
EXTANT

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#1

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INTRODUCING EXTANT

A private newsletter from Paul Rhoads, EXTANT will appear at irregular intervals. It will present, among other things, material deemed inappropriate for COSMOPOLIS. The first section of this issue, originally for COSMOPOLIS 59, is reaction to Vance-BBS postings of January 05. The 2 sections following include material originally written for COSMOPOLIS 53, reaction to postings on the GaeenReach-BBS last fall. The open letter to Steve Sherman concerns postings on the Vance-BBS of the same period.

With regard to the relevance of some of this material, I do not mind being, but do not mean to be, provocative by drawing a comparison to George W. Bush. Among that part of the world's population who have an opinion on the matter, president Bush is believed, by an alleged majority, to have lied about 'WMD'. The Iraq war, they claim, is in fact motivated by a secret plan to control Iraqi petroleum if not to rule the world at personal whim per the tenets of an obscurantist sect. Now; while the war in Iraq may or may not be a good thing, and Bush's part in it may or may not be honorable, one must be more than ignorant to believe these slanders since the facts are readily available. The amazing acceptance by so many of blatant untruths, as we have seen, becomes an important aspect of the war itself, with actual battlefield and 'collateral' consequence.

So with the VIE. The success of the project, to the arguably important extent internet communications impact it, cannot be advanced by spreading lies, about the project, its managers, members of the Vance family, or the author himself. Also to be considered is collateral effect on the promotion of Jack Vance's work in general, and the personal reputations of various individuals who, though they may not be Jack Vance, do exist.

Of course many see though any slander; you can't fool all of the people all of the time. There are also those who do not care one way or the other, those who are merely indifferent, and those who take the moral high-ground, looking down on all parties in contention with egalitarian and god-like contempt no matter what the issues, tactics or consequences. But, as Lincoln famously underlined, you *can* fool some of the people all of the time and all of the people some of the time, so there are those who will either believe, or be perturbed by, publicized lies, to the detriment of others.

Last October it was my considered opinion that the project, with thousands of hours of as yet unaccomplished volunteer work still out-standing, remained critically vulnerable to ongoing public slander. With basic project work now complete, and even though several dozen people must still effect hundreds of hours of volunteer work, and though things may still go wrong, in my opinion the project is at last beyond the reach of Kali's cyber avatars.

This does not mean slander should be ignored, should not be met and opposed with vigour. At the very least there is the matter of honor. EXTANT, however, will not be restricted to polemics. Anyone may contribute to EXTANT on the same public-forum basis of openness that ought to pertain for COSMOPOLIS.



DOWN WITH SHAKESPEARE!

AND OTHER FAILURES

In Reaction to Cosmopolis 58 I am accused, on the Vance BBS, of making 'the assertion that Vance is superior to Shakespeare' as well as 'failure to recognize what Vance is actually doing'. Each may decide where my readings of Vance, which I have tried to share with COSMOPOLIS readers each month, fall on a scale, which my detractors seem to reserve for them, running from malicious deformation to nescient scribbling. Combing through my elucubrations in COSMOPOLIS 58 I fail to discover, however, any hint, let alone any assertion, regarding the relative status of Vance and Shakespeare. I do plead guilty to having mentioned the latter (let it never be alleged I fail to confess my mistakes!) but only as part of my crusade against allegations that Vance's work suffers from plot weakness. Commenting on the scene, from *Magnificent Showboats*, where Zamp alters *Macbeth*—the one I so recklessly quoted—Dan Gunter comments:

I do think that this scene is useful to demonstrate that Vance understands plotting. By making fun of Zamp's "improvements," Vance shows not only that he understands what constitutes the important action in Macbeth but also that he understands that attempts to explain some of the plot elements would actually detract from the arc of the plot.

Whatever the absolute value of this remark Dan Gunter seems in perfect agreement with the essence of what I thought I was suggesting. Unsure of himself, Dan Gunter does concede: 'maybe that's Rhoads' point.' But he does not think so:

If that were his point, I don't think that he'd call this passage "perhaps the most daring in literary history." Instead, he'd spell out his argument much as I have done.

