

# APOCALYPTIC VISIONS FROM THE PAST: THE COLONIZATION OF MARS IN DICK'S *MARTIAN TIME-SLIP*

**Elena Corioni**  
Catholic University of Milan

## ABSTRACT

In recent years, climate change has emerged as a dominant theme in literature, with writers trying to find new ways to express how the alteration of climate affects people. Even though it was published before climate change was so pressing an issue, Philip K. Dick's *Martian Time-Slip* (1964) deals with the worries caused by an Earth that is becoming increasingly inhospitable, pushing people to migrate to Mars. This article explores how Dick expresses the challenges that immigrants must face in trying to adapt to a new environment and how he uses Martian society to criticize the degeneration of the capitalistic society that marginalizes people who are acutely able to empathize with both the human and the nonhuman world. Among these marginalized people there is Manfred, a child who suffers from autism. Dick depicts Manfred's mind as an instrument that disrupts people's linear sense of time and that denies the principle of cause and effect.

**Keywords:** Philip K. Dick; *Martian Time-Slip*; migration; climate change.

## INTRODUCTION

In the foreword of the anthology *American Earth: Environmental Writing Since Thoreau*, Al Gore writes that “environmentalism, while inevitably a source of conflict, is inherent in our national character, a fundamental part of our heritage as Americans” (2008, xviii). While literary studies began focusing on the relationship between literature and the environment as recently as the early 1990s, American literature has always produced eco-fiction, a subgenre aimed at scrutinizing the story of people in the natural world. According to Scaffai, from its inception, eco-fiction developed into two main strains: the first has its roots in Henry David Thoreau's work and is grounded in an exaltation of nature, which he saw as the origin of ethical and civil rights; the second employs the themes and concerns of nineteenth and twentieth century science fiction, enriching the genre's conventions with subjects and reflections rooted in ecological issues (2019, 115).

A close connection can be traced between New Wave science fiction and the development of the modern environmental movement: both came into their own in the

1960s and 1970s and influenced each other. Indeed, Rebecca Evans explains that “when environmentalism emerged, it “took shape as a necessarily *predictive* as well as descriptive field” (2019, 436). She claims that the modern environmental movement viewed the world as being in “the early stages of ecological disaster” and sought to motivate policy makers and society to prevent future catastrophes by using science fiction’s literary “speculative strategies in general and the genres of apocalypse and dystopia in particular” (Ibid.). At the same time, Evans continues, New Wave science fiction tried to distance itself from earlier genre offerings and “was willing to reject escapism and interrogate pressing social issues” (438). The New Wave writers were interested in formal experimentation, avoided utopian scenarios, and responded to contemporary anxieties by addressing environmental issues. Therefore, the alteration of the natural environment and the resulting threats to the survival of our planet have been primary concerns of science fiction since the 1960s. Eric C. Otto defines New Wave and the environmental texts of the first few decades of the twentieth century as narratives of “ecological loss;” as society “was starting to see its way of living as incompatible with local and global ecological fitness,” science fiction depicted dystopian futures caused by cataclysmic events on a devastated Earth (2019, 582). This means that, even before the concept of the Anthropocene gained currency and climate fiction emerged, science fiction writers depicting apocalyptic scenarios proposed that human greed can change—and, in some cases, even destroy—the natural environment.

Even novels written in the 1960s and 1970s by writers who did not see themselves as producing ‘ecological science fiction’ show the way in which ecological thinking influenced science fiction. Indeed, an interest in environmental issues is evident in all of Philip K. Dick’s work. In *The Ruins of Earth* (1971), one of the first science fiction and ecology anthologies, Dick’s “Autofact” depicts a postwar era in which robots control the world, monopolizing the planet’s resources and leaving humans with nothing. In the introduction to this anthology, Disch wrote that he appreciated Dick’s work because it warned readers of the dangers of technology and therefore played “a significant part in the very urgent business of saving the world” (1971, 6). Dick composed other short stories that examined the consumption of natural resources, including “Survey Team”

(1954), which deals with humanity's "insatiable desire for more and more resources" (Markley 2006, ch. 5). Further, McKibben's (2008) anthology—*American Earth: Environmental Writing Since Thoreau*, already quoted at the beginning of this article— included a passage from Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* in which protagonist Decker remembers "how in his childhood it had been discovered that species upon species had become extinct" (Dick 1968, ch. 4). *Martian Time-Slip* (1964) is another of Dick's works depicting the way in which men constantly alter the natural environment. In this novel, Dick represents an Earth where levels of pollution are so high that people are dying, and Mars, now colonized by humans, is experiencing a process of desertification caused by the exploitation of natural resources.

