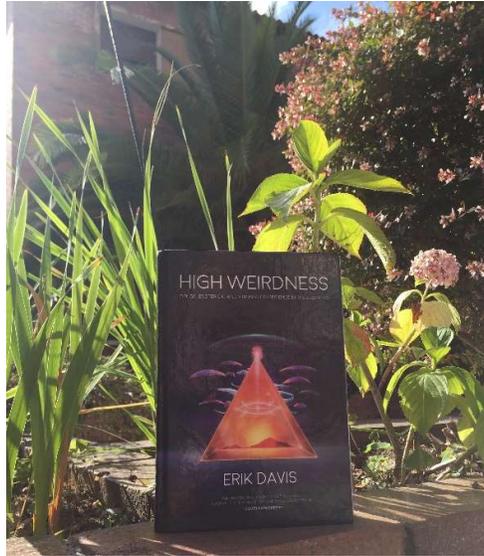


A Pilgrimage into *Weird Highness* by Eris Davik



Magic Theatre – For Madmen Only – Price of Admission – Your Mind

Herman Hesse – *Steppenwolf*

Exploring the Weird is Weird. Investigating wormholes in the fabric of the space-time continuum opens wormholes in the fabric of the space-time continuum. That is my summary of *Ness HighWeird*. To arrive at that conclusion I summoned the Weird, heading off on a two-day journey along northern Spain by bus, train and foot, towards a cultural centre in a small town to hold a literary workshop about – appropriately – Magical Realism – scribbling this review in a notebook while gazing at the mountains and coast and chatting with pilgrims and wayfarers. As anticipated, Weird Things occurred on the trail that mirrored the Weird Things in the book. The book review is road review, travel log, trip report. It is a Weird Tale about Erik's Weird Tale about Weird Tales from the 1970s.

Onwards...

Last night I took a stroll, pondering on the spirits who haunt High NessWeird. What lurks beneath? Who lurks beneath? I glance casually at a bookshop window and see a large, black, hardback volume of H.P. Lovecraft, edición, prólogo y notas Leslie Klinger, introducción Alan Moore. Wow – what a book! I gaze longingly, turn and cross the street. A lad walking towards me with a garish T-shirt of Cthulu, face-tentacles rising from dark stormy seas. Red eyes. Wow! Fear-thrill of the Weird shivers through my body.

Lovecraft. Heavy ancestor. Intrepid explorer. Honourable guide of the Weird.

Cthulu. Monster of the Deep Weird. Strange, exhilarating, frightening-as-fuck.

‘Lovecraft,’ writes Erik in the opening pages, ‘a writer whose captivating tales of forbidden books and loathsome cosmic monsters loom over much of the high weirdness ahead’ (12).

Lovecraft and Cthulu lurk beneath.

This is what happens: the Weird will not be confined to the pages of a book. This is the subterranean current of *Weird NessHigh*. ‘This book is about high weirdness, a mode of culture and consciousness that reached a definite peak in the early seventies, when the writers and psychonauts whose stories I tell herein pushed hard on the boundaries of reality – and got pushed around in return’ (1). The Bros. McKenna, Robert Anton Wilson and Philip K Dick all explored the Weird and found themselves entangled in webs of strangeitude where the lines blur between fact and fiction, reality and fantasy, dream and waking, sanity and madness. ‘My central goal,’ writes Erik, ‘is to tell some wild stories about three seventies psychonauts, and to explore ways of reading these stories that will, again, take them seriously without taking them literally’ (23), or, as Erik writes in 🌀🌀🌀🌀, his scholarly tribute to Led Zep IV, ‘The specters may not be real, but I just call ’em as I see ’em.’¹ That is a valuable hermeneutic strategy to tackle any field, but indispensable for the Weird.

For the Weird has many cousins: the mystical, spiritual, religious, divine, numinous, sacred, heavenly, hellish, holy, enchanting, enchanted, mythic, mysterious, visionary, paranormal, blissful, oneiric, imaginal, magical, hyperdimensional, archetypal, psychedelic, esoteric, supernatural, shamanic, daemonic-daimonic-demonic, alien, faery, freaky, queer, freaky, bat-shit-crazy (or psychopathological, if you prefer) and frightening-as-fuck. That is the Weird, and any exploration reveals that these cousins of the Weird are integral to the fragile fabric of reality.