I am torn between apology for failure to restrict myself to proscribed procedure per the model *ex post facto* provided by Dan Gunter, and suspicion he is motivated by something other than magnanimity. He, meanwhile, 'anticipates':

. . . that Rhoads will respond to this post in the next issue of Cosmopolis, explaining at length why Macbeth really needs Zamp's "improvements." My preemptive response is, "If Vance intended to have Zamp 'improve' the plotting of Macbeth, why didn't he have him clear up the business of the third murderer?"

While I would be glad to offer explanations, failing to see where or how I asserted that Macbeth needs Zamp's improvement, and since I even fail to think so, I find myself at a loss—third murderer or no. Dan Gunter, however, does not, himself, fail to compare Vance's work to the bard:

I do not think that they are the equal of Shakespeare's.

You heard it first on the Vance-BBS! I might venture that 'there is no accounting for tastes' were this not likely to provoke further disapprobation, since Dan Gunter goes on to stipulate that he does not:

. . . think that — on application of any reasonably widely held criteria of literary excellence — anyone can state to a reasonable degree of certainty that Vance's works are superior to Shakespeare's.

For I take this to mean that, to the contrary, taste *can* be accounted for, in this manner: although someone may say that Vance is superior to Shakespeare, and may even do so with a certain degree of certainty, they cannot do so with a certainty which attains a 'reasonable degree'; ergo, certain tastes, failing to meet this test, rather than being unaccountable, are, to the contrary, *accountable* to ignorance, stupidity, or both—or to whatever 'lack of reasonableness' is properly called. Dan Gunter's point, however, depends on the mind-numbing emulsion of relativism and positivism to which he seems to subscribe. For example, he stipulates that 'standards of literary excellence' exist but that they are only 'held more or less widely'; which must mean, either, that literary standards fail the test of absolute universality, with the consequence that taste, as he understands it, *is* all, or that opinions which fail to achieve a reasonable degree of certainty, by reason of non-application of reasonably widely held criteria of literary excellence, are stupid and ignorant. Which? The solution seems clear; he writes:

. . . though our literary standards are admittedly incomplete, there is enough agreement regarding certain of those standards to permit persons learned in the applicable field to arrive at defensible conclusions.

I believe we have here a subtle hint to the expression of taste I failed to make, but the answer to our question is another failure; the failure to allow real existence to taste. Dan Gunter states that:

If taste were all, then no one could object that I erred [when I opine that X is better than Y when X is generally understood to be worse than Y]. . .

Taste, thus defined, failing to adhere to the defensible

conclusions of learned persons, cannot be reconciled with them to any degree, much less a reasonable one, and thus disappears into non-existence. To put this the other way around, persons learned in the applicable fields are unable, by the force of their own reasonableness, to demure from establishment dictates. Or, to put it yet another way: if taste to which none may object is not all—as Dan Gunter alleges—how can it be anything? Thus, when he suggests he does not fail to limit himself to the dictates of learned persons in applicable fields it only remains to congratulate him on his submission to authority and conclude he is beyond taste or, in a nutshell, a tasteless person.

Another poster, reacting to the same comments, provides a nice sample of that vancian method known as 'patient explanation of the obvious':

. . . having a character "improve" the text of Shakespeare does demonstrate that JV is aware of plot considerations. If the plot improvements don't actually add anything, it just underscores JV's plot savvy; he is writing as a comic and therefore intends these additions to be amusing.

I hope those to whom these remarks were intended profited by them.

A certain 'aldiboronti' uses the same indignant derisiveness regarding my alleged intellectual capacities and accomplishments (who made any claims?) characteristic of Dan Gunter. Though his comments cast me (justly?) in an unfavorable light I reproduce them for the specialist catalogue of scholarly arcana peeking out between the insults—an effect which may amuse EXTANT readers:

Rhoads speaks of daring for all the world as if it has not been common practice for centuries to meddle with the plots of Shakespeare's plays. A few examples will suffice to point up his ignorance:

Nahum Tate, a Restoration playwright, altered King Lear to give it a happy ending, with Cordelia being saved at the last moment. It held the stage in place of Shakespeare's version for over a century, until David Garrick restored the original. (A little more daring than Vance supposedly toying with Macbeth, wouldn't you say, Mr. Rhoads?)

