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Do Bicycles Dream of Atomic Sheep?

Forms of the Fantastic in Flann O'Brien & Philip K. Dick

Joseph Brooker

Birkbeck, University of London, UK

j.brooker@bbk.ac.uk

This article develops an insight briefly offered by the American novelist Jonathan Lethem, into an affinity between Flann O'Brien's *The Third Policeman* and the science fiction of Philip K. Dick, especially his novel *Ubik*. The article reads across the work of O'Brien and Dick in relation to the themes of sublime or divine substances; artificial life and cyborgs; and persecution and paranoia, a comparison that suggests a common root in the work of Franz Kafka. The article finally proposes that this comparative reading demonstrates the parallels that can be discerned between works in different genres, and the need for a flexible concept of science fiction in its relations with other kinds of the fantastic.

Keywords

The Third Policeman, Philip K. Dick, Franz Kafka, Science Fiction, fantasy

The Brooklyn-born novelist Jonathan Lethem moved to San Francisco in 1984. One reason was that his literary idol, the science fiction writer Philip K. Dick, had lived much of his life in the city. Dick had died in 1982, but Lethem, undeterred, joined forces with the pioneering rock critic Paul Williams to become a central member of the homespun Philip K. Dick society. The society produced a regular newsletter, for which Lethem regularly wrote copy. His final contribution in 1990 was the essay 'Two Dickian Novels.'

None of this would seem to have much to do with Flann O'Brien. Yet Lethem's article is in fact an intriguing artefact for O'Brien studies, a little-known critical statement on the man from within the seemingly distant world of American science fiction. Lethem describes a novel he has just read:

The book's main character is, without his knowledge, murdered in the first chapter. He proceeds to enter a bizarre and shadowy mirror-world, and

experiences there a bewildering array of 'impossible' events. He spends most of the novel in pursuit of an elusive policeman, who is supposed to possess the ability to enlighten the protagonist in his confusion. Mysterious signs of this policeman are everywhere. In the end, the protagonist learns he is dead, only to have this awareness immediately stripped from him. The novel ends with our character back where we first found him: newly murdered, on the verge of the events of the novel we've just finished reading.¹

Lethem, we can tell, is describing *The Third Policeman*. The novel is, he avers, 'wildly funny, linguistically brilliant, and highly Dickian.' He does not suggest that Dick had actually read the novel, saying: 'It's almost certainly an instance of parallel development' (*Ecstasy* 48). Notably, *Ubik* was written in 1966, before the publication of *The Third Policeman*.² Yet Lethem finds what he calls the *Dick Effect* in Flann O'Brien's novel, even though it lacks such obvious science fiction trappings as Dick's trademark talking robot taxicabs. Lethem finally proposes that 'an inquiry into what we call the *Dick Effect* begins not with Dick's companions in the pulp SF [science fiction] of the 50s, but instead with an exploration of the history of "strangeness" (or, "cognitive estrangement") in fiction per se' (*Ecstasy* 49). He thus invites readers to think across, as well as within, literary genres.

Such an inquiry is taken up, three decades on, in the present essay, which seeks to connect different kinds of 'strangeness' and test the degree of their affinity. As such, it situates Flann O'Brien alongside other writing outside the main stream of naturalist fiction, probing the comparison that Lethem makes between *The Third Policeman* and Dick's fiction, especially *Ubik*. This inquiry follows upon certain other attempts to read O'Brien's work in relation to the genre of science fiction. Each of these has made a contribution to our understanding of this connection. Samuel Whybrow has pointed to *The Third Policeman's* historical origins towards the end of what Farah Mendlesohn identifies as a certain period of magazine science fiction, dominated by a 'sense of wonder.'³ Val Nolan suggestively emphasises the Irish context of O'Brien's ventures into this speculative field, pointing to Irish traditions of fantasy and folklore and arguing that O'Brien's work seeks to balance modern science with the immensely powerful legacy of Catholic theology.⁴ Jack Fennell, while issuing a groundbreaking history of Irish science fiction as a whole, has also provided more specific analyses of Brian O'Nolan's very early forays into the satirical science fiction short story, and echoes Nolan in positing vexed relations between religion and science as crucial to the late novel *The Dalkey Archive*. Further, Fennell has demonstrated that even in his guise as Myles na gCopaleen, O'Nolan used such science fiction tropes as the trip to the moon.⁵ None of these critics, as it happens, invokes Dick. Building on their work,

the present essay also starts from the premise that comparison, likeness and contrast between very different writers and modes can yield enlightenment and new critical perspectives. How far was Flann O'Brien really a Dickian novelist, or the reverse? And what can the inquiry suggest about O'Brien's place in the modern literary field?

Dickian Novels

Lethem calls *The Third Policeman* 'a sibling' to two of Dick's novels: *Ubik* (1969) and *A Maze of Death* (1970). It is worth spelling out the underlying similarities that led him to this judgment. *A Maze of Death* centres on an exploration team on a mysterious world, Delmak-O, which turns out to be part of what science fiction scholars call a 'pocket universe' – the technological construct of a further world.⁶ In this meta-world, the reconnaissance team is actually the crew of a marooned spaceship, fabricating a series of collective hallucinations to pass the time. The bulk of the novel's action is thus revealed to be a virtual reality. In the book's last action, one character, Mary Morley, returns to the next collective hallucination to get away from her straitened circumstances and seems to be headed not to a new one but back to Delmak-O. The sense is seemingly of grim circularity. The novel shares with *The Third Policeman* the deployment of multiple fictional worlds within one story, with the relative status of these worlds only revealed to the reader at the end. More specifically, both novels share an implicitly cyclical structure, ending with an awful scenario about to be experienced again. Apart from these strong structural resemblances, the novel's thematic texture is not especially close to O'Brien's. While the novel thus provides good corroboration for Lethem's case, the present inquiry will focus instead, in the first instance, on the more celebrated *Ubik*.

In *Ubik*'s projected 1992, big corporations hire people with psychic powers to further their interests. Glen Runciter runs a major firm of such specialists. He assembles a crack team of them for a special job on the moon. The job is a trap. A bomb goes off, leaving Runciter dying. His team, led by the shabby Joe Chip, escapes while trying to keep Runciter alive. For this future also features cold-pac technology: cryogenic freezing in which people can be preserved and can be periodically, briefly revived for communication with the living. Runciter's wife Ella is already frozen in such a unit. But Runciter dies, and his grieving team tries to reassemble his corporation.