Erik explores in the first chapter, as he did so entertainingly at Breaking Convention in 2017, the lowbrow, uncanny, wayward, deviant nature of the Weird in popular (and unpopular) culture of the seventies. There is a particular flavour to the Weird, something that emerges from the torn posters and scattered debris that linger from the sixties. A landscape of broken dreams. Fertile soil for weeds of the Weird. Again, Erik describes this landscape poignantly in 🌀🌀🌀🌀 ‘I grew up along the southern Californian coast, surrounded by the spent fuel rockets of the spiritual counterculture, and I definitely absorbed some of the hazy hippie mysticism in the air.’² Serendipitously, I was born smack in the middle of the decade (in Led Zep pagan country), providing me with a rich dose of Weird alongside standing stones, crop circles, food colouring and leaded petrol fumes.

Onwards...

Before setting out this morning, I read in a Cuban novel the name of a family of US sugar-barons in pre-revolutionary Cuba: the Prestons. I think of Prestonia, Burrough’s respectful-fearful name for DMT. I leave for bus station and pass a group of chirping holidaying schoolkids all with PRESTONIA emblazoned on yellow T-shirts and rucksacks. That thrill-shiver again.

¹ Davis, Erik (2005) 🌀🌀🌀🌀 (New York, Bloomsbury), 10.

² Davis, Erik (2005) 🌀🌀🌀🌀 (New York, Bloomsbury), 7.

Burroughs. Heavy ancestor. Intrepid explorer. Honourable guide of the Weird.

Prestonia. Monster of the Weird. Strange, exhilarating, frightening-as-fuck.

Beat biographer Barry Miles suggests that ‘each Beat had his own decade’³: Kerouac the jazz 50s, Ginsberg the hippie 60s and Burroughs the punk 70s. We are definitely in Burroughs territory here. The dark wizard looms large, as all four psychonauts found themselves in the Interzone of their own Weird making. Burroughs’ wayward trip to the Colombian Putumayo on the quest for *yagé* and its telepathic properties back in the 50s blazed the trail for Dennis and Terence’s wayward quest for *oo-koo-hé* and its capacity to allow you ‘to see and converse with the little people’ (103) in the 1970s. ‘Burroughs – whose spirit lies heavily over *Illuminatus!*, as it does over Philip K. Dick’ (189), was, let us not forget, the originator of the notorious 23 mytheme popularised by Wilson. ‘Burroughs remains the key figure here’ (190), Erik confirms.

Burroughs and Prestonia lurk beneath.

The first Weird Tale follows the McKenna brothers as they hike their way into the jungle of southern Colombia on a quest that provides not *oo-koo-hé* but cosmic quantities of cubensis shrooms. The double-page photo of Terence that opens the chapter is suggestive of the whole: black and white multi-plane focus that enlarges twigs and stalks in the foreground and plunges the skinny, willowy, bearded, white-cotton-clad, butterfly-net-wielding Terence deep in his vegetal frame like some half-glimpsed woodland spirit. The ferns and trees around him are blades of grass and moss. Blink and the elf-man will disappear back into Faery.

Many doorways are opened from the central narrative of the brothers’ Experiment and Terence’s later theories and systems, and Erik guides us into these strange halls and passages: the Jungian alchemical, the UFOlogical, biological, neurological, poetic, glossalalic and artistic. These twists and turns in the chronicle are fascinating and informative, providing a rich texture marvellously heralded by such headings as *Esoteritech*, *Pharmakon*, *Shroom with a View*, *Romancing the Stone*, *Psy-Phi*, *Metabolic Ontology*, *Psychogenesis*, *The Tale of the Silver Key*, *Martian Hop*, *Daemonic Men*, *Weird Beings*, *Logosophia*, *Voices*, *Guides*... (reluctantly I must stop)...

