

PKD OTAKU #3

Patrick: book reviews from science fiction magazines and fanzines

Eye in the Sky

Damon Knight: *Infinity* November 1957. Pp. 99-100

Dick's fourth novel is an *Unknown*-style fantasy. What appears to be a science-fictional situation in the opening chapter -- eight people fall from an observation platform when an atom-smashing bevatron goes out of control -- turns out to have nothing to do with the case. The eight wake up in a cockeyed world, but have not been translated to another plane of reality, as you might expect, by the bevatron: they are images of themselves, wandering around in a dream world belonging to one of their number, something like Alice in the Red King's dream. ("If that there King was to wake,' added Tweeeldum, 'you'd go out --bang! -- just like a candle.") Meanwhile, their bodies are lying unconscious on the floor of the bevatron chamber.

This section of the story takes the form of a satire on Jehovism, exemplified for safety's sake by a crackpot Islamic cult called Second Babiism. (The courageous editor can afford to thumb his nose at any Moslems who may chance to pick up the book.) For blaspheming, the hero gets stung by a bee; for lying he is deluged by locusts. Applying for a job in a research electronics firm, he finds that "communications" now means a direct line to the deity; his qualifications are determined by reading a passage from the holy book, *Bayan of the Second Bab*; and by turning the spiritual tables on a group of hostile young believers, the hero gets them damned on the spot -- i.e., turned into ape-like dwarves while everything around them is withered and blackened.

This kind of thing is good fun for infidels, and Dick lays it on with a trowel (e.g., God Almighty delivers his own pulpithumping Sunday morning sermons on TV).

On p. 121, the proprietor of this fantasy-world, an old soldier named Silvester, gets cracked on the scone by an imaginary bedpost, and the scene immediately changes -- the rest of the characters don't go like candles, but they do find themselves in a second and equally askew world of phantasm. This one turns out to be that of a feather-brained matron

named Mrs. Pritchett, who keeps deleting from it anything she feels is not quite nice -- beginning, of course, with sex; auto horns, rude traffic cops, and so on down to clouds, water and air. Having abolished everything, Mrs. Pritchett winks out and fantasy-world #3 is born.

The book is divided in this way into four dream sections, with a prologue and an epilogue in the real world. At their best, the dream episodes almost achieve the chilling balance between reality and horror of Hubbard's *Fear*; but the pace is too rapid, the story thread too slight. Once the unreality of the action has been established, there is no real urgency in it; Dick has to keep on leaping agilely from one set of assumptions to the next, in order to sustain the reader's interest at all. The characters, who in any other Dick novel would have acquired substance from their background, are here like empty Jello molds.

In the mundane section, Dick has something to say, but all too little time to say it, about the Negro in America, about security systems, Communists and liberals. Perhaps the deepest fault of the book is that, in the dream sections, it dodges such living issues to tilt at straw men: back-street cults, 19th-century prudery, paranoid maiden ladies, 1930 parlor pinkery.

Time Out of Joint

Frederick Pohl: *Worlds of If* November 1959, p. 98

Philip K. Dick is an adventurous sort of byline for the science fiction reader, because he never knows what he will get. In Dick's first novel, *Solar Lottery*, which Ace has just reissued, he gave us a complicated and quite unsatisfying picture of an Earth governed by some sort of quiz-show device for selecting a ruler. It was perhaps even more complex than van Vogt. His newest book is *Time Out of Joint* (Lippincott) -- "oh cursed spite," says Hamlet, finishing the quotation, "that ever I was born to set it right." But Dick's hero does not set it right. He gets less use out of more power than any science fiction hero of recent years. This is a most uneven book. There is a masterful opening in which Dick supplies the reader, with skill and economy, just the right hints as to what the surprises will be. There is some adroit weaving of the threads, and then... The book doesn't exactly end. It disintegrates. Lippincott, for reasons best known to Lippincott, has chosen to hide the fact this is science fiction by labeling it "A Novel of Menace." Well, so was *Moby Dick*. But *Time Out of Joint* is science fiction, all right, and fine of its kind in the first hundred-odd pages.

The Man Who Japed

Larry T. Shaw & Irwin Stein: *Infinity* April 1957, p.p. 96-97

The Man Who Japed by Philip K. Dick and *The Space Born* by E. C. Tubb appear back to back in an Ace Double book. If we were slightly more ignorant about the editorial method, we might attribute this to a deliberate effort to produce a paradigm of the current status of the science-fiction novel. Briefly characterized: the novels are: Dick -- an interesting, almost spectacular failure; Tubb -- a competent, thoroughly readable, and thoroughly unexciting success.

As is required of the spectacular, *The Man Who Japed* generates great excitement, throwing off sparks in the form of new (or new-looking) concepts in all directions. A genuine act of creation takes place, with the reader's co-operation. The humorless world of Morec, well-articulated, believable, deadly, comes into being and the protagonist is set into motion, dancing to the culture's tune.

And here, probably, is where the failure lies. The culture itself is so well made, that the cross currents working against the dominant personality fail to convince. They seem like rational constructs as opposed to emotional experiences. As is so often the case, Alan Lindsey works within the culture, yet in opposition to it. How he alone, of all Morec citizens develops an aberrant personality is not sufficiently explained to be convincing. Dick was undoubtedly aware of this failing, and tries, through several scenes involving disaffected teen-agers, to make amends. But these are never more than patches on the surface of the fabric.

The climax too, seems manufactured by the plot necessities, rather than by the fabric of the narrative. It is, in its own way, exciting, even dazzling -- and totally lacking in conviction, either to the reader or, one suspects, writer. One must blame the exigencies of the time and space.

As a whole, however, the book is well worth reading.

Dr. Futurity

Frederik Pohl: *Worlds of If* July 1960, pp. 104-05

John Brunner's *Slavers of Space* and Philip K. Dick's *Dr. Futurity* combine in an Ace Double volume of not quite total merit.... After some satisfactory adventures, though, Brunner's invention deserts him and the story takes a "surprise" twist which we cannot approve (as flimsy) and may not discuss (as giving away the payoff).

