

# EXTANT

August 2005

#6

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## VIE UP-DATE

### 2d PRINTING

As of publication of Extant #6 all 2d printing Readers volumes are ready. The Deluxe volumes are being hand-made by Sr. Biffi and will be ready by early September.

Packing is planned for the week of September 12. The following have expressed readiness to attend:

Thomas Rydebeck  
Jurriaan Kalkman  
Billy Webb  
Christa Jonkergouw  
Vince Serrano  
Bob Luckin  
Craig Thomas  
Mary Beth Jowers

### ELLERY QUEEN VOLUME

With TI participation from Rob Friefeld, Chuck King is proceeding steadily with the texts, which will soon enter Composition. We hope to print sometime this fall.

### EXTRA VIE READERS SETS

My plan for the creation of extrasets for late would-be subscribers has not worked. Some of us, however, in hopes of future profits, invested in extra sets. I am currently offering one Readers set for 3000 Euros. However, other set holders may be willing to sell for less; I would be happy to put interested parties into contact with as many extra-set holders as I am in contact with. Other extra set holders who would like to use Extant to market their sets are welcome to do so. See my contact addresses on page 15.



## BETWEEN HEAVEN AND EARTH

### ART AND REALITY

For most readers of Vance, as for most readers of any writer, whether Vance is a religious believer and his stories encourage or support religious belief, or whether he is an atheist and his stories comfort and support eradication of religion, is a non-issue. We normal readers read for pleasure unrelated to any species of what might be designated by the oxymoron: 'philosophical activism', or even from philosophical worries of any sort. The only 'philosophy', so to speak, which enhances a normal reader's enjoyment, other things being equal, is Truth.

There is nothing startling or profound in this assertion. For readers of Wodehouse, Bertie Wooster's chagrin at the prospect of marriage to one of his female nemisae, with shame for the besottment which got him so entangled, is funny and even poignant because it is all so true. Marriages, but also relationships in general, are inexorably a compromise between hopes and dreams, desires and needs which sometimes run together, sometimes conflict, and sometimes change. That Wodehouse does not lose sight of this is part of the reason his stories are so engaging. In the Jeeves stories he toys with serious or even potentially tragic matters; this solid foundation of reality, or truth, is what makes his froth, magical in itself, particularly endearing as well as enduring. Not everyone escapes marrying a Roberta Wickham—or whichever wodehousian harpy frightens or tempts you the most—and, for those unlucky but awakened souls, whom all men (to speak only of the lesser sex) to some degree must be, the bitter-sweet tang of Bertie's misadventures is a delectably dangerous flavor.

Such truth underlying an enjoyable story does not make it enjoyable because, as is so often proposed, we thereby learn something about life. We may indeed learn something about life, but that is not what gives the specifically literary pleasure we seek in a story. Learning may or may not be pleasurable; that is a different matter. Sometimes we must engage in learning that is not pleasurable. What might be called recreational reading, the kind of reading we are doing when reading Vance, is always pleasurable—or always should be if the book is not to drop from our hand and the writer forgotten. There is, however, a relationship between truth and pleasure which has nothing utilitarian.

Learning is the ingestion of information, or truth, about reality. The information in question is not reality or truth

in itself; it is a representation of it. For example; coming to understand the symbolic statement 'E=MC2' makes us aware of, or attunes our minds to, such things as the burning process inside the sun. The concept of 'the Holy Trinity', like 'E=MC2', is a symbolic representation of a truth—or, if you prefer, a presumed truth. Whatever one's politics may be it is unquestionable that both the Trinity and Einstein's famous formula are not equivalent to what they are intended to represent but symbolic representations, more or less complete and accurate. The existence of the things in question, real or imagined, is totally independent from, and indifferent to, these representations. For this reason it may be said that reality, or truth, is infinitely higher in dignity than the symbolic representations which comprise learning or art.

An advertisement which successfully encourages us to believe that a certain brand of ice-cream is particularly delicious is, one might say, successful art. But, no matter how initially seductive, it will eventually be judged on the accuracy of its claim. If the ice-cream tastes bad the advertisement will become notorious as a lie, and its artistic effect, in the measure it has been seductive, will be correspondingly despised as sham. One of the most successful advertising campaigns in history was for one of the worst products in history, the Ford Edsils. Both remain notorious as icons of flimflam and shoddy work. Bicarbonate of soda, on the other hand, being an ancient and effective stomach remedy, the only way the famous Alka-Seltzer ads of the 1970s could have displeased is artistically. When he couldn't believe he ate the whole thing most of us remember with fond amusement the *trouvai* of his disheveled and disabused wife drawing out: "You ate it, Harry!"

Would this be funny even if Alka-Seltzer did not sooth heart-burn as advertised? Perhaps, but then the ad would never have happened. Bicarbonate of soda, then or now, may dispense with advertising.

My point is this; reality and art are in a dynamic relationship. The slogan 'art for art's sake' fails to take this into account. Because art is about pleasure, the relationship between reality and pleasure is also dynamic.

This matter can be approached from another angle. A literary character is engaging and memorable, and thus enjoyable, and thus artistically effective, when they have a quality suggested by terms such as 'convincing', 'believable', 'recognizable'. What these terms seek to indicate is not that a character would be one we have already met in reality, or might reasonably expect to so meet, but, however fantastical they might be, like Cugel, that they project a quality of reality. Cugel's unapologetic self-concern, or Myron's naive thirst for adventure, no matter how impossible their actual adventures, are qualities we, as the saying goes, recognize in ourselves.

Characters like Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe or John D. MacDonald's Travis McGee have much less of this quality. They offer other sorts of gratification. The pleasure offered by Chandler is ironic and second degree. It is like the fun Jane Austen pokes at gothic novels in *Northanger Abbey* when, for example, rather than being a pile of ancient stones covered in ivy as the young heroine, with shivers of

pleasure secretly hopes, the abbey turns out to be new and constructed of fresh brick. MacDonald's character is an avatar of the all-powerful American ur super-hero, updated by sexual prowess, a taste for Shostakovich and a Jewish side-kick. Marlowe is less about reality than commentary and art. McGee is less about reality than the vicarious gratification of self-satisfaction.

A Vance hero like Kirth Gersen is different, even if he too has a vein of American super-herodom which may play well to the vicarious gratification urge.

Gratification though vicarious identification is certainly a species of literary enjoyment, but it is a base or secondary one. Vance condemns self-affirmation though vicarious experience, but talk is cheap. Though I have read several McDonald novels this quotation from *A Tan and Sandy Silence* is off: <http://home.earthlink.net/~rufener/>

*"A parade is a group, and I'm not a group animal. I think a mob, no matter what it happens to be doing, is the lowest form of living thing, always steaming with potential murder. Several things I could write on My Placard and then carry it all by myself down empty streets. "UP WITH LIFE. STAMP OUT ALL SMALL AND LARGE INDIGNITIES. LEAVE EVERYONE ALONE TO MAKE IT WITHOUT PRESSURE. DOWN WITH HURTING. LOWER THE STANDARD OF LIVING. DO WITHOUT PLASTICS. SMASH THE SERVO-MECHANISMS. STOP GRABBING. SNUFF THE BREEZE AND HUG THE KIDS. LOVE ALL LOVE. HATE ALL HATE."*

To say nothing of the mawkishness and violence, this is a play to the mob itself, a condemnation of mob-think under cover of brave individualism, flattery of conformity masquerading as anti-conformity. Vance's objection to conformity and group-think, by contrast, is genuine.

A higher pleasure is confrontation of what we really are with what we ought to be. Gersen is plagued by doubt, dogged by romantic failure and remarkable for the ambiguous talent of play-acting. He is also a moral chameleon, constantly making quick steps over the line. But, being somewhat moony, this troubles him, which distracts him, leading to mistakes and failure. He must then go back into hero-mode, and again step over the line to save the day.

This characterization may only crudely reflect Vance's use of Gersen; I want to suggest the quest into moral ambiguity which hovers around the demon prince books. Their subject, one might say, is the anatomy of evil. Vances' message, reduced to a formula, is not that evil is a force inherent in the universe, that evil does not exist, that it is only relative, or that it is a sort of culture transmitted like a disease by corruption. It is that evil is solipsism. Evil is the effect which occurs when the personal trumps the interpersonal or, to use the more clumsy and approximate Marxist terminology, the triumph of the individual over the collective. To redress the wrongs inflicted by the solipsistic demon princes Gersen must violate both society and himself: he intimidates the Krokinole Imp in *Star King*, coerces Myron Patch in *The Killing Machine*, bribes and steals at the Philidor Bohus Lyceum in *The Palace of Love*, abandons Maxel Rackrose to the Darsh whips at Tintle's Shade in *The Face*, is responsible for the death of poor Bugardoige on the Voymont in *The Book of Dreams*. The world is so made that

evil cannot even be corrected without resorting to evil and personal sacrifice. It is perhaps ham-handed to point it out but the war in Iraq is a case in point.

The personality of the character Vance has constructed to express this is attuned to the problem. Where Marlow is the puppet of a sly prestidigitator, where McGee is a vehical for morally unambiguous affirmation of triumphant sexually liberated materialism, Gersen does not obscure a view into the depths. The view may be antic and artful. It is none-the-less unflinching and uncompromising. This quality, I say, contributes to the sharp artistic superiority of Jack Vance over Chandler and particularly MacDonald. Vance neither winks at us knowingly nor flatters use abjectly. With smiling grace he puts us nose to nose with a problem which will dog the world to the end of time, and us to our dying day.

## ALFRED'S ARK

I offer what follows neither, as I have felt it useful to do in the past, to show that Vance does not denigrate religion, nor to demonstrate his attachment or non-attachment to any ism or ology. Rather I wish to articulate that stance which, I say, contributes so importantly to making his work both artistically powerful and full of truth, and thereby supremely enjoyable.

