

EXTANT

May 2005

#3

CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| NOTES ON THE AMERICAN LITERARY TRADITION..... | 1 |
| PERSONA, CULTURE, AND THE FLIGHT OF THE WINGED BEING... | 2 |
| RECYCLING THE TRASH..... | 12 |
| CAN PNUME SWIM?..... | 17 |



NOTES ON THE AMERICAN LITERARY TRADITION

There are many famous American writers. Hawthorne and Faulkner spring to mind. Without feminist prod one may as easily mention Harriet Beecher Stowe and Edith Wharton. There is Edgar Allan Poe, Jack London and James Fenimore Cooper. There are celebrated contemporary writers such as Saul Bellow* and Philip Roth.

I pretend to neither authority nor omniscience in this area but I would be surprised if some who might justly claim both did not agree that the rich American literary tradition boasts three super-stars: Herman Melville, Mark Twain and Henry James. I would venture, further, that many who have had the good fortune to discover Jack Vance would, like myself, unhesitatingly add his name to this list.

Quite apart from any literary justification, properly speaking, of this list there are intriguing geographical and biographical convergences which suggest the working of some mysterious national force. These lead me to suggest that the peculiarly American tradition of greatness I propose, begins with Richard Henry Dana (1815 - 1882).

Dana wrote a single book which, until standards of all sorts were abolished in the 1970s, was considered an essential American classic: *Two Years Before the Mast*. It is not a novel but the account of his adventures as common sailor. For reasons of health—poor eyesight in fact, which, since Homer, is the classical literary affliction—he put by his studies at Harvard and took a post as seaman aboard the *Pilgrim*, a small merchant vessel bound for California. The voyage took place from 1834 to 1836 when California was a mostly uninhabited province of Mexico. We do not fail to note many the vancian echoes in Dana's masterpiece. A purely literary one is exemplified in this passage:

A sailor has a peculiar cut to his clothes, and a way of wearing them which a green hand can never get. The trousers, tight round the hips, and thence hanging long and loose round the feet, a superabundance of checked shirt, a low-crowned, well varnished black hat, worn on the back of the head, with half a fathom of black ribbon hanging over the

left eye, and a peculiar tie to the black silk neckerchief, with sundry other minutiae, are signs, the want of which betray the beginner, at once.

Herman Melville, born 4 years after Dana, was a New Yorker. Like Dana he too went to sea. His first voyage, at the age of 20, was aboard the whaler *Achushnet** as cabin boy. Melville's stories tell of the Atlantic but even more of the Pacific, and the Polynesian islands. He died in 1891.

Mark Twain was born in 1835, while Dana was collecting hides in California. Twain was a Mississippi river man in love from boyhood with the steam driven paddle-wheel river-boats. He eventually became a river-boat pilot himself. His greatest masterpieces are set on the Mississippi but he also traveled in Europe and set some of his books there.

Henry James was born, about ten years after Twain (1843), in Boston, and died the year Jack Vance was born: 1916. James traveled much in Europe, particularly England, France and Italy, at that time still considered the center and origin of the modern civilized world, and his work is so much a tension between America and Europe that the Atlantic ocean, though never more than a minor setting, seems always present.

For anyone familiar with the outlines of Vance's biography I need not draw the obvious parallels. Vance was born in California, raised on the Sacramento river and worked many years as a seaman. An assiduous traveler he made several voyages to Europe and even round the world. Like Melville some of his books are set at sea (*The Dark Ocean, The Deadly Isles, Blue World*) or involve sailing or sea travel (*The Domains of Koryphon, The Palace of Love, The Houses of Iszm*). As in the stories of Mark Twain a great river, or an estuary, is sometimes the setting (*The Magnificent Showboats of the Lower Vissel River, Lune XXIII South, Big Planet, Trullion, Emphyrio*) or recount the adventures of children (*Lyonesse, The Flesh Mask*). Like Henry James cultural tensions are often an essential theme (*Gold and Iron, Marune*).

A case could also be made for the properly literary affinities which I believe also link these writers. While none of them indulge in the excesses of a Faulkner, they are all 'literary' writers; not only do they conceive their prose poetically, never neglecting the music of language, they are adventurous in their vocabulary. Where Melville and James are unrelentingly high-minded Twain affects a certain American vulgar buffoonery, hints of which also appear in Vance. Like Twain and Vance, James is also a great comic, but Vance is also high-minded in his way. Melville is a master of atmosphere, a torch Vance takes up with éclat.



* Qualified as 'amiable hack', on page 38 of COSMOPOLIS #61, by Jim Lee.

* An old Massachusetts area Indian name.

PERSONA, CULTURE
AND THE
FLIGHT OF THE WINGED BEING

In Vance's earliest stories his two most basic themes are already strongly marked. These may be roughly labelled: The Problem of the Mask and The Quest for Life. There is a close relation between them and, as Vance works them out, they are his way into the deepest possible artistic commentary on the Modernist situation.

WHAT IS MODERNISM?

Before discussing Vance's relation to the Modernist situation we must come to grips with this slippery ism.

Modernism is difficult to discern because we live in it, but the first point to get clear is that, despite its name, there is nothing new about it. Its essence is a universal and eternal human attitude and its traces may therefore be found, for example, in Greek and Roman authors. In *The Republic* Plato's character Thrasymachus is a spokesman for this attitude. He takes the famous cynical position that there is no such thing as good and bad, that only power counts and only pleasure is real. Xenophon's *Heiro*, where the tyrannical attitude—another way to define the essence of Modernism—is explored. What we call Modernism the Greeks sometimes called 'Sophism'. The Roman poet Lucretius* was a Materialist, another facet of Modernism.

The term Modernism covers several things to which no one properly descriptive name can be given. I equate it with Leftism. The essence of Leftism, I say, is elevating human desire above Reality. I use the word Reality in the non-Modernist sense, where it is equivalent to Truth. Truth, however, and thus Reality, is not possible to fully comprehend. It is too vast and complex for us. We humans are condemned to an incomplete or flawed perspective, or some degree of ignorance. When we substitute our ignorance with our will, the result is Leftism, or Modernism.

The substitution of ignorance by will, however, is too simplistic a formula. We humans are obliged, or condemned, to fill in the gaps of our understanding of Reality by speculations, which are often driven by desire, about how we want things to be, even when draped in the sober robes of empirical science. This can even be true when the resultant understanding does not appear superficially desirable, for it is not infrequent that ugliness is seductive. Also, it may be fair to equate speculation itself with desire; normally we associate desire with the pleasant, but some may lust for Truth, which may not be.

We can make a gross attempt to define aspects of Modernism by opposition to their non-Modernist opposites. For example, one might say, with a certain justice, that Modernism is Atheism versus Religion. But Modernism does not, strictly speaking, depend upon Atheism, which is active disbelief, not mere indifference to the question of the existence of God. Or one might say that Modernism is Materialism versus Transcendentalism. But, though Modernism does tend to be Materialist, it is not defined by Materialism. Vance illustrates this in *Nopalgarth*, where he shows how it is possible to be

Transcendental and Materialist at the same time. Or one might say that Modernism is the opposite of Traditionalism. But this too is incorrect because, though traditional ways tend to be tried and true, and therefore to work, or to be of proven effectiveness, they are not necessarily True or Good. Female circumcision may be a workable social institution but we do not judge it Good. An analogous case is how, in recent centuries, Christianity has been sometimes regarded, and promoted, as socially useful even if not true. Napoleon had this view when he resuscitated Christianity after the violently anti-Christian French Revolution.

Another way to define Modernism by its opposite would be to point out that the bastion of anti-Modernism is Christianity, in general, and the Catholic Church in particular. This is not because the Catholic Church is the guardian of Tradition but because it is the guardian of Truth. This statement should be understood in the technical sense, a sense mandated by the Modernist situation; whether or not the Truth which the Catholic Church pretends to guard is actually true is a separate question not directly relevant to the point I am trying to make. The Catholic Church conceives of itself not as the guardian of an ossified dogma but of the living Truth. But Modernism is profoundly* Relativist, or anti-Truth. Attachment to the idea, rather than the reality, of eternal and transcendental Truth is the watershed.

To develop this point; if Reality is that Jesus Christ is the son of God who died on the cross to liberate us from sin then Christianity is indeed the guardian of Truth. If this story is a myth then the Catholic Church, in particular, is merely a guardian of a tradition. But, even in the latter case, it remains the core of anti-Modernism because, apart from the philosophy of Leo Strauss which is not yet widely diffused, it is still the major countervailing force. The Church could not, then, properly be called the defender of Truth, but it could be called the defender of the Idea of Truth.

The Straussian analysis of Modernism is summed up in his observation that, for the classics, where individual character was important, for the Moderns institutions are important. To put this another way; Modernism replaces personal virtue with social structures. An example of this shift of emphasis is the idea that criminality is motivated by economic conditions rather than personal corruption. The Modernist thinks he can legislate human virtue by changing the human condition. The anti-Modernist might grant some importance to outward conditions but he would look, ultimately, to the human heart or soul as the source of outward conditions, rather than the other way around.

For the purposes of this exposition we may say that there are three basic forms of Modernism: Machiavellianism, Marxism and Heideggerianism. It is somewhat useful to include Nietzsche's approach, but this may be seen as a proto-form of Heideggerianism. A few words on each:

* It is profoundly Relativist, as opposed to absolutely Relativist, because absolute Relativism is, again technically speaking, absurd. This is succinctly explicated as follows: Relativism is a Truth-claim to the effect that there is no Truth. This is illogical and self-contradictory, therefore absurd, thus meaningless. The term Relativism is best understood to designate a cynical if half-baked attitude toward the idea of Truth. Essentially it is a tactic against anti-Modernism, or a defense of Modernism against the withering assaults of Reality.

*Lucretius was a Roman disciple of the Greek philosopher Epicurus.

MACHIAVELLIANISM

This is basic Modernism, closely related to Thrasymachus' view. The Machiavellian view is 'cynical', or dog-like, but it is different from Thrasymachus' view because of an important innovation: Machiavellianism is not simply a corrupt or tyrannical attitude, it is a social project.

For Machiavellians the good things are peace and prosperity or, to put it more brutally: tranquility and riches. To procure and defend these goods Machiavelli, without flinching or squirming, counsels and approves heinous behaviors, normally associated with mobsters or tyrants. For example, if it is necessary to kill an enemy Machiavelli recommends that his whole family, as well as all his friends, also be killed, to diminish risk of revenge, or help guarantee success. To a true Christian (as opposed to a hypocrite using religion as a cover), or even to a pious Pagan, war and poverty, the anti-values of Machiavelli, are preferable to such behavior. For a non-Machiavellian success is not the ultimate good. To put this another way: for the anti-Modernist the ends do not justify the means.

