
COSMOPOLIS

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The Works of Jack Vance on Audiotape

Since I came into contact with Jerry Hewett through the Jack Vance Information page I've acquired all Vance's books in one form or another.

Jerry's interest in Vance in translation inspired me to look around for Dutch translations. I used his list of Dutch editions, that Jerry got from another fan, to keep track of the books which both Jerry and I were looking for. This list is of interest to all Dutch fans and can be found in a past edition of Greg Parmentier's *Vance Phile*.

Jerry and I are both on the lookout for the Dutch hardcover editions of *Tschai*, and that gave rise to some confusion. When I indicated to Jerry that the cassette of *Tschai*, which appears on the list, is one of the most difficult items to find, he responded that he thought it was an audiotape. I had assumed it was a slipcase (the word "cassette" has many meanings in Dutch, and Meulenhoff has published slipcased versions of *Tschai* and the *Demon Princes*). These editions are indeed difficult to find and my collection is not yet complete.

Many books in The Netherlands have been taped for the blind. Since Jerry thought that Vance would be "tickled pink" if he heard people were making tapes of his books, I became curious about Vance on tape.

In the public library one can find a list of special institutes handling tapes. I got in touch with the special library "Le Sage Ten Broek" in Nijmegen and was gratified to be given a long list of Vance available in tape or Braille. Mysteries are included as well, and some of the other novels have even been taped twice from different editions. There are classics like *Tschai*, most of the *Demon Princes*, *To Live Forever* and others. Copyrights are arranged with local publishers. Given the number of offerings, Jerry will have a big job transferring this bibliographic data to *After The Fact*, the continuing update of *The Work of Jack Vance*. But Dutch audio tapes are just the

beginning – we've also discovered that Vance has been taped in other languages as well.

In The Netherlands the rules governing audio books are explicit: only disabled people who can not read are entitled to use the tapes. So Jerry can't do any listening himself. He will have to be content with the long database printout from the institute.

Three years ago, while consulting the computer system in my library, I found *Dinner with the Murderer (Deadly Isles)* by John Holbrook Vance, published 20 years before. I thought I had everything but had missed this book! Imagine my disappointment to find that the book was missing or stolen.

Interestingly, though the existence of this Dutch translation has never been mentioned on the Internet, Jerry has it in his bibliography. Not many people in Holland have it, so I'll give the details: *Detective Omnibus # 4* by Amsterdam Boek, published in 1973, hardcover with dust jacket, containing three mysteries, one of them by Jack Vance as John Holbrook Vance.

When I finally found a copy, I liked Vance's mystery better than the others; no surprise! A review of *Deadly Isles* by Hans Verkuil has appeared in *The Vance Phile* (issue #4, July 1994). Thanks to the *VIE* many people will get access to all Vance's work, and I hope it will bring Vance the attention he deserves.

Willem Timmer: wjtimmer@worldonline.nl

Quoins, Tympan & Frisket

The Composition Team has accomplished the following tasks as of May, 2000:

- Definition of the word processing and final composition platforms.

- The specification of the page layout and design of front and back matter.
- The selection of a default font: Adobe Garamond.
- Tests in Word and PageMaker, generating PostScript (PS) and Portable Document Format (PDF).
- Discussions with Sfera regarding file format.
- Development of a *VIE* specific font: Amiante.

Here is an incomplete list of things that need to be worked on:

– Composition team web site: just as I have insisted that the Text Entry, Proofreading, and TI teams have specific team web sites that include a primary tracking page and additional technical materials to support the understanding of their team function: we too need such a web site.

– Definition of our own team processes: we must define how work will come to us, how it will be assigned and tracked, how documents will be stored and reviewed, and how versions of the document will be generated for delivery to the printer.

– Complete specification: the final layout and book design must be completely specified for *VIE* managers to review via our web site. The font (Amiante) must be presented when completed, open for review, after internal testing by the team.

Current tasks include the following:

– Paul Rhoads and Joel Anderson are working together to completely finish Amiante. This work continues very actively. I take this time to tell you that I have moved from a sense of general but hopeful concern, to tentative approval (a month ago), to my current full endorsement of Amiante, based on the intensive refinements by Paul and Joel. Not only is the font taking shape as a font at a certain size, but adjustments are also being made with respect to how it looks and fits on the defined page.

– John Schwab has prepared a special teaching tutorial for those of us who have used other word processing or composition packages but not PageMaker. About a month ago, both of us came to feel the need for this tutorial. It is vital that we teach people such as myself (used to other tools) a systematic way to use PageMaker. This tutorial is currently under review.

– Bob Lacovara, John Schwab and I have been fitfully working on the important question of whether we shall use PDF or PS in our final delivery to Sfera. There are pros and

cons to both approaches (note, PDF shall be used for all internal cross-team reviews according to the currently defined *VIE* processes). However, the issue is not yet formally settled but is actively being pursued.

John Foley, Composition Team

Statistics

Current *VIE* Progress as of May 22, 2000

TOTAL NUMBER OF STORIES IN <i>VIE</i>	131
Assigned for digitization	131
Digitized	117
Assigned for 1st proof reading	109
1st proof completed	80
Assigned for 2nd proof	62
2nd proof completed	17
Assigned for correction:	18

John A. Schwab, Text-Entry Coordinator

Proofreading Update

It's been a busy month at proofreading HQ. Last month the new proofreading mentors' team was launched to general appreciation, but one thing we learned was that even the best-proofed texts would not be harmed by an extra pair of eyes. With this in mind, around forty new assignments have been made since the April issue. Here are some of the key facts:

- 164 assignments have been made in total
- 96 of these are complete
- nearly 3.8 million words have been proofread
- 57 proofreaders have completed one or more assignments

The following proofreaders have completed five or more assignments:

PROOFER	JOB
Patrick Dusoulie	8
Steve Sherman	7
Rob Friefeld	6
Bob Lacovara	5
Ron Chernich	5

In terms of wordage proofed, the “top ten” are:

		WORDS PROOFED
1	Steve Sherman	507,100
2	Chris Corley	215,500
3	Patrick Dusoulie	199,300
4	John Schwab	191,000
5	Michel Bazin	179,900
6	Evert Jan de Groot	164,500
7	Till Noever	155,300
8	Rob Friefeld	151,200
9	Rob Gerrand	116,000
10	Bob Lacovara	115,400

It’s never too late to join the proofreading team – many of the assignments made this month were to first-time proofers, and our mentor team of Steve, Chris and Patrick stands ready to help you. There are still plenty of texts just waiting for a critical eye to be cast over them – an email to tim.stretton@bigfoot.com will get you one.

Thanks again to all those who have made themselves available to carry out a proofing assignment. The great progress we are making is a powerful testament to your dedication and hard work.

MISSING IN ACTION

Despite the best efforts of the mentor team to contact all active volunteers, some remain elusive. I have no option but to reassign those jobs with silent volunteers, so if

Cliff Abrams

Bobs Cocks

Ivo Steijn

are reading this, please get in touch with me.

Tim Stretton, Proofreading Lead

Textual Integrity – Will Anyone Notice the Difference?

The work that we call Textual Integrity (TI) has to do with bringing the texts back into as close a conformance with Jack’s intentions as we can. How much of a difference that makes depends on several factors. Some of the published texts are heavily modified from Jack’s originals – “corrupt” is a nasty word, but not always inappropriate – and others aren’t. In some cases we have good evidence relating to Jack’s intentions – “setting copy” typescripts are nice to have – and in other cases we don’t.

It also depends on where you start from – that is, with which published editions you compare the final *VIE* text. If your familiarity with many of the earlier short stories comes from the versions published in Underwood-Miller collections such as *The Dark Side of the Moon* and *The Augmented Agent*, you’ll find that some of the texts that appear in the *VIE* are rather different. Many of the stories in these collections were revised, not by Jack, with the general effect of “updating” the vocabulary, especially where technical terms are used – so, for example, *Ultimate Quest (Dead Ahead)* contains many alterations, whereas some others have far fewer. As a general rule, we’ll be restoring the original magazine texts of these stories. We have no evidence that these have not also been edited – in fact, almost certainly they will have been – but they are a generation closer to Jack’s intent, and in some cases we have, from the Vances’ archives, annotated tearsheet copies which will allow us to correct some of the errors in the magazine versions.

