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VIE REPORT

The pdf of VIE volume #14 bis, all 560 pages, is delivered at last. Stefania Zacco, our girl in Milan, writes to me: 'you and Marcel will receive blues to check by March 9. No beautiful drawing this time?'

I would like to especially thank *Chuck King, Bob Luckin, Rob Friefeld and Marcel van Genderen* for their work in the finishing stretches, but all volunteers who contributed to the EQ volume have put in hundreds of hours over the last many months. They are:

DONNA ADAMS	TONY GRAHAM
MARK ADAMS	JOEL HEDLUND
MICHEL BAZIN	ROBERT MELSON
MARK BRADFORD	DAVID REITSEMA
RICHARD CHANDLER	PAUL RHOADS
DEBORAH COHEN	MIKE SCHILLING
CHRISTIAN J. CORLEY	JOHN A. SCHWAB
MIKE DENNISON	STEVE SHERMAN
ANDREW EDLIN	TIM STRETTON
BRIAN GHARST	HANS VAN DER VEEKE

Rather than a frontispiece, this volume includes a highly interesting notice, by Chuck King, about the restorations, particularly of *Strange She Hasn't Written* [published as *The 4 Johns*], an exceptional case in the annals of VIE text restoration.

The volume should be in production towards the end of March, with delivery in April. The current plan is to send volumes out individually to European subscribers. The others will be pre-packed in their mailing boxes, group shipped to the USA, probably chez Bob Lacovara, and individually forwarded to the Americas and Asia.

WARNING TO MANAGERS

There has been much talk of offering the ELLERY QUEEN volume to managers as a thank-you gift for

their work. This matter depends upon project finances and board policy, neither of which are controlled by myself. Due to the break-down of most of the project structures I have been unsuccessful, over the last year, in transforming this initiative into firm policy. The problem is not unwillingness on anyone's part, but the tedious administrative/clerical efforts which must be made.

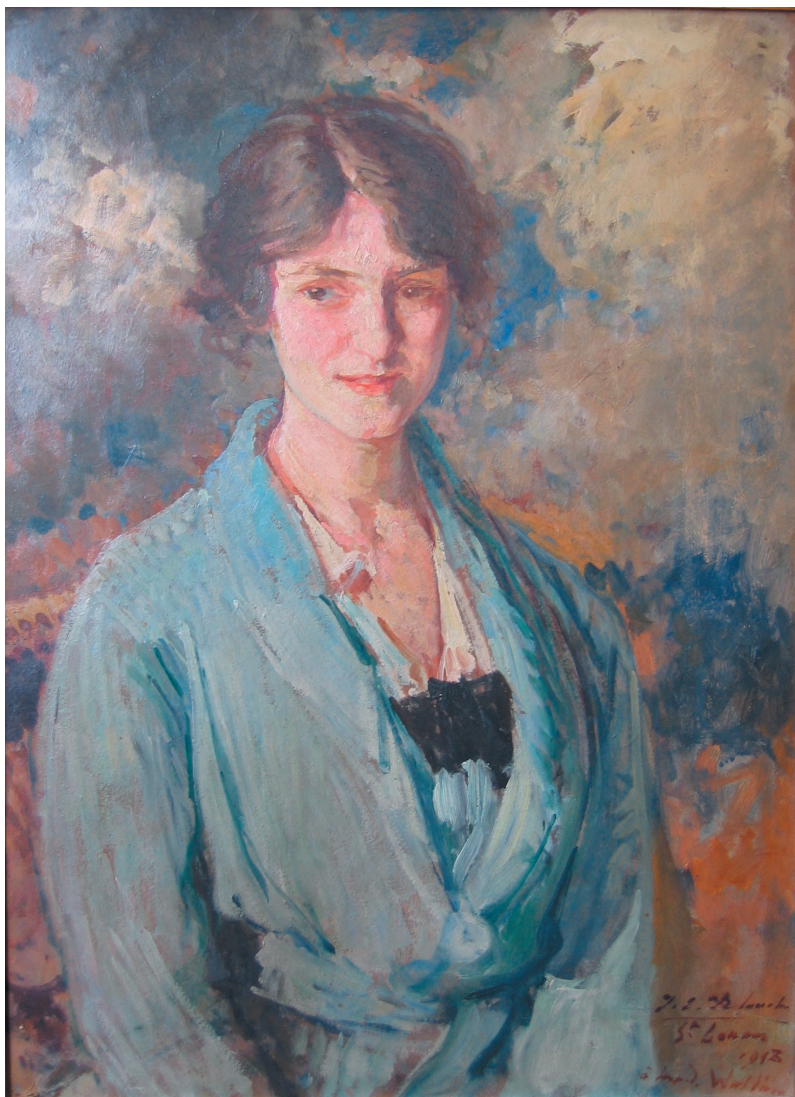
(March 4: I have just learned that Suan has calculated enough volumes for all managers, wheather they have ordered or not. It is still not clear whether they will be distributed as gifts.)



A 1000 WORDS ABOUT PICTURES

JACQUES-EMILE BLANCHE

Jacques Emile Blanche is not a painter you hear about every day. He was famous in his time mostly as a portraitist. His painting are extremely hard to find in public museums. I have only encountered three: two in Lyon, and one in Albi. The latter is a stunning little interior which inspired



Portraite of Gabriel Walther, by Jacques-Emile Blanche, 1918



Karen Mosman, by Paul Rhoads, 2004, work influenced by Jacques-Emile Blanche.

sketch, handled with vigorous freedom, on a cardboard panel. Many passages recall the powerful brush handling of Gericault but the over-all conception is distinctly English. The composition, of course, recalls Gainsborough's *Blue Boy* but the painting has more in common with Reynolds in feeling. The characterization is extremely lively; the likeness is said to be only middling but I suspect it is better than Biton's children say. They came to know their mother only later. Her face broadened with age and Jacques Emile Blanche was not such a successful portraitist for nothing. The handling is as bold as Picasso's, but multi-functional in the grand tradition where each stroke expresses not only color and form but light and texture too. In short: a masterpiece!

me to make paintings in a similar line. His style is very much in the classical French vein, and seems to descended from Thomas Couture and Delacroix, the former a major transmission rod of the properly French tradition, from the 18th century masters though David, while Delacroix introduced the English note into French painting.* The best example of Jacques-Emile Blanche's work, which I know

first hand, happens to be his portrait of my mother-in-law. Born Gabriel Walther, 'Gabby', as she was sometimes called, was herself a painter of enormous talent, who signed her work with another family pet-name: 'Biton'. I am sorry I never knew her; she died before I met her daughter. Gabby had some painting instruction from Jacques-Emile Blanche, who took refuge at St. Louand during the first world war. The portrait was painted there, as noted on the pannel, in 1918. It is a life size



Still life by 'Biton'.

Biton herself, though an assiduous artist, has no carrier at all. But her work, even if it only hangs here and there in the houses of her children, or rots in old portfolios in attics

and dusty trunks, is first rate. Though neglect a great number of her pastels have been wrecked. I rate them, in their original state, superior to Mary Cassat. Her rare water-colors are perhaps her most original works; those I know hang in kitchens and corridors here and there in private homes. Biton's work has a feminine sensitivity but is fundamentally as powerful as Delacroix or Renoir. Her satisfying composition, her melted effects and suavely bold reliefs, her robust sense of form, original sense of color, subtle and powerful treatment of light and texture, her delicious surfaces, all are on a level rarely met even in many paintings by recognized masters. Her style has nothing of the so-called 'modernist', but it is high time this silly qualification were stricken from our critical vocabulary. Anyone who can paint this well can ignore all adjectives, no matter how noisomely gluey their socio-cultural import.



Still life by 'Biton'.

* At jssgallery.org/Paintings/10132.html one may read this passage, written by Oscar Wilde '...[Jacques-Emile Blanche] was closely associated with Manet and Degas. From the early 1880s [he] had been a frequent visitor to London, where he spent a formative period working closely with Whistler and Sickert, and exhibiting with the New English Art Club from 1887. During the 1890s he became a successful portrait painter of fashionable society...'.

MY UNCLE'S LIBRARY

A few years ago, like most of my friends, I had a personal library of a certain proportion. Nothing exceptional but enough to be a concern when I changed domiciles, to require some planning to make accessible. The VIE created a need for 5 more feet of shelf space. But now, with the death of my uncle last year, my personal library has doubled. Even so, the books I have inherited are only a small portion of my uncle's library, and this acquisition is not the beginning of my relationship to it.

My uncle's earthly remains lie in a cemetery on Martha's Vineyard. He moved there when he retired, to be near his mother. My grandmother was a remarkable woman. She died about 10 years ago, still hale and fierce at the age of 102. On her head stone, a simple rock, my uncle had carved words from the bible: 'Woman of Valor'. On his own head-stone, at his request, is engraved: 'Captain Stanley T. Gabis, U.S. Air Force'. Having served in war he has the right to an American flag on his grave—though when I visited this decoration had been neglected, temporarily I hope.