*Alfred's Ark* may not be Vance's most famous story, or even a popular favorite. It is not science fiction, or fantasy, or mystery, and at 2000 words it is one of his very shortest. It is set in that most prosaic of settings, the contemporary mid-west. As in so many vancian stories there is no hero, and if there is a moral—none of Vance's stories has a sharper one—it is wreathed in a chuckle which blunts any moralistic edge.

*Alfred's Ark* is neither based upon, nor a variant of, the bible story of Noah. Alfred Johnson, not a classical protagonist but the principal character, is obsessed with that bible story of how God punished evil by flooding the earth, saving one good man, with his family and a pair of each type of animal, for a fresh start. In contrast to the original Vance's new Noah is self-appointed. Believing he has broken the secret code of scripture, he is, in fact, nothing less than a 'fundamentalist crack-pot'. A new flood, Alfred insists, is being sent by God, and Alfred plans to ride it out.

Alfred may be a crack-pot, he is also a typical mid-westerner: benevolent and practical. The story begins with his visit to the kindly and down-to-earth Ben Hixey, Editor of the *Weekly Courier*. This scene, with its contrast between biblical and modern times, is a gem of comic grace:

*"I suppose you want me to print big headlines about this flood?"*

*Alfred hitched himself forward, struck the desk earnestly with his fist. "Here's my plan, Ben. I want the good citizens of this town to get together. I want us to build an ark, to put aboard two beasts of every kind, plenty of food and drink, a selection of good literature, and make ourselves ready. . . I want to run a big ad on your front page. At the bottom I want you to print: 'Flood coming June 20th. Help and funds needed to build an ark.'*

A bit farther on Vance again mines this vein:

*Alfred received a great deal of jocular advice.*

*"That barge sure ain't big enough, Alfred," called Bill Olafson. "Not*

*when you consider the elephants and rhinoceroses and giraffes and lions and tigers and hippos and grizzly bears."*

*"I'm not taking savage beasts," said Alfred. "Just a few pedigreed cattle, cows, horses and sheep, nothing but good stock. If the Lord wanted the others saved he'd have sent me more money. I got just enough for what you see."*

*"What about a woman, Alfred? You ain't married. You planning to repopulate the world by this here immaculate conception idea?"*

*"If the right woman don't come along," said Alfred, "I'll just up and hire a woman for the day. When she sees I'm the only man left alive, she'll marry me quick enough."*

Alfred may be crazy but there are lots of people with crazy projects; Watts with his towers or the Frenchman who spent several decades building a motor yacht in his garage as a scale model of the cruise-ship *France*. The situation is totally realistic; if somebody did get the idea that God was about to send another flood—despite the covenant of the rainbow whereby God stipulated that never again would He wipe-out humanity—matters would proceed along the lines Vance indicates.

American society being what it is, the hullabaloo in Marketville attracts a publicity agent:

*The problem of securing a woman to become progenetrix of the future race solved itself: a press agent announced that his client, the beautiful movie starlet Maida Brent, had volunteered her services. . .*

But even advertising strategy does not cancel out human nature, or caprice, and the following deliciously natural event occurs, for Maida Brent is more than a product, she is a human being:

*The rain began to fall during the evening, and at ten o'clock was coming down heavily. At eleven, the press agent sloshed over to the ark. "Maida! Hey Maida!"*

*Maida Brent appeared in the doorway of the cabin. "Well?"*

*"Let's go! We've got all the stuff we need."*

*Maida Brent sniffed, looked toward the massive black sky. "What's the weather report say?"*

*"Rain."*

*"Alfred and I are playing checkers. We're quite cozy. You go on. Bye."*

The stage is now set for the last act. The rain is falling, on schedule, and soon floods are reported. His neighbors, having teased Alfred for months, consider the evidence, and panic. When Alfred won't let them on his ark they clamber aboard anyway, and for good measure toss him off 'kicking and cursing' but before the reader can catch his breath:

*There was a clap of thunder; the rain lessened. Overhead appeared a thin spot in the clouds. The sun burst through. The rain stopped.*

Alfred is obviously a fool. His interpretation of scripture was an absurd fantasy even if, like a lucky roll of the dice, there was some rain on a certain day. As for his friends and neighbors, they may lack finesse but are hardly monsters of evil. Even the level-headed Ben Hixey's rational repose was shaken:

*Ben looked up from an AP dispatch, grinning rather ruefully. "I've been reading the weather report."*

*Alfred nodded. "I know. Rain."*

Man is a feeble and foolish creature; his intelligence in particular is unreliable.



*Alfred's Ark* would be interpreted as a swipe at religion only by those who miss the point. The only religion which gets mocked is the personal mania of a character who is basically appealing. The story could also be interpreted as an condemnation of human fatuousness, but the fatuousness in question is of such small scope that condemning it is like expunging a mosquito with a charge of dynamite. Alfred is a nut, but he is a harmless nut. His neighbors rib him, but not too hard. In a moment of panic some get carried away and toss Alfred in the mud, but as soon as the situation loses its menace this animal reaction seems strange even to themselves.

The story is not designed to instruct us that prophets are phonies because not the falseness of Alfred's ideas but the reactions and behaviors of the folk around him are its subject. The story is gentile; the author seems to find the foolishness of his characters not merely amusing but touching. And yet, behind the small scale, the mildness, the low-energy absurdity, looms something larger and darker which gives the story its bite. We humans do not know where we come from or where we are going. Living in a world of mystery we are not only blind, blithe and complacent, but resolutely and obstinately so. The story of Noah and the flood may or may not be true but it is not as if God, or some other cosmic force, is not constantly wiping out whole populations. The Indonesian title wave was real enough. The earthquakes in Turkey a few years ago killed hundreds of thousands. The summer heat wave of 2004 killed 14,000 in France. And as for the mass slaughter by kamikaze holy warriors in major cities of both west and east; if the latter are not the tool of Allah it must be confessed that they are servants of some kind of mysterious entity or force, whatever or whomever it might be. Less dramatically, but no less tragic or puzzling, we are scythed down in statistically significant numbers by speeding cars and galloping cancers. We are frail mortals with our heads are full of infinity. Our hearts are a jumble of universal benevolence and particular malice. We are driven by passions against which our spirits rebel or to which they make unholy alliances.

Vance takes a stance at once in the midst of all this and outside it. He uses a point of view, a voice, which is 'in it but not of it'. This stance, from a literary point of view, is, I say, the stance of stances. It is the ideal stance of the story teller because it allows an equidistant, pan-optic, and thus self-correcting view of the ensemble. It is therefore redolent of reality, or truth.

#### ANOTHER SORT OF LITERARY STANCE

the 20th century produced two great works of fantasy, both based on Western European mythology: *The Lord of the Rings* and *Lyonesse*. These western books, both destined to become deathless classics, exemplify the two pillars of Western culture, Jerusalem and Athens\*. Tolkien's book, though this is not generally realized, is a profoundly Christian, or even Catholic work, where Vance's story uses the natural or 'philosophical' attitude. The characteristics of the religious or philosophical stance taken by these author's is a not negligible aspect of the success of thier work, and the artistic

inadequacy of Tolkien's myriad imitators is largely due to failure in this regard; the paltriness of their stance is the major flaw of their work.

Tolkien's book is not a religious book as such, but the seductiveness of his world is its richness. This richness is a function of its structure. Sauron is more than a big bad bogey man. He is, like Satan, the personification of a ubiquitous anti-life temptation. The ring is no mere gee-whiz gee-gaw, like the holy grail it is 'spiritual object', a portal though which evil temptation seizes hold of the material world. The hobbits are not just cutesy grotesques, they are the essence of the Saxon spirit. The elves are not mere charming mythological anachronisms, they are the spirit of Beauty in the world. Strider is not a hunk with a blade but a locus of spiritual and earthly election, ruin, exile and renunciation, ambition rule and royalty. It is not enough to put a heterogeneous band of seekers in a barren landscape armed with named hand-weapons to generate a Tolkien-like seductive force. Such a book, for the same reason, is unlikely to emerge in Arab, Chinese or Zulu culture. Perhaps an Indian, digging into eastern history, the Ramayana, and Hinduism, might produce something analogous. I only wish he would.\*

Vance's book, in a different way, is based as profoundly as Tolkien's on the Western heritage. In more ways than is often suspected *Lyonesse* is a mere retelling of the Arthur Romances but, just as *The Lord of the Rings* is animated by a Christian insight, so *Lyonesse* is brought to life by a truly philosophical stance. I say 'truly' to distinguish Vance's attitude from debased secularism, the flouncing tart which parades as lady Philosophy. For philosophy is even so little a negation of religion that a major part of the Western philosophical heritage flourished under the sobriquet 'handmaiden to Religion'. Of course neither is philosophy identical to religion, and aspects of it are, indeed, opposed to it. What I want to suggest is the breadth and depth of the vein Vance mined. It is ironic that, while *Lyonesse* has no inspired no wanabees, *The Lord of the Rings'* countless imitators take a stance fundamentally closer to Vance.

Tolkien's tale, as rooted as it is in folklore, is a sweeping and symbolically complete drama of redemption. Vance's story, like the Arthurian legends themselves, is a treasure chest of Arthurian elements: wizards meddling in affairs of state and suffering romantic setback, a round table and political calculation, betrayals and imprisonments, trips by sea, maidens in distress, hidden identities, diversionary quests, strange animals. The animating spirit of *Lyonesse*, Vance's philosophical stance, may be suggested in a comparison of his fairies with those of Tolkien. The philosophical view is man's natural view, or the low view. The religious view is a transcendental or high view. Tolkien's elves are noble creatures; beautiful, serene, wise, tragic. Vance's elves are diminutive, mischievous, grotesque, lewd, inconsequential. The philosophical view, because it is earth-bound, is not unrelated to bawdy vulgarity.

\* if *Dune* were not such a lousy book one might suggest that Frank Herbert has done for Islam what Tolkien did for Christianity. In any case *Dune* is as much based on 1960's era dogma as Islamic mythology.