Machiavellianism is automatically Atheist, of course, but not Atheist in the proper sense since the term, as already mentioned, implies active disbelief. True Machiavellians are indifferent to the question of the existence of God. Machiavellianism is also Materialist, but it has no theoretical side. It evacuates the higher view without commentary, leaving the low view triumphant. God and the Transcendental are ignored. To some people the Machiavellian perspective seems self evident, and Machiavelli is vaunted by his disciples as a champion of what seems to be universal and evident values: peace and prosperity. They are universal and evident, but only in the limited sense indicated above. For anti-Modernists there are horrors which are too high a price to pay even for peace and prosperity because, for example, saving our souls is even more important.

Machiavellianism, as I say, is related but not equivalent to classical Tyranny. A Tyrant has great freedom of action. As a result he may indulge his personal pleasures, however grotesque, but also he lives in fear for his life from all other would-be tyrants, his victims who seek revenge, or ordinary people who seek freedom from his oppression. Tyranny is therefore inherently unstable and weak. But Machiavelli admired the tyrant's freedom of action, a powerful tool against chance; his innovation is the use of ruthless tyrannical tactics not in favor of one man's personal power but for of the common good, the welfare of a democratic republic—which is the kind of government Machiavelli favored because, founded on the collective strength of all the citizens, he believed it was the most dynamic, and thus the richest and most powerful and secure. In this he was correct.

Machiavellism, or something like it, is sometimes called 'realism', where Reality is assumed to contain no God or Natural Law.

MARXISM

Marxism springs from the Modern philosophies which follow Machiavelli and therefore contains an active strain

of self-conscious anti-Christianism. Marxism grafts the idea of Progress onto Machiavellianism and thus reinforces and modifies the Machiavellian low view with a theoretical foundation whereby everything is deliberately understood in Materialistic, or economic, terms. With Progress comes class warfare, an inevitable historical evolution from Aristocratic to Bourgeois to Proletarian society.* Favoring the common good, like Machiavelli, Marx includes in his dogma the post-Christian ideal of universal equality. Beware men of universal benevolence! In Christianity all men are equal before God only. For Marx universal equality means equal material wealth; a hopeless dream.

With Marxism, and its Historical Progress, comes the idea of the New Man, or Socialist Man. For Marx man is a product of his environment (rather than the environment being a product of the souls of the men who constitute it, as in the Christian view), and man is therefore infinitely moldable. So; to change the environment is to change man. By instituting the dictatorship of the Proletariat—a change in the environment—Socialist Man will emerge.

It cannot be denied that the environment, or human institutions, have importance. But, as de Tocqueville points out, good institutions can only be built on the foundation of citizens of good character. For this reason de Tocqueville is one of the leading anti-Modernists. Lenin, Trotsky, Bukharin and Stalin tried desperately to create the New Man. Their efforts were not merely a failure, they were a criminal disaster of unprecedented scope. (See footnote †, page 12.)

HEIDEGGERIANISM

This form of Modernism is the most difficult to comprehend, the most modern, and the one we live in. Now is the time of its greatest influence but also its decadence and the beginning of its evaporation. As Stalin was the greatest of the Marxists so Hitler was the greatest of the Heideggerians. Multi-culturalism is a degraded and distorted but successful form of Heideggerianism. Today's Left is therefore more philosophically akin to Hitler even than to Stalin.

Where Marx taught that society is generated by History Heidegger taught something much deeper; that Reality itself is generated by Culture. For Marx we are pawns of Progress. Progress can be foreseen and encouraged but it is stronger than we; this justifies murder of class enemies who stand athwart History. But for Heidegger our capacity to realize we exist is a function of our Culture. A man cannot belong to two Cultures because they contradict each other; they reduce his world view to incoherence and he cannot function:

Cugel, leaping away, could not control his right eye. The lid flew open; into his brain crashed such a wonder of exaltation that his breath caught in his throat and his heart almost stopped from astonishment. But concurrently his left eye showed the reality of Smolod, the dissonance was too wild to be tolerated; he stumbled and fell against a hut.

VIE VOLUME #15, PAGE 25.

* Progress is a post-Christian idea. With Christianity God is the lord of history. Without God something else is moving history along. Marx thought he saw historical forces at work dragging us toward the Communism. Millions of his followers agreed.

Awareness of colors, shapes, textures and sounds is sentience. Cugel's mind, stunned by the dissonance between the Overworld and normality, goes numb, approaching the non-sentience of a rock. Since such fundamental notions as Good and Evil vary totally from Culture to Culture; they have no universal or absolute reality. They are nonexistent outside Culture. If we are not anchored within a Culture we cannot be aware of, say, good, evil, beauty, ugliness, shame or admiration. Our awareness dulls, for the distinctions which makes reality decipherable fade, and we sink into an undifferentiated state where awareness itself becomes impossible; our Beingness then evaporates. Being, in the human sense of being aware of ourselves, is therefore predicated upon inculturation. When our Culture becomes decadent, when its vitality fades, the degree of Beingness it offers to us diminishes. Cultural integrity and vitality is equivalent to Being.

Is Heideggerianism true? Our sense of being may depend greatly upon Culture, more greatly than we are naturally prepared to recognize, but Reality, and the human capacity to sense, learn and adapt, still trumps Culture, just as personal virtue trumps social structures. Vance gives full reign to the Heideggerian insight while never losing sight of these deeper facts.

MULTI-CULTURALISM

The Multi-culturalists may reject the Hitlerian idea of Cultural superiority but they retain the idea of each individual locked into his Culture. They also proclaim the various Cultures equal. They argue that, because there is no universal standard, the Cultures cannot be compared. But this argument fails to do justice to Heidegger's insight. The idea of equality, and particularly of equality as something good, is a value of Western Culture; in the Heideggerian optic this value is, therefore, incommensurable with other Cultures, or not a value in other Cultures, or meaningless, or non-existent in other Cultures, and thus in the absolute, where nothing exists in any case. The other Cultures might consider themselves superior, or they might consider themselves inferior, as the Aztecs did.

Multi-culturalism is incoherent. In France, Arab and African customs, which conflict sharply with Western values, such as polygamy, forced marriages, veiling and female circumcision, are being tolerated in the name of the Heideggerian insight that no Culture can be judged because there are no universal values. The practice of Multi-culturalism is like wearing one Overworld eye-cusp. Disoriented by the jarring view of two incompatible systems we become incapable of discrimination and critical thought. Our sense of good and evil drains away. Our lives become somnambulant; we wander through a polychromatic but ghostly dream without rhyme or reason, which eventually fades to leave us in a blank nowhere.

Even though Hitler is the ultimate Heideggerian the idea of Cultural superiority as such is not essentially Heideggerian. For Heidegger there no common measure between the cultures but he does not have the goody-goody attitude of the Multi-culturalists. If a Culture dictates its own superiority, that is the way of it, in the context of that

culture, than which there is no other context. The Multi-culturalists, whose Existentialism (the name for Heidegger's philosophy) is polluted with anti-Christianism, tolerate, or disguise from themselves, the sense of superiority of the Islamo-Arab Culture, for example, for the sake of their hate of Western (Christian) Culture. Heidegger would say that the Multi-culturalist West is losing its vitality and sinking into non-being. I say the Modernists are suicidally willing to embrace their worst enemies so long as they can continue to pretend that Reality is their plaything.*

A NOTE ON NIETZSCHE

The Nietzschean form of Modernism might be called a proto, or even naive, form of Heideggerianism. It is related to another naive philosophy, Positivism, according to which Man, not God, is the Creator, or the definer of good and evil. Nietzsche's philosophy is closely related to Machiavellianism because both throw away the Ten Commandments. Taken with Thasyticus, these strands are the essence of Modernism: Man as the measure of all things. But such ur-Modernism has less influence than Marxism and Heideggerianism (or Existentialism) in which Man loses this god-like freedom and is locked into a more deterministic framework. This sense of relative human impotence accords better with our natural sense of Reality.

Christianity also appears to close man into a scheme; God has created a game which man is forced to play. But God allows man the freedom to play the game as he likes. He cannot invent good or evil but he can practice both. He cannot define what Man is but he can seek to become a different kind of man than he finds himself. Vance's world, for all the inculturation of his societies, is Christian in this sense; men are free to explore and understand life across the spectrum of experience. They can change their perspective. They are influenced, but not absolutely determined, by History and Culture. They have a freedom Marx and Heidegger would never accord, and only his villains pretend, like Nietzschean supermen, to redefine Reality and in this, with some notable exceptions, they fail.

PERSONA AND CULTURE

The word Persona is the name for the masks used in Greek theater. We use it to designate personality as mask of the inner man or, more subtly, as outer form that tends to mold the inner man. However great this molding power however, as there is a difference between an actor and the mask he wears, so there is always some tension between our outer personalities and our inner selves. This tension has always been a literary theme but for Vance it is a major theme. It appears at the very beginning, in 1944. In *T'sais* Ettar is given the face of a demon:

* Apropos, in his article of May 18: *Suicidal Tendencies in the West: Tolerance unreciprocated leaves West vulnerable*, Bruce Thornton writes: *Anyone familiar with the history of Islam and its 14-centuries-long violent jihad against the West and the Jews will not be surprised or shocked by [Islamic reaction to Newsweek's gaff]. They express perfectly the arrogant intolerance of a religion convinced it has been chosen by God to rule the world, and so is justified in using every means, whether violence or propaganda, to fulfill that divine mandate. As the final and complete revelation of the divine, Islam feels no need to respect or tolerate other religions or secular notions like "human rights," for they are all the detritus of infidel history to be swept away in the final triumph of the one true religion.*
See: <http://victorhanson.com/articles/thornton051805.html>

" . . . when I pointed out the creature than sickened me the most, by magic she gave me its face, the face I wear now."

VIE VOLUME #1, PAGE 63.

T'sais herself wears a mask, but her sort of persona, if typically vancian, is interior. She suffers a tension not between an outward appearance and an inner self; her inner-self itself is a mask for an even deeper self:

Rend, stab, bite, said her brain, but a deeper surge welled up from her flowing blood, from every cell of her body, to suffuse her with a sudden flush of pleasure.

IBID., PAGE 42.

In *Phalid's Fate*, 1946, another kind of mask, this time intertwined with a Cultural aspect, appears. Ryan Wratch's brain is implanted in the insect-like body of a Phalid, with Phalid brain segments retained to help Wratch deal with the Phalid body. For Wratch:

Nothing . . . appeared as before. The Phalid eyes and Phalid brain segment altered the semblance of everything.

VIE VOLUME #5, PAGE 9.

This alteration is extensive to a point that shocks the reader. The Phalid's appearance is as repulsive as the creature of Ettar but Wratch does not suffer like Ettar; Miss Elder was 'a gorgeous creature with lustrous dark hair, large tender eyes, a body supple as a weeping willow' but, to Wratch's 200 Phalid eyes she appeared:

. . . a pallid biped with a face like a deep-sea globefish, a complexion no more pleasant than a slab of raw liver.

And when he looked at himself in a mirror — ah! What an infinitely superior creature, said his eyes — tall, stately, graceful! What a glossy carapace, what supple arm tentacles! A noble countenance, with keen horizon-scanning eyes, an alert beak, and what symmetrical black whisker-sponges! Almost regal in appearance.