My uncle Stanley was not a military man however. He was a professor of political philosophy, government and public administration. He spent his carrier at the university of Missouri. This is a post of minimal prestige, and public administration always seemed a tedious subject. Much of my uncle's life was devoted to philosophical researches in view of articles or books, none of which were ever written. None of this, however, blunted my keen respect and affection for my uncle. With time I understand better how, for all his intellectual gifts and proclivities, he was in certain ways more a man of action than a man of ideas, and public administration is as much a matter of art as of theory, as much a matter of acting as of calculating.

When my uncle retired to Martha's Vineyard the local government had decided to reform itself. He was drafted into this effort and became one of its leading spirits. Later he organized a weekly conversation group which became a local institution, featuring the prominent thinkers and writers who infest the island, such as Samuel Huntington and Stanley Burnshaw. These, and many other people, valued my uncle's conversation as much as I did.

In the war he was a personnel officer. His job, at the air base in Fogio, Italy, was keeping the bombers crewed; each day some of the planes always failed to return. My uncle's work was not for the faint of heart. At the end of the war he organized the discharges.* Efficient processing of this sort has nothing of military glory, but it was my uncle's pride. Few of the men concerned, I imagine, were aware that a certain captain Gabis was responsible for getting them started home as quickly as possible, but what could have been a source of greater happiness for them?

As a doer my uncle was also an enthusiastic *bricoleur*; in this department he always amazed me with his disorderly habits and inept use of tools. Being his favorite nephew, and ept with tools, I was often drafted to correct, complete, or simply to effectuate in its entirety, one or another of his handy-man projects. More than once I put his tool bench in order, only to find it back in its natural state on my next visit.

When my uncle retired he bought an old house and decided to install his library in the attic, a narrow space lit by two

small windows, squeezed under a high-peeked roof. He had a skylight installed, but it could never be discouraged from leaking. There were no shelves, and the books waited, in dozens and dozens of cartons.

My uncle was not a penny-pincher but neither was he conventional. There was a lumber yard down the road which had a public scrap pile; I was appointed to build the shelves from this detritus, which included no proper boards. We gathered a quantity of lengths in sections of about 2"x2", and flimsy slats of various widths. With the former I made ladder-like units, which supported the slats, doubled up and fitted between the rungs as shelves. To complete the ensemble, again at my uncle's request, I make a turning shelf of several stages, for books in current use, from an old floor-lamp my uncle had scavenged at the dump.

Then the books had to be shelved. To my surprise they had been packed in no order. When I expressed concern, my uncle told me just to shelve them at random! He claimed he knew them so well he could find them without trouble. Perhaps in Missouri that was true. There he had put each book on the shelf in the first place. But randomly disposing 5000 volumes in the inevitably inconvenient shelving of the new attic library, running along the floor or arranged in cramped corridors, was unrealistic. Ignoring his instruction I gave the library a summary organization by major subject: 'literature', 'classical philosophy', 'modern philosophy', 'communism', 'American history', 'administration', 'current affairs'. Over the years, as my uncle added new books and made use of old ones, this organization was progressively blurred, but persisted none-the-less.

For me the library became a place of wonder. Many of the most stimulating moments of my life occurred there, in conversation with my uncle or reading his books.

My uncle was the son of Russian Jewish immigrants who, escaping the late 19th century pogroms, passed though England. My grandmother spent her early childhood in London and always retained an English accent. She learned tower diving in England, and when the family ended up in Philadelphia she competed at the national level. Later she became a hair-dresser and fur saleswoman. My uncle's elder brother became a car salesman; he was a talented amateur musician, a fabricator of wooden toys, a teller of jokes, a cheerful well-loved man. His sister, my mother, was (and is) a bohemian spirit who became a professional pianist. My uncle, by contrast, was a good student and went on to college. After the war he went to the university of Chicago where he was the first doctoral student of the notorious Leo Strauss. Strauss had a decisive influence on him, as he did on many others. My uncle, therefore, is counted among the nefarious 'Straussians' to whose shadowy machinations are occasionally imputed the worst of the neo-conservative turpitudes.

Straussians class themselves by generation. The 'first generation' are those who, like my uncle, studied under Strauss directly. The most celebrated of these is Allan Bloom, author of *The Closing of the American Mind*, a book highly Straussian in character. My uncle's doctoral theses, *Secrecy in Politics, A Study in Attitudes* (Chicago, 1957). The summer I read it for the first time, and discussed it with my uncle each evening, was an important educational experience, and though I lack a normal academic cursus, I like to think of myself as a 'second generation Straussian'. But 'Straussian' or not, Strauss' ideas have much influence on me, and I continue to study him.†

† See note next page.

* I do not know exactly who his responsibilities covered; it seems to have been the tens of thousands of air-men stationed in southern Italy.

My uncle was a little like Socrates; he never wrote a book, and he loved to talk to people, and people loved to talk to him. His was a life of action in this sense.

After my he my aunt allowed me to take the books I wanted from the library. Most precious of all are 30 folders of unpublished mimeographed transcripts of Strauss' classes. These rare documents are now in my possession, along with several hundred coveted volumes: 19th century translations of Plato's dialogues, histories by Ranke and Grote, Lobe Classical Library editions, and various rare books of particular interest to Straussians.

My uncle's collection, by the time of his death, had out-run the libraries storage capacity but my culling trimmed the stock down to a manageable quantity, so I put the shelves in good order. In the course of this I opened the occasional volume, and at one point I chanced upon a tedious and forbidding title: *Representative Bureaucracy, An Interpretation of the British Civil Service*, by one J. Donald Kingsley. My uncle was much on my mind and here, in an apparant apotheosis of its opacity and ennui, was his subject: 'public administration'. Glancing inside, and much to my surprise, I was instantly captivated—for a whole set of reasons I will detail here. But I will offer a passage which my fellow Vance readers, I am confidant, will not fail to enjoy as much as I do:

The flow of work within the hierarchy is both upwards and downwards. Some matters, such as parliamentary questions or occational suggestions for new legislation, reach the department through the Minister. Others originate in the lower reaches of the hierarchy, often in the course of contact with members of the public, and make their way upward. Perhaps, if the question involved is of sufficient importance it may even come to the attention of the Permanent Secretary or the Minister. But except in the case of matters of major policy or questions of unusual importance, the actual decisions will be made and action take lower down. . . Minutes and memoranda pass up and down the line until by a selective process they reach their proper level and are disposed of. . . there is a sense in which the higher administrative officers and particularly the ministers are in the hands of subordinate officials.

† I depart from the Straussians, however, at a few points. One of them is my conviction that Strauss is the most important 20th century thinker. Strauss himself opposed this idea adamantly, insisting to his students that he was only an historian of ideas. I experienced this adamance, at second hand, through my uncle, and through other Straussians. (I believe Allan Bloom touches on this matter in one of his writings.) Strauss seems to have accepted the nineteenth century attitude which gives first honors to originality—or what is taken for originality—and so gives a certain credit to the idea of progress, of which he is, none-the-less, the most important critic. Strauss, therefore, considered Heidegger as the greatest 20th century thinker. Strauss and Heidegger were fellow students in Germany. The young Strauss, so I have heard, was in love with Hannah Arandt, who rejected him to become Heidegger's adulterous lover. Though not a religious man Strauss, obedient to a Jewish tribal tradition, married his brother's widow. These facts are rich objects of reflection.

The character of Strauss' thought is related to neo-conservative thinking (whatever that may be) only by an indirect link. His fundamental insight is no rejection of modern philosophy, but that criticism of it, specifically a fresh look at it from the perspective of classical philosophy, is not only possible but necessary. This is regarded by some as, at best, a retrograde denigration of modernism, which is a more or less deliberate misunderstanding of Strauss and the basis of the conspiracy theories surrounding him. Though certainly no 'enemy' of modernism, his thought is the acid which cuts into it most deeply. This cannot be forgiven. Closely related to this matter is how Strauss is the first man in centuries to take up the study of medieval philosophy, including thinkers like Farabi and Maimonides (an Arab and a Jew) in a serious rather than an antiquarian spirit. Understanding such thinkers, he argued, is crucial to regaining a true understanding of the Greek philosophers, which time, and modern philosophy, have made inaccessible. One of his most controversial positions is that, because of political circumstances which no longer prevail in the West, though they do prevail under Communist tyranny, ancient writers concealed their true meanings under a venir of acceptable meanings. Strauss defined a set of special techniques for uncovering these true meanings. See the appendix to this article for a sample of Straussian thinking, an unpublished conference from the transcriptions mentioned above.

The system, obviously, offers exceptional opportunities for sabotage. . .

There is also Kingsley's description of conditions after Gladstone's retirement:

. . . there was a lull, a brief period of dilletantism, during which Mr. Arthur Balfour moved in graceful langour across the stage and society cultivated the art of living intensely. It was the Indian Summer of the old order; the afterglow of a radiance already extinguished, and it would disappear forever in 1906.

Jack Vance's work often sings the special delights of such eras.