\* 'Religion and Philosophy',

The low, earth-bound, or philosophical view, is betrayed when it is swathed in the long black robes of tragedy. The Nasgul are unforgettable because they are symbols of the intertwined nature of earthly corruption and eternal damnation. Jack-in-the-box ghost kings and other papier-mâché monsters cooked up by Tolkien's imitators are just nine-pins to be knocked over. Vance gives us clinical view of corruption, sparing neither its pitilessness nor its paltry absurdity. The cold grandiose ambitions of Casmir, the lewd opulence of Audry, are off-set by their petty fragility. Their paths are such as the Nasgul must have tread in life. If Vance hints at it most softly, no less neatly than Tolkien he sketches an eternal destiny.

By contrast, if religion offers a key to the meaning of life, philosophy does not, or should not pretend to. It offers, rather, an approach to things. To the low view life is a somewhat inchoate tumult of the gay and the sad, the sublime and the ridiculous, the wise and the foolish. Where Tolkien expresses a profound and internal if divine order, Vance observes a vast and variegated integument. Both views are views of the ensemble, and both faithfully maintain a position in it but not of that ensemble. They do not betray what they show by loving or hating any of it too much or, if their loves and hates are as strong as they should be, do not allow them to prejudice their clarity of view.



## TOWARD WESTERN UNITY

Some of my readers were shocked by my suggestion in Extant #5 that we need to war back at Islam. I remain hopeful that, sooner rather than later, and particularly soon enough, a majority of Westerners will agree. It is becoming clearer each day that so-called main-stream Islam, or most imams and Muslims world-wide, even if they neither call for nor practice suicide bombing themselves, tolerate in alarming percentages and to an unacceptable degree Al Caida's doings. Victor Davis Hanson, at his excellent web-site *Private Papers* [<http://victorhanson.com>] recently wrote:

*... we should no more tolerate the expression of Islamic fascism on the shores of the West than Churchill would have allowed Hitler Youth to teach Aryan global racial superiority in London while it was under the Blitz. . . . If the terrorists are not isolated and ostracized [in Muslim countries] then any Western government would have to be suicidal to admit any more young males from the Islamic Middle East.*

Bruce Thorton, also featured on *Private Papers*, whose concerns and positions are very close to mine, suggests in his article of July 26 (*Doublespeak Unveiled: Muslim "moderates" are true to spirit of Islam*) makes the point that, to say nothing of the illusions of the Left, the Western strategy (or 'Bush strategy' if you prefer) of spreading democracy and freedom, good as far as it goes, rests upon an analysis which fails to come to grips with the essence:

*As long as leaders in the West continue to confuse the true nature of the struggle, we will be at a disadvantage. The counter to a spiritual*

*motive is not a material good, for man does not live by bread alone. Democracy, economic opportunity, an open society — all these were enjoyed by the London murderers, and they killed their fellow citizens anyway. Somehow we must find a way of articulating the spiritual good for which we fight, and stop reducing all causes to material or psychological ones. For centuries Christianity provided the spiritual goods and motivation needed to fight back against jihad and eventually reverse its momentum. With Christianity weakened into another life-style choice, particularly in Europe, what can take its place to steel us for doing what must be done to stop the slow death of the West by appeasement, indifference, and demography?*

What indeed? The return of Western society as a whole to Christianity is certainly not to be looked for in the near term, even if the new interest in and cordiality toward the papacy, as well as the progress of Christianity world-wide are positive indicators. However I do not think that unbelief as such is a barrier to renewal of Western moral and unity, and if the Church once militated against secularism that is no longer the case. Despite all the crowing about the rise of Christian fundamentalism the actual source of disunity lies in the other camp, with the secularist extremists. I am referring to those who, for example, label opposition to such things as abortion, sexual promiscuity and homosexuality 'religious extremism', rather than regarding it as a legitimate or respectable position, even if wrong. but this example is only the most obvious. Just as fundamentally significant are promotion of such things as deconstruction, anti-hierarchism and anti-authoritarianism in education, the storm of isms which disguise the transmogrification of art into nihilistic political agitation, the dogmatic relativism which has reduced philosophy to tepid politicized babble, and the bouquet of Multiculturalist and pro-non-white-male minority militantisms which work as an acid upon our socio-cultural foundations. All these bad things, it is clear to me, are in retreat. The question is not; will the West re-attain unity? but; will the power and prestige of the secularist extremists wane fast enough to allow the growth of a sufficient Western consensus before the Jihadists get the better of us?

No one is talking about it but there are areas of France under Islamic control. Regular folk enter them at risk. They are likely to be robbed, beaten, have their cars burned. There are places like this within 30 miles of where I live, hell-and-gone out in the French provinces. Women are dressed in those atrocious hoods and sack-dresses; the men wear regulation Muslim beards and robes. I am informed areas of such uniform and rigid Muslim dress code are absent from North Africa itself. Should a normal folk, or even an abnormal one, be incommoded in such an area the defenders of public order will shrug. The Muslims are not to be provoked but every week another French synagogue is pelted with Molotov cocktails or inscribed with swastikas, and acid is thrown at Jewish children in school yards. A radio station in Paris is living on advertisements from a company that moves your furniture to Israel, where more and more French Jews feel they can live better! The media tip-toes around the subject but affairs are no better in Holland and England. At last

the French are throwing out a careful selection of the most inflammatory imams. But they, and all Western governments, will have to go much farther to reverse the galloping tendency.

Meanwhile, how does Islam treat Christianity? In Mecca, the so-called 'holy city', non-Muslim are not tolerated. Christian churches are not tolerated in Saudi Arabia. If Islam is a religion of peace and tolerance why not follow its excellent example? Why not close the mosques and escort the imams to the border? And what about a Christian dhiminitude for Muslims: fines or banishment, or both, for anyone who espouses that creed? Unless, of course, they reform it, and in a hurry. Reform it how? It needs to be very similar to Christianity—so if they can't manage the reform in time, and they insist on being religious, they can always become Christians, or Jews for that matter.

Extremism? Intolerance? Hate-mongering?

Do we, or do we not, agree—in what I believe is the Western manner, religious or non-religious, but 'Christian' in either case—that tolerance should dictate our relations and love should reign in our hearts? If we do, and we are serious, then we must be intolerant of intolerance and murderous hate-mongering should be excluded. Is it not intolerable when crowds chant: 'Death to America! Death to Israel!?' It is not hateful to put hate-mongering is out-of-bounds. It is not intolerant to note that tolerance of intolerance is absurd.\*

Those who protest most loudly against this line of thought are the same who pretend that extirpating religion from Western society is the straight path to the shining future; they would ban Islam and Christianity together, but the latter above all. It is my hope that this position be corralled into a minority by non-believing Westerners who, whatever they think of the Immaculate Conception, the Transfiguration or the Resurrection, recognize that Western society stands on a foundation which includes what might be called Christian culture. They will reject the accusation that Christianity equals fanatical intolerance, that it has nothing to do with what they value most in Western society, even if they do not go in for the mythology.

Why do Western anti-Westerners not emigrate to Africa or Asia? Why, instead, do Africans and Asians massively immigrate to the West? What do they know that African and Asian immigrants ignore? Why are the ex-colonialists, the old sources of Christian missionary zeal, the great bulwarks of bourgeois society, so relentlessly and exuberantly attractive to these alleged victims of Western crime?

The anti-Westerners do not take this question seriously, and even if they regard African society as superior to Western society, ultimately they reject both. They are partisans of a utopia. They might be loath to admit it but to them man is an organism who wants nothing but food, shelter, medical care and sexual opportunity, and whose non-physical needs do not extend beyond entertainment and a reasonable dose of social prestige. Some people, alarmingly, do actually live like that. They disguise from themselves that others, of larger perspective, have died, and must continue to die, on far battle-fields that their narrow illusion be perpetuated.

\* Nota Bene; my logic in this paragraph depends on accuracy of the proposition that the difference between Islam and Islamism is either non-existent or so small as to be negligible.

I believe that the work of Jack Vance provides a model and even training for a new union of believers and non-believers in a renewed Western society firmly re-founded on its millennial base, and I found encouragement of this belief in a recent discussion on the VanceBBS where one Faucelme stood up and did his part to instill and encourage that spirit of tolerant, ironic and inquisitive intelligence which is, to me, a vancian trait, but also a flower of Christian culture, a unifying, restorative power. The thread in question\* begins with an impeccably vancian post by Patrick Dusoulie citing evil shenanigans by some religious fanatic of an eastern European sect who justified himself in these words: "*Listen, I didn't hurt her, I didn't break her head or anything, just her hands and feet.*" Patrick commented:

*Somehow, this reminded me of Jack. Exactly the sort of gruesome, banal torture that you find in his novels, all in the name of a strong belief in something, whatever that is. If I had my way, or when I become master of the world (progress is slow, I'm afraid) I would exterminate all dogmatists. OK, not many people would remain on this planet, but so what? Wouldn't be so bad, would it?*

Patrick's humor, irony, self-mockery and pungent style are a delicious mix which makes interaction with him on any level a privilege and, in my opinion, a model of the sort of man upon whom the resolution of our current crisis depends. His post was followed by the usual persiflage and badinage, including a creeping tendency to condemn, not dogmatism as Patrick does, but religion as such. Patrick, in his good natured way, provided a clarification:

*I think Jack has nothing against faith in whatever supreme being comes to mind. But he strongly objects to religious organizations, and most particularly to individuals who usurp the role of being the only intercessors (see Blue World) between the faithful and that Supreme Being, with all the usual consequences (privileges, abuse of power, impunity from common law, etc.) He also, very logically, objects to the dogmatic paraphernalia that usually gets built around the "simple faith". Jack does not object, I think, to the individual faith and the individual addressing directly his personal divinity/divinities. That's private. Naturally, it's not as simple as that, since as soon as someone strongly believes in god(s), you can bet the wife and children and family and neighbors and compatriots and all other human beings had better believe in the same god(s), or else. What I'm describing above is my own take on Jack's position, that's all. It happens to be exactly how I feel about it all, but that's just a coincidence, surely.*

To which no objection can be made. Patrick makes his own views clear. He presents his interpretation of Vance, and clearly labels it as such. Above all we sense a deep fund of good will and camaraderie, a readiness to engage in civilized discourse with opinions he may not share. This is the message of his wit and self-mockery. He thinks strong thoughts but, ingratiating himself, makes room for others and thus invites them to discourse. With Patrick the conversation is open.