And Ryan Wratch grew somewhat uneasy to find how completely he was forced to accept the Phalid's version of outward events . . .

IBID., PAGE 10.

This is Heideggerian. Wratch, implanted in the somatic Culture of the Phalid mind, can only have Phalid reactions. His normal reactions are effaced. They exist as empty concepts, inoperative memories. Miss Elder's beauty is a function of human Culture. If this seems like a grotesque sci-fi cultural speculation rather than a profound statement, read *The Flesh Mask*, 1948, where an even more startling effect of this type occurs. The young protagonist, Robert Struve, has an accident which deforms his face in a way reminiscent of Ettar:

His mouth was drawn over to the side; his left cheek was like a dish of brains. Above the mouth was a low gristly ridge, with black holes for nostrils. The eyebrows had been burnt off, and were growing back in odd angles.

VIE VOLUME #10, PAGE 12.

Robert wears a bandage on his face until, in an cruel incident, it is torn off. He punishes his tormentors and rides away:

A block down the street Robert remembered his bandage. He laughed. His face was naked, and it was as if his whole body were naked. He felt immensely powerful. His face was responsible. It gave him a stern and terrible force.

He never wore the bandage again.

IBID., PAGE 16.

Robert Struve not only adopts the Cultural perspective of his body, he eagerly embraces its values as a consolation. Wratch is enchanted by mere colors; Struve is drunk with power. He is now an outsider, a monster. The world hates him and consequently normal values are not his values; hate cuts him off from the Cultural norms for Struve may hate return. On the basis of legitimate hate he becomes morally free to act from hate. He is has learned the tyrannical attitude.

Vance tries the idea again in 1949. In *Château d'If* rather than a new face the hero is thrust into a whole new body. But this time the protagonist, Roland Mario, has an Ettar-like or antagonistic relationship to the repellent persona:

Though living in Ebery's body, the feel of his clothes, his intimate equipment was profoundly disturbing. He could not bring himself to use Ebery's razor or toothbrush. Attending to the needs of Ebery's body was most exquisitely distasteful.

VIE VOLUME #5, PAGE 96.

The 'Phalid Cultural effect', however, remains a menace:

" . . . You will gradually change, become like the Ralston Ebery before the change. And the same with Roland Mario's body. The total change will be determined by the environment against heredity ratio in your characters."

Mario smiled. "I want to get out of this body soon. What I see of Ebery I don't like."

VIE VOLUME #5, PAGE 90.

Mario's consciousness would eventually succumb to Ebery's somatic Culture.

In *The Ten Books*, 1949, Vance fits a persona on a whole society and reverses the Ettar-formula of the beautiful interior disguised by an ugly exterior. The faith of the men of the Culture of the ten books, with their extravagantly beatific exaggerations, prompts them to create a society of ideal achievement. They are thus cut-off from sordid but real aspects of human existence, inner ugliness, inner truth, the expression of which they realize they lack and need.

In 1953 Vance mingles Persona and Culture in a new and more complex way. In *The Houses of Iszm* Farr is conflicted between his own somewhat irrational impulses and the hypnotic suggestion imposed by the Thord. Farr's personality is rooted in his Culture; he is a man with a 'highly developed social conscience'. His indignation that the Iszic houses not be made available to the poor on Earth is both an aspect of his personality and of his Cultural conditioning (see VIE volume #8, page 7). The Thord's suggestion that he must go to Penche is an impulsion alien to Farr's personality and Culture, but no matter; willy nilly the Thord injunction has become

an aspect of his reality. Though he fights the impulse, as he loses consciousness after the attack in the bar-room he can't help gurgling: "Call Penche . . . Call K. Penche!" (Ibid., page 93). If the implanted impulsions are none-the-less not what we would call a true aspect of Farr's personality, aspects of Farr's own personae are also somewhat artificial, or conditioned, or Cultural, as the remarks of Zhde Patasz (Ibid., page 28-31) or Omon Bozhd (Ibid., page 34-35) suggest. Farr's inner-self is lost in a maze of personae.

In *The Miracle Workers*, 1957, hypnosis is used to impose demon Personae on the warriors, an idea that reappears in *Ports of Call**. *The Moon Moth*, 1960, introduces a new twist; not only are the masks of Sirene beautiful, like the Culture of the men of the ten books, they are intended not to dissimulate the inner man but to reveal it. For the Sirenese the natural face is a lie, an Ettar-like imposition. Behind their masks the Sirenese consider themselves without conflict: the outer is now the true reflection of the inner. Of course the Sirenese are kidding themselves; despite their precautions their Culture of strakh, which pretends to measure the inner man and thereby adjust his outer appearance, their system is no more reliable than the hope that a woman would be as good as she is beautiful.

The Sirenese can use any mask they like, as long as they can 'make it stick' (volume #17, page 214), and Thissell defeats Angmark by exploiting this tension. The Sirenese, like everyone else, don't like to admit the shameful difference between their inner and outer selves. Their masks are frauds, impositions, tactics. Their poses, whether of humble modesty or superb truculence, come to the same thing; a defence of vulnerable inner selves. Without a mask Thissell is dishonored by Sirenese Cultural norms, but his logic forces the Sirenese to admit that willingness to go maskless is proof of courage they lack, or that their mask-wearing is an act of cowardice. Indeed; who cares to have their inner-selves exposed?

The examples go on and on. The lords of Ambroy (*Emphyrio*) unknowingly play the part of human aristocrats until the new Emphyrio reveals to them their true selves. The Anome is a weak man in a Persona of absolute power—who also has an inner Persona, his inner-soul, an asutra, as powerful as his outer Persona seems. Padero/Efraim (*Marune*) develops a new personality as an amnesiac, but is pulled back into his old Persona as he discovers his original identity. Kokor Hekkus maintains multiple Personae in the real world, while Howard Alan Treesong's amazing band of paladin inner-Personae has its precursor in Norbert, Bad Ronald's Atrantian alter-ego.

What about the Cultural aspect?

In *The World-Thinker*, 1944, Laoome generates Cultures in a Darwinian-Heideggerian tour-de-force. These are Personae worn not by some human protagonist but by Reality itself. Laoome dresses up Reality in different forms and Cultures, and sets them in motion like mechanical puppets.

In *Golden Girl*, 1945, the heroine is wrenched from her Culture. The privation leads to metaphorical Heideggerian non-existence; she kills herself in despair at her loss.

In *Gold and Iron* (VIE volume #7) humanity must come to grips with its Cultural inferiority to the Lekthwan.

Schaine Madduc, in *Domains of Koryphon*, after being indoctrinated in Leftist attitudes off planet, discovers the values that make her an unashamed Land-Baroness of Uaia. She abandons one Cultural Persona for another.

* see COSMOPOLIS #57, 'How to Praise Lurulu', particularly pages 23-23.

In *Phalid's Fate* the Cultural implications of the 'father forest'—which Wratch forces to surrender, thus defeating the Phalids—is fully revealed in *Star King*. Not only is the biological mechanism of the forest on Teehalt's planet essentially the same but Teehalt's forest, and the whole planet, has a Cultural relation to humanity like the relation of the father forest to the Phalids:

*The world was too beautiful to leave; far too beautiful to remain upon. It worked on something deep inside him, aroused a queer tumult which he could not understand. There was a constant force from somewhere to run from the ship, to discard his clothes, his weapons, to merge, to envelop and become enveloped, to immolate himself in an ecstasy of identification with beauty and grandeur. . . **

VIE VOLUME #22, PAGE 17.

As with Laoome's worlds, on Teehalt's planet Reality itself wears a Persona, and therefore can change its mask:

This world was no longer innocent; it had known evil. A sense of tarnish lay across the panorama.

IBID., PAGE 212.

In his Phalid Persona Wratch is subject to a three way Cultural tension more familiar from the Demon Prince stories:

There had been so much that Ryan Wratch had missed, although conversely, he had experienced much that would never be given to more careful Earth-bound men: the solemnity of plunging through endless black void alone, the thrill of landfall on a strange planet, the companionship of his two brothers in the rude pleasures of space outposts, the fascination of sighting an uncharted planet out on the border between known and unknown, a world which might show him some new and wondrous beauty or a rich civilization, rare new metal or jewels, ruins of a cosmic antiquity.

Indeed there was a wonderful fascination to space exploration and free-lance trading, and Wratch knew that even if he were given a new lease on life, never again could he reconcile himself to a quiet existence on Earth.

And yet Wratch thought of the things life had withheld from him. The color, the brilliant gaiety of Earth's cosmopolite cities during this most spectacular and prosperous period in world history; the music, the television, the spectacles, the resort towns, almost feverish in their pleasures; the society of civilized women, with their laughter, beauty, youth.

Angrily, Wratch thrust these thoughts from his mind. He was a—how had he put it?—a mechanism with a certain function to perform before it could permit itself to be destroyed.

VIE VOLUME #5, PAGE 26.

The call of nature, the call of society, the call of duty; Gersen, Reith, Etwane, to mention only them, all feel these pulls.

Finally, we might mention *Night Lamp*:

At Thanet on the world Gallingale, the quest for status was the dominant social force. Social levels, or 'ledges', were exactly defined, and

* Compare volume #5, page 37: "Brother, little brother, are you abnormal of mind?" said the voice in gentle, surprised tones. "You burn the arms that fold you to eternity? Did not Bza bring you to the Father?"

distinguished by the social clubs which occupied and gave character to that particular ledge.

VIE VOLUME #42, PAGE 22.

This is a nice example of Vance's integration of Persona and Culture. Skirlet's Clam Muffin Persona, of which she is proud, is also a weight upon her inner-self. It both exalts and oppresses her. Jaro is more free inwardly, thanks to his nimp status, but inevitably frustrated since it cuts him off from outer things he can't help desiring. Jaro is in a further tension: the call in his soul from Garlet. This is not an outer mask but an inner Persona, a Culture imposed upon him, but also part of him, like the Thord hypnosis of Farr, like the values of our own Culture upon us.

This 'antic-overview' is far from exhaustive. These themes may be found throughout Vance's work in endlessly varying guise.

THE FLIGHT OF THE WINGED BEING

As we traverse the river of human time in our wonder boats. . .

VIE VOLUME 26, PAGE 141.

The Persona/Culture theme is related to the Quest of the Winged Being, which is Vance's fundamental theme. The quest is the search for the Fruit of the Tree of Life. Its most frequent and natural metaphor is travel. This takes many forms, including microcosmic adventures in imaginary worlds and private infinities. More prosaically there are: wanderings from planet to planet (*Son of the Tree, Space Opera, Ecce and Old Earth*), travel over a planet (*Big Planet, Dark Ocean, Domains of Koryphon*), from province to province (*The Man in the Cage, The Magnificent Showboats, Maske:Thaery, The Anome, The Book of Dreams*). Sometimes Vance evokes the various forms of infinity (*Dead Ahead, Rumpfuddle*). Spatial contrast give flavor to time; the passing of the hours of our lives is underlined by a procession of spatial frames.