APPENDIX; from Strauss' course on THE REPUBLIC:

Since this is the last meeting, I would like to make only a brief concluding remark about our theme. I know that a summary is absolutely impossible and I can only state a few points which are in my opinion the best summary I could give. The main point—the *Republic* is not a treatise on justice like the fifth book of Aristotle's *Ethics*; this is a work of art. This does not mean that we should sit with gaping mouths enjoying these poetic beauties; it means only that we have to think five times as much as we have to do when we read the fifth book of the *Ethics*. That it is a work of art everyone agrees, but what does "work of art" mean. When I was young, younger than you are, I heard this story which I regarded as extremely insipid. Only now in my old age have I seen how wise it is. This is the story of the great Greek painter who painted grapes in such a way that the birds came to pick them. He was such a great painter that he deceived the birds. This seems to be very silly and it reminded me of the story of President Roosevelt who didn't understand much of painting and yet was so thrilled about the painting of his wife because the painter succeeded in imitating exactly the color of his wife's hair. For this reason he found it a perfect painting. Here we have a simple notion of the imitation of nature. But let us try to interpret that simple and insipid story. What does are mean?—to imitate nature obviously. But the second point which is equally important is deception, illusion. Of course they are not real grapes but only painted grapes. So we have an imitation of nature and at the same time a delusion. In what does delusion consist?—In abstraction from something. In this case we abstract from the three-dimensionality, to say nothing of anything else. If you take a sculpture which is three dimensional, you abstract from life and motion, Now from what does a book like Plato's dialogues abstract? Let us be as superficial as we can. He abstracts obviously from visibility. We hear stories and even complicated descriptions, but we don't see anything. We saw the enormous effort required in today's report in order to make one thing visible. I don't have to tell you that in Plato this little thing—abstraction from visibility—is very rich in meaning. The real things are invisible and not even audible. Non-visibility of the merely audible is a kind of transition. The second point, and one which is more central, is the denial of chance. Everything is necessary. That Socrates had such a strange wife, that he had such a strange nose and eyes is all meaningful. So the Platonic dialogue as such abstracts from chance, from visibility and perhaps some other things. But every individual dialogue makes a specific abstraction. This specific abstraction is partly indicated by the setting. For example, when Socrates talks to generals and then he talks to young mathematicians, he disregards certain things in talking to generals which he does not disregard in talking to young mathematicians and visa versa. The understanding of every Platonic dialogue means to get a precise notion of that x from which he abstracts in the particular dialogue. I give you one example which is more familiar to me. The dialogue *Euthyphro* is characterized by abstraction from the soul. The word soul doesn't occur in that dialogue. In the moment you think of the soul you see a problem which you do not see in the dialogue itself. Now in the *Republic* I would say the thing from which he abstracts is the body. The body is mentioned there, but the body is minimized. And that is the meaning of the communism. The body is that which cannot be possessed in common. The need of these young, maybe still growing people, is also not fulfilled as far as food is concerned. There is an asceticism here. I mentioned also this solid geometry business. Why is this asceticism needed here?—for the sake of the city. This is the sacrifice of the individual to the city, that is to say for other human beings. This is the primary theme of the *Republic* and that is the primary meaning

of justice. The desire for such sacrifice, which Glaucon and Adeimantus have, is a noble passion, but as all passions, no matter how noble, it is in need of purification, of catharsis (as the Greeks said). That is the function of the *Republic*—to appeal and to awaken this passion in the reader (and I think that he does in every reader) and at the same time to purify it, to change its direction from a dimension in which it cannot be fulfilled to a dimension in which it can be fulfilled. In other words this purification means a change in the meaning of justice. Justice in the highest sense of the term is not sacrificing one's self to the polis, or others, but to take care of one's own soul—philosophy.

What Plato discusses in the *Republic* under the title justice is more familiar to us in our language under the title morality. Morality is a problem in the *Republic*. The fundamental alternatives as we still know them are—morality is non-rational or it is rational. With regard to the former, you know today the favorite doctrine: morality is non-rational and has no substance; it is merely an expression of subjective preferences. Plato takes the opposite stand: morality is rational, but (and this is the difficulty) there is a great ambiguity regarding morality. Is that morality which is rational identical with what we ordinarily understand by morality. Now Plato discovers two roots of justice or morality—one is society, the polis and the other is philosophy, thinking. Both roots lead to more or less the same demands. My habitual example here: if you are a habitual drunk, you are both a bad citizen and a bad thinker. But they are not identical. There are certain rare but important cases in which the demands of thinking and the demands of the polis do not coincide and may conflict. But there is a graver problem—a dimension of morality which does not have any rational basis according to the teaching of the *Republic* and which I believe we all regard as terribly important.

Now what does Plato do in the *Republic*. He destroys the family; there is no question about that. This means that incest becomes morally possible. Plato forbids the gravest form of incest between parents and children. But on what ground?—on the lowest possible ground, a purely eugenic ground. The sacredness or the awe which we connect with this prohibition, and which neither Freud nor anyone has given an adequate account, is completely lost in this process. But this is the greatest indication of the problem of morality—that this most awe inspiring prohibition which all civilized nations have regarded very seriously loses its basis. Even when Plato takes up the problem again in the form of the problem family and polis (*Statesman*) he gives again a purely utilitarian and political justification. People must marry outside the family, because otherwise the family union will be so close that it will do damage to the political society. Therefore there should be exogamy, and this cannot be maintained (as you can easily figure out for yourselves) without a strict prohibition against any sexual relations within the family. But again this is a purely political consideration. Obviously this is a great problem. The connection with the theme of the *Republic* would be as follows. What is presupposed in all prohibitions, at least as we know them in the West, against incest? They are all prohibitions against intercourse between blood relations. The hypothesis of the *Republic* is based on an abstraction from the blood relations. I think it is not too difficult to see how this is connected with an abstraction from the body, because our kinship relations are essentially mediated by the body. That Plato did not favor that transgression of the prohibition against incest I have no doubt. Plato forces us to state the problem of morality in a much clearer way than we otherwise could by making this simply bi-partition of body and mind. The body with its needs—food, shelter and so on—society. And society requires certain moral habits. The mind and its needs require certain moral habits. There is an intermediate sphere which is not covered by that, and one could perhaps say that it is precisely this intermediate sphere which does not allow of a utilitarian explanation is precisely the sphere of morality as such. So we are left with a great problem.

This brings me to another aspect of the same problem. There are two roots of morality—the polis and thinking. And yet there is an amazing convergence between the moral demands of society and the moral demands of thinking. How can we understand that. I give you only one point for your consideration. You have the desires of the body; you have the desires of the mind. These desires are radically different, but both are accompanied by something negative. . . [unintelligible]. . . in man is called the spirited part. So it seems that this spirited part of the soul of which we have heard so much is really the link which establishes the unity of man as a mere animal needing food and so on and as a being capable of thinking. Therefore I think the central theme of the *Republic* is really spiritedness. Take Glaucon as an example. The lower part of the soul is called by Plato the desiring part, but he has a higher word for that which he uses on other occasions—eros. . . [unintelligible]

[The lecture was evidently not recorded beyond this point.]

ON-LINE PROFILE

ALTERNATIVE REALITY WEBZINE

'ARWZ' was started in September 2005. Fantasy is currently getting most of their attention but the the folks at ARWZ hope, as the number of freelance contributors increases, to have more articles and resources on science fiction and horror. Their approach is to treat alternative reality genres as potential literature, they seek to identify the literary aspects in genres stories, and they are eager to promote work which defies genre conventions with the hope of arriving at a greater and higher synthesis. The ARWZ credo is that popular fiction can be thought-provoking and have artistic value, while not sacrificing the entertaining, adventurous elements that makes it popular.



VIOLANTHE

ARWZ seeks to associate itself with other sites, and maintains a page of profiles of associate sites and online communities. One of these is the VanceBB. The ARWZ profile of that online community will appear in the next few months.

Violanthe, a founding editor of ARWZ, has made a steady and successful effort to animate the VanceBBS with her ludic and thought provoking questions.

The ARWZ site currently features of reviews of new and old books, including:

Beowulf, translated by Constance Hieatt.
Changing Planes, by Ursula K. LeGuin.
The Man in the High Castle, by Philip K. Dick.
Dragonflight, by Anne McCaffrey.
Rusalka, by C.J. Cherryh.
Small Gods, by Terry Pratchett.
Pillars of the Earth, by Ken Follett.
The Dispossessed, by Ursula K. LeGuin.
Deception Point, by Dan Brown.
Feast for Crows, *Storm of Swords*, *Clash of Kings*, and *Game of Thrones*,
 by George R.R. Martin.

Movies, including:

The Chronicles of Narnia, directed by Andrew Adamson.
King Kong, directed by Peter Jackson.

And TV shows, including:

Star Trek: The Next Generation, Season One on DVD.
Xena: Warrior Princess, on DVD.
Buffy the Vampire Slayer, on DVD.

SILLY SCIENCE

MARS SOCIETY REDUX

Last week the Mars society managed to obtrude itself upon my attention not once but twice. French national television, a fifth column if there ever was one, featured a report on the Canadian Mars Society's 'martian living unit', and the French national radio, marching in the same column, also mentioned them. This coincides perhaps innocently with the recent triumph of Green Peace over the French government, internationally embarrassed over a ridiculous fuss over the asbestos in the decommissioned aircraft carrier *Clemenceau*. On the pretext that the dismantlement facilities in India (world leader in this area) are sub-standard—a good example of what these same Leftist activists would in other circumstances condemn as 'post-colonial xenophobic paternalism'—Green Peace managed to block the ships transfer to India, after it had passed the Suez canal (paying a 1.5 million Euro toll). The *Clemenceau* is now being towed back to France, via the Cape of Good Hope, to the port at Brest, though the Mayor of that city has announced he won't play host to floating asbestos traps. Rubbing its virtual hands, Green Peace has announced it will continue to hound the French government with full zeal.

