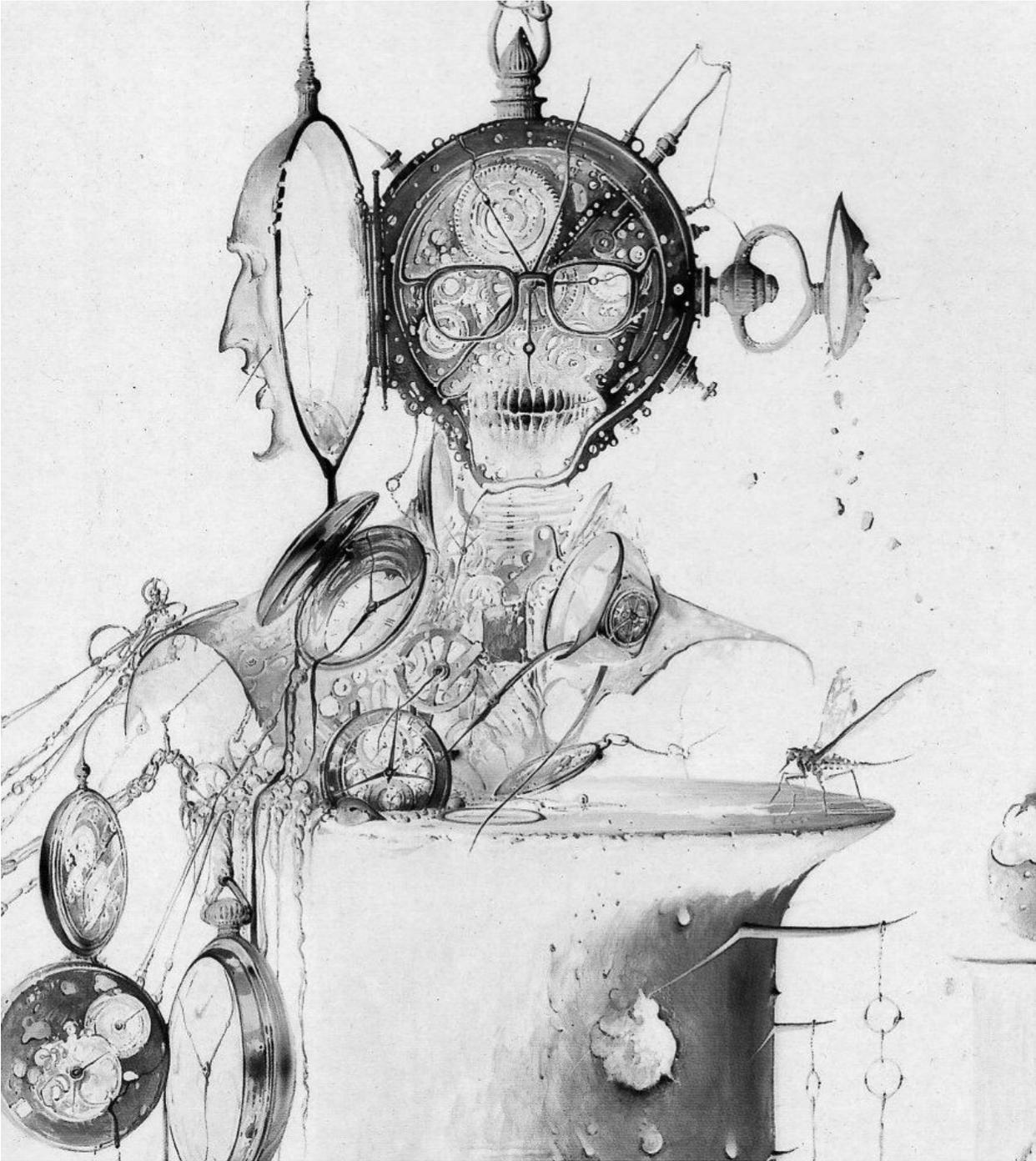


Reflection Statement



The Divine Invasions, or How Philip K. Dick Explores Nightmares is a critical response to the canon of cult science fiction author Philip K. Dick, selectively *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* (1964) and *Ubik* (1969). The analysis details the ways in which personal, social and theological nightmares are explored and permeate the work and literary worlds Dick crafted. Due to my critical response focusing upon a relatively unknown author, I ensured my piece inhabited a space between intense critical study of Dick's work and a personalised essay, allowing for readers unfamiliar with his canon to engage with my composition.

