Phil’s trip appears in Chapter 11 of *Maze of Death*, written in 1968 but not published until 1970. In the book’s Forward Phil explains, “In the novel, Maggie Walsh’s experiences after death are based on an L.S.D. experience of my own. In exact detail.” We may, perhaps, doubt this to some extent. After all, Phil is a writer and would normally be expected to arrange his material in a coherent way for publication. But reading through his letters and interviews we do find a good deal of consistency between Phil’s raw experiences with the drug and Maggie Walsh’s adventure in the afterlife.

One obvious overlap is the use of Latin. Maggie speaks in Latin throughout her journey. Phil, apparently, had the same experience. As early as July 18, 1967 he mentioned to Rich Brown in a letter, “Added point: when I took LSD...I found myself able to use only Latin...” He wrote to Valerie McMillan on September 8, 1970: “I have a strange relationship with Latin, by the way, as I’ve probably mentioned. When I take acid I can speak and write in Latin; when I haven’t – ah, I did tell you. Okay. But I still find it spooky.” And he told Arthur Byron Cover:

“First of all, you can’t write anything when you’re on acid. I did one page once while on an acid trip, but it was in Latin. Whole damn thing was in Latin and a little tiny bit in Sanskrit, and there’s not much market for that. The page does not fall in with my published work.” (“Vertex Interviews Philip K. Dick” Feb. 1974)

Phil seemed mystified by his facility with a language he never studied but if it is the same Latin Maggie Walsh speaks in *Maze of Death* (as Phil claims in his Forward) then much of the mystery disappears. All the Latin quoted is from the Requiem Mass of the Roman Catholic Rite. The bulk of it is from the medieval hymn, “Dies Irae.” In the pre-Vatican II Roman Catholic service a requiem mass would be common at most funerals. Though not Catholic Phil was a classical music enthusiast and would doubtless have been familiar with this music since Requiem Mass compositions have been popular throughout history. Mozart, Verdi and Berlioz all wrote such masses. The “Dies Irae” (“Day of Wrath”) is a famous hymn and the original Gregorian chant has numerous recordings. Phil was obviously familiar with it as he uses a variation on the title for his novel, *Deus Irae* (“God of Wrath”), which he began writing in 1964.

The Latin in *Maze* is the following:

“Libera me, Domine. De morte aeterna, in die illa tremenda [Set me free, Lord. From eternal death in that awful day]. Maggie utters these words upon hearing “something huge and far off, chugging violently into the darkness.” When she sees the Intercessor/Christ launched from a giant crossbow (something Phil actually saw during one of his acid trips) she cries out, “Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi” [“Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world”]. These words are from the “Agnus Dei,” a standard part of all Masses, not just the Requiem Mass. It is a plea for forgiveness and, in the third verse, a hope to rest in peace.

Looking down far below her, Maggie sees a Dantesque hell world: “a vast frozen landscape of snow and boulders. A furious wind blows across it; as she watches, more snow piles up around the rocks. A new period of glaciation, she thought, and found she had trouble thinking – let alone talking – in English.” Gasping with pain she says,

“Lacrymosa dies, illa. Qua resurgent ex favilla, judicandus homo reus” [Full of tears is that awful day when guilty mankind will rise from ashes to be judged]. And then, “Huic ergo parce, Deus! Pie Jesu Domine, dona eis requiem” [Spare them, O Lord. O Loving Jesus grant them rest] – though who “they” could be is unclear since Maggie is quite alone.

A chasm opens at her feet and she falls toward it. In panic she calls out, “Liber me, Domine, de morte aeterna!” [Set me free, Lord, from eternal death in that awful day] This is from the Responsory after Absolution in the Mass. The entire first sentence of the Responsory would be appropriate to Maggie's situation:

“Libera me, Domine, de morte aeterna, in die illa tremenda
quando coeli movendi sunt et terra
Dum veneris judicare saeculum per ignem.”

[Set me free, Lord, from eternal death, in that awful day
when the heavens and earth will be moved
when you will come to judge the age by fire.]