Faucelme, thus welcomed and encouraged, introduced a

\* See, or, better yet, don't bother to see: <http://publ.ezboard.com/bjackvance>, The Robles, 'Jack could use that...' posted by 'axolotl' on July 1st, 05.



reaction to Patrick's original post. It provoked a bit of heavy handed anti-Christianism from the VanceBBS celebrity writer, Matt Hughes, but Patrick restored a civilized atmosphere with such commentary as:

*. . . many abominations are committed everywhere, everyday, by many people who are not led by religious motives. But they don't usually present the same remarkable contrast between motives and actual deeds. They're not "better" for all that, they're just not striking in the same way.*

Faucelme's idea may be resumed in the following excerpts from this phase of the conversation:

*Out of the many homicides daily occurring, a murder/manslaughter/accidental death is selected as newsworthy because it was caused by colourful religious practitioners of a faith few "mainstream" westerners share. Meanwhile, presumably, many more mundane deaths caused by good proponents of western liberalism go unnoticed. Ergo, religion causes people to do bad things. . . [This] plays into the comfortable anti-clericalism of large swathes of the western world. . . (If anyone is interested, I consider myself manifestly a product and part of this "liberal" tradition.)*

The Moderator then reacted to Faucelme's comments with a flamboyant diversionary gambit:

*I'm having a hard time remembering when I read of someone killing someone based on some tenet of western liberalism (whatever that is). I wonder what that would look like. "I'm a proponent of socialized medicine, so I'm going to crucify this young woman." Or: "I'm in favor of progressive taxation, so I'm going to have to cut out this virgin's heart."*

Faucelme, not yet realizing that the rules of discourse, so to speak, had, shall we say, changed, gamely offered some examples; Clinton's bombing of Belgrade and the embargo on Iraq, the latter of which he characterizes as :

*. . . depriving the common people of the means to filter water and manufacture penicillin. If a million children die, it will be — and I quote — "worth it".*

This example may not be ideal, and Faucelme might have made matters easier on himself with a simple contrast between anti-religious and pro-atheist bias, exemplified, for example, by mainstream complaisance in regard to mayhem committed in the name of atheism (e.g. Stalin's and Mao's murderings); his point, however, is more subtle and important.

In an effort to satisfy the Moderator's unsatisfiable complaint that he is not defining his terms, Faucelme defines 'western liberalism' as the *post-enlightenment western consensus — democracy, the rights of man [and etcetera]*. He goes on:

*If there is a point in my ramblings, it is this: I believe that "we" (those western liberal types) are conditioned to see religion as a source of moral hypocrisy and corruption. Thus when religious people do bad things, we react with "a-ha!" and our views are confirmed. When they do not do bad things, we do not notice that anything is done at all, due to the aforesaid conceptual filter. Thus our prejudice is not dispelled. Meanwhile, non-religious people can do all manner of evil, without any danger of setting off a reaction of "a-ha! A lack of religious conviction has led to this pass!" We are not conditioned to respond like this; in the past, more people were.*

*Thus, we have the case of [the Moderator], who cannot conceive of western liberalism, broadly understood, contributing to a psychological state in which atrocities are committed. . .*

This is followed by some good natured posts from Ed Winskil and Mike Berro, whereupon, having opened Faucelme's mouth, the Moderator jumps down his throat with a post entitled: '*Shut it down, Faucelme*'. He disqualifies Faucelme's response to his previous remark as '*an attempt to respond to my post*', and his examples as '*meaningless*'. Referring to the Iraq embargo he writes:

*. . . that conduct had nothing to do with any tenets of western liberalism [. . .] whatever those tenets might be. The conduct was perhaps motivated by political (including geopolitical) principles, but only a schmuck would think that those political principles had anything to do with "western liberalism".*

Having called him a Schmuck he then scorns Faucelme's intelligence:

*You apparently fail to understand that specific individuals, and specific parties, may engage in practices that have nothing to do with the fundamental political philosophy that they espouse.*

This is followed by a set of likewise inapropos arguments, for, that someone might do something unrelated to the philosophy they espouse does not mean they never do anything on the basis of a post-enlightenment western consensus which, though bad, is ignored because it is perceived through that filter of cultural prejudice. I will not report or comment the Moderator's arguments, except for a representative sample of its gratuitously aggressive and perhaps even paranoid nature. Each may judge if these qualifications are fair:

*. . . your arguments are more notable for their vehemence than for their coherence. [. . .] you responded to the initial post entirely out of proportion to the actual content of that post, bringing to it your hypersensitivity to a non-existent "anti-religious bias". You brought to this board a perception that you have that is based on conduct and statements beyond this board. Based on those perceptions, you started a slanging match. I won't put up with it. The Jack Vance Message Board isn't a place for flame wars. It's not a place for personal attacks. We have had two years without any significant nastiness on this board,\* and I'm not going to allow you to alter that. So moderate yourself, or I'll do it for you.*

Ed Winskil then made one of his jovial attempt to restore civilized discourse:

*Well, I don't think there's anything bad about polemics, as long as they don't get personal. [. . .] I find Vance's anticlericalism and savage satires on religion extremely entertaining and amusing. Of course, I find his summary executions of recalcitrant barons equally entertaining. And he does not spare more secular political faiths, either. . .*

Faucelme, creditably ignoring the Moderator's distortions and menaces, then made an even more earnest, and under the circumstances quite generous, attempt to explain himself:

*Again, I plead guilty to insufficiently defining the term "western liberalism". Perhaps why this has caused confusion is because we are*

\* Editors Note: This reference is to the post Wave 1 delivery troubles when the Moderator becoming responsible for the VanceBBS and Bruce Yergil created a competing 'Vance' board.

*practically all Western liberals of various stripes, as opposed to Muslims, Orthodox Jews, Eastern Orthodox Christians or traditional Catholics. Most of those of us who remain Christians, especially Protestants, still think in terms deriving more from post-enlightenment thinkers than from the Scriptures or Holy Tradition. (does the Bible mention human rights? The universal franchise?)*

*I used this term to contrast with the religious tradition, which was the dominant one in western culture for more than a thousand years, and which is now all too often thrown up only as an oddity, especially an objectionable one, as in the case of [Patrick's] Romanian monk.*

*[Oh Moderator], if you cannot see that Clinton's intervention in Kosovo/Serbia had a lot to do with western liberal values, at least notionally, I am at a loss. The entire episode was framed as being for humanitarian purposes, specifically for the protection of a minority ethnic group, far away and ethnically unrelated to the intervening nation. This sort of casus belli is a new thing in history, and can easily be traced to a specific Western humanistic tradition. The same applies to the embargo on Iraq. Of course, I would argue that the apparently worthy reason for intervention was just a smokescreen for other goals, just as the monk (perhaps less consciously than Clinton) used his beliefs as a pretext for something else.\**

*But my argument is not based on the idea that secular values furnish equally good pretexts for violence as do religious values. Perhaps they can; but because the beliefs of those who do not subscribe to a definite religious tradition can be nebulous, they have more leeway to practice iniquity without violating anything they have specifically espoused. This does not mean that pointing out religious abuses as typical tells us anything real about the nature of religious profession: my point all along.*

*But if committing murder without first espousing religious values benefits the villain, as he is less likely to gain news coverage, perhaps this form of evil will spread, as in Darwinian terms there is an adaptive advantage. In this case, instead of beating the dead horse of anti-clericalism, we should insist on the newsworthiness of evil deeds carried out under benevolent, non-religious pretexts.*

Faucelme, in once sense, weakens his argument here, for if one does not insist upon the non-humanity of unborn babies, or the non-sacredness of life in general, abortion would be an example of the *post-enlightenment western consensus* sanctioning mass murder in a crisply non-nebulous manner. From a larger point of view, however, Faucelme's very inability to make such a point actually strengthens his argument because, as a self-proclaimed member of the *post-enlightenment western consensus* whose conception of *post-enlightenment* murderousness is in fact nebulous, he himself is an perfect example of his own thesis.

In a good natured response to Ed Winskil's peace-making, Faucelme wrote:

*It is not religion that leads to evil, it is human nature. In some circumstances religion provides a ready-to-hand pretext. In other circumstances, less so. Surely we can all agree on this.*

But the Moderator, titling his next post '*further nonsense*', opens a new round of rhetorical gambits and accusations. Luckily for us he sums them up at the end in a short phrase:

*Your arguments are absurd, Faucelme. They boil down to this: You don't like those damned liberals. Great. I think that we've got that. Now put the lid back on the teapot: it's already steamed dry.*

\* Editors Note: Faucelme alleges, and I tend to agree, that Clinton was glad to bomb a European Capital in order to deflect attention from his impeachment proceedings. One may also note that our having warred upon a European country to protect an insurgent Muslim minority earned us no brownie points with Bin Ladin.