An analogous fault mars Philip K. Dick's equally inventive *Dr. Futurity*. A 21st century doctor is snatched by a time machine into a still farther future, the death-loving world of the year 2405, where his healing skill is considered a foul perversion, and he is at once trapped into a complicated net of underground activities.

The death-lovers have been constructed with attention to those corroborative details which give artistic versimilitude, and thus Dick's narrative is neither bald nor unconvincing. It is quite convincing. It is even hairy. What flaws the story is a really excessive troweling-on of time paradoxes, so that most everybody turns out to be almost anybody else.... In mediocre stories neither of these endings would do great harm; but the bulk of these works is very far above mediocre.

Damon Knight: *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* June 1960, p. 86

DR. FUTURITY (Ace, 35 cents) is another of Philip K. Dick's curiously intense and murky nightmares. This one uses the familiar gambit of the modern man transported to a future world, and makes him a medical doctor, charged with saving a man's life, in a eugenic society which views life-saving not only as criminal but as a moral offense.

The story is even less plausible than usual; for instance, Dr. Parsons has barely had time to identify the language of the future as a synthetic blend of English, German and Latin, before we find him speaking and understanding such sentences as, "The only complexion of your type, in my experience, is the result of a highly contagious plague." Ignoring such lapses, and Dick's frequent stylistic howlers, is worth your while; Dick's plots may be jerry-built, but his visions of horror are authentic. He has a gift for making his stock backgrounds look lived-in (as when Parsons finds a cigarette butt smoldering on the control panel of a deserted spaceship); he also has the ability, almost alone among s.f. writers, to make the politics of his future world sound like more than perfunctory pieties. Banal though it is at times ("Good God, he thought, I'm lost in space and I'm lost in time. In both dimensions"), this novel has moments of unexpected vividness and power. As usual (Mr. Amis please note) Dick has a needle sharpened for our own society: "By denying such a powerful reality [as death], you undermined the rational basis of your world. You had no way to cope with war and famine and overpopulation because you couldn't bring yourself to discuss them."

The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldrich

P. Schuyler Miller: *Analog* August 1965, pp. 152-53

An author can't come up with a "Man In the High Castle" every time, but in this case Philip K. Dick certainly didn't try. This time he's standing in for A. E. Van Vogt, or maybe for a Pohl-Van Vogt collaboration. The result is wild, zany, and lively, but not very memorable.

Today's "Barbie" dolls are obviously the inspiration for Perky Pat Layouts, around which the story wheels and whirls. With a little aid from a nice habit-forming drug, peddled *sub rosa* by P.P.E. along with the minutely detailed Perky Pat layouts, the bored people of the overcrowded future live it up by imagining themselves into the surrogate world they have built up. As with model railroaders and their hobby, there is no limit to the details with which the sets can be constructed; a goodly chunk of the economy hangs on it, and on the planets, to which segments of the overpopulated Earth are shipped to molder after being "drafted," these installations are all the life worth living.

Then a wheeler-dealer comes back from Alpha Centauri with a more potent drug and layouts of a more perplexingly entrapping type, and the plot starts to get tangled. Is the mysterious Palmer Eldrich the villain of the piece or the hero. In fact, just what is going on from moment to moment? The only way you'll ever find out is by reading the book, and you may be confused then.

The Crack In Space / The Zap Gun / Counter-Clock World

Judith Merrill: *The Fantasy & Science Fiction November 1967, pp. 32-35*

Philip K. Dick is admired, if anything, even more by Old Thing adherents than by TNT people. Yet he is virtually the only established American s-f writer who demonstrates a consistent awareness of the facts of life in this country today.

Perhaps because his work is so colorful -- and sometimes so garbled -- Dick does not seem to be as highly regarded for the acuteness of his political/sociological observations and projections as he deserves: this in spite of the fact that *THE MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE* is generally considered (on both sides of the *THING* fence) to be his best book, and it is the one with the least pyrotechnics and the most fully-developed socio-economic extrapolation. Since then, his work has been, in general, more flamboyant but also more complex in concepts; more ambitious in scope, but seldom as fully realized.

The three recent novels under discussion here -- *THE CRACK IN SPACE*, *THE ZAP GUN*, and *COUNTER-CLOCK WORLD* -- are all somewhat more restrained and less infuriatingly *disconnected* than most of the interim work (notably last year's *NOW WAIT FOR NEXT YEAR* -- and the elusive quality of something-extra, a note quite graspable *plus*, which pervaded *NEXT YEAR* and *PALMER ELDRICH*, is (if somewhat modified) beginning to be more comprehensible.

That is to say, I think I have at last discovered what it is that at once delights and annoys me in the particular kind of *brightness* characteristic of Dick's works of the last five years or so -- and it has to do with appropriation of a very specialized and very contemporary aspect of pop art: an approach probably excellently well suited to his content -- and incidentally, but irrelevantly, extremely irritating to me.

Pause for story identification: *ZAP GUN* is the Romeo-and-Juliet story of Lars Powderly, weapons fashion designer for Westbloc, and Lilo Topchev, his opposite number in Peep East, set against a fascinatingly postulated near-future of intensely controlled economy, in which the two great powers maintain stability by the conduct of a false war, fought in mock-up on tabletops, while the "commodities" on the UN-W Natsec Board think up ways to adapt the weapon designs to practical civilian use. *COUNTER-CLOCK WORLD* contains one of the very few future-projections of the present Black Power movement in which there is any genuine comprehension of the issues, motivations, and directions of today's "insurrection," along with further comments on our anticulture, and some cogent asides on the character of contemporary matrimony -- all thrown into a really unbelievably banal plot set in an amusing, sometimes-satiric, lightly-scatological reverse time fantasy, whose burlesque-and-bathos effects almost neutralize the political concepts completely. *CRACK IN SPACE* uses abortions and human deep-freezing, a pleasure-satellite run by a two-headed mutant, and lots of fast action to veil a meaty account of economic and race issues in an election campaign.