Now she sees the Intercessor again, strangely altered. “Something with immense wings soared up, like a great metallic dragon fly with spines jutting from its head.” She calls to it, “Salve me, fons pietatis” [Save me, O Fountain of Love]. Caught in the updraft of the dragonfly's wings Maggie is propelled toward a series of colored rings. Here Phil borrows from the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, which he was reading in this period. The rings represent various wombs for her rebirth. Now confident that she will be spared damnation in the frozen hellworld, she utters her last Latin words: “Mors stupebit et natura. Cum resurget, judicanti responsura” [Death will be struck dumb, and nature too, when creation rises to answer the Judge]. But Maggie does not fear the Judge. “She had been judged and the judgment was favorable. She experienced utter, absolute joy. And continued, like a moth among novas, to flutter upward toward the proper light.”

Again, it's hard to tell how much of Phil's actual acid trip is reflected here. Phil didn't speak Latin but he clearly would have been familiar with the source of the Latin he used in *Maze*. At the very

least he must have checked the spelling since everything is spelled correctly. It may be that he did *recite*, rather than “speak,” Latin from the Requiem Mass when he was tripping. (We may discount, I think, his claim in *Vertex* to have written a page in Latin – let alone Sanskrit.) Phil's trip was by all accounts rather unpleasant and he may have sought some safety in prayer. That he would use the words of the Roman Catholic Mass, a religion to which he did not belong, I suspect has more to do with Mozart and Verdi than Catholicism.

"Lost in the Shoddy Lands" by Paul Di Filippo

The year of our story is that far-off future date of 1992 (*Ubik* first saw the light of day in 1969), a time when the elderly yet vital Glen Runciter operates an anti-psionic bureau. His human agents, “inertials,” each have the power to cancel out by their presence within a certain radius one particular psionic talent, such as telepathy or precognition. In a world where psi operators are for hire as spies or saboteurs, Runciter does a smashing business. He's aided in the management of his affairs by his dead wife. Science has discovered that upon bodily death the mind remains active for a short time. If frozen immediately into “cold-pacs,” the recently deceased can survive mentally for a certain stretch of “half life,” years or months, depending on their final quota of vitality. Ella Runciter resides in a Zurich “moratorium,” where her husband can communicate with her through a microphone and headphone arrangement. But on his most recent visit to Ella, Runciter is dismayed to find that her personality is being bled away by a nearby half-lifer, a teenager named Jory.

Meanwhile, back in the North American Confederation, Joe Chip is leading a marginal existence. Despite being one of Runciter's top employees—Joe is not an inertial, but a skilled tester of inertials—the lonely single man is poverty-stricken and harassed by the various autonomic devices in his life, including the door to his conapt, which demands payment for every usage. One morning, a Runciter talent scout brings a woman named Pat Conley to Joe for testing. Pat has a strange anti-precog talent: the ability literally to alter the past and create new timelines, thus frustrating precognition. Soon Pat is employed by Runciter, and she, Joe, Runciter and 10 other inertials are on

their way to the moon, supposedly to perform a job for a millionaire named Stanton Mick. But the invitation proves to be a trap by Hollis, Runciter's nemesis. On the moon, the group is subject to an explosion. All survive save Runciter, who is rushed into a cold-pac.

Yet is this actually the case? Upon the return of the survivors to Earth, reality begins to waver and dissolve. Objects from 1992 begin to regress into antiques. Messages from the supposedly dead Runciter begin to appear in the most unlikely places: in TV ads and in printed slips inside cigarette cartons. Members of the Luna group start to die off in a curious manner, withering to weightless husks. As the de facto leader of Runciter Associates, Joe Chip has some nebulous hunches and intuitions as to what is happening to them. But can he survive long enough to prove his theories and turn the tide of entropy around? Maybe if he can get his hands on this mysterious spray can filled with the enigmatic substance known as Ubik. ...

Dick's all-consuming social satire

This novel occupies what seems to me to be a central place in Dick's canon. It comes after the magnificence of such works as *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* (1965) and before such mature masterpieces as *Flow My Tears, the Policeman Said* (1974). As a pivotal keystone, it harks both backward and forward. The whole setup of a society in which psionic talents predominate is straight out of the many early PKD novels, while the emphasis on the afterlife and theological issues augurs the preoccupations of Dick's *Valis* trilogy. The plotting is not as recomplicated as some of Dick's books, nor as simplistic as others. In short, this book offers a perfectly representative slice of all of Dick's virtues and very few of his vices.