We start with the general principle that in selecting our preferred texts, we choose the version nearest the author in time and space, where possible. Generally, this translates into “first American publication.” This is a standard literary editing rule-of-thumb, but it’s no more than that. Consider *The Dragon Masters*. The first published version, in *Galaxy*, August 1962 – the text that won the story a Hugo Award – is very different from the text next published by Ace Books in 1963. The punctuation and, in some cases, sentence structure in the *Galaxy* version is very different, with the effect of making the sentences shorter, the rhythm more

staccato. To my eye, it is the *Galaxy* version that has been heavily edited, while the Ace text, probably set from the author's typescript (certainly not from *Galaxy* tearsheets!), is a better representation of the author's intent. Having said that, Ace's proofreaders/copyeditors showed definite interventionist tendencies in other Ace publications of Jack's work, and there is no reason to suppose that they would have treated *The Dragon Masters* with any greater respect. Ron Chernich has noted that in some respects the text published in *The Hugo Winners* is better than the Ace text – so in the absence of the manuscript, the TI work will have to take account of the various published versions to arrive at a reasoned conclusion as to the best available reading.

While the bibliographical history of Jack's work has been well documented, the textual variations have not. It is probably true to say that no two editions of the "same" work are textually identical unless one is a photographic reproduction of the other. Even that statement needs to be qualified. For example, the Dobson 1975 reprint of the collection *The World Between*, retitled *The Moon Moth*, is a photographic reproduction of the Ace edition – except for the first page, which has been reset. But in order to accommodate the taller format of the Dobson edition, there's been a cut-and-paste job done on the Ace pages to fit more lines in per page. In at least one place, clumsy setting work has meant that a scene break has been omitted, and there is no guarantee that elsewhere text has not been lost. This might look like nitpicking in the extreme – but it illustrates the dangers that lie in wait for any less-than-totally-vigilant TI worker.

There are several possible reasons why different editions of the same work might vary. One is simple generational degradation, as one edition, reset using a previous edition as setting copy, simply introduces new typographical errors. A good example of this kind of degradation is the DAW collection *The Narrow Land*, where many new errors are introduced to the versions published originally in magazines. Another reason is that later editions are often re-edited, usually but not always more lightly than the original editing. A good rule-of-thumb is probably "never trust an anthology re-publication." There is a letter in the Mugar Library collections from Harry Harrison to Jack, in which he thanks Jack for allowing him to re-edit a short story for an anthology publication. At least he asked! Not all editors will have been so punctilious.

Abridgement is common in fiction publishing, but there are few real cases in the Vance *oeuvre*, the most celebrated

being *Big Planet*. It's interesting to note however that the abridgement in the Avalon edition and subsequent reprintings until the Underwood-Miller and VGSF editions is modest compared to the author's own reduction of the text length. The Vance records show that the original version sent to Scott Meredith, Jack's agent in 1951, was 72,000 words long, and that the reduced version supplied to *Startling Stories* for their publication in September 1952 was down to 48,000 words. Unfortunately, the original manuscript no longer exists – unless someone out there knows better?

A couple of texts may actually have been lengthened by their editors. We know that the very end of *DP!* was added by the editor; the added text is removed in its appearance in *The Dark Side of the Moon*. *Gold and Iron* presents a different problem. Some people (notably John Schwab) have felt the ending suspect – and indeed Jack confirms that the "happy ending" has been tacked on to the point where the story originally ends. However, one would be hard-put to come to this conclusion on stylistic grounds – if someone else wrote the "new" ending, he or she was very good at imitating Jack's style. A plausible hypothesis is that the publisher asked for the new ending and Jack supplied it, probably quickly and reluctantly. That would be consistent with what we know from the record of correspondence about the way Jack worked with his publishers. Unfortunately – though entirely understandably – neither Jack nor Norma can always remember the detailed textual history of stories published perhaps forty years ago.

What of the texts where we know exactly what has been done by their editors? In about twenty instances we have access to the typescripts used as setting copy by the publishers, complete with proofreaders' and editors' marks. (We'd like more – any offers?) The extent of editorial intervention varies substantially from text to text, though in most cases it's limited to matters such as punctuation and word choice, the text not being substantially re-organized. *The Eyes of the Overworld* was heavily edited at the detail level by Ace, seldom if ever to the benefit of the text; *The Pleasant Grove Murders* and *The Fox Valley Murders* were also fairly heavily copyedited, though more sympathetically. At the other end of the spectrum, some of the Underwood-Miller editions, such as *The House on Lily Street* and *The View from Chickweed's Window*, have been typeset without editorial intervention directly from the author's typescript. These will

be the easiest of all texts from the point of view of TI, though they will, of course, be treated with due diligence.

Tim Stretton has been working with the setting copy of *Wyst*, and his list of recommended changes to the published text runs to over 400 items, or about two per page. Nearly all of these are restorations of the original text as per the author's typescript. Note that we will not always restore the author's original, though there is a strong presumption in favor of doing so. The *VIE* philosophy is to represent the author's intent, and as we might assume that the author's intent is not to make embarrassing mistakes, those relatively few cases where a proofreader has corrected a clear error may be allowed to stand. Proofreaders and copyeditors have a legitimate job to do, though on the evidence of the manuscripts I've seen, the standard of their work has been variable, to say the least.

The TI work is quite likely to turn up the occasional surprise. In working with the author's original WordStar files for *Ecce and Old Earth*, John Schwab turned up a missing paragraph, which will appear for the first time in print in the *VIE* edition. Who knows what else we might find?

Alun Hughes, Textual Integrity Lead

Some Reactions to Critical Appreciations

More About Science Fiction

The letter from Rob Gerrand in *Cosmopolis 4*, and the appearance of *Jack Vance: Critical Appreciations and a Bibliography*, prompt me to again address the question of Vance and science fiction. I begin, as I did before, by recalling some facts:

1 – The *VIE* has nothing to do with science fiction.

2 – Jack Vance himself, on many occasions, has insisted in my hearing that he is not a science fiction writer. On those occasions he never fails to volunteer that he does not like, or read, science fiction, which he identifies with Star Trek and such juvenilia. That part of his own work which he considers science fiction, he refers to dismissively as “gadget stories.” He thinks robots and aliens are without interest and explains with contempt: “If you want a robot that runs fast (gesture of turning knob) you push a button and it runs fast.” He explains that faster-than-light travel or the universal language of his

future are mere conventions; obvious impossibilities necessary to the kind of story he writes – which he refers to as “the kind of story I write.” If you ask what this is, he hems and haws, and might even come up with some kind of answer before becoming fed up with the subject. When he does deign an answer, it sometimes includes the word “speculation.”

3 – I am not concerned about prestige, as Rob Gerrand suggests, but prejudice. Most people are prejudiced against science fiction. Prejudices are not the noblest product of the human mind, but they go hand in hand with general ideas, of which they are the vulgar form; and general ideas, mere mortals that we are, cannot be dispensed with. The main difference between a prejudice and a general idea is that the former is unexamined, which does not, by itself, prove it wrong. I have great difficulty getting people to sample Vance because they are prejudiced against him as soon as they think he writes science fiction. I have thought long and sympathetically about this and decided that, essentially, their prejudice is justified. Now I, who am not prejudiced against science fiction, know these people are going to miss some good stuff. But, not being prejudiced in favor of science fiction either, I believe they are more right than wrong. The point is not that there are great heaps of trashy science fiction. That there are heaps of trash in other genres as well has nothing to do with it. My point is this: science fiction by nature, even at its best, is a flawed genre. So if Vance does write science fiction, in my opinion the prejudice against him would be justified. As for the science fiction university courses mentioned by Rob Gerrand, there are university courses in lots of things.

4 – The focus on Vance as an exponent of science fiction always emphasizes certain early works. But during his early period the majority of Vance's work was probably non-science fiction. This may be no more than a fun-fact but, whatever the case, the *VIE* chronological list, when it is published in the addenda volume, will clarify the point.

5 – This last is not “a fact,” it is an opinion, but I will include it here anyway; I am convinced that if Vance cannot be detached from the stigma of the science fiction label, his work will never penetrate into the mainstream, which is the major *VIE* goal. The *VIE* book sets are designed with this in mind; they will look like regular books, and nothing about them will suggest science fiction. The *VIE* also has a publicity program. This program will eventually include the argument that Vance is misunderstood if he is seen as a

science fiction writer. This is the extent of the official anti-science fiction position of the *VIE* and, given Vance's own attitude, I feel perfectly comfortable with it. As for *Cosmopolis*, though I am the Editor-in-Chief (of the *VIE*, not of *Cosmopolis*!) I present my ideas here on an equal footing with anyone else who cares to present their ideas about Vance. Since I believe in open, amicable discussion, and for the sake of the vigor and intelligence of the *VIE* itself, I am even eager to see contrary views propounded in *Cosmopolis*. A variety of opinions, and the dialog engendered, will surely better our understanding. I know I speak also for Bob Lacovara in this regard.