In this article, I will attempt an ecocritical interpretation of *Martian Time-Slip* using Scaffai's (2019) definition of the interactions between literature and ecology as a critical starting point. Ecology is the branch of biology that deals with the relationship between living organisms and their environments. However, the word also refers to all human activities that develop in relation to the environment, such as agriculture or industrialism, as well as to measures taken to protect and preserve it. Therefore, according to Scaffai, in literature, an ecocritical approach studies the relations that characters establish with their environment, how their activities change it, and the results of those changes, such as catastrophes, epidemics, and climate change. The concept of *Umwelt* is central to this approach. Introduced by biologist Jakob von Uexküll in the first half of the twentieth century, *Umwelt* refers to the environment as it is perceived by different organisms, meaning that both humans and nonhumans have particular visions of the spaces they inhabit. When narratives give voice to nonhumans, they employ the literary device of "estrangement," using an unexpected perspective to reframe a familiar reality (Scaffai 2019).

As Disch (1971) pointed out, an ecological consciousness is expressed in literature through interconnectedness: the "peculiar tunnel vision and singleness of focus" of the so-called hardcore science fiction saga "is the antithesis of an 'ecological consciousness' in which cause and effect would be regarded as a web rather than as a single strand chain" (6). Following from this, *Martian Time-Slip* is built upon different webs that tie

together its characters. Brain W. Aldiss found three webs: that of civilization, that of humanity, and that “connecting all the good and bad things in the universe” (1975, 43). The characters are also connected to each other by their shared experience of being the colonizers of a new planet; each one interacts in different ways with the space as they try to survive in an inhospitable environment. Mars itself is something of a nonhuman character, and many characters are defined by their interactions with the nonhuman. In writing about different points of view and visions of the same space, Dick creates a web, a sort of literary ecosystem to which each character brings his own way of being and thinking. Mars is a space of interconnection, a biosphere inhabited by humans and nonhumans that exists only in the interaction of these elements.

This paper will explore how *Martian Time-Slip* deals with concerns linked to the future of the natural environment and the human race. In the first section, I will explore the dynamics of migration and terraforming; setting the novel in an extraterrestrial world permitted Dick to rewrite American history, linking Western expansion to the new frontier of Mars and showing the destructive forces of colonization. Dick also explored the dynamics of homesteading, showing how new generations develop a sense of belonging to Mars’ environment. The second section of the paper examines Dick’s conception of mental illness: during their visions, Manfred and Jack, both schizophrenics, adopt the role of connectors between the human and the nonhuman. Moreover, Manfred and Jack’s points of view seem alien and cause estrangement in the reader.

#### MARS: A DYING PLANET?

Many science fiction writers decide to approach the question of nature through displacement to another planet. There is, in fact, a long tradition of sci-fi works set on Mars or involving the invasion of a Martian population seeking to escape extinction. Popularizing the image of Mars as a red, dry planet, once home to a Martian civilization, was Percival Lowell’s non-fictional trilogy (*Mars* 1895; *Mars and Its Canals* 1906; *Mars as Abode of Life* 1908), based on Lowell’s astronomical observations that had led him

believe in the existence of artificial canals on the surface of Mars.<sup>1</sup> Both Edgar Rice Burroughs and H. G. Wells were influenced by Lowell's works. Wells depicted in *The War of the Worlds* (1898) the invasion of the Earth by Martians seeking to colonize another planet to escape an ecological crisis. Burroughs envisioned a dying Red Planet inhabited by a "partly medieval and partly Native American-inspired society" (Heise 2011, 452). Then in the postwar period Ray Bradbury published *The Martian Chronicles* (1950), a collection of stories set between 2030 and 2057 that examines the effects of Martian settlement on Earth and Martian people. Inspired by realistic accounts of Midwestern lives in the first half of the twentieth century, such as the connected stories of Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*, Bradbury evangelized for Mars' "power to redeem or rescue a troubled and threatened world" (Abbott 2005, 240).

After Bradbury, Philip K. Dick wrote about the colonization of Mars in two novels: *Martian Time-Slip* (1964) and *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* (1965). Both novels were written during what critics have usually recognized as the most artistically accomplished period of Dick's production, which includes Dick's masterpieces (*Dr. Bloodmoney*, *Martian Time-Slip*, and *The Man in the High Castle*). *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* is set only partially on Mars. The image of the planet that transpires is very bleak. In 2016, people are drafted to emigrate to Mars because on Earth temperatures are rising; however, the colonizers find Mars a hostile environment, barren, and covered by dust. They try to make vegetables grow, but the land is too arid. They try to construct irrigation canals, but water is too sparse. Mars is so inhospitable that a native civilization does not exist on the planet, and the only animals are Martian rodents, which eat humans' crops, and jackals that prey on people. In this novel, Dick is not very interested in depicting the struggle for survival on the Red Planet: the environment on Mars is so hostile that people do not really try to establish contact with it, and they hate the land. In this "desolate wasteland," humans survive "the hardship of

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<sup>1</sup> Before Lowell, the Italian astronomer Giovanni Schiaparelli had observed on Mars' surface a network of "channels," which was mistranslated in English as "canals" (Calanchi 2016, 10).

their daily exile from Earth only by means of drug-induced virtual-reality experiences of a different, easier life” (Heise 2011, 454).