The list goes on and on; John Dryden's reworking of The Tempest, Colley Cibber's butchering of Richard III, and, to cap it all, Macbeth itself was totally reworked just after Shakespeare's death, by Thomas Middleton. Several of the songs in the play, and some of the verse spoken by Hecate, are remnants of this adaptation, the play having been restored to something close to the original by Hemmings and Condell, fellow players of Shakespeare's, in their First Folio edition of 1623.

*Vance, of course, was having fun, Rhoads is just clueless.**

* The personal hostility which certain persons are not ashamed to display—the expression of which the Internet situation facilitates—remains, to me, not merely astonishing but actually peculiar. In the Vance-BBS thread here discussed Dan Gunter indulges in the following pseudo-literary ad hominem remark: *Paul Rhoads and Alexander Feh't are one and the same. Yin and yang. The serpent swallowing its own tail. . . Personally, I'm inclined to think that they were conjoined twins separated shortly after birth. The craniectomy was a challenge.* And yet, in a seamless prolongation of Feh't's self-appointed mission of mensural post-Cosmopolis attacks, of which I am honored to have been the target for several years, and now that this redoubtable hetman of the GaeanReach-BBS, out-gunned and out-manuevered, has lowered his flag and slunk off the field, Dan Gunter, who in an eerie parallel is hetman of the Vance-BBS, has eagerly snatched up the mantel of 'beloved leader of anti-Rhoadsian yappage'. What I have in common with Feh't, other than my condition of monocephalod biped—a condition which may, or may not, be shared by Dan Gunter—remains unexplained. The odd pretension that the editor in chief of the VIE is a menace to Jack Vance's reputation, and that public, as well as private, attacks upon him are the best available remedy, is an idea and a behavior which, ipso facto, suggest, at mimimum, spiritual brotherhood.

Finally, the much admired author Matt Hughes offered his own commentary on this matter, in the form of a lapidary and somewhat leaden aphorism, perhaps the product of his own creative genius:

Never tell a joke to a man who lacks a sense of humor.

In an instinctive motion, which if not something else may be evidence I am as ignorant and clueless as 'aldibronti' claims, I initially read this as signaling a change of heart. However, I eventually realized, with a slowness also not to the credit of my intellectual capacities, that Matt Hughes referred not to Dan Gunter's reading of me but to my reading of Vance. With a 'certain degree'—as Dan Gunter might say—of 'sadness'—so to speak—I am therefore obliged to point out that poor Matt Hughes must, once again, be charged with erotic failure.

For all this the Vance-BBS has not sloughed into utter decadence. In the section devoted to messages addressed personally to Jack Vance, one Casey Simpson makes a refreshingly frank and amicable post:

Sir, I am halfway through Lurulu and could not wait to thank you from the bottom of my heart for the lifetime of enjoyment and inspiration you have given me through your works. I hope I'm not laying it on too thick but you're right up there with Shakespeare as far as insight in the human condition and the ability to show that insight through your art. Most of all you're just plain fun.

The new novel feels like opening the door and seeing an old friend standing there, if I may be so bold. Well done!

To say nothing of other, and better, things, and to paraphrase the Bonze of Padme, I am dedicated to wonder why this blatant and unvarnished failure to be sufficiently learned in applicable fields to arrive at defensible conclusions failed to deflect Dan Gunter toward Casey Simpson who, unlike myself, is obviously guilty?

The last word may be left to the robust David B. Williams who, parsing Dan Gunter's phrases to somewhat similar effect, made the following deft remark:

. . . even if informed opinion holds WS superior, I know which writer I enjoy the most!



TITLE-MANIA RE-DUX

RESPONSE TO DAVID B. WILLIAMS

In COSMOPOLIS 59 David B. Williams makes 2 points.
1) He insists that, in his opinion, the title *Mazirian the Magician* is 'bland' and 'does not represent the book as a whole.'
2) He opines that Jack's objection to the title *The Eye's of the Overworld* lacks a full measure of logic, that the title is a good one and, as I would say, a 'vancian' one, with textual support.