In all three books, Dick makes use of every available color-and-motion effect -- as well as his innate magnificent sense of timing -- to create a spell-binding effect which carries the reader easily through the countless *non sequiturs* and logic-gaps of his plots. In every case, it takes aliens or supermen to get things resolved. The characters, going through a series of disconnected but (each time) briefly convincing motions and emotions, seem to be painted entirely in primary colors --

And it was that thought that the flash of insight came to me. Phil Dick is not writing novels, but comic-strip continuity -- and when you chew on that thought a bit (even if, like me, you have trouble swallowing it) you may recognize that it is *not* a Bad Thing, after all. Dick is writing what the British critics like to call a "novel of ideas" rather than a "novel of manners." It doesn't matter what sort of nonsense he makes use of, to carry his concepts -- as long as he can hold the reader, and as long as the idea-cargo itself comes through intact. He may offend my sense of fitness -- but I learned to read out of Victorian novels. My children learned mostly out of comic books, and the public school adaptation of comics known to the Ed Biz as Visual Aids.

Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?

Judith Merrill: *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction August 1968, pp. 22-23*

DO ANDROIDS DREAM OF ELECTRIC SHEEP? Does not suffer from any of the assortment of novelistic shortcomings which qualify my admiration for the other three books: Dick has apparently worked his way through to a methodology that gives him much more control, and makes his ideas much more accessible to the reader. IN a review of

his some months ago, I compared his techniques to those of the comic strip, and I understand there were readers who took this as denigration. If it seemed so, it was probably because the comic strip itself is simply not a congenial form to me: I don't like the flat bright colors, and stylized images. But I recognize that in this particularity I am stranded almost alone on the far side of a generation gap (with people twice my age, since it is my own generation that first took the comic book to heart) -- and it has never stopped me from *reading* (well, some) comics, or from recognizing the value of the form as a message-medium.

In any case, I have read, I think, every one of Dick's books from cover to cover, even when he infuriated, or baffled me (as for a while he was doing regularly): at the least there was always the same sort of thing I found in the Aldiss novel -- flashes of awareness of a concept entirely outside my own bag, and not successfully communicated, to me, by the author -- but clearly worth reaching for, and coming back to.

Whether I have acquired skill at reading Dick, or he has, as it seems to me, begun to organize his material more successfully, this time I experienced none of the jump-frame confusion I have suffered from in the past. This is a rich book, which deals with aspects of the whole range of conflicts, dualities, dichotomies, and interchanges approached in all three of the others described here -- and is nothing like any of them. Some of the elements will be familiar to regular readers of Dick's; others are new. This is a world of falling population and sublethal fallout dust, of Wilbur Mercer and the black empathy box, of religious devotion to living animals and merciless extermination of androids, of "specials" and bounty hunters, mood consoles and the inescapable Buster Friendly. Every one of these things is meaningful in context, and the context is constructed to contain all the meanings and multiply them.

Perhaps the best thing I can say is that there were still some ideas I'm not sure I know whether I liked, or agreed with, or fully understood -- but I assume I will see them from some other angle the next time around.

And I can say with some certainty that the Happy Ending is *supposed* to make you weep.

P. Schuyler Miller: *Analog* September 1968, p171

"Ex Africa..." the Romans said. "Ex Dick," we should say. The rest is the same: "always something new." He simply does not repeat himself.

This time we are in a future in which the world is so nearly used up that mankind is escaping to the planets and stars. On Earth, those who can't escape are fighting against the threat of a real or fancied replacement by androids. Pets are status markers, even when they are mechanical. Occupied apartments are hovels, yet many buildings are abandoned to decay. It is a world of contrast and contradiction, in which we follow the fortunes of one Rick Decard bounty hunter.

Eight androids have escaped from Mars and taken refuge on Earth. Two have been hunted down and killed. Decard sets out to get the other six. He must kill or be killed; the androids are as ruthless as he. He is harassed by the need to replace his mechanical sheep with a live pet, if only a spider. He is tempted by an android woman who has offered to help him. And interwoven with the whole intricate web is the empathic cult of Mercerism, whose devotees can link themselves electronically with their martyred teacher and share his suffering.

It may take a couple of readings to make sure exactly what is happening to Decard, and why, and how the world got in the mess it's in by 1992. Try it.

Richard E. Geis: *Science Fiction Review* no. 33 (October 1969), pp. 28-29

This is at once a simple and a difficult book to review. Simple: it's about a future bounty hunter who is assigned to "retire" six renegade androids. Difficult: it is about identity, what makes a man human, entropy, reality, and the illusions we must have, the pathetic needs of the ego...on and on.

Philip K. Dick has mastered his tools. He is now verging on artistry in his novels. I think sometimes he plays with the reader. Dick pounces in the opening paragraphs, gets a hold on the reader's attention and interest, and leads him into scenes that demand thought, self-examination, analysis...then into confusion...then into reality that seems on one page to be solid, and on another page to be quicksand.

Rick Deckard and his wife Iran are not happily married. They live in a world of slow death from radioactive dust that hides the sun in a haze. A world war is past and mankind faces extinction. Most animal and insect life is gone, life is sacred, and the status of a man or a corporation is in the possession of an animal or animals...alive...and not fake-electric imitations that hopefully fool the neighbors.

Deckard and his wife live in an apartment in which the three most important items are a Penfield mood organ, a religious "empathy" device, and a television set.

The first three pages of the book are tragic, pathetic and frightening as Dick savagely and satirically shows the emptiness and despondency of Iran Deckard's life and how she copes -- with the settings of the mood organ: 481 -- Awareness of the manifold possibilities open to me in the future; 888 -- The desire to watch TV no matter what's on it; 594 -- Pleased acknowledgement of husband's superior wisdom in all matters....

They live in an apartment house only one-third occupied. The suburbs are falling into ruin, abandoned except for isolated mental defectives.

Rick must wear a lead codpiece to protect his genetic purity.

There are colonies on Mars which are marginal. People are urged to emigrate.

Near-perfect androids are manufactured to work on Mars but they often rebel and kill their human masters, steal a spaceship and come to earth to "pass" as human. They have to be hunted and killed...not killed, retired.