We have on display Dick's capacity for social satire. The absurd outfits that pass for fashion, the existence of such institutions as "Bonds of Erotic Polymorphous Experience, a sixty-unit sub-surface structure catering to businessmen and their hookers," and the banality of a consumer culture all paint a portrait of a deracinated society that has lost all touch with essential life-roots. Of course, the consumerist madness is at the core of the book. Joe Chip's salvation lies in the attainment of the ultimate product, Ubik. Each of the 17 chapters

begins with a paeon to Ubik, naming it variously as a car, beer, coffee, salad dressing, medicine, shaver, laminate, a savings and loan, hair conditioner, deodorant, sleeping pill, toaster pastry, bra, plastic wrap, mouthwash and cereal. By the last chapter, Ubik has mutated into the Prime Mover, God Himself. Yet Joe does not triumph until he learns that Ubik is as much a matter of his own spirit as it is exterior salvation.

Of course, we also get to enjoy the comedy of Dick's perpetual anti-machine crusade, as the devices in Joe's life harangue him. We get to see that archetypal pairing of the evil dark-haired woman (Pat Conley) with the blond female savior (Ella Runciter) which informed so much of Dick's writing. And we get the surrealism and paradoxes he loved. No plane of reality is privileged, as the book's startling ending proves.

Surely this is the one PKD novel that most inspired Ursula Le Guin to write her PKD tribute, *The Lathe of Heaven* (1971). And also the creators of the *Matrix* must have loved the virtual-reality nature of the half-life scenes. Although it does not have as high a profile as some of Dick's novels, *Ubik* is indeed insidiously ubiquitous.

This is one of those Dick books I deem essentially unfilmable as such. While the outward trappings of the story could easily be captured on the screen, the metaphysical weirdness is essentially un conveyable.

WHY DOES WILLIAM GIBSON KEEP SAYING THOSE THINGS ABOUT PHILIP K. DICK?

"I'm starting to get into punk rock."
- Philip K. Dick (1980)

"I never got into Phil Dick."
- William Gibson (1987)

To tell you the truth I personally never saw much connection between Philip K. Dick and William Gibson. They are both fascinating writers but beyond the fact that they work in the genre of science fiction they seem to have little enough in common. Harlan Ellison, to keep it in the SF family, always struck me as being a more likely precursor to Gibson than PKD. Of course Phil is, today, a cultural icon, what with *Blade Runner* and *Minority Report* and John Ashcroft. Phil gets written about a lot these days in places like *The New York Times*

as a prophet of the encroaching "Total Surveillance State." This is fairly recent and has more to do with Spielberg than any PKD novel as such. Still his popularity is probably at an all time high here in the 21st Century, which is pretty ironic given his near invisibility in the mainstream while he was alive. Inside science fiction, of course, he was well known and appreciated. It's pretty hard to imagine anyone writing in the field not having been at least a little bit influenced by Phil -- in particular anyone reading and learning their craft from the Sixties through the early Eighties.

Even so, a good writer, an original writer, will develop his or her own distinct voice and soon shed any obvious influences. Gibson had other influences such as Alfred Bester and Joanna Russ and you can see bits and pieces of them in his early work. What *is* unusual is the repeated insistence that there is not a trace of PKD DNA in his makeup. It's weird. Over and over again Gibson says, "Philip K. Dick? Nope. No connection. Barely read the guy and besides he was crazy. Everything I know I got from Pynchon. Pynchon, Pynchon, Pynchon. And William Burroughs." Gibson has been saying this for seventeen years. It makes you wonder. In January 2003 alone he speaks of Dick on three separate occasions, once to tell us Dick was crazy, twice to reiterate, in case we missed it the first fifty times, that *there was no influence*.

Gibson actually wrote the introduction to *The Selected Letters of Philip K. Dick 1974* in 1990. It is, without a doubt, the worst introduction he ever penned -- and Gibson typically writes terrific introductions. But on this occasion his muse failed him and he ends up saying nothing much at all. Coincidence?