If in *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* the reader can only glimpse the difficulties colonizers must face on Mars, *Martian Time-Slip* is much more involved in analyzing the process of homesteading. As explained by Carl Abbott in the article “Homesteading on the Extraterrestrial Frontier,” “homesteading is a particular facet of the complex processes by which agriculturists settle ‘empty’ and undeveloped territories, whether the prairie of North America or the imagined planets of SF, and it is a process with deep resonance in American history and national identity” (2005, 242). In *Martian Time-Slip*, Mars is “both colony and frontier” (Markley 2006, Ch. 5): it is described as the last frontier and its colonization clearly mirrors that of the American West. Dick is hardly the first writer to employ the idea of the frontier in science fiction and to adapt it to extraterrestrial worlds. It is one of the clichés of sci-fi to see the future, particularly Mars’s territory, as the new representation of the American Western frontier. In analyzing the *topos* of the frontier in science fiction, Abbott suggests that “because the imagery and mythology of the western frontier so pervade American culture, science fiction repeatedly internalizes the stories that Americans tell about the development of the West and writes them forward for places and time yet unknown” (Abbott 2005, 243). Usually, there are two processes described in narratives about humans trying to make a living on extraterrestrial planets: homesteading and terraforming. Terraforming indicates the deliberate transformations of a planet’s ecology, atmosphere, or climate to make it more hospitable to humans. Homesteading narratives focus on single individuals or families, their attempts to adapt, and “draw on the rich experience and mythology of the American farm–farming frontier” (ibid.). Terraforming narratives, instead, are about power and politics; they talk about the big picture and often are involved with problems related to technology and science.

Philip K. Dick is not interested in science or technology per se.<sup>2</sup> Mars displays a spatial configuration akin to Earth's landscape, with prairies, mountains, and deserts. The atmosphere is thin but breathable; therefore, humans can live on Mars almost as they live on Earth or, to be more precise, in California. In fact, as pointed out by Umberto Rossi, "the barren Martian landscape is quite similar to that of the state where Dick lived for the most of his life . . . like California, Mars is a dry, desolate land" (Rossi 2011, ch. 4). Robert Crossley, in his book *Imagining Mars: A Literary History*, writes that the image of Mars in *Martian Time-Slip* is retrograded because scientific plausibility is not a priority for Dick (2011, 227). The way Mars is described in the novel is affected by the assumption still popular in the 1960s about the Red Planet's presence of canals. This belief was definitely refuted in 1965 when the United States' Mariner 4 Spacecraft took pictures of the barren landscape of the planet. At this point, "even Dick . . . could not ignore the unprecedented photographic images of Mars that began to enter the collective consciousness" (227–228); in 1968, Dick himself wrote in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968) that "in the old days they had believed in canals on Mars" (Dick 1968, ch. 15). Yet these canals are very important in the depiction of Mars in *Martian Time-Slip*. Besides being "anamorphic images of the complex system of aqueducts supervised by William Mulholland which allowed the fast growth of Los Angeles at the beginning of the twentieth century" (Rossi 2011, ch. 4), they give an image of how Mars's natural landscape has been affected by the human endeavor to establish a prosperous society. Indeed, they represent social inequalities rooted in the new communities grown on the planet: only wealthy people can have constant access to the water brought by the canals, while the rest of the population must be careful not to waste a single drop. When, in the first chapter, flying in his helicopter, Jack sees the canals from the sky, they look like a "fertile spiderweb of lines" which connects all the colonies (Dick 1999, 47). However, the water of the canals shows "the accretions of time, the underlying

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<sup>2</sup> *Martian Time-Slip* "offers the pleasure of a good realist novel" (Palmer 2005, 156). Its very strong realist component is attested by the presence of the theme of marital crisis, a motif often found in Dick's sci-fi and mainstream novels.

slime and sand and contaminants” (ibid.) because of the UN’s incessant filtering: the canal system and its water, once pure, now sluggish and green, also symbolize the deterioration of human relationships in Martian society.