The androids have no feeling of empathy for each other, as humans do. The police scientists have a polygraph-type of test which can detect this lack of empathy. But the android manufacturers keep making improved models with better, smarter brains...

One of the new Nexus 6 androids has succeeded in killing the San Francisco Police Department's senior bounty hunter. Rick Deckard is next in line for the job. He must find and kill six androids...

This book is multi-leveled, fascinating, baffling, suspenseful, always absorbing.

Yet the loose ends bother me: it is not explained how the police know where all the androids are and what occupation the androids have adopted; how the empathy religion, Mercerism, works to create the illusion of reality, and how a cut from a thrown stone in the Mercer trance is transformed into a real cut when the Mercerite releases the handles of the empathy box; how the dying culture and shrinking economy of the city can have so many small evidences of thriving "business-as-usual" life, including constructing new buildings when so many must be vacant; why spaceship theft is so easy for androids.

There is in this Dick book, as in others of his, a vague feeling that this world is stage set, thin papier-mâché, backdrops.

Why would anyone plant an electric toad in the middle of a desert near the Oregon border?

Read the book and try to figure it out....

UBIK

P. Schuyler Miller: *Analog* October 1969, p. 174-75.

Philip K. Dick seems to be the Van Vogt of the "new" cycle of major science fiction writers. Like Van Vogt, he has done a few extremely good books -- "The Man in the High Castle" is his "Slan" -- and many others that are less memorable but not at all forgettable. Like Van Vogt, he has adopted the pattern of extreme wheels-within-wheels plot complexity, in which nobody knows from page to page what is going on and who is on whose side. He usually resolves the tangle better than Van Vogt does, or did, but not in this case.

In the beginning, we have a future industrial espionage yarn unfolding nicely but conventionally. Telepaths and other psi-talented people have an obvious value when it comes to reading trade secrets from people's minds, seeing through solid walls, and so on. Runciter Associates is a kind of counter-espionage organization whose employees can neutralize the psi fields of the spies. Several of the country's top telepaths have vanished, and Runciter is determined to find them. He thinks he has, when a team is hired for a neutralizing job on the Moon. They go there -- and are killed. But the story is just beginning.

You have to read this yourself to untangle it, and I'm not sure you will then. I'm not at all sure I have. At first sight, Runciter was killed and the team members are under some kind of attack that destroys them one by one. But things happen that suggest they are dead or in some sort of fantastic limbo, where a live Runciter is trying to reach and rescue them. Time keeps shifting strangely and unpredictable. And there is the patent medicine called "Ubik," which seems able to arrest the change but changes itself.

Maybe I'm just not with it anymore. Call this the most psychedelic of Dick's books...or one that got away from him.

Richard E. Geis: *Science Fiction Review* #32 (August 1969): p. 30.

This novel is one of THOSE...engrossing, unputdownable, fascinating, baffling. I haven't enjoyed a book so much in years

Here is Philip K. Dick manipulating reality again; this time in the world of half-life in the minds of people frozen soon after death. It is not a placid inner world, and not not placid for the reasons you might think.

There are psi elements, time regression elements, a psychotic entity which...

No, I won't give it away. The novel is a literary dance of the seven veils; as each puzzling veil falls more is understood, and then more; there are reversals, hints, and there is a brief sight of the golden truth, and deliberate teasing, and finally...finally...understanding is there naked --

-- and it goes poof in the last six paragraphs as Dick strikes again!

Ubik stands for ubiquitous, but that's no clue at all... or is it? The book defies plot encapsulation. Read it. Read it!

Our Friends from Frolix-8

Jan M. Evers: *Luna Monthly* #24/25 (May/June 1971), p. 46

Dick has created a society based on new forms of men, Specials and Unusuals, who rule, or the Old Men. Unusuals are the next step in evolution so to speak, and have greater capacity for dealing with abstract concepts. Specials have special talents, such as telepathy. Old Men are plain ordinary humans, and are getting the short end of the stick. Alcohol is banned, with various tranquilizers taking its place. There are detention camps on Luna for malcontent Old Men who refuse to obey the superior New Men. Into this steps Provoni, intent on helping Old Men get their chance too, even if this means bringing help -- help from a far off planet.

This book has more logic and cohesion than most of Dick's work. The plot is well structured. He does a lot of scene and point-of-view shifting, as usual, but it's easier to follow. The sense of continuous reality is better. This is less trippy, more down to earth, yet with many far-out ideas. This is a readable and entertaining book.

The Maze of Death

David C. Paskow: *Luna Monthly* #26/27 (July/August 1971), p. [?]

Delmark-O is the location for a colony of Earth people but, after the assemblage is met, communications are terminated and, in much the same manner of the people in Agatha Christie's "Ten Little Indians," people begin to die, murdered by assailant or assailants unknown. A psychosis seems to have taken hold in the colony; not knowing why they have been selected or what purpose lies behind the colony itself, fear and distrust fills an already tense atmosphere.

Philip K. Dick has mixed weird personalities, sex, drugs and religion (once again) and produced an irritating, frustrating, highly entertaining, almost impossible to put down novel (once again). This won't be classed as an IMPORTANT Dick novel, but it should be read (and bought, in paperback).

Flow My Tears, The Policeman Said

Paul Walker: *Luna Monthly* #51 (Spring 1974), p. 13

I could not read Philip K. Dick's new novel, *Flow My Tears, The Policeman Said* either. I never thought I could say that about anything by Philip K. Dick, but I found the first sixty pages of the novel dated, pretentious, and boring. Of course, I should have seen it coming: since, I believe, *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldrich*, it was evident Dick was losing his sense of humor; that unique and peculiar irony of his, that sense of cosmic comedy that made his dark visions so entertaining at the same time they were scaring the daylight out of me. The visions have become more psychotic, their consequences nastier, his sociology bitter and cynical, until now I find his books very ugly, ridden with despair and

spiteful feelings. *Flow My Tears* is a sixties novel full of juvenile paranoia, of spite and hate against society, and a most unpleasant novel to read. It is the story of a famous TV personality who is equally famous as a lady's man. One night, on the verge of "getting away from it all" with his girlfriend, he is almost murdered by a former sweetheart, and wakes the next morning to find his 'identity' gone; that is, his ID cards, his show, any memory his friends or associates had of him; he cannot even verify the date of his birth. And in his near-future world in which blacks have almost been exterminated, and students live in underground colleges, and the 'pols' and the 'nats' patrol the surface, jailing anyone without the proper papers in forced labor camps, Dick's protagonist is completely at the mercy of his time. How he survives and attempts to re-establish his identity is the story as far as I could bear it.

