



The Transmigration of Timothy Archer

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The Transmigration of Timothy Archer, the final novel in the trilogy that also includes *Valis* and *The Divine Invasion*, is an anguished, learned, and very moving investigation of the paradoxes of belief. It is the story of Timothy Archer, an urbane Episcopal bishop haunted by the suicides of his son and mistress - and driven by them into a bizarre quest for the identity of Christ.

The Transmigration of Timothy Archer Details

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Author : Philip K. Dick

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From Reader Review The Transmigration of Timothy Archer for online ebook

Robert says

Some notes upon finishing the book.

This is NOT the third book in the "VALIS Trilogy". It is what the author says it is in *What If Our World Is Their Heaven*, a literary novel that took more out of him to write than four SF novels. He had something to get out about life in general, and his experience with Bishop James Pike in particular, and this is it, a thing in itself. There is nothing here that requires the kind of suspension of disbelief demanded by genre SF. All is derived from conventional religious and cultural discussions and equally conventional material about the paranormal (mediums, their influence and authenticity and post mortem channeling) with some fictionalized modern archeology bearing on the sources of Christian thought. There is no endorsement of or necessity for belief in the paranormal here, all such elements are left uncertain with different characters holding (and changing) different and conventional views. That is only to say that it is not really a part of the flow of immediately prior P.K. Dick works represented by *VALIS*, *A Scanner Darkly*, *Divine Invasions* etc but a really good straight literary novel reflecting Dick's philosophical ideas but in no way a genre work. The development of Angel Archer as first person narrator and the places the narrative takes her are sufficient and excellent without the undue strain of integrating it with any of the preceding works.

There is one really unconventional idea, that an origin of the Eucharist, dating back to 200BC, may have involved a psychotropic mushroom prepared as both food and drink. That idea like many others plays a part but does not become a crucial element itself, nor is it entirely settled by the end, nor does settling it matter. One may use that idea to argue a link to *A Scanner Darkly*, for example, but does that accomplish much? In the absence of a real speculative dystopian setting, what of it?

Dick does a masterful job of integrating his usual themes without resorting to anything fantastic. One Dick thread that appears in this book is very ingeniously deployed. In the genre works e.g. *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* and *Impostor* we often find the question of what distinguishes humans from very sophisticated machines. In this non-genre setting, the narrator discusses this in regard to herself, if after all the losses suffered she has been reduced to a machine, the humanity having been ground out of her by events. A machine in a sense found in philosophy or spiritual works not a literal mechanism, however sentient or possessed by a sense of identity, as in a genre work.

If there is one Dick trademark that is really absent in this story is the background of a dystopia. Our actual world, set at the time of John Lennon's murder, is dystopia enough for this story. It does not stray from this realistic setting nor does it posit any speculative alternative history from it.

In the documentary *The Penultimate Truth About Philip K. Dick* one of the interviewees expressed relief at reading this book saying: "At least, Phil didn't die insane" (or words to that effect). With that assessment I completely agree, this book is literature not genre and never actually goes off into psi-psycho-shifting reality territory but is well grounded in reality taking philosophical mystery, traditional questions of religious faith and human error into account. It also highlights the real tragedy of his being struck down as he was in the midst of what was clearly the height of his powers as a writer that might have gone yet higher.

As you may have noticed I am fed up with the compulsion in some quarters to regard the "VALIS trilogy" as complete.

The final book of the "VALIS Trilogy" would have been *The Owl In Daylight* that never reached a tangible preliminary written form when the author died. (That title comes from a southern expression meaning dazed and confused, apparently owls can only function well at night and will fly erratically and even injure themselves in day time. The interviews cited above did not give me any specific idea what additional layers of meaning he meant to add to the phrase, only that he like it enough to use it.) He did outline a very interesting idea of aliens that developed in a world where speech and hearing would not evolve (although I disagree with the idea they do not have words at all) and might experience human auditory events as extrasensory perception or revelation, and would use technology to experience these things via a human host. That sort of premise does require the usual suspension of disbelief of SF genre work. (Whether the S means "Science", or Ellison's "Speculative").