What is Science Fiction?

Whatever Rob Gerrand, and those who agree with him, think of my opinions about science fiction, I hope they can begin by agreeing with me about this: there is a problem getting Vance wider notice, and this problem has to do with the prejudice against science fiction. In turn I will agree that just because Vance says he does not write science fiction, it doesn't prove he doesn't. The question of whether he writes science fiction does not depend on his opinion, nor the opinion of any one of us. It depends on the real definition of science fiction, and an analysis of Vance's work that correctly gauges what it is. This definition and analysis can only be made through thought and dialog. In this spirit I will begin with Rob Gerrand's definition:

*Science fiction is best defined as "speculative fiction."
Speculations about how we would be if a change were made (...)
Speculation using the imaginative freedom that science fiction confers...*

This was probably not written with the idea it would be subjected to analysis so I present it as provisional. My first reaction to it is: if science fiction is this, there are many books not ever included in any science fiction bibliography which ought to be, like Plato's *Republic*. I have heard it argued that science fiction is the prolongation of a supposed genre that includes books like *The Republic*, but I regard this as a tactic to benefit science fiction from the prestige of such books. In any case, it is not a defensible argument. It would mean there were no correct names for these books before the appearance of the term "science fiction." But *The Republic* is well served by the term "political philosophy," which also covers *Gulliver's Travels*, and the term "science fiction" is obviously ill-adapted to both. But science fiction is indeed about speculation. I agree with this. But speculation about what? Can it be anything other than science? By this I mean science in the largest sense of the

word: hard science, technology and, ever since the fifties as far as I know, soft science: sociology, psychology, anthropology and so on. The soft science aspect seems even to be a Vance innovation, so I will not deny that science fiction owes much to Vance!

Arthur Cunningham's book is in our hands at last. Though various points of view are expressed by the contributors, I will only discuss the science fiction aspects of some of them. My discussion should not be misinterpreted as contradicting my agreement with them at many points. I am concerned here only with the question of science fiction and Vance.

Clearly, for Dan Simmons and Tom Shippey, Vance is a science fiction writer. While I recognize that neither is addressing the question "what is science fiction?" I tried to distill their definitions out of their essays. After dismissing Star Trek-style science fiction as trash, Simmons goes on to say: *The language of science fiction is best embodied in the works of Jack Vance by the brilliance of his naming of things and places and people, by the effortless prose which shows so much action at so little visible expense of energy...* He then goes on to speak eloquently about Vance's poetic power. But I do not see what is essential to science fiction about this undeniable poetic power. Is Simmons really saying anything else than that Vance writes well? Perhaps his thought is that since what is being described is in the future and on other planets, it requires a special poetry of science fiction to be able to do it well. If this is what is meant, I would respond that 99% of what Vance describes can be found on Earth today, and anyway very few writers are capable of describing effectively even what they have right in front of them. But whether or not they have their subject in front of them demonstrates nothing. Alfred Sisley did most of his painting while looking at a subject. Titian did most of his painting in the studio with no subject in front of him; what counts is the paintings they produced, not how they produced them. Maybe what Simmons means is that Vance's naming conjures up alien planets and future times. This would mean there is a specific poetic power that generates a flavor of the future, or other planets. But most of our terrestrial home is exotic to us. What is different about other planets that is a *different* kind of difference than the differences among the five continents, the airs, the rocks, the chasms and currents in the seven seas, the fuming neighborhoods of volcanoes, geysers, oil refineries, or Chernobyl; all parts of Old Earth? And why should a poetic power to evoke the future be an

essentially different thing than the poetic power to evoke the past, or even the present for that matter? Is the diary of Marco Polo, or the work of any capable historian, a sort of science fiction? Here is a Vance description of dawn on another planet: *The suns tumbled up into the mauve autumn sky like rollicking kittens: Sasetta over Ezeletta behind Zael.* Now what is science fiction about this? The name Sasetta is taken from an old Italian painter, and Ezeletta and Zael reinforce this somewhat medieval reference, since they ring like “Ethelberta” and “Grail.” And nothing could be more terrestrial than rollicking kittens and the mauve autumn sky. As for multiple suns, if this is what makes science fiction, then science fiction is about décor, which is denied by everyone. What makes this passage so good is the comparison of the movement of celestial bodies to gamboling kittens. This is pure Vancian poetry and it has nothing to do with science fiction. I will not contest the idea that there are special poetic powers, but it is impossible for me to find a special poetry in Vance which can be identified in any way as science fiction.

Boys' Books

I agree with Simmons that Vance's work can be called boys' books. I think he would agree with me that this is merely the foundational level. Robert Louis Stevenson, Herman Melville, Mark Twain and Jack London also wrote books in this category. In the same sense, Jane Austen wrote girls' books. By these terms I mean books about adventure on the one hand and marriage on the other. Of course one or two girls might be interested in adventure, and one or two boys might be interested in love, so these terms are a bit silly. Still, they are useful general ideas, which contain several grains of truth. Unless we accept the radical thesis that there is no difference between boys and girls, such terms will always have a certain relevance, at least until feminism transforms the world to an extent it yet has not. Nothing prevents edifices built on such foundations as “girls' books” from attaining greatness – and, in my opinion, Jane Austen is the greatest novelist of all; at least she is my own favorite. However, Simmons carries the boys' book notion a step further: *There are notable exceptions, but my memory of female characters in Vance calls up an amorphous crowd of girl-women in the mould of Phade, the minstrel-maiden in The Dragon Masters (...)* Notable exceptions indeed! Here is a list of female heroines who are also the principal protagonists of the stories where they appear (with help from A. E. Cunningham's new bibliography):

Jean Parlier – Abercrombie Station, Cholwell's
Chickens: 1952

The Mitr – 1953

Betty Haverhill – The Dark Ocean: written in the
1950s

Alice Tynnott – Assault on a City: 1974

Madouc – 1989

Schaine Madduc – The Domains of Koryphon:
1974

Then there are heroines who, while not the principal protagonist of a whole story, are the principal protagonist of their own story within a story:

Suldrun – Suldrun's Garden: 1983

Glyneth – Lyonesse

Wayness Tamm – Ecce and Old Earth: 1991

Skirlet Hutsinreiter – Night Lamp: 1996

Dame Hester Lajoie – Ports of Call: 1998

To the above may be added a set of female characters who have the same kind of special importance:

T'sais – 1950

Lurulu – The Golden Girl: 1951

Komeitk Lelianr – The Slaves of the Klau: 1952

Kathryn – Ecological Onslaught: 1953

Miss Mel – Meet Miss Universe: 1955

Madoc Roswyn– Space Opera: 1965

Drusilla Wayles (& Jheral Tinzy, et al.) – The
Palace of Love: 1966

Zap 210 – The Pnume: 1970

Tatzel – Lyonesse

The Murthe – 1984

Smonny – Cadwal

Spanchetta – Cadwal

Dame Clytie – Cadwal

This list is not complete. There are several other memorable and major female characters like Alice Wroke, the Flower of Cath or Alusz Iphigenia Eperge-Tokay, as well as a welter of minor, though memorable ones: Pallis Atwrode, Damael Blanche-Aster, Miss Shoop, the Countess Otilie ... In any case, the point should be clear: Vance's

work is marked from one end to the other with a variety of important, strongly etched, memorable female characters. From the violence and reckless derring-do of T'sais and Jean Parlier, down through a series of calmer, ever more "feminine" characters, from the brave Alice Wroke, to the tricky Kathryn, or the driven Madoc Roswyn, arriving at last to such dreamy innocents as Drusilla Wayles or Zap 210, who are hardly non-entities. Though oppressed by an evil destiny, they struggle toward the fullness of life. This does not change the fact that Vance writes books which, structurally speaking, may justly be termed boys' books. But his female characters hold a place in his work equivalent to that in Jane Austen's of such male characters as George Knightley or Messrs Bennett, Collins, Darcy and Woodhouse. Though I doubt the majority of female Vance readers make this non-literary demand, those among them who require a same-sex figure to identify with are as well served by Jack Vance as Jane Austen serves her male readers. Vance is a universal artist, like Jane Austen, not because of whom he addresses, but because his art encompasses so much. (It might also be mentioned that the creation of Jean Parlier in 1952 should put Vance in the feminists' golden book. This gal is as pragmatic, egocentric, daring and morally flexible as Cugel.)