The really odd aspect of all of this is that when Phil died in 1982 a thirty-four year old William Gibson published a moving tribute in a Seattle fanzine. Talked about taking STP and "After that, we always referred to the night we did the PKD and spent the next 48 hours looking for the way home to Base Reality." And "I'm going to miss Mr. Dick, a man I never met." And "He was the only product of the American genre sf scene you could give to hardened Burroughs and Pynchon fanatics without wincing a little. Because, at his best, he was truly Dread, the poplit equivalent of certain moments in rock when an improvised guitar line comes scything out at you like a snapped cable and cuts the mind-

body dichotomy eight ways from Sunday." And "Times like these, a good hit of PKD shakes the scales from the tired eyes." But by 1986, after winning the Philip K. Dick Award no less, it's all about Pynchon.

It doesn't matter much, of course. We read William Gibson because we like his books and that's that. We read Philip K. Dick because we like *his* books and maybe never the twain shall meet.

Some recent remarks...

blog: January 13, 2003

PHILIP K. DICK

I usually skip the "influence" questions, on grounds that if you know your own influences, your digestion's pretty sluggish. I'll make an exception, though, when someone suggests an influence I know I haven't had, and PKD is definitely one of those.

I read THE MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE when I was twelve or so, and a proud new member of the Science Fiction Book Club. The concept of American vintage collectibles in a Japanese universe stuck with me, and not much else. Thereafter, I read virtually no PKD. Why? My guess is that my MDR of paranoia was satisfied by reading Pynchon instead, and my regular nature-of-reality workout provided by the ever-limber Jorge Luis Borges. Dick just never found a niche in my ecology of favorite writers.

blog: January 18, 2003

But influential impact often has little to do with how well a writer or book might be known. Phil Dick's entire corpus has had almost no impact on me, but a single reading of Thomas M. Disch's ON WINGS OF SONG, I know for a fact, influenced me mightily.

blog: January 28, 2003

I thought it [*The Matrix*] was more like Dick's work than mine, though more coherent, saner, than I generally take Dick to have been. A Dickian universe with fewer moving parts (for Dick, I suspect, all of the parts were, always, moving parts). A Dickian universe with a solid bottom (or for

the one film at least, as there's no way of knowing yet where the franchise is headed).

[An earlier version of this article originally appeared in *Interference on the Brain Screen* #6]

A letter in *The Guardian* Jun 19, 2004 p. 8

Astonishing that after giving us all that detail on Paul Verhoeven's film adaptation of Philip K Dick's "We Can Remember It for You Wholesale" (Adaptation of the week, June 12), Andrew Pulver can conclude that in *Total Recall* "the issues of memory, identity and time-slip, hinted at in Dick's original, are fully spelled out". Hardly. In Dick's story identity is revealed as a *mise en abyme*; it is thoroughly paranoid, manufactured and co-opted by forces outside the fiction of individuality. In the movie, Arnold Schwarzenegger plays an Hegelian hero who discovers and ultimately determines his true identity through action. *Total Recall* is a classic example of Hollywood's tendency to rewrite disturbing, open texts as reassuringly closed narratives.

Anthony Mellors
Norfolk

There have been a number of reviews of Emmanuel Carrère's biography of PKD, newly translated into English. This is one of the better ones.

**"The truth as he knew it"
by Francie Lin**

I Am Alive and You Are Dead: A Journey Into the Mind of Philip K. Dick by Emmanuel Carrère.
Translated from the French by Timothy Bent
Metropolitan Books: 316 pp., \$26

"Often people claim to remember past lives," Philip K. Dick told a sci-fi convention audience toward the end of his life. "I claim to remember a different, very different, present life." This statement, in all its koan-like paradox, mystified his listeners, for what could it possibly mean?

It meant, for one thing, that the author of mind-bending works like *Do Androids Dream of Electric*

Sheep? and "We Can Remember It for You Wholesale" was perhaps not inventing anything when he wrote about the dark alternative realities and nightmarish government conspiracies in which his characters, over the course of some 50 novels, are freakishly ensnared.

That is, at least, French novelist Emmanuel Carrère's take on the life and works of Dick in his brilliantly inventive biography *I Am Alive and You Are Dead: A Journey Into the Mind of Philip K. Dick*. Carrère combines fact and fiction to form a new sort of genre, blending literary criticism and cultural history with a novelist's earnest speculation. He emerges, somewhat bloodied by the experience, with a picture of a life by turns pathetic and heroic, but most of all plagued by a sense of feverish doubt and emptiness that nothing — not heroin, not psychotherapy, not marriage, affairs, religion or any of the other standard panaceas of the 1960s and 1970s — could quite subdue.