This grouping of the last three books is very convenient for some hardcore fans, readers who are obsessed with the idea of trilogies (one of my favorite trilogies is the five Douglas Adams books, and would Dick have stopped at the magic number three?), and even more so for frustrated publishers, but does not really exist. We are left with a gap in the work that can not be reliably filled, not that no one will or even should try (as ex-wife Tessa already has, but that is another story, or even a yet to be written novel of family intrigue over the estate of a famous writer). But the culprit was a great book out of sequence that the author had to write before finishing the other task. We should be grateful for what we have here and not invent structures that do not exist.

Jamie says

see Dick. See Dick run. See Dick write about the sacred quest to escape one's body and transcend the narrow human perception of experience through the ongoing search for the essential logos via the ingestion of psychedelic mushrooms while retracing the steps of the Christ. (pant)

fromcouchtomoon says

Easier to pay attention to than *The Divine Invasion*, but still heavy on the Sunday School, I find myself missing the mind-trip of the previous novels. PKD seems to handle women better as first-person female protags. The best parts are when Angel philosophizes about books and records.

Gray says

"The fixed idea of madness is fascinating, if you are inclined toward viewing with interest something that is palpably impossible yet nonetheless exists." (p.97)

The Transmigration of Timothy Archer is the final novel Philip K. Dick completed before his untimely death in March 1982. Often listed as the third part of the VALIS Trilogy, it bears little relation to the first two VALIS books. (Dick's intended third part of the trilogy, *The Owl in Daylight*, never progressed beyond a rough outline.) It is classed as being both a postmodern and philosophical novel which Dick was quoted as saying *"is in no way science fiction."* Interestingly, his agent had a different interpretation of the book:

"in your science fiction they drive things called flobbles and quibbles, and in this one they drive Hondas —

but it's still essentially a science fiction novel. Although I can't explain exactly how."

These quotes are taken from an interview the author gave to *Twilight Zone* magazine at the beginning of 1982. At that time the interviewer remarked that Dick "*was in excellent spirits and was looking forward to the premiere of Blade Runner [...] with considerable excitement*". It is sad that he didn't live to see it.

Timothy Archer is a different kind of book to both *VALIS* and *The Divine Invasion*. While it still features heavy doses of philosophy and religion, for a Dick novel it is pretty mainstream. It has a contemporary setting, (1980 at the time of its composition), and references to actual events of the time including the death of John Lennon and the lectures given by Alan Watts, (Edgar Barefoot in the book).

The main character is Angel Archer, Dick's first female lead (!). She narrates the story of her friendship with Bishop Timothy Archer, a thinly veiled literary representation of Dick's friend Jim Pike.

"I am the last living person who knew the Bishop Timothy Archer of the Diocese of California, his mistress, his son my husband [...]"

In a series of flashbacks, Angel reminisces about her relationships with Bishop Archer and his son Jeff, who we learn is Angel's husband. We also meet the Bishop's mistress Kirsten and her schizophrenic son Bill. They are a fascinating group of characters that Dick has written. I quickly found myself caught up in their world, enjoying their quirks as well as their intelligence. To me, they felt more rounded than Dick's typical characters that people his pulpier works.

If you are a fan of Dick's science fiction, this book might surprise you with its picture of late 1970s California life and a plot involving religion, the occult, death, the afterlife and the possible origins of Jesus' teachings. (Phew, take a breath.) Not to mention mind-altering mushrooms! I enjoyed it and found it refreshing after the convoluted strangeness of *The Divine Invasion* as well as the exegetical dryness of *VALIS*. This may have been aided by it being the fifth book of twelve in my yearlong PKD + Exegesis group read-a-long.