Two particularly remarkable things now start happening. First, the world around the characters starts to decay. Cigarettes crumble to dust in characters' fingers; a car regresses into an old jalopy. Historical time runs backwards, as the universe in which the characters are stranded crumbles. Second, Joe Chip and friends start to receive messages from Runciter: written on bathroom mirrors or appearing suddenly

on TV screens or coins. The understanding emerges that their employer is still alive, and his team are dead. It is they who perished from the bomb on the moon, while he survived: they are in cold-pac, experiencing a kind of collective hallucination. It turns out, further, that this hallucination is generated by another cryogenically frozen mind, the malign boy Jory who is in cold-pac beside them. It is finally proposed that the entropic process arises because Jory is mentally generating this world and cannot summon the strength to stop it from running down.⁷ As Adam Roberts puts it in a hair-splitting paradox that Flann O'Brien might have appreciated, the cold-pac subjects are gradually devolving 'further towards a deader form of death.'⁸

Both *Ubik* and *The Third Policeman* turn on the sudden, surprising explosion of a bomb. In *Ubik* it is described as such – 'The bomb exploded' (*Ubik* 72), reads a single-line paragraph – but its effects are ambiguous: whom did the blast actually kill? In *The Third Policeman*, the bomb is incognito, until near the end of the novel. It kills the protagonist, but he does not realise this until much later: it is registered as 'some change which came upon me or upon the room, indescribably subtle, yet momentous, ineffable.'⁹ Despite this difference, in both books the bomb creates ontological change. It is not just that it takes people who were alive and makes them dead: that would not leave much narrative. Rather, it sends characters from life to a liminal state, an afterlife or death-in-life, a purgatorial state or a cryogenic one; and in both cases this is deliberately left unclear. The fictional process of both novels sustains characters beyond death, allowing readers to believe that the protagonists we read about are as unproblematically alive as before, and only later revealing the profound ambiguity in their status.

A larger uncertainty arrives in *Ubik's* brief final chapter. Here we switch at last to Glen Runciter: alive, seemingly back on the other side, and finding his pockets full of coins with Joe Chip's face on them. The previous scenario, in which Chip's world was infiltrated by Runciter's presence, has been inverted. The effect is deliberately dizzying: as Roger Luckhurst says, 'a lack of closure that exacerbates the ungroundedness of any notion of the "real".'¹⁰ The reader may conclude that Runciter is as dead as Chip, in a distinct cold-pac zone to which Chip's remaining life force has penetrated; that Runciter is really alive, but Chip is able to reach him from cold-pac; or again that, as Hazel Pierce proposes, Runciter lives but 'his own regression has begun.'¹¹ Overall, Dick ends the novel on a bewildering note, with alternate ontological zones vying for priority over each other. The science fiction novelist Kim Stanley Robinson is among those who perceives here a metafictional effect, proposing that 'Every reader of *Ubik* becomes engaged, just like its characters, in the struggle to create a coherent explanation of the events of the narrative,' a struggle that Robinson believes ultimately confounds the reader.¹²

In the terms of Flann O'Brien's fiction, it could be said that we are as close to *At Swim-Two-Birds* here as to its successor: for that debut piles world upon world and sees them, to some extent, interpenetrate and feed back into each other. Furthermore, if we take the force of the metafictional reading of *Ubik*, then we may recall that *At Swim-Two-Birds* is O'Brien's most flamboyantly metafictional novel, its multiple worlds also, in effect, multiple stories and written texts. If, for all this, we concur with Lethem about *The Third Policeman*'s special relevance, we may cite two initial reasons. One is that both the Dick novels he cites – like *The Third Policeman* and unlike *At Swim-Two-Birds* – also end with a suggestion of circularity. Mary Morley in *A Maze of Death* seems about to go through the whole fictional world again, as though pressing the button to restart on a computer game. *Ubik*'s last line, as Runciter's experience echoes Chip's earlier, is 'This was just the beginning' (*Ubik* 224). The second is that in *The Third Policeman* and, especially, *Ubik*, ontological instability and a proliferation of fictional zones are not just a matter of structural play, but are profoundly connected with the matter of life and death.

This initial comparison has suggested some grounds for Lethem's intuition of a thematic relation between these very differently situated writers. In the next three sections of this essay, I explore three more specific areas of affinity between them. The first concerns scientific and mystical views about the nature of matter; the second, questions of the organic and inorganic; the third, issues of social power. In the final section I will draw together the significance of these connections.

Ubik & Omnium

In *Ubik*, Jory's fabricated world is decaying. One thing can stop this process. Glen Runciter's cryogenically preserved wife is trying to promote life in this other world via a mysterious substance. The substance is called Ubik. It is advertised, almost literally, in a brief italicised epigraph at the start of every chapter of the book, in which Dick satirises marketing language:

We wanted to give you a shave like no other you ever had. We said, it's about time a man's face got a little loving. We said, with Ubik's self-winding Swiss chromium never-ending blade, the days of scrape-scrape are over. So try Ubik. And be loved. Warning: use only as directed. And with caution. (Ubik 66)

There are sixteen of these jingles, each one offering Ubik as the name of a different consumer good: beer, kitchen cleaner, underwear. With a quiet dark comedy, most also carefully emphasise a message on the lines of '*Perfectly safe if used as directed.*' This Ubik

sounds an ambiguous matter, potentially dangerous as well as beneficial; 'ubiquitous' in having so many diverse manifestations. This point assumes metaphysical significance, but in these advertising fragments it also suggests corporate power.

The Ubik that both Glen and Ella Runciter provide to Joe Chip is a life-giving, negentropic substance, a principle of vitality. Its existence is trailed a long time through the novel, and Chip is dying of entropic decay when Glen Runciter sprays it on him: 'the air flickered and shimmered, as if bright particles of light had been released, as if the sun's energy sparkled here in this worn-out elderly hotel room' (*Ubik* 189). At the novel's close, Joe Chip asks one of Ella's avatars just what Ubik is. The answer he receives is not spiritual, but a barrage of what seems pseudo-science: 'The negative ions are given a counterclockwise spin by a radically based acceleration chamber, which creates a centripetal tendency to them so that they cohere rather than dissipate' – and so on for a long paragraph (*Ubik* 220–1).

As the most prominent of the policemen, Sergeant Pluck, incredulously asks in *The Third Policeman*: 'Did you never study atomics when you were a lad?' (*TP* 86). O'Brien's book also runs on a peculiar physics. As the Sergeant declares:

Everything is composed of small particles of itself and they are flying around in concentric circles and arcs and segments and innumerable other geometrical figures too numerous to mention collectively, never standing still or resting but spinning away and darting hither and thither and back again, all the time on the go. These diminutive gentlemen are called atoms. (*TP* 86)

O'Brien is working in a comically homespun vein, Dick in a surreally speculative one that also gestures at scientific credibility. Both novels, in different ways, are playing off the tones of 20th-century atomic science for literary effect. Yet Dick offers a different sense of Ubik in the italicised epigraph to the final chapter, where the tone diverges completely from the advertising slogans we have come to expect:

I am Ubik. Before the universe was, I am. I made the suns. I made the worlds. I created the lives and the places they inhabit; I move them here, I put them there. They go as I say, they do as I tell them. I am the word and my name is never spoken, the name which no one knows. I am called Ubik, but that is not my name. I am. I shall always be. (Ubik 223)

On this account, Ubik is the source of everything. If this is not evidently the case in the 'real' 1992 in which the novel commences, Dick may nonetheless intend it seriously for the half-life cold-pac world in which his characters spend the latter half of the book. Within that sub-world or nether zone, we may infer, Ubik is the name for what is

positive and life-giving. This italicised passage shifts the sense of it by, in effect, giving it a voice. Ubik, in this instance, is not merely substance but subject.

