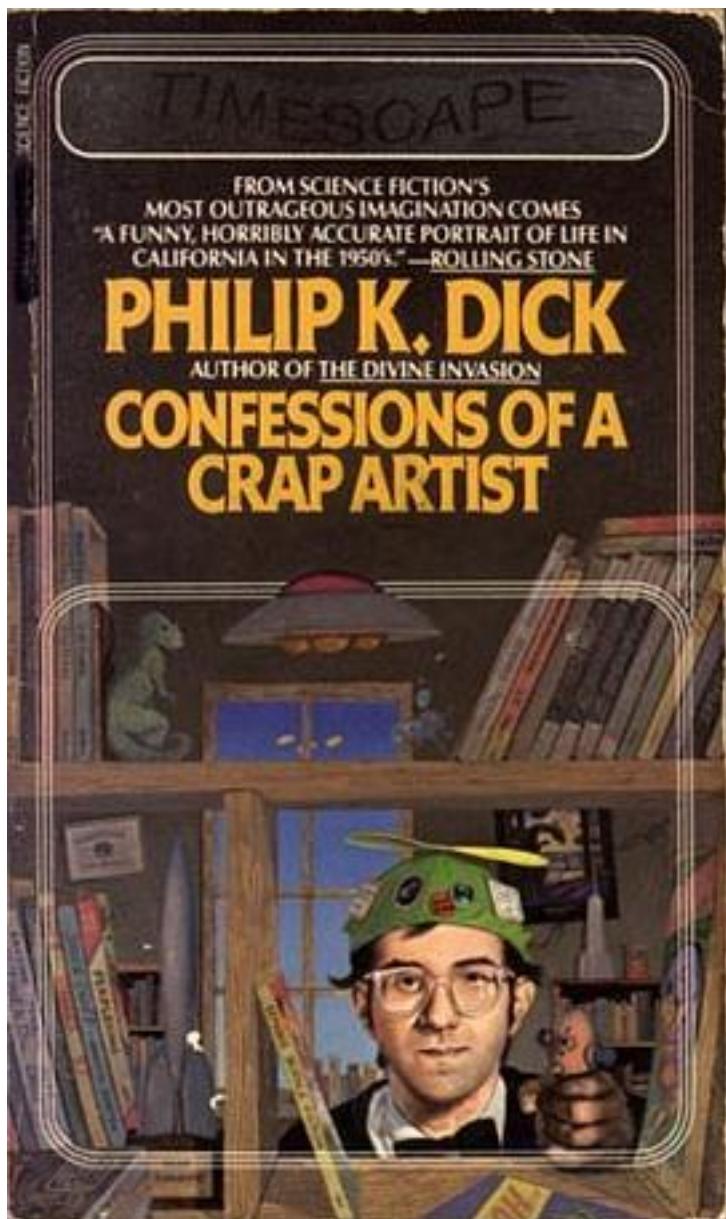


Confessions of a Crap Artist



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著者:Philip K Dick

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INTRODUCTION

Paul Williams

Confessions of a Crap Artist was written in 1959. It is a *tour de force*, one of the most extraordinary novels I've ever read. There are, I believe, two essential reasons why it has taken Philip K. Dick sixteen years to get this novel published. The first reason is the intensity of the picture the author paints. This is the sort of book that makes editors shiver with (perhaps unconscious) revulsion, and leaves them grasping at any sort of excuse ("I don't like the shifting viewpoint") to reject it and get it out of their minds. The people are too real.

The second reason is that it is a "mainstream" novel written by an author who had already established himself as a fairly successful science fiction writer. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a science fiction writer to be accepted as a serious novelist when he's not writing science fiction.

Philip K. Dick was born in 1928. He began writing professionally in the early 1950's, and although he steadily submitted short stories and novels to mainstream publishers as well as science fiction markets throughout the 1950's, it was only as a science fiction writer that he was able to get into print. His first short story appeared in *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* in 1952; his first novel, *Solar Lottery*, was published by Ace Books in 1955. Since then, he has had thirty-one other books published in the United States, all of them science fiction.

Despite Dick's considerable popularity -- in North America and especially in Europe (where over 100 different editions of his books are in print) -- *Confessions of a Crap Artist* is the first non-science-fiction book by Philip K. Dick that has ever been published. It is one of at least eleven "experimental mainstream novels" (his term) that Dick wrote during the first ten years of his professional career.

Confessions is "experimental" only in that it was written without regard for novelistic conventions. Dick's value as a writer lies in his unusual and unusually vivid perceptions of the world we live in and the way people behave, especially the way they behave towards each other. These perceptions dictate the form and substance of his novels. In this case, the story is told in the first person by each of three different characters, in different chapters; there are also sections where third person narrative is used. This is unusual, but it works; those few novels of Dick's where he has tried to shoehorn his perceptions into a "novelistic structure" that did not originate within himself do not work half as well. Dick's books are uniquely structured, not out of self-conscious experimentation in the manner of writers who are aware of themselves as part of some "avant-garde" movement, but out of simple necessity.