Aside from the paranoid social background, the story moves at a snail's pace, with talk-talk-talk. If it got better halfway through, I could not care less. To me the most important part of a book is the first third: if a novel does not engage the reader's attention and sympathies by then, the writer does not deserve a second chance; and Dick so thoroughly alienated me I am not even curious how it all came out.

P. Schuyler Miller: *Analog* December 1974 pp. 167-68

Here is Philip K. Dick making like A.E. van Vogt of the "Null A" days, and doing it very well.

Jason Taverner, star of one of 1988's top TV shows, goes to the hospital after a cast-off starlet has attacked him with an ordinarily deadly Callisto cuddle-sponge -- and wakes up in a fleabag hotel, stripped of every bit of identification but with a wad of money in his pocket. Little by little he finds that he doesn't exist. Nobody has heard of him or his show. His friends have never seen him. There are no records of his birth or life in the files of one of the nastiest police states you could ever ask to see. He uses his money to buy a set of forged ID cards -- and is promptly betrayed to the police.

Now the focus changes, and we see the Taverner enigma from the point of view of the police. There *can't* be a man in their world for whom there are no records. If some tremendously potent underground agency can extract every mention of a man from a nation's files, they want to find it and smash it -- fast, the way they would treat the "students" who burrow under the ruins of the old universities, or the unreliaables who die in labor camps. But Taverner is helped to escape...and the nightmare begins.

I admit I am still not sure just what KR-3, the police laboratories' multiple space inclusion drug, has done. Is the world where Taverner doesn't exist a hallucination of the poisoned TV star...or is his success a pipe dream of the nobody in the flophouse? What are the people who exist in both worlds, and how can they live mutually exclusive lives and shuttle back and forth between them? How can a woman become a skeleton in moments?

I do not much like the book's Part Four, either. As if he were winding up a Victorian romance, Dick gives us a quick rundown on what happened to every major character and some minor ones. Poor Taverner, of course, has found the police state too much to buck -- or was he a hallucination too? You decide.

Joanna Russ: *Fantasy & Science Fiction* January 1975, pp. 14-16

John Brunner's *Total Eclipse* and Philip Dick's *Flow My Tears, the Policeman Said*. (sic) are hard to assess, since Mr. Brunner can no more be unintelligent than Mr. Dick can lose his feelings for the gritty, chancy irrelevancies of real life. But neither book coheres. *Eclipse* reads like the first draft of a fine novel John Brunner ought to write someday and *Tears* like a beginning that could not find an end with the equivalent of, "He woke up and found it was all a dream."
[...]

Tears (also Doubleday's) is non-coherent in the opposite way; Dick apparently starts with the overtones and lets them (when he is at his best, as in *Counter-Clock World*) produce their own, organically whole plot.* *Tears* is best in its digressions and at its periphery and weakest at the center; the genetically special hero is a very unconvincing superman who in fact has only his charm (and perpetually bad judgement). The theme of finding out what life is like among the proles (i.e. losing your money and power) is God-awfully stale, nor does the author really care about it, and his attempt at the end -- I mean I *think* so -- to replace the hero's second reality by a third, only piles up inconsistencies and unanswered questions instead of attacking our very perceptions of reality. Some of the digressions are fine by any standards; for example the telepathic clerk in a cheap motel who says cheerfully, "I know this hotel isn't much, but we have no bugs. Once we had Martian sand fleas, but no more"; Monica Buff who is a compulsive shoplifter, with a big wicker bag she got in Baja California once, and who never wears shoes or washes her hair (she's only talked about!); Ruth Rae (something of a character herself) tells a marvelous story about the pet rabbit ("lipperty-lipperty) who wanted to be a cat; the agreeable Jesus-Freak cop who answers Ruth Rae's frightened, "I *hate* L.A." (she's being arrested) with an earnest, "So do I. But we

must learn to live with it; it's there." The most brilliant character in the book is a waif named Kathy, all innocence and psychotic emotional blackmail, who has violent temper tantrums in which she goes rigid and screams (she calls them "mystical trances") and who allows the author to render with frightening verisimilitude what happens when you try to tightrope-walk with a skillful, vicious, grown-up eight-month old. Unfortunately the book also has failures like Alys Buckman, who is a Lesbian *and* married to her brother *and* a drug freak *and* an unidentified "fetishist" (she wears tight pants, a leather shirt, hoop earrings, and a chain-link belt), *and* a sadist (her stiletto-heeled boots are hardly Lesbian), *and* an electronic-sex addict *and* lobotomized in some way never clearly described, *and* a collector of "bondage" photos (another male specialty). IN short, she is pure *diabola ex machina*, a male fantasy of a macho, homosexual, leather S&M freak projected on to a woman.** The Epilog is unfortunately like a cartoon *Punch* once printed: author-at-typewriter with the caption "'The hell with it.' Several shots rang out and they all fell dead. The End.'" In any other profession *Tears* would be called good, sometimes fascinating, example of overwork and the prolific author would be pensioned generously for several years in order to mellow and recuperate.

**Counter-Clock World* is built on the dichotomy of the Hobart Effect, i.e. the physical resurrection of the dead, and the deaths of almost everyone you care about in the book -- as a line of poetry (which is quoted more than once) says, "It is the lives, the lives, the lives that die."

**John Rechy, a homosexual author, has a character very like this in one of his recent books and C.S. Lewis's Fairy Hardcastle in *That Hideous Strength* is another. If a woman can't be a lady, she automatically becomes Marlon Brando in "the Wild Ones." Pfeh. See other recent stories about hairy, muscled Women's Libbers (yeah) who smoke cigars (chomp) and cut up men (help!).