*Martian Time-Slip* depicts a near-future Mars colonized by terrestrials who are trying to terraform the planet to make it more like the habitat of “Mother Earth.” A replica of Earth’s subdivisions into states, Mars is now almost completely a desert land without any natural resources. Humans are trying to tame the wild nature of Mars without leaving anything pristine: there are ranches intercut with the desert and oases like the settlement of the plumbers, with fountains and steam baths erected on the margin of the desert. While Bleekmen had occupied once only one-fifth of the planet and had left the rest “as it had found it” (Dick 1999, 8), humans want to reshape every part of the environment. Mars, or at least a part of it, was a fertile and rich land that permitted the development of an advanced civilization, but after human colonization, it is subject to a process of desertification caused by the exploitation of natural resources and by human activity. It was once a sort of Eden that had been spoiled by humanity’s short-sightedness. Arnie Knott, for instance, imagines an original state of perfection on Mars: “All Mars, he decided, was a sort of Humpty Dumpty; the original state had been one of perfection, and they and their property had all fallen from that state into rusty bits and useless debris” (Dick 1999, 75). As humans are trying to make Mars more similar to Earth, the Red Planet is undergoing a process of decline that replicates the one of Earth, where overpopulation and pollution (two of the main concerns expressed in sci-fi novels of the 1960s and 1970s) are forcing people to Mars. These images of ecological devastation and resource depletion “employ Mars both as a reflection of contemporary problems and as an intimation of Earth’s future” (Markley 2005, Ch. 5). Humans seem doomed to repeat again and again the same mistakes, as happens in Dick’s short story “*Team Survey*,” in which “the survivors of an endless war on Earth that has left the planet uninhabitable blast off for Mars” (ibid.). When they arrive, they find out that Mars too has been stripped of its resources and devastated by an ancient civilization that left long ago for another planet. The narrative turn happens when the team understands this civilization is the human one, that six thousand years before had fled to Earth. At the



end, the team seeks a new, virgin world, but it seems very probable that they will destroy that world, too.

*Martian Time-Slip* is also a homesteading narrative depicting the efforts of families to survive in a grim country. Mars' landscape is another image of the American West, with dust that covers everything and descriptions of violent sandstorms. Mars represents to many characters a sort of Promised Land where they can create a new and perfect society. This kind of discourse echoes the narrative built around the idea of Manifest Destiny—Mars as a new frontier is a sort of second possibility for humanity to initiate an ideal society. Yet, in *Martian Time-Slip*, Dick is revisiting the glorious history of American movement westward. If once writers used the Martian setting to draw utopias or myths (Calanchi 2016), Dick challenges the traditional Western myth built on stories of success through perseverance. Abbott explains that, between the 1950s and the 1960s, when historians were rediscovering the history of the West and the human and natural cost of Western expansion, some sci-fi writers began to question the national narrative that celebrated individualism and scientific progress (2005, 251). The revision of the American past is reflected in *Martian Time-Slip*: it seems that the colonization of Mars is failing because Mars's society is controlled by people like Arnie Knott and Jack's father, who think only about their personal interests and speculate on Martian land. Their behavior causes much pain to people and the planet, causing what seems to be the imminent extinction of the Bleekmen and the desertification of the planet. "Dick saw the frontier controlled by the inescapable power of capitalism and consumerism" and believed that the social and economic life of Mars "subverts the values of dedication, family, and neighborliness that lie at the heart of the homestead myth" (Abbott 2005, 252).

Consequently, Mars seems doomed to become a planet without an ecosystem. Plants are almost completely absent, and animals are rare—and often quite horrific. However, the narrative technique deployed by Dick leaves some uncertainties about the real nature of Mars. *Martian Time-Slip* is narrated through the technique of "multiple internal focalization" (Rossi 2011, Ch. 5). There is no omniscient narrator, but Dick uses the point of view of different characters (Arnie Kott, Jack Bohlen, his wife Silvia and his

son David, Leo Bohlen, Norbert Steiner and his son Manfred, Otto Zitte, and Dr. Glaub).<sup>3</sup> Dick experimented with this technique in his realistic or mainstream novels, where the reader can often find “multiple plots and multiple narrative foci” (ibid.). According to Umberto Rossi, this literary procedure embodies the dichotomy between *koinos kosmos* (shared world) and *idios kosmos* (private world). What Dick calls *idios* and *koinos* is a simplification of what Dick found in existential psychoanalysis, where *koinos* means *Eigenwelt* or private world and is opposed to *Koinos*, or *Mitwelt*, or shared world. Both “are the human counterpart” and differ from *Umwelt*, which is “the environment, the natural world: the world as it is” (ibid.). This implies that a shared world is just another human construction, a cultural artifact, one might say, the product of the interaction of individuals. In addition, the shared world or *koinos kosmos* could break down, in Dick’s terms, revealing an *Um welt* or natural world that we are not equipped to directly cope with (ibid.).

In *Martian Time-Slip*, Dick represents only the private worlds of single characters and not what the reality, within the boundaries of the narration, really is. The reader can read points of view on the world that contrast, so if sometimes the shared world that the characters inhabit seems bleak and grim, in some cases it seems that Mars could actually be a more interesting environment, with an ecosystem that some characters, like Arnie’s sons, David, or the Bleekmen, seem to value. If we analyze the point of view of persons who are at the margins of society, for example, because they suffer from mental illness or because they are ‘just’ children, life on Mars seems to acquire a new significance. This means that not only is it impossible to know the reality, but also the shared world is unstable. When one of the machine-teachers of the Martian school says to his students that it is impossible that they have seen a raccoon because they do not exist on Mars, maybe, as Pagetti suggests, the teacher should not be so sure about

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<sup>3</sup> Umberto Rossi writes that he does not think that Dick ever adopts David’s point of view, even if Darko Suvin also inserted David in this scheme. In some passages, Dick adopts David’s internal focalization, and other aspects of his character can be deduced by what people think about him or by what he says in dialogues. As I will discuss in the rest of the article, it seems to me that David is an important character in *Martian Time-Slip* and that his attitude towards others, and in particular towards the Martian environment, is very clear.

denying or disappointing students because there are different ways to ‘see’ a racoon (Pagetti 2006).