The purgatorial region of *The Third Policeman* also turns out to be powered by a special substance. Another of the policemen, MacCruiskeen, explains: 'Omnium is the right name for it although you will not find it in the books.' And what is omnium? 'You are omnium and I am omnium and so is the mangle and my boots here and so is the wind in the chimney.' It comes in waves of every colour, high and low; it is 'the essential inherent interior essence which is hidden inside the root of the kernel of everything and it is always the same.' Further, 'It never changes. But it shows itself in a million ways and it always comes in waves.' Omnium, MacCruiskeen insists, 'is the business-end of everything':

Everything is on a wave and omnium is at the back of the whole shooting-match unless I am a Dutchman from the distant Netherlands. Some people call it God and there are other names for something that is identically resembling it and that thing is omnium also into the same bargain.

To own omnium would give one immense power: 'If you had a sack of it or even the half-full of a small matchbox of it, you could do anything and even do what could not be described by that name' (*TP* 114).

In both novels, then, a substance is described which has extraordinary life-enhancing powers, and whose description moves ambiguously between magical, religious, and scientific terms. Their names are uncannily analogous: Ubik is ubiquitous, omnium is omnipotent, perhaps also omnipresent – which is of course to say ubiquitous. Both Ubik and omnium seem at times to be substances, physical matter of which you could store a certain quantity in a box. But both also seem vastly to transcend this level. The Ubik which claims to pre-exist the universe is akin to the omnium that is 'at the back of the whole shooting-match.' Both, therefore, can also be viewed as analogues for God, understanding that term to be not necessarily an acting and thinking subject (though as we have seen, Ubik does appear to gain the voice proper to a subject), more a principle of oneness pervading the universe. If their names are analogous, so are their evasions of naming. MacCruiskeen's statement suggests that the entity in question has numerous names, none of them exhausting it. It is curiously akin to Ubik's assertion that '*I am the word and my name is never spoken, the name which no one knows. I am called Ubik, but that is not my name*' (*Ubik* 223). The notion that the divine is beyond naming, though we continue to deploy temporal human shorthands for it, has theological pedigree: notably, as Bernhard Lang reminds us, for Jews who have long been forbidden to utter the name of their deity.¹³

Amid their disconcerting narratives, both Dick and O'Brien have tried to fashion a version of sublimity which moves from matter to transcendence. The cultural sources behind these visions surely contrast. O'Brien is spinning off the Catholic teaching in which he had been thoroughly schooled, with its own interest in the paradoxes of God's substance, singularity, unity, and incomparability.¹⁴ There may be a breath of heresy about his extension of this mode of thought to his invented substance; what Jennika Baines calls 'a twisting of the mysteries that define his faith.'¹⁵ The book's imagination of omnium represents a point at which the orthodoxy of catechism flows into a paganistic pantheism – which is also represented in the book, in Joe's image of becoming 'part of [...] the world': something like 'the spirit of the scenery in some beautiful place like the Lakes of Killarney, the inside meaning of it if you understand me' (TP 167).

That pagan spirit brings us closer to Dick, who was ever more interested in theology but not in a way that would have altogether satisfied the Catholic hierarchy who dominated Irish society for most of Brian O'Nolan's adult life. Douglas E. Mackey calls Dick 'a profoundly religious writer,' though one who 'had no faith in faith.'¹⁶ Dick arrived at such interests not, like O'Nolan, *via* the catechism of the Christian Brothers, but *via* his own diverse theological reading. Christianity is especially important to this formation but is blended with comparative religion and mysticism. Adam Roberts avers that 'Dick almost always inflects his contingent and proliferating "realities" in theological ways.'¹⁷ He notes the precision with which doctrinal questions from Christian history are taken up in Dick's fiction and reminds us of a range of works that reflect this aspect of Dick, including the messianic adventure of *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* (1965) and the invented religion of Mercerism that compensates citizens for their alienated existence in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968). In *Ubik* too, Ella Runciter expects to be reincarnated from half-life into a new body and has a vision of 'smoky red light' as a future to avoid (*Ubik* 17, 214). It is made explicit that this vision derives from the ancient *Tibetan Book of the Dead*: the casual reference to and credence given to this work is an instance of the prevalence of non-Western forms of mysticism across Dick's thought and writing. The ecumenical Dick believed that the ideas of Jesus Christ, Buddha, or the history of mysticism should essentially flow together. No sectarian believer, he was more an eclectic occultist or New Age seeker.

Ubik contains a vein of irony about its eponymous substance, not least in the advertising scripts that punctuate it; but the idea of *Ubik* as a life-force, or even a holistic way of conceiving of all creation, represents a more serious aspiration on Dick's part. Douglas E. Mackey proposes that *Ubik* in this respect was a step forward for Dick, in replacing a world of 'conflicting subjectivities' with 'the concept of ultimate reality, beyond both subjectivity and objectivity. It is unified, uncreated, and absolute. It is what religion calls God, science calls the unified field, and Dick calls *Ubik*.' Mackey

emphasises that for Dick at this stage, the physical and metaphysical are not strictly at odds: 'Dick's conception of the unified field is simultaneously scientific and religious.'¹⁸ Mackey equates the term 'unified field' with the scientist David Bohm's concept of a 'holomovement' comprising subjective and objective, matter and consciousness: in effect allying Dick with what Steven Connor has called the 'weird science' of holistic New Age thought.¹⁹

Despite the profound differences of background between the two authors, the roles of *Ubik* and *omnium* give further and strong corroboration to Lethem's intuition of an affinity between these novels. In both, we find characters suspended ambiguously between life and death, uncertainty about the real and what determines it, and the revelation of a ubiquitous life force which moves between a consumer substance and a new name for God. What most profoundly connects the authors here is the way that they span the terrain of science (high technology in Dick, atomic theory in O'Brien) and that which seems to lie beyond it (Eastern mysticism in Dick, a sublimated Catholicism or paganism in O'Brien). In both works, significantly, a final border between science and its others is hard to detect.

Natural & Crafted

A further echo of *The Third Policeman* can be found elsewhere in Dick, in a text not cited by Lethem though a significant part of the corpus behind his 'Dick Effect.' This is *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (henceforth *Androids*), which became Dick's most famous work after its adaptation into the film *Blade Runner* (1982). The novel centres on the bounty hunter Rick Deckard who works for the police department in a San Francisco which has been, as is customary with Dick, blasted and blighted by atomic war. Deckard specialises in hunting and destroying androids, which he identifies by testing their capacity for empathy. One element of the narrative thus highlights the boundaries of the human and non-human; the suspicion that any person encountered could be a robot undermines confidence in one's judgement of humanity, including one's own.

The themes of natural and artificial life, reality and simulacrum, also extend to the use of animals as pets and status symbols. Deckard has an electric sheep grazing on the roof of his apartment building; virtually his greatest ambition in life is to obtain a real one. *The Third Policeman* features another kind of sheep. Visible from the road, they are more than once described as 'tiny' (*TP* 54, 129). We are not encouraged to think that those sheep are electric, but there is a strong sense in this novel of the world (at least after the bomb blast) as artefact, in which 'Everything seemed almost too pleasant, too perfect, too finely made' (*TP* 41). This sense of having woken into an artificial world

is also a regular contributor to Lethem's 'Dick Effect'; Ruben Borg's description of the world of *Blade Runner* as 'a denatured reality' is apt here.²⁰ The sheep's most telling cameo is in Sergeant Pluck's account of molecular theory.