Cy Chauvin: *Delap's F&SF Review July 1975, pp. 17-18*

This is Philip K. Dick's first new novel in over three years (the hardcover edition was published last year by Doubleday). It deals with Dick's typical themes, but with enough apparent freshness for it to be nominated for a Hugo award this year as Best Novel.

Jason Taverner, a tv star in the year 1988, wakes up and finds himself completely unknown. His friends find him a stranger, and no one recognizes him at all. More than that, he does not even legally exist -- there is no record of his birth in the central computer banks. The book details his struggles to come to terms with this situation.

"I've lost the ability to tell what's good or bad, true or not true, anymore," says Taverner, in a statement that would make a fit epithet for the novel. Taverner is never sure who is for or against him, and as in all Dick's novels, **Flow My Tears, the Policeman Said** has strong elements of paranoia. Taverner himself is neither hero nor anti-hero, and while he attempts to solve his problem, it is not through his own efforts that he achieves success.

The background is more sketchy than in most of Dick's novels, and lacks the clever details -- e.g., talking suitcases, self-propelled shopping carts -- that are such a unique hallmark of his fiction. Dick's prose is not really much better than that of a middling journalist, but then it has rarely been more than work-a-day.

The book's major flaw, however, lies in Dick's explanation of how Taverner woke up one morning without an identity. According to the author, he passed over into another universe that didn't previously exist, due to the effect of a drug on another character. "Taverner, like the rest of us, became another datum in your sister's percept system and got dragged across when she passed into an alternative construct of coordinates," one of the characters explains.

Yet the attentive reader will certainly wonder how a drug taken by a single person can affect the minds of thirty million others (the total viewers of Taverner's tv show), or transport Taverner physically from a hospital to a dingy hotel room. I can see no possible way for a drug to alter the perceptions of anyone besides the user. If the drug had been sprayed into the air or water, or if Taverner had taken the drug himself, Dick's explanation might be sensible. As it stands, the book makes very little sense at all.

Logic has never been one of Philip K. Dick's strengths, however, and his writing appears to have undergone little change during his three year absence.

Deus Irae

Richard E. Geis: *Science Fiction Review* #19 (August 1976), pp. 19

DEUS IRAE, an ambitious collaboration by Philip K. Dick and Roger Zelazny (Doubleday, \$5.95), is...beyond me on the religious level, beyond the obvious ironic ending that shows the lies that buttress and often foundation the faiths of men live by. There is a great deal of comment, self-questioning, trotting out of believer/non-believer perspectives and psychology. There is erudition. On one level I'm respectful, and on another I mutter, "Christ, this sort of thing has been thrashed out again and again and again for eons. Why again? Why do these two heavy science fictional talents feel the need to restate the obvious, to retread this old, old tire?"

I'll grant they do it very well, in the body of a fascinating pilgrimage by one Tibor McMaster, an armless, legless painter in the post-Smash world of extreme mutants and isolated small cities in North America. He is on a journey to find and photograph (for a church mural he is painting in Charlottesville, Utah) the face of the worshipped God of Wrath -- a still living man named Carleton Lufteufel, former head of ERDA, the man who gave the order to drop the Bombs....

The still hanging-on Christain Church is interested in discrediting the ascendant God, and Tibor has a friend/enemy tracking him... There is a hunter out to find and kill the God... There are the strange mutants Tibor meets on the way... The Goulart-like robots and computers (time and shortages have addled their brains)...

It should be noted that Tibor is travelling on a specially made cart pulled by a cow, and that he has powered mechanical arms.

There is hope and redemption at the end, a spiritual upbeat, caused by...well, ambiguity raises its fuzzy head for me here. I was taken aback by the ghost of Lufteufel and by the fantasy science. The novel is science fiction only because of its label and its use of standard sf furniture. But sf has many corners, and why not one marked Spiritual SF? Robert Silverberg is not the only one who can write this variety.

There are sections which show the hand of Phil Dick, and sections which betray the strong style of Roger Zelazny. (I particularly liked the satirical mutated human 'bugs' who worship their god named Veedoubleyou. There are many pranks like that.)

I don't know if this is a good book or not. It's sure as hell different, and it kept me reading (with raised eyebrows, but with interest). It has something for everybody but the hard science types.

Joe Sanders: *Delap's F& SF Review* February 1977, pp. 17-18

A few years after World War III, the world is largely depopulated. The survivors, tormented by various war-spawned diseases and deformities, try to pull themselves into a livable social and personal order. One outcome of the war's traumas is the Sons of Wrath sect, which holds that a god who would permit such horror must be the God of Wrath rather than love. They worship the government scientist directly responsible for the horror weapons used in the war. One SOW church has commissioned Tibor McMasters, a limbless mural painter, to portray the angry god, but the church hierarchy insists he must seek out the scientist himself to use as a living model.

This much of the novel, according to Ted White in *Algol* (Winter 1976), was written by Dick over ten years ago, then put aside. I can see why. The setting is graphically unpleasant; the characters are gropingly, earnestly real; the writing is straightforward but full of complex resources; it's pretty good Dick. But it doesn't seem to lead into immediate or easily-resolved action.

Tibor McMasters is very reluctant to start on his pilgrimage, so he visits the local Christian minister, Dr. Abernathy, in search of council and a graceful way to abandon the search. So they talk. Pete Sands, a young Christian acolyte, takes drugs in search of Truth. He has a vision of God. They talk. Pete describes this experience to Dr. Abernathy; they talk about it. All of this is *good* talk, realistic-feeling conversation that presents the characters vividly and sets up striking ideological problems. However, it doesn't suggest that the problems can be solved by the razzle-dazzle burst of action and mysticism that actually concludes this book.

To do justice to the opening of **Deus Irae** would have to be much longer, richer, more fully worked out novel. It would have to take Tibor (and others?) through the pilgrimage and show what he discovered, how it changed him. But this would have been extremely difficult to do, calling for a major effort of imagination and character exploration. Perhaps Dick felt unsure of the results, unsure it would be worth the investment of labor.

