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VIE - UP-DATE

On March 10 Marcel van Genderen and I received 'blues' for the 546 page volume '14 bis'. With an erratum signaled by Chuck King from his review of the .pdf, a handful of compositional issues were turned up, including a few matters of italics ruled upon by TI. The corrected file was sent to Milan on March 20. The changes were checked in Milan, and volume '14 bis' is now in production. Stefania Zacco thinks the books will be ready in early or mid May. This means delivery in May or June for Europeans, and June or July for others.

The Ellery Queen books are the only Vance texts I have never read. In fact the author once discouraged me from by reason of editorial 'tarting up', so I look forward to this volume! I have, however, caught snatches of the texts in the course of VIE work, and am delighted by this passage from

The Man Who Walks Behind (published as: *The Madman Theory*), which shows Vance's interest in Oz:

If Earl Genneman's layout had been impressive, this was a marvel. There was a central area divided into four sectors, each tinted a different color: purple, yellow, red and blue. At the center was a city of domes, towers and palaces, all fashioned of brilliant green glass. Retwig watched Collins with a smile. "Do you recognize it?"

Collins nodded slowly. "It's the Land of Oz, by golly. I haven't thought of it for—well, a long time."

"I probably know more about Oz than any man alive. The research I have put into this project, the money I've spent! And here it all is. The Land of Oz. The blue Munchkin country, the yellow land of the Winkies, the red Quadling country, the purple Gillikin country, the Emerald City at the center. There's the Tin Woodsman's castle, and there's the palace of Glinda the Good. Notice the cottage where Tip lived with Mombi the Witch. There's Foxville, and Bunbury, and Bunnybury. Over there is the Nonestic Ocean—I'm sorry I don't have room for the islands of Pingaree, Regos, Coregos and Phreex. Below is the Deadly Desert and the Land of Ev.

The Nomes work underneath the mountains; in the crags live the Whimsies, the Growleywogs and the Phanfasms. I've used the O'Neill illustrations faithfully. In fact the only false note is the railroads themselves. Baum would have disapproved. Still, they're the excuse



'Wheat beer or Barley Water?' Andreas Irle and Paul Rhoads; photo by Ute Irle.

VIE SOCIAL NOTES

Andreas Irle, whose German language Vance editions inspired the VIE, has once again graced St. Louand with his suave presence, this time accompanied by his wife and 3 children.

EDITION ANDREAS IRLE is currently printing its first paperback edition of the Lyonesse series, based on VIE setting, including maps. This is an exciting initiative which will prolong the VIE effort. EDITION ANDREAS IRLE will be making more out-of-print Vance texts available individually in paperback over the coming months and years, so you can give your favorite VIE volumes, in this handsome paperback format, to your friends! To order books or request texts, contact:

editionandreasirle.de

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for all this, and I've kept them in character."

He went to a panel, touched switches. From below came a faint whirring, and Oz-type locomotives tugged Oz-type cars through the landscapes. In the mountains directly below, a small gray mining mole hauled gondolas heaped with sparkling crystals from the Nome caverns, dumped them into a hopper, returned within the mountain to reappear with a new load. Green trolley cars traversed the avenues of the Emerald City.

"There's a lot I had to leave out," said Retwig.

VIE VOLUME '14 BIS', PAGE 470.

Somewhere in COSMOPOLIS I speculated that the Phanfasms inspired the village of Somlod, as seen through the lost lenses of the demon Underheard (*Cugel the Clever*), and that Sirenese society, in *The Moon Moth*, was inspired by the Whimsies. Among the scarce commentators on Vance there seems little interest in the Baum influence, while influences which are minor or even nonexistent are often emphasized, such as Clark Ashton Smith.* Given Vance's own repeated and enthusiastic declarations regarding Baum, as well as the obvious parallels between Vance's favorite Oz book (*The Emerald City of Oz*) and several of his own stories, I cannot rid myself of the suspicion that this lack of interest suggests an enthusiasm about certain subject matters and styles rather than an interest in Vance as such. I also suspect the Baum influence lacks appeal because he seems old fashioned, quaint and childish. The fashionable taint of the weird is absent. I happen to be enthusiastic about Baum, as well as Wodehouse, the authors most frequently mentioned by Vance, but as a student of Vance I am just as interested in Bouroughs and Farnol, though these authors do not excite me.

These considerations relate to this month's *Literary Frolic*, because not only Baum, but Bouroughs also, are *democratic artists*, in a way Smith is not. Smith, one might say, is a 'self-conscious bohemian' which, artistically speaking, is an almost anti-democratic stance. But I will not develop this line in EXTANT 13.

I do not mean to suggest that Vance is only interested in 'democratic' artists. I will argue that Vance's art begins in democratic art, that its initial influences were of that type. But there are also bohemian aspects to some of Vance's earlier work. The most obvious is the structure of *The House on Lilly Street*, which is related to the 'stream of consciousness' technique, so fashionable into the early 1970s, at which point Western Culture toppled into the ruinous extremism from which it has yet to escape, a chief symptom of which is its self-forgetfulness.



* For the best argument in favor of Smith's influence, see COSMOPOLIS 59, page 21.

A COMMENDATION FOR THE SELDOM-THANKED

by Chuck King

"I wanted a mission. And for my sins, they gave me one."

—Capt. Willard, *Apocalypse Now*

I wanted TI projects, and for my sins they gave me *two*: two of the messiest, most headache-inducing projects in the body of TI work: *The Star King*, and *Strange She Hasn't Written* (a/k/a *The Four Johns*).

The story of the TI effort on *The Star King* was told in COSMOPOLIS 54. (For what it's worth, although I may not have heretofore said so publicly, I came to agree that the resolution to the Pallis issues that Paul championed was in fact the proper one.) The adventure of TI restoration of *The Four Johns* is recounted in the preface to the Ellery Queen volume, but since many people will not see that book, here it is in a nutshell:

As originally constituted, the Vance Integral Edition did not include Vance's work-for-hire Ellery Queen mysteries, and Vance disowned them, citing extensive editorial intervention. At the time, it was thought that only one partial manuscript survived, not enough to restore the text to what the author had intended.