Seasoned readers of Dick's stories will know what this great emptiness alludes to, but for others, consider a scene from *The Man in the High Castle*, widely considered to be Dick's best work. The novel envisions an alternative present in which the United States is occupied by Japan and Germany, the Allies having lost the war. The Japanese, who have taken over the West Coast, are obsessive collectors of genuine Americana. Wyndam-Matson, a purveyor of fake antiques, shows a woman he's been sleeping with two cigarette lighters:

"One of those Zippo lighters was in Franklin D. Roosevelt's pocket when he was assassinated. And one wasn't. One has historicity, a hell of a lot of it. And one has nothing. Can you feel it? ... You can't. You can't tell which is which.... You see my point. It's all a big racket; they're playing it on themselves. I mean, a gun goes through a famous battle ... and it's the same as if it hadn't, unless you know. It's in here.' He tapped his head. 'In the mind, not the gun."

"In the mind," says Wyndam-Matson. Which is to say, "not real." The most disturbing aspect of this scene, however, is not that there is a "real" lighter and a "fake" lighter but that the two are essentially indistinguishable: "You can't tell." The

interchangeability of true reality and ersatz reality is the terrible void that whistles below the feet of Dick's characters, and it made itself felt in his life as well. One would think that a person who could write so rational and prescient a scene must himself have a strong sense of reality, but in Carrère's estimation, Dick suffered from a debilitating split personality, so that while he understood that there were distinctions between "(a) writing that Nixon was a Communist (b) believing it, and (c) believing that it was true," this understanding did not necessarily prevent him from swinging wildly from certainty on the one hand to doubts about the authenticity of the world on the other.

Time and again Dick's works address the problem of distinguishing between reality and artificial illusion: Witness Douglas Quail in "We Can Remember It for You Wholesale," whose humdrum reality begins to unravel when he receives a memory implant of Mars; or the androids with implanted human memories in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* who refuse to believe they aren't real.

These imaginings, far-fetched as they seem, were nevertheless rooted in the anxiety and myopic reality of postwar America that were heightened, for Dick, by his long term residence in the San Francisco Bay Area. During the McCarthy era, FBI agents, suspicious of his first wife's attendance at Socialist Workers Party meetings, suddenly arrived on Dick's doorstep in Berkeley and began questioning him. Eventually they developed a wary friendship with him, even as they continued to push questionnaires full of assertions like: "The greatest threat to the Free World is (a) Russia (b) our high standard of living (c) subversive elements hiding in our midst." During the 1970s, conspiracy moved to the sphere of drugs. Carrère writes that "narcs sometimes tried to pass themselves off as dealers and sold hash ... dealing served as a perfect cover.... Everyone knew that dealers could also become narcs and start informing on their associates and clients.... Cops, dealers, users — they all changed roles depending on the circumstances and depending on what role others were playing."

Such instability engendered a climate of mistrust, and mistrust spilled over into every aspect of Dick's life. Pathologically jealous, he resented his partners — he was obsessed with, married to or lived with at least six different women — if they

showed any streak of independence. At least one of his marriages ended in a peculiarly horrific way when Dick, who shared a psychotherapist with his wife Anne, suggested to the doctor that Anne was trying to kill him. Alarmed, the doctor sent the sheriff to take Anne away to a psychiatric hospital, and then Dick immediately began to doubt whether it was Anne or he who was psychotic. "Now that Anne — zoned out on tranquilizers — couldn't tell him he was wrong, [Dick] was less sure he was right." He tried to get Anne released from the hospital, but it was too late: she came home "a zombie."

Doubt extended beyond his romantic entanglements and into the murkier realm of religion and the nature of consciousness. In the early 1960s, driven by a vision of a satanic face in the sky, Dick became a member of the Episcopal Church, mainly because the church, unlike psychologists, took his vision as an objective event, a real manifestation of evil rather than an indication of insanity. His religious feelings remained complex. He offered a stinging parody of the Eucharist in his 1965 novel *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*, and yet he remained a staunch Christian, defending his belief against debunkers. When his friend Bishop James Pike reported to him that the Gospels "were a fraud" and that Jesus was just a follower whom others had elevated into "a colossal scam," Dick answered that this didn't change anything. He still had faith.