This is not good natured. Faucelme's point is interesting, even important. His manner was polite. He made good-faith efforts to explain himself when challenged. In his next post, charitably entitled '*It seems rather blustery today*', he understandably complains:

*. . . You willfully misinterpret my ideas, and would presumably misrepresent any rejoinder in the same way [. . .] I have succinctly explained my objections to knee-jerk anti-clericalism in at least two of my posts in this thread, and they still stand . . .*

*Again, without trying to sound like a literary snob to those who might not have read such "weighty" books, I recommend "The Brothers Karamazov" and "Magic Mountain" [by Thomas Mann]. Essential, enlightening, and wonderful books with much to say about the clash of religion and secularism in western culture. Hint: liberal humanism and Catholic traditionalism are represented in the latter work by two characters perpetually engaged in polemic. A third character is introduced, before whom these quarrelling siblings can only maintain silence. And for mine as well, the palm can only go to him. That is one reason why I do not identify with either side of the "culture wars". Am I being cryptic? Read this great book.*

The Moderator responded, in a manner consistent with his previous posts. Faucelme then made a final effort:

*. . . If you don't believe that some new winds blew through western political thinking post-reformation and especially post-enlightenment which allowed the emergence of a secular order, one strand of which contributes to anti-clericalism, I am not the one to educate you.*

*As to the "false dichotomy" red herring you threw up, I did not claim there was an absolute dichotomy between "western liberalism" and "the religious tradition". In fact, I referred to them as siblings in a previous post. Nevertheless, there is a divergence at the ends of the spectrum — militant secularism vs clerical power — of which the French revolution in many ways could be considered the type, although of course the conflict between Athens and Jerusalem has manifested in a multitude of ways in different times and places.*

*You dispute that Clinton's wars were iniquitous acts committed under cover of humanitarian ideals.*

*There is no need to argue the merits of Clinton's wars. This is a diversionary tactic on your part. [. . .] Believe the wars to be wonderful if you like. [You wrote:]*

*Initially you ascribed it to Clinton's desire to draw attention away from his political problems. Now you assert that it "had a lot to do with western liberal values, at least notionally."*

*I did not initially ascribe to one and then the other. I said that Humanitarianism was the ostensible motive; political gain the real one. Just as the motive of a deluded religious man might be ostensibly deliverance but really sadism. I made this abundantly clear in the initial post; I can only conclude that you deliberately misinterpreted me. You fail to understand if you think I look on western liberalism as bad. It is the air we breathe. I can only speculate that perhaps you are irked by the overtly religious discourse prevalent in the US, and the "conservative" values which accompany it, and have projected a certain position in the "culture wars" onto me. An understandable mistake: I do not expect you to con the niceties of the situation elsewhere in the western world. These things can lead to misunderstandings, especially over words like "conservative" and "liberal" [. . .] that you are writing as a polemicist in the "culture wars" would explain your spleen; the clash of American traditions seems in many instances to be acrimonious. If you feel embattled, do not worry. Reflect that Jack Vance's skepticism strikes a sympathetic chord with a greater portion of the people elsewhere. In fact, it itself can become a mindless dogma. This is one reason why I refuse the easy embrace of reflexive anti-clericalism.*



In view of the gratuitous insult to which Faucelme had been subjected this is admirable for generosity and restraint. In it we have a sample of the sort of thinking and discourse which, I feel, is needed from non-believers to minoritize militant secularism and foster the urgently needed Western unity which is the subject of this article. Please note; I do not object to secularism per se, only the militant variety, the willingness to resort to intellectual, and eventually physical, violence in its service.

In a poscriptum Faucelme takes note of the Moderator's attitude:

*May I also add that the tone of a previous post where at the slightest note of dissent you invoked the threat of censorship was, as the English say, poor form.*

But the Moderator is relentless. If, from his next post, 1,100 words of inchoate polemics, I offer a sample it is not to subject the Moderator to public humiliation—it would be sanguine to hope that publicizing remarks he has left undeleted on a public web-site might spark a wholesome embarrassment in his breast—but as a sample of the attitude which, I say, is the crucial barrier to Western unity; responding to Faucelme's speculation that the Moderator has projected 'a certain position in the culture wars' onto him, the Moderator retorques:

*Spare me your psychoanalysis. It has as much basis in fact as your conclusion that 50 percent of the U.S. public is "anticlerical".*

*Try this: I'm irked by the fact that you jumped with hobnailed boots onto an innocuous topic and began stomping about, making ridiculous claims. In this regard, note that everyone else who responded disagreed with your analysis.*

*I'm also irked by the fact that you continue to argue through mere assertion. The completely hokey statistics that you pulled out above are a great example.\*Finally, for you to call me a "polemicist in the 'culture wars'" really takes the cake of intellectual dishonesty. Has it occurred to you that you're the one who began writing polemically about this issue? Has it occurred to you that you're the one who has identified a "culture war"?*

*I suppose that's what offends me most: the intellectual dishonesty that I see in these posts. You say things that you don't back up. You change positions. You don't respond to my points—and then you dredge back up your original posts and make your points again, as if I hadn't demolished them before. Your approach is intellectually bankrupt.*

At last fully awake to what he is up against, Faucelme writes:

*All of your vitriol aside, I had to laugh at this, and not in a derisive way. This is very good! I can see you have had a lot of practice at this game: I identify your opinions as fitting into the liberal spectrum of the debate as I understand it to exist in the US (chiefly from your anger at what you perceive as my anti-liberalism). I note that this is referred to as the "culture wars." You then tell me that I am the culture-warring polemicist, because I have been first to "identify" it! A good strategy, and identical to that taught by Ignatius de Loyola to the Jesuits: make no positive statements, but simply twist back the words of others. A ver nothing, only criticize.*

\* Editor's Note: I have not reported the Moderator's attacks upon, and Faucelme's perfectly adequate defense of, his statistics.

I'm not sure about the Jesuits but I do know that the tactic in question is Leninist, a standard technique of anti-Western Communist propaganda throughout the cold war. However this may be, and assuming Faucelme's diagnosis of the Moderator's attitude is correct, I would emphasize its militancy. The Moderator seeks not to engage but to disqualify. When it comes to hopes for Western unity the Moderator is a negative example.

Let us turn to positive examples. Faucelme, coming self-consciously from the secular side, refuses to cultivate prejudice against religion. I, who come from the religious side, though I may be infected with it refuse likewise to cultivate prejudice against secularism. Faucelme and I, like everyone else forced to gape and squint at the world through a set of cultural attitudes like customized dark glasses, do our best to take this into account and attenuate the influence. This means self-suspicion, the struggle, unnatural to naturally selfish man, to remain open, and even active efforts to engage others.\*

I by no means intend to imply we should lightly reject our own convictions. But a healthy suspicion of 'I' and a resolute openness to 'you' is, I say, essentially Western, for Western society, my friends, with its Classical and Christian foundations, emphasizes several things present in no others and, like a domini gone emeritus retains the use of his modifications, it nourishes them even when it goes post-Christian.

Faucelme mentioned Jerusalem and Athens. This is the title of a famous essay by Leo Strauss in which, though personally secular, he tries to restore a balance between these two foundational aspects of our culture, tilted too far toward the latter. Jerusalem stands for religion. Athens stand for philosophy, or the quest for knowledge without the aid of revelation,† or by man's natural powers alone. Philosophy though by no means identical to secularism is therefore its root. The philosophical, or secular, aspect of Western culture does not arise from Greek society as such, but from thinking which arose in democratically inclined, or 'freedom loving' Athens. At the heart of this thinking, exemplified by Socrates, is the calling into question of established and traditional truths endorsed by society. Socrates was condemned to death for teaching disrespect of the gods of Athens to its youth. The charge, if distorted, is not fundamentally

\* Faucelme might not agree. In another thread on the VanceBBS he wrote: '... now that the VIE has been completed, and Rhoads has branched out into screech thankfully unconnected with the best interests of the author we love, he can be seen simply as the hilarious crank that he is. I couldn't read another word of his awful prose, but I salute the cosmic humour of the Great Architect that has allowed such a mind to exist. Like an examination of the odd appendages of some rainbow-coloured deep-sea nudibranch that has eyes in its arse, reading Rhoads expands one's respect for biological variety.' If this clever sally is not an absolute violation of the Golden Rule neither does it perfectly embody the ideal of Platonic friendship. It has been suggested that I have my head up my ass (see Extant #1) and Faucelme, with minimal subtlety, here likewise implies that the dorsal cavity in question contains at least some of my cephalic organs. Such a nudibranchian configuration, however, does not handicap my clairvoyance regarding Faucelme's human virtues, including his excellent prose (which it is a pleasure to reproduce in EXTANT), and yet he disqualifies me as 'crank'. Let us hope he is wrong, on this point only, if for no other reason than that my admiration of him be, if not justified, at least not self-destructive.

† Revelation: information provided by angels, ghosts or other spiritual beings.

inaccurate. What Plato, though whose writings we know what we know of Socrates, makes clear is that Socratic investigation depended less upon logic, information and investigation, or what we would today call 'science', than, of all things, friendship. An individual man is incapable of coming to grips not only with the totality of phenomena but even with some minor sub-section of it, without the help of other imperfect minds. This help cannot be philosophic ['love of knowledgeish'], or two-way, it can only be dogmatic [a 'teaching'], or one-way, if it is not given, and taken, in a spirit of friendship, or abandonment of self and openness to another. Only if friendship prevails can there be fully fruitful exchange, great discovery and exponential progress.

This Platonic attitude remained an elite privilege in Greek society and remains difficult of access even today. As for Jerusalem, Christianity pretends that human persons are created beings, endowed with freedom—specifically the freedom to disobey the divine ordinances, without which obedience would be morally meaningless—and that the meaning of life is resumed in our acceptance or non-acceptance of those divine ordinances, resumed in the Golden Rule: 'love thy neighbor as thyself'. This Rule may not manifest itself brilliantly in all aspects of Western society but, at least by contrast to others, and certainly in its ideals, a uniquely Western emphasis on personal freedom and its natural corollary, value of the individual, is to be discerned.

If Jerusalem and Athens were identical, if they were not even in some ways contradictory, Western society might lack its unexampled dynamism. If the Golden Rule does resume the law of God, it resumes neither Christianity itself nor the Christian aspect of Western society. It is, however, a non-negligible part of both, and over-laps largely with the Platonic injunction to friendship. It is in this area, this most robust root of Western culture, that the grounds of Western unity are to be sought.