During the course of TI work on other texts, however, more manuscript evidence was discovered. Jack Vance generally hand-wrote the first drafts of his work, and for that purpose he used whatever paper may have been lying around—junk mail, royalty statements, his son's math homework—but most significantly for our purposes, he often wrote on the backs of typed drafts of earlier works. A number of Vance manuscripts currently reside in the John Holbrook Vance Collection of the Mugar Library at Boston University. The manuscripts are indexed by what is on the front of each, but until July of 2003, no one had made any record of what was on the backs of those manuscripts. At that time, while perusing a manuscript, I happened to note on the back of a page part of a typed manuscript of *The Four Johns*, one of the Ellery Queen mysteries and, supposedly, a lost manuscript. A careful review of the rest of the manuscripts at the Mugar Library turned up 78 previously-unsuspected pages of typed manuscripts of Ellery Queen mysteries. Most were from *The Four Johns*, and that meant that, between those pages and fragments we already knew about, we now had most of a manuscript of that book. We also now had a fairly substantial chunk of *The Madman Theory*. In light of this new evidence, VIE management approached the Vances about perhaps including the Ellery Queen stories after all. Happily, they (and the Ellery Queen copyright holders) agreed.

Restoration of these texts was a fascinating but also exhausting task. Vance described them as 'tarted up', so we expected differences between the manuscripts and the published versions, but it was still a bit daunting to realize

that in *The Four Johns* (published by the VIE with Vance's intended title, *Strange She Hasn't Written*), nearly every sentence was different to a greater or lesser extent. There were indeed sections that had simply been re-written, but more commonly the texts were generally similar, but with a word here or a phrase there added, excised or changed. This of course made documenting the changes a Herculean task: *Strange She Hasn't Written* ended up with nearly 2400 end notes. By way of comparison, *Araminta Station*, Vance's longest book, had only 238 end notes. *Emphyrio*, the book for which we had the best textual evidence, had 813, and *The Star King*, one of the more involved and hairy TI jobs from the VIE proper, had 1566. *Strange She Hasn't Written* exceeded that by over eight hundred notes.

Beyond mere magnitude, the task of resolving all those differences was complicated by stemma issues involving the manuscript. As we got into it, it became apparent that the manuscript we had assembled was composed of different drafts—in at least one instance, a page contained holographic edits that we expected to continue on the next page, but the next page was clean and unmarked. And, more problematically, the manuscript did not appear to be Vance's final version. Evaluating the differences between the manuscript and the published text, some were clearly edits by the Ellery Queen editors, but some looked a lot like the kind of changes that Vance tended to make from draft to draft. And of course, some sections appeared to have been changed by both Vance and the editors. As the last text to go through TI, *The Four Johns* got the benefit of years of experience on the part of the TI team, especially ROB FRIEFELD, in recognizing edits that were the result of Vancian revisions versus changes made by an editor.

Once the differences between the MS and the published text were documented, we went through them and evaluated to the best of our judgment which represented changes that were probably made by Vance himself in the course of revising an early draft (which should be retained), and which represented changes made to his final version by the Ellery Queen people (in which cases we would revert to the manuscript text). The experience of reviewing thousands of such differences gave us a fairly good sense of the kinds of things that the Ellery Queen editors tended to do, and with that perspective we took a close look at the segments of the text for which we did not have manuscript evidence. In a number of instances it was clear that the existing text was the work of the editors, and we were able to propose changes back to what Vance probably wrote—at the very least, something closer to his vision than what finally appeared in the published book.

Although many of the changes that were ultimately made were relatively minor (i.e., a word here, a punctuation mark there), taken together the result was, effectively, a new book, a book that reads like a Jack Vance mystery. It is not, I think, hyperbole to call *Strange She Hasn't Written* a lost Vance novel, rediscovered and presented for the first time.

When I became a VIE volunteer I hoped that through my efforts I could help perpetuate the work of my favorite

author, but I never suspected that I would get the opportunity to participate in bringing a work like *Strange She Hasn't Written* to light and making it available for the first time (in something close to its original form) to his other fans. The experience was extremely gratifying.

But my intention is not to pat myself or the rest of the TI team on the back. In the context of VIE work, TI is one of the more visible tasks that VIE volunteers perform. I would like to say a public "Thanks!" and "Well done!" to a group of people who have labored long in relative obscurity: the Imps.

The Implementation team gets a text when TI is done with it, and the TI propositions have been finalized; at that point, the Imps go through and very meticulously make all the directed changes to the text. Texts are impeded in parallel and the results compared, to ensure that changes were made correctly. The text produced by the Imps provides the input for Composition.

As the person who generated most of the nearly four thousand end-notes in *The Star King* and *Strange She Hasn't Written*, I have long felt a bit guilty for inflicting those immense jobs on the unsuspecting Imps. (Also *The Uninhibited Robot*: over six hundred end notes in a short story; the final Word document version had 24 pages of story and 97 pages of notes.) *Strange She Hasn't Written*, in particular, was a bad one because due to looming deadlines corners were cut in the format of end-notes, the result being that not only did that text have the most notes of any text in the VIE, that immense number of notes were potentially less clear than notes in the other files.

The Imps nevertheless performed admirably, wading through that morass with a minimum of confusion, quickly and efficiently.

So, Imps: take heart in the knowledge that somebody knows what you had to go through, and appreciates what you did. The entire Implementation team deserves more credit than it has generally received, but the Imps who worked on *Strange She Hasn't Written*—DONNA ADAMS, MIKE DENNISON and JOEL HEDLUND—are to be especially commended for doing a fine job with such a troublesome text. If ever we meet, drinks are on me!