Upon deciding to study English Extension 2, the idea of composing a critique of Philip K. Dick's literature appealed to me. The exact aspect of his work, however, upon which I would focus remained elusive. For a time I considered analysing the translation of his work to film mediums, or using my passion for his work to encourage a discussion surrounding the deconstruction of the 'western literary canon'. Ultimately my thesis came to me through sheer chance, as after reading *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* I experienced a remarkably personal nightmare. This occurrence, in tandem with Graham Sleight's description of the novel as a "nightmarish labyrinth with no exit,"⁵⁵ saw my final concept realised through the connection of nightmares to his texts.

As such, the purpose of my composition was to personally uncover the inclination for Philip K. Dick's literary work to inspire nightmares. No other texts I have encountered have affected my psyche in such a way, and so I felt it appropriate to determine how and why his work had impacted me in such a way. Moreover from this personal purpose, a theological purpose was uncovered as both *Three Stigmata* and *Ubik* grapple heavily with Dick's personal religious

⁵⁵ Dick, P., & Sleight, G. (2009). *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*. London: Orion.

attitudes at the time of their authoring. This once more reflected an individualised aspect of his work for me, encouraging a consideration of my own theology in order to contrast with the ideals espoused by his texts. This intimate introspection with aspects of Dick's canon lead to a primary consideration of the 'how' of his texts, examining techniques first and foremost, ultimately denoted by the title of my composition.

Although I was familiar with a small number of Philip K. Dick's novels and short stories when I began the project, intensive reading and research regarding both his canon, and critiques of his work was required to further consolidate my thesis. This process included reading novels *Dr. Bloodmoney, or How We Got Along After the Bomb*, *A Scanner Darkly* and *VALIS*, among many other Philip K. Dick novels and short stories, in order to develop a thorough understanding of his authorial style. Supplementing my knowledge of Dick's fiction, Anthony Peake's *A Life of Philip K. Dick: The Man Who Remembered the Future* and Carl Freedman's essay *Towards a Theory of Paranoia: The Science Fiction of Philip K. Dick*, were amongst the texts that aided in the construction of my composition, from a critical and biographical perspective of the science fiction auteur. In particular, Freedman's work suggesting "commodity fetishism which, as Dick's texts also suggest, can be coordinated with paranoia,"⁵⁶ was paramount in the formation of my concept. Supporting my niche understanding of Philip K. Dick, *Freud's Theory of Dreams* by Ernest Jones, and *Cognitive Phenomenology of Religious Experience in Religious Narratives, Dreams and Nightmares* by Patrick McNamara, April Minsky, Victoria Pae and Alina Gusev informed my composition, with regards to the occurrence and imagery of nightmares. Through this arduous research process the lens through which I would analyse Dick's canon was

⁵⁶ Freedman, C. (1984). Towards a Theory of Paranoia: The Science Fiction of Philip K. Dick (Vers une théorie de la paranoïa: La SF de Philip K. Dick). *Science Fiction Studies*, 11(1), 15-24. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4239584>

constructed.

Within Philip K. Dick's canon, his 1969 novel *Ubik* was essential to my study of his work from personal, social and cultural levels. Akin to *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*, lengthy segments of the novel are unclear as to which layer of fictional reality they occur in, which in turn informed my critical analysis of the nightmarish imagery of Dick's novels. *Ubik* is a driving force in my investigation because of Dick's unique narrative voice that reflects the nightmarish imagery I seek to highlight. In part Dick achieves this through manipulation of narrative tense, however he also utilises a broad vocabulary, shifting from high and low modality language in order to refine and obscure elements on his literary worlds, demonstrated by the description of "a puddle, but not of water. The puddle was alive and in its bits of sharp, jagged grey splinters swam,"⁵⁷ discussed within my composition. *Ubik* also features deep-seated theological themes, another point brought up by my major work. The novel parodies the commodification of religious practices through the representation of *Ubik*, a cure-all spray that claims it "made the worlds."⁵⁸