I've commented in earlier reviews about how much I've missed PKD's more mind-bending atypical sci-fi tales such as *Ubik* and *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*. Well, this story was something different again, something unexpected. And the good news is there are more books to come! Next up is *The 3 Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*.

Definitely recommended, if only to experience the wonderful Angel Archer.

<https://beginjapangrayman.wordpress.c...>

Kat says

One of my very favorite books, since way back when I first read it in 97 or 98. Not really "sci-fi", and although it's technically the third book in the Valis trilogy, you don't need to read the others to read this, and there aren't any spoilers for the first two books, it's standalone. Deals with a lot of the emotions around people you love dying.

Sentimental Surrealist says

A woman, you say? Narrating a Philip K. Dick novel? Wait a minute. Wait. A. Minute. For one, everyone knows that the only first-person narrators allowed aboard the Philip K. Dick train are fictional characters known as Philip K. Dick. For another, the guy's misogynist tendencies cannot be missed. And I can't say I'm a fan of them, but since he tells cool stories, I'm willing to bear with him. For the record, he does a decent job with the woman. Philip K. Dick didn't make his name on his characters, but Angel Archer is definitely one of his more memorable protagonists. Maybe it's only because of the "OMG a woman with an interior life in a Philip K. Dick novel" factor, but look. She's just as sarcastic, frank and world-weary as any of Phil's male heroes, and this means that she, like them, comes off as an asshole from time to time. But in the end, you get the sense she's someone who really cares about those around her, but has grown so sick of not being listened to that she snarks just to stay sane. Look, I'm not saying he died and came back to life as Virginia Woolf or anything, but it's a step in the right direction.

Really, there's a lot of new territory explored here. It's certainly a long way from the dystopian reality-melting postmodern sci-fi adventures the guy cut his teeth on. It's mostly a very restrained novel, which pulls it away from the prior two VALIS novels: while there's much theological discussion between Angel and her bishop stepfather Timothy, the theology is in service of a broader plot. This makes it a massive step above *The Divine Invasion*, where characters delivered their discourses and the plot occasionally peeked its head out and asked "hey, what about me?" and was given five pages of extraordinarily half-assed attention before the discourse kept up. It's different here, though. Here, Timothy theories reminiscent of VALIS' gnosticism and devotes his life to proving them, sacrificing his relationship with a troubled family and position in the church at their expense; Angel frequently warns him of his actions' consequences, but her warnings in vain. Sounds like a compelling narrative to me.

It's just not the type of narrative you'd expect from its author. The first two VALIS novels had been unabashedly strange and written on the grandest scale imaginable, but outside of a seance which actually works and the promised transmigration, everything that occurs here is in the realm of the possible. And yet, the theories and themes explored still fit in well with the first two, even though the conflict the first two set up doesn't resolve. Apparently, this was what Dick wanted his unfinished *Owl in Daylight* to do (this wasn't supposed to be a part of the trilogy, but a thematic companion), and while it's a shame he didn't live to finish the trilogy the way he'd wanted to, at least we got this out of the bargain. I'll tell you what, though - after how messy *the Divine Invasion* was, I could've gotten used to a few more novels like this.

Bradley says

This is a re-read for me and perhaps not exactly my favorite of his last and greatest sequence of linked novels that began with VALIS, but it is still profound and beautiful.

Truly, it is a very good book, but it stands as both a major departure from PKD's normal fiction. That's to say, it's a novel that explores all the same themes that he's known for, but he does it in a very firmly grounded and mainstream way that very much does NOT touch upon his more traditional SF style.

Suicide, madness, drug use, heavy intellectualism comes right to the fore... but rather than deal with it from

inside the person most afflicted with it or get funky with some really strange happenings, we follow Timothy Archer's daughter in law, Angel, as she tries to come to grips with the grief of losing Tim along with all of Tim's friends.