Be all this as it may, it reminded me of a piece I wrote for COSMOPOLIS which was never published, a reaction, solicited by the Editor but then rejected, to a letter from Jonathan Clarke, Director of the Australian Mars Society, complaining about my Mars Society exposé in COSMOPOLIS 23. See COSMOPOLIS 54 page 28, for the full text of Director Clarke's letter, which he entitled: 'More Accurate Mars Society Information'. I give the essential here, followed by my reply, given new actuality by current events.

♦ ♦ ♦ ♦

...Paul Rhoads...commented on a TV program about the Mars Society [which he suspects of] being a "Greenpeace type, crypto anti-western propaganda organization" whose leaders are not actually interested in Mars colonization but in "converting Earth's population to their fanatical, moribund and absurd religion of post-communist anti-capitalism."

Whether or not the article is an accurate reflection of the program I cannot say. But I will say that it is not an accurate reflection of the Mars Society, which is a collection of affiliated groups in more than a dozen countries and made up of scientists, engineers, and ordinary people who are interested in the Mars as a focus of human endeavour. The goals of the Society include public education about past present and future Mars exploration through web pages, conferences, and publications, research into strategies for exploring and living on Mars, and funding instruments and, ultimately actual spacecraft for missions to the Red Planet. The Society is funded largely by subscription and sponsorship but works closely with a range of universities and space agencies. . .

A plethora of information about the Society was available on the web at the time that Paul Rhoads wrote his article. There is simply no excuse for not doing even the simplest research and avoid promulgating such errors. The Mars Society is not crypto anti-western, in any way associated with or resembling Greenpeace, nor does it hold to post-communist anti-capitalism political viewpoints. The Society is however enthusiastic, committed, and eager for members who can contribute to its goals.

Is the Mars Society, as Director Clark suggests, merely an innocent club of space exploration enthusiasts, or, as I

claim, a cover for subversive activism? Who made the TV documentary which so sympathetically presents the Mars Society and its goals, if it was not the Mars Society itself? In COSMOPOLIS (page 7) I wrote:

For a group that pretends their goal is the colonization of Mars they are disproportionately obsessed with global warming. Their obsession is such that their plan for the habitation of Mars, rejecting more obvious methods, is to build Martian green-house gas generation stations. These, so they claim, will produce at a rate equivalent to the current green-house gas production on earth. After 50 years the resultant climatic change will melt the Martian polar cap [...] accelerating global warming [...] According to the Mars Society this plan will give humanity a refuge just at the point Earth becomes uninhabitable [through global warming! and] provide the experience in planetary ecology necessary to reanimate a dead Earth.

I concluded that the Mars Society would seem not to be interested in the:

...colonization of Mars [...] but converting Earth's population to their fanatical, moribund and absurd religion of post-communist anti-capitalism.

If I were Jonathan Clarke, and the society in which I held an important post was falsely accused like this, here is the letter I would write: *Dear Sir, the producers of the documentary mentioned by Paul Rhoads simply had no excuse for not doing even the simplest research to avoid promulgating the lies highlighted by Rhoads. Allegations (A), (B) and (C etc.), as formulated by Rhoads, are untrue for reasons (X), (Y) and (Z etc.).* But never mind; let's play the game Johnathan Clark's way. The 'simplest research' at marsociety.org, at first glance indeed reveals an apparently innocent group pursuing an apparently legitimate goal.

The 'Policy' document on the Australian Mars Society site explains:

The Mars Society is an international non-profit incorporated organisation determined to promote a real goal for space programmes around the world, and to undertake private activity taking us a step closer to Mars. Founded in Boulder, Colorado in 1997, it now has thousands of members across dozens of countries. The Society undertakes the world's most ambitious privately funded Mars research programme in co-operation with leading organisations such as NASA. Already it has helped advance Mars mission planning, recruited funding, talent and resources, organised scientific conferences, and established a simulated habitat/lander facility on the largest uninhabited island on Earth, Devon Island, considered analogous in many ways to the Martian surface.

Well and good! But the 'Founding Declaration of the Mars Society'—almost certainly penned by Dr. Robert Zubrin, first president and leading spirit of the Society—includes this paragraph:

As we begin the twenty-first century, we have evidence that we are changing the Earth's atmosphere and environment in significant ways. It has become a critical matter [...] In this project, comparative planetology is a very powerful tool, a fact already shown by the role Venusian atmospheric studies played in our discovery of the potential threat of global warming by greenhouse gases. Mars, the planet most like Earth, will have even more to teach us about our home world. The knowledge we gain could be key to our survival.

So there you have it; the Mars Society proposes to save Earth from global warming, exactly the thesis of the TV documentary.

The Mars Society, I say, is a cover for an occult group of activists. This, as we shall see, is absolutely clear, and I cannot believe that Director Clark is merely one of the dupes. His letter to Cosmopolis is therefore a tissue of deliberate lies. Consider the following. Visitors to the Mars Society site are asked to sign their 'Mars Petition', which includes this:

Mars, the planet most like Earth, is believed to have had a wet climate and can help us understand the impact of climatic change on our home world. The knowledge we gain could be key to our survival.

What 'knowledge' will we gain? Apparently that promoted by the TV documentary, namely that by fixing Mars atmosphere with greenhouse gas we will learn how to fix Earth's atmosphere which, by the way, is being wrecked by greenhouse gas.

The Mars Society lays great emphasis on lobbying governments. The Canadian branch has lobbied all the Canadian political parties to support the Canadian Space Agency (CSA). Their letter sent to the various parties is published on their site, as well as the replies. The CSA, meanwhile, has awarded a \$20,000 contract to Mars Society Canada, which money is being used to finance camping trips in Australia:

Expedition Two will be launched this August in the red desert of Australia. It is the second of a long term series of expeditions using scientists, engineers, and a wide variety of supporting personnel engaged in interdisciplinary studies in Mars analog environments and situations. This program is managed by the international Mars Expedition Research Council, which has selected Mars Society Canada and Mars Society Australia to host Expedition Two. As a co-host, Mars Society Canada welcomes the Canadian Space Agency's contribution and thanks the agency for its support [which] brings the project funds, including cash grants and in-kind donations, to approximately \$50,000.

Canned beans and sterno for the Mars Society campers will be financed by the Canadian tax payer.

Another trip is promoted as follows:

Expedition Alpha [...] will be conducted at the Mars Desert Research Station [...]. Applications will be considered from anyone in good physical condition at least 18 years of age without regard to race, creed, color, or gender. Scientific, engineering, practical mechanical, wilderness, and literary skills are all considered a plus. [...] Those selected will be required to participate in crew training exercises, to act under crew discipline and strict mission guidelines during the two-week expedition. Every trainee must commit to the full two weeks.

Research program, or political indoctrination camp? One of the Mars Society research programs is advertised as follows:

Take Part in Space Mission Design!

The challenge for students and private individuals is to design an Earth Return Vehicle (ERV) for a humans-to-Mars mission. All skill levels are welcome [...].

Hmm. Next time I return to Earth please remind me to avoid the Mars Society model ERV, which might have been designed

by someone from one of their lower skill-levels.

The Mars Society promotes a battery of 'Task Forces' including an 'Education Task Force', responsible for the development and promotion of educational curricula and projects regarding Mars, aimed at 'Elementary, Secondary and University level students'. The Education Task Force is also responsible for "selling" both school districts and individual educators on the presentation of Mars based curricula to students. There is a 'Political & Public Outreach Task Force' whose role is defined as assisting Mars Society efforts in the area of education of politicians and to engage in direct lobbying of local, National and International political bodies to engender support of the goals of The Mars Society. There is a 'Technical Task Force' responsible for the evaluation, investigation, and development of science and technology that *may* be used in the exploration and settlement of Mars, *as well as* in Mars Society missions and *other projects* [my emphasis] whatever those might be.

The 'Mars Society Education Web' offers: a complete tutorial on how to analyze results from the Mars Exploration Rovers; folks are urged to:

Participate in our contest and be the first to determine the composition of the unknown Martian samples.

These 'unknown samples', to be analyzed by folks of 'all skill levels', will be collected where; in 'Mars analog environments'?

Above all, emphasis is laid on political activism. Daniel Faber, Director of 'Mars Society Canada', makes the following cynical appeal to Canadian Mars Society members:

[...] Between elections, and even during "safe" election campaigns, the politicians are relatively free to decide the fate of Canada as they see fit. As long as the basic needs of society are met, the politicians can afford to concentrate on their own political ends rather than the wishes of their constituency [...].

- Write a letter, or make a phone call, to your local candidates. Explain that you are representing a space advocacy community in their riding, and ask them to take a specific action (i.e. to support the increase of CSA funding from 300 million to one billion dollars per year, i.e. from \$10 to just \$33 per person). Let them know that their response will be circulated to a wide audience, and then send the response to this list.