Jack’s father, Leo, for instance, is interested only in his speculation. He sees the red planet only as a free land of which he can take possession. To Leo, Mars looks like a miserable scenario: “He saw a flat desert with meagre mountains in the far distance. He saw a deep ditch of sluggish brown water and, besides the ditch, a moss-like vegetation. That was all, except for Jack’s house and the Steiners’ house a little farther on” (Dick 1999, 116). Leo thinks that he is in front of a grim environment that still needs more planting and landscaping. For Jack, instead, this landscape has something that fascinates him; it bears the mystery of a world inhabited by the centuries. He is surprised that his father does not want to “walk around, look at the canal, the ditch. . . . You haven’t even glanced at it, and people have been waiting to see the canals—they’ve argued about their existence—for centuries” (Dick 1999, 115). Jack is one of the few characters who does not see Mars as a place to exploit or as a desolate land, but as a space with an identity and a history that must be respected. In the first chapter, while he is flying over the Martian land and sees the canal system, he feels a connection with the land. It is as if he could feel the exhaustion of the environment, its hope to be left alone in its wild element: “[O]ver the west,” he sees “the reaches, which were waiting for human science to race back and pass its miracle” (Dick 1999, 7).

Along with Jack, future Martian generations seem the only ones who really feel a sense of belonging to the Martian environment. It is typical of homesteading narratives to focus on the “challenge of learning to live off a strange land,” but also to address “the problem of generational change as children prove better able than parents to learn and adapt to the new environment” (Abbott 2005, 245). Second-generation immigrants have a more direct relationship with the Martian landscape and show a sensitivity that seems odd to people who still identify home with the Earth. Arnie Knott has two sons born on Mars from his first wife, but he cannot establish any form of communication with them. To their father, they seem “novel and peculiar,” without any sense of humor, “and yet they were sensitive; they could talk forever about animals and plants, the landscape itself. Both boys had pets, Martian critters that struck him as

horrid” (Dick 1999, 18). These children are curious about the land and the civilization that inhabited it; indeed, they often wander in the wasteland and return with what seems to Arnie worthless things such as, “a few bones or relics of the old nigger civilization, perhaps. When he flew by ‘copter, Arnie always spotted some isolated children, one here and another there, toiling away out in the desert, scratching at the rock and sand as if trying vaguely to pry up the surface of Mars and get underneath. . .” (19). It seems that, to Arnie’s sons, the Martian environment is not so horrible: they have never seen nature on Earth, so they do not have anything to compare with Martian wilderness, unlike their father.

Jack’s son, David, is representative of the entire new generation of children born on Mars from immigrant families. David is both romantic and practical, with a deep interest in mechanics, a subject in which he excels; he brings together in himself a love for science and for nature. It seems to me that through this character Dick opens to the possibility of the establishment of a new, future society in which an attitude toward scientific development and an ecological spirit will result in a more conscientious relationship with the land. David is very often associated with his garden, of which he is very proud: it is the first thing that David would like to show his grandfather when Leo lands on Mars, and he often talks about his garden in his letters to Leo. David, with great care, attends to the growth of beets, carrots, and potatoes, trying to cultivate a land that is dry and fruitless. This garden is an example of what Willa Cather called in *O Pioneers!* (another homesteading narrative but set in the Great Plains of the twentieth century) the attempt to “make an impression” upon a land that is as arid and monotonous as the Great Plains of the United States. As in Willa Cather’s work, one can find gardens cultivated by immigrants who are successful in importing plants from all over the world. In cultivating this garden, David demonstrates a deep understanding of Mars’ land (usually, families are quite unsuccessful in planting gardens on Mars): if he is modifying the Mars environment by introducing vegetables that could be found only on Earth, he is doing this in an attempt to render Martian land more fertile. David does not farm on an industrial level; he just tries to reach self-sufficiency. Arnie Knott, instead, wants to terraform the Martian environment only for his own profit and,

therefore, tries to produce the New England-type of melon, “because everybody likes a good slice of cantaloupe in the morning for his breakfast” (Dick 1999, 12). David’s garden is also very different from Arnie’s sister’s garden, which is an ostentatious display of wealth and water overuse, because she cultivates only flowers.