Erik is a fine wordsmith, and his view is mythic and holistic – appropriate for a scholar of comparative religion – taking the McKennas’ experience and its many narrations as a Weird Epic. Of course, the Weird does not flow in one direction. This was something I discovered when exploring Borges’ Weird Experience that he called mystical. Borges fell into one of his stories. He wrote (and read) his way into it and wrote his way out of it. (And let us not forget Burroughs explaining in the introduction to *Queer* that ‘The death of Joan brought me in contact with the invader, the Ugly Spirit, and manoeuvred me into a life-long struggle, in which I had no choice except to write my way out.’) So Erik explores how Dennis and Terence’s Experiment was a wild encounter with their own philosophies and desires. They fell into one of the science fiction comics that they devoured as kids, becoming super-characters in their own drama.

³ Miles, Barry (1992) *William Burroughs, el Hombre Invisible* (London: Virgin), 7.

La Chorrera's waterfall casts a spray across time, wetting the brothers before they took off for the jungle, misting Terence's lens as he rapped about the Logos and the Alien Other who is also the Self, influencing Dennis' ongoing brave and compassionate explorations of the information matrix shared by humans, plants and fungi.

Onwards...

During the workshop we discuss some tales by Julio Cortázar, Borges, García Márquez and Isabel Allende. I discuss my beef with the expression Magical Realism, in that it separates the Magic from the Real. 'Magic is Real,' I say, 'and the Real is Magic.' One lady asks if she might tell a tale. Of course! we all say. When she was a child her grandparents both died within weeks of each other. There was a large family gathering at the grandparents' house. Feeling overwhelmed she went out into the patio. Her grandparents were sitting on the bench, smiling serenely and reassuringly. She felt no fear, but smiled back at them, feeling that everything was going to be all right. They were there, sitting on the bench, as real as you or I. Their realness she has never doubted. It is magic. It is real. No problem!

What a beautiful story, we say, and thank her.

The Experiment at La Chorrera reflects a similar *mélange* of the real and the magical, and that is what makes the Tale truly Weird. It cannot be easily explained; 'a conceptual break all readers of this tale must confront. For like most accounts of his weirdness, the Experiment tends to polarize audience interpretations between pathology and poetry, diagnosis and *délire*' (11). The tale is full of weirdness: strange buzzing, cloud-busting, 'crypto-rapping,' *I Ching* divination, activation of 'a shamanic archetype,' discarnate entities (including the 'Nobody People' from the brothers' childhood whispered night-tales), a UFO encounter, and the mysterious appearance of a silver key, again from the brothers' childhood. It is a tremendous account. It is an imaginal account. Real and not real, true and false, inner and outer, self and other, scripted and unscripted, fictional and non-fictional. Both + neither + one + the other. It is Magical and it is Real.

It is also nourished by trauma. This, which Erik fleetingly touches on, is important and deserves deeper consideration. The brothers had recently lost their mother. Weird (synchronistic or numinous) experiences, as Jung explored, cluster around Archetypes. The death of the Mother is such an Archetypal event, a mass of gravitational libido (psychic energy) that bends space-time. Why do I consider this important? This is why 'paranormal' events are rarely reproduced in clinical, observed, experiments. They lack trauma, and short of the experimenter murdering the subject's mother, the test lacks the psychic energy of trauma. Indeed it goes further – push the experiment too far and you risk inducing the trauma. Woops! Naysayers will still say nay, but in private they'll likely reveal that they had a Weird experience as a kid when their grandmother died...

And so we are finally released from the back-eddies of the McKennas' Weird Tale and the interpolated reflections on Félix Guattari, Latour, Jung, mushroom spores and psychopathology, and take a well-earned break...

...only to turn the page to be confronted with a double-page photograph of Robert Anton Wilson, lounging by the window in a very seventies apartment, coffee and cigarettes resting on a huge turntable-radio, balancing in his clenched right hand – yes! – a pyramid with an eye. Smiling slyly with a twinkle in his eye he seems to be asking: Pilgrim, dare thou enter Chapel Perilous? Hast thou the courage?

I guess so!

Onwards...