This ability to contain a paradox — to be both the champion and the adversary of any given point of view — was part of Dick's genius where the plots of his books were concerned. But as Carrère's story unfolds, it becomes clear that it was also what crippled Dick in his everyday life. Lucidity and intelligence did not make him any less prone to paranoia; indeed, they apparently fueled it. "Perhaps if you know you are insane," notes one of his characters in *The Man in the High Castle*, "then you are not insane."

Dick battled the idea of being crazy and paranoid even as he suspected that it might be true. External circumstances periodically contrived to confirm both points. In 1971, his house in San Rafael was broken into and destroyed: "His first reaction was gratitude: now he knew he wasn't paranoid." But later, one of the jaded detectives assigned to inspect the scene asked Dick "why on earth he had done all this." Dick himself eventually

came to consider this a plausible explanation: "He had no memory of having [broken into his own house], but he also knew that that proved nothing."

Fans of *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* or its Ridley Scott movie counterpart *Blade Runner* will recognize this episode as peculiarly Dickian, for in those works, the human bounty hunter hired to destroy android replicants suffers a similar loss of certainty. As he goes about his job, he is eventually beset by a nagging, unverifiable dread that he himself is not human but an android implanted with human feelings and memories: Just because he doesn't know he is an android does not mean that he isn't one. Carrère, in a section devoted to the fallow later years of Dick's life, offers a hypothesis for Dick's dwindling output as well as for the eerie connection between Dick's life and his work:

"[Dick's] famous imagination was reputed to have dried up, but he himself knew the truth behind his writer's block lay elsewhere. He had never had imagination; he had merely written reports." That is to say, he didn't need to invent his stories; they had happened to him. The government conspiracies, the capricious sense of self, the malevolent face in the sky: These were the truths of Dick's existence, and of them he made powerful fantasies. He died quietly, in Santa Ana, of a stroke in 1982. He was 53.

Reading *I Am Alive and You Are Dead*, one is plagued by a certain amount of doubt. The book is consistently fascinating and brilliantly written, but as Carrère himself attests in the preface, it is not a biography in the purest sense of the word. Certain events, like the break-in of 1971, Dick's failed relationships and his one-sided correspondence with the FBI about a Communist plot to brainwash him, are verifiable, but how, for example, would anyone be able to confirm what Dick was thinking during his heroin detox treatment at a center called X-Kalay? "[H]e could think of no place he would rather be than here," Carrère writes. Or know how he interpreted the sight of his EEG screen as he lay in the hospital after a suicide attempt in his garage: "Vague thoughts stirring about in his dull brain produced tiny, irregular spikes in the horizontal sweep...."

These questions matter, perhaps, but they seem to matter less given Carrère's subject: This was a man, after all, whose concepts of himself and of reality were mercurial at best, and a "definitive" biography would be almost antithetical to the entire

Dickian enterprise. In a way, then, Carrère is the perfect biographer for the high master of sci-fi literature, for he seamlessly weaves together facts and close readings of Dick's fiction, using one to illuminate the other. What emerges is less a snapshot than an impressionist painting — a portrait of a mind ceaselessly haunted by the flickering of a truth seen dimly, just beyond the scrim of the visible world.

From *I Am Alive and You Are Dead*:

In *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, Dick had invented the word 'kipple' to designate an entropic state of decomposition and chaos toward which all things naturally tend. Now his own life was becoming kipple. Moreover, what did it mean to say 'my life' when he was no longer sure that this life was his to begin with, or even that he was alive?

There was only one thing to do — go back to the typewriter, to the row of letters, QWERTYUIOP, arrayed across the keyboard and start another book — his 32nd or his 35th, he couldn't remember. What he did know was that he had to write it to make some money and that if he didn't — if he didn't, what then? He would have to overcome his disgust at his style, which had become so dry he feared the words would shrivel and crumble into dust on the page. His syntax was flat, repetitive, purely logical — the syntax of an android. His vocabulary had grown increasingly abstract, cold and predictable.