DEMOCRATIC ART*

A VIEW OF VANCE VIA THE VIE PROJECT EXPERIENCE

PRECURSORY EXPLANATIONS OF THE OBVIOUS

It may be said that the root of Vance's art is the literature of popular democracy.

Prior to the 19th century, generally speaking, art was aristocratic. The art of the 18th and 19th centuries, like society, evolved toward the 'bourgeois', or 'middle class' manner—terms which do not designate ordinary folk but 'the rich', or, as Greeks said, oligarchs.

The aristocrat owes his rank to his own, or to his ancestors, military valor—or banditry if you prefer. He used weapons. He hunted dangerous animals. He knew the countryside (the better to maneuver armies). A natural chief, his haughty bearing inspired confidence in troops. Vance paints a bold picture of this quintessential aristocrat in *The Last Castle*.

The rich were different. They had no pedigree. They were not fighting men but merchants, money lenders, engineers. Their domain was not war but industry and commerce. They lived not in the country but in towns. Vance shows us such men, in tycoons like K. Penche or scientists like Aile Farr (*Houses of Iszm*), financiers like Jehan Addels or Otille Panshaw (*Demon Princes*), gentleman investigators like Milo Hetzel, or entrepreneurs like his client Sir Ivon Hacaway.

Of course aristocrats might be rich, but their money comes from land; they farm, or collect rents from serflike laborers. The bourgeois make money in innovative industries. Their relationship with labor is not paternal but contractual. The shift in power from warrior kings to barons of industry is the purple thread in 18th and 19th century social history.

In the 20th century another class comes to power: the poor—or the 'masses', to use the newer term. It was middle class driven technical evolution, the so called 'industrial revolution', which eventually raised the poor to the pinnacle of society—giving rise to 'total war' which mobilized the total resources of 'mass society', both under fascist and communist tyrannies as well as in the 'democratic' West. These wars were contested by armies numbering in the millions, drafted and forced to fight in the national, or 'common' cause. Gone are the aristocratic days when war was for bands of aristocrats, a few hundred or a few thousand strong, fought for the glory of their personal freedom, for family, or for king. Between these two kinds of war there was a transitional period. In the early 18th century English army of Marlborough the high command remained aristocratic but, in a 'middle class' evolution, certain grades—regimental commands for example—were not matters of promotion or appointment but purchase. The ranks themselves, the cavalry in particular, were filled with both aristocrats and the rich (the 'middle class' oligarchs), but the need for larger masses of infantry resulted in soldiers raised among the poor. In the old armies each soldier provided his own weapons, even his own food and quarters. The Greek Hoplite armies are a notable example. In Marlborough's army,

by contrast, regimental commanders often provided arms to their men. Marlborough, who believed in the saber as principal cavalry weapon, provided a pistol, with three rounds *per campaign*, to each cavalry soldier. Marlborough also managed the whole army's logistics; it had become a mass too large to remain effective without central control.*

'Modern democracy' is the principal type of regime in the 21st century Western world, societies too large and complex to be dominated by one class in the old manner. Mass education and (more or less) egalitarian access to bureaucratic authority and political posts give Western regimes their democratic, or 'rule by the poor' character.

HIERARCHY, FOR AND AGAINST

As important as such structural aspects may be, it is *attitude* which gives color, and to a large extent even substance, to the various societies. This assertion is not contradicted by indicating that a crucial difference between the aristocrats and the bourgeois, on the one hand, and the poor on the other, is that the latter are the majority. Nota Bene: this 'majority' is no precarious 51%. The poor tend to constitute over 90% of the population. Largely for this reason the cultural shifts which accompanied the development of democracy, unlike those which occurred in the change from aristocratic to middle-class regimes, was characterized by devaluation of hierarchies.

The aristocrats and the oligarchs were minorities whose dominance could not be justified without affirmation and defense of a hierarchy. An aristocrat rules because he is, he claims, the natural ruler. He is superior. He is stronger and smarter. He is a man of character and striking personality. A ruling majority of over 90% wants no such myths—though an aristocrat might remark it ignores an unflattering reality. Democratic rule, animated by a current of underlying egalitarianism, is justified by its 'majority status'—a euphemism for superior force.

But modern democracy, as opposed to Athenian democracy, is not pure. Each citizen does not participate in government directly; the system of representation introduces an aristocratic element because electoral candidates claim superiority; they are an elite of the rich or the prestigious, oligarchs and aristocrats of the modern age. Modern democracies are really what Aristotle called 'mixed regimes', in which all classes share power. Despite a countervailing tendency of technological complexity—imposing upon society a magician-like class of technocrats—the progress of egalitarianism, and consequent ever more adamant rejection of hierarchies, has reached an extreme.

The impact of this evolution upon art has been catastrophic. This will be considered further down. First I would like to underline the contrasts between the different sorts of societies, for our democratic mentality masks to what an extent the dominance of the poor makes a cultural difference.

* The navy was a different matter. Marines, or sea-going soldiers, were still aristocrats, along with the officer class. But the common sailors, as always, were recruited among fishermen and merchant sailors, or from among the poor, who were even pressed into naval service at need. Crews were cared for by the captain. Sailors, therefore, were already, a sort of 'professional class' before the rise of the democratic soldier. The old Greek navies also followed this pattern; citizens too poor to own Hoplite arms served as rowers in the triremes.

* This article is dedicated to JOHN SCHWAB, of whose many strengths none was more resolutely at the heart of the VIE project than his gift for friendship.

Today we are seduced by the idea of 'good management'. This ultimately democratic and egalitarian notion has roots in the pardonable prejudice that there is a right way to do things and, therefore, that anybody, whatever his social background, who understands this right way, can manage things well, or that 'governance', as it is now often called, is a technical problem. This is an illusion. Of course sometimes a technocratic perspective is indispensable. There are absolutes which must be respected, like avoiding bridge collapse. But most things are not so straight forward. The 'good way' often turns out to be a preference, a class bias.