These opinions being, as David B. Williams himself underlines, opinions, there would seem to be very little to say. I would, however, like to agree with David B. Williams' that, regarding 2, Vance's objection is not as good as it might

be. I also agree (as should have been clear from my comments in COSMOPOLIS 58) that the title is vancian and good.

As for 1, while I must incline with that sacred awe which the personal taste of intelligent persons should inspire, when David B. Williams finds Vance's preferred title 'bland' I wish he had engaged the positive reasonings in it's defence I advanced in COSMOPOLIS 58, if only to refute them.



THE ANTI-VIE MARTYR BRIGADE STRIKES, AGAIN [FROM SEPTEMBER 2004]

In the mud tracks of the 'wanhk' tea-pot tempest, the cyber thugs remain staunch:

'On the topic of changes to Vance's texts, and Vance himself as the ultimate arbiter of what is the "intended" or "correct" presentation, it occurs to me that he once consented to all those editorial changes of text and titles, letting MAZIRIAN THE MAGICIAN become The DYING EARTH and whatnot. He could have chosen not to go along with these ideas. In the same way, he is now consenting to various compromises with the VIE. All in all, "authorial intent" is a somewhat nebulous notion.'

And 'whatnot' indeed! As another cyber-thug insinuates:

'Not only the titles of Vance's books, not only the "grey area" options will be changed [. . .] Vance's texts [. . .] are in peril.'

Wriggling in several directions at once, their rational would seem to be that Vance was maneuvered into 'choosing' 'The Dying Earth' by commercial publishers and now, in the same manner, has been maneuvered into 'choosing' 'Mazirian the Magician' by the VIE. But if this is so what basis for complaint against the VIE do the carpers leave themselves? If 'authorial intent' is such a nebulous notion, where's the beef?

The thug-requisitory, delighting in VIE vulnerability, continues:

'[. . .] to my mind the most interesting information [. . .] is that 'the VIE has been deprived of a certain number of volunteers and subscriptions — discouraged from joining or encouraged to quit — by cyber-mischief' and that '[c]yberthugs discouraged potential subscribers.' This is really the first intimation I have had that the efforts of myself (small) and others (considerable, in some cases at the risk of their life and sanity) have perhaps not been in vain after all.'

Which, if nothing else, casts a dim light on Vance's 'transcendental osmosis' by which the ill fortune of some augments the good fortune of others.



A WOMAN'S HONOR

Anti-VIE thuggery is promoted on a handful of web-sites located in the near-Beyond of the cyber-sphere. Some of my friends reproach my ongoing concern. Some, though sharing my concerns, feel my tactics are wrong. Others, though

sympathetic, believe I am motivated by hurt feelings.* Indeed, were I motivated by anything other than concern for the project, and if counter-measures were not important, their objections would be good. Thanks to my high-profile in the VIE project, (and because no good deed goes unpunished) I am indeed a major target of this 'mindless malice' but I claim no exclusivity! To say nothing of other VIE managers regularly excoriated, truly scandalous are the attacks upon Norma Vance.† Call me 'male chauvinist' if you must; such attacks on a good and honorable woman are odious and intolerable. Those who indulge and promote them—all, ironically, VIE subscribers—need a correction. It is ironic that if I had the degree of VIE control these trolls attribute to me their subscriptions would have been cancelled long ago.

Everyone really interested in the work of Jack Vance should keep a few facts in mind; All of Vance's work, from the 1940s until the 1980s was typed and retyped by his wife, to say nothing of proofing and other editorial duties. When Vance switched to computers in the 1980s it did nothing to lighten Norma's task; her husband's growing eye-problems obliged her to an ever closer collaboration. Meanwhile, as the cyber-age advanced and more and more responsibilities for manuscript preparation were thrust upon authors, these fell to Norma. She was obliged, for example, to proof the *Night Lamp* blues (from various editors, first versions and up-dates) no less than seven times. The dedication in the Berkely edition of *Suldren's Garden* is: *To Norma, wife and colleague*. To say nothing of gallantry, to say nothing of what is owed to her for herself, attacking Norma Vance with regard to her husband's work is, in my view, an attack on that work.