Anthropological Theory

On page 67 of *Critical Appreciations*, Tom Shippey writes: *Vance's work should be seen as centrally preoccupied with one of the most acute moral dilemmas and major intellectual developments of our age...* He then goes on to stake out a claim for science fiction: (...) *a dilemma and a development (...) which tend to be avoided or left unfocused, to our detriment, in literature of the mainstream.* Then (p. 81) Shippey states that Vance has gone farther than any other author in exploring the vital and sensitive issues of cultural comparison, absolute and relative value, and the balance between multi-culturalism and self-respect. The moral dilemma in question is "cultural relativism." To read Shippey's interesting commentary one would conclude that this pernicious idea is a product of anthropological theory, which has had not only a great influence on Vance but has been a major shaper of twentieth century culture. While I agree with these points in some respects, I would point out that cultural relativism has deeper roots than the anthropological theorists Shippey cites. Note that Shippey's claim is that science fiction, and Vance, are significant because of their exploration of issues raised by a branch of what I call soft science: anthropology. But relativism, of which anthropological cultural relativism is a variety, is nothing new. The anthropologists, to

say nothing of theorists in other areas like the arts, did nothing more than apply modern philosophical relativism to their domains. In other words, cultural relativism, which Shippey identifies as the source of multi-culturalism, is merely one of many streams, like the sloughs in a swamp joining and separating, generating all sorts of contemporary cultural phenomena. So while it is not false to say that anthropological theory is the source of multi-culturalism, it is just as true to say that, for instance, certain Modernist art theories like surrealism are also the source of multi-culturalism.

Surrealism is the idea that creativity – thus Art – has its source in the unconscious. This makes such premodern underpinnings of Art as knowledge, learning, or skill nuncupatory. Anything learned is dead intellectualism, and even any artistic influence negates the value of art since, to be genuine, art must be original. It must spring whole and pure from its supposed source in the inarticulate, shadowy, instinctive depths – which explains why dung, the product of peristaltic intestinal activity of which nothing could be more unconscious, has become such a feature of contemporary art.

Now – where do such hyper-sophisticated – and silly – ideas come from? I will not trace out the tortured history of Modernist ideas, the source of both modern art and anthropological theory. However, I will make the following exposition: according to relativism there is no Truth. Instead there are a multiplicity of truths, all local and "culture" based. This idea, of course, is a radical departure from the dictates of common sense. Two plus two really does equal four, whoever and wherever you are. But relativists claim that even mathematics is a mere cultural norm. The argument is this: "Look at the variety of opinions! Each (person, culture) is different. No single one of them is better or more right than any other; each is right in their own way; each has his own truth." If the listener is unconvinced by this, and continues judging other cultures by his own standards, force is applied: "How dare you seek to impose your truth on others!" – which attack is often prolonged by: "You are an absolutist; therefore a fascist!" I point this out because it is impossible to understand relativism without understanding its real source: the lust for power. Relativism is not a reasonable argument, it is an ugly passion. The effrontery of relativism never ceases to amaze me, for the rebuttal, on the level of reason, is simple and clear. It is even so evident that relativists must be, at best,

blindly stubborn since no honest response to this rebuttal exists, beyond meek acknowledgement of relativism's wrongness. Here is the rebuttal – but first, this passage from *Rhialto the Marvelous*:

*Herarch the harbinger held up a black-enameled forefinger:
“My habit is to make each problem declare its obverse. The
first message, ‘NOTHING THREATENS
MORREION,’ becomes ‘SOMETHING DOES NOT
THREATEN MORREION;’ and again, ‘NOTHING
DOES THREATEN MORREION.’”*

By a similar non-transformational manipulation, the relativist claim; “THERE IS NO TRUTH,” becomes, “THE TRUTH IS THAT THERE IS NO TRUTH,” and again: “THAT THERE IS NO TRUTH IS THE TRUTH.” So relativists are as absolutist as they claim their opponents are, with this difference: non-relativists can be open to the idea that they have something of real importance to learn from other cultures. They believe in the existence of truth, which is something different than knowing what truth is. Belief in truth engenders the search for truth, which opens the mind to unfamiliar ideas. On the other hand relativists, who claim to be open to other cultures, are in fact closed to them in the decisive respect. They know that they themselves, and only they, possess the ultimate truth, the only truth that really matters: the truth that relativism is the Truth. While pretending to respect other cultures, in fact they dismiss any truth claims as “culture,” local color so to speak, nothing to take seriously. Not only is this exactly the sort of absolutist arrogance so vociferously decried by these same relativists, but their basic claim is auto-destructive non-sense.

The variety of opinions which is the cornerstone of cultural relativism – and thus multi-culturalism – is really a matter of neutral human qualities like taste, human limits like ignorance and stupidity, or human vices, to mention only the least bad, wishful thinking. Truth may be difficult, or even impossible, to fully grasp, and perhaps we can hope for no more than progress toward Truth through our personal and collective darkness. This does not alter the fact that not Truth, but Ignorance and Stupidity are what is relative. These latter are what provide the dizzying spectacle of contradictory realities which, as should never be forgotten, are a basic fact of life. Anthropology is right to bring these differences to our attention (though multi-culturalism goes beyond looking at the variety of cultures to insist on their moral equivalency) and Vance has found this information enriching and amusing. Truth obviously exists. If it did not we could not even begin to

talk about it not existing. But even if Truth could be demonstrated to be unknowable, relativism would remain a uniquely nasty form of stupidity since, carried to its logical conclusion, it pretends that each of us is living the *spell of forlorn encystment*, that each human life is a private infinity which touches no other in any real way and, ultimately, whatever “I” desire is beyond good and evil. We may not know the Truth, but we do know it exists. Relativism is right when it points to our errors and ignorance. It is a dangerous lie when it tries to replace Truth. In practice, the opinions of most people today are a mishmash of relativism and different moral views. But peoples’ opinions have always been something of a mishmash; what is specific to our time is the growing presence and importance of relativist opinions.

Machiavelli and Socrates

Modernist relativism can be traced back to Machiavelli. Machiavelli’s innovation was to make immorality respectable. For him, and for Modernism, what counts is not goodness, but power. This means: each person his own truth, each culture its own morality. In other words: no right and wrong, no morality. There is only authority based on power; a force from which there is no longer an appeal to something higher like Truth, Natural Law or Revelation. Modernists like to think all this is very modern, but the Greeks were perfectly familiar with it. Thrasymachus, an historical character who appears in Plato’s *Republic*, is the most famous pre-modern spokesman for relativism. Thrasymachus, unlike the devious Machiavelli and his modernist followers, states the case in bald human terms: people want the good things. Clever and strong people can simply take them; all they have to do is brush aside the ridiculous moral restraints imposed by society, which have no grounding in reality and are nothing more than a trick by which the weak protect themselves from the strong. The Gods will not punish evil, since there are no gods or, if there are, they do not care about the doings of men. Wisdom is the realization that law and morality are a meaningless tissue of human conventions (this idea is known as Conventionalism, the extreme form of which is Relativism). Free of these illusions the strong may easily attain their desires. Thrasymachus even uses some of the arguments of anthropological theory to show the relativity of all moralities.

Who is Thrasymachus, and under what circumstances does he present these views? Thrasymachus is a sophist, or

teacher of wisdom for hire. He delivers his famous arguments at a gathering of the richest and most talented young men of Athens. Were Socrates not present it is to be feared that some of them would not hesitate to make Thrasymachus' wisdom their own. Those who do not know how Socrates triumphed over Thrasymachus can read about it in *The Republic*; I will only mention that the young men are impressed by Thrasymachus and demand that Socrates refute him in an overwhelming way. They demand that he show that it is better to be just, even if everyone thinks you are unjust, persecutes you, tortures you and kills you, and, were you to have been unjust, you would have been thought just, given every reward and every pleasure, and have lived a long and prosperous life.