Take a government authority for military affairs, one under, say, Henry V, and another under an American President of the last quarter of the 20th century. Henry's knights would have spurned the idea of wages, though they were glad to accept presents—what today would be called 'bribes'. They were no paid servants! They expected to enrich themselves by their personal feats of arms, by the steadfastness of their loyalty, by capturing lands, grabbing booty, ransoming noble prisoners. The latter were put in the moral shackles of an oath not to escape, their company cordially enjoyed in an elegant manner until the ransom came. The Knights were ready, of course, to give their life for their king, as a matter of honor.

A democratic soldier is different. No matter how personally dedicated to blasting Mislovic from Belgrade or Saddam from Baghdad, he is paid a wage. He is forbidden to collect booty or take personal prisoners. He is guaranteed a pension if he survives, or to his widow if he is killed. This is not merely because the aristocrat has a rich domain and needs no wage; he might be ruined. It is also not because the democrat is poor; he might be a rich businessman, or son of one. It is also not because the aristocrat is idealistic and the democrat is mercenary—because the reverse might just as well be true.

In the final analysis no right and wrong can be found in these contrasting attitudes, but the contrasting social structures from which they arise generate dramatically different moods and social fabrics. From the democratic perspective the aristocrat, with his love of honor and readiness for violence, seems like a fool or a bandit. From the aristocratic perspective the democrat, with his 'petty bourgeois' concern for personal happiness, comfort and security, his wages and pensions, seems like a mercenary or a lackey. It is not possible, from the perspective of these attitudes, to judge which generates the best human type, or best attitude, (assuming one of them is better). To compare them we must look down on them both, impartially, from the heights of the philosophical perspective. In this Aristotle is the model, and according to him the aristocratic model is superior. But I mention that merely to keep my democratic readers on the alert, having done which I will try to describe the differences between aristocratic, middle class, and democratic art. However, before that, I would like to further illuminate the scene by indulgence in a lengthy personal reflection. I do this not merely for the pleasure of self-contemplation, but to cast certain lights on democracy—and it is not only personal, but pertinent to everyone who has been involved in, or takes an interest in, the adventure of the VIE project.

THE PROBLEM OF MODERN DEMOCRACY, AS SEEN THROUGH THE VIE

Thomas L. Pangle, in his introduction to *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*, a book designed as an introduction to the thought of Leo Strauss, explains that the 'very openness of the open society', by which he means modern western society,

...contains within itself a self-destructive germ...the tendency of democratic tolerance to degenerate, first into the easygoing belief that all points of view are equal...and then into the strident belief that anyone who argues for the superiority of a distinctive moral insight, way of life, or human type is somehow elitist or antidemocratic—and hence immoral. This is the syndrome that Tocqueville characterized...as the new, soft, "tyranny of the majority": a subtle, unorganized, but all-pervasive pressure for egalitarian conformity arising from the psychologically chastened and intimidated individual's incapacity to resist the moral authority of mass "public opinion".*

Pangle then quotes Strauss:

There exists a very dangerous tendency to identify the good man with the good sport, the cooperative fellow, the "regular guy", i.e., an overemphasis on a certain part of social virtue and a corresponding neglect of those virtues which mature, if they do not flourish, in privacy, not to say in solitude: by educating people to cooperate with each other in a friendly spirit, one does not yet educate nonconformists, people who are prepared to stand alone, to fight alone...†

The impulse to launch the VIE project was, for me, based on more than personal enthusiasm for Jack Vance. I was also convinced that others would understand the importance of such an Edition and be ready to make the sacrifices necessary to its creation. In this I was correct. I did fail to understand how technically difficult it would be, but that problem was essentially easy to solve: harder work than initially planned. But another failure of foresight was more problematic; the project turned out to have an Achilles heel, a consequence of the very 'crisis of the West', reaction to which, ironically, was at the heart of project motivation.

Of course I cannot speak for the other VIE volunteers. Their motivations are their own, and it is not for me to say what they are, but I believe that my motivation was shared by many of my colleagues, even if understood in different ways. I do not mean anything so grandiloquent as that Vance readers feel that honoring and preserving Vance's art would somehow 'restore Western culture'. I mean that, in various ways, people who cherish the work of Jack Vance are *people who are prepared to stand alone, to fight alone*, or who at least, on some level, value that individual bravery and personal generosity choked-off in the climate of dogmatic moral relativism which results from *all-pervasive pressure for egalitarian conformity*.

Note that this motive, which is not aristocratic as such, has an aristocratic element. The VIE volunteer wants no wage. He has a certain concern for 'honor'—honor for the work of Jack Vance—based on a sense of its importance which, even when value judgements are rejected in speech, is, willy-nilly, an affirmation of hierarchy.

Moral relativism and egalitarian conformity are linked by the problem of human diversity. Diversity runs counter to the democratic ideal. When the ideal of society is equality,

*The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism, Thomas Pangle, page xxv.

† Ibid.

differences between rich and poor, intelligent and stupid, lucky and unlucky, inspire a jealous and small-spirited impulse to conformity; no nipple should project farther than another.

But there are other ways to be equal. Christian doctrine teaches that men are equal in the eyes of God, which has been a partly successful antidote to the arrogance of the powerful in Christendom, a standard to which appeal could be made. Imams and mandarins have never had themselves sculpted on the facades of building being pushed into hell by demons for their sins, like the bishops and princes of Christendom, to remind themselves that, in the end, they will be judged for their spiritual souls not their earthly glory.

Equality of chance though public education is a mundane expression of this insight. It is a praiseworthy social goal, which has even been approximately realized in Modern Democracies. Egalitarian conformity, by contrast, is a combat against all aspects of diversity, particularly those which touch worldly glory. It is allied to moral relativism because that is the major justification for sweeping away the hierarchies endemic to diversity, not to say the human condition.