I arrive at the tiny train station in the morning, lizards zipping across the warm platform, and talk with a rucksacked pilgrim leaning painfully on his walking stick. 'What brings you on the Camino?' I ask him. 'I need some perspective,' he replies. 'I have been doing things in the same way for too long, stuck in a pattern, you understand?' 'Damn right I do!' and I think of RAW, BS and Reality Tunnels. We board the train and sit together. He is going four stops to the next hostel, too lame to walk today. 'Some may say I'm cheating by taking the train, but I'm in too much pain.' 'Fine by me,' I say, 'you're still on the Camino... So have you gained the perspective you are searching for?' 'I don't know. I don't think so. Maybe it will come later.' He is Romanian, in his thirties, a theatre director. He has been troubled by a question for a number of years. 'Can you explain that question?' I ask. 'No! I would need two hours and my English is not good enough.' 'Well, we have twenty minutes. Give it a go.' He agrees, and gazes awhile out the window.

'In modern theatre it is enough for a character to come on stage for his full personality to be revealed and known. Nothing is hidden. All is at once visible. And there is no separation between actor before the show and actor during the show. He is performing at all times, whether playing the role in the play or living his life. There is no separation of roles. We are actors performing. The audience are also playing a role, and that's why they recognise the personality of the character on stage, so as to react appropriately. We are all actors on stage and actors in the audience and actors in the street outside the theatre. We are also playwright and stagehand and critic. I want to see the division between the roles but they all blend into each other. Nothing is fixed.'

'And why do you want things to be fixed?'

'I don't know. That's what troubles me! I've been trying to sort out the layers in my theatre, but I've become stuck. That's why I want perspective from the Camino.'

I dig into my rucksack and bring out Ness WeirdHigh. 'See this book. This is about actors who are also writers who are also characters and readers and critics and heroes and anti-heroes. They were author and not-author of their own books and their own lives. The divisions between the roles can never be fixed. They played all those roles at the same time. They were sane and mad, insightful and delusional, entertaining and vexing, all at the same time. Crazy stuff, right?'

He flicked through the book, stopping at the photos.

'I have an image,' I told him. 'Imagine a rainbow. From afar each colour is distinct. Yet if you zoom in there is no hard division between one colour and the next. One just blends into the next. Zoom out again and there are distinct colours. Both perspectives are equally true. The playwright is playwright, the actor actor and the audience audience. But zoom in and they blend. No problem!'

He smiled a deep smile and we sat in silence awhile and shook hands firmly as he hobbled off at his stop. Adios peregrino...

The chapter on Robert Anton Wilson is a tough ride. Wilson went deep into Chapel Perilous and at times that twinkle in his eye was eclipsed by panic and fear. All is not roses in Weirdland. It is, again, a holistic reading of Wilson's biography, friends and collaborators, writings, experiences and experiments. No space here to summarise the tangled tale so I'll focus on that same deep current that flows beneath all the chapters: Wilson became a character in his own drama. He played with conspiracy theories, Crowleyan Magick, faery folklore, acid gnosis and general Weird Stuff. As he explored so he inhabited. (This is a drama dazzlingly told by Daisy Campbell and her band of Weird performers in the play *Cosmic Trigger*). Just as things from his life became plots in his books, so plots from his books spilled into his life. Playwright, actor, character and audience perform together indistinguishably. Would my Romanian pilgrim friend be perturbed or consoled? Consoled by perturbation, I would hope...

Onwards...

*We have to leave the train at Llanes. An earlier accident with cows on the line ahead. Take a bus to Ribadesella then board a new train. I disembark on the hot platform and the train pulls off. On the wall across the rail-tracks I see the three simple letters **DMT** graffitied in black on the white paint. Holy shit! This is getting strange. It's a little scary. I stare at the graffiti. Nobody else cares. The letters are mine alone, daubed on the wall for me. I'm in my own Weird Tale. I feel that shiver of the Weird again. Unlike the Prestonia T-shirts (and to satisfy any doubters of my Weird Tale) I can take a photo of this. As if dreaming, I stand motionless on the hot platform...*



Of course: DMT is a doorway into the Weird. Following Rick Strassman’s suggestions that endogenous DMT may catalyse religious, mystical or spiritual experiences, it may be behind all these Weird Tales. Erik cites Terence: “The political revolution has become too murky a thing to put one’s hope in. so far, the most interesting unlikelihood in our lives is DMT, right?” (91). That was back then. Now, on a lonely sunny train station in northern Spain, I am stunned by the same interesting unlikelihood. The bus arrives, bound for Prestonia. I climb aboard and resume my notes.