David’s sensitivity is not limited to the natural world; he also shows empathy towards his neighbors. He shows a compassionate heart when he asks his mother to help the Steiners by giving them water because they finished all their stores. David is afraid that the Steiners’ garden will die if they do not have enough water stored up for it; he thinks that this would be terrible because he knows that, in the desert-like landscape of Mars, gardens are very precious and rare. He understands that, if the Steiners are always so demanding and in need of help, it is simply because they do not know “how to keep their property going right” (Dick 1999, 3). David reveals a deep sense of community, and the value of community life will be the note on which *Martian Time-Slip* will end.

#### MENTAL ILLNESS: A CONNECTION BETWEEN THE HUMAN AND THE NONHUMAN

One of Dick’s main concerns while he was writing *Martian Time-Slip* was mental illness; he was particularly fascinated by Ludwig Binswanger’s *Existential Psychiatry*, a book inspired by Heideggerian phenomenology (Pagetti 2006, Introduction). In “Diagnosing Dick,” Roger Luckhurst (2015) draws a brief history of the psychological theories that influenced the discourse about mental illness in the United States between the late 1940s and the 1980s, and points out how Dick’s work “was often profoundly sensitive to these changes in psychiatric discourse” (2015, 19). In particular, while Dick was writing *Martian Time-Slip*, the way mental illness was considered was changing. In 1960, Thomas Szasz published “The Myth of Mental Illness,” arguing that psychiatry was merely demarcating deviations from socially sanctioned norms. This was an argument that had just been made by R.D. Laing in *The Divided Self* and would soon after guide Michel Foucault’s *History of Madness*, first published in 1961 (Luckhurst 2015, 23). Thanks to existentialist psychology and counterculture, which was developing in the

1960s and 1970s, mental illness began to be seen differently, as caused by the society and the outside world.

In *Martian Time-Slip*, two characters suffer from mental illness, in particular from two different forms of what in the novel is called schizophrenia: Jack and Manfred. Manfred is a ten-year-old boy whose diagnosis today would be autism, now considered a specific learning disorder with a possible genetic or neurobiological basis. However, it was only separated from schizophrenia and the general nosology of psychoses as late as 1979. In *Martian Time-Slip*, there are “competing conceptions” of psychosis (Luckhurst 2015, 24). The first is more traditional and sees Manfred’s autism as a “child form of schizophrenia” and connects the illness to a conflictual relationship with his parents. Schizophrenia was once seen as a form of dementia, that is, a degenerative illness for which there was no cure. In Dick’s novel, it is often repeated that Jack cannot really recover from schizophrenia because there is no cure; as for Manfred, his father raises the possibility that the child’s mother, cold and distant, is to blame for Manfred’s condition. But *Martian Time-Slip* also clearly conveyed the influence of the anti-psychiatry movement of the counterculture of the 1960s in its depiction of mental illness.

Jack decided to emigrate to Mars after what he calls a neurotic episode, during which he saw the personnel manager’s office of the firm where he worked as a dead man transformed into a machine. But, on Mars, he re-experiences similar episodes. Jack expresses the belief that mental illnesses are caused by the oppressiveness of society. Mentally ill people are seen as strange or ill because they do not respond to the world in the way that it is expected from them. However, Jack thinks that maybe they are the only ones to see reality for what it really is. He sees that the realities that the schizophrenic or autistic person cannot understand are the ones that are imposed on him:

the reality which the schizophrenic fell away from—or never incorporated in the first place—was the reality of the interpersonal living, of life in a given culture with given values; it was not biological life, or any form of inherited life, but *life which was learned*. It had to be picked up bit by bit from those around one,

parents and teachers, authority figures in general . . . from everyone a person came in contact with during his formative years. (Dick 1999, 61-62)

The very idea that autism and schizophrenia are illnesses to be cured is, according to Jack, just a cultural belief. He states, “a child who did not properly respond was assumed to be autistic—that is, oriented according to a subjective factor that took precedence over his sense of objective reality” (61). Those considered mentally ill are the ones who are impossible to teach because they do not accept truths that are imposed on them. Jack expresses the same view of Binswanger’s mental illness, according to whom “psychosis was to be grasped as a process of ‘world-building,’ and the doctor had to understand what he called ‘the world-design or designs in which the speaker lives or has lived’” (Luckhurst 2015, 25).