. . . now the countryside had altered. Yonder, across the river was Lelander; here was Maunish; nothing was quite the same.

VIE VOLUME #26, PAGE 147.

And Vance fits time itself with a Persona:

. . . the great colossus Time, loomed ever taller over his mental landscape. The years were advancing; there was no turning them back.

VIE VOLUME #43, PAGE 272.

The world is infinite but life in finite; we are brief sparks awash in an vast ocean. Even were we immortal we may only be at one place at a time; lacking omnipresence Infinity is closed even to immortals. We may intimate immortality and omnipresence; we never possess them. Do we possess even our small and brief heres and nows? They fleet away. We are like Myron Tany; brief wanderers in infinity grasping at bright straws which elude us. Our human ambitions and goals are tinsel dust. Is our journey a meaningless meander? What is the Fruit of the Tree of Life?

At the heart of Vance's work is the somber planet Kyril. In

Son of the Tree it is the druid planet of the great World Tree. In *Ports of Call* it is the planet of the pilgrimage and the Holy Mountain, the volcano of annihilation. Wingo's vicarious pilgrimage recalls the power of Treesong's interior saga:

Mewness:

There are long roads yet to be traveled and many an inn where I would take refuge. . .

Rais:

Farewell, Immir. The time has come. . .

Hohenger:

I must be away, to far places and new battles.

VIE VOLUME #26, PAGE 293.

Would Wingo throw himself into the volcano, affirming Nothingness, or draw back, clinging to the voyage, the mysterious pilgrimage? It may be a *grand round*, from dust to dust, but not only is it rich and colorful, it is pregnant with what might, somewhat preciously, be called numinous immanence.

Numinous immanence has a mundane side. As Myron travels from planet to planet his Persona/Culture changes. His inner self, his needs and desires, change. Vance elaborates this evolutions with subtlety, a touch so light that, alas, some readers seem to miss it—though this lightness is his most exquisite stylistic delight. We are like Myron; we evolve. We are not quite the same from one day to the next. We are not the same here as there, in the presence of this or that person. This is the voyage; it is outer and inner.

The Tree of Life is space and time, the Personas and Cultures, the costumes in which Laome dresses the world. And the Fruit?

"From the forest comes the Fruit of Life," said the voice. "He who eats it is impregnated with a second life, presently brings to the light of the green sun another of the Children."

VIE VOLUME #5, PAGE 41.

In Christian terms we must die to be reborn to true life, the life of the spirit. Our old self, materialist, egoist, greedy, lustful, frenetically hunting illusory pleasures, is replaced by the new self, with a truer vision of his place in the frame of infinity.

The lightest of all Vance's light touches is on the last page of the last book (volume #43, page 569) when Myron thinks 'dismal thoughts'. There is no specific preparation for this event. The whole of *Ports of Call* is its preparation. Logically it should make no sense; Myron is no brooder. He has been through many dismal episodes with no such reaction. But the passage feels natural. Myron has changed. He has accumulated guilt. He began a simple and fresh soul but, inevitably, he has become complex. He is filling up with tensions for which there is no resolution. Lurulu is a state of grace one can only dream of. Impossible to be on all planets at all times satisfying all desires, answering all calls of duty, living the infinite richness of existence. Our narrow lives are dogged with an ever-growing catalogue of failures, regrets, empty triumphs. Does this mean that the 'voyage itself' is the goal of the voyage, the fruit of the tree of Life? No. Life, whatever it is, must in any case be lived.

The pilgrimage must be made, one way or another, like it or not. Choosing, accepting the pilgrimage, choosing life, making it one's own—in Christian terms being reborn—this is the fruit. The awakened life is the life that is grasped, accepted, deliberately lived, even if, like Solzhenitsyn's Ivan Denisovich, we are trapped in a maze of horror, because the essence of life is joy, the sheer joy of existence itself.

Wingo asks Cuireg why he made the pilgrimage:

I felt ever more aware of details and textures and nuances. One morning knowledge came to me in a burst of insight. I saw a black lump of rock thrusting up between bushes at the side of the road. I stopped short and said: 'Rock, I see you well enough, but you cannot see me. Why? Because I am sentient, but you are not! Why should this be? Simple enough! I am animate, and you are an inert lump.'

VIE VOLUME #43, PAGE 548.

Wingo then: *began to comprehend Cuireg's perception of the pilgrimage as a metaphor for an event of far larger significance.* Wingo defines this to himself as: *an assertion of vitality.*

Not the voyage, which we are already on, but the sense of voyaging; not mere existence, which is thrust upon us, but awareness of that existence; the sense of being alive.

There is nothing Modernist about this but it is Existentialist, or about existence, and is therefore not without relation to Heidegger.

I preach augmented existence; Vogel wanted me to approve his solipsistic ruthlessness.

VIE VOLUME #24, PAGE 130.

Heidegger joined the Nazi party because he believed that Persona, or Culture, *is* existence. Better to be a Nazi than *not to be*. For Vance, to the contrary, Culture is a mask which reality must wear, for there is no such thing as disembodied Reality just as there is no such thing as disembodied or non-incarnated people. Reality's costumes may hide its essence but our inner-selves are also Personas. Our existence, existence itself, expresses itself in and through all of them. This fundamental tension is where the flint-spark of life is struck.

Voyaging can be the a mere accumulation of postcard views or mood impressions but the process of Life, the experience of contrasts, tensions, change, help us, sometimes force us, to the essential experience. Of course we grow, but growth implies something natural, healthy, inevitable. Contrasts which might stimulate the awakened life are not necessarily natural or healthy. We may sink into sin, become deformed by mania or obsession, become dull, passive, inert, discouraged. There are rocky shoals in the sea of life, oppressive Personas and Cultures waiting in ambush. The voyage is dangerous.

NOTES ON A COMPARATIVE VIEW

How do other great authors handle such large matters, which, studying Vance, can come to seem 'the theme of themes'? The most vancian author in this way may be Alexander Solzhenitsyn. In *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* he dramatizes a miserable creature, a zek of the gulag, living a day of intense, even ecstatic, beingness. Stalin, the NKVD, the capos, the absurd work, the impossible cold; nothing can stop

the flow of his life force. Man and his perverse crimes is nothing. God and his joyous gift of life is everything.

Where Vance is subtle, soft, slow, quiet, lightly ironic, Solzhenitsyn is brash, giddy, intense, rapid, with a sarcasm so intense it can fail to register on the visible spectrum—the soviet authorities failed to detect it, for example, and the book was published in Russia.

Ivan Denisovich's inner life and the life of the gulag are incompatible Cultures. Ivan might be shot by an hysterical guard for showing up late to lunch, but he can't tear himself from the joy of his work—building a wall intended for evil uses, as a slave of tyrants, in such cold it is unbuildable. Despite every outer influence Ivan is charged with a mysterious vitality. He is inspired, apparently insanelly, with joyful vitality.

Solzhenitsyn is a self-consciously Christian writer in the dark heart of Modernism. Like Vance his basic theme is vitality (or how vitality expresses itself in the Modernist maze) but for both writers this theme seems a natural rather than a theoretical impulse. In the *Gulag Archipelago* Solzhenitsyn recounts how he was sucked into the stalinist maelstrom, imprisoned in a matrix of incomprehensible evil generated by reified Socialism. Perhaps sensitivity to the contrast between this surreal situation and his natural inner self drove him to his theme. But what motivated Vance to vitality, or consciousness of it, as basic theme?

If there is a biographical explanation it might be found in his school days. Vance the boy wore thick glasses. His ears stuck out. He was an 'egg-head' and was put forward a grade, to find himself at even greater disadvantage with the girls. His over-powered imagination was no help:

The thought of supple young bodies and the fascinating things which might be accomplished . . .

VIE VOLUME #12, PAGE 113.

I have had heard from Vance himself accounts of certain youthful follies. A story in the public domain is how he wooed his wife. Having noted and targeted her, he showed up at her door with a bag of doughnuts, unknown and unannounced, and asked if she would make coffee. How many men would do such a thing? It is the act of a bold, even extravagant, tactician. Speaking for myself, such a procedure would have been unimaginable.

I doubt I am alone when I confess the almost infinite degree to which females intimidated me, or how I suffered a double pang in consequence: hunger for female contact and shame at my cowardice. But, though inwardly sweating, at some level I was serene. My time, it seemed to me, must eventually come. I was impatient but not impatient enough for 'gallant enterprise'.

Vance has sometimes described a tactic of seduction which the sort of coward I was might think workable:

". . . patience is involved. You sit off by yourself, pretending disinterest, and watching the sky or a bird, as if your mind was fixed on something spiritual, and they can't stand it. Pretty soon they come walking past, twitching just a bit, and finally they ask your advice about something, or wonder if they can buy you a drink. After that, it is simply a matter of docking the boat.

VIE VOLUME 41, PAGE 175.

But I was never brave enough, or cold-blooded enough, to hunt by any method, only warm-blooded enough to lose what strength and mental coherence I possessed under the calligynic* assault. In spite of all I had a certain, limited, success. Perhaps this accounted for my underlying confidence.

At school, which is to say among adolescents, the girls have the upper hand. Afterwords there is a period of relative equality, which fades in favor of the boys. Women then find themselves in the Man's World. Some, keeping their powder dry and consolidating their positions, negotiate this fundamental down-turn in their prospects with success. But the former boys are now free to sate their hungers, though some, the 'good and honest' ones, choose the 'fools game' of fidelity, of keeping a promise they were tricked into, respecting the compromised soul now revealed behind the fading mask of the sorceresses who bewitched and dominated their weak young hearts. They are the salt of the earth.

Vance presents a caricature of this situation in *Araminta Station*. Monomantics, or the ultimate in feminist egalitarianism, has failed, leaving women back where they started. Zaa's imprisonment of Glawen reveals her impotence as clearly as her threat reveals her frustration:

". . . Until I am satisfied with your services, and until my primitive female rage is soothed, you shall never leave. . ."

VIE VOLUME # 39, PAGE 622.

In his stories Vance recounts many episodes of adolescent erotic frustration. They suggest he personally suffered a conflict between what the psychologists call 'poor self-image' and a willful spirit which refused to accept a fatality of superficial reactions and rejection. Reckless counter-measures, it seems, led to extravagant humiliations. Graceful heroes like Glawen Clattuc calling suavely upon the Tamms, Jaro Fath biting Skirlet's ear, or Myron Tany moving with something like ease in and out of romantic adventures, is perhaps who Vance would liked to have been. Bad Ronald, Howard Hardoah or Vogle Filschner seem closer to how he actually felt.