'Now take a sheep,' the Sergeant said. 'What is a sheep only millions of little bits of sheepness whirling around and doing intricate convolutions inside the sheep? What else is it but that?'

'That would be bound to make the beast dizzy,' I observed, 'especially if the whirling was going on inside the head as well.' [...]

'That remark is what may well be called buncombe,' he said sharply, 'because the nerve-strings and the sheep's head itself are whirling into the same bargain and you can cancel out one whirl against the other and there you are.' (*TP* 87)

Pluck's sheep is an emblem of contemporary science, a case study in the new physics, while Deckard's sheep is a 'sophisticated piece of hardware' with a 'concealed control panel mechanism'; its 'oat-tropic circuit' makes it act keen on cereals.²¹ Both writers here are drawing on notions of advanced science for their new conceptions of the animal. In one novel, the sheep is a vehicle for the illustration of its most memorable new scientific principle. In the other, the sheep is the local exemplar of the death and displacement of the natural; and Dick's title bids us imagine an alternative stratum of artificial existence in which robotic animal would correspond harmoniously to intelligent android.

In Dick, it is plain, the uncertain status of the natural extends also to the human. Less obviously, this is also significantly true of *The Third Policeman*. Here, too, the status of characters' humanity or reality is questionable. Sometimes this is more for metaphysical or linguistic than technological reasons. Thus the question of personal identity repeatedly becomes indeterminate, with the narrator, upon first losing his name, entertaining a series of possible soubriquets seemingly at random, and Sergeant Pluck later tries to discern his real identity by the absurd method of putting a lengthy series of names to him one at a time (*TP* 43, 103–5). But in another sense too, the novel memorably troubles the boundaries of the human. The molecular theory outlined by Sergeant Pluck explains a phenomenon common within the novel's purgatorial world: namely the tendency of human beings and their bicycles to take on each others' characteristics. Given the alleged tendency of atoms to cross from one object to another on contact, it follows that

people who spent most of their natural lives riding iron bicycles over the rocky roadsteads of this parish get their personalities mixed up with the personality of their bicycle as a result of the interchanging of the atoms of each of them and

you would be surprised at the number of people in these parts who nearly are half people and half bicycles. (TP 88)

Human riders are witnessed behaving like bicycles – ‘leaning with one elbow on walls or standing propped by one foot at curbstones’ – and bicycles in turn take on agency. Thus ‘The behaviour of a bicycle that has a high content of humanity [...] is very cunning and entirely remarkable’ (TP 89–91).

O'Brien's conceit is broad comedy. But it also presents ideas which trouble the boundaries of the human, suggesting its porosity to the objects and machines around it. Amanda Duncan has highlighted this aspect of Sergeant Pluck's discourse, comparing it also with the peculiar imbrication of man and bicycle in the mid-century fiction of Samuel Beckett.²² From this point in the novel – with Pluck asserting that the local postman is seventy-one per cent bicycle (TP 91) – it becomes problematic to see the human subject in this novel as whole and consistently itself, as against a compound of organic and artificial. A more recent term summarises one way of putting this: the cyborg. In describing what it means to be half-human and half-bicycle, Sergeant Pluck may be said to anticipate the Cyborg Manifesto that Donna Haraway issued in the 1980s, proposing a ‘hybrid of machine and organism,’ a category of liminal entities ‘who populate worlds ambiguously natural and crafted.’²³ Flann O'Brien would hardly have imagined coinciding with such thought, yet the explicit way his characters blend with inorganic technology actually makes him, remarkably, closer to Haraway's vision than is Dick, whose androids are non-human despite being almost indistinguishable from the organic species that fashioned them.

It is appropriate to distinguish the respective positions and cultural sources of Dick and O'Brien in relation to these questions of transhumanism. Dick wrote of androids almost indistinguishable from humans, in part because he was long vexed by the questions of what was the human and what certainty humans could have about their own identity (hence the name of his character Deckard echoes one of the greatest thinkers to press such questions, René Descartes). He located this inquiry in a realm of high technology because he occupied a realm of rapid technological advancement: he observed the growth of nuclear technology and cybernetics from Northern California and wrote *Androids* shortly before his nation landed men on the moon. Finally, of course, he cast his inquiry this way because he was immersed in the *milieu* and iconography of science fiction: it was habitual to Dick to frame his metaphysical questions in imaginative future scenarios of high technological advancement.

The immediate rationale for O'Brien's own brand of transhuman imagination is that his characters are in the afterlife, not on Earth as we know it. The living dead are no longer straightforwardly human – a point that chimes with Borg's study of posthumanism, which emphasises death as a focal point for the boundary of the human

and its artificial others.²⁴ If we seek motives for O'Brien's way of framing this theme: first, he was drawn to the bicycle as object and social institution, as a widespread part of Irish life, a relatively low-tech item compatible with a heavily rural nation. Second, he was intrigued, if partly for comedy's sake, by the new physics of the Einsteinian age.²⁵ As Carol Taaffe remarks, it is an apt coincidence that Erwin Schrödinger would take up residence in Dublin, at the invitation of the mathematician head of government Éamon de Valera, soon after O'Brien completed his novel, and O'Brien would go on to joust with this honoured guest in his *Irish Times* columns.²⁶ Equally relevant, Katherine Ebury has demonstrated how far his work engaged with the conceits and imaginative strategies of popularisations of the new science, as produced by Arthur Eddington and Sir James Jeans.²⁷ Third, O'Brien's conceit characteristically demonstrates a certain rationalism. Like the theories of the savant de Selby which are expounded across the book, the 'atomic theory' gains its effect in part from seeming to start from a relatively rational starting point, the composition of matter from atoms. Among O'Brien's specialisms is logic that goes awry despite seeming soundly grounded. For all his flights of fancy, he was a writer Jesuitically proud of his own rigour. In this sense, as in most of the other aspects just discussed, he was quite unlike Dick, whose thought could be wildly expansive at the risk of incoherence. Yet from these contrasting sensibilities and historical situations, the two produced comparable problematisations of the human and its inorganic others.

Guilty People

Dick's fiction helps us to define a further element of *The Third Policeman*. O'Brien's afterlife is not merely a wonderland. It is also a place of fear and peril, even if you are already dead.