Erik refers to the fabulously-named political scientist Lance deHaven-Smith’s binary of conspiracy theories: ‘On the one hand, you have rational but nonconforming political, economic, and historical accounts that attempt to describe and expose covert organizations or individual agents working behind the scenes to achieve concrete goals. On the other hand, you have ungrounded, baroque, and sometimes “paranoid” fabrications whose flawed logic produces imaginative narratives that are more or less akin to mythology, clinical delusions, and urban folklore’ (182). Ah – would that it were so simple! The boundary between the two is very, very, hazy... and this is the verdict of the two Bobs (Wilson & Shea): ‘*Illuminatus!*’ Erik continues, ‘is founded on the opposite premise: that the distinction between the political discourse of conspiracy and the fantastic fabrications of the paranoid, psychedelic, or occult mind is impossible to locate’ (183). Exactly! That is why Wilson’s books are so maddening – they are plausible and bat-shit-crazy at the same time, because the plausible is bat-shit-crazy (look at US or UK politics today) and the crazy is plausible. On this note I recommend to readers Wilson’s introduction to *Everything is Under Control: Conspiracies, Cults and Cover-ups*,⁴ an invaluable guide for remaining sane in a bat-shit-crazy political landscape.

⁴ Available [here](#)

As with the McKenna chapter, Erik guides us down the bedevilling lanes that bedevilled Bob & Bob with no thread of Ariadne to guide us back out of the labyrinth because there is not outside the labyrinth – out is in and in is out. Help! And as before, Erik punctuates the chapter on Wilson with superb headings, prefiguring the Weirdness to be explored within: *Illuminate us!*, *Fnord*, *Mindfuck*, *Orgasm Heretics*, *Eldritch Palmer*, *Sacred Chaos*, *Zenarchy*, *Discordia Oppositorum*... (as before I could go on). For Wilson fans or for those with no prior knowledge, these segments are illuminating, revealing the birth and genesis of these now-memetic concepts such as Operation Mindfuck, maybe-logic, *Hail Eris!*, ‘We Discordians must all stick apart’, fnords, or the mysterious number 23...

A word on Mindfuck: in the spring of 2017 I had planned to give a talk to the University of Kent Psychedelic Society (the longest-running society of its kind in the UK, that helped birth the first Breaking Convention conference) about Burroughs and Gysin and their cut-ups and permutations. As the date approached I became increasingly nervous. In the wake of Brexit and Trump I sensed that reality was being cut up and permuted by forces of chaos and disorder that I could not stomach. Operation Mindfuck, I understood, was playing out around us. ‘Today,’ writes Erik, ‘it is impossible not to recognize the high cost of media pranks that exploit the ambiguity between truth and fiction’ (201). This has gone beyond playing out funky pranks against Authority and Order in the name of Eris. The clowns in charge, and they are vicious. I bottled, and cancelled the gig, unwilling to spread the disorder of cut-ups and permutations, eager to build rather than tear down. Finally my apprehension passed, and a few months later I gave the interactive talk, including performing some cut-ups. We can out-clown the clowns, out wit the dimwits. Cut up their dreadful reality, fuck with it and reassemble it on our terms. We must not leave Operation Mindfuck to the thugs and bullies. ‘The Discordian game,’ Erik wisely acknowledges, ‘must be understood as an inoculation *against* paranoia’ (201). Nicely put!

Well, Wilson did warn us about entering Chapel Perilous.

And so we arrive at the last stop on the Robert Anton Wilson leg of this Weird Pilgrimage and raise our tired eyes from the book. The sun shines and we breathe deeply. Nice...

...and turn the page. Oh my word! What is coming down the line? A double-page photograph, like the others in black & white, and even more unsettlingly Weird. Blurry and out of focus. An edgy, spontaneous energy. A shirtless, bearded, Philip K. Dick reading aloud (so it seems) from *The Science Fiction Hall of Fame* to his infant son (if not his son then whose?) whom he is clutching tightly to his hairy chest. Kid looks happy but wiggly, eager to escape Dad’s Weird embrace. PKD looks restless, agitated, enraptured by the text. He looks quite scary. He looks a little – let’s say it – mad. The photo reveals all: obsession, fascination, craving, suspicion, paranoia, fear, anxiety, bravery, genius, creativity; and further photos later in the chapter (presumably from the same reel) show him stern and bare-chested clutching a wiggling cat (351), and sitting against his rustic bookshelf clad in an unbuttoned wizard shirt explaining some intense idea (361). In all photos he looks harried, unsettled, flustered, crowded in. As with the other psychonauts studied, the lines are blurred between reality and fantasy, fact and fiction and, importantly, lucidity and madness. ‘From an early age, Dick’s