Three stories from the nineteen forties—*T'sais*, *Phalid's Fate* and *Château d'If*—written when Vance was around 30, present a situation which may be post-facto wish-fulfillment or a salve on youthful wounds:

Foul face after face T'sais saw, and each burnt her brain until she thought she must scream and die — visages of leering eye, bulbed cheek, lunatic body, black faces of spiked nose, expressions outraging thought, writhing, hopping, crawling, the spew of the demon-lands. And one had a nose like a three-fold white worm, a mouth that was a putrefying blotch, a mottled jowl and black malformed forehead; the whole a thing of retch and horror. To this Etarr directed T'sais gaze. She saw and her muscles knotted. "There," said Etarr in a muffled voice, "there is a face twin to the one below this hood." And T'sais, staring at Etarr's black concealment, shrank back.

He chuckled weakly, bitterly...After a moment T'sais reached out and touched his arm. "Etarr."

He turned back to her. "Yes?"

"My brain is flawed. I hate all I see. I cannot control my fears.

* This word may be found in volume #34, page 10: *Rhialto, whose expertise in the field of calligynics had earned him his cognomen, found her beautiful but severe. . .*

Nevertheless that which underlies my brain — my blood, my body, my spirit — that which is me loves you, the you underneath the mask."

VIE VOLUME #1, PAGE 69.

"No! I'm going to get a space-boat and live out in space the rest of my life. I don't need anyone.

"I'll come too."

"You can't. What of your reputation?"

"Oh, I think I'm safe with you", and she laughed. "Anyway I don't care."

"Legally," wrote Wratch with sardonic emphasis, "I'm a woman. I've eaten the Fruit of Life. Eventually this body will become a mother. I hope I don't develop a maternal instinct."

She stood up. She was crying.

"Don't! Don't talk like that! It's horrible — what they've done to you!" She wiped her eyes furiously with her hand.

"All right!" she said angrily. "I'm crazy. I'm insane. Well, it's leap year. I think you're the most wonderful man I know. I love you. I don't care what you look like. I love what makes you tick, inside. So you've got me. . ."

VIE VOLUME #5, PAGE 45.

"Now we shall go to the stars. You and I, if you'll take me. What do I care if your body is gross? Your brain is you."

IBID., PAGE 131.

True love, true seduction, is a power of the soul. The soul, not the body, is the seat of:

. . . a secret force . . . exerting irresistible thrust. It partakes of all gaiety, of the striding gallantry of the beautiful Tattenbarth nymphs, of the soul's conquest over infinity.

VIE VOLUME 26, PAGE 213.

From the soul emanates enchantment, eternal beauty outshining tinsel dust no matter how alluring its mortal shape.

Jack Vance was not thrust into the gulag and forced to wear the soviet mind. He was imprisoned in his body but his mind was fitted with wings by the Muse. The microcosm of the human individual reiterates the macrocosm of the human Cultures. The drama of history and philosophy is encapsulated in each life. The contrast between the fallen world and the fundamental insight of heavenly bliss is a human constant.

Existence as a fundamental literary theme would seem to be a Heideggerian phenomenon of the second half of the 20th century. It is not for nothing that the philosophy of our time is called Existentialism.

Great writers of the proceeding period had Culture as their fundamental theme. For Henry James it was the tension between Europe and America. For Thomas Hardy it was the tension between mutating social classes. In Hardy's *Woodlanders* the tension is generated by the evolving place of women in rural society. If Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* is superficially the age old story of the aristocratic rogue and the innocent milk maid (Richardson's *Pamela* or *Clarissa*) here the social, or Cultural, tension is what counts most. In *Jude the Obscure* the friction is the divide between the artisan and the educated classes, or how social structures and human thirsts, or the tension between the outer world and our inner life — or the

outer and the inner Culture—drives and hampers, leading us into a maze at the center of which is triumph or tragedy, or at least a funerary monument to hope and desire. In this regard there is a relation between Hardy's Jude and Vance's Myron Tany; if Vance is more elliptical and optimistic, *Ports of Call* also recounts the descent into this maze. Myron's life, like Jude's, begins in hope and continues in an ever greater complexity of loss, renunciation and confrontation with sin which cuts him off from certain life-paths.

One might label Jane Austen's fundamental theme 'the gifts of the Holy Spirit'—particularly Strength and Wisdom. Two of her stories (*Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma*) are nice accounts of how small deviations from the path of these virtues endanger happiness. No other writer does anything so finely sculpted. Austen deals in nuanced contrasts between Christian virtue—understood in the most generous and robust sense—and small sins, not of pride exactly, perhaps 'self-satisfaction' is the term. *Mansfield Park* is in the same register but Fanny's fault, unlike Emma's, is not too much Wisdom (so to speak) but too little Strength—though she is a heroine of Strength, as Emma is a heroine of Wisdom.

Vance's work is also finely sculpted but not in this register. There, if Austen's work might be compared to a detailed urban scene by Carpaccio, Vance's work might be compared to a diffuse Turner sunset. Vance's 'fine articulations' are broad and atmospheric.

Excitement in painting comes from the artist's power to dramatize form and space. Abstract painting can never have this excitement because its 'forms' are abstract or unreal. Dealing likewise in real things, where Jane Austen sculpts virtue Vance sculpts the feeling of life.

POSCRIPTUM ON MODERNISM

AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Prior to the French Revolution, Modernism, or Leftism, expressed itself only in its ur-forms; cynicism, atheism, classical tyranny and selfish or perverse willfulness of individuals. The preparation for coalescence into something greater begins, one might say, with Louis XIV and his ministers, Colbert and Vauban. Louis XIV's rule is called 'absolutist' and the work of Colbert and Vauban was toward centralization, or regularization and rationalization of what was then a disparate territory—17th century France included populations speaking several different languages. Though Louis worked great changes upon France his 'absolutism', compared to the degree of control exercised by ordinary 21st century states, might better be called 'untrammeled freedom'.* The centralizing tendency, however, was crucial, as well as the scale of the ambition. The same period saw the French philosopher Descartes promulgate the most rationalist philosophy ever conceived. The Romans ruled the world but their rule, whatever else it may have been, was in harmony with Natural Law; they took man at face value and

*I do not mean to suggest that individuals were 'freer' in 17th century France than today, though in some ways they were—most people lived prosperous but localized lives, by the standards of the age. I am referring to the degree of control that the central authority had over individual citizens. It was, in many respects, much less in the 17th century than today. Local authorities were sometimes oppressive and controlling. The literature and other traces of the time testify to a period of dynamism and pride. The French Revolution pursued centralization and rationalization.

accepted the world as they found it. They were notoriously 'pragmatic'. The 17th century saw the re-emergence of the possibility to rule the world, but this time Man planned to do more than rule; he planned to transform.

The bloody class warfare and anti-Christian passions unleashed by the French Revolution should not disguise from us their rationalist foundation. Ever since the Revolution, in which thousands of aristocrats were murdered and thousands of churches burned, France has struggled to come to terms with the problem of disparate riches (or 'social inequality') and religion. The chronicle of this struggle is a fascinating story of Rationalism's effort to englobe forces incompatible with itself. The story is one of violence, expulsion and repression alternating with experiments of accommodation, often motivated by lassitude in the face of persistent realities.*

I do not mean to suggest that Rationalism is inherently violent or even anti-religious. When it becomes a political force, however, it becomes a tool, or avenue of expression, for the spectrum of Modernist or rational-passions. It may be noted that Catholicism remained a strong force in France during the post Revolutionary period, as well as that Catholic action upon society, and aspects of its doctrine, is not necessarily anti-Rationalist. Some episodes of French state persecution of the Church may be spectacular but they spring from the same impulse as certain un-dramatic attempts to fit the Church into a rational scheme, such as a famous law from 1901 which sought to control religion by redefining it as a state authorized 'association', subject to certain controls.

The Russian Revolution, one might say, was a more successful version of the French Revolution. For, by 1917, 128 years after the latter, the theoretical underpinnings of Modernism had been solidified and the Modernist spirit had polluted minds world-wide. The result, for half the population of the planet, was a century of darkness and tyranny unknown since the collapse of the Roman Empire. The paroxysm of this horror is crystallized for us in the persons Hitler and Stalin, men whose extravagant criminality continues to exert a mesmerizing fascination.

... a new set of standards comes into force. The perceptive malefactor recognizes his evil and knows full well the meaning of his acts. In order to quiet his qualms he retreats into a state of solipsism, and commits flagrant evil from sheer hysteria, and for his victims it appears as if the world has gone mad.

VIE VOLUME #25, PAGE 56.

However spectacular a star Hitler has become, and even if he is not generally recognized as the ultimate Leftist superstar, the Russian Revolution is the crucial event in the

* Such struggles as those between secular and religious authorities or between religions, existed prior to 1789 but one does not have the sense of a philosophical or existential conflict. For example, the struggle between Protestants and Catholics in the 16th century seems to have been understood, by the actors, as a matter of heresy and temporal power, or to be about who was the more or less accurate on given points of theology, or science, and who would rule. Post 1889, resolution of such questions is elevated to the point where it seems to be a matter of defining Reality itself. This, it seems to me, is an important aspect of the spectacular vehemence of Modern debate and the unprecedented murderousness of the consequent wars.

The pre-Modern era was certainly not innocent of all Existentially motivated conflict. One thinks of Catharism or the Islamic doctrine of Jihad, to which the Inquisition and the Crusades, respectively, were pragmatic reactions. Within Christendom, however, prior to the out-break of Modernity, there were no existential wars of aggression.

historical progress of Modernism. Several consistently ignored facts should be kept in mind. The Russian revolution began more like the American revolution, as a broad-based 'liberal' uprising in favor of individual freedom and democracy. It was aimed at the Tsarist regime in the context of World War I. Under the Tsars Russia had been enjoying a period of development unprecedented in history. 19th century Russia was not only an industrial giant, it was a literary and musical giant. On the other hand, though serfdom had been legally abolished by the Tsar in 1861, much of the economy remained based on large scale oppression, and an aristocratic class still enjoyed feudalistic privileges. The Communists took advantage of the revolutionary disorder to seize power and resuscitate the policies of the French Revolution:

*Terror is but prompt, severe, inflexible Justice. It is therefore an aspect of Virtue. It is less a particular principle than an aspect of a general principle of Democracy, applied to the pressing needs of the country.**

ROBESPIERRE, SPEECH OF 5 FEBRUARY, 1794.

The needs in question are elimination of enemies of the revolution, and destruction of their infrastructure. For the Communists, as for the French Revolutionaries, this meant murdering rich people and priests, and looting and torching their palaces and churches. Not only internal enemies of the revolution are targeted, but unaggressive neighbors who, failing to share the revolutionary values, become an existential menace. As the French sought to export their revolution to Europe, so the Red army, created and commanded by Trotsky under the aegis of Lenin, began to build the soviet empire, sweeping south and east to conquer peoples only now, a century later, emerging into the light of liberty.