Sound simple? Well, grief isn't simple and Tim's life and intellect was pretty fantastic and the impact he had upon everyone was pretty profound. His struggles with faith and his eventually giving up the cloth and going to great lengths, intellectual or otherwise, to discover the real truth about Jesus, has long term effects on everyone.

That's not to say there isn't a lot of really strange things happening here, however, but they're all based on reality and scholarship and the deepest quest for meaning that anyone can or ought to strive.

What if Christianity was a mushroom cult, that systematic drug use and hallucinations WAS the body of Christ? That all the early Christians were, after all, drug pushers? I love it. It's even based on some really impressive scholarship. But beyond that, there's also the idea that this mushroom also opens our minds to see the truth of reality and in so doing, allows us to link-in with the system of the universe and carry on past death for real. So, blithe and humorous assumptions aside, this was the real aspect of faith and the promise... and the tragedy is... that we lost this bridge.

Even so, my takeaway from this book, with this topic, is only a single feature in a very rich tapestry of characterizations, explorations, and fundamental human experience. Don't take my word for it. Read it with the other VALIS novels and get really surprised that this was so mainstream. I know I was.

And now I really can't wait to pick up Radio Free Albemuth again! It, perhaps more than all the rest, is the capstone of all these ideas and it is a firm adventure in revolution and science fiction greatness as well! All the ideas and themes come back in full force.

What a fantastic storyteller!

Stuart says

The Transmigration of Timothy Archer: Explores madness, suicide, faith, the occult

Originally posted at Fantasy Literature

Philip K Dick's Radio Free Albemuth (1985) and VALIS (1981) were strange but moving attempts to make sense of his bizarre religious experiences in 1974 when a hyper-rational alien mind contacted him via a pink laser from space. He then wrote The Divine Invasion (1981) and The Transmigration of Timothy Archer (1982), both loosely connected titles in the VALIS TRILOGY, although the latter was posthumously substituted for the unfinished The Owl in Daylight. Sadly, these were the final novels that PDK wrote before his death in 1982. The Divine Invasion is a complex retelling of the second coming of Christ to an Earth dominated by the fallen angel Belial. If you crave deep philosophical discussions of Gnosticism, anamnesis, and salvation, you'll be entranced. Otherwise, you may be completely lost.

The Transmigration of Timothy Archer (1982) is a much more controlled, almost mainstream novel narrated by a female protagonist in the first person (perhaps the only example in PKD's oeuvre?) about the complex relationships between an eccentric but extremely erudite Catholic Bishop named Timothy Archer, his lover Kirsten Lundborg, her schizophrenic son Bill, the Bishop's son Jeff Archer, and his wife Angel Archer. The book delves into despair and suicide, questions religious faith, and shows the damage caused to loved ones

who try to save troubled souls. It's a big departure for PKD, and it's sad to see that he didn't have more opportunities to explore this direction.

The story is told by Angel Archer, the wife of Jeff Archer, who himself is the son of Episcopalian Bishop Timothy Archer. The Bishop is a highly-educated former lawyer, a Renaissance man who challenges many key Catholic doctrines, questions segregation, favors the ordaining of women, enjoys debates on controversial topics, reads Latin and Greek, and is a well-known public figure due to frequent public appearances. In fact, PKD based this character very closely on the real life of James Pike, the Episcopalian Bishop of California from 1958-1966, whose story very closely resembles that of Timothy Archer. In fact, PKD was close friends with him, and he officiated at PKD's marriage to Nancy Hackett, the step-daughter of Maren Hackett, a woman who Pike was romantically involved with after his second marriage collapsed. This complex interweaving of PKD's personal life and friends with his fiction is a trademark of his later period, as he increasingly used it to explore his own troubled life and departed from his earlier pulp SF origins.