- Arrange to meet your local candidates. Go in small groups, and be prepared with a policy statement (for example the Mars Society Canada policy [...]) That is why you joined.

The Canadian Mars Society is also raising money directly:

Mars Society Canada has become an online associate of Amazon.ca in order to offer its members Mars-related fiction and non-fiction books and DVDs. Purchasing these through our links on this website will allow a portion of the price you pay to be forwarded to MSC. Mars Society Canada will use these funds to continue to promote a Canadian destiny in space and Mars.

'Fiction and non-fiction', or just 'fiction'?

From the 'Mars Society Education Web' page, if one avoids their links to 'games and sims' and 'cool topics', one can reach a page dedicated to a conference on the exploration of Mars called: 'The Case for Mars'. The conference started with a paper entitled: 'Biology and the Planetary Engineering of Mars' by Julian A. Hiscox*. It is a series of speculations concerning the alteration of the Martian atmosphere through

*Julian A. Hiscox, Department of Microbiology, University of Alabama at Birmingham: Julian_Hiscox@micro.microbio.uab.edu. [This link is now dead.]

bio-technology and such AI Gorish man-totally-dominates-nature methods as deviating comets and provoking volcanic explosions. In what might as well be a parody of accademic jargon, Hiscox writes:

In common with microorganisms, nano-robots may have a huge growth capacity, i.e. doubling time, which for some bacteria, growing under ideal conditions, can be as little as 20 minutes. Ideal growth conditions for nano-robots are therefore likely to resemble those found for microorganisms (see Figure 1.). However, conditions on Mars will not be ideal for grow of either microorganisms or nano-robots. Nutrients/substrates may vary in abundance, there may be competition for resources etc. Therefore, growth is likely to be linear rather than exponential [..]

Poor little nano-robots, slurping hungrily at substrate resources but loosing-out in the competition for survival. I'm not sure who will provide the latter, perhaps strands of standard 6-D Basic vetch? This paper is a delight, and will interest and amuse anyone, such as myself, fond of *The World Between*.

There follows another paper concerning solar energy on Mars, the link to which is broken, and then a statement by someone I never knew was an scientist, Norman Mailer, more famous as a New York intellectual, activist culture-idol, who is perhaps best described as America's answer to France's Michel Foucault, so called 'philosopher', and self-defined insane-pederast, who has done more than any other human organism to define deviancy down. Finally there is a paper by Dr. Robert Zubrin himself, entitled 'The Significance of the Martian Frontier'.[†] Zubrin is a futurist with a cultural-historical perspective which cannot fail to interest Vance readers. An admirer of 'yankee ingenuity', Zurbrin begins his article with the following claim:

The United States has, today, all the technology needed to send humans to Mars. If a "travel light and live off the land" strategy [..] were adopted, then the first human exploration mission could be launched within ten years at a cost less than 20% of NASA's existing budget. Once humans have reached Mars, bases could rapidly be established to support not only exploration, but experimentation to develop the broad range of civil, agricultural, chemical and industrial engineering techniques required to turn the raw materials of Mars into food, propellant, ceramics, plastics, metals, wires, structures, habitats, etc. As these techniques are mastered, Mars will become capable of supporting an ever increasing population [..] capable of mounting engineering efforts on an exponentially increasing scale. Once the production infrastructure is in place, populating Mars will not be a problem—under current medical conditions an immigration rate of 100 people per year would produce population growth on Mars in the 21st Century comparable to that which occurred in colonial America in the 17th Century. Within a century, an engineering capability could be created on Mars with the capability to literally transform the planet, if not to a fully Earth-like environment at least to the warm, wet conditions of Mars' primitive past, making a desert world into a new home for a new spectrum of descendants of terrestrial life.

From here it is an easy step to the program presented in the TV documentary, with greenhouse gasses asphyxiating Earth through industrial pollution at the same rate needed to warm Mars into life (50 years).

Dr. Zubrin goes on to expose his visionary historical-cultural theory:

[..] the fact that Mars can be thus settled and altered defines it as the New World that can create the basis for a positive future for terrestrial humanity for the next several centuries [..] The essence of humanist society is that in it human beings are valued, that human life and human rights are held precious beyond price. Such notions have been for several thousand years the core philosophical values of Western civilization, dating back to the Greeks and the Judeo-Christian ideas of the divine nature of the human spirit. Yet they could never be implemented as a practical basis for the organization of society until the great explorers of the age of discovery threw open a New World in which the dormant seed of medieval Christendom could grow and blossom forth into something the likes of which the world had never seen before [..but luckily]The New World destroyed the basis of aristocracy and created the basis of democracy, it allowed the development of diversity by allowing escape from those institutions that were imposing uniformity, it destroyed a closed intellectual world by importing unsanctioned data and experience [..But] consider the probable fate of humanity in the 21st Century under two conditions, with a Martian Frontier and without it.

In the 21st Century, without a Martian Frontier, there is no question that human diversity will decline severely. Already, in the late 20th Century, advanced communication and transportation technologies have been eroding the healthy diversity of human cultures on Earth, and this tendency can only accelerate in the 21st. On the other hand, if the Martian Frontier is opened, then this same process of technological advance will also enable us to establish a new branch of human culture on Mars and eventually worlds beyond. The precious diversity of humanity can thus be preserved on a broader field, but only on a broader field. One world will be just too small a domain to allow the preservation of the diversity that is needed not just to keep life interesting, but to assure the survival of the human race.

Shades of Jack Vance; a stale and decadant 'Old Earth' crouching at the center of a spritely constellation of new worlds colonized by waves of racial, religious and philosophical groups, adventures, gold miners and freeks!

Zubrin then gives examples of our technological stagnation, including a conspiracy theory:

[..] anti-nuclear activists have only been allowed to have their way with commercial nuclear industry because the world's dominant financial institutions currently hold the mortgages on literally trillions of dollars worth of coal, oil and gas reserves.

The capitalist oligarchs are holding back the march of humanity! Zurbrin's solution: the 'Martian frontier'.

[..] Consider a nascent Martian civilization: its future will depend critically upon the progress of science and technology to which the colonists will therefore enthusiastically contribute. [..] A prime example of where this is likely to occur is energy production. Mars does have one major energy resource that we do currently know about; deuterium, which can be used as the fuel in nearly waste-free thermonuclear fusion reactors. Earth has large amounts of deuterium too, but with all of its existing investments in other, more polluting, forms of energy production, the research that would make possible practical fusion power reactors has been allowed to stagnate.

The heavy Martian industry described in the TV documentary is taking shape:

*Julian A. Hiscox, Department of Microbiology, University of Alabama at Birmingham: Julian_Hiscox@micro.microbio.uab.edu. This link appears dead.

† It is quite intriguing and was to be found at: spot.colorado.edu/~marscase/cfm/artlist.html, but the link is now dead.

The Martian colonists are certain to be much more determined to get fusion on-line, and in doing so will massively benefit the mother planet as well. Fusion power will also lead to fusion propulsion, making possible spaceships that will carry hundreds of passengers and thousands of tons of payload rapidly back and forth between Earth and Mars [...] by acting as a driver on technology, the Martian Frontier can become a gateway to the practically infinite hinterland that lies beyond.

Martian technological advance will save 'western civilization':

[...] a new standard will be set for a higher form of humanist civilization on Mars, and viewing it from afar the citizens of Earth will rightly demand nothing less for themselves [...] if it is not to continue its ongoing degeneration into sham, democracy in America and elsewhere in western civilization needs a shot in the arm. That boost can only come from the example of a frontier people whose civilization incorporates the ethos that breathed the spirit into democracy in America in the first place.

Now Zurbrin exposes the deeper philosophical substrates:

There are greater threats that a humanist society faces in a closed world than the return of oligarchy, and if the frontier remains closed in the 21st Century we are certain to face them. These threats are the spread of various sorts of anti-human ideologies [...]. At the top of the list of such pathological ideas [...] is the Malthus theory, which holds that since the world's resources are more or less fixed, population growth must be restricted or all of us will descend into bottomless misery. Malthusianism is scientifically bankrupt and all predictions made upon it have been wrong, because human beings are not mere consumers of resources. Rather we create resources by the development of new technologies that find use for them. The more people, the faster the rate of innovation, and this is why, contrary to Malthus, as the world's population has increased, the standard of living has increased, and at an accelerating rate. Nevertheless, in a closed society Malthusianism has the appearance of self-evident truth [...] if the idea is accepted that the world's resources are fixed, then each person is ultimately the enemy of every other person, and each race or nation is the enemy of every other race or nation. The inevitable result is the creation of tyrannical regimes to restrict population growth, such as that now prevailing in China, or worse, the development of Nazi style genocidal governments as various populations become convinced that their vital self interest requires the elimination of those other races that are allegedly competing with them for the world's finite resources. Only in a universe of unlimited resources can all men be brothers.

Despite his lyrism Dr. Zurbrin's conception of fraternity is cheap; men will not behave properly toward each other unless all stress or friction is eliminated. They will heed no call for cooperation or sacrifice. Men, according to the Doctor, will only cooperate if they have no reason not to:

[...] Unless people can see broad vistas of unused resources in front of them, the belief in limited resources tends to follow as a matter of course. Unless the frontier is re-opened, the probability is high that humanity will create hell for itself in the 21st Century.