[*Los Angeles Times* Jun 20, 2004]

Book Reviews-

The Man Who Japed

Villiers Gerson, *Fantastic May 1957*: p. 122

In "The Man Who Japed," Philip Dick attempts to delineate a future, post-war world in which the leading force is Morec -- for *Moral Reclamation*, the all-encompassing censor, tutor, and law-giver of the warless future world. In this milieu, Allen Purcell, a creative young propagandist, finds himself offered the post of Director of Entertainment and Propaganda, a powerful position whose present job it is to counter the japery of a mysterious scofflaw

who has not only cut off the head of the statue of Morec's founder, Major Streiter, but had placed it in an attitude which may do serious damage to the humorless efforts of Morec.

The Purcell discovers three disturbing facts: first, that he is a sleep-walker; second, that it was he who destroyed the statue; and third, the reason for his japey.

Mr. Dick has a positive talent for fully depicting the physical status of a future world; his extrapolation of psychic and moral components is, however, sketchy. In an effort to enliven a story whose static qualities tend to make interest falter, he has added extraneous action which never quite proves convincing. But "The Man Who Japed" is an interesting effort even though it falls short of the author's previous novels.

The Variable Man

**Anthony Boucher, *Fantasy & Science Fiction*
February 1958: p. 109.**

Shorter s.f. includes collections by two writers familiar to F&SF readers: Robert's Sheckley's PILGRIMAGE TO EARTH (Bantam 35 cents) and Philip K. Dick's THE VARIABLE MAN (Ace 35 cents). "Variable" is the word for both volumes.... The Dick book contains the title novella and 5 novelets (one previously anthologized). It seems probable that the medium length is least suited to Dick's talents: both his short stories (which have been collected in England, but not here) and his full-length novels are more individual and impressive. But through there are awkwardnesses and confusions in these fairly-long stories, you'll also find fertile ingenuity and a striking power in the use of evocative symbols.

The Cosmic Puppets

**Calvin M. Knox, *Science Fiction Adventure*
March 1958: pp. 100-101.**

This seems to be the month for infusing new life into old clichés. Duncan re-examines multiple universes, Heinlein and his Lorenzo, and Philip K. Dick, in his fifth Ace novel, looking at the hoary concept of the alien beings who take over a small and ordinary American town.

This one is really a long novelette, not a novel, and it's actually fantasy and not science fiction. It lacks the complexity and rich intellectual ferment of Dick's four earlier novels. Briefly, it's the story of Ted Barton, who returns to his hometown after a long absence only to find the whole town altered beyond recognition.

The characteristic Dick virtues are present: the tight, nervous, compelling prose style, the sharp characterization, the startlingly real dialogue, the meticulous development of the unsettling situation. It's a fantasy in the *Unknown* tradition, unfolded with the rigorous logic of the best of that magazine's lead novels, and it makes exciting reading for those who enjoy an occasional pure fantasy.

Incidentally, the version of the book that appeared last year in *Satellite Science Fiction* underwent considerable editorial alteration; this appears to be Dick's original untailed draft.

Dr. Futurity

P. Schuyler-Miller, *Analog* October 1960: p. 170.

"Dr. Futurity" provides us with a duly unpleasant future society, in which immortality is government administered, teen-age gangs serve as a scavenging squad for malcontents, suicide is routine, and it is a crime to heal. Dr. Jim Parsons, snatched into this environment by a time dredge -- out of a time rather far in our own future -- naturally has to fight his way out. He gets unexpected help, then finds that accepting it has involved him in an effort to change history and made him a murderer instead of a healer. Some details of the future culture are brilliantly drawn; others, like the hybrid Latin-German whatsit language, just don't convince. By the end, it's a little hard to work out the score or even tell who's up.

Radio Free Albemuth

Byron Coley: *Force Exposure* no. 10 (1986): p. 110.

...this is the legendary "Valisystem A" manuscript -- that is, the complete bk that was later disassembled and rebuilt as a different bk called "Valis." It is a heaping pile of great stuff. Technically, Dick's writing was entering a whole new phase of mastery when he died and his ideas about how man is able

to fuck over his fellow man was entering a similarly heightened plane. In this bk, Dick writes of his "pink light experience" and its complications in terms of their potential political meaning more than in terms of their potential religious meaning. Of course it may turn out that the political conspiracy here (which is of Illuminati-esque proportions) actually has plenty to do with god-incarnate. Wonderfully written, this is an excellent study of the collapse of Sixties-style radical politics in relation to fascism, religion and you. It also has about as much to do with science fiction as my shoe. Please read it.