That said, if I opine for war upon Islam the Western response would not be automatic agreement. No less, and certainly not in the sacred name of values however obliquely invoked, would it be automatic rejection. My anti-Islamism is no weaker than Patrick Dusoulier's anti-dogmatism, and as strong as the feeling of many people, including certain amiable readers of *Extant*, that Islam is a religion of peace and tolerance which, in current circumstances particularly, should be treated with careful and exaggerated respect. Still others might privately agree that although Islam is dangerously identical to Islamism prudence dictates a public stance to the contrary to encourage precisely the emergence of such a difference, however presently small or even non-existent. Still others might argue that more robust pressure, yet short of war, might inspire the reform in question.

In Western society, I say, such differences, no matter how strongly held and no matter how dire the circumstances, would be debated, perhaps with great heat, and even with ire, but against an ultimate background of mutual respect and genuine inquisition, or readiness to be convinced away from one's own convictions. What impedes such discussion is the very dogmatism—not beliefs as such, but bigoted adherence to them—which Patrick deplors. When dogmatism is

animated by militantism the situation becomes hopeless. The Moderator's unfriendly refusal to honestly engage Faucelme, his adamant quest to disqualify him, is a case in point. Dogmatism is not holding opinions strongly, it is holding them blindly. Faith may be blind; God does not, cannot, require blind obedience because he created us free. Man, in himself, can never grasp the absolute, so faith is a gift not a faculty, but the seeing and thinking faculties, called 'gifts of the holy spirit', are not thereby nullified. Man, by God himself if Christian theology is to be credited, is made to question his faith. As for Socrates; he did not pretend to teach. He hoped, together with others, to investigate and learn.

If the world at times obliges us to take a stance, let us not forget the ultimate nature of any position, which the distilled wisdom of 2000 years whispers must ever remain provisional.



## HONORS, DISHONORS AND DISSES\*

In addition to kind things said about me in Cosmopolis 63, I recently discovered that the VanceBBS moderator, was styling himself 'Irker of Paul Rhoads' in his electronic signature. I do not wish to look a gift-horse in the mouth but neither can I resist the temptation of wondering why he would choose to thus distinguish himself. Who am I and what have I done that anyone should publicly define themselves with regard to me? Is it my objection to snakes insinuating I am a nazi, saboteurs lying about the physical and textual quality of VIE books post-Wave 1 delivery, displeasure at personal slanders and threats tolerated on the VanceBBS board? Though I do not style myself the irker of anyone—though, with respect to certain individuals, it seems I might accurately have done so—the Moderator apparently objects more to me than to any of the rogues and rogueries referenced above. The 'Gaeen Reach', where the latter became institutionalized, was spawned, in my opinion, by his bungling of the VanceBBS crisis. That dim blue place has at last dwindled to an ideological mud-wrestling puddle for those high-profile cyber-personalities Bruce Yergil and Alexander Feht (their anti-Rhoads alliance has at least trained them to keep talking to each other; more power to them!) and was never anything but an anti-Paul Rhoads board—another trophy to inscribe on my Scroll of Honors, with a blot of ink.

In the Moderator's defense the deplorable situation he took over the VanceBBS to fix was no fault of his, his willingness to step in to do the dirty work was commendable, and he invested his energy. But, like sows ears and sledge hammers, good intentions and hard work are not enough if you need to make a silk purse or fix a pocket watch. Correct procedure would have

\* Or, as we used to say in New York when the lady ignored jeering: *dis is disses missis dismisses*.

been either to ban the culprits *en-masse*, quickly and silently, with one painless cut, or to counter them with determined but fundamentally friendly argument. Instead there was moralizing, disqualification and threats of banning eventually carried out with much wriggling, sawing, screaming and blood, once the victims were properly screwed up to an extreme of exasperated frustration. Thus maladroitly promoted, in drawn-out wrangles appeasing the slanders which were supposed to be controlled, the fundamental problems were needlessly prolonged and even deepened. The Moderator has complained I fail to appreciate his efforts. Given the deplorable results he might moderate even this gripe. I have continued to object, and react where possible, to any allowed or unanswered slanders of the work of Jack Vance, the Vance family, the VIE, my friends, or even myself, promoted or tolerated on the VanceBBS, when I am able to learn of them. Has this disobedient persistence reinforced the Moderator's animosity to the point of making it an aspect of his identity? The Moderator is a man famous for ironic urbanity. The moniker, therefore, may be intended in the second degree, to such an effect as: 'I only mention Paul Rhoads to show how very little I care about him', but this is too deep for me.

It is somewhat, but given the nature of life only somewhat, poor form to boast, so it is with a certain hypocrisy that I hesitate to reveal that I, at least, do not scruple to point out to those who, incredibly, have failed to see it for themselves that, not only does the Moderator irk me, he actually gives me a pain in the ass.

Another thing I do not hesitate to reveal is my approach to friends who frequent the VanceBBS to ask why they were giving the Moderator a free pass on this. Various reactions ensued, some more gratifying than others. Among the less was the suggestion, not altogether original, that I am only getting what is coming to me. Here is a selection of my reactive explication:

*Of course the Moderator is free to ban me; I had and have no objection to that, even if his reason for doing so had nothing to do the VanceBBS, and of course he remains free to take shots at me. And, of course, anyone is free, as Bob [Lacovara] suggests, to 'remove themselves from such an ungentlemanly situation', but to my mind that does not quite meet the case. We may want to be but we are not living in a world of gentlemen, and a strategy of turned-up noses will not hasten the advent of that utopia. It seems to me that no one should get a free ride for nasty tricks against someone in the presence of that someone's friends.*



*Neither the Moderator, nor anyone else, is denied access to EXTANT, though almost no one has bothered to avail themselves of this truly wonderful opportunity.*

*All kidding aside, I would emphasize that my complaint has nothing legalistic. I do not feel my 'rights' are being abused — I don't even feel I have any rights; any advantage I happen to enjoy I regard as a lucky chance to be protected, savored and unabashedly exploited to the hilt. No; I feel that the Moderator is being gratuitously nasty and aggressive, that his acts constitute, if only in embryonic form, a real danger to me, and, in particular, I wonder why those in a position to do something about it, particularly those who both use the Vance BBS more or less regularly and whom I consider personal friends, give him a free pass [. . .] The Moderator will be subjected to a serious drubbing in Extant #6, a fate he might mitigate, if not escape, by laying off.*



Extant - #6

*I'll add another comment — as is my wont.*

*Does no one take my personal interests to heart enough (sigh!) to find it ironic and unfortunate that, on what is certainly the most exposed portal of internet-Vancedom I, the Editor-in-Chief of the VIE, who, as such, might hope to cherish a certain mini-celebrity in that micro-universe to oppose to the otherwise relentless obscurity of the rest of my existence, am subjected to permanent derision by the keeper of that portal?\** I am not unaware that the Moderator's behavior is a sort of honor but, all things considered, it is an honor I would happily forgo, for reasons already exposed.

*The Moderator is handicapped by a markedly un-vancian inability to conduct civilized discourse. He presents a thin front of urbanity which quickly splits apart when his ideology, or his sovereign will, is called into question by even a breath of a respectful hint. His attitude is not only unfortunate for the loss of a more generalized respect and consideration in which I personally might otherwise fondly hope to bathe, but for the cause of Vance's work, and the VIE, as well. It has often been suggested that, as a high-profile representative of Jack Vance I am a sub-standard specimen. I admit to an analogous feeling about the Moderator.*

Addressing two friends in particular, I wrote

*It is not amazing to me anyone might feel this is much ado about nothing, but is it nothing to you that, without it being quite the end of the world, it is not nothing to me?*

*Your letter — perhaps I am misreading — suggests a degree of ill-temper or even ill-feeling. You attribute to me the unkind opinion that your opinion is nuncupatory, which suggests you think I address you not for the reasons I stated, but to use you. But, for example, might you not, as a gesture of friendliness toward me, and without changing your basic opinion of the situation (whatever it is, exactly), suggest to The Moderator that what he is doing is something he might want to reconsider, or ask him what benefit he envisages by the introduction of this note of maliciousness into the world? But, beyond that, I even begin to wonder if you don't think what The Moderator is doing is, somehow, ok.*

*Very sincerely, if any friend of mine, even one whose behavior I did not totally approve,† was being treated in a way I felt was unnecessary or unjust, even by another friend of mine, I would speak-up about it. I am not so benighted that I regard The Moderator's little trick as some kind of catastrophe, but I do confess that I was, well, confused, or troubled, when I got onto the VanceBBS after several months and saw that The Moderator had been doing this for weeks without a peep from anyone. It's like, I don't know, being called a 'dirty Jew' — though 'Irker of Paul Rhoads' is an urbane expression of contempt rather than a gross insult — and no one objecting. It's one thing if [you] feel intimidated by The Moderator — he is a bully after all — but you are no coward! So what is going on?*

*To come to the point, I can't escape the suspicion that, somehow, you approve what The Moderator is doing.*

---

\* Bob Lacovara offered this remark regarding celebrity status: 'In analogy with the license granted to the public to harass real-world "celebrities", you grant license to [the Moderator] and anyone else to say what they please, because Paul is a "celebrity" within the Vance community. Very well. If The Moderator and anyone else's comments were restricted to the Vance community, then I would accept the analog as valid. However, the personal attacks and slanderous comments made by the likes of a feht are not restricted to that community, but in fact easily available in the outer world where, in fact, Paul is simply a private citizen. Note that, by the way, I disagree with the notion that, because a person is well-known, that person's rights are somehow diminished by granting license to smaller but noisier people. This, however, is a separate issue.'

† Editors Note: and whose behavior can be absolutely approved? If we are not a little indulgent with each other we are doomed.