That results from its strange physical laws. But it is also more directly tied to the police force. Consider the sinister effect of Sergeant Pluck's first appearance: 'Ordinary enough as each part of him looked by itself, they all seemed together, by some undetectable discrepancy in association or proportion, a very disquieting impression of unnaturalness, amounting almost to what was horrible and monstrous' (TP 56). Pluck is comic, but also a frightening figure. As soon as Inspector O'Corky announces that a murder has been committed locally, Pluck lights on the narrator as the culprit simply because he is in the police station at the time. We know that the narrator really is a murderer, and that Pluck's arbitrary judgement is in a sense correct. But we may still be chilled by his eagerness to, in his own words, 'Hang you by the windpipe before high breakfast time,' or his subsequent reaffirmation that 'we can take you and hang the life out of you,' rendering life void 'by asphyxiation and the fracture of the spinal string' (TP 102, 105). In one aspect the Sergeant can seem a bumpkin; but from another

he is distinguished by his relish for execution, a character untouched by empathy or qualm. As Borg observes, 'In the realm of the dead, the powers of the law – to judge, to punish, to protect – are shown up in all their arbitrariness.'²⁸

The world of *The Third Policeman* is already troubling. But the parallel with Dick helps to highlight how far it is a world of official persecution. For Dick's fictional universe is perhaps the most paranoid in all literature. In many of his stories, reality is not what it seems; one should trust not appearances, or the state, or authority, or those who seem to be offering assistance. Dick's fiction has a recurrent place for the police. His 1974 novel *Flow My Tears, the Policeman Said*, again narrates an ontological crisis in which reality cracks apart. At the same time, its dystopian setting is a police state in which technology has made the authorities almost omnipotent, readily able to persecute the protagonist; he particularly experiences an intense negotiation with a Police General. It is thus not an altogether spurious connection that is suggested in one fan's online mash-up of this novel's cover: *Flow My Tears, the Third Policeman Said*. Though not discussed further in the present inquiry, this novel is most likely the main reason that Lethem (*Ecstasy* 47) cites 'an elusive policeman' as a Dickian motif in O'Brien.

In *Androids*, Deckard travels to interview an android opera singer, who tries to save herself by accusing him of harassment and calling the police. In short order an officer arrives: not a bounty hunter like Deckard but what Dick repeatedly calls a 'harness bull.' The term is early 20th-century hard-boiled slang for uniformed police; it will turn out that the policeman is an android, so this metaphorical bull, like Deckard's sheep, is electric. The harness bull, whose name is Officer Crams, wears an 'archaic blue uniform with gun and star' (*Androids* 83) – in this respect, he is aligned with the officers of *The Third Policeman*, who not only wear blue uniforms but are also apparently 'archaic' as holdovers from the colonial Royal Irish Constabulary, which by the time the novel was written had been replaced by the post-colonial Garda. The policeman claims to know all the local bounty hunters and denies any knowledge of Deckard. He marches Deckard away and flies him in his hovercar to the Hall of Justice. But he is heading South, not North: the harness bull declares that the place where Deckard works every day is 'the old Hall of Justice [...] it's disintegrating; it's a ruin. Nobody's used that for years' (*Androids* 86). He flies Deckard instead to what he calls the new Hall of Justice, on Mission Street. Its architecture strikes Deckard as 'attractive – except for one aspect. He had never seen it before.' Inside is an entire alternative police station, full of desk sergeants and support staff, cutting athwart Deckard's usual sense of reality: 'Who are these people? If this place has always existed, *why didn't we know about it?* And why don't they know about us? Two parallel police agencies, he said to himself; ours and this one. But never coming in contact – as far as I know – until now' (*Androids* 87).

The experience is classically Dickian: reality seems to have broken in two; a protagonist moves between separate worlds unaware of each other's existence. What is especially striking for us is that the ontological split centres on the police. The Mission Street Hall of Justice may be one of literature's closest cousins to the astonishing barracks of *The Third Policeman*, whose narrator reflects that

I had no doubt at all that it was the barracks of the policemen. I had never seen with my eyes ever in my life before anything so unnatural and appalling and my gaze faltered about the thing uncomprehendingly as if at least one of the customary dimensions was missing, leaving no meaning in the remainder. (*TP* 55)

A certain bewilderment is common to both texts and protagonists. But what Dick highlights here is how, in *The Third Policeman*, this is closely linked to power and persecution. The world of ontological instability is also one of sudden arrest and mysterious, arbitrary authority against which one protests in vain. The police take diverse forms – the 'archaic' harness bull, the mysterious leather-clad gunmen in *A Maze of Death*, the Interplanetary police who suddenly materialise in the story 'We Can Remember It for You Wholesale' (1966) – but as Lethem says in another essay, in Dick's fiction, 'everyone is *always* about to be arrested.'²⁹

Does this element of the two writers have a common source? One can be hypothesised. Franz Kafka too developed non-naturalistic writing in a modern, 20th-century context. He too created a vertiginous sense of the instability of the world around the embattled individual subject. And Kafka too was enthralled by forms of social power, persecution, and paranoia. For Dick, writing in the American 1950s and 1960s, Kafka was a fact of the literary landscape: more than that, as Mark Greif has recently reminded us, Kafka was frequently central to the earnest literary and social discussions of post-war America.³⁰ Kafka was a natural precursor for a paranoid. Hence Dick's ready admission that 'the fantasy writers such as Kafka and the Kapecs' had been part of his reading.³¹ Brian O'Nolan's own engagement with Karl and Josef Čapek is well attested by his adaptation of *The Insect Play* in 1943. In his Preface to the 1994 edition of that work, W. J. McCormack also links the Čapeks and Kafka, noting the tendency of such material to circulate as far as Dublin.³² In a similar vein, Niall Sheridan cited Kafka, Proust, and Kierkegaard as key literary figures in the reading of O'Nolan's circle in the 1930s: 'Brian greatly admired these last three writers.'³³ To triangulate *The Third Policeman* with Dick and Kafka shows it in a new light: as a work of the modern fantastic in its disconcerting and paranoid mood.

The motif of paranoia has been varyingly construed at different points of modern literary history. David Trotter has posited a 'paranoid modernism,' centring

on English novelists (Ford, Lewis, and Lawrence) and arising from these writers' marginal and agonistic relation to an increasingly professionalised society that they felt undervalued the artist.³⁴ Modernist style, for Trotter, emerges in part as a form of compensatory 'expertise' in reaction to this sense of persecution.³⁵ David Spurr has further applied this concept to Joyce and Kafka, but his analysis remains largely biographical rather than textual.³⁶ While Spurr's diagnosis of Kafka's non-fictional documents is persuasive enough, what is pertinent in the present context is his development of paranoia as fictional mood and theme. It is this that ultimately finds an echo in the distinct context of the post-war United States, in which Dick wrote. Here, a central document is Richard J. Hofstadter's essay 'The Paranoid Style in American Politics,' published in *Harper's* in 1964.³⁷ Hofstadter traces the angry, accusatory mode of the rising political Right to a much longer history of conspiracy theories that he indicates have fuelled American history. Right-wingers in the mould of Senator Joseph McCarthy furiously denounce a nation that has been furtively infiltrated by enemies of its values and pedantically construct an edifice of evidence for the betrayal. Hofstadter mentions that there can be, in principle, a paranoia of the political Left, and it is this that fuels Dick's relentless suspicion of state authority. So too does it provide much of the flavour in his great successors in this regard, Thomas Pynchon and Don DeLillo, in whose fiction the world's coherence and connectedness often appear to be a matter of covert network and occult conspiracy.