Dick made some fascinating comments about his attitude towards writing in a letter to Eleanor Dimoff at Harcourt, Brace and Company, written February 1st, 1960, at a time when Dick was most actively engaged in trying to market his "mainstream" novels:

Now, I don't know how deeply to go into this, in this letter. The intuitive -- I might say, gestalting -- method by which I operate has a tendency to cause me to 'see' the whole thing at once... Mozart operated this way. The problem for him was simply to get it

down. If he lived long enough, he did so; if not, then not. In other words, according to me (but not according to you people) my work consists of getting down that which exists in my mind; my method up to now has been to develop notes of progressively greater completeness... If I believed that the first jotting-down actually carried the whole idea, I would be a poet, not a novelist; I believe that it takes about 60,000 words for me to put down my original idea in its absolute entirety.

Philip K. Dick has three particular talents that have allowed him to not only "put down" his visions but to bring them to life: his ability to create believable, sympathetic characters; his sense of horror; and his sense of humor.

Confessions of a Crap Artist is the story of four people who live in and perceive very different universes but whose lives get hopelessly tangled together through the usual combination of destiny, accident, and their own deliberate actions (stress on the latter -- the novel is at its most acute in the scenes where each character assesses his own situation and then deliberately acts in such a manner as to dig himself deeper into the pit). Jack Isidore, the "crap artist" of the title, is a simple-minded lost soul, fascinated by bits of information and incapable of distinguishing fact from fantasy -- seeing the world through his eyes is a bizarre, unforgettable experience. He is not an idiot in the tradition of Faulkner's and Dostoevski's famous idiots; his idiocy is close enough to our normalcy to scare us.

Fay Hume, Jack's sister, is an intelligent, attractive, hopelessly selfish woman, married to a beer-drinking, inarticulate regular guy named Charley Hume who owns a small factory in Marin County. They live in an absurdly non-functional modern house in Point Reyes, a rural outpost several hours north of San Francisco, with two daughters and some livestock and an incredible electric bill. Charley's purpose in Fay's life seems to have been to build her this dream house; that done, he withers in her eyes and she turns her attention to a young married man named Nathan Anteil. Nathan is a true intellectual, a law student; he spots Fay for what she is immediately, but is drawn to her anyway. Why? He doesn't know; perhaps even the author doesn't know; he only knows that it's true, this is the way people are.

And the story is disturbing, hilarious, and utterly believable because the reader, too, can't help recognizing the truth when he sees it, however crazy it is. Charley attacks his wife because she makes him buy Tampax; it's ridiculous, but who among us can fail to see the sanity underneath Charley's madness? Who can fail to identify with Fay in her moments of self-realization, such as the following soliloquy? It's funny, of course; but it's too accurate not to also be painful:

Almost at once I felt, acutely, that I was a hysterical nut. They shouldn't trust you with the phone, I said to myself. Getting up from the bed I paced around the bedroom. Now it'll get all over town, I realized. Fay Hume calls up some people in Point Reyes and raves like a drunk. That's what they'll say: I was drunk. Sheriff Chisholm will be by to take me away. Maybe I ought to phone him myself and eliminate the middleman.

The reality of Philip Dick's characters stems quite simply from the fact that they are real to him; he hears them talking, in his mind, and records their conversations and thoughts -- his dialogue, in almost all of his novels, is excellent. He is especially good at capturing the interactions between people; the authenticity of his work lies not so much in what people say as in how they respond to each other. In a conversation in 1974, Dick told me, "Well, the idea of a single protagonist, I never could understand that too well... What I've felt is that problems are multipersonal, they involve us all, there's no such thing as a private problem... It's only a form of ignorance, when I wake

up in the morning, and I fall over the chair and break my nose, and I'm broke, and my wife's left me... It's my ignorance that makes me think I'm an entire universe and that these miseries are my own and they're not affecting the rest of the world. If I could only look down from a satellite, I would see all the world, everybody getting up and, in some analogous way, falling over a chair and breaking something."

The humor in the novel, in everything Dick says and writes, is self-evident ("I stood in the middle of my room doing absolutely nothing except respiring, and, of course, keeping other normal processes going"). Dick writes from the center of some vast despair that is, however, never final; the reverse of cynicism is at work here. No matter how miserable and absurd his characters' actions and thoughts are, Dick's attitude toward his characters is always, finally, sympathetic -- he loves and understands them, his books affirm a faith and affection for humanity, in spite of all our idiocies. The result is somehow comic. In *Confessions* particularly, every little hilarious detail of the awful vanity of our minds is mercilessly exposed. It is possible a woman could drive a man to such a state that he would assassinate his own pet theep? You better believe it.