Multiculturalism is a refinement of the battle against diversity; it embraces a superficial diversity on condition the cultures submit to a fundamental conformity. The diverse cultures are allowed to be different horizontally, but there must be no taint of vertical superiority and inferiority.

Relativism teaches us that claims of superior goodness are spurious; the cultures are equal because such claims are sheer bigotry. Being equal all cultures may be universally embraced without shame or danger because the claims and pretentious which make them what they are have no weight, only color.

If Vance readers shared my motivation, many of them are also influenced, to various degrees, by the ensemble of attitudes and pressures suggested by the term 'egalitarian conformity', which introduces my third failure: I had no notion what the Internet environment held in store. I was first astonished at how quickly and easily it allowed us to gather and establish a vast, powerful organization, and then at how it exposed us to malice and sabotage. As early as January of 2000, barely 4 months after its inception, the project was under deadly pressure via the Internet. These struggles began to emerge into public cyber-spaces that spring, but the recurrent disturbances overtly visible were only the tip on the iceberg. Readers of COSMOPOLIS, and the various Vance posting boards, were aware of this exposed part, and the insightful could infer more. But few are aware of the sometimes desperate conflict which characterized part of the internal project experience. A major leit-motif of these struggles was a suspicion, sometimes amounting to alarm, that I, the man who had initiated the project, its principal manager and 'driving force', was also its major liability. Again and again I was warned by some of my friends that I would wreck the project. In several crucial instances some of them, exasperated by my obstinacy, and willing to credit certain lies, allowed themselves to be transformed into enemies, falling into the ranks of irresponsible outsiders accusing me of every turpitude mischievous imaginations could suggest. More usually however, apart from confusion and doubt instilled in people discovering the project, the internal effect of the slanders was to raise concern that since, as it was frequently

contended, I had provoked them though lack of caution and irresponsibility, I was responsible for the dust cloud choking the project, and that this disqualified my methods and proposals. Argument around these points was sometimes intense. Their crucial theater was the highest sphere of project management, and on two occasions I even resigned—a gesture uncharitably, but not altogether unjustly, interpreted as a tactic of blackmail. Since there could be no meeting of minds we were obliged to a test of force.

The project's ultimate success comforts my conviction that mine was the right way, but I never doubted it. We all understood that the key to success was long-term teamwork, which in turn depended upon friendly relations. Less well understood was how much the project depended upon a constant in-flow of outside energy, in the form of new subscribers and new volunteers,* and how this need was related to the projects external posture and internal policies. I called the necessary policy 'openness',† but I was never able to rally the solid support for it which would have rendered our work tranquil.

Luckily for the project—or so I believe—it was none-the-less constantly felt that 'Paul Rhoads' could not be done without, so that, in the end, my 'behaviors' had to be borne. The 'behaviors' in question, neither of which seemed to have anything to do with 'managing', were two:

- 1) A constant public offering of views on the nature and importance of Vance's work, even when those views contradicted strictures of egalitarian conformity.
- 2) Warring on those who warred upon the project.

If one wishes to absolve the project's enemies of all personal responsibility, it can be argued that I caused these wars by pushing their buttons. I have even been accused of being deliberately provocative, but that is not true. I did set out to speak my mind. I was not unaware that some of my opinions would probably fail to meet universal approbation, and that I was provocative is undeniable because some people felt provoked, but the freedom with which I spoke was neither self-indulgent nor unconscious, nor yet fabricated. A condition of honest, fearless thinking and expression, at the heart of the project, was a necessary condition to its success. Since the core of the project was our shared sense of the importance of Vance's work, this sense, like a sacred flame, had to be kept alight. Though I am proud of my effort in this regard, and though I intend to practice no false modesty about the value of my COSMOPOLIS articles, their importance to the project was less whatever literary insight they may contain than how they were a sign, at times a defiant one, of the vitality of the intra-project discourse I meant to maintain. Though I was by no means the only COSMOPOLIS contributor to address literary questions, I was always disappointed there were not more, and sought to compensate by engaging other people's thinking, with praise, commentary, elaborations or dismantlings. I made use of thoughts, in and out of COSMOPOLIS, from friends and

* The importance of volunteer in-flow may be appreciated by considering the time the project required (5 years), the number of volunteers (almost 300), and when these volunteers joined. (This may be estimated by looking for Wave 1 and Wave 2 texts in volunteer credits in volume 44.) Even though many of the most important managers were early volunteers, the inflow of volunteers never stopped. It is impossible to maintain that without such relative late-comers as Bob Luckin, to cite only him, it would have been possible to achieve the same quality in the same time.

† This word has migrated to the heart of multiculturalism, or the 'egalitarian conformity' which is gnawing at the heart of the West. I was using the word, in the context of the project, before this use was as confirmed as it is today. Obviously I do not use it in the new sense.

enemies alike. But the essence of this *intra-project discourse* was not conversation or debate as such, it was a demonstration that live thought, whatever its exact character, real friendliness, whomever or however virtual the partners, nourished the project from within. I struggled to promote this not only in COSMOPOLIS, but in all my project doings.