The temptation to be unjust – for example: to pilfer or commit adultery – is great, and there is no lack of rationalizations to support such shenanigans. But up until Machiavelli, philosophers defended justice against the human lust for power. They tried to tame the selfish passions by turning people's attention to higher things and helping them to master themselves. But Machiavelli did a new thing; he put philosophy in the service of the passions: the fears which make us long for prosperity and peace, the selfish arrogance which makes us long for wealth and power. He said: "the philosophers were concerned with how things should be: I am concerned with how things really are. By studying how men really are, not how they should be, I will show how we can establish peace and prosperity." He accused the old philosophers of being ineffectual. His advice, for a change, would be effective. The utilitarian bias of Modernism begins here. But Machiavelli also recommended the most devious and murderous policies imaginable – and why not? For him morality didn't exist. Any means was acceptable, as long as it succeeded. Only failure was unpardonable.

Machiavelli's ideas have been extremely seductive. In the 20th century they have had a particular vogue in the form of Communism, the purest imaginable example of Machiavellianism. Communism pretends to be all kindness and light, but is really all horror and lies, as anyone who has survived subjection to it will inform you. It generates falsehood in such stupefying amounts that millions have been bamboozled, and in particular many free people, who obviously don't know what's good for them, continue to accept the calumnies Communism has perpetrated against the heroes who have struggled against it. I mention this because understanding such phenomena is one key to understanding the nature of modernism. Another example of how

modernism plays out on the practical level is that, since there is no such thing as evil, there is no such thing as guilt. In the last several decades this has made a great impression on Western criminal justice systems. So there are links between such apparently disparate things as relativism, materialism, viewing criminals as society's victims, and Communism. The links are not necessarily direct, but all are aspects of modernism. I, personally, disapprove of them, but that is not the point. There are other aspects of modernism which are not so bad, in my opinion again, but this is not a discussion of modernism; it is a discussion of the nature of the science in science fiction, a subject that cannot be treated without understanding something about the nature of modernism.

Science

What we think of as "science" began with the Greeks of classical times as a subordinate aspect of philosophy, or "love of knowledge." In the modern era, with the triumph of Machiavellian immorality, philosophy, which is concerned not only with *is*, but with *ought*, withered away, because *ought* (what we ought and ought not to do) is nonsense in a materialist world where there is no good and evil. Meanwhile "science," or the pursuit of knowledge about what *is*, has replaced it, and theology, as our most important way of knowing (thus psychologists replace priests, sociologists replace moralists, and therapists replace judges). It is therefore natural that modernism be materialist. I do not use this term in the sociological sense of consumerism, but in the metaphysical sense. Metaphysical materialism is the natural philosophy according to which there is no god or, indeed, any spiritual component to being, or beings like humans, at all. Our thoughts and feelings, like our bodies, are mere accidents in a mindless, purposeless, machine-like process. This process has no meaning; it is a mere sequence of movements constituted by unconscious, mechanistic quarks, vibrations, or whatever the stuff of matter ultimately is. The only choice left to philosophy in this situation is: to oppose materialism by defending theology and classical philosophy; to waffle around in "utilitarian" ideas; or to cave in and elaborate relativism or other ways of explaining our thoughts and feelings about our thoughts and feelings (since they do not seem to us to be the mindless, heartless mechanism that materialist philosophy pretends; mere *sound and fury signifying nothing*.) This does not mean science is evil. In fact science springs from exactly the same source as Art: wonder. So there is

certainly nothing wrong with the pursuit of knowledge about the *is*, or natural phenomena. But when it becomes a matter of applying such information to real life, in other words when science stops being theoretical and starts being practical (or when science becomes technology) moral questions arise in abundance. To evoke the atom bomb and genetic engineering is sufficient to make this point. Again, this is no condemnation of science. Art also, like technology, is morally neutral; it can be good or bad. It is neither by nature.

Soft Science

The above considerations show why Modernity is characterized by creeping atheism, materialism and, inevitably, relativism; and help explain why the soft sciences, like sociology, psychology and so on, are not sciences in the strict sense as is often pretended, but procrustean transmutations of what are otherwise perfectly legitimate areas of study and work. This transmutation consists of jettisoning the idea of good and bad in order to explain everything in mechanistic, morally neutral, terms. As a result the soft sciences have trouble coming to grips with reality. There are grains of truth in mechanistic and materialistic explanations, but in fact human beings are neither rats nor machines made of quarks, and they cannot be understood in this way. Doctrinaire sociologists and psychologists, when put on the spot, can be maneuvered into admitting they themselves are as rat-like as they claim other people are. This is an amusing party game, but obviously these honest folk have been taken advantage of by their professions. They don't really mean what they are forced to claim, for how can a mindless rat understand anything worthwhile about another mindless rat? Despite this important handicap, sociologists and psychologists – even the doctrinaire ones – can perform useful work because they rarely operate only in function of the theories that dominate their disciplines. They are human beings like anyone else, so they exercise their intelligence, benefit from their experience, and, as best they can, work against evil and for good. The theoretical constructs upon which they stake the scientific status of their disciplines, however, lead to much waste and many aberrations.

Is Vance a Science Fiction writer?

A writer like Van Vogt – as best as I can remember, and I will not go back and check – writes real science fiction. He postulates a physics (null A) and a development of man's intellectual and physical nature, and then gives us stories about what would happen under these conditions. This is speculation

of a specifically science fiction kind, and it is obviously trite, since it boils down to pointless fantasy from which we learn nothing except, in Van Vogt's case, more than we want to know about the writer's paranoid contempt for the world (this may be unfair but, as I say, I will not waste another instant with these books).

By contrast, what does Vance do? Even a story like *The Dragon Masters* is not a speculation in this sense. In this story Vance postulates certain conditions that his interest in anthropology suggested to him, and Shippey's analysis is exciting and convincing; Vance is indeed ringing the changes on aspects of anthropological and genetic theory. Shippey goes on to say that while Vance debunks the theoretical underpinnings of anthropological theory, like cultural relativism in its most extreme forms, his heroes *refrain from judgement* and that the value of Vance's work is not that it provides an alternate world view, but its sheer exploration of these themes, since the *question of absolute value is not answered*. If we limit this to mean that Vance's heroes don't advance a rival philosophy which is meant to be understood as the author's opinion, I must agree. But the fact that *the question of absolute values is not answered* is something else.

First of all this would be too much to ask. It is not for artists to address the thorny question of absolute values. This is the job of theologians and philosophers. So when art does address such questions it is no longer art, but philosophy or theology – which is why Plato's dialogues, though artistic, are not called plays. However, I do not agree with Shippey when he suggests that, at the deepest level, Vance's *oeuvre* partakes of the modernist aloofness from a feeling for values and morality. Specifically, yes; Vance toys with anthropological theory, as he toys with linguistics in *The Languages of Pao*, with biology in *The Houses of Isz'm*, or with zoology in *Cadwal*. But he toys with other things in exactly the same spirit: questions of social class (*The Face*), architecture (*The Houses of Isz'm*), music (*Durdane*), food and dress, not to mention moral qualities like lust, greed, fear and so on. Here is an example in the realm of psychology:

(...) he was less than a savory travelling companion. Etzwanne looked him over critically. "Time we were repairing your appearance, which at the moment is a cause for adverse comment."

"I need nothing," Finnerack muttered. "I am not a vain man."

Etzwane would not listen. "You may not be vain but you are a man. Consciously or unconsciously you are affected by your appearance. If you look untidy, unkempt, and dirty, you will presently apply the same standards to your thinking and your general mode of life."

"More of your psychological theories," growled Finnerack. Etzwane nonetheless led the way to the Baronial Arcades, where Finnerack grimly allowed himself to be shorn, barbered, bathed, manicured, and attired in fresh garments.

What this adds up to is the old saw that *clothes make the man*, in the form of a satire of soft science. There is truth in it, but sensible people can think of another adage, equally true: *don't judge a book by its cover*. So are we to take Etzwane's comments for Vance's belief, for Etzwane's belief, or merely for Etzwane's tactic to get Finnerack washed and changed? Who can say? And it does not even matter. This is what I mean by toying or playfulness. So why is such toying with anthropological theory, or linguistics, to be put in another category? This question demands a measure. I think the measure should be what we learn, because what makes the exploration of something significant is what we learn from it. By the same token, the richer a subject, the more there is to be learned, in other words, to resort to yet another adage: *you can't make a silk purse from a sow's ear*. In *The Dragon Masters* what we learn about cultural relativism is this: it is a silly idea. If it were true, people would be totally unable to communicate or cope with new situations, as Shippey points out. It is not only silly, but obviously Vance does not think it is true since people like Joaz Banbek brush aside the supposed restraints of cultural relativism as if they did not exist. And since people, for the most part, obviously can cope with new situations – most of us seem to be surviving in our changing world – the component of truth left in anthropological theory is small, and of different import, than what the anthropologists claim. As for Vance's dalliance with genetics in *The Dragon Masters*, it is merely amusing foolishness, out of which Vance teases a certain amount of entertainment mileage. We learn very little from all this because the subject is essentially petty.