Kaiser Wilhelm, the leader of Germany in World War I, financed Lenin's take-over of the Russian revolution. This was a tactic to relieve the German military as it fought on two fronts. The favor was returned 20 years later when Stalin built Hitler's tanks and plains, and trained his armies, as part of the Soviet Communist plot to take over the world. Stalin planned to profit from Hitler's victories in Western Europe, which would leave Western armies in ruins. Thanks to the Hitler-Stalin pact Hitler would have a free hand to reduce the West, and his back would be turned when Stalin chose to strike. As it turned out Hitler struck first, holding back the Red army long enough for the allies to garrison the West.

Whether this controversial reading of the history of World War II is correct† or not, it comes to the same thing: at the end of the war Stalin ruled as much of Europe as possible, in a stand-off with the allied armies. The Soviets never abandoned their hegemonic ambitions and continued to take bites out of Europe, Asia and the rest of the world whenever they could. Whatever their actual intended tactics, their strategy of world domination cannot be denied.

On a philosophical level World War II is the battle of the forces of Modernism (Nazism/Fascism and Communism) against the forces of anti-Modernism. That the Modernists fought

* *'La terreur n'est autre chose que la justice prompte, sévère, inflexible ; elle est donc une émanation de la vertu ; elle est moins un principe particulier, qu'une conséquence du principe général de la démocratie, appliqué aux plus pressants besoins de la patrie.'*

† In a recent TV documentary, speaking of pre-war Soviet policy, Russian witnesses of the period take for granted that there was to be a war between Russia and Germany.

among themselves is the reason the anti-Modernists could save part of the West.

To see this point with full clarity the philosophical link between Stalin and Hitler, or Marx and Heidegger, or the internal structure of Modernism, must be understood. It is articulated at both a superficial and a fundamental level.

The fundamental Modernist dynamic is dehumanization. The Communist dehumanize the rich—in a logic of class warfare in the context of the 'dialectic of history' or ineluctable historical progress from a society dominated by the rich to post-Christian egalitarianism. The Nazis dehumanize non-Aryan peoples—in a logic of Cultural superiority founded on the Heideggerian insight of the primal importance of Culture, or its existential ineluctability.

Modernism is the child of proud Rationalism. True Reality leaves Man futile and confused. To dominate Reality, to raise himself to a god-like level, Man must reduce Reality to manageable proportions. To dominate Reality its proportions must become consonant with the measure of himself, or the human mind. The mind does not love or feel; it makes order. Love, to say nothing of the rest of wild and woolly Reality, does not fit nicely into the mind's order. The order of the mind requires neat explanations. Rationalism therefore tends toward Materialism, which offers the hope of a universal mathematical model of reality. The mind can, or hopes it can, encompass otherwise incomprehensible human motivation in economic (mathematical) and instinctual (chemical) terms. Like square pegs fitting into square holes these simplified schemes, however impoverished, unrealistic or even phantasmagoric, conform to a syllogistic logic satisfactory to the mind. The mind cannot encompass, for example, sentimental attachment to things which appear useless or ugly. Such attachments it must attempt to explain as pathologies. Thus Rationalism gravitates toward eugenics and euthanasia, or extermination of the sub-standard, deformed or worn-out. Modernism is heartless. For the same reason Modernist art, abstraction, minimalism or conceptualism in particular, is cold. One might say that Modernism is the mind un-chained from the heart and even the body. As we see in the Nazi athletic aesthetic, or the Western consumer aesthetic of perfect bodies, even the human body can succumb to the Rationalist passion.

In this regard I would point out that the classical Greek aesthetic has nothing to do with the Modernism. The Greek aesthetic was ideal, not rational. It sought perfection in an understanding of the physical that did not exclude the sentimental or the spiritual, but sought to harmonize them. Greek sculpture, furthermore, displays a total variety of human body types. There are indeed many Greek statues of youthful and athletic figures, but fat old drunken Selinus is also a favored subject. The beauty of mature men and women, bodies massive or slack, none are excluded by the Greek artist, who has no cult of youth but sees beauty in everything.

Modernism idolizes youth for 2 reasons: the youth is a potential New Man, and the youthful body has maximal strength and vigor, values consonant with Rationalist accounting. What good is weakness? Weakness cannot be admired by the mind. But to the heart it can be a value, a source of spiritual strength, insight or charity. In the Bible it is written: 'my weakness in my strength'. This idea is alien to

Communism, Fascism and Materialism.

Finally, to properly understand this matter the tactical links created by the Left between Hitler and 'the right' and the Catholic Church, must be seen for what they are. First of all 'the right' is a term which will not stand examination. For example: the 'Left' is currently the 'conservative' force in many areas, such as opposition to the Bush doctrine of aggressive Democratic promotion or, opposition to 'liberal'—in the classic European sense—policy of breaking down archaic welfare state structures. Though I, personally, support these anti-conservative policies my point is not that the Left is wrong to oppose them, but that conservatism is not a political measure which defines the non-Left. Second of all, though there will always be a group of people happy to believe and promote Leftist propaganda about Pius XII and his alleged cooperation with Hitler (and thus unity of the 'extrem right' with the Church), anyone interested may easily learn the truth about this matter.* The Left has long exploited the historical accident of the Western alliance with Stalin against Hitler. It is my belief that the election of Benedict XVI to the papal throne signals the demise of this diabolical tactic, and of intellectual terrorism in general.

More difficult to untangle are such things as diabolization of the 'radical Christian right', with its background of alleged horrors of Church behavior in history, as exemplified by such popular favorites as the Spanish Inquisition, the Crusades or the St. Bartholomew massacre. This propaganda is based on distortions, ignorance and silences. The most important silence is this: no force has been more viciously and successfully murderous and oppressive than Modernism, or the very Rationalism, Atheism and Materialism which Modernist advocates oppose to Christianity. The millions upon millions of assassinations committed in the 20th century so dwarf any such crimes of the past, that the poor Past, looking up from its dirty work, must contemplate our Present with stupefied astonishment. I do not say this to disqualify pre-Modern or anti-Modern guilt. Men are men, and as such they will occasionally misbehave. But the Church has never indulged in Modernist auto-flattery, or the idea that man is good. *Qui voudra faire l'ange, fera la bête.** Instead it has constantly warned man of his sinful nature, his tendency to rapine, larceny, murder. It created a system of confessionals designed to help men confront their crimes, to confess their evil acts, and even evil hopes. But the Church itself is only a collection of men prone to sin. Christianity itself may be a fairy story, and the Church may be a bad thing, but the Leftist critique of the Church as a force of 'rightist oppression' is absurd. What infuriates the Left cannot be 'the right', since 'the right' fails to exist.† It is also not oppression which troubles the Left for, obviously, oppression, to say nothing of murder, rape and larceny, does not bother it at all; the Left has happily tolerated unprecedented quantities of it in its Modernist allies during the 20th century. What infuriates the Left is resistance to its hopeless crusade to rationalize the world.



* No more need be mentioned than a single fact: Pius XII was honored by Israel as one of the greatest Jew-saving champions of the War.

† Who would make angels will make beasts. See VIE volume #27, page 18: ". . . if I were the Faceless Man, I would abolish fear and hardship, and you would never work at the tannery." Eathre stroked his head. "Yes, dear Mur, I know. You would force men to be kind and good and cause a great disaster. . ."

‡ like equally mythological 'Capitalism'.

Old souls will forgive my vanity as, once again, I bring forward in EXTANT material generated by the defacto 'Paul Rhoads message board'. I do not pretend it is elevating or even consistently entertaining; deftly excerpted and annotated, however, even to those not directly concerned, it offers an antic perspective on the human beast.*

Followers of the amazing internet career of Alexander Feht learn, perhaps with gratification, that though an irreducible apostle of the great J.S. Bach he is not unfamiliar or universally contemptuous of lesser artists. Feht's doctrine which holds that only persons of pure-bred and unimpeachable morals, DNA hard-wired into their souls, are capable of artistic greatness, is a nice counterpoint to these revelations, provoking comic entanglements in his always pungent style. Among Feht's favorites we find:

A song ascribed to Guns n' Roses ("Sweet Child of Mine" — amazingly complex composition there and, probably, the best guitar cadenza in rock music).

One song ascribed to Elton John ("Candle in the Wind") — I include this one despite the fact that Sir Elton is one of the most repulsive personalities on the music market; I am sure he didn't write this song.

Most of the other stuff I've heard so far doesn't even qualify as "music" and, in my not so humble opinion, is destined for oblivion.

The uncompromising Martin Read's musical taste also offers an interesting contrast with our expectations of his, in his own words, 'above average intelligence and considerable education':

I find everything after Bach in the "classical" area pretty tasteless. Can't stand all the "Romantic" trash — way overblown. I . . . consider Dylan to be my favourite modern songwriter (quite like his squeaky-raspy voice also).

A master of indirection, note how Martin informs us that he only 'considers' Dylan to be his favorite modern songwriter; how are we to know if he really is? Do we care?

Perhaps this succulent ambiguity provoked Feht to offer a few musical pointers, or perhaps he simply wished to indulge in a bit of navel gazing:

Romantic music can be as powerful as rock if performed correctly, and much more complex at that . . . I must admit, though, that after coming to America I, too, have become less interested in Romantic music. . . our response is shaped by our environment, and "I" today am certainly not "I" who came to the US in 1986. Who am "I"?

Who indeed? And what is the meaning of 'is'? Martin then offered some navel gazing of his own:

I have to admit to a strange split in my tastes . . . I only really like very clean and mathematical compositions . . . In vocally based music, however, the reverse is true. I really crave emotional intensity, such as is found in the "broken voice" of the really great Flamenco singers. It is very peculiar I must admit.

Fascinating. Feht, however, preferred to discuss his own peculiarities and perplexities:

* I encourage no one to visit this flame-war zone. The address, however, as a matter of record, is: <http://publ17ezboard.com/bthegaeareach>.

Before knowing Jack Vance, I would have said that Ska and Zydeco (yes, I listened to several samples) compare to Beethoven and Schumann as a bright wallpaper with rhythmically repeating balloons and flowers would compare to Rembrandt and Kaspar Friedrich. Now, having listened to what Jack prefers as "music" (which isn't very far from that clanking early New Orleans racket) I am completely at loss. Apparently, there is no way to construct a reliable trend reflecting a relation between intellect and musical tastes. Alas.

So it goes; Reality famously fails to conform to our preferences, which can annoy folks who feel that everything ought to be comprehensible to their minds, or to fit the world into a Rationalist mold.

Bad Ronald then chimed in with some personal theories of his own, which end up—surprise!—endorsing rock and roll:

There is a proper place for wallpaper and there is a proper place for paintings by the masters, as I am sure you will agree. Covering your walls with the work of Rembrandt would be very distracting. But more to the point, one must learn to appreciate subtle things. The greatest works of art often happen when the artist is working within a very restrictive set of constraints. One idea behind twelve-tone music was for the composer to use everything the scale has to offer, ostensibly the entire possible range of expression, but the actual result was seldom very interesting. A cleverly crafted pop song that restricts itself to only using two chords can be so much more sophisticated and rewarding.