Another cyber-thug, attempting to spin his own mischiefs into a personal disaster for the Vances, caused by (sigh) you-know-who, posts:

'The declining years of Jack Vance should have been graced by the VIE as a heartfelt appreciation of his literary life's work. However, he has been [. . .] pulled into a scene of strife and recrimination. There is only one person to blame for this [. . .]';

To which mantra a fellow thug intoned the response:

'Jack's [. . .] wife, made it possible for him to make many other people suffer.'

* If so, there is no lack of reason! In recent days, for example, I am called: a 'neurotic' a 'neuraesthetic moral cripple' a 'religious fanatic', 'envious' and 'mediocre'; I am defined, colorfully, as 'impending madness and destruction' and, in more pedestrian manner 'a piece of shit'; it is stated that I have: 'contempt for humanity', have 'cheated, insulted, and exploited' and engage in: 'self-promotion', 'propaganda', 'censorship and persecution'. At the very least I am in a poor position to whine and whimper that no one pays me any attention.

† In what could these attacks possibly consist? In the interests of sociopathology I provide a sample:

[. . .] a freak [. . .] wields so much power over Vance's son and wife, who, in turn, totally control every communication of the aging author with the outside world. [. . .] Jack Vance always despised social climbing [. . .] Certain members of his family are very different. Vanity, ease of life, and being accepted in higher social circles are their primary concerns. [The freak] promised them [all these beautiful things.] Why? to influence the great works of art that, otherwise, would be very dangerous to the Church.

I lack the mental flexibility of these people. The picture of Norma Vance maintaining a superannuated adleplate husband under house-arrest for the sake of grubbing lucre and swanking with the glitterati, is too much for me.

If anything revolts me, personally, in the glut of attacks which my person has been honored to receive over the last few years, it being used as a slander against Norma.

Norma Vance is not only crucial to her husband's work, to which she has devoted her life, she is crucial to the VIE. The project honors her with a special mention on the credit page of each volume. If a tiny blot of ink on a few hundred books is the 'social advancement' after which she is alleged to hunger, all I can say is that this is one tiny blot of ink that has been earned, and well earned, by an heroic life of work, devotion and self-sacrifice.



AN OPEN LETTER TO STEVE SHERMAN

Last winter a revolting review of *Lurulu*, by Alexander Feht, was posted on the Vance-BBS. It was discussed, with various degrees of sympathy, and comments were made about me. Being banned by Dan Gunter from the Vance-BBS I was unable to react. You, however, were good enough to post a letter from me. Shortly thereafter Dan Gunter locked the thread, preventing further discussion. On December 14, 2004, Dan Gunter offered the following explanation:

I disagree intensely with [the conduct of Paul Rhoads] in regard to Feht . . . and I will not condone reigniting this fire . . . Feht is part of the dead past . . . This board is a better place without the Feht-Rhoads wars . . . I banned Paul from this board because he continued to post at Bruce's board in a manner that I thought unwise at best.

This statement, apart from revealing a peculiar attitude, is inaccurate. Dan Gunter banned the 'Editor in Chief' of the VIE from the Vance-BBS for the same reason Feht went off like a firecracker in the summer of 2002, because he could not abide straight talk, could not take 'no' for an answer, and could not live and let live. As long as the Vance-BBS worked no particular harm I was content to allow those responsible to go about their business without squawk from me. In the present circumstances I have no qualms about publicizing the following e-mail exchange‡, which occurred about a year ago:

DAN GUNTER 1:

You know, Paul, if you would stop posting on the Gaeian Reach, it would die. You may enjoy what you're doing, but you're not improving Jack Vance's reputation by engaging in petty battles with the likes of Feht et al. Instead, you're simply continuing to stir the stink pot around the VIE. Try this: Don't post on the Gaeian Reach for three months. Don't take potshots at Feht, Bruce Y, or Martin Read in "Cosmopolis" or on the Jack Vance Message Board. Just let them stew. I'm guessing that the Gaeian Reach will be completely moribund at the end of that time.