What about linguistics? *The Languages of Pao* is predicated on the notion that language determines how we think and are. Dan Simmons feels this idea is correct and gives a number of examples he has encountered which seem to bear it out. Shippey points out that the theory has not held up in the linguistic world. How does Vance feel about it? Whether he personally believes it or not, the deeper message about language in *The Languages of Pao* contradicts the basically playful

premise upon which the story is built. It is not language that determines how we are, but we who determine how language is. The Paonese linguistic elite, who will eventually dominate Paonese culture because the other elites depend upon them to inter-communicate, invents Pastiche: *a bastard mishmash of a language*. The text goes on: *The instructors (...) objected to Pastiche as a formless mélange, a hodgepodge without style or dignity. The students were unconcerned, but nevertheless made amused attempts to contrive style and dignity for their creation*. So what is language, particularly the language that eventually will dominate Pao? Is it an exterior force that shapes human souls, or is it a human creation with its ultimate source in human creativity? In other words, which is prior; language or man's humanity? According to cultural relativism our humanity is a function of our culture, and not, as the pre-moderns thought, the other way around. Pastiche is not based on a pragmatic or utilitarian aim like Valiant and the other languages invented by Palafox, but on *whimsy, style and dignity*. *The Languages of Pao* was not written to support any particular view of language or man, nonetheless it would be more useful to an argument for the pre-modernist view in which man is ultimately free, than for a modernist view in which man is a blind slave of exterior conditions. I do not mean to make caricatures of these ideas. Sensible Modernists and pre-modernists – and these two *ists* should not be taken for symmetrical opposites – would agree about many things. People obviously are determined by exterior conditions in many ways and to various degrees. The difference is that the logic of modernism constantly drives anything touched by it toward a conception of humanity as lifeless machines. This is a hideous anti-human error unique to modernist thought. The plot of *The Languages of Pao* is predicated on modernist linguistic theory. The Dominies of Breakness claim they can manipulate worlds with their linguistic powers, and indeed the speakers of Valiant become the aggressive, domineering bullies Palafox intended. However, is this because of Valiant, or because of the martial inculturation they are subjected to? It is not difficult to imagine even speakers of Paonese responding identically to such inculturation. In either case the underlying idea is that Scientists can make ordinary people jump through hoops, while they crack the whips. But what about these scientific supermen? Are they also jumping through hoops or are they free? Whatever the case, what we learn from the unplanned advent and unexpected triumph of Pastiche contradicts the theoretical basis of the story and

is consonant with the thrust of the general Vancian attitude in favor of human freedom.

Which brings me to this observation: those who are most committed to Vance as a science fiction author always draw their main arguments from the two books we have been discussing, which date from 1956 and 1962. I have observed this phenomenon again and again. As I have tried to argue, I do not think even these books properly support the Vance – science fiction argument, but the majority of Vance’s works, and everything from his mature period – which I feel starts in about 1964 – are even more problematic for this argument. In Durdane, Shant might be seen as another exploration of anthropological theory. But really it is just a theater for the adventures of the hero who remakes it in defiance of anthropological theory, and even with the participation of the Historical Institute, which thus destroys its own Star-Trek-ultimate-directive ethos. Shippey points all this out, but I do not think it can be maintained that Vance fails to propose a better model than anthropological theory. What is this model? Vance is not a theorist, so there is no point in looking for a regular model or theory from him. But, from a moral point of view, he does suggest the following: the world is full of ways of being; some of the differences between these ways are morally indifferent and more or less amusing, some of the bad things are tolerable, and might have good sides; but some things put a society in mortal danger, to say nothing of what individuals suffer, and these have to be changed or improved to be made acceptable. The corollary of this is that, of course, such change is possible and even desirable. This is Vance’s alternative to cultural relativism. We discern it most clearly in such places as the following dialog from *The Brave Free Men*.

Mialambre – Our deficiencies are real. Two thousand years has brought many changes (...)

Finnerack – They were men in those days (...) They lived like men, they fought like men, and if necessary they died like men. (...)

Mialambre – (...) We shall not find their like in the Shant of today.

Etzwane – Yet (...) they were only men, no more and no less than ourselves.

The rest of this dialog (see *The Brave Free Men* chapter 8) is a reflection on freedom and restraint, law and the individual. It is of philosophical scope and might be compared with a Platonic dialog. It is not his toying with science, hard and soft, or other such things which make Vance’s work great – though

these contribute to making it rich, amusing, and timely – it is those deeper strata which sometimes rise up in outcroppings like this dialog. I do not make the mistake of taking what his characters say for what Vance thinks, or thinking I know which character speaks for Vance, if any. But this dialog shows the kind of thing Vance puts in the midst of a world reflecting the unsatisfactory tenets of anthropological theory, and in direct contradiction of it. These men are struggling to escape and transform the cultural situation in which they find themselves, and in the end they succeed. Vance is perpetually subjecting such things to similar critiques. Take this example from chapter 9 where Vance toys with the nature/nurture controversy:

(...) “They were never angels of delight,” declared the superintendent. “Now they are well on their way to becoming true fiends. (...) “They’re mean as sin and no two ways about it. First I thought to treat them well and win them over. I fed them tidbits; I gave them a fine pen; I said ‘chirrup,’ and I whistled little tunes. I tried to teach them speech and I thought to reward good behavior with beer. To no avail. Each attacked me tooth and nail when I gave them the option. So then I thought I’d learn the truth of the matter. I separated them, and Erxter I continued to gratify and appease. The other, poor Musel, I set to cov. When he’d strike out at me I’d deal him a buffet. When he’d gnash at my hand I’d prod him with a stick; many the beatings he’s earned and collected. Meanwhile Erxter dined on the best and slept in the shade. At the end of the experiment was there any difference in their savagery? Not a twitch; they were as before.”

So I agree with Shippey that Vance explores these things, but I do not agree that his work is *centrally preoccupied* with such explorations or that he does no more than *explore* them. He offers a different perspective. At the very least he can be said to advocate human freedom. This means he advocates things like cultivation of a large, detached view, a capacity for competent action in many fields, the importance and humanizing qualities of Art, and even morality of a perfectly recognizable kind. Vance clearly enjoys presenting characters like Ifness without comment. It is just one of the most familiar kinds of Vancian mischievousness. He is saying: people like this exist. He leaves it to the intelligence of each reader to draw any moral conclusions that might need drawing, and he provides all the evidence needed. And anyway, condemning Ifness is not necessarily so evident. There is much to be said for non-

intervention – though so many people are saying it that it has become exasperating. The point is that for all his supposed aloofness, in the last analysis Vance does not stand aloof from moral questions. Here is one example where he contrasts the modernist with the pre-modern idea:

“A person does as his inner soul directs.” Finnerack jerked his head toward Etzwane. “Who gave him the right to take to himself the authority of the Anome? He had no more right than I.”

“The difference is real,” retorted Mialambre. “A man sees a house on fire. He rouses the inhabitants and extinguishes the blaze. Another, in order to punish the arsonist, fires a village. One man is a hero, the other is a maniac.”

Again, I do not confound Mialambre with Vance, and these two lines are not the last word on the subject. But it is not the partisans of modernism who are busy exposing these considerations. Direction from the inner soul is the dung of contemporary art, Ruth Benedict’s *cup of culture*, Nietzsche’s *will to power*. It is the unique source of modernist legitimacy.

Gastel Etzwane’s ultimate disenchantment with Shant is an image of man unfettered by culture. What does Etzwane long for? From the perspective of cultural relativism all he could possibly desire is more variety than Durdane can now satisfy. But this would be craven, like an addict in need of his next fix. What Etzwane desires is indicated by the sense of music; *music of unimaginable grandeur, exalting all who heard (...)* He wants something that can never be satisfied by all that is here below. He longs for Beauty and Truth.