But the humor in no way dilutes the horror. The horror in all of Dick's novels is that the world around us is cruel and insane, and the more courageously we struggle to remove the blinders from our eyes and see things as they really are, the more we suffer. Awareness is pain; and Dick's characters are cursed with awareness, like the autistic child in *Martian Time-Slip* who hears the noise of the universe decaying. In *Confessions of a Crap-Artist*, the horror is that human beings torture each other, and fail repeatedly to do what is best both for the people around them and for themselves. We are dimly -- sometimes even acutely -- aware of the interconnectedness of our lives, but we don't seem to be able to put that awareness to work for us, in fact our efforts to do so only make things worse. The novel is summed up in Jack Isidore's poignant observation: "In fact, the whole world is full of nuts. It's enough to get you down."

Here are Philip K. Dick's thoughts on *Confessions of a Crap Artist*, from a letter dated January 19, 1975:

When I wrote *Confessions* I had the idea of creating the most idiotic protagonist, ignorant and without common sense, a walking symposium of nitwit beliefs and opinions... an outcast from our society, a totally marginal man who sees everything from the outside only and hence must guess as to what's going on.

In the Dark Ages there was an Isidore of Seville, Spain, who wrote an encyclopedia, the shortest ever written: about thirty-five pages, as I recall. I hadn't realized how ignorant they were then until I realized that Isidore of Seville's encyclopedia was considered a masterpiece of educated compilations for a hell of a long time.

It came to me, then, back in the '50's, to wonder, What if I created a modern-day Isidore, this one of Seville, California, and had him sort of write something for our time like that of Isidore of Seville, Spain? What would be the analog? Obviously, a schizoid person, a loner, like my protagonist. But underneath, most important of all, I wanted to show that this ignorant outsider was a man, too, like we are; he has the same heart as we, and sometimes is a good person.

In reading the novel over now, I am amazed to find that I agree even more that Jack Isidore of Seville, California, is no dummy; I am amazed to see how, below the surface of gabble which he prattles constantly, he has a sort of shrewdly appraising subconscious which sees maybe very darkly into events, but shit -- as I finished the novel this time I thought, to my surprise, Maybe ol' Jack Isidore is right! Maybe he

doesn't just see as well as we do, but in fact -- incredibly, really -- somehow and somewhat better.

In other words, I had sympathy for him when I wrote it back in the '50s, but now I have I think even more sympathy, as if time has begun to vindicate Jack Isidore. His painfully-arrived-at opinions are in some strange, beautiful way lacking in the preconceptions which tell the rest of us what must be true and what must not be, come hell or high water. Jack Isidore starts with no preconceptions, takes his information from wherever he can find it, and winds up with bizarre but curiously authentic conclusions. Like an observer from another planet entirely, he is a kind of gutter sociologist among us. I like him; I approve of him. I wonder, another twenty years from now, if his opinions may not seem even more right on. He is, in many ways, a superior person.

At the end, for instance, when he realizes he was wrong, that the world is not going to end, he is able to survive this extraordinary (for him) realization; he adjusts. I wonder if we could do as well if we learned that he was right, and we were wrong. But perhaps most important of all, as Jack himself observed, didn't we see all the normal human beings, the sane and educated and balanced ones, destroy themselves in truly dreadful ways? And see Jack steer clear, throughout, of virtually all moral wrongdoing? If his common sense, his practical judgment as to what is, and as to what he can or can't do, is fucked, what about his refusal to be led into criminal and evil acts? He stays free; from a realistic standpoint he is doomed and damned, but from a moral one, a spiritual one if you will, he winds up untarnished... and it is certainly his victory, and a measure of his shrewd judgment, that he realizes this and points it out.

So Jack has insight into himself and the world around him to an enormous degree. He is no dummy. From a purely survival standpoint, maybe he will -- and ought to -- make it. Maybe, like the Emperor Claudius of Rome, like "The Idiot," he is one of God's favored fools; maybe he is an authentic avatar of Parsifal, the guileless fool of the medieval legends... if so, we can use him, and a lot more like him.

This forgiving man, capable of evaluating without prejudice (in the final analysis) the hearts and actions of his fellow men, is to me a sort of romantic hero; I certainly had myself in mind when I wrote it, and now, after reading it again so many years later, I am pleased at my inner model, my alter self, Jack Isidore of Seville, California: more selfless than I am, more kind, and in a deep deep way a better man.

Confessions of a Crap Artist is, in Phil Dick's opinion, easily the finest of his non-science fiction novels, and one of the best books he has ever written (ranking, in the undersigned's opinion, with Dick's Hugo-Award-winning The Man In The High Castle and his equally brilliant Martian Time-Slip). It is also, I think, one of the most penetrating novels anyone has written about life in America in the midtwentieth century.

Philip K. Dick was living in Point Reyes, California, when he wrote this novel. Shortly after completing it, he married the woman who had inspired him to create Fay Hume, and they lived together for the next five years.

New York City, February, 1975

作者介绍:

PKD

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