DAN GUNTER 2:

Paul, your posts on Bruce Y's board have done nothing except stir up that hornet's nest and make you look ridiculous. I am appalled. And,

‡ I have received complaint that this is contrary to *netiquette*. But if that stricture is to be a refuge for scoundrelry include me out. I was content to let Dan Gunter ban me from his VanceBBS, for any reason he liked, and to insult me in the process, so long as no public harm was being done. But what he has since chosen to 'tollerante' or promote on his site changes the situation.

unfortunately, your conduct there does reflect badly on the VIE. Had you listened to advice of people who supported you, you would not have made the series of foolish moves that you have made on that board.

PAUL RHOADS 1:

You have not been particularly helpful in the past and you are not being helpful now. Your analysis of the situation is flawed. The number of people who agree with you is utterly besides the point. As for the GR; stop visiting it if it upsets you.

. . . you remind me a little bit of Alexander Felt: a self appointed defender of Jack Vance.

DAN GUNTER 3:

YOUR analysis of the situation is flawed. You have no idea whether or not I've been helpful, for you simply haven't taken any of my advice. Along with David Pierce, I took steps that removed silly comments regarding you and the VIE from the Jack Vance Message Board.

You think that wasn't helpful? Well, thanks for the gratitude. Your comparison of me to Alex Felt is both stupid and offensive. Only a fool would have made such a statement to someone who has tried to help you. You personally can no longer count on any support from me. Congratulations on burning yet another bridge.

PAUL RHOADS 2:

"Your analysis of the situation is flawed."

Naturally. I'm always wrong about everything. Luckily the VIE keeps lumbering along in spite of me! Please stop talking to Yergil. And please stop watchdogging me.

DAN GUNTER 4:

You know, Paul, you asked for my assistance back in late May/early June. You wanted me to help you; I tried to help you, but you have had your head too far up your ass to listen. So you don't want my advice: fine. Go it alone. I'm not going to take any steps to protect you. If someone wants to criticize you on the Jack Vance Message Board, I'll let them do it. You are once more fair game, bub. Congratulations. By the way, don't tell me not to talk to Yurgil. What an arrogant fool you are. I'll talk to Bruce or anyone else I like. Don't bother to write again. I have written you off. You combine arrogance and stupidity in a particularly unlovely manner. You have one equal in that respect: your twin, Alex Felt.

DAN GUNTER 5:

By the way: I have blocked your messages to me, and I have banned you from the Jack Vance Message Board. Enjoy your friends on the Gaeon Reach.

It is not a problem for Dan Gunter that Felt's insinuatingly slanderous review of *Lurulu* (a disgusting document, including personal attacks upon the Vance family, and upon aspects of which I comment in COSMOPOLIS 57) be posted on the Vance-BBS. It is also not a problem for Dan Gunter when a person of probity, such as yourself, comments on it and mentions me. But it is beyond the pale that I should respond to you, and that you should make my response public—no matter how serious my thoughts and courteous my tone. This means that for Dan Gunter Felt is not a problem; it is the 'Felt-Rhoads wars' which are a problem. To put this another way: Felt is ok were it not for Rhoads.

If, one wonders, Dan Gunter has the right (as apparently he

feels he does) to demand the silence and direct the conduct of the 'Editor-in-Chief of the VIE' in the name of the reputation of Jack Vance and for the good of the VIE project, in which Dan Gunter has no roll, what is the logic of tolerance for, or even engagement in gratuitous ad hominem slanders of this Editor-in-Chief on the foremost Vance site on the net? If indeed, as Dan Gunter claims, this person's actions have an effect on the reputation of Jack Vance, would not public denigration of him likewise have a negative effect on that reputation? If Dan Gunter wants me to be silent about Felt, why, by the same logic, is he not silent about me?

Dan Gunter is apparently unconcerned with such self-contradiction, but I remain concerned about things published in public places near the VIE. Folks who think along the lines traced above should not be amazed at my pretension that such matters are of significance to the VIE project—though my reasoning is totally different.