This stance, and this practice, I insist, was a key to project success. The most lowly post-proofer, though guided and supported, was free and encouraged to bring forward independent insights. In this way many errors and problems, which would otherwise have gone untreated, were revealed and resolved. Every manager made their own jobs. People like Mike Berro, John Foley, Bob Lacovara, Chris Corley, Hans van der Veeke, Koen Vyverman, Patrick Dusoulier, Thomas Rydbeck, Max Ventura or Russ Wilcox, made contributions so personnel that, if they had not invented their own functions or spontaneously initiated their own action, their often all-important contributions would never have existed.* The accomplishments of other managers is only less dramatic because the need for what they did was clearer, though Robin Rouch created 2 new teams because of needs she foresaw. Suan Yong and John Schwab built veritable little empires, to their own specifications, which, like a pair of pillars, held the project up. In spite of this blatant dependence on creative personal contribution, my conviction that a constant demonstration that the project was open not only to the labor of each volunteer, but to the initiative and thinking of each person, was never shared more than warily by other members of upper management. It was usually felt that, once underway, the project had been transformed from a volunteer magnet, a dynamic of a certain character, into a job-processing apparatus. So my action looked to many like nervously compulsive trouble-making, even destructive folly. In defense of their attitude it may be pointed out that the project came to hold close to a million dollars of subscriber money, that many of its crucial aspects were in few hands, or even controlled by a single volunteer, that we were vulnerable to flame attack from without and defection from within. It seemed banal to insist we could not afford to antagonize anyone.† The devil, however, is in the details, and the particulars of the progress of the VIE project from controversy to controversy offers a nice case of the contradictions inherent in modern democracy; the tension between the collective and the individual.

* Mike Berro was the most visionary and courageous person in the VIE. I had an idea, a vague plan, a ram-like determination to accomplish something with sheer effort. Mike instantly had faith in that plan, and in my ability to carry it out. He supported, he even created, the project by giving it an Internet presence and sustaining it financially in its first need. That Mike and I had some occasionally sharp and difficult disagreements only emphasizes my point. John Foley, unasked, created the Master Plan, the principles of which came to be universally recognized as essential. He designed and ran the Composition team, which was differently structured from all the others. Bob Lacovara not only created COSMOPOLIS, which established a stable project locus, he developed and tended our technical functioning, particularly regarding electronic tools. He also resolved a diverse host of practical and moral problems. Chris Corley's insights were the basis of techno-proofing, which the initiative and talent of Koen Vyverman exploited to an amazing extent. Hans van der Veeke, as volunteer coordinator, a position he created by seeing a need, made the projects internal workings more supple, reactive and human; the 'legendary locator' is responsible, to an important extent, for our eventually excellent capacity to attract and hold volunteers. Patrick and Thomas generously took directing rolls in the packing operations, nightmares of organization, and sheer work. Max Ventura designed the new VIE web page, and Russ Wilcox created a promotional program.

† The controversies, of which this section suggests only an outline, took many forms. There were the efforts to curb my 'behaviors', and my efforts to stir fellow managers to the vigorous actions I believed necessary. But my frequent failure to succeed in the latter, while antagonisms inspired by the former grew, eventually provoked real breaches. After I resigned from the VIE board, of which I had been vice-president (I was non-the-less invited to participate in further meetings) the breaches grew wider

A BIT OF VIE HISTORY

After a euphoric beginning, the project suffered a several-pronged attack on the occasion of the Oakland Work Festival. It was decided by some that I was a literary incompetent who, for the good of the project, needed to be moved aside, and at the same time my initiative to create a font was declared irresponsible. I was taken aside and asked to step into a subordinate position. It was proposed that my duties should be limited to illustrating the books. At the same time I was menaced with a campaign of public denunciation if I refused to abandon typography.

But these initiatives were not carried out with enough resolution. No substitute for the Master Plan, no nomination for a new Editor-in-Chief, were proposed. To do so would have meant going well beyond discontented mutters and sly maneuvers. To actually displace me the leaders of this 'fronde'* would have had to elaborate and openly declare their own VIE plan. They would have to select and publicly nominate their own personnel. They would have had to make an open challenge to the project, as already constituted, with their explicit or implicit agreement. This would certainly have so scandalized and troubled volunteers and subscribers (none of whom had yet sent money) that, without any doubt, the project would have quickly faded.

This limited, but still forceful, challenge was met with a variety of tactics. The campaign of public denunciation was quickly stifled—at the cost of my being, forever after, labeled a censurer—and the project's form and structure were maintained, but at the price of a crippling compromise, which could only be provisional and had to be quietly undone. This compromise was that John Vance, rather than myself, should have the 'final word' on controversial editorial decisions. By choosing to insist on this particular point the fronders made an error. In the first place I never had any intention of doing anything else than working both with the Vances and my project associates as closely as possible, per the stipulations of the Master Plan. In the second place, as later became very clear, the absence of an established process of arbitration, for textual controversies in particular, with an accepted and project-internal method for their ultimate resolution, would quickly have exposed the project to unsupportable internal stress. If John Vance had been willing to play a major roll in front-line project work, the compromise might have been

and wider. Eventually, in serious breakdown of cooperation at the top, I was obliged, with a small circle of allies, to run various more and more clandestine operations, so that, once again, I cannot simply deny accusations of 'conspiracy' and 'treason', however nescient they may ultimately be. In the spirit of the openness which won the day for the project, I now favor revealing the story of all this, but my partners in crime, following the same impulse, it seems to me, which countervailed during the whole project, demure. They feel there is nothing to gain by such revelations, which is true as far as the book-sets go. But it seems to me there are things to be gained which go beyond, that these revelations would decorate the project with a crown of light. One might argue that such a crown adds nothing to the triumphant existence of the books. But the Vance Integral Edition is itself only a crown on the work of Jack Vance; the crown with which I would crown a crown is still a crown on the head of Jack Vance. Since I have, once again, failed to make this sort of point with my associates, and since, indeed, there is no book-production related gain, and also because it is high time the project ended and disappeared, the revelations will not be made. Extant readers, however, are authorized to imagine 'the worst'.

* Some of its participants meant well. I do not mean to paint the fronde, in all its aspects or many of its participants, as evil. As I have elsewhere explained some of the motivations were understandable. Some persons acted from a proper sense of prudent responsibility, at least partly based on my notorious incapacity to spell. However there were some who acted with malice. Ideally this should have been perceived, and refused, by the others, but that is too much to ask. The crucial tactic of the most guilty, however, was so effective, so dastardly, and weighed so heavily on the whole rest of the project, that it will not be mentioned.

viable, but his personal life excluded this. Or, if Alun Hughes had been able to consecrate more time to project work, that could have been an alternative.