"The Plague Yard" Simon Dwyer

"THIS MAY BE HEAVEN OR THIS MAY BE HELL..."

Our fictional history is alive with ghosts, zombies, the undead, those who have been resurrected, cloned robotised and rebuilt. Because, in the spiritless, fleshy world of the West, we are generally terrified of ceasing to exist. For me, one of the best, trickiest writers of such life/death scenarios was another Californian resident, Philip K. Dick. Dick is famous for two reasons. One, he appeared in the first edition of *Rapid Eye Movement* magazine in 1979, and two, he was by far and away the best SF writer on this "or any other" planet.

Dick's best books -- *Ubik*, *Flow My Tears*, *The Policeman Said*, *Do Androids Dream Of Electric Sheep?*, *The Three Stigmata Of Palmer Eldrich* -- were among the first novels I read. I think it was those books that hinted to me that Time and Life are circular and, if your Perception is purely linear, you will only experience one tiny sliver of the circle. What a hippy.

Mostly rush-writing as a cheap pulp fictioner in the '50s and '60s, Dick became a cult writer of the early '70s in Britain, a well-thumbed copy of such gems as *The Turning Wheel*, *The Man in the High Castle* or *Dr. Futurity* being as essential a fashion accessory to wasted white artschool boys as a copy of Roxy Music's first album. But Philip Kendrick [sic] Dick deserved whatever popularity he got by being -- along with Alfred Bester -- a writer who used the generally appalling serious SF genre to spark the human imagination away from the drudgery of everyday perception. His plots

never relied on tedious technology and fancifully named planets. To Dick what counted were ideas, altered states, love and life under pressure. The Science Fiction element being used, as it should, only as a vehicle from which to create new, internal worlds. Worlds not of outer, but of inner space. The universe in the minds of men. His anti-heroes were normal, boring, fallible, mistake ridden men who learned to cope in the most weird and extraordinary of circumstances. Humans under stress, again, whose perceptions were challenged by those old favorites, Space, Drugs, Love and, in his later work, Religion. Most popular Science Fiction nowadays is overblown Dungeons and Dragons fantasy trash of the type Heavy Metal Horror fans and aficionados of crappy B-movies adore. Although those weaned on the Classics would rather die than admit to even reading it, Philip K. Dick's visions and versions of the future present -- that is, an inner turmoil -- are as good, if not better, than any dystopia dreamed up by Orwell or Burgess, Huxley or Vonnegut. His plots took place in future societies whose worldviews were governed by the distorting influences of idiosyncratic messiahs. His heroes were little scraps of humanity seen living under such madness. We all teeter on the edge of our own insanity. Whereas Serrano passes comment on 'social reality' and becomes a world famous blasphemer, in practically all of his novels, Dick mirrored the world by juxtaposing TWO LEVELS OF REALITY. One which is objectively perceived, the other which was determined by the processes of other people.

Perhaps, not surprisingly, Dick, so rumor has it, spent a lot of his time taking unusual drugs, extracted from sheep's glands, with Dr. John Lilley ...

[*Rapid Eye 2* (1995)]

A HANDFUL OF DARKNESS

Presents a menacing future world where the technological dream has spiraled into freakish nightmare. Here is the unseen tomorrow, lurking on the other side of time's distant horizon. Here, too, is the present -- a troubled pre-disaster world seen through the silent eye of the post-disaster future...

PKD OTAKU is a fanzine devoted to an ongoing conversation about the fiction and non-fiction of Philip K. Dick. It's edited and published, by Patrick Clark, P.O. Box 2761, St. Paul, Minnesota 55102, USA. No subscriptions. Individual issues are \$2.00, or by prior arrangement: for written or art contributions, letters of comment, traded publications and/or review copies. For further info, please email me at: pclark@jjhill.org.

“Otaku” is a Japanese word for someone with a hobby that has become an obsession generally characterized by exhaustive artifact collecting and fanatically detailed knowledge of some subject.