The Science Fiction Perspective

Though I think I enjoy *The Languages of Pao* and *The Dragon Masters* as much as anyone, I wonder why some people place them at the summit of Vance’s *oeuvre*. And I do not understand the vehemence sometimes displayed in defense of science fiction. What is science fiction that it deserves this passionate allegiance? Is it merely that writers like Aldiss, Lem, Bradbury or Vonnegut – to list only some of the ones I have enjoyed – have provided pleasure? There must be a better reason.

My militant contention that Vance is not a science fiction writer is, to a certain extent, a merely tactical one. I do not really care what label is stuck on Vance, so long as it does not interfere with his work penetrating into the mainstream. But if I thought the label was correct I would never try to expunge it merely to attain my goal. I am willing to grant that *the kind of story* Vance writes comes out of science fiction; so that if

science fiction is defined as stories taking place in the future, or on other planets, then okay: Jack Vance writes science fiction. But in this case *The Little Prince* would also be science fiction, which is ridiculous. I believe that Rob Gerrand, Tom Shippey, Dan Simmons and Jack Vance all agree with me that the whole Buck Rogers thing is, at best, harmless adventure or, at worst, contemptible trash. So the essence of science fiction is clearly elsewhere. If it is “speculation” pure and simple, then the term “science fiction” is no good, because there are all kinds of speculative literature which are clearly not science fiction. Which brings me back to where I started – pax Rob Gerrand; science fiction is: fiction about science. This science may be theoretical, technical, or soft. But this is not a proper ground for literature.

Lem, whom I admire, is a science fiction writer. His work, unlike Vance’s, is inconceivable outside the genre. But because it really is science fiction it will never go beyond a certain point. My favorite Lem book is about a future controlled by mysterious drug masters. Conforming to Shippey’s analysis of Vance, Lem does not judge this world, he merely shows it. The effect is exhilarating, and even though the book is comic, it is frightening and ultimately depressing. Lem shows us a scary future and offers no hope. It is inhuman. Another book, *Solaris*, presents a similarly terrifying and hopeless situation based on speculative scientific things. Such books are fascinating in their way, but not nourishing. We cannot draw human strength and wisdom from them, the way we so obviously can from Vance. This is the problem with science fiction; it is not really about people, and literature has to be about people. The paragraph Vance devotes to how he writes, in his *Biographical Sketch and Other Facts*, begins, and is mostly about, his characters – people. In this regard, how many characters by science fiction writers can anyone remember? Vance’s characters are memorable, and the proof is that we remember them.

I will finish with an extract from a great writer, one of the guiding lights of humanity. While reading it, please consider the question of what Vance’s work is really about; is it about exploring such things as cultural relativism and the *dépassé* linguistic contention that language determines culture? Or is it not far closer to this kind of thing?

I am already known here to the folk of the hamlet, who like me very well, above all the children. I made an upsetting observation. At first, when I approached them and

questioned them in a friendly way, some of them would brusquely turn away from me, thinking I wanted to tease them. I did not let that discourage me, but it gave me the strong sense of something I have observed more than once. People of a certain rank always hold themselves at a cold distance from the people, as if they feared that by approaching them they would lose something of their dignity; and there are even some brutes, ill intentioned jokers, who seem to approach the people only to wound them with their mocking disdain.

I know we are not all equal, and that we never will be: but it seems to me that he who believes he needs to hold himself at a certain distance from those he calls “the people,” in order to maintain their respect, is no less wrong than the coward who hides from his adversary for fear of losing the fight.

If you ask me about the people here, I’ll tell you that they are like people everywhere. The human species is uniform: most work the better part of the day to earn their living, and the bit of liberty left to them they find so irksome that they seek every means to escape it. Oh human destiny!

But, after all, they are decent people. Sometimes when I forget myself and let myself be carried along with them by the pleasures which are left to man – like cordially amusing ourselves around a well garnished table, or arranging carriage promenades, or dances or such things – it produces a happy effect in me; but then my thoughts must not be disturbed by the memory that there are, in myself, so many other faculties the springs of which are rusting away for lack of use, and that I must hide my inner self with great care. Ah! This idea shrivels the heart! And yet, my friend, it is often our fate to realize we are unknown to those around us.

(from *Werther* by Goethe; extracts from letters IV and V. Translated from d’Aubry’s French version of 1896, by P. Rhoads)

Paul Rhoads, Editor-in-Chief, The VIE

Notes from Readers

From Amy Harlib

Thank you for another excellent issue. *Planet of Retribution* – LOL! – “Zach Fance” was actually successful achieving a parody of Vance’s inimitable style – no easy feat! Wouldn’t mind another installment from the “Deranged Astrophysicist”!

Paul Rhoads has done it again! He has written another superb article so rich in thought provoking content not to mention lovely illustrations and perfectly apt quotes which serve to crystallize what has always intuitively been for me a major reason for Vance’s appeal and stature as a writer of fantastic fiction – his “naturalism” which I would also define as HUMANISM!

Thank you! Keep ‘em coming – this is getting as addictive as Vance’s work itself!

Bob replies:

Paul tells me he is working on several new articles, including discussions of aspects of Cadwal and Cugel, for future *Cosmopolis* issues. And we owe some of this month’s article to the letter, last month, from Rob Gerrand, who spurred Paul on to his discussion of just what constitutes science fiction.

As is always the case, we appreciate your comments, praise and criticism. It was a bit slow this month: only Amy has checked in with a “letter for the editor.” All of our readers, however, are cordially invited to submit letters.

Bob Lacovara, Editor of *Cosmopolis*

Bob’s Closing Comments

With these last few paragraphs, I bring the fifth issue of *Cosmopolis* to a close.

Who is Zach Fance?

I hope you enjoyed the pastiche from last month. Zach Fance is in another reality Mr. Rhoads: not Paul, but his father, George. I greatly enjoyed the story that Mr. Rhoads produced for us: we’ve had one call for another installment from this author, and I hope to see something new soon.

What is Science Fiction: The Short Form

Ha! Now there’s a question which has probably contributed more to global warming than even many political discussions. (“The Short Form,” for those of you not familiar with the US 1040 tax forms, is the abbreviated version of the tax form for those of us who don’t know

how to take advantage of our country's 14,000 page tax code.)

First, why is it hard to answer the question, "what is science fiction?" Paul Rhoads has had a shot at this, and in any science fiction anthology one may come across implicit or explicit definitions by the dozen. But an engineer, when confronted with a question which is hard to answer, will often ask, "Is something wrong with the question?"

This isn't guile or subterfuge. It is possible to ask ill-formed questions and engineers are trained to keep (at least one) eye out for them. It is trivial to make pathological statements: a famous example is the sentence in italics which follows this one. *I am telling you a lie.* Without recourse to semantic mumbo jumbo, this sentence asserts that "true is false." No meaningful logic or algebra can support such a statement and it is sophomoric to debate it.

But "what is science fiction?" doesn't seem to fit this category. It is not of the form "what is a blue kilogram?" and seems, plainly, to ask for a definition of a literary form.

Why do I drag this on? Because there hardly seems to be even one definition that any two people agree with, and that itself tells me that something is rotten in Denmark.

Some 3,000 books ago, I devised my own system of categorizing books, for two reasons. One is that no matter how impressed I might be by a novel or short story, a recommendation to anyone, no matter how apologetic, which included the words "science fiction" was a kiss of death. The other reason was that I had little patience with the exact category of the work: I was concerned with whether or not the story "reached" me at a level beyond than mere entertainment.

My system is as follows. I categorize works as "literature of the first or second 'kind'." The second kind is anything which doesn't really seem serious, or has no significant message, in short, anything which might be read merely for entertainment. There's nothing wrong with this: I like it, very often.

The first kind, however, is a different story. Literature of the first kind has affected me in some way. Either I have learned something new, or something I always knew has been shown to me in another light, or I find that something that I "knew" was perhaps wrong. Perhaps I was swept away by the depth, or breadth, or simple beauty of the prose. Perhaps some aspect of the human condition was illuminated. Sometimes, after a reading, I might find that my thoughts keep drifting back to a novel or short story, something a part of my mind *insists* must be re-examined. There are many reasons that

a book or short story might so affect me, but there it is. A subjective, but workable definition for my own use.

Within these categories of first and second kind, I recognize that some works are superior to others, and therefore might be called first class, or second class. Third class efforts, of any kind, may stay on the shelf as far as I am concerned.