But Dr. Zurbrin has stated that human beings create resources by developing new technologies so that 'the more people, the faster the rate of innovation, and the higher the standards of living'. So is Dr. Zurbrin a Malthusian or isn't

he? At any rate he agrees with Al Gore that man controls nature:

Are we the makers of our world or just its inhabitants?[...] Nineteenth century Americans, building cities, draining swamps, and digging canals could have no doubt as to humanity's role as improvers of creation. Today much of what they saw as progress is cited by many as environmental destruction. Despite abundant scientific evidence that evolution is intrinsic to nature, a belief is spreading that nature as it is at the moment is sacrosanct, and that humans should not have the right to change it. An open frontier on Mars would not merely restore the 19th Century American humanist views in such matters, it would raise it to unprecedented heights, because in the process of terraforming Mars we will not merely be taming a wild world, but bringing a dead one to life. What greater affirmation of the positive nature of the human creative spirit could there be?

Zurbrin's argument is more notable for visionary elan than internal consistency. His deepest interest, however, would not seem to be Mars exploration. That is only a tactic to favor and prolong what he calls 'western humanist society':

[...] Free societies are the exception in human history, they have only existed during the four centuries of frontier expansion of the West. That history is now over, the frontier that was opened by the voyage of Christopher Columbus is now closed. If the era of western humanist society is not to be seen by future historians as some kind of transitory golden age, a brief shining moment in an otherwise endless chronicle of human misery, then a new frontier must be opened. Mars beckons.

Zurbrin now indulges in a effulgent vision of galactic man, ending on a dark note and a warning:

[...] the key thing is not to let the process stop, for if it is allowed to stop for any length of time society will crystallize into a static form that is inimical to the resumption of progress. That is what defines the present age as one of crisis. Our old frontier is closed, the first signs of social crystallization are clearly visible. Yet, progress, while slowing, is still extant; our people still believe in it and our ruling institutions are not yet incompatible with it. We still possess the greatest gift of the inheritance of a four hundred year long Renaissance, to wit, the capacity to initiate another by opening the Martian frontier. If we fail to do so, our culture will not have that capacity long. Mars is harsh, the people who settle it will need not only technology, but the scientific outlook, creativity, and free-thinking individualistic inventiveness that stand behind it. Mars will not allow itself to be settled by people from a static society; those people won't have what it takes. We still do. Mars today waits for the children of the old frontier, but Mars will not wait forever.

Like an aircraft moving down a runway, western civilization used the freedom afforded by the open frontier to accelerate itself to takeoff speed. The end of the runway has now been reached. If our journey is to continue, we must now take courage and fly.

Use it or lose it, baby.

If I were not myself enthusiastic regarding Martian exploration I'd probably be even less indulgent toward Dr. Zurbrin and his followers. He and his Mars Society remind me of Ron L. Hubbard and Scientology. The latter is science fiction as personal psychology-salvation. Zurbrin's game is science fiction as leftist-green political activism, spiced with some traditional American folk-attitudes. Whatever else the Mars Society may be, it is a formidable propaganda machine.

If it did not itself produce the TV documentary I saw, why would it allow itself to be so misrepresented? In fact, no misrepresentation has occurred. My 'antic overview' of the Mars Society turned up no reference to the TV documentary, but the ideological humus is rich and deep.

As for the Mars Society's ostensible program, surely there are EXTANT readers competent to judge its claims regarding, for example, early trips to Mars:

Instead of carrying all the rocket fuel necessary to reach Mars and return to Earth in gigantic "Battlestar Galactica" spaceships, Mars explorers need only take with them enough fuel to reach the Red Planet, and a sufficient stock of hydrogen. The raw materials necessary for manufacturing return fuel already exist on Mars. By employing an ISRU system already demonstrated in labs on Earth, based on a century-old chemical process, carbon dioxide extracted from the Martian atmosphere can be combined with hydrogen to produce enough fuel to power exploration vehicles and a direct return to Earth for the crew. In one stroke these central enabling features helped slash program cost from the US\$550 billion of the 1991 SEI 90 day study to around US\$50 billion.

In reaction to another of my gripes about the inconsistencies of the global warming people, a letter writer to Cosmopolis called me a 'scientific illiterate'. If the shoe fits, wear it, but to this scientific illiterate the Mars Society and its allegedly scientific activities combine subversion with wackyness to a refreshing degree.



CYBER FOLLIES

THE LITERARY CANNON BACKFIRES

I confess it; I feel humiliated that Dan Gunter has ignored me lately. I am unconsolated for my banishment by even a single snark! But I will not let personal disappointment spoil things for readers of EXTANT. Swallowing my pride, up-holding a spirit of public service, I will squeeze a few bitter drops of entertainment out of him just the same. I am not, after all, the unique vector of his razor-sharp wit, the unique provocation of his fountain of *bon mots*—such as this bit of very snappy word-play, introduced into a political discussion:

I think that the Lewinsky scandal was—ahem—blown all out of proportion.

'Ahem' indeed! But take note, this is no vulgar punnery for-its-own-sake; Dan is serious about his politics:

I'm a deep-dyed Democrat. Heck, the Democrats are usually too conservative for me.

Which explains, I suppose, his libertine indulgence for

Clinton's peccadillae. I wonder how Mrs. Gunter feels about her husband's dandyish indifference to presidential adultery, or do the Gunters swing?

But Dan's domestic situation is none of my business. What interests me is how this proud and radical chaotist has shown himself to be an equally rabid conservative traditionalist! This juicy contradiction was revealed in all its glory by the advent of Violanthe.

'Violanthe' is the pseudonym for Violet Kane, a founding editor of the *Alternative Reality Web Zine*.* The folks at ARWZ profess interest in 'thoughtful conversation of alternative reality literature', which explains, as we shall see, Violanthe's incursion.

Violet Kane is an interesting person. EZ-Board, which hosts the VanceBBS, reports she has made some 11,000 posts on its various forums since 2002, which is almost 8 per day, and she writes reviews and editorials for ARWZ. One of the latter is entitled *Can Fantasy Fiction be Adult Fiction?*, the conclusion of which is this complaint:

How is fantasy fiction ever going to garner a "mature" respect if its "adult" stories stick to the tired fairy tale convention of child narrators?

Violet Kane is a dedicated militant who wants fantasy fiction to grow up and take the respectable place in literary ranks she believes it deserves. At the outset of the VIE project some wished it would carry the torch for science fiction, and there was lively debate about that, but the effort to free one writer from the sci-fi pigeonhole is not without relation to Violanthe's broader quest, with which we may therefore have a certain sympathy.

One day Violanthe introduced herself on the VanceBBS:

Hi, everyone! Some of you already know me, or may have seen me around the forums. . .I've been consulting with Dan Gunter because I would like to write up a profile of the Jack Vance Board. We decided that we'd like your help in compiling this profile, since you folks are such a large part of the works here. . .I'm. . .interested in what you find important and unique about this community. . .what are the personalities of your most prominent, or outspoken, members. . .? What do you see as the guiding premise. . .of the board? What types of discussions do you encourage—or discourage?{†}. . .I would like. . .to give our readers a sense of the character of your board. . .what mood they'll discover in the various forums. . . [whatever] you feel is important to tell prospective members. . .

It seems that, at first, Violanthe thought to gather information discreetly, from Dan Gunter alone, but, in consultation with him, broadened her research to a program of public questionnaires for the VanceBBS 'community' generally. It is no surprise that Dan Gunter, as the *most prominent* and *outspoken member*, has been the most assiduous and prolix responder to these questionnaires, as, for example, when Violanthe put a question about the prerequisites of contemporary literary enjoyment:

What are the classic novels and stories that everyone ought to read? Those essentials for any good literature fan? What are the literary classics you would name as prerequisites for enjoying literature today? What are the essential classics of general literature, and what are the genre-specific essentials?

* see page 5.

† I am looking forward to Violanthe's account of the VanceBBS's attitude to such things as poetry slams, or discussions about controversial aspects of the VIE project.

Delighted at this prompt, Dan Gunter hastened to provide the lucky Violanthe with a fulsome reply, embellished with helpful and witty remarks. It is a performance we all may savor:

DAN GUNTER'S 'MUST READ' LIST OF CLASSICS:

HOMER: Obviously.
SOPHOCLES: The Theban plays. I wish that I were better read in the Greek plays, but I do know that these are essentials.
VIRGIL: "The Aeneid". Fitzgerald's translation is outstanding.
CHAUCE: "Canterbury Tales".
MARLOWE: "Dr. Faustus".
SHAKESPEARE: Stacks of 'em. And everyone knows it. The usual DONNE suspects.
The usual MARVELL suspects.
MILTON: "Samson Agonistes", some of the poems; I have never been able to finish "Paradise Lost", but that's my fault.
POPE: quite a bit: he was a great poet, but unfairly treated for a long time.
DEFOE: "Robinson Crusoe".
FIELDING: "Tom Jones".
MOLIERE? (Ages since I read any).
AUSTEN: "Pride and Prejudice", "Emma", and "Persuasion".
BLAKE.
SOME BYRON (although he has not aged well).
Bunches of KEATS.
Some SHELLEY.
COLERIDGE: "Rime of the Ancient Mariner," "Xanadu," and probably others
Some WORDSWORTH.
TENNYSON: quite a bit, really.
DICKENS.
ELIOT: "Middlemarch".
HAWTHORNE: "The Scarlet Letter" and some of the short stories.
POE: some of the stories and poems.
MELVILLE: at least "Moby-Dick", "Benito Cereno", "Bartleby, the Scrivener", and "Billy Budd".
DICKINSON: tons.
WHITMAN: bunches.
TWIN: at least "Huckleberry Finn".
Some DUMAS.
Some BALZAC?

