Abstract

This thesis attempts to study the influence of the nuclear threat on the human psyche and its reactions to it by analysing a few novels set in the tradition of nuclear apocalyptic literature making use of a psychoanalytical framework. The thesis deals with the works of Philip K. Dick, the novelist whose imagined world is unique in that it is an innovation on the nuclear apocalyptic literature set in the religious tradition, as well as the secular Science Fiction tradition. Unlike most other writers in these traditions within Science Fiction, Dick employs the basic strategies of these traditions to analyse the issue of nuclear threat without, however, reaching the same conclusion as the other writers. Further, the solutions he evolves are also very different from that of the other novelists.

The study analyses how Dick has portrayed an apocalyptic vision that haunts the individual and the technological world in which they live in. The focus of the study is mainly on the role of nuclear weapons that pose a danger to the characters inhabiting the world, and the concomitant psychosis. The analysis is inspired by the plight of people living in technological societies, which are based on rivalry and violence. The study is concerned with the way Dick explores the nature and cause of evolution of the 'nuclear war', a war that leads to the destruction of not just the present, but of the past and the future as well. Through this, the study hopes to add a new perspective to the nuclear issue that would open up the nuclear debate to a wider audience. The impact of nuclear threat on the human psyche is an aspect of the problem that does not usually get the attention in the nuclear debates that it deserves. This is the main reason for the importance given to psychological and psychoanalytical analyses in the present study. It seeks to read Dick's fiction that deals with the nuclear issue using a psychoanalytical framework employed by the clinical studies of Robert Jay Lifton. More than any other empirical study of the
impact of the nuclear bomb on the human psyche, Lifton's work traces the connection between
the response of the human mind to the nuclear threat and the threat that nuclear weapons pose to
human future.

This thesis seeks to analyze the nuclear question as presented in ten novels of Philip K.
Dick's fiction; Dr. Bloodmoney or How We Got Along After the Bomb (1965), The World Jones
Made (1954), The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch (1965), The Penultimate Truth (1964),
Vulcan's Hammer (1960), Dr. Futurity (1959), Time Out of Joint (1959), The Eye in the Sky
(1957), Martian Time-Slip (1964), and Cantata 140 (1966).

Chapter One of the thesis, "The Nuclear Shadow: An Introduction" looks at the critical
and literary tradition that addresses the nuclear debate by identifying the issue from diverse
perspectives and sets the debate in the context of the Industrial Revolution and the subsequent
development of technological societies. The chapter also foregrounds the main features of the
apocalyptic literary tradition. Alongside the parameters of the study, this chapter also tries to set
the critical framework to be used for the analysis.

Chapter Two, "Science Fiction: A Reappraisal" starts with an evaluation of the Science
Fiction tradition by studying its origins and evolution across time, with a special focus on the
nuclear catastrophe. It deals with the major authors and their works in this particular sub-genre.
This chapter also attempts a critical evaluation of the sub-genre and Science Fiction in general by
responding to the main concerns raised by the critics of Science Fiction. This chapter also tries to
probe into the human propensity for violence and destruction while examining the debate on the
sharing of power between humans and machines.

Chapter Three, "Dealing with the Nuclear Threat" analyses select novels of Dick dealing
with the nuclear question. It focuses on those characters in these novels who are both the victims
and victimizers of the nuclear threat. The analysis is sustained by drawing parallels between the works of Dick and Lifton to demonstrate how a combined analysis of two seemingly divergent paradigms can contribute to a better understanding of the nuclear issue.

Chapter Four, “Life Beyond the Nuclear Threat” looks at the possible alternatives that, if followed, can prevent the impending doom from becoming real. It highlights the strategies to stop the slide towards the genocide of the human species. The chapter looks at specific instances in Dick’s and Lifton’s works and their subjects in order to locate instances of hope and redemption.

Chapter Five, “Beyond the Shadow, Towards Light: Conclusion” brings together the different issues raised in the previous chapters and tries to place the findings in proper perspective to suggest a better and enriched understanding of the nuclear issue. This chapter reminds the reader of the pivotal thesis in the novels chosen for study: the modern society, caught up in a perpetual state of conflict, may be able to salvage itself through the redemption of its characters who are imprisoned in their different alternate worlds, with seemingly no hope for redemption.

Dick’s fiction deserves a close look by those interested in the nuclear issue since the writer suggests the way to deal with this issue, which has assumed the proportions of a negative sublime. Further, going against the tradition of the nuclear apocalypse, Dick offers solace and hope to the world suffering under the shadow of the nuclear catastrophe by hinting at the possibilities of escape from the aporetic situation humanity is faced with. The road to recovery starts with the increase in the number of people participating in the debate. When the nuclear debate reaches a wider range of audience, a new consciousness— the consciousness to survive as a community is bound to develop. This study is a modest contribution to Dick’s programme.