Much of O'Nolan's writing is distant from this tradition. Yet it is also true that as Myles na gCopaleen, O'Nolan wrote a number of courtroom scenes in which he sometimes appeared in the dock; as does a persecuted Trellis in the latter stages of *At Swim-Two-Birds*.³⁸ Once one invokes *The Trial*, one starts to consider its consonance with the other fictions in play here: with Dick's police states and android cops, and also with the miniature police state of *The Third Policeman*. Michael Wood writes that Kafka's protagonist Joseph K 'never manages fully to persuade himself that the court has mistaken his identity, only that the accusation is unfair and incomprehensible.'³⁹ Wood brings out the disturbing erosion of K's sense of innocence. When he claims not to be guilty and asks how anyone can be, his interlocutor replies: 'That is true, but that's how all guilty people talk.' There is an unsettling echo in *The Third Policeman*, in the fact that the protagonist is arrested and sentenced to be hanged for murder arbitrarily, without cause – and yet we know, as the police do not, that he is indeed a murderer. O'Brien's narrator is somehow both innocent and guilty at once, while K is innocent but increasingly struggles to make this case convincing. Considering Orson Welles's film of *The Trial*, Wood notes: 'If the court is wrong to accuse you without naming the crime, you must be wrong, for the very same reason, to proclaim your innocence.' Welles gave his own verdict on K: 'He is not guilty as accused, but he is guilty all the same.'⁴⁰

O'Brien picks up on such logic in his narrator's confrontation with Sergeant Pluck, who at first struggles to pin a name on his suspect so that he can be hanged – among them 'Joseph Poe or Nolan' – then cheerfully concludes that as he does not legally exist, he cannot commit a crime. 'Anything you do,' avers Pluck, 'is a lie and nothing that happens to you is true,' which means in turn that, in the narrator's own words, 'because I have no name I cannot die and [...] you cannot be held answerable for death even if you kill me' (*TP* 104–105). Kafka's inspectors could hardly have worked up a more chillingly inescapable logic.

All three writers root such excesses in mundane structures. In real life, Franz Kafka (insurance agent) and Brian O'Nolan (civil servant) were bureaucrats, men at work in offices amid typewriters and memoranda. Hence Kafka's *Castle* with its inflated descriptions of the workings of vast impenetrable bureaucracy, whose communiqués O'Nolan might have recognised from his day job. Something of the bureaucratic mode which had been familiar to O'Nolan since at least 1935 gets into *The Third Policeman*, in the policemen themselves: note-taking, figure-checking (the figures, of course, all being fictitious [*TP* 106]), quota-meeting. Even Dick, a self-confessed Californian 'freak,' nonetheless wrote of the inner workings of corporations and of suburban frustrations.⁴¹ As Fredric Jameson has put it, Dick's is 'a literature about business' whose 'average heroes' are 'small employees [...] petty bureaucrats [...] caught in the convulsive struggles of monopoly corporations.'⁴² In short, this odd trio of writers who conceived persecution in frighteningly fantastic terms were also apt to root it in its most everyday structures: to adapt Hannah Arendt's phrase, all three explore the banality of power.

A Fantastic Grotesque

This article has demonstrated affinities between some of the works of Flann O'Brien – above all *The Third Policeman* – and Philip K. Dick – especially *Ubik*, but with other texts also relevant. It has also proposed Kafka as a relevant precursor. Yet it is now necessary to step back and consider the broader significance of these findings. What is their import for thinking about Flann O'Brien's place in modern literary history?

Given Dick's immersion in the genre of science fiction, a first answer could be that the connections indicated above show that Flann O'Brien is closer to science fiction than has usually been supposed. Those exploring this proposition are oddly encouraged by the author's late letter (1 March 1963) to Timothy O'Keeffe about *The Dalkey Archive*, expressing 'a horrible fear that some stupid critic (and which of them is not?) will praise me as a master of science fiction.'⁴³ In disavowing the genre, he draws our 'stupid' attention to his relation to it. As noted earlier, certain critics have productively followed this hint. Like the present essay, they have not reductively sought to reveal

that O'Brien was 'really' a science fiction author. Whybrow sees this critical discussion as bringing together 'Three things that are usually considered separately: sci-fi, the absurd and the literary,' while Nolan emphasises that 'O'Brien [...] was not writing to fit any specific genre conventions' and that *The Third Policeman* and *The Dalkey Archive* rather 'bear the fingerprints of multiple, modern generic subdivisions.'⁴⁴ Thus, Nolan proposes, the novels can be variously claimed by 'a variety of generic categories with markedly distinct reading codes and audiences,' so that *The Third Policeman* can be described as 'fantastical' and 'science-fictional' at different times, due to its 'breadth of both reference and imagination that transcends cosy delineations of genre.'⁴⁵ It can be agreed that O'Brien, writing around the end of the 1930s, shares some reference points and concerns with 20th-century science fiction – most especially, as Nolan, Fennell, and Ebury have emphasised, the development of modern science. He deals with these challenging scientific developments in ways that parallel the concerns of science fiction, but in a literary framework that has different roots, contexts, and, accordingly, tones and forms.

Building on this recognition, it is productive to consider the matter of genre and classification itself. First, we may observe that texts classified as popular or genre narratives, and texts that have been situated (especially by academic criticism) with the categories of late modernism or postmodernism, sometimes explore shared concerns in strikingly similar ways. The case of O'Brien and Dick reminds us of the possibility of reading across, from one genre to another or from one realm of cultural production to another – in effect from pulp to pataphysics. Motifs and modes of writing vary; Dick's writing can be inventive, but at the level of the sentence it does not compare with *The Third Policeman*, which the Dickian Lethem could immediately see was 'linguistically brilliant.' Yet cultural and intellectual concerns can be at stake on both sides of these boundaries.

Second, one potential reason for this is the existence of shared precursors and, by the same token, 'family resemblances' – which we have witnessed here in the case of Kafka and the Čapeks. The case of O'Brien and Dick encourages us to recognise how certain figures inspirational in the development of the modernist novel could be equally crucial in that of science fiction. Once again, the tonal outcomes are different, but the Kafkaesque finds a new, divergent legacy in each.

The case of Dick here also encourages us to think about the boundaries of science fiction itself. Historically, the genre has often been defined in highly rationalist terms. The greatest exemplar of this tendency is the Marxist critic Darko Suvin, who from the late 1960s defined science fiction as a literature of cognitive estrangement: one that could productively remove us from the normal (estrangement), while doing so in a way that seems somewhat rational and scientifically coherent (cognitive). Science fiction, for Suvin, must be distinguished from other modes outside literary

realism, even if myth, fantasy, or fairy tale join science fiction in being non-naturalistic or 'metaempirical' genres.⁴⁶ Thus, he argues, myth breaks with the empirical only to instate a timeless and religious world view; folktale blithely ignores physical laws and thus fails to engage the real; fantasy or Gothic determinedly breaks such laws and troubles our sense of the possible. Science fiction, for Suvin, differs from all these '*metaphysical*' modes by virtue of its 'cognitive' character.⁴⁷ As Luckhurst summarises:

the [science fiction] reader enters an imaginative world different (estranged) in greater or lesser degree from the empirical world around the writer or reader, but different in a way that obeys rational causation or scientific law (it is estranged *cognitively*). Hence, a science fiction future is one that is meant to extrapolate rationally or scientifically from tendencies within the 'empirical environment.'⁴⁸