Most controversial textual points turned out to be highly technical, and it came to be recognized that their resolution usually had to be based on principles, the elaboration and understanding of which was no trivial matter. The taste or personal preferences of one person or another, even if that person were a member of the Vance family, even if it were Jack Vance himself, could not often give an apropos resolution, and such a system would not even have been viable in the face of such a mass of work, based on such great stocks of evidence, and involving texts some of which were over 50 years old. There were famous instances when questions put to Jack resulted in answers to which the universal reaction was regret the question had ever been

put. There would then be a muttered consensus to forget all about it. This was not because Jack was being silly, or that he was mistaken; it was because the questions were impossible to ask correctly. For even if Jack's response about a phrase or a paragraph were creatively interesting, it almost inevitably neglected wider aspects of a text he might not have seen for decades, and could not review in depth, to say nothing of comparing published and manuscript versions, including his own reworkings. He was busy working on *Lurulu*. The VIE project was there to handle these matters. Of course Jack himself, and Norma even more, were the direct source of many important corrections, but the mass of textual problems, thousands and thousands of issues, could not be resolved that way.

As the projects Principal Editors will confirm, they were mostly settled by slowly established standards, plain hard work, and consensus arrived at though robust discussion. On those notable but rare occasions when issues were settled by the authority of the E-in-C, the outcomes were gracefully accepted.*

John Vance, I hasten to point out, was no part of the fronde. He actively sought to conciliate. In the end the fronders succeeded only in a half-baked attempt to humiliate me. It would have been better if John had insisted on the

* Some of the most famous examples have been exposed in COSMOPOLIS, such as the *Durdane* map issues and the *Star King* stemma controversy. But, if it may be justly said that certain key points were settled by E-in-C authority, my choices were only made after months of cooperative work, without which the issues could not have been clarified to the point where a reasonable choice even came to view. So, even in these cases, the result was still fundamentally collaborative.

Master Plan, as already accepted, and, like Mike, shown firm personal confidence in me. But that is asking too much, and, as it turned out, neither the Master Plan, nor the E-in-C, were derailed.

Though patient work, by John Foley, to solve the typography dilemma, and the successful launch of double digitization (which imposed over a year of extra work by a new team, and a host of new procedures) as well as the growing vitality and smooth operation of the project in general, my legitimacy was more or less silently† re-established; finally, with the personal reconciliations, necessary after the Oakland troubles, the Master Plan migrated back to the center.

Against the backdrop of this stabilized situation, underlined by constant gains in work momentum, new angles of attack from the outside developed. Besides the font controversy, which kicked up pointlessly in the spring of 2000, strong reaction to



COSMOPOLIS articles broke out that summer. This brings us back to the democratic problem.

The various objections to my articles all had one thing in common; they were motivated by what Pangle calls the *pervasive pressure for egalitarian conformity*, but they came in two flavors: 'primary objections' from those who disapproved the content, and 'secondary objections' from those who, in the interest of peace and tranquility, disapproved provocation. It is not germane to revisit the ideological issues here, and the conflict within management was never overtly on the primary level—much of the strongest concern came from managers who did

† Only more or less. In August 1903, Suan Yong posted on the 'Gaeon Reach': ". . .but we have all (I think I speak for *all* of us) come to realize that Paul has done an INCREDIBLE job of organizing the VIE engine into the smooth-running entity it is today." Suan's own organizational work was always remarkable, and better remain so, at least until after EQ volume delivery!

not even read COSMOPOLIS. They were concerned, even alarmed, at the fervor and excitement of some primary objectors, many of whom were not even volunteers, but who were prepared to go quite far to punish the project for failing to silence me or chase me out.* But these managers were just as troubled, and sometimes even more so, by my intransigence. They refused to see attacks on me as attacks on the project, so that I appeared to be the whole problem. Certain VIE managers, converted to this view, applied relentless pressure. Their argument was always the same, and ultimately inspired by the ideal of egalitarian conformity.

It may have been clear to all of us that, to be successful, we had to 'cooperate with each other in a friendly spirit', but I was not a 'good sport'. Rather than being a 'cooperative fellow', a 'regular guy', I was uncontrollably 'prepared to stand alone, to fight alone', because, I knew, the project also depended upon that.

These two aspects, friendly cooperation and maverick independence, are together the true heart of modern democracy, in the absence of which it must die. But they are contradictory,† and it is hopeless to try and resolve that contradiction with relativism, or by declaring all values equal. When personal opinion is stripped of wider implication, independent thought or action is acceptable only as harmless eccentricity. Since there is nothing essential in it to defend, when it (whatever 'it' is) is attacked, it finds few defenders.‡

THE DYNAMIC OF MODERN DEMOCRACY

To illustrate a fundamental dynamic of modern democracy, I will use a specific experience related to the VIE.

In December 2004 Alexander Feht's review of *Lurulu*, which had appeared elsewhere on the Internet, was posted on the VanceBS by VIE volunteer Luk Schoonhart, sparking a controversy, already commented in Extant #1. 'Jojo Lapin', a pseudo-person who, if not Alexander Feht himself is Feht's mouthpiece, praised the review, provoking this reaction from Dan Gunter:

... it's simply ridiculous to move [Feht] very high up the list of Vancean critics. . . he has. . . revealed himself to be a very biased reader of Vance. He understands Vance from his own wildly conservative perspective and thus often misreads him.

The first response to this comment seems obvious, and 'Jojo' himself instantly put the pertinent question, namely:

* Their methods included more than mendacious postings. There were e-mails, sometimes broadcast to as wide an audience of VIE managers and subscribers as possible, legal and physical threats, telephone calls, personal visits.