In the novel, Angel Archer is married to Jeff Archer, the Bishop's son. Angel Archer initially works at a small law office in Berkeley run by two political activists who represents drug pushers. She pays the bills since Jeff cannot, and eventually becomes manager of a Berkeley record store, something PKD did in real life. When Angel introduces her feminist activist friend Kirsten Lundborg to Tim, he agrees to give a free lecture for Kirsten's feminist advocacy group. But unknown to Angel, Tim and Kirsten begin an affair as well. When she confronts the Bishop about it, he easily deflects her accusations with his legal skills, pointing out that he himself is not married and Kirsten is a single mother, so they are not adulterers. However, Angel is concerned that this romantic relationship with Kirsten, who becomes the Bishop's personal secretary, will damage his credibility as a public religious figure.

Meanwhile, Angel's husband Jeff Archer develops an attraction to the older Kirsten, and when he discovers she is having an affair with his father, this causes him severe psychological trauma. As time goes on, he begins to suffer from depression and signs of madness. Eventually he commits suicide, causing intense feelings of guilt in Tim and Angel. Subsequently, Kirsten develops cancer and starts taking barbiturates for the pain. She gets increasingly hostile and paranoid, suspecting Angel and Tim having an affair behind her back, and becomes very bitter and angry at life.

Events further devolve as strange ghost-like phenomena occur to Tim and Kirsten, such as objects in the house falling and breaking, Kirsten feeling the pain of pins being pushed under her fingernails, and finally they visit a spiritual medium who reveals in a séance that Tim's son Jeff is trying to communicate with them and warns Kirsten that her life is in danger. To Angel's dismay, Tim believes these supernatural explanations and decides to write a book about their experiences. Angel knows this will destroy all Tim's remaining credibility, but he is determined to see it through. Eventually Kirsten kills herself with an overdose of barbiturates. This not only confirms the psychic's prediction, but also adds further guilt and pain to the lives of Tim and Angel. They struggle to understand why their loved ones chose to take their own lives and why they could not prevent it.

Tim then learns that an archaeological dig in Israel has unearthed Zadokite Gnostic scrolls that refer to many of Jesus's famous statements, but over two centuries before the birth of Christ. This throws most of Tim's beliefs in Christianity into question, particularly the core doctrine of Jesus Christ being the son of God and not just a prophet. He is determined to go there himself to investigate these claims, and goes out into the Judean desert to recreate the experience of Jesus wandering in the wilderness. Alone and disoriented, he falls to his death and is not discovered for days.

Saddled with tragedy after tragedy, Angel Archer seeks spiritual help from a guru named Edgar Lightfoot,

whose teaching focus on Zen Buddhism as a form of psychotherapy and healing. There she encounters Kirsten's schizophrenic son Bill, who has survived all these deaths without feelings of guilt. As they spend time together, Bill one day reveals that the spirit of Timothy Archer now inhabits his mind, and divulges details about Tim that would not be easily known, and also speaks in tongues, quoting from Dante's *Divina Commedia*, one of Tim's favorite literary and religious works. Angel realizes that his mind has completely succumbed to madness, but is still drawn to the possibility of reconnecting with Tim's spirit. The book ends on this ambiguous note.

The Transmigration of Timothy Archer represents perhaps the most personal of PKD's works other than *A Scanner Darkly*, *Radio Free Albemuth* and *VALIS*, and is the most mainstream of his later novels. Despite the painful and depressing subject matter, I felt it was a very courageous attempt to search for the reasons behind madness, despair, suicide, religious faith, and whether there is anything that can be done to prevent such tragedies. The sense of inevitability in the characters runs deep, and yet avoids cheap sentimentality. As you might expect, he does not arrive at a life-affirming realization at the end, but he has taken the readers for quite a ride. This book is not really SF or fantasy at all, and would not likely appeal to many genre readers, but for those PKD fans intent on knowing his final thoughts on life, it is an important work and well worth reading.