Suvin's influential definitions have been subject to challenge and debate. Some suggest that his firm distinctions between SF and other non-naturalistic genres are unsustainable or ahistorical, while they are certainly evaluative.⁴⁹ Carl Freedman has observed the problems raised by temporal changes inherent to science itself: what seems 'cognitive' and scientifically plausible at one moment in history may appear fanciful at a later date, thus threatening to remove a text from the precincts of science fiction and usher it into the more dubious realm of fantasy. Freedman finesses the problem with the notion of a 'cognition effect,' by which an SF text need not rely on actually reliable science but must simply proceed on a coherent basis; what matters now is 'the attitude of the text itself to the kind of estrangements being performed.'⁵⁰ As long as a text seems to think scientifically, it may be viewed as SF, even if its science is fanciful. As Adam Roberts explains: 'science is just as frequently represented in the SF novel by pseudo-science, by some device outside the boundaries of science that is none the less rationalised in the *style* of scientific discourse.'⁵¹

Definitions like those proposed by Suvin have been useful, not least in giving critical legitimacy to science fiction. As the critiques just cited indicate, they have also necessarily been reductive. The comparison with Flann O'Brien reminds us that science fiction has often opened onto a wide hinterland of other modes of narrative and thought, including myth, religion, and metaphysics. This is what the Polish science fiction novelist Stanislaw Lem articulates in an essay written shortly after *Ubik*'s publication. Lem proposes that Dick occupies unusual, liminal territory that frustrates more dogmatic attempts to draw generic borders. Thus Dick might be read as introducing 'occultism or spiritualism' to science fiction,

and in the indeterminacy of his explanations might break some of the genre's supposed rules: 'the convention of SF requires rational accounting for events that are quite improbable and even seemingly at odds with logic and experience.' Yet, Lem proposes, 'the evolution of literary genres is based precisely on violation of storytelling conventions which have already become static. So Dick's novels in some measure violate the convention of SF, which can be *accounted to him as merit*.' Lem provocatively argues that:

the demand for absolute purity of genres is becoming nowadays an anachronism in literature. The critics and readers who hold Dick's 'impurity' with respect to genre against him are fossilised traditionalists, and a counterpart to their attitude would be an insistence that prosaists should keep on writing in the manner of Zola and Balzac, and only thus.

Ubik itself, Lem considers, could be viewed as 'a fantastic grotesque, a "macabresque" with obscure allegorical subtexts, decked out in the guise of ordinary SF.' Its generic status is therefore ambiguous or multiple, and this is no bad thing.⁵²

Lem's analysis helps to corroborate the parallel explored here. As Borg puts it, 'the subversion (or suspension) of generic forms deregulates a work, sets it adrift of its legal and ethical mooring.'⁵³ Dick and O'Brien were rooted in contrasting literary *milieux*, but the works considered here venture boldly around different generic norms and frameworks, thus opening points of thematic and conceptual connection. Both novelists disregard naturalism, in differing yet related ways. One writes consciously from within science fiction, the other in a strange, uniquely hybrid other mode (modernism, myth, religion, Gothic, parody of science). In this context it is very suggestive that Fennell, in his ground-breaking history of Irish science fiction, posits this national field as unusually open to folkloric and mythical legacies.⁵⁴ This supports Nolan's observation that, in observing *The Dalkey Archive's* science-fictional character, we should also 'emphasise its connectivity with an antecedent fantasy tradition in which things were not always rigorously explained': a continuum that makes the character of De Selby a kind of 'electric Yeats.'⁵⁵ Elsewhere, Fennell has observed that Myles na gCopaleen's science-fictional columns refuse to draw a firm distinction between the scientific and the mythic: his journey to the moon involves attacks from 'evil banshees' from the astral plane.⁵⁶ Fennell avers that 'While the supernatural is notionally out of bounds for a genre that appears to define itself in relation to science, this is not always the case. [...] Cross-pollination between [meta-empirical genres] has always occurred to some extent and deliberate genre blurring is becoming more and more prevalent.'⁵⁷ Fennell does not allude to Dick, but as we have seen, he is a major case in point.

It is thus helpfully symptomatic that Lethem's first impulse in comparing Dick and O'Brien is to talk of a history of 'strangeness [...] in fiction per se,' which he only subsequently thinks to narrow to the more rigorous Suvinian 'cognitive estrangement.' These instances of 'strangeness' occupy different loci in the broad field of the fantastic, as a term encompassing various kinds of narrative not content with realist convention. Rosemary Jackson's influential summary of the field posits that science fiction belongs alongside 'myths, legends, folk, and fairy tales' and more, 'all presenting realms "other" than the human.'⁵⁸ Of course, these forms often do include the human; so Jackson might more properly have written of genres presenting existence in ways other than realist narrative. But such a capacious sense of the fantastic as the other of literary naturalism has also been offered by Lethem himself, who consistently seeks to unite science fiction and experimental writers in the same rhetorical gesture: Angela Carter alongside Samuel R. Delany, Borges consorting with Ballard (*Ecstasy* 33–4, 68–9). In this field, writers may display unexpected connections despite contrasting backgrounds and temperaments. Insofar as such connections can be explained causally, shared textual influences are a relevant factor. I have posited Kafka as one such here. Lethem's original essay posited Lewis Carroll as 'an important and unrecognised common denominator' (*Ecstasy* 49) for themes that Dick shared with others. The influences of both these precursors on the field merits further, specific study.

Meanwhile, in differing tones, varying from humour to horror, we have seen how major works by Flann O'Brien and Philip K. Dick take on and estrange questions of death, power, and the human. In 1940, O'Brien's publisher Longman responded to the manuscript of *The Third Policeman* by comparing it to his previous novel: 'We realise the author's ability but think that he should become less fantastic and in this new novel he is more so.'⁵⁹ O'Brien may have been at least temporarily disheartened by the verdict. But it was an admonition that Dick's science fiction, and much of the most challenging literature of the 20th century, never heeded. An attention to the varied forms of the fantastic can help us remain alert to the complex map of 20th-century literature, and Flann O'Brien's peculiar place on it.

Competing Interests

Joseph Brooker serves on the advisory board of *The Parish Review: Journal of Flann O'Brien Studies* but had no involvement with the peer review or acceptance process of this article.

Notes & references

¹Jonathan Lethem, *The Ecstasy of Influence* (New York: Doubleday, 2011), 47. Subsequent references given in the text as *Ecstasy* with page number.

²See Douglas A. Mackey, *Philip K. Dick* (Boston: Twayne, 1988), 92.

³Samuel Whybrow, 'Flann O'Brien's Science Fiction: An "Illusion of Progression" in *The Third Policeman*,' in *'Is it about a bicycle?' Flann O'Brien in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Jennika Baines (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2011), 129–30, citing Farah Mendlesohn, 'Introduction: Reading Science Fiction,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, eds. Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 3.

⁴Val Nolan, 'Flann, Fantasy, and Science Fiction: O'Brien's Surprising Synthesis,' *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 31, no. 3 (Fall 2011): 178–90.

⁵See Jack Fennell, *Irish Science Fiction* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014); Jack Fennell, 'Irelands Enough and Time: Brian O'Nolan's Science Fiction,' in *Flann O'Brien: Contesting Legacies*, eds. Ruben Borg, Paul Fagan, and Werner Huber (Cork: Cork University Press, 2014), 33–45; and Jack Fennell, 'Myles In Space: Science Fiction and *Cruiskeen Lawn*,' *The Parish Review: Journal of Flann O'Brien Studies* 3, no. 1 (2015): 64–77. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.16995/pr.3128>.