Woof.

So these are the books everyone should read to be a good literature fan, are they? . . . I wonder if anyone else, besides my petty-caviling self, noticed anything wrong? Are there not—ah ha!—a few omissions? Is Dan Gunter truly up to the mark? What about Faulkner, eh Dan!? But my smug sense of superiority was not of long duration. Next day Dan posted:

. . . I have to add Eliot, Faulkner, Roethke, Elizabeth Bishop, Hemingway, Ralph Ellison. . .

He then tacked on a special clause to parry petty cavils:

. . . so many, so many!

So there you have it; Dan will stand by, indifferent and untroubled, the day it is revealed how George W. Bush gets his daily blow-job in the oval office from women other than Mrs. George W. Bush, but he is also the William Bennet of the cybersphere, a 'great books' man! You could—*ahem*—blow me down with a wet noodle, or even a sausage, ha ha! That's Dan all over! In another thread he discussed a

passage from Marvell and, in delicate reference to those dark times before that poet was admitted to the literary cannon, wrote:

Marvell has long been part of the *literary canon*,

which is amusing talk from someone who also writes:

The Andy Griffith Show is my favorite television show of all time.

I am tempted to point out Dan's error of taste, since everyone knows 'I Love Lucy' is the best television show of all time, but I won't stoop so low. After all, perhaps Dan Gunter is simply gifted with such a rich, diverse and unusual personality that . . . I mean, in case you reject the theory he's a ridiculous—*ahem*—blow-hard.

Be this as it may, and whatever their nature, will the engaging contradictions of the personality of the VanceBBS community's most prominent and outspoken member nourish Violet Kane's understanding of the character and mood of the board? We may, at least, hope they do.

Ignoring Dan's personality, let's take a quick look at some of his points. He wishes he 'were better read in the Greek plays' yet 'knows' all are 'essential', including the ones he has not read. Hear-say? What is his source?

Dan pretends 'everyone knows' that 'stacks' of Shakespeare must be read but, if everyone knows this, why mention it? I suspect he does because of his little weakness for claiming the majority agrees with all his opinions. He thinks this gives his opinions more authority. Of course it also means he lacks originality, that his ideas are common. For example, his rejection of *Sense and Sensibility*, *Northanger Abbey* and *Mansfield Park* as first rank books, puts him in accord with the standard view of Jane Austen's work according to which these are lesser novels. Personally, I reject this view, but that puts me in a minority and proves, per the Gunter system, that I am wrong.

As for Byron, since has 'not aged well' he must be pretty hot stuff for the temporal rot degrading his work not to have sunk it into the second rank, right down there with *Mansfield Park*. And whatever does Dan mean by 'Balzac'? Does he mean 'maybe Balzac but maybe not'? This ambiguity may be an encouraging sign; Dan mind, after all, may include zones of doubt.

Finally we may note, with satisfaction or alarm depending on our outlook, the addition of Ralph Ellison to a list including Homer, Virgil, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Dickens, Melville, Twain, and even 'Balzac?'. What, after all, is Balzac next to Ralph Ellison? Or should I say: 'Ralph Ellison'?

What will the lovely Violet Kane make of all this? Dare we hope she recommends the VanceBBS as an agreeable haunt of cultivated and spiritual personalities, where literary conversation, or 'the winds of reason'—*ahem*—blow?



POLITICS AS USUAL

OH GOODY, CIVIL WAR!

I was disgusted recently by the unconcealed journalistic glee which greeted the alleged prospect of civil war in Iraq. These media types will, as usual, have to eat their words, and will do so in their typical manner; like shameful Runes wolfing down cold meat and leaks in a secret cabinet. We need not, I mean, hold our breaths waiting for any retractions. They will quickly settle back into their routen of daily reports of the murderings by Sunnite Saddam-era nostalgics and Al Caida assassins. I suppose they can call that a 'civil war' if they like. Their smug attitude, however, will have as much affect on things as the rest of their self-important fantasies.

Listening to the Iraqi government officials who occasionally speak, many of us are struck how their average quality is that of your best American elder statesmen, and the best of them are veritable marvels of gravitas and presence of spirit. I sincerely hope, once we have helped the Iraqis put themselves in order, they will gratefully return the favor and help us do the same.

My predictions:

- 1 - The Iraqi government will be formed, and the Iraqi security services will make steady progress against the terrorists.
- 2 - The media will continue to insist that the situation in Iraq is a hopeless disaster while persisting in its refusal to cover the multitude of positive developments.
- 3 - Islamists world-wide will continue to act-out, whipping themselves into fury after fury, progressively polluting the broader Muslim attitude, which will not, in the middle term, make any attempt to resist.
- 4 - Western leftist elites, the media in particular, will persist in its enthusiastic if confused assistance the Islamist anti-western project.

THE FRENCH CONNECTION

The situation in France is hotter and hotter. In addition to the *Clemenceau* fiasco, the country is being shaken by bird flu (11,000 turkeys dead in the first French farm hit, plus some cats in Germany) and the Chikungunia virus (thousands infected on the island of Reunion, all suffering persistent symptoms, and over 50 dead), but also by the torture-murder of a Jewish boy at the hands of a gang of amateur extortionists 'of immigrant descent' (as the phrase goes), and finally a legal scandal which seems as if it will, at long last, sweep away France's archaic justice system.

The Outroux child-molestation affair featured a set of unconvicted suspects who were kept in 'preventive detention' for years. This situation is not unusual in France, which uses a justice system radically different from the Anglo-American one. The latter, though it recieves a great deal more public funding than its French counterpart, is systematically evoked as the horror of horrors by the knee-jerking anti-Americans, particularly the leftist magistrates union, which is resisting, by any and all means, the forces of change. In the French system the accused is put into the hands of a *judge de l'instruction* who controls the investigation, not only for the prosecution, but also for the defense. The accused's lawyer is allowed to make suggestions, which are accepted or rejected as the judge likes. Independent investigative work is frowned upon. The police do the investigation, at the judge's orders.

And you thought Judge Dred was a comix book! The Judge Dred of the moment is judge Burgeau, an arrogant empty-headed 'yoot' who, ignoring the pleas of his victims and the complaints of their lawyers, threw the Outreau suspects into filthy and primitive French jails (recently condemned, by an international commission, as superior only to the prisons of Moldavia), to be slapped around by the police, and identified to their fellow prisoners as child molesters, with predictable results. One of them was murdered during his incarceration. Another suspect has still not been cleared; mentally handy-capped since birth, unable to walk and barely able to feed himself, this man, it was alleged, went on a regular basis to a certain building, climbed five flights of stairs to a tiny apartment where, with a crowd of other adults (the number of which could not possibly have fit into the designated space), were said to have sodomized a crowd of children. Such are judge Dred's investigative capacities.

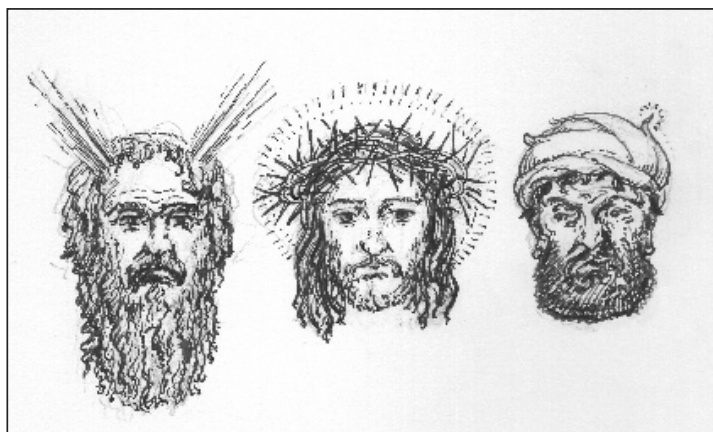
The American system is decried, for the usual reason: the rich get a better deal. This is true. In France, by contrast, everyone gets a rotten deal. At least in America the accused has some rights, and really and truly is presumed innocent until proven guilty. In France they throw you in jail first, slap you around a little, and ask questions later — sometimes years later. The American system may not be good, but how can it be improved? Its limits are not institutional, they are human. The smarter French commentators and elected officials, ignoring idiot anti-Americanism, are calling for reform in the direction of the Anglo-American adversarial system.

Having been personally dragged before French judges no less than seven times, and having been investigated by the French police thrice, I can assure my readers that, if it must happen, I'd rather it happened in America.