The remainder of the story bears the mark of Zelazny's witty, impatient intelligence. The characters spend much less time talking; they act. Things happen fast, in terse snatches. Some of that is appropriate to the fact that Tibor is traveling

on his pilgrimage, no longer confined in one place. And some of the inventions in the last part of the novel are fine: The Great C, a surviving computer that sends female extensors to prowl the ruins, looking for humans to drop into an acid vat; the mad Russian autofact that showers Pete with pogo sticks; the God of Wrath confronts the rats. These bits are quite striking. Zelazny is extremely adept at creating situations in which action is more important than reflection, in which characters can work out their problems by decisive physical effort.

But in **Deus Irae** the change of direction does mean that some vital thing gets lost. For one, too many characters from the book's opening are forgotten, and too many of those who remain seem over-simplified and manipulated. The recovery of spiritual health that ends the story seems forced and unsupported by the action. It's approximately as profound as, "If everyone would light one little candle, what a bright world this would be." And there is no psychological freshness that might have made such an assertion convincing.

Too bad. This strange collaboration fights against itself, rather than permitting the writers' talents to complement each other. It's a novel to wish on: that Dick had finished the book with the same concentration he began it; or that Zelazny had conceived the idea himself and shaped the plot to his skills. **Deus Irae** doesn't give either man the chance to really do well the things he can do best.

A Scanner Darkly

Richard E. Geis: *Science Fiction Review* #20 (February 1977), p. 53

"Philip K. Dick's A SCANNER DARKLY, issued by Doubleday at \$6.95, made more interesting because of what Phil had to say about the book in the SFR #19 interview. It's a well-written novel about drug addiction and the dealer/user/narc underground"

"And, it isn't science fiction, in a true sense; it's a translation. The 1986 time-frame, the Substance D drug, the advanced spy devices employed...these are not essential to the plot.

"But it is a terrifying novel, Geis, in the subtle destructiveness of the drugs, in the self-destruction, and the horrible end-justifies-the-means plot of the Federal narcs.

"Better believe it. Phil Dick was a "hero" of sorts to the sf fans who were into drugs, but this book will cool that ardor; he has seen too many friends turn into mental basket cases, and this book is his warning. It has elements of Kafka and Orwell. Recommended."

The Best of Philip K. Dick

Barry Malzberg: *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* August 1978, pp. 32-33.

Philip K. Dick, in his Institute essay, talks about his basic theme being the intersection of dreams and reality with, perhaps, dreams being the successful extra point kick. Dick is a very significant writer, rightly regarded as the most important in the history of the genre, but his work in the last ten years has had the self-consciousness of someone paying too much attention to critics and too little to his inner voice. For what it is worth I don't think that Dick's theme was about levels of reality or the controlling aspects of dreams at all until he began to read the blurbs above his stories and fan magazine reviews. I think that Dick, in his creative prime, was really our first and best exponent of craziness.

Science Fiction is a crazy form of literature – there is no reason why it should be otherwise, and it is impossible to do creative work of any kind in this genre unless one is at least in touch with one's potential for insanity – and Dick was the first modern writer within the genre to codify it, to give technological weight and heft to madness.

And here, in *The Best of Philip K. Dick*, a good representative collection drawn more of a necessity from the first half of his career (like many of us Dick virtually stopped writing short stories after he found he could sell novels), are all these coins. "Imposter," whose protagonist turns out to unconsciously be the Alien Among Us; "Colony," in which paranoia becomes an entire planet which creates malevolent physical substitutes for those near and dear (I have had that feeling); "Oh, To Be A Blobel!" which, its artifacts stripped, is the ultimate science fiction story about marriage.

There is the craziness, but there was in the early Phil Dick another theme which to the best of my knowledge has never been picked up on in criticism: Dick wrote painfully about near-future war and the integration of war into the social

system, and stories like "Foster You're Dead" showed more than a moderate amount of courage for their time, the dark center of the nineteen fifties. If craziness was his second grand theme, war was his first, and in 1966 came time travel... the most recent story in this book and the only short story Dick has published since 1974 is the brilliant paradox story "A Little Something For Us Tempunauts."

Dick has begun to receive his due in recent years. His work is largely back in print, he has been called by a *Rolling Stone* reporter in a major profile "the best living science fiction writer," he is beginning to generate the kind of income and audience he has deserved since at least 1954 and *Solar Lottery*. I think there are limitations to this writer – for one thing what I once took to be stylistic clumsiness I now think came from the necessity to publish, in essence, first drafts – but even the limitations are to be celebrated. He has been a science fiction writer for a quarter of a century and has never, to the best of my knowledge, published a single story out of cynicism or contempt. Ears and a half tail at least.

The Golden Man

Thomas Disch: *Fantasy & Science Fiction* July 1980, pp. 46-48

On some days of the week Philip K. Dick is my favorite science fiction writer, but while I'm in the witness box and under oath I must say that when *he* is bad he, too, is horrid. *The Golden Man* is not without A+ offerings, and no serious reader should flinch from the categorical imperative of buying it: fifteen heretofore uncollected stories spanning the years from 1953 to 1974, with an introduction and notes by the author -- a First Edition, in fact for only \$2.25. However: a lot of the fowl in this book are turkeys. As such, they have a baleful fascination for us loyalists, who must ask ourselves how the germs of Dick's greatness can be discerned in, Lord help us, *this*.

An instance of *this*, from "the Last of the Masters (1954), a hyperkinetic foray into hairy-chested-style hugger-mugger. Here is the tail-end of its action-packet denouement:

Tolby was heavier. But he was exhausted. He had crawled hours, beat his way through the mountains, walked endlessly. He was at the end of his strength. The car wreck, the days of walking. Green was in perfect shape. His wiry, agile body twisted away. His hands came up. Fingers dug into Tolby's windpipe; he kicked the youth in the groin. Green staggered back, convulsed and bent over with pain. "All right," Green gasped, face ugly and dark. His hand fumbled with his pistol. The barrel came up.