⁶See Philip K. Dick, *A Maze of Death* (London: Gollancz, 2005).

⁷Philip K. Dick, *Ubik* (London: Millennium, 2000), 209. Subsequent references given in the text as *Ubik* with page number.

⁸Adam Roberts, *The History of Science Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006), 242.

⁹Flann O'Brien, *The Third Policeman* (London: Paladin, 1988), 24. Subsequent references given in the text as *TP* with page number.

¹⁰Roger Luckhurst, *Science Fiction: A Cultural History* (Cambridge: Polity, 2005), 163.

¹¹Hazel Pierce, *Philip K. Dick* (Mercer Island: Starport House, 1982), 32.

¹²Kim Stanley Robinson, *The Novels of Philip K. Dick* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1984), 97.

¹³Bernhard Lang, *The Hebrew God: Portrait of an Ancient Deity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 201.

¹⁴Val Nolan's emphasis on Irish Catholicism as a specific and formative context for Flann O'Brien's interest in science is highly pertinent here: see Nolan, 179, 184–6.

¹⁵Jennika Baines, "'Un-Understandable Mystery": Catholic Faith and Revelation in *The Third Policeman*,' *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 31, no. 3 (Fall 2011): 89.

¹⁶Mackey, 131.

¹⁷Roberts, *History*, 240.

¹⁸Mackey, 92–3.

¹⁹See Steven Connor, 'Weird Science,' *New Formations* 50 (Autumn 2003): 94–105.

²⁰Ruben Borg, *Fantasies of Self-Mourning: Modernism, the Posthuman, and the Finite* (Leiden and Boston: Brill | Rodopi, 2019), 54.

²¹ Philip K. Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (London: Grafton, 1972), 10, 12. Subsequent references given in the text as *Androids* with page number.

²² See Amanda Duncan, 'Communing with Machines: The Bicycle as a Figure of Symbolic Transgression in the Posthumanist Novels of Samuel Beckett and Flann O'Brien,' in *Culture on Two Wheels: The Bicycle in Literature and Film*, eds. Jeremy Withers and Daniel P. Shea (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016), 152–70.

²³ Donna Haraway, 'A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century,' in *Science Fiction and Cultural Theory: A Reader*, ed. Sherryl Vint (London: Routledge, 2016), 235.

²⁴ Borg, 1–2.

²⁵ See Andrew Spencer, 'Many Worlds: The New Physics in Flann O'Brien's *The Third Policeman*,' *Eire-Ireland* 30, no.1 (Spring 1995): 145–58.

²⁶ See Carol Taaffe, *Ireland Through the Looking Glass: Flann O'Brien, Myles na gCopaleen, and Irish Cultural Debate* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2008), 77–8, and Alana Gillespie, "'Banjaxed and Bewildered': *Cruiskeen Lawn* and the Role of Science in Independent Ireland,' in Borg, Fagan, and Huber (eds.), 169–80.

²⁷ Katherine Ebury, 'Physical Comedy and the Comedy of Physics in *The Third Policeman*, *The Dalkey Archive*, and *Cruiskeen Lawn*,' in *Flann O'Brien: Problems with Authority*, eds. Ruben Borg, Paul Fagan, and John McCourt (Cork: Cork University Press, 2017), 87–102.

²⁸ Borg, 143.

²⁹ Jonathan Lethem, 'Introduction' to Philip K. Dick, *Selected Stories* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2002), viii.

³⁰ See Mark Greif, *The Age of the Crisis of Man: Thought and Fiction in America, 1933–1973* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

³¹ Philip K. Dick, *The Selected Letters of Philip K. Dick 1938–1971* (Grass Valley: Underwood Books, 1996), 55–6.

³² See W. J. McCormack, 'Series Editor's Preface,' in Flann O'Brien, *Rhapsody in Stephen's Green: The Insect Play*, ed. Robert Tracy (Dublin: Lilliput, 1994), vi.

³³ Niall Sheridan, 'Brian, Flann, and Myles (The Springtime of Genius),' in *Myles: Portraits of Brian O'Nolan*, ed. Timothy O'Keeffe (London: Martin, Brian, and O'Keeffe, 1973), 40.

³⁴ For a previous reading of *The Third Policeman* in relation to this theme, see Paul Fagan, "'Expert diagnosis has averted still another tragedy": Misreading and the Paranoia of Expertise in *The Third Policeman*,' *The Parish Review: Journal of Flann O'Brien Studies* 3, no. 1 (Fall 2014): 26–7. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.16995/pr.3118>.

³⁵ See David Trotter, *Paranoid Modernism: Literary Experiment, Psychosis, and the Professionalisation of English Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

³⁶ David Spurr, 'Paranoid Modernism in Joyce and Kafka,' *Journal of Modern Literature* 34, no. 2 (Winter 2011), 178–91.

³⁷ Richard J. Hofstadter, 'The Paranoid Style in American Politics,' *Harper's Magazine* (November 1964): 77–86. Available at: <https://harpers.org/archive/1964/11/the-paranoid-style-in-american-politics/>

³⁸ For Myles's courtroom scenes, see Flann O'Brien, *The Best of Myles*, ed. Kevin O'Nolan (London: Picador, 1977), 137–53. For a fuller discussion of Myles's relation to law, see Joseph Brooker, 'Estopped By Grand Playsaunce: Flann O'Brien's Post-Colonial Lore,' *Journal of Law and Society* 31, no. 1 (March 2004): 15–37.

³⁹ Michael Wood, *Franz Kafka* (Tavistock: Northcote House, 2003), 32.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁴¹ Dick refers to himself as a 'flipped-out freak,' in contrast to the upstanding Robert A. Heinlein, in the 'Introduction' to *The Golden Man* (New York: Berkley Books, 1980). Available at: <http://www.sisabianovenia.com/LoLeido/NoFiccion/Dick-GoldenMan.htm>.

⁴² Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London: Verso, 2005), 347.

⁴³ Flann O'Brien, *The Letters of Flann O'Brien*, ed. Maebh Long (Victoria, TX: Dalkey Archive, 2018), 343.

⁴⁴ Whybrow, 131; Nolan, 179.

⁴⁵ Nolan, 179–80.

⁴⁶ Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 3–4.

⁴⁷ Suvin, *Metamorphoses*, 11.

⁴⁸ Luckhurst, *Science Fiction*, 7.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Carl Freedman, *Critical Theory and Science Fiction* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 2000), 20.

⁵¹ Adam Roberts, *Science Fiction*, second edn (London: Routledge, 2006), 8.

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⁵³ Borg, 65.

⁵⁴ Fennell, *Irish Science Fiction*, 8, 36.

⁵⁵ Nolan, 187–8, 183.

⁵⁶ Fennell, 'Myles in Space,' 68.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁵⁸ Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London: Methuen, 1981), 13–4. For a historically specific argument about the recent erosion of boundaries between kinds of fantastic literature, see Gary K. Wolfe, *Evaporating Genres: Essays on Fantastic Literature* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2011).

⁵⁹ Quoted in Anthony Cronin, *No Laughing Matter: The Life and Times of Flann O'Brien* (London: Grafton, 1989), 101.