If Jack sees humans as machines, it is because he perceives that people have lost their sense of empathy, while sometimes machines show more empathy than humans. This reflection on the apathy of the human race and its incapacity to feel compassion towards one another or towards the natural world is one that will intrigue Dick for many years and that will find complete expression in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1986). In this novel, androids created to serve in the colonies are so similar to humans that sometimes it is difficult to recognize them. The only aspect that can really differentiate androids from humans is their incapacity to empathize with other persons, and with animals. In the end, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* is a reflection on what it means to be human, as suggested by Kim Stanley Robinson’ “The question pondered by the novel is not the one of the title, which asks for the definition of the androids, but it is rather one concerned with the nature of humanity, of humaneness” (1984, 92). Emblematic of this novel is a scene in which a group of androids torture a spider just to see what would happen to it if it had four legs instead of eight. The scene is narrated from the point of view of John R. Isidor, an intellectually below-average human. Isidor is treated badly by society, but he is very sensitive. He feels sick while he is watching the androids cut one leg after the other off a spider that could well be the last spider on Earth; he feels so sick that he decides to kill it, letting it drown into the sink. In worlds like the Mars of *Martian Time-Slip* and the Earth of *Do Androids Dream*

of *Electric Sheep*? it is not easy to understand and define what *being human* means. The fact, for example, that it is almost impossible to distinguish between electric animals and real animals points out that the border between nature and culture, the typical duality on which Western culture is based, is becoming blurred.

Manfred's understanding of the world, as well as Jack's schizophrenic episode, are described as moments of absolute reality, "with the façade stripped away" (Dick 1999, 68); they unveil a reality that society is not prone to accept. I find it very meaningful the way in which Jack describes mental illness when he says that the schizophrenic falls away from the reality of a "given culture with given values," not from "*biological life*, or any form of inherited life" (61; emphasis added). Indeed, what the reader sees through Manfred's eyes is the biological process of decay and entropy (which Manfred calls *gubble*). It is as if, under the surface, autism enables Manfred to grasp the constant working of time. Manfred can see the corruption of things and the moral corruption of people: In his morbid visions, Manfred sees that the culture and society around him is condemning the human race to extinction with its yearning for power and riches.

Similar to Jack's episodes, Manfred's subjective perspective of the world blurs the confines between the human and the nonhuman. His vision puts him outside the common world of the other characters; his view is that of the "other," one who lives on the margins. Dick expresses the gulf that divides Manfred from the other characters, also adopting a language stylistically different to express the child's inner world. The world described through Manfred's eyes causes in the reader the effect of "estrangement," which enables the reader to see aspects of life usually taken for granted. An example of estrangement is the way in which, during the dinner in chapters 10–12, Manfred sees Arnie while he is eating: "[H]is (*Arnie's*) head was a skull that took in greens and bit them; inside him the greens became rotten things as something ate them to make the dead" (Dick 1999, 127). There is almost a role reversal in this vision: vegetables are alive until Arnie eats them, while persons are seen as lifeless "suck of bones" (*ibid.*). The language used for Manfred is a very material one, one that sees humans as a set of bones and organs, in which the nonhuman seems to take revenge on



humans and take possession of their bodies. The other characters are scared of Manfred because his mind sometimes invades their thoughts, but Manfred also is a victim: “This invasion leads readers to see Manfred as a threatening, possibly destructive presence; but this happens because in these last chapters we mostly see the autistic boy’s private world through Jack’s idios kosmos, suffused with fear and anguish. When we directly access Manfred’s private world . . . we see that the boy is not threatening, but threatened” (Rossi 2011, Ch. 4).

Moreover, to express what Manfred sees and sometimes also what Jack perceives, Dick uses a language that seems disconnected. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Eugen Bleuler, a Swiss doctor who studied schizophrenia, listed four symptoms that permit the recognition of mental illness in a patient. Two of them are important because they find expression in the style adopted by Dick to express Manfred’s visions. First, “there were symptoms that show a loosening of the associations in thoughts, a loss of a normal linear narrative of the self, so that schizophrenics were said to display highly disorganized cognitive processes and a ‘great irregularity’ in their time-associations” (Luckhurst 2015, 21). Additionally, “Bleuler pointed to a profound ambivalence, by which he meant that patients were disabled by being able to hold both positive and negative feelings and cognitions simultaneously, leaving them stranded by conflictual meanings” (ibid.). These two aspects translate into a narrative that is not linear, that disrupts the cause and effect relationship, and into a narrative that uses simultaneity: Manfred sees the future and the present at the same time, and he sometimes does not know the difference between the two timelines.

It also seems possible that Manfred’s visions are affected when the people who surround him are selfish: capitalists like Arnie and Leo, or morally corrupted like Jack and Doreen, whom Manfred sees as bodies in decay because they are having an affair. Instead, when he is with the Bleekmen, he seems to find a sort of peace and someone who can empathetically share his vision and emotions (I do not see Manfred as an apathetic character; conversely, he seems to me deeply sensitive and affected by his nightmarish visions). Both Manfred and the Bleekmen inhabit the periphery of society, and both are subjected to a sort of imprisonment (Vallorani 2006). Manfred and the

Martian natives share a common experience, which is one of submission and dispossession.<sup>4</sup> Heliogabalus explains to Arnie that “his [Manfred’s] thoughts are as clear as plastic to me, and mine likewise to him. We are both prisoners, Mister, in a hostile land” (Dick 1999, 183). Nevertheless, Manfred’s impression of the Bleekmen is very different from that of other colonizers. If they usually see this native population as miserable and poor, so weak that they will abandon their culture and religion to accept that of the colonizers, Manfred perceives in them the elegance of their movements and their sensibility. At the same time, the Bleekmen are the only ones who do not treat Manfred differently because of his “condition” and who really accept him as part of their community, showing compassion and comprehension toward the child. Both share a deeper connection with the wilderness of the Martian environment. Manfred, having found his place among the Bleekmen, in one of the last scenes, walks with the Martian natives towards the desert without fearing it. Instead, he finds a sense of peace in that landscape: “The desert lay ahead, for them and for him. But none of them had any regrets; it was impossible for them to turn back anyhow, because they could not live under the new conditions” (221).