nervous system regularly played host to a variety of debilitating and traumatic psychological symptoms: paralyzing anxiety, clinical depression, agoraphobia, paranoia, vertigo, and a globus hystera that made it impossible for him to swallow food in public' (316). Such are the qualities that run throughout this chapter. Welcome to the final trip, the final psychonaut chapter. The freaky world of Philip K. Dick.

Onwards...

Thinking Wilson and PKD, Romanian theatre and bat-shit-craziness, and gazing at the hills I jot down a line from Hermann Hesse's Steppenwolf, repeated by Ram Dass in Be Here Now that I think would be nice as epigraph for this Weird review:

Magic Theatre – For Madmen Only – Price of Admission – Your Mind

The doors open and a fellow enters in a waft of cigarette smoke. Shrugged shoulders and sad, piercing blue eyes. Unsettled. He wobbles up the carriage, eyes unfocussed, resigned look of one who has suffered. Drunk? Junkie? Junk-sick? Mentally ill and medicated? I gaze out the window. At the next stop he lurches to the doors, fumbles with a cigarette and takes two heavy draws before chucking it as the doors close. He wobbles towards me, stumbles and grabs the seat. 'Tabaco – te engancha. Me mata...' I nod. '¿Peregrino?' he asks. I guess I am a pilgrim. I guess we all are. 'Sí.' I reply. He asks where I'm from and where I'm headed, spittle collecting at the sides of his mouth. We chat. I can hold his madness and suffering at arm's reach, negotiate them with smiles and affirmations. I navigate my way through the random things he tells me about shops and shoes and cars. He is going to Oviedo. I will be changing in Berrón. We probably have half an hour. Ok. Let's roll...

'Me llamo Jeremias. Como el profeta. But the prophets were not divine. They were just good at deduction.'

'Deduction?'

'Deduction. They deduced well. They deduced how things would happen. So they would look at the sky and see the clouds and deduce that a storm was coming. They also deduced big things, like the collapse of their culture. Jeremias deduced the plague of locusts. It wasn't divine vision. He just worked it out. That's why they threw him in the cisterna.'

'¿Cisterna?'

'Cisterna. He called out the corruption and predicted the locusts. That's why the authorities did away with him.'

'Are you good at deducing, Jeremias?'

'Claro que sí. Look. A friend was riding a bicycle. It had a front brake but no back brake. I told her she was going to have an accident. This was because I could relate one concept with the next.'

'Did she fall?'

'¡Sí, hombre! Se dio una ostia. It was deduction, see. I'm not divine.'

'Do you also deduce the future of our culture, like Jeremias the Prophet?'

'Yes.' He leant closer, wobbly and stinking of tobacco. 'No more money. We're all going to run out of money. Not enough money to go round.'

'How so?'

'Los Chinos. The Chinese don't pay taxes, and they're everywhere. Too many of them. And there are too many foreigners not working and being paid lots of money. We – the Spanish people – are being driven out by immigrants who are taking and taking and not giving back. That's why I can't work. They've taken all the jobs I can do. Too many of them. Too many of them. We need someone strong in charge...'

I close down, shut off and look away through window. He rolls on, leaning so close the peak of his cap touches my ear. I fall into a scary place. This sad, lost fellow might also be a sad, lost, angry and violent fellow. What bullshit have they been feeding him? Who does he hang out with? Does he hang out online in horrible sites? Who feeds him this shit? These are not his prophetic deductions, surely... Fuck his deductions! I look again at his tattoo – a teardrop beneath the left eye. Shit – is this some far-right emblem? A prison-gang branding? This is suddenly nasty – he is right in my space, filling my head, filling my consciousness. This is intense. I'm not listening to the slurry words and stare at the passing mountains. The same eerie, dream-like, weirdness as before, but now it's nasty. This part of the trip is not fun. I want out...