Fifthwindow says

This book is a critique directed against the over-educated and those who find identity in books. Angel's life is education without experience. Angel's vast education makes her view reality with an "it's all been done before" attitude. She has a sickening rationality towards the beliefs of others. It shows the modern life of a hyper-rationalist. The seriousness clouds her mind from any mystical elevation. Such a mindset devalues the beauty of life. It is about a woman who was ruined by her education. Her materialist attitude towards non-material things such as records was an ironic example.

The Bishop was looking for the literal physical fountain of youth. The Bishop returned like Jesus to redeem Angel, his friend. But she did not recognize him. The book allows optimistic readers to hope that when Bill moves in with her she will finally recognize the Bishop in him. Although Dick seems to suggest that Angel can no longer be reached. I do not agree with the reader who said this is a positive ending. But this book brings up some important issues. Static knowledge becomes a barrier to true illumination and those who seek knowledge as an end to a means. The written word can only get you to the edge of the cliff-you have to leap off.

The letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.

Lyn says

My first thoughts about *The Transmigration of Timothy Archer* was what a terrible shame, what a great loss that Philip K. Dick died so young.

His voice had matured in the 80s but his imagination and his speculative genius was still very much intact and vibrant as in the 50s. My second thought was (and I have wondered this same thought after reading other books by him) why in the world was he not more popular in his own time.

He was ahead of his time, way ahead of his time. Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* was published in 2003, but more than twenty years earlier, Philip K. Dick had asked many of the same questions and had arrived at far more insightful and artistic conclusions. Of course, sadly, while Brown has basked in comet-like literary and financial success, Dick died after years in poverty just as the world at large was becoming ready for him, just as another visionary genius was about to raise the curtain on the world Phil had made.

This is not so much pure science fiction as the more nebulous, but more quantitatively accurate term for PKDs work – speculative fiction.

In some respects, this was one of his greatest work, rivaling *Ubik* in its theological scope and determinism, while departing from *Ubik*'s fluid symbolism.

This has all the great themes of his canon: imagination, speculation, theology, mythology, mysticism, psychology, philosophy, references to classical music and art, German enlightenment, mental illness, drug use and yes, even an appliance repairman.

Dick fills this narrative with as much irony and paradox as his creative mind could muster. The narration by Angel Archer and the dialogue between Angel and Tim becomes a vehicle whereby Philip can explore the tangents where his world and our world intersect.

This is the introspective journey of Bishop Timothy Archer, and told by his daughter in law Angel (in a way vaguely reminiscent of Bergman's *Wild Strawberries*) for truth, in his beliefs and in himself. This is about life and death and beyond.

Darwin8u says

"No single thing abides; and all things are fucked up."
? Philip K. Dick, *The Transmigration of Timothy Archer*

Transmigration of Timothy Archer was brilliant in parts, very engaging, but there were also pieces that just didn't quite fit. I'm willing to give PKD a lot of credit for attempting, so late in his life, a 'mainstream novel'. Ultimately, however, I couldn't quite swallow the whole book (oh me of little faith). I'm not sure if it was a dissatisfaction with it not living up to my expectation(s), or having too much of the novel actually exist there AND me just wanting more. I think part of it was Dick set the reader up. He wanted to yank the reader left, and then yank the reader right, then trip the reader, so we can see what it is like to live in his head as he is trying to make sense of his own mortality and faith.

I love that each of his three Valis/God/Gnostic books: *Valis*, *The Divine Invasion*, *Transmigration of Timothy Archer* are so different. For me, the structural and style differences in these books allowed PKD creative room to explore his big religious themes: God, faith, salvation, love, fate, compassion, the search for identity, knowledge, etc, from as many sides and angles as possible.

Bishop Archer describes the book's central quandary when he says:

"My point," Tim said, "is that if the Logia predate Jesus by two hundred years, then the Gospels are suspect, we have no evidence that Jesus was God, very God, God incarnate, and therefore the basis of our religion is gone. Jesus simply becomes a teacher representing a particular Jewish sect that ate and drank some kind of – well, whatever it was, the anokhi, and it made them immortal."