*Is this correct? Have I read you wrong?*

*I have never done anything to provoke,\* and certainly never slandered The Moderator. For years he has, privately and publicly, insulted, hectoring, threatened and degraded me. On those occasions I judged he had gone too far in public — I never even complained when he performed his tricks in private — I defined the limits to my forbearance. I can appreciate that some might judge my style of reaction unnecessary, poorly conceived or counterproductive, but they, in turn, might understand that I do not. I, after all, was the party concerned. We have been over this terrain uncounted times so I will say only that one cannot run a vast volunteer project, now, mercifully, almost achieved, in a climate of downward spiraling slander, censoriousness and ill-will. I have subjected the poor Moderator to the occasional blast of countervailing bandinage, in as light a tone as the subject permitted, never doing more than hold up a mirror to his acts, offering a 'public close-reading' so to speak. Assiduously I have done him no injustice because I have no desire to harm him. I have no illusions about how he likes this but, as the person chiefly responsible for the VIE, there can be no question of letting things go to hell. If others fail to see the logic of this position they might respect that I think I see it. Just wait until the 2d printing sets and the EQ book is delivered: the spectacle of my Jurassic indifference to the [trolls of on-line vancedom] will truly impress you!*

*So, I ask myself, why do you seem to condone the Moderator's action, as if he were the aggrieved party? Is this latest piece of anti-Paul Rhoads foolishness, however paltry, so lacking in unsavoryness that it is totally beneath your notice?*

*I will suggest something else. [You] made a very careful statement:*

By continually choosing controversial topics, you vastly increased the likelihood that this would actually occur. . . you have indeed made yourself "fair game for all sorts of nonsense". . .

*Does this not really mean that, because I have expressed ideas unapproved by the crowd, because I have 'put conscience above an agreeable group atmosphere' (as Benedict XVI said), I have renounced [your] goodwill and protection? If this is the price of following one's own lights, of failing to agree with the self-appointed majority, of ignoring the thought police; so be it. I have spent my whole life getting punished in this manner so it is no amazing novelty. But I can't shake the conviction that the world would be a better place if honest men, however divergent their opinions on this or that topic, banded together against maliciousness.*



In a happy coda to this fuss the Moderator graciously consented, thanks to the intermediary of our mutual friends, to accommodate himself to my sensibilities. I ask nothing more of my conception of an ideal world! I now wonder if the Moderator is equally content with the mitigation of his drubbing his gesture of good will merited? Assuming he even deigns to peruse the awful prose of this screed, he ought to be; the first draft of Extant #6 gave off sparks and sharp crackling sounds.†



\* Editor's Note: I mean, of course, I have never *deliberately* provoked him. If he finds my peristaltic existence objectionable this cannot justly be held against me!

† I cannot resist offering EXTANT readers a reply from one of my friends, Tim Stretton, a stylist well know to the Vance on-line community:

*[The Moderator's] cognomen seems to me essentially foolishness, but—given the previous history between him and Paul—one with an undertone of malice. I don't think*

## THE GREAT VIE DEBATE

The pro-VIE point of view is that of Paul Rhoads, written at the request of Hans van der Veeke, for Cosmopolis 63, though not published there. The anti-VIE point of view was copied off the Gaeon Reach posting board; it is by that matchless anti-VIE champion Alexander Feht.

### PRO-VIE

Even in its moment of conception the VIE was already a collaborative effort. When Norma Vance showed me Andrea's Irle's edition of *Domains of Koryphon*, 'here', I thought, 'is how Vance ought to be published!' A simple and dignified format, as if Vance were a writer of literature, not cheap and vulgar entertainment for adolescent minds. It is not that I minded reading Vance in crummy paperbacks or over-blown 'deluxe' editions. Orthographically challenged as I famously am, it is not as if the blatant textual cock-ups which plagued many of the editions—the mere tip of the iceberg as it later became clear!—bothered me too much. I knew that several of the titles were editorial but I just crossed them out and penciled in the correct ones. And though most of the work was out of print I had a copy of almost everything. So the initial impulse for the VIE was not reactionary or selfish. It was a positive movement, a desire to bring something into being the necessity for which seemed compelling.

I discussed my idea with Jack, Norma and John, and we began to make plans. The key strategy was to create the edition with a team of volunteers. This choice implied a set of other conditions: the edition could not generate profit, we ourselves could not be compensated for our work, the edition would have to be pre-sold to subscribers, the internet would be the organizational mode. But it implied something deeper. John and I tested the idea with anyone who had competence in publishing or related disciplines, and the response was universal: the project was impossible. It was, we were warned, far more work than we realized, and an unlimited set of hidden barriers awaited us. This advice turned out to be correct in all respects, except one. The project was not impossible. This, at last, has been demonstrated. Our irrational persistence is vindicated! The reason for this success is this: the impulse to create the VIE turned out to be shared by all Vance's readers.

By August of 1999 preliminary work had been carried as far as it could go. Very quickly we were in touch with Mike Berro and, if my memory does not deceive me, less than a week later the VIE web-site was on-line. Reaction was electrifying. Volunteers and subscribers poured in; thus began a 5 year saga of cooperation, discovery and

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*he enhances his own lustre, and in posting in a forum where Paul is denied right of reply, he commits at the very least a boorish act.*

*[The Moderator] should, in my opinion, either remove his offending sobriquet or unban Paul. I suspect he will do neither and so the world will remain a slightly—but definitely—worse place. It seems little enough to brag about.*

Tim will, I am positive, be glad his suspicion turned out unfounded.

adventure, much of which has been detailed in the pages of *Cosmopolis*.

By the nature of things each VIE volunteer has personal motivations, but there turned out to have been a common feeling not only that the VIE should exist but that taking personal responsibility for its existence is a duty not to be scamped. This sentiment, shared by the great majority of volunteers, can only have one source: the work of Jack Vance in contrast to its pre-VIE state of publication; the instinctively felt importance of his marvellous stories by contrast to the tawdry, careless, infrequent and even irresponsible manner in which it had, thus far and for the most part, been handled by publishers. Vance deserved a proper publisher; his readers themselves would band together, in an act of gratitude, and be that publisher.

What unites VIE volunteers is important because it is the fuel which carried us to success. But just as important are what makes volunteers different, because these differences are chassis, motor, headlights, gearbox and the rest of the composite vehicle which got us there. Being so much at the center of the project, perhaps no one is in a better position to feel this than myself. Looking back there are things I know now which I could not even have suspected in 1999: if John Foley had not imposed the Master Plan and taken charge of the composition team, the project would have failed. If Bob Lacovara had not created *Cosmopolis* and made a crucial series of technical and human contributions, the project would have failed. If Alun Hughes had not contributed his textual expertise the VIE would not have its present éclat. If Koen Vyverman had not contributed his technical brilliance we would never have got around mountains of difficulties. If Suan Yong and John Schwab had not brought their clear thinking, adamant dedication and Herculean work capacity, the project would have come apart by centrifugal force. I could go on. I am keenly aware of the countless individual initiatives which constitute the ensemble of VIE work. Absolutely irreplaceable individual contributions were made by Chris Corley, Joel Anderson, Tim Streton, Robin Rouch, Joel Reidesel,

Steve Sherman and Hans van der Veeke. Without the gratuitous dedication and massive efforts of the likes of Deborah Cohan, Derek Benson, Patrick Dusoulrier, Rob Friefeld, Chuck King, Richard Chandler, Dave Reitsema, Joel Hedlund, Damien Jones, Dave Kennedy, Bob Luckin, Marcel van Genderen and the post proofing sub-team heads and other champion workers, it is impossible for me to imagine how the project could have been achieved. Five years is a long time; if we had been only 100 volunteers, rather than 250, we would have failed from enervation and entropy; those who did merely 10, merely 5, merely a single job contributed, therefore, significantly to the project's vitality and success.

So the VIE is a tribute to more than the motivating power of the work of Jack Vance, to his readers sense of its high importance—to such an extent that they would give several years of their life to its creation. It is also a tribute to something emphasized in all Vance's stories, something at the heart of what we all find so valuable in it: the wondrously variegated nature of the universe, and the supreme value of each person.

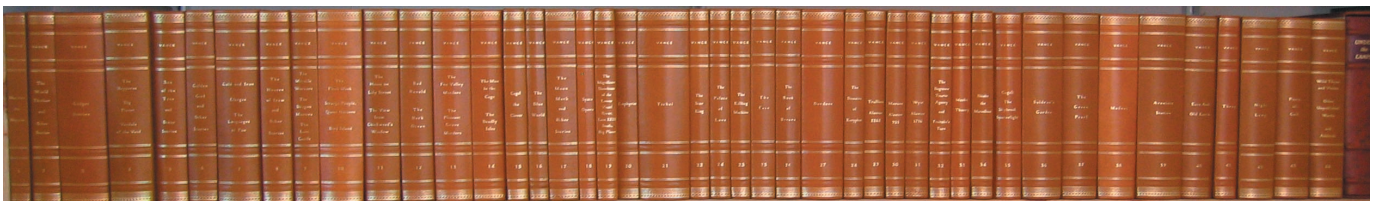
*Paul Rhoads, May 2005*

## ANTI-VIE

Today I received the rest of the VIE volumes. Not counting the \$150 that VIE owes me for the two returned "Deluxe" demonstration volumes, my immediate business with the VIE is over—though this inimitable gang of fancy pants certainly will take its deserved place in the book about Jack Vance that I am going to write.

Looking at the brown-bag-colored, decidedly weird, cheap-looking but luxuriously expensive books, printed using the worst typeface I've seen in any of the Jack Vance's editions—and at the long, sad (and woefully incomplete) Wave 1 errata list\* inserted in the last volume (not to mention the truly pathetic illustrations)—I don't understand, what all the noise was about.