PAPAL WISDOM

False teachers, a large number of which belong to intellectual elites in science, culture and the medias, promote an anti-evangelism. They proclaim the death of all ideals, and thus contribute to a profound moral crisis of our society, which has opened the way to tolerance, and sometimes even exaltation, of modes of behavior which, in previous times, outraged morality and even common sense. When you ask them: 'what should I do?' their unique reply is that there is no definite truth, no sure way. They want you to be like them: skeptical and cynical. More or less deliberately they defend an approach to life which has led millions of young people to a sad solitude in which they are deprived of reasons to hope and incapable of true love.

John Paul II, Speech to the youth of Manila, 14 January, 1995; from: JEAN-PAUL II, AU-DELÀ DE LA PEUR. Excerpt translated from the French by Paul Rhoads.



STYLES OF RELIGIOUS HEADGEAR

GRILLED DOG

ODE TO MY ENEMIES

*Gunter and Fetty, my enemies dear,
Stiffen your lips, cry not in your beer;
You made a good effort, you gave of your best,
You tried to stop 'Rhoads', that world-class pest!
Feel no shame that your efforts fell short,
You worked well together and tried to abort
His boot-licking, black-mailing, censorious ploys,
His right-wing fanatical bible-bumpoise;
If Fate did not deign to bless your endeavor,
If that rascal 'Rhoads' has proved the more clever,
Don't blame yourselves for your miserable flop,
Don't brood and pine or blow your joint top!
It is not your fault your objective alliance,
De-facto agreement, strategic compliance,
Has laid such an egg, his slipped such a flopper,
Has blabbered and gurgled and come such a cropper,
For when you consider the size of the grains
Which God the Almighty supplied you as brains,
When frankly you measure your mini-frost hearts,
Your truncated vision and other small parts,
Surely you'll grasp that the fault is not yours,
For how could a brace of such low-octane boors
Curb so pugnacious a spirit as 'Rhoads',
Who pesters you so that you're hopping like toads?
Oh what a team, like the lovers called Sprat,
One all dried up, the other so fat!
Oh what a marriage of judge and poltroon,
Yelping out fatwas and howling the moon!
Oh what a pair; one righteous, one crass,
One huffing and stuffy, one seething with sass!
One a forensical magistrate proud,
The other a blustering cumulous cloud;
One a policeman, the other a thug,
A ruffian cur with a pipe in his mug;
One chopping logic, his eyes all apop,
Compulsively proving the bottom's on top,
The other careening around like a clod,
Whining and griping and blaspheming God!
All was in vain, my enemies sweetly,
The V.I.E. volumes were all printed neatly!
Each was delivered to grateful subscribers,
Volumes defective were changed, and the labors
Of hundreds of readers of Vance were directed,
In spite of your efforts to have him ejected,
And right to the end, by that scoundrel, that 'Rhoads'!
And yet, when you think upon all of the modes
By which you so stridently sought to depose,
To chase and to curb and to morally hose,
That thorn in your hides, that whiff up your nose,
It boggles belief, how he hung on that way,
Five years of effort without any pay,
Constantly banged at by bullies like you!
Against such a masochist what can you do?
Whatever it is, it's not you can do it,*

*Wondrous alliance of gristle and suet!
Hulk on your boards, Vus and Vuwus,
Growl and mutter and stir up your fuss,
Drool your invective, toss darts unabashed,
They slosh from your mouths like halito-sass,
Your 'petty attack' and 'rabitty punches',
I took them for months and for years by the bunches,
And what is your salary for so much endeavor?
What is the prize you have earned for forever?
What heavenly token or sign in perdition
Of that part you played in the mighty Edition?
Give a glad cry; your works shall not fade!
The scroll of your honors is here being made!
These lines are a monument, by Thalia wrought,
To Feht, Alexander, and Dan Gunter taught,
A deathless reminder to all who will prance
The mountains and seas of the worlds of Vance,
Of how, long ago, in trollish alliance,
Together, twin brothers, they made their defiance
Of that band of heroes who would not be stayed,
Who labored so long in Friendship's hand layed.
No more for each other your venoms you curbed
Than for your sub-lunary henchmen and erbs,
The very same grimace to us did you show,
And so in the winds of this verse will you blow,
Your images floating, your faces in moan,
Faithfully copied, to everyone shown.
So please now be quiet, my enemies sublime,
We've had quite enough of your squawk for all time.
The game it is over, the work it is done;
I'm sorry to say that not all was fun.
But most of it was, and that part's in print,
In forty four volumes, plus one soon to mint.
These are the trophy to those volunteers,
Who, shoulder to shoulder, for five mighty years,
With heave and with haul, and over an ocean
Of unending labors and selfless devotion,
Sailed the ship of their dream into harbor;
Its perfume doth spread in the heavenly arbor!
Turn up your gaze, with chagrin and dismay,
Think of the part you have failed to play,
For in this adventure you played the goons,
Smokey Lens-Larqueishly flickering moons.*



ECHOES IN THE ETHER

Paul,

Please don't worry about typefaces. It is clear to every sensible person that the mere idea of producing a complete edition of Jack Vance stories is so silly that whoever suggested it should be treated in a secure facility until they are well again, or at least until they are no longer a danger to the community. To have actually produced such an edition with the immense amount of editorial effort first in getting the text back in its original form, and then removing almost all the typos, (from 44 volumes), must tell us something about the people who complain about the typeface. I would hesitate to give such people an ingot of gold lest they dropped it on their foot and then sued me.

You ask what caused the big bang. Louis Alvares holds that it was a fluctuation in the quantum soup which might be caused by switching on a really large particle accelerator as are presently being constructed. Alternatively you can accept Eric Lerner's theory outlined in his book "The Big Bang Never Happened". This is very much on the lines of Hoyle's "Evolution from Space". Both writers ask awkward questions for which satisfactory answers are yet to appear.

Larry Niven once replied to an indignant reader: "Professional writers have a technical term for people who assume that the views expressed by their characters are those of the writer. We call them idiots."

Lastly. As to your being "snarky". I would advise your critics to have a well sharpened vorpal sword to hand at all times. There is something of the boojum about you under your mild and self-effacing exterior.

Non carborundum,
John Edwards

Hi Paul

I have finally received my VIE and have devoted my spare time to reacquaintance since then. I see another copy reached Auckland in October—mine reached here in January this year. But I am very happy. Incidentally I read the amiante font dispute in Extant. I can say that as someone with indifferent eyesight, and a habitual reader in trains, I have had no difficulty.

Regards
Chris LaHatte



Paul Rhoads, self-portrait, 1993.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:
*Thanks to Rob Friefeld and
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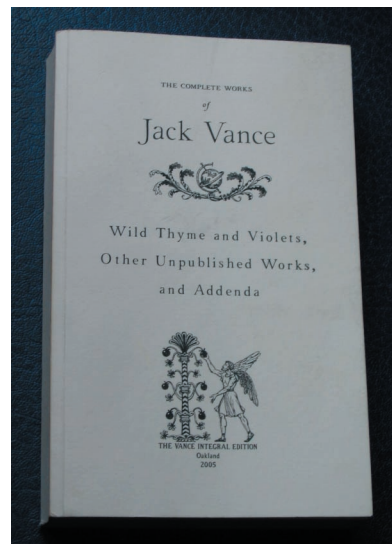
Contact EXTANT:
prhoads@club-internet.fr
paulrhoads@wanadoo.nl
emeraldofthewest@yahoo.fr

Extant - #12

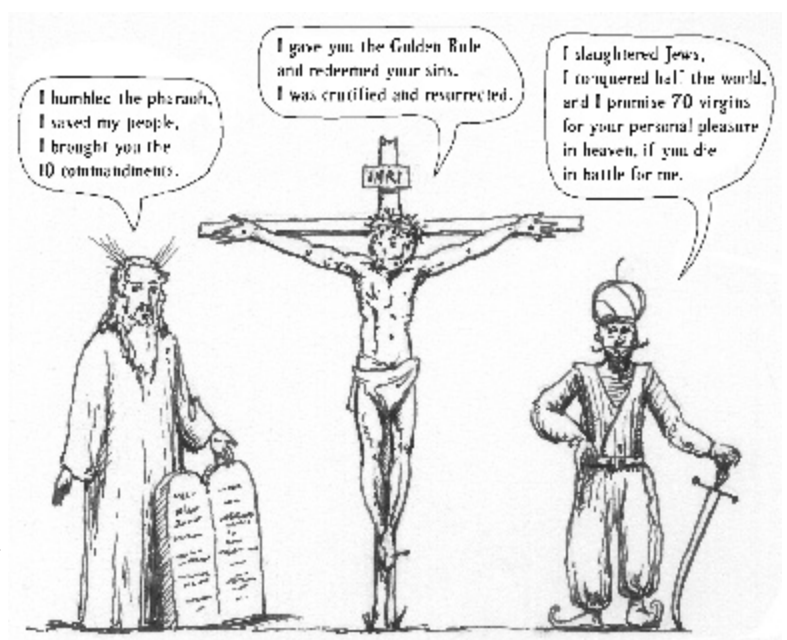
MISCELLANEOUS IMAGES



Detail: portraite of Genevieve Bonnet, by her mother, 'Biton', 1924.



Sample VIE paperback, produced by Stefania Zacco, during developement of paperback initiative. The title page was used for the cover. I believe there are two of these volumes in existance. They were printed by Visentini, the VIE printer.



Prophetic Appeals