As for Felt being 'part of the dead past', it might interest Dan Gunter to know that, among other things, Felt has not ceased to militate against the VIE off the internet—for instance in telephone calls to the Vances—and Dan can hardly deny that Felt's nasty views recently appeared on his Vance-BBS. It is a funny way of being dead.



BACKGROUND TO THE ABOVE

Anyone really interested may consult the actual postings on the Vance-BBS—though if you want my advice: don't bother. That the above, at least, may be clear, here are extracts from Steve's remarks to which I felt a reply was wanted.

Deploring the flame wars which have animated the VIE cyber-space, Steve wrote:

Rhoads and Felt were in agreement on virtually all issues — the greatness of Vance, the debasedness of postmodern art — until Rhoads made an (admittedly dense, but harmless) remark associating Felt's atheism with Lenin's. Felt blew his top and everything that has happened since is the fallout from that one disagreement. He exchanged e-mails with me and Mike Berro suggesting that Paul's religious views disqualified him from his role in the VIE. Mike and I both cited Paul's central — indeed indispensable — role in making the VIE happen. Evidently Felt's antipathy to religion — which I admit parallels Vance's (and to some extent mine, even if I continue to sing with the Christians), though by no means with such intensity — trumps all other considerations, including his professed devotion to the work of Jack Vance.

When all is said and done, the difference between Felt and Vance is that the former turns difference of opinion into hatred. Vance, great artist that he is, presents poisoners, cynics, trivial tour guides and a myriad others, as the fully human individuals that they are. Nowhere in Vance is there black-and-white characterization of human beings. Even the villains have their own first-person awareness of themselves. Felt is clearly incapable of such a differentiated view of humanity.

Steve posted my response on the Vance-BBS:

My famous remark to Felt about his religious beliefs being the same as Lenin's was neither 'dense' nor 'harmless'. After buttering me up with flattery and sending me a cd of his music, Felt was subjecting me to

daily proselytism to adopt his religion — ironic in a person who then accused me of doing such a thing. My reactions were laconic, bland and good humored. At one point, in lapidary and amicable response to his on-going polemics, I noted that his strident anti-Leninism might seem to be contradicted by the aggressive anti-Christianism he shared with that man. The remark, being the trigger that set him off, can't be called 'harmless' — but who knew? Fehrt turned out to be an intellectual suicide bomber. If I had not responded to him he would have continued writing to you, and others, and militating as he did. What on earth suggests he might have done otherwise? Certainly not the months of non-reaction we later tried. That trigger remark, however, was not 'dense'; it fingered a contradiction in Fehrt's thinking he would do well to consider. Making such points is what discussion is about. Otherwise one might as well say nothing. Am I to be held responsible, or even characterized as to any degree foolish, for treating Fehrt in a friendly way? Even assuming we had suspected he was a sociopath — which no one, except perhaps Bob Lacovara, did — what could we have done at that time? Later we, or those in a position to do so, might have made swift and severe moves, but that never happened either.

As for Fehrt and me being 'in agreement on virtually all issues', I beg to differ! While I am not the type of person who runs away from an idea wringing my hands because it was endorsed by a monster — Hitler liked Beethoven, so do I; Stalin enjoyed vodka, and, on occasion, so do I — but Fehrt's ideas, those I can make sense of, are never to my taste. I do not believe in salvation though eugenics. I do not believe in the diabolization or degradation of classes or segments of society based on their opinions. As for Fehrt's ideas about what he calls 'modernity', they are incoherent. In fact his thinking, with its emphasis on genetic superiority, has a neo-Nazi taint, and seems a form of thought even more 'modern' than Communism — despite the mind-numbing drumbeat of nazi-'conservative' equivalence. In contradiction to Fehrt's desire that a master race of genetically evolved aristocrats rule the world and rid it of noisome sub-species (such as Christians) though a process of infertility, he is also an Ayn Randian libertarian exulting the individual against society. I don't like any of this.