Examples of literature of the second kind abound: almost all "science fiction" and "fantasy" fall into this bucket. Why? Most of science fiction and fantasy are simply stories written to entertain. No one learns anything from such works except that: (a) the good guy usually wins big, (b) he gets the girl as an added benefit as well, and (c) you should have borrowed the book from the library, since you are now out \$7.00 (or \$27.00) in return for a few hours' entertainment.

The early works of Asimov which deal with his robots fall neatly into first class literature of the second kind. Well written, clever, nicely plotted, engaging. His later stories, for various reasons, drifted slowly but surely, to my mind, into the second class category. The works of Piers Anthony, after a first few books (notably *Macroscope*) drifted quickly to second class and then third class: I no longer find his work palatable.

On occasion, I am pleasantly surprised to find a work of the second kind which transcends its genre, and appears, full bloom, not to be "science fiction" or "mystery" or "fantasy" but simply literature of the first kind, sometimes of the first class. I cannot admit Asimov, to use him as an example once more, to this altitude, but Sheri Tepper has on occasion produced a work which must be called literature of the first kind. I refer you to her book, *The Gate to Women's Country*. Let me also mention Crowley's *Engine Summer*. From my choices, you may be able to "calibrate" my point of view.

I am not unaware of the fact that I am being read by followers of Jack Vance, and you must now be waiting for my take on Jack's work with regard to my own system of classification. Part of the work of Jack Vance must be considered first class (and sometimes, truth to tell, even second class) literature of the second kind. This judgment can hardly be refuted: it is easy to point to space opera written by Jack early on. Yet I am not involved with the *VIE* to the extent you see me because I think of Jack Vance as almost-as-good as Isaac Asimov. Not likely.

Some of Jack's work transcends the mundane, the entertaining, the genre. For me, to read *The Moon Moth*, for example, is to discover something about human communication. To read *The Last Castle* is to uncover clues to the stratification of society. To watch Jack's strange protagonists (Cugel comes to mind) struggle to solve (and sometimes fail to solve) their problems is to gauge one's own reaction to a world possibly turned upside down. (You may have works you would nominate in this category: I would be most happy to hear your thoughts.)

Here, in Jack's work, is an inventory of literature of the first kind, mired in the stigma and stereotype of a genre, and unappreciated but by a few. Perhaps the *VIE* will help to change that.

Now, a careful reader will be smiling at this point, because it's clear that (a) I have not stopped at a page break, and (b) I have not offered a definition of science fiction.

Paul Rhoads, in his article in this issue, points out that advocates of science fiction claim that it is not about décor. Paul is busy addressing their ideas about science fiction so he does not develop this idea further, but I cannot pass this point so blithely. It appears to me, that to a very great extent, science fiction is most clearly characterized as a genre by nothing more or less than décor. How so?

All science fiction attempts to produce an exotic atmosphere by offering unfamiliar locales, languages, customs, or hardware. As Paul points out, these unfamiliar elements may be obtained about as readily on planet Earth as anywhere else. (Walk about Kabukicho in Shinjuku in Tokyo some time.) If we were to take many science fiction stories and apply a sort of compositional philosopher's stone, which re-mapped locality, environments, customs and so on, we would be able to convert many science fiction stories to westerns, or historical romances. Same story, same plot, same good guys and bad guys and heroines: just a different color sky, an extra moon or two. I maintain that science fiction can all too often be mapped to other genres, often in a simple and transparent manner.

Barry Longyear's excellent trilogy, *Circus World*, is a good case in point. It's a great read: the trials, tribulations and successes of a traveling circus. Good characterization, good writing, interesting plot, many authentic-sounding circus details. Oh. Yea. The circus travels from venue to venue on a starship: it is marooned somewhere and the circus society expands to form its own world. It could just as well have been

done on a Pacific island, I suspect. It's science fiction though, because of the décor. It would be fantasy in an alternate universe, if the action took place on Earth; an historical romance if it was shipwrecked somewhere on Earth. But let me state again: it's a great story.

Science fiction does have a *few* special earmarks. A great deal of it, particularly science fiction written before the '70s, comes with a special apology built right in. It is a part of the story near the beginning of the tale which exists to make the locale, languages, customs, or hardware plausible. I call this the "here it comes" part, and is often of this nature:

Barbie looked thoughtful. "We'll soon be at Carbonzo-Bean 12. Let us hope that the Frabulans have no warning of our arrival."

Captain Steele said, "we no longer rely on inefficient chemical propulsion. Indeed, we could not venture to the Magellanic Clouds in less than millions of years at speeds below lightspeed. Our spin-symmetric quark reduction drive creates a copy of our vessel and its contents anywhere in this space-time continuum, as long as we are not within a few feet of a large mass such as a star, and naturally, all interstellar debris is displaced by the induced charm effect."

Through this (somewhat) over-the-top example, we see a means by which a science fiction author apologizes for the impossible task of bridging interstellar or intergalactic space: often with babble, worse, with pseudo-science. What conceivable importance is it just how a starship gets from here to there before its crew is dead?

The real reason that "here it comes" is a weakening element of a novel is that an author may reasonably assume that the reader will accept the author's basic assumptions without apology. If the reader doesn't like the assumptions ("You can't travel faster than light!") then the reader should discard the story. Alternately, once the basic assumptions are exhibited, the author owes it to the reader to "follow the rules" and develop his tale in accord with the assumptions.

To some extent, the "here it comes" part of a story disappeared from the genre as New Wave and Cyberpunk authors assumed that the readership would "cotton on" to whatever was going on, or worse, presumed that it was unimportant that the readers receive a good orientation to the environment of the story. Of course, this is a good thing only if you feel that the departure of '50s and '60s science fiction is offset by the arrival of New Wave and Cyberpunk. (I'm ambivalent myself about New Wave: Ballard, good;

Moorcock, tedious. I detest Cyberpunk entirely: it is entirely too much like magic without rules. Of the older works prior to the '60s: some are simply gems, "here it comes" or not.)

On the other hand, there is a rather dismal sub-genre in which stories are based upon something called "hard science." I really don't know what this term means in the context of *fiction*, but in practice it means that a novel is subsumed to the very latest fringe physics, and contains no real science at all. Regardless of the length of their academic credentials, cranky novels by tenured (bored?) astrophysicists who hawk Tippler's machine god universe, or screwball superstring physics of six (nine? thirteen? twenty-three?) dimensions, some curled on themselves, are intellectual masturbation: it is rarely important in telling a tale that there be the slightest shred of actual science involved in the mix. Most of these novels could be mapped with my philosopher's stone to westerns, but perhaps not good ones. Again, décor. The décor of "hard science."

For those of you who haven't read Frank J. Tippler's *The Physics of Immortality*, I will summarize, since you will recognize the story line from current plots in science fiction: we're all going to live forever. That's because in the far future, a demonstrably benevolent race of super-intelligent machines will recreate us all in computer simulation, not from our souls, but from stray traces of electromagnetic energy which we emit during our lives. All will be wonderful, in this best (and last, as it happens) of all possible worlds. Even though the universe will continue to exist for only a finite time, the godlike machines will just up the clock rate on us so that we experience a new joint "life," even an entire "universe" before Time runs out.

Are you relieved? Going to dump the faith of your fathers for the faith of the physicists? Not me. Should you wish to mutter "stuff and nonsense," Dr. Tippler will invite you to learn the modest amount of calculus and physics necessary to understand the hundred pages or so of equations [yours, free, included in the book] which demonstrate to any who have the wit to understand how his contentions simply must be true. (If you don't understand the equations, that's okay, you'll still be Saved on the SuperDisk.) Curiously, these equations do not include any material from the field of information theory, possibly because information theoretic concepts of noise and signal might upset the eternal apple cart: possibly you would be restored more like a low-resolution JPEG image than Cinemascope. I'm not sure: I'm reluctant to get into a discussion with Dr. Tippler. Call it cowardice.

I contend: science fiction is fiction with a scientific sugar coating. It can be very good fiction indeed, and the sugar coating may make it exotic and thought-provoking, but that alone will never make it literature of the first kind. Science, as window dressing, does not help us understand the workings of the heart, the loneliness of the individual, the joy of love, the constants which link us to past generations, and by extension, to generations to come.

The human aspects of a novel are delivered by the novelist, not by the setting in the Old West, in Victorian England, or a far star in a far time. When the novelist delivers the human condition, we may rightly call the product literature of the first kind, and be indifferent to the setting, to the décor.

Now I assert: much of the writings of Jack Vance are literature of the first kind, the literature of human condition, and the window trappings of magic, far stars and far times do not matter at all.



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