I am glad this shameful project is over. The best part

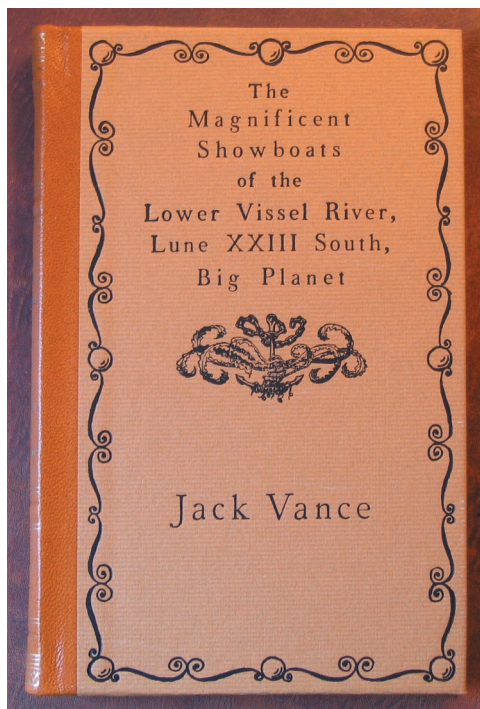


THE VIE READERS BOOK SET: THE ENTIRE OEUVRE OF JACK VANCE; CHRONOLOGICAL, COMPLETE, CORRECT.

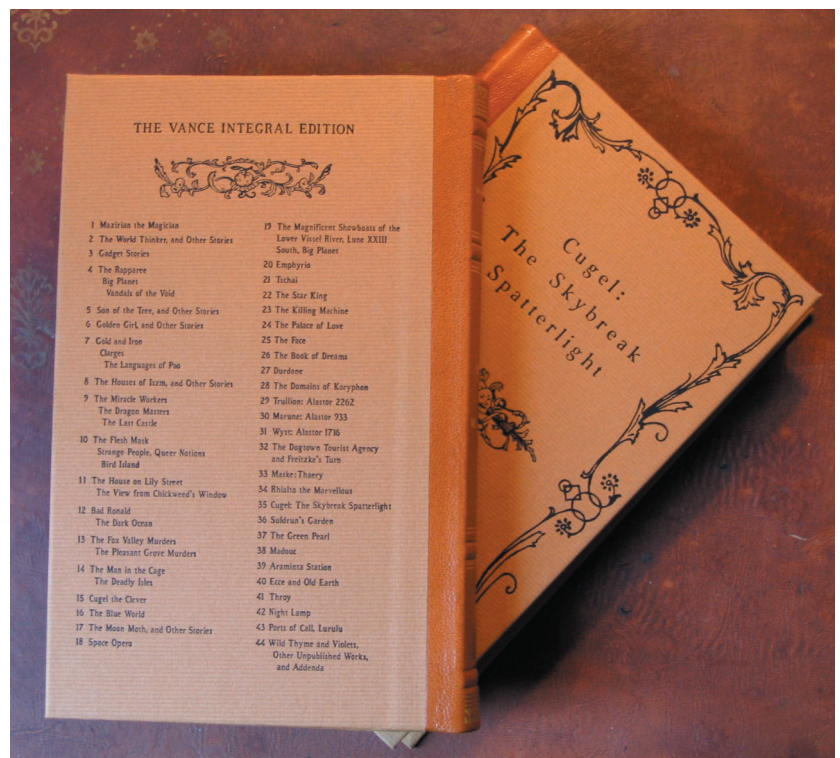
\* Editor's note: Wave 1 errata are listed and discussed in *Cosmopolis* #59, page 4. Mr. Feht's suggestion that the wave 1 errata are 'woefully incomplete' is supported, to begin with, by cryptic remarks regarding an alleged error in 'most editions of *Wyst*' regarding the bonter expedition of Chapter 4. He complains that 'Woble' on page 69 is the same as 'Doble' on page 76. Here indeed the VIE may indeed have cleaved more closely to the manuscript than true prudence would dictate, though I imagine most readers can cope with this and even might be pleased with this peek, however fleeting, into the creative imagination. Mr. Feht also alleges that there is a missing sentence in the same text, though since he fails to say which, and since phrases added by editors or deleted by Vance himself

were taken into account by the VIE, I can comment upon this no more than upon unspecified errors he claims to have discovered in *Lyonesse*. Mr. Feht claims that all of them have been "approved" by the highest authority on Jack Vance, *His Modesty the Editor-in-Chief, Paul Rhoads*. And then, somewhat inconsistently, asks: 'but who am I to waste my life pointing them out to the Doble-standard people who treated me like dirt?' He then resumes his famous boast: 'I've said many times that three professional editors would do a better job than two hundred volunteers.' This is a large, in fact 33%, adjustment of his original estimate which was of 'two professionals'. Still, if nothing else, it casts scorn more widely than upon the head of *His Modesty the Editor-in-Chief*.





FRONT COVER OF VOLUME 19.

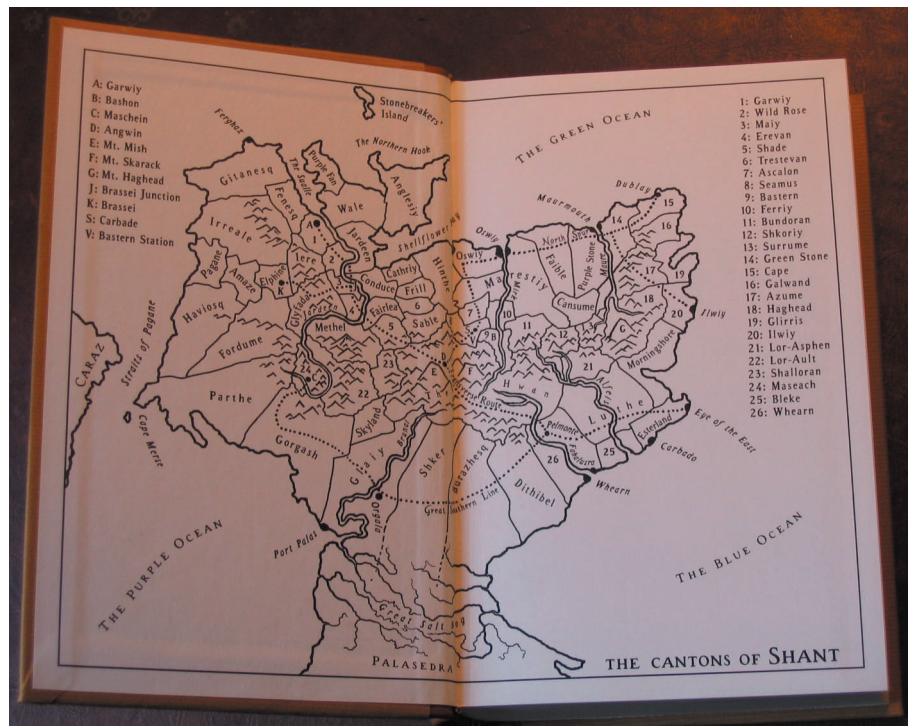


BACK COVER CATALOGUE.

of it is that it went so unnoticed by the majority of Vance's readers that it failed to do any substantial damage to Jack's name.

I only wish I'd never got involved with the dishonest and cowardly, tasteless and self-serving people in charge of the VIE. I shall never make such a mistake again.

*Alexander Feht, August 2005*



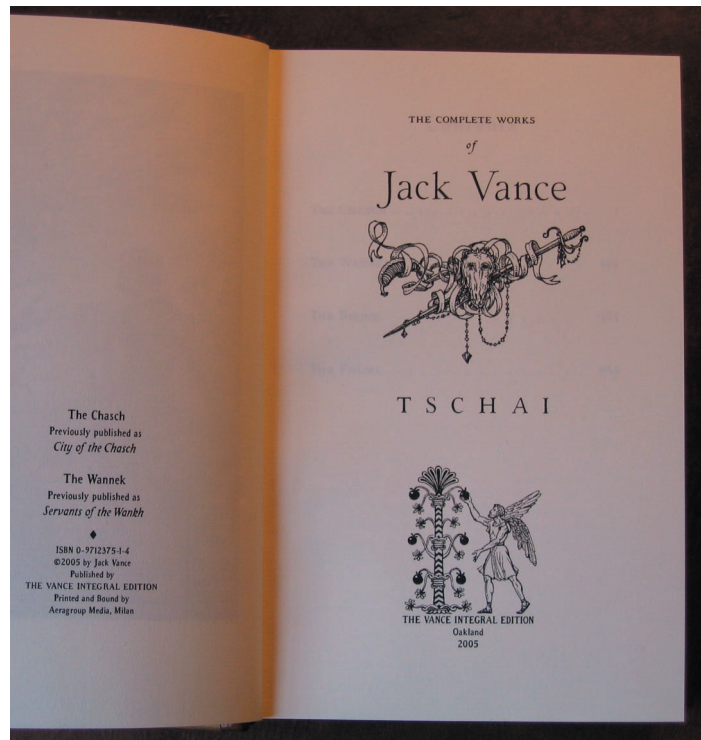
NEVER BEFORE PUBLISHED MAP OF SHANT, VOLUME 27.\*

\* Photos by Paul Rhoads. Early subscribers, such as Alexander Feht, paid \$1,250.00 for their Readers sets of 44 books. This, not counting delivery, is \$28.40 per volume.





FRONTISPIECE, VOLUME 29.



TITLE PAGE, VOLUME 21.



## LETTER:

... I just read your Blue World essay in EXTANT, which I enjoyed thoroughly! Like you, I do not read Vance with the conscious intent of "analyzing". I always enjoy reading his words, and I almost always have something to think about afterwards. I have often heard the critique of "poor plot structure" and wondered why I do not find it to be true; your essay gave me some good ideas on how to counter this critique when I encounter it in the future—which I no doubt will.

I received my Wave 2 volumes a week ago, and am already enjoying them immensely!

*Chris Corley*

## EXTANT ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

Thanks to Rob Friefeld for his help with EXTANT #6.

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(whichever works best for us)



*'His Irked Modesty'*  
*Paul Rhoads*