Such is subtlety. Feht, however, sees a flaw:

While true, your logic seems to be lacking a certain important element. Granted, there is a proper place for everything. What makes Rembrandt, though, more important than any wallpaper? What makes Beethoven's sonata more important than most of the thousands of "intricate" two-chord musical self-expressions mass-produced by the modern commercial musicians?

It is fine to proclaim freedom of expression and other basic libertarian principles, and I agree with these principles. I will be the last person on Earth to try to silence somebody just because I don't like his views or his way of expression (unless, as in the case of Paul Rhoads in "Comsomopolis", such views are expressed in the forum explicitly dedicated to a different person or purpose).

But to define the hierarchic difference in cultural importance (to weigh the moral=evolutionary survival value) between various ways of expression, art skills, and cultures is much more difficult and no less important.

During the last several decades to attempt such a definition of hierarchic difference has been largely verboten: the perpetrator is invariably subjected to endless frivolous attacks and accusations. However, every one of us, even a welfarist multiculturalist gay Trotskyite from San Francisco, knows in his heart that such a difference exists.*

The time has come to openly, if cautiously, discuss the undeniable reality of inequality in cultures, styles, and tastes, without being called a Taliban or a Nazi from the onset.

To resume Feht's ideas:

- a) A hierarchy of cultures exist.
- b) It is a function of Darwinian evolutionary processes.
- c) These evolutionary processes lead not merely to greater survival potential but to higher moral states, which are linked: higher morality *is* the survival value. But what morality is it?

*Alexander, here, is making delicate reference to the host of the 'Paul Rhoads posting board': Bruce Yurgil.

The stage is now set for a clash between the multiculturalists and, to coin an oxymoron, the 'Fehtian DNA-Traditionalists'. Bad Ronald takes up the gauntlet:

I find this a strange and biased comparison. Most of everything, including "classical" music, is crap, naturally. If one feels compelled to compare musical genres, which I am not sure is meaningful, surely each genre should be represented by its finest works?

A fine sally. Feht deftly parries :

Isn't the best of Beethoven's sonatas, then, more meaningful and important than the finest of all wallpapers?

This would have been rhetorically effective if Feht had not appended a massive postscriptum. Note how Feht's Darwinism underlies all his thinking:

There is no bias in saying that Western civilisation is more important, more advanced, and more beneficial to the human kind than any other known human culture. With all its fallacies and failures taken into account.

On the contrary, it is a very dangerous, potentially disastrous bias to proclaim the "equality" or the "incomparability" of cultures, as is prescribed by the multiculturalists. This uninformed reasoning ultimately leads to destruction of civilisation.

Beethoven and Bach are among the highest manifestations of the Western civilisation, the bearers of some of its best ideas and of the level of complexity that requires a significant development of the brain to appreciate. In other words, Western civilisation would be incomplete without Bach and Beethoven.

Rock/pop music and most of the 20th century art are much lesser manifestations of the same civilisation — it [Western civilisation] could exist and, in fact, will exist as if these manifestations would have never taken place.

In my opinion, the duty of a modern man is to define a rational system of moral and cultural values based on our best scientific knowledge, to free humanity from the intellectual slavery of religion and irrational beliefs, and to move toward a society without coercion. But to deny the qualitative differences between individuals, groups, peoples, and cultures is to deny the scientific truth and, therefore, to return to the realm and rule of the irrational.

So: Western civilization collapses without appreciation of Bach and etc. But this is a pleonasm because 'Western civilization' *is* Bach and etc. For Feht, however, Western civilization is not what counts; it is merely a by-product of evolution of the species, of our genetic cerebral-moral development. Western Civilization's cultural (or racial, or class), superiority, to say nothing of its content, is nothing but a tag marking the evolutionary superiority of its adherents. As we evolve, Bach, inevitably, will be left behind in the trash heap of history, along with the cave paintings, as we march bravely forward toward our ever more evolved state. Western Civilization is not a substance in itself, a moral, aesthetic, political and social ideal, but like the slime-trail of a slug, the mere by-product of a process: evolution.

Given his Heideggerianism one need not be amazed that Feht complains of being called a nazi. 'Bad Ronald', however, does not stoop so low:

While I think you are right that it is possible to construct some kind of objective measure of the merits of various types of cultural expression, I suspect your instincts mislead you about what such a ranking is likely to look like. For instance, figurative art, including that of Rembrandt, would probably end up rather low on any such list, simply by virtue of its being figurative rather than pure.

Here Bad Ronald is recycling a notion from the 1920s influenced, as is Feht, by evolutionary theory and Dialectical Materialism, otherwise known as Progressive Thinking or, in vancian terms: Peeferism. According to these doctrines everthing, including painting, necessarily progresses toward a more perfect form or expression. A century ago this was assumed, by Peefers, to be for painting what they called Abstraction, whereby the alleged superficial aspect (representation) was stripped away to leave sheer image construction of pure color and form, or the essence. But Abstract painting has been mostly abandoned in the past 30 years. This means, either, that Art is slipping back into a primitive state, and thus evolution is not inevitable, or that Bad Ronald and his Peefer mentors are wrong that abstraction is essence. Feht, though also a Evolutionary Progressive, uses a rigidly Darwinian standard—grafted onto some patient explanations of the obvious—to different effect, which Bad Ronald might qualify as reactionary:

Do you mean "abstract" art? If so, I would definitely disagree. Powerful emotional states and complex thoughts are most readily conveyed by landscapes, "still life," portraits, and other forms of "figurative art." The ability of abstract art to do the same is questionable, to put it mildly. An abstract painting is always a Rorschach test to some degree. Individual expression, imprinting of individuality on countless generations, afforded by the "figurative art," is immeasurably more valuable.

(By "value" I always mean the resulting long-term survival value for the species. There are no other "values." There may be different human species, however.)

Through the fog of quotation marks looms Feht's Darwinism. The expressiveness of art has no importance in itself; it is a mere measure of our evolutionary progress, and thus our superiority. Constitutionally indifferent to such important implications Bad Ronald clings to his archaic Peeferism:

I am not necessarily talking about what you or I would enjoy the most, but rather what represents the most important intellectual achievements. . . . Early human societies only had representational art; as human culture has developed art has moved away from pictures and into dealing with ideas.

In response Feht offers a panoptic disquisition on the problem of Culture and Art, clearing away with a bold sweep of a hairy arm theoretical underbrush baffling to lesser mortals:

The earliest, primitive human societies had mostly the abstract, ornamental or highly symbolic art. Even if primitive artists attempted to be representative, their creations were highly symbolic, schematic, and impersonal. (Islam is still at it.) Perception and skill necessary for individual expression through representative art have developed only in Europe, three times: first time during the "Cro-Magnon" cave painting

period, thousands of years BC, of which we know almost nothing, then during the Greek/Roman era, just before the coming of the Christian dark ages, and, finally, during and after the Renaissance, when Christianity began to lose ground (now, for all purposes related to art, European religion is dead). Return of the abstract symbolism in the 20th century wasn't a development, it was a degradation; in a way, we returned to the primitive self-expression of the pre-Cro-Magnon cavemen.

But if the degradation of Art coincides with the death of Christianity, does this not mean that anti-Christianity leads to the degradation of Art?

The idea that Christianity was responsible for the decadence and consequent fall of Rome, which plunged Europe into the dark ages, is not original to Feht. It was launched at the time, and the first chapter of Augustine's contemporary book, *The City of God*, is dedicated to its contradiction. Though men like Gibbon, prior to Feht, have attempted to refute Augustine, his famous defence remains operative. Also the Renaissance cannot be called a period when Christianity lost ground. There has always been anti-Christian activism, before the conversion of Constantine and ever since, including during the middle ages. The great Modernist thrust does germ in the 16th century, but does not touch more than a minority elite before the end of the 18th century. The real retreat of Christianity in Europe does not begin until the late 19th century. The current sorry state of European Christianity is more than compensated on the world stage by its vigor in Africa, Latin America and Asia. The great period of Renaissance art, understood in its largest sense, may be said to run from Cimabue in the 13th century, to Renoir who died in the 20th. This cannot be made to coincide with any death of Christianity in Europe, even if it is restricted to the so called High Renaissance of the 15th to the 17th century. On the other hand, assuming one disagrees with Martin Read's Progressivism, Modernist art, beginning in the early 20th century with the Russian suprématisist or the Italian futurist movements, which are fundamentally linked to Communism and Fascism, mark the beginning of the end of the representation Feht finds crucial to higher art, and coincide with actual European de-Christianization.

Feht goes on to propose an objective measure of artistic value, a nice example of the Rationalist passion:

There is a simple and straightforward method of measuring the value of art objectively, excluding any influence imposed by the personal preferences. Benjamin's and other art historians' narcissistic confabulations notwithstanding, art is a consumable. The objective value of art (V) is the product of quantity of its consumption (q) and duration of its consumption (t): $V = qt$. According to this formula, Rembrandt, Bach, and Alexandre Dumas have tremendous values, with huge q and very long t, while, say, Andy Warhole, [sic] Shoenberg, [sic] and Ezra Pound have miserable objective values, with extremely limited q and very short t.

One may note that Jack Vance is a Pound fan; I have heard him recite Pound from memory.

Feht's formula is now examined by the 'welfarist multiculturalist gay Trotskyite':

Excuse me, but have you looked at sales figures lately? Classical music, as a whole, accounts for only 1% of music sales. Britney Spears has outsold Bach. True, no one will remember her in the future, but her Q is so much greater than your idol that her 't' doesn't matter. At least when

you use such idiotic formulations as the one you posited.

Your Eurocentrism is pathetic, and yes, racist. Your dig at Islam is ignorant as well. Islamic art and architecture is still exerting its influence centuries later. Please point out some modern composers that write in the Bach school, I'd like to hear them.

For me, the real test of what makes art 'ART', is the influence it has on other artists. Louis Armstrong, a poor African descendant of slaves changed the musical landscape forever. Scott Joplin, before Louis, was just as brilliant as Bach, inventing a completely new musical form. Fifty years later, Chuck Berry rocked the world with a brand new beat.

Andy Warhol, a minor talent himself, changed the way we even look at art, and by extension, life itself. Except, of course, to bigots who feel that their presumed superiority over the minor races is threatened with cultural degradation.

Since moving to California, I've been exposed a lot more to native American art and music. Their culture is just as valid and important as any European art. They didn't have an "idle class" that could sit around in a drawing room playing piano, or in a church playing an organ. They had to work and hunt to survive but still managed to create their own art. And they were able to do it without destroying the land and breeding dictators like you know where.

Bad Ronald also finds Feht's formula unsatisfactory:

Your measure would make the Bible the pinnacle of literature, something I think you will agree is unlikely to be the case.

I think popularity, which seems to be what your measure is really intended to capture, is not exactly the same thing as artistic merit. But even accepting this premise, your measure has a number of problems — an obvious one being that it is biased in favor of things that have been around a long time.