Half of Green's head dissolved. His hands opened and his gun fell to the floor. If that isn't bogus machismo, John Wayne never had cancer. But I suppose we all look silly, we pulp writers of long, long ago, so I shouldn't cast the first stone.

Other stories here resist being liked by virtue of their depressive rather than their manic tendencies. My least favorite, "Precious Artifact" (1964, when Dick was in his novelistic prime), presents the archetypal Dickean situation -- the world as mirage engineered by invading aliens. But the tone is flat and affectless, the supporting detail thin and uninspired, the prose written with a dogged determination to provide a week's groceries. The story's sixteen pages read like sixty -- not because his theme is depressing, but because he is writing with his last three ergs of working energy.

I've written elsewhere, in his praise, that Dick's method relies more than most writers on improvisation. Characters spring to life and seem to behave autonomously. Such a method is easier to employ in novels, where there's more room, but Dick's best stories display a similar scatty sense of design and amplitude of invention. It may be that Dick conserves his best inspiration for his novels -- or else those ideas just grow, like Topsy, into novels while lesser inspirations wither on the vine. Whyever, his ratio of success for short stories has not been as high as for novels, and these stories represent a kind of second or third pressing, having been passed over when his earlier (and better) collections were assembled.

Even so, the book includes a couple of classics. "The Little Black Box" (1964) is a masterful account of Christian conversion as alien invasion; it strikes a Mozartean balance between irony and sympathy. The title story, from 1954, though a degree less quintessential, is a thoroughly implausible though well worked-out account of a supeman of the Blond Beat variety. One can't read it without wondering what the results would have been if Dick had freaked out in *that* direction. Jorge Borges goes to Gor!

But he never would or could have. Witness "The King of the Elves" (1953), a fantasy that rivals Well's "Mr. Skelmersdale in Fairyland" for its blend of the banal and the magical. The hero, Shadrach Jones, a filling station attendant, is approached one night by a group of indigent, pathetic Elves. They elect him their king and ask him to lead them to battle against the Trolls, who are, as we all know, taking over everything. Jones is doubly an underdog, the victim not only of his trollish employer but of his minion elves (who represent a kind of Divine Schizophrenia *a la* R.D. Laing).

While many underdogs may turn out to be supermen when their secret identity is revealed, Dick's underdogs are too grounded in an observed humanity for fantasies of *ressentiment* to come to van Vogtian fruition.

The jewel of this book is the introduction, a meditation on the nature of sf and a memoir of his career, in which he tells of grocery-shopping at the Lucky Dog Pet Store and of writing fan letters to Capital Records to prophecy that Linda Ronstadt's next record would be "the beginning of a career unparalleled in the record industry." He daydreams of the epitaph to be carved on his gravestone in his alternate existence as a talent scout:

HE DISCOVERED LINDA RONSTADT
AND SIGNED HER UP!

It's that beguiling mixture of bravado and humility that gives his best stories and novels their induplicable air of being centered in something more than an alert intelligence; Dick's fiction seems prophetic, not in the trivial sense of predicting events or trends, but in the Old Testament sense, in the sense that Dante, Blake, and Shelly are prophetic, because they speak from the burning bush of an achieved human wisdom. Readers who feel such claims are not too large will not rejoice greatly in *The Golden Man*, but Dick is of that stature where even his failures merit publication.

Valis

Algis Budrys: *Fantasy & Science Fiction* August 1981, pp. 52-53

Philip K. Dick, for instance. The chapter on Dick [in Charles Platt's *Dream Makers*] is a wow. It wasn't acid he was on while writing *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldrich* and all those other loopy 1960s novels. It was amphetamines, and it was amphetamines because, he says, he needed the speed to produce at a rate that would keep up with his then-wife's ability to spend money. (This is fascinating to me because in every other case I've heard of, speed *slows*; it produces logorrhea, all right, but produces over-meticulousness, too). After a while -- after that slew of books, and in the last increments of that failing marriage -- a peculiar light suffused Dick's world, and a voice began to speak in his mind.

It began by diagnosing a hidden potentially fatal congenital defect in his child. It instructed him to fire his literary agent, showed him moves that enabled him to collect a slew of overdue royalties, and changed his drinking habits. IT systematically re-ordered his world, and his view of the world. At about this time -- I'm not sure of the exact chronology -- his cat and dog died of multiple tumors, possibly induced by radiation from the light, but were making attempts to communicate with him before they died. And then the voice began telling Dick about the avatars of the Savior and the nature of reality. For example, much of the Christian Era is false time, inserted into the world by malefic forces. We are actually only a comparative handful of years past the birth of Christ, and there is nowhere near as much physical distance as we might think between the Mediterranean area and California.

I was saying these were not things we might say face-to-face. But actually Dick has put all this into a novel -- *Valis*, his first novel in four years, a Bantam paperback original. He's not sure what the voice was. It might have been God. It might have been a Vast Active Living Intelligence System. It's gone now as an everyday companion, but the effects of its visit linger, and *Valis* is the semifictionalized account of its doings.

Taken as a novel, it has its drawbacks. Philip K. Dick is in it as a character. As a character, he has the delusion that he has an acquaintance named Horselover fat, to whom most of the adventures happen. Actually, Fat is Dick. (As he points out, "Philip" is derived from the Greek word for horse-lover" and "dick" is German for "fat.") Dick and Fat eventually merge, briefly, and sanity returns to their lives, but that doesn't last. A new Savior is born, probably, as a girl child. But that doesn't last. A number of other purely arbitrary things happen, and seems to have no storytelling purpose.

As a tract, it's a whizbang. The purpose of the book appears to be to convey a series of epigrams on the nature of reality. It concludes with an appendix repeating the epigrams. These are just sufficiently convoluted and confabulatory to make excellent material for a new, short, Holy Book. They are absolutely choc-a-bloc with all the enigma required to support a worldwide, millennia-long, prophetic religion replete with exegetic enterprises and rife for multiple schism. It's a sure bet Dick has founded a mystic cult with this effort. If it turns out to be an enduring and universal one, won't L. Ron Hubbard be jealous.