Manfred and the Bleekman decide to go into the desert, the space that on Mars represents the wilderness that terrestrials have not been able to tame. The desert also represents the ‘original spirit’ of the Martian environment, the only aspect of the landscape that has not been changed by humans’ endeavors. In the middle of the desert, there is a rock, Dirty Knobby, that is important in the narration. Dirty Knobby seems to represent the spirit of the Martian environment. It is the place where all things and persons are connected: it is here that Arnie sees for the first time through Manfred’s eyes and enters his mind, mainly thanks to the barbiturates that he takes, but maybe also because of the nature of that place. This empathetic experience changes Arnie,

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<sup>4</sup> Umberto Rossi compares the Bleekmen to Native Americans: “the Bleekmen are evidently the Martian equivalent of the Native American or Mexicans which lived on the West Coast before it was colonized by European American” (Rossi 2011, Ch. 5). Some critics have seen analogies between Dick’s Martian civilization and Australian Aboriginals (Pagetti 2006), while according to others, Bleekmen’s enslavement re-enacts that of African Americans (Vallorani 2006).

making him more sensitive. For the first time, Arnie acknowledges Manfred's pain in feeling so isolated from the rest of the world: he wants to keep his promise to mail Manfred to Earth, as the child wants. It is emblematic that this moment happens at Dirty Knobby, a place that, despite its strange name, seems to be a mystic place for the Bleekmen and seems to emerge almost as a character at the end of the novel. While he is walking toward the rock, Arnie feels its presence (maybe also because he is affected by what Heliogabalus said to him about the mountains), and it seems to him that Manfred's mind is merging with Dirty Knobby.

Finally, the establishment of contact with the Bleekmen breaks through Manfred's sense of isolation, while Jack decides to return home to his family after he has left Doreen, acknowledging the pain he caused Silvia and choosing to conduct a moral life from then on. Regarding the ending of *Martian Time-Slip*, Kim Stanley Robinson wrote that "it is the quietest, calmest, and most resolute of Dick's endings . . . Against this developing nightmare history are offered only the acts of caring for family and neighbors, but for the moment it is enough . . . Meaningful private life can counteract the pressures of a dystopian society" (1984, 58). Fredric Jameson recognized a strong utopian element in *Martian Time-Slip*. Manfred appears for the last time, and this time, he can communicate with other people. He thanks Jack for what he did, trying to communicate with him. "Here then is the collective, the primitive communism of the aboriginals, who have also become the helpers and the rescuers of the schizophrenic Manfred, himself now a new kind of prosthetic being who has emerged from out of the future of his own past" (Jameson 2005). As pointed out by Rossi, "Manfred reaches salvation by leaving the American web (not just the building but also the socio-economical context which created it) and finding his place between the marginalized and defeated. Madmen are the only hope left" (2011, Ch. 5). Moreover, in their quiet endings, Jack and Manfred prove to have gradually developed a sense of belonging to the Martian land. Manfred can escape again to the desert with the Bleekmen, while Jack decides not to end his marriage and chooses to keep living on Mars. Connecting with each other and with the environment seems to be all that can define what human nature really is and offer some sense of hope in the face of a ruthless society. Being human

means to act like David, who tries to make something grow from the land, not to enrich himself like Arnie or to display his wealth like Arnie's sister but to establish "communication," a mutual exchange with the land. This sense of community and the possible beneficial outcomes from a close connection with the environment seem to redeem the characters. Dick ends *The Tree Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* in a similar way: Barney Mayerson, once interested only in his professional career, decides to remain on Mars, to keep living with the other Earth immigrants and to try to make his garden grow, even if that environment is even bleaker than that of *Martian Time-Slip* and no one seems to be successful in taking care of their crops. Both these novels end on the concept of interconnectedness between humans and between the human and the nonhuman, as the only way to survive in a world that can seem hopeless and ruled only by entropy.

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**Elena Corioni** is a third year PhD student at the Università del Sacro Cuore. Her thesis is a study on the American writer John Edward Williams, winner of the National Book Award in 1973 for *Augustus*, and of the reception of his novels from the Sixties up to today, in particular in the US and in Italy. She earned her MA at Università degli Studi in Milan in English Contemporary Literature. E-mail: elena.corioni@icloud.com