We pull into a station and he lurches forward to have two hits of tobacco.

The dark moment has passed, and I grab my pen and paper like a shipwreck survivor to a life-raft. He wobbles back but I no longer want to engage. I want distance. He's still the sad, lost fellow with sad blue eyes and chronically shrugged shoulders, but he has frightened me, spilling over me cupfulls of paranoia, resignation, blame and fear. He wanders off. I return to my notes.

Magic Theatre – For Madmen Only – Price of Admission – Your Mind

The chapter on PKD is another deep exploration of another deep explorer, whose intense Weird experiences derived not from psychedelics: 'Dick only tripped a handful of times on classic psychedelics, although he could gobble speed like a biker' (37) but from his own feverish, often paranoid, quasi-religious state of imagination. And we can identify that deep current flowing through the chapter that flows through the book: Dick wrote himself into his crazed fiction. Events spilled into and out of his works. This, as with the Borges case I briefly cite above, is most notable with the powerful religious or mystical experience dubbed by PKD as 2-3-74 in honour of the date upon which it took place. This account, in which a fish symbol causes his sudden immersion in an esoteric Christian cult of the late Roman period, is familiar to many through the 1986 comic illustration in *Weirdo* by R. Crumb. The episode was preceded by his intellect, imagination and writing, and in turn inspired his intellect, imagination and writing. 'Supernatural or not, it is clear that Dick's account of 2-3-74 often read like episodes from his earlier fictions, which abound in time-slips, schizophrenic visions, dualist metaphysics, conspiracies, and spookily animated everyday objects' (325). It is a watershed moment

in Dick's life and work, and Erik teases out the different threads and, as before, explores the episode and its repercussions holistically.

2-3-74 is at the heart of the most dizzyingly Weird of Dick's works: 'his self-declared "Exegesis" – an immense and sometimes tortured private journal that eventually clocked in at over 8,000, largely hand-written pages' (1).

Here, after the countless twists and turns of the narrative exploration of the McKennas, Wilson and Dick, we come to the ultimate weird twist in Erik's book: Erik's own entanglement in the tangle of Weird tales. Having written his senior thesis at Yale on PKD's "Postmodern Gnosis" Erik some years later collaborated on the revising and editing of *Exegesis*. When considering a PhD, Dick's "psychotic religious experiences" and the texts he made from them furnished an obvious thesis topic. [...] But at the last minute I balked. I ultimately wasn't that interested in focusing on PKD in isolation – and frankly, I feared losing my way, and possibly my sanity, in the loopy labyrinths of the Exegesis' (381-2).

So, as an act of self-preservation Erik decided not to write an exegesis of Exegesis. But in a sense that is precisely what we have. Not only in the hefty chapter on PKD, but the book as a whole. As he describes in the Introduction, Dick's experiences share notable similarities with the McKennas' and Wilson's, and Erik has gone to astonishing lengths to inspect, scrutinise, peruse, triangulate, interpolate and extrapolate and generally lose himself in the mycelial network of interconnecting threads and currents. By folding into the picture the other explorers, Erik dramatized and contextualised Dick's Weird Tale in the most exegetic way possible. He may have kept his sanity, but he never really balked from his ambition. 'All our psychonauts were, without a doubt, weirdos of a sort' (36). Having reached the end of the book we must recognise that to the list of weirdo psychonauts we must add the author, Erik Davis, and we must add ourselves, the valiant reader.

Onwards...

The train arrives at the destination. I stroll along the beach back towards my family, alert as always to the words on T-shirts. Ignoring the ubiquitous Just Do It, I♥London (or NYC or Barcelona...), AC/DC and Ramones, two messages catch my eye. An old man with the English words Miracles Come in Threes. I think of the three principle chapters of the book and the hazy distinction between hallucination, delusion and miracle. A woman with the words La rebelión empieza leyendo (the rebellion begins with/by reading). Yes – this is at the heart of High Weirdness: the adventures and misadventures of the psychonauts began, unfurled and were recorded in text. They read their way into the experiences, read their way through and read their way out. Erik reads the layers, assesses and synthesis and provides us, the readers, with text. All we have is text. The information network buzzes with language. And so the rebellion begins...

Hail Eris!