The importance of *Ubik* with regards to my composition was furthered after reading *Towards a Theory of Paranoia: The Science Fiction of Philip K. Dick* by Carl Freedman. Beyond his thorough discussion of *Ubik*, Freedman considers Philip K. Dick's personal psyche, positing that "The paranoid is not only someone for whom every detail is meaningful - for whom nothing can be left uninterpreted or taken for granted -but someone who holds a conception of meaning that is both totalizing and hermeneutic"⁵⁹ and "[n]o particular of

⁵⁷ Dick, P., & Lethem, J. (2007). *Four Novels of the 1960s* (1st ed.). New York, N.Y.: Literary Classics of the United States.

⁵⁸ Ibid

⁵⁹ Freedman, C. (1984). Towards a Theory of Paranoia: The Science Fiction of Philip K. Dick (Vers une théorie de la paranoia: La SF de Philip K. Dick). *Science Fiction Studies*, 11(1), 15-24. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4239584>

empirical reality is so contingent or heterogeneous that the paranoid cannot, by a straightforward process of point-for-point correspondence, interpret its meaning within the framework of his or her own grand system”⁶⁰. These ideas were not only fundamental in my study of Philip K. Dick, but also provided me with a clearer insight into the influence of paranoia upon an individual. Freedman’s work also informed the structure of my composition. Upon reflection of ‘*Toward a Theory of Paranoia*’, I restructured my composition, allowing me to write more specifically about *Ubik* and ‘*Three Stigmata*,’ whereas previously I had sought to delicately build toward a discussion of the two texts.

Through the influence of other critical analyses of Philip K. Dick’s work, *The Divine Invasions* began to reach its own unique voice. My discussion of “*The contrast between the high concept medical theories about the human mind, and five drug users failing a basic mathematical problem*,”⁶¹ saw me seamlessly interweaving my personal analysis and evaluation with direct quotations from *A Scanner Darkly*. This proved particularly difficult in this instance as the section of the text I chose to analyse features quotations from scientific journals. Despite this, I believe crafted a strong composition that leads my audience through one of my favourite sections of *A Scanner Darkly*. As my composition veers into questions regarding religion in Philip K. Dick’s science fiction, I found myself utilising an increasingly conversational voice when writing “*for Dick, the ultimate nightmare wasn’t necessarily an evil god, but merely the idea of living inside a reality that belonged to someone else*.”⁶² Despite the arguable shift in

⁶⁰ Freedman, C. (1984). Towards a Theory of Paranoia: The Science Fiction of Philip K. Dick (Vers une théorie de la paranoïa: La SF de Philip K. Dick). *Science Fiction Studies*, 11(1), 15-24. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4239584>

⁶¹ Frith, M (2019). *The Divine Invasions or How Philip K. Dick Explores Nightmares*.

⁶² Ibid

voice, my composition has in part been built around this idea, and as such, is justified to audiences based upon what they have read of my critical response.

From its conception, the audience for *The Divine Invasions* has always been fans and fellow critics of Philip K. Dick's work. Beyond its influence upon my thesis, the consideration of audience also played a decisive role in the structure of my work, as I was able to speak more freely about the nature of his work and spend less time establishing narrative events to unfamiliar readers. This decision felt further justified throughout my study of English Advanced Module B: Critical Study of Literature, for which I have gained a wealth of knowledge regarding Modernist poet T.S. Eliot. Not only did it become apparent that my individual study of Philip K. Dick's work mirrored the collective study of Eliot I was partaking in with my classmates, it also became apparent that the poetry of Eliot is unwelcoming to those unfamiliar with the texts he alludes to. An understanding of the way in which acclaimed author T.S. Eliot limits his audience informed the way in which I considered my own audience.

My continued research and uncovering of Philip K. Dick's canon has taken me on a deeply formative journey, reshaping the way I consider not only the work of my favourite author, but all texts I encounter. The composition of my major work has also been one of the most rewarding experiences of my time in the education system, allowing me to challenge myself and reach new peaks of the independent thinking that the subject of English enables. I believe my composition will provide responders with new ways to consider the nightmarish work of a nearly forgotten author.