‡ A related, or parallel, contradiction is explicated by Leo Strauss in another extract presented by Pangle, originally from Strauss' *The City and Man*, 1964, chapter 3, 'Thucydides: The Meaning of Political History':

... The Western tradition is threatened today as it never was heretofore. For it is now threatened not only from without but from within as well. It is in a state of disintegration. Those among us who believe in the Western tradition. . . must therefore rally around the flag of the Western tradition. But we must do it in a manner. . . worthy of that noble tradition. . . we must uphold the Western principles in a Western manner [in awareness] that the vitality and the glory of our Western tradition are inseparable from its problematic character. For that tradition has two roots. . . which are ultimately incompatible with each other—the Hebrew element and the Greek element. . . Both philosophy and the Bible assert that there is ultimately one thing, and one thing only, needful for man. But the one thing needful proclaimed by the Bible is the very opposite of the one thing needful proclaimed by the Greek philosophy. According to the Bible the one thing needful is obedient love; according to philosophy. . . it is free inquiry. . . The Western tradition does not allow of a synthesis of its two elements, but only of their tension: this is the secret of the vitality of the West.

† It must never be forgotten that the relativist position is absurd. Its advocates, claiming there is no such thing as 'ultimate truth', are proclaiming exactly what they denounce, a doctrine which happens to be even more 'absolute' and 'universal' in its pretensions than those they complain of in misty religious values or the provisional values of philosophy.

why a "wildly conservative" perspective would necessarily lead to misinterpretations of Vance? But 'Jojo's' response surprised me. Dan is saying that since Vance's work does not embody 'wildly conservative' ideas, he cannot be understood by those who use that perspective. 'Jojo' did not challenge this on the line which seems obvious; instead he affirmed a fundamental agreement with Dan; Vance, he claims, can be correctly understood from a wildly conservative perspective because some of Vance's ideas are indeed wildly conservative, or, as 'Jojo' puts it, Vance represents a *peculiar mixture* of ideas: libertarianism, conservatism, racism and nihilism. 'Emphyrio', and 'Wyst', 'Jojo' says, show that Vance is a libertarian because they are an *incisive critiques of slave societies*. The Institute of the Demon Prince novels show that he is conservative because it considers that *wisdom. . . is best kept from the unwashed masses*. The Yips of Cadwal demonstrate Vance's racism, and his nihilism is found in *the might-makes-right politics of 'The Gray Prince', which is quite transparently a comment on the validity of the claims to land of Native Americans*.* There is something in Vance, 'Jojo' claims, *to embarrass anyone*.

My own reaction to this was put succinctly in the letter from John Edwards, in EXTANT #12, quoting Larry Niven: *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*. By this definition 'Jojo' is an idiot, but there is a grain of truth in his idiocy. Vance could not be so compelling on these subjects if he were unable to imagine his way into understanding of, or even sympathy for them. The flatness of so much art is the result of dull incapacity to see things in color and depth. It is a sorry thing when a view, properly characterized as colorful and deep, is taken for political and philosophical bias. If Vance is not blind to how the Hobbsian state of nature glorifies limitless personal liberty at the expense of the weak, or how collectivism flatters the weak at the expense of human excellence, it hardly makes him a libertarian. If he can appreciate the ideas of the Institute, which are actually a semi-comic dramatization of Spenglerian angst, it hardly makes him a conservative. If he can feel his way into the tissue of contradictions inherent in the tortured concept of property, it does not make him an advocate of slavery, colonialism or the right of the mighty. The grain of truth in 'Jojo's idiocy is that, as militants for collectivism, for example, would quickly sense, while Vance may not be their worst enemy, while he may not even be their enemy at all, neither is he fighting shoulder to shoulder with them under the banner of their favorite cause.

Please note: I am not trying to deny that Vance is any of the things 'Jojo' says he is. Nor am I trying to claim that Dan Gunter is wrong that a conservative bias, as opposed to some other bias, makes understanding Vance difficult. These are different questions. I am not trying to show that such approaches to understanding art are wrong, but that they are politicized. Specifically I wish to indicate that Ideological

* This question was addressed by Vance in an interview for *Slash* magazine (#17 October 1998, translated from the French by Patrick Dusoulier):

QUESTION: Is it true that the French colonial history in Algeria inspired *The Gray Prince*?

JACK VANCE: No, that was an abstract idea. I simply realized that the legal ownership of any piece of land, however small — except in the extreme northern regions or in utterly inhospitable places — results from an initial act of violence. All you need to do is go far enough back into the past. The American Indians complain about having been expelled from their land, but they did the same thing previously to other tribes, and so on, going back to the first settlers who came through the Bering Strait.

QUESTION: And. . . those first settlers expelled the animals?

JACK VANCE: That's right. All the saber-tooth tigers died!

readings of Vance, whether from the self-proclaimed left, or the left-designated right, have something in common.

This similarity is expressed in a common hostility to my kind of reading of Vance, but I am not insinuating that my reading is therefore superior. Of course ideological readers of Vance, who, naturally, treat me as a personal enemy, complain that *my* reading is politicized. This is superficially because they cannot see things in other terms; to them all readings are political, and readings which fail to comfort their prejudice are wrong, and art which fails to have their prejudices is bad. But the deeper reasons are more important.

Dan Gunter's most recent hostilities on the VanceBS, along with the unwillingness of several regulars, who are also important VIE folk, to raise a voice of complaint, provoked Alexander Feht, in a Hache-Moncouresque gesture, to what he called an *urge to defend his arch-enemy**:

It is obvious to me that [Paul Rhoads] is being ostracized by his former stooges and collaborators not because of what he is saying, and not because of how he is saying it.

Paul Rhoads is in opposition to the all-pervading moral and cultural rot that encompassed our world during the 20th century, and now endangers the precarious existence of civilization itself. This is the main reason why morally and culturally insolvent people like