Artistically Fehrt seems to be a simple reactionary, which I am also not. I was brought up upon, and continue to appreciate, the great moderns: Mondrian, Klee, Miro, Kandinski, Brancusi, Calder — to speak only of painting and sculpture. If, as an artist myself, I do not emulate these particular men at this point in time, that does not mean I never did, or that I fail to comprehend or heed their message. So called 'contemporary art', of course, is not an issue. Failing to be art in any meaningful sense of the word, it is not an artistic issue — except to the extent that a blaring and deafening discourse would have us believe that it is a progressive form which has replaced 'traditional art', just as the dictatorship of the proletariat is supposed — was supposed — to replace 'bourgeois society'.

I would also like to comment on your comparison of Fehrt with Vance. Your remark might leave an unwary reader with the impression that you think they agree fundamentally with differences concerning only tone or attitude. It is true that there is a great difference of tone between Vance and Fehrt, the former being broad minded and benevolent, the latter narrow and malignant. But their fundamental views are just as different! I find not one single hint in Vance of desire for rule by a genetically superior aristocracy, or celebration of the individual at the expense of society. *Gyl Tarvok* restores the possibility of ordinary and honest folk to live normal and productive lives in a human society, against the equivalent of a genetic aristocracy.

As for religion, those who, like Fehrt, enjoy flattering their own anti-Christian attitude by claiming Vance as a militant in their cause, would, in my opinion, do better elsewhere. Vance's anti-Christianism, what there is of it, will advance no jihads that are not already running on other fuels, or simply coasting downhill.

Since I am banned on the Vance-BBS, Steve, perhaps thinking that anything directly connected with me might, per *netiquette*, be out-of-bounds, justified posting the above letter in a little preface:

. . . as I have characterized [PAUL'S] views. He should have the opportunity to characterize them himself. I stand by 'dense'. As Vance makes clear in PARAPSYCHE, an atheist is not inevitably also a Communist.

Eager to reassure Steve regarding my opinion of his opinion, I made this reply, which never reached the Vance-BBS:

If my remark to Fehrt was 'dense' it was certainly not because I think communism equals atheism! Fehrt himself is proof of this; he is a non-communist atheist. But I know lots and lots and lots of folks like that. You for example. My point to Fehrt was, a) that his anti-Christianism resembled Lenin's in its militantism and that, b) even if Communism does not equal anti-Christianism, there are parallels which ought to be carefully considered by any thoughtful non-Communist anti-Christian such as Fehrt presented himself — i.e. neither an atheist as such nor a non-militant anti-Christian such as, possibly, yourself or Jack Vance. The most obvious of these links is materialism. Some anti-Christians might be Buddhists or Mohammedans, in which case they are not materialists. But Communists, atheists and non-religious anti-Christians are necessarily materialists. All Communists are materialist, but being a materialist is not evil! Now; if you are a Communist you have a metaphysical basis for your beliefs (however sadly inadequate), but if you are a non-Communist atheist your metaphysics are reduced to the most threadbare materialism possible. You believe neither in historical progress nor a benevolent creator God. You are plunged into the most abject Positivism and become, if you are honest and coherent, incapable of justifying any choice — though condemned to continue to make them, which is the universal human fate. You may, of course, drift along quietly, on condition you are not militating against anyone.

But of non-Communist anti-Christians (of the militant stripe) one may fairly wonder upon what basis they press, let alone make, any truth-claims. The truth-claims made by Fehrt turn out to look very much like Lenin's truth-claims, namely that there are inferior classes of humans which block progress and ought to be eliminated, and that history and science are working together to perfect man and society according to a recipe supposedly concocted by 'rationality'. This is certainly anti-Christian, and it may even be 'anti-Communist' by some small degree, though one has the impression that Fehrt's anti-Christianism overwhelms his anti-Communism, or that his Ayn Randian tendency, mixed with his anti-Christian virulence, makes him resemble strangely a Marxist.

This point may be wrong, or it may be 'dense' in the sense of 'obscure', 'complex' or 'difficult', but it is not, I say, 'dense' in the sense of being blithely foolish or ill-considered. Pointing it out to Fehrt at the time occurred to me as an act of charity. It still seems like one.



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