Feht bravely stands by his convictions, wherever they may lead—but he does not suffer fools gladly:

Objective truth is not necessarily a pleasant, uplifting thing. Bible is the most important and, yes, popular collection of words written so far, whether we like it or not. One could hope that it won't be always so.

I would appreciate intelligent argument but your opinions are so uninformed as to be considered unintelligible.

Look, Bruce, it's too late to teach you manners or to put you through the ABC of music. For the sake of your elementary education, however, I'll mention a fact or two.

Whatever is Britney Spears's sales volume, her songs are lasting in memory few weeks at their best. When you multiply two factors, one factor being negligible makes the whole product negligible, too. Dig multiplication, brother cracker? (Oh, I forgot, I am a dirty Jew with probable drop of Negroid blood in my veins; I am so damn sorry!)

It has been proven by the statistical research that Mozart has outsold any other composer or musical performer during the 20th century.

Duration of popularity is critical.

Bach has been an orphan, a pauper, and a descendant of cerfs (aren't we all?); Bach influenced, and continues to influence all composers who wrote after him, including pop/rock songwriters. Moreover, Bach invented the tempered scale-based keyboard used by all musicians black, white, green, and mottled.

Jazz, whatever its own arguable merits, would be impossible without European musical instruments and European diatonic system of harmony. Louis Armstrong, Ella Fitzgerald, and Duke Ellington would be the first to acknowledge this, they weren't idiots. Actually, Duke would tell you to go fly a kite, Bruce, as soon as he would hear you utter an irrespectable word about Johann Sebastian Bach.

American Indians and other primitive peoples never had any individual musical expression before the coming of the Europeans. Individual self-expression in art is European invention by definition.

Koran forbids representative art in principle: there is no Muslim representative art, leave alone individual self-expression in art. (Architecture is a different matter, though never forget that Taj Mahal was designed by the Italians, and Blue Mosque in Istanbul — the "jewel of Muslim architecture" — is a copy of Aghia Sophia in front of it, with minarets added).

Try to get one thing through your head: you're not doing any favor to the Blacks or the Indians by inflating their achievements, telling propaganda-laden tall tales, and making them look like a fraud. In fact, you are betraying them and insult their dignity. You are the only one who brings up the race and pays attention to the color of the skin all the time: you are the racist. Fortunately, you are not in charge of any cultural or racial affairs, Mr. Wannabe Holy Grand Inquisitor.

If you hate your Caucasian ancestry so much, go ahead and be at least consistent: never use any Western technology, science, or medicine, never drive a car, grow your food in the wild without the help of even a wheel or a plough. Then, and only then will you be free from the "cursed superiority" of the white males that feeds this world and saves it from savagery and ruin.

You exonerate Islam, the most bigoted, violent, and sexist religion in the world, just because the Muslims are the enemy of your enemy, therefore must be good. How low are you ready to creep?

Go, leave the comfy gutter of Uncle Sam's welfare haven, and join your brother-in-arms, bin Laden's spiritual teacher in Yemen, who has the guts to be consistent: he lives with the goats in the mountains and never uses any Western product or invention. He is of the opinion that his pupil is too Westernized, depraved, and soft to understand the full glory of Islam.

Will you survive even a day without the gifts of hated Western civilisation, Bruce? I doubt it. Have you ever been persecuted for your ancestry? I doubt it: otherwise, you'd be careful not to spread disinformation so thick. Do you even know, really, what hard work is? Have you ever paid half of your income, earned with sweat and blood, in taxes you proclaim so fair? Not a chance.

As soon as you leave the artificial confines of Berkeley, all your beliefs evaporate in the face of reality, and there's nothing left for you but to hate the real world for not being a free-for-all cesspool of togetherness you want it to be.

You never had any ethical problem with Paul Rhoads, you only hate him for ideological reasons. Were Rhoads a bloody communist, his vulgar self-promotion at Jack's expense would be all right with you, wouldn't it?

Whoosh! One imagines poor Bruce sprawled among the cigarette butts and empty beer cans in the vacant lot behind his trailer, having been blown through its flimsy walls by this blast from his computer screen.

How are we to understand this polyoptic ragout of politics, art criticism, indignation and invective? Feht rejects a 'free-for-all cesspool of togetherness' in favor of what he calls the real world, which for him, we have learned, is an arena of Darwinian survival dividing the world not exactly by race or culture, but by what comes to the same thing; a scale of Darwinian evolution dividing humanity into morally superior and inferior groups. This is a form of Modernism because, to say nothing of more obvious considerations, it meets the basic test: dehumanization. Feht's invective and outrage are its characteristic mark. He treats his moral sub-humans as

unworthy of life. For example; Feht has explained to me my own sub-human status, implicit in my 'vulgar self-promotion at Jack's expense'.

Were you not groping Jack Vance's heritage with your dirty fingers, were you not usurping the printed space and the publicity deserved by Jack and assigned to Jack, I wouldn't notice your existence any more than I would notice that of a cockroach in the forest. But when you imagined yourself to be worthy of fame at the expense of my favorite writer, when you profaned and defiled the very idea of conserving and popularizing his great works, you made the worst mistake of your life. Whatever you say now, whatever you do, however you try to hide, rationalize, justify, or correct what you did, there will be no peace for you: I will be your gad-fly, your scourge, punishing you until the end of your picayune days, may they end in pain, and as soon as possible!

This is about as close to a death threat as you can get on this side of legality. It is certainly a naked display of the dehumanizing impulse which is the foundation of Feht's doctrine, and the essence of any Modernist stance. If I, an outspoken anti-Modernist, am his privileged target, I am not alone. My VIE allies, even if they deplore and combat my doctrines, are treated as 'adulating worms', to be crushed under Feht's boot. One imagines the two branches of Modernism, like Dame Clytie and Smonny (metaphors of Stalin and Hitler respectively) at each other's throats.

What is Feht's problem, and, by extension, what is the Modernist, or Leftist, problem? Feht once confessed:

Discovering Jack Vance coincided with the most difficult period in my life: depression caused by medication...and, probably, midlife crisis. The works of Jack Vance helped me to survive, and acquired in my eyes certain life-giving quality, a halo, so to speak.

So far, so good, but then:

A disparity, an incompatibility between the levels of Paul Rhoads' writings and those of Jack Vance was gradually getting on my nerves, and finally became unbearable.

Feht's interpretation of Vance supports his personal ideology of evolutionary moral superiority, including condemnation of Christianity. My interpretation of Vance is different. Why is a disparity of interpretations of Vance not unproblematic for Feht? Various interpretations, of Vance or of anything else, must inevitably exist and, perhaps, whatever their ultimate value, each may offer something of worth in a wide ranging conversation.

The essence of the difference between tolerance of different views and eagerness not to converse but to suppress is the difference between anti-Modernism and Modernism. The anti-Modernist places himself face to face with a more or less unknowable Reality. His attitude may be hopeful but it must be humble. Like Socrates he knows that he does not know. This does not mean total ignorance; as Socrates points out; you can only know how little you know by knowing at least something.

The Modernist lusts to dominate Reality. Beyond a certain minor degree, this is impossible. The proper attitude toward Reality is that of the anti-Modernist for, though it may be comforting and flattering to think we are bigger than Reality—

even if that 'condemns us to the void', a fate Modernists seem to relish in various styles—in the end it does no good to deny its overwhelming and mysterious nature.

But man lusts for mastery. This lust is fundamentally natural, and even necessary in a certain way. We require a degree of mastery to function in life. And our mastery, however great, remains frustratingly limited. It is a situation more or less difficult for everyone. We can never be as powerful as we need or would like to be. The Modernist impulse therefore is profoundly personal at base. Feht, for example, found comfort in Vance, which became for him a personal playground, or salve, to his wounded soul. Vance has such importance to him—as I think art in general has for many—that he could not resist involvement with the VIE. But when the openness animating the project led to publication of interpretations not in harmony with, and therefore corrosive of, the psychological use Feht made of Vance, he could neither tear his eyes from the spectacle nor bring contradiction in a civilized manner. But like all fanatic Modernist/Leftists Feht cannot abide the dichotomy between the outer world and his inner world.

It is an immature impulse to squall and squawk when the outer world fails to conform to our desires, as when the milky breast is withdrawn too soon from sucking infants lips. The VIE fouled Feht's utopia, his private psycho-erotic toy. Adding insult to injury, the VIE, the ultimate machine to honor Jack Vance, was not made up of the morally superior beings it ought to have been, but an unwashed rabble of genetically inferior, or slug-like scurrying creatures, better off crushed under a boot.

Feht is the most prominent model of this phenomenon around the VIE. But all who seek to censor rather than converse suffer a similar immaturity. Beyond the VIE microcosm, the whole world is a battle ground for the forces of Modernism/Leftism against anti-Modernism, or what I would call normality—though human beings by nature must be touched by the temptations underlying Modernism. Hate mongers like Feht and Bad Ronald, Bruce in his arrogant campaign to change VIE management, Dan Gunter's pious relish to impose his standards of civility, or Martin Read's intellectual terrorism and whining demands for apology, all have one animating force: a conviction of moral superiority allied with a reductionist vision of Reality. From the ranks of such men come the tyrants of the ages, great and small. Those who agree, or would compromise with them, form their battalions of collaborators.



CAN PNUME SWIM?

Michael Parsons has a 'minor query'. He writes:

"In the closing paragraphs of section 3 of *The Pnume*, Zap 210 warns Adam to keep clear when he pulls it into he canal (it gives a croak of consternation), as it will tear him apart: but it cannot swim. As the pnume does not reappear I assume the account is accurate.

"But in the opening paragraphs of *Servants of the Wankh** on his voyage with Ylin Ylan a seaman points out a dark floating shape, disturbingly man-like. Anacho identifies it as a Pnume:

*"So far from land?" [. . .]what does it do out here, in mid ocean?"
Perhaps it floats by night on the surface, watching the moons swing
by. . .*

"This is in the paperback Tor published by Tom Doherty Associates as an Orb edition. Perhaps a miss-print? but not for Phung, surely? Wankh† swim but are not related to Phung, being very much out of their world."

This seems to be another of those inconsistencies which have been identified in several longer works, particularly *Durdane* where place names and baloonway routes were the subject of much discussion—as exposed in COSMOPOLIS. Perhaps when pnume want to swim in the ocean they equip themselves with a flotation device, or perhaps when Vance wrote *The Wannek* his conception of the world Tschai included pnume-inability to swim, and when he wrote *The Pnume* this had changed. Given the obvious power of *Tschai* 'generation of a consistent reality' as a measure of the power of the art of fantasy would seem to be disqualified.



CONTACT

OR

CONTRIBUTE TO

EXTANT AT:

prhoads@club-internet.fr

or:

paulrhoads@wanadoo.nl



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

Thanks to Steve Sherman and Rob Friefeld for their aid in publishing this issue of EXTANT.

* Here Michael Parson's makes archaic reference to *The Wannek*.

† Not 'Whnkh' but 'Wannek', of course.