PKD doubles down when Bishop Archer finds out that the anokhi is a psychedelic mushroom out of which the Zadokites made a broth and a bread. The Zadokites drank the broth (blood) and ate the bread (body). Thus, Dick essentially turned early Christianity into a secret mushroom cult. So, in this novel Jesus (and his apostles) becomes dope dealers and smugglers. Throw into this reincarnation, mysticism, drugs, a ton of 70s music, cars, Berkeley, etc., and you get the raw and messy PKD working hard to both mess with your head and sort it all out. I'm still trying to decide what he really wanted to do, and what he actually ended up doing to me.

Bettie? says

It is like information theory; it is noise driving out signal. But it is noise posing as signal so you do not even recognize it as noise. The intelligence agencies call it disinformation, something the Soviet Bloc relies on heavily. If you can float enough disinformation into circulation you will totally abolish everyone's contact with reality, probably your own included.

Putin seeks religious help to quell Russian dissent

Ferret says

I was surprised by the tone of the book, which is not typical for Dick, when I started reading. But as I adjusted to it, I really started to like it. There is an honesty and a nakedness to Angel Archer's narration that is startling and difficult, yet simultaneously extremely charming. You can't help but love Angel, not in any sort of physical way but in a deep emotional way.

Unlike Horselover Fat in VALIS, who is also a stand-in for Dick the way Angel is in this novel, Angel is honest with the reader. There is no screwing around with the truth the way Horselover Fat does. But Angel is not honest with herself, and this is where the challenge to the reader comes in. Dick enlists every reader as an amateur psychoanalyst, trying to help save Angel from her own flaws, though even the trained psychoanalysts Angel is seeing cannot save her.

It is an ode to humanity's ability to confront death, and a prayer for the discovery of a greater source of strength. The inner jacket of my edition begins by saying "Angel Archer is a survivor." Yet Angel is not satisfied with being a survivor. It's not enough for her. But she cannot figure out what is, until the novel's end, where she ambiguously accepts a higher task in trying to reenter society to save her friends. This may be what she needs. It may not. I really can't say, and I know I will continue to struggle with it, because Dick has made me care for Angel Archer, and for Timothy Archer, too.

Linda says

Well, I hate to say this but this was my least favorite of the VALIS books. My guess is because it was too mainstream and not enough far-out weird stuff. So even though a lot of the religious stuff bored me (mostly because a lot of it is just over my head), the story itself with Angel, Tim, and all the other characters, did not fill in the rest of story with the wacky dialogue and interactions that I enjoyed in the previous two books. Yeah, there were some great scenes, but just not enough to pull the book as a whole up to a level that I fully enjoyed.

So, I'm hovering around 2.5 stars. Mostly 2 stars, with periodic 3 star scenes. Oh well, time to go back and read some of his earlier works now.

Michael Perkins says

This novel is based on a real person, Bishop James Pike, episcopal Bishop of California in the 1960's. Pike and Dick were friends. The story of Pike is quite bizarre and PKD has rendered it in novel form. This is likely why this novel has a different vibe than his other ones.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Pike

Eric says

This book, the third part of a trilogy beginning with Valis, was nowhere near as mindblowingly wacky as Valis. Rather it was bitter and full of denial. The common thread between Valis and Transmigration is that someone is confronted with the reality of the supernatural, life after death, the resurrection, and they turn their back on it. The major problem in Transmigration is the coldness of the narrator. It sucks to finish reading this book, because even when confronted with everything she has witnessed Angel Archer is still cold, impersonal, dead inside.

I just don't get it. I mean this woman is presented with evidence enough to canonize this man, but she continues on with her life, blindly.

I'm going to have to find the second book, The Divine Invasion, and see if it helps mitigate the harshness of this book.

Three stars, because I hated the narrator.

Dorie says

This is a challenging, yet compelling third book of the VALIS trilogy, although it stands alone as a novel. It's an empowering and intellectual glimpse into the interpretation of madness, theology and philosophical

illusion. Mind twisting, thought provoking and at times disturbing; the obsession with God and metaphysics, schizophrenia and suicide, and the characters themselves drove this book for me and it has definitely made me think and perceive intellect in a new way. Absolutely fantastic.....

Peter says

Imagine what it would be like to meet Philip K Dick at a dinner party in the mid 70's. He seems to be the person who would dominate a conversation, but in a good way. Filled with ideas, stories, convoluted connections and theories. After a few drinks I'd think "This guy is a genius!". But then when I woke up the next morning, I'm not sure if any of it would make any sense, but still I'd invite him over again to hear what he had to say. What a character he must have been! What a loss that he died so young!

When I finish one of his books, I usually think "Well, that was just OK". But then the ideas presented build over time, and I start to see a variety of different viewpoints, or possibilities, or maybe think of something new that at first wasn't so obvious. Some of his books can be somewhat obtuse, at least compared to a lot of other Sci-Fi, but then again that's why I like his writing. I'll always learn something new reading one of his novels, and I've never forgotten any of the ones I've read. I must have read the bios on Wikipedia of at least a dozen philosophers and religious leaders mentioned in this book.

I definitely get the sense that this one was a highly personal writing experience for Mr. Dick, considering that this book was influenced by his friendship with Bishop Pike. It must have also been influenced by his experiences in Feb-Mar of '74, when he felt that he had been taken over by the spirit of the prophet Elijah. Yes, that's right taken over by the prophet Elijah. So this is not really Sci-Fi for me. I'd think of it as really an essay on Christianity.

It helps to know a something about his life to understand and appreciate this book. Knowing the story of Bishop Pike, and Dick's own "religious experiences", I felt this book was a very touching tribute to a friend and a great insight into one of the great oddballs of 20th century Sci-Fi.

Maureen says

wow. well, this is pretty fresh in my mind, and it's been a couple of weeks. that doesn't surprise me though because the ideas that dick toyed with in his last cycle of books are to me the most compelling, indeed the most disturbing and challenging to my mind. dick's narrator angel archer is one of his most resonant, matter-of-fact, and yes, human. she is a rare accomplishment in terms of his development of a female character, though this may well be because she has his own very human voice, or perhaps, as i speculated as i was reading it, the voice of the twin sister he had lost so young, whose voice he alone had heard before. angel is a comfortable narrator: she guides us through the big ideas and concepts about life, and after life, and death and ancient texts easily that are spun out by dick; she is our virgil, as he references and echoes dante's commedia throughout this work. you may find, as i have, that he whets one's appetite for embarking on that journey once again. i have inferno opened here before me romanced and bemused by dick in his very loving homage: the allusions only underscore his own exploration of theological ideas. dick embeds these ideas in a further layer: his relationship with the real-life bishop james pike, and some of the incidents of his real life are spun into the title character timothy archer, and it is through him the plot that drives the pedagogy adheres.

really, one of dick's best books in terms of pacing and execution: it is often acknowledged that dick's strength lies in his ideas but here, i find very little to quibble with, in fact he allows the tension to build into an almost unbearable peak -- i actually did stop three quarters of the way through because everything seemed to be spinning out of control but when i came back, still curious to see where he would go, he eased me downward, toward my own katabasis through his words, and finally dante's.

this is really a four and a half stars review.

Darryl says

PDK's swan song, as it turned out. It is also his most life-affirming book he ever wrote. Part biographical, part literary fiction and part paranormal mystery and 100% Masterpiece, this book is told from the perspective of a woman, something Dick had never done before. That he pulls it off so easily is a testament to the narrative powers that Dick possessed. Sadly, he died weeks after completing this outstanding book. The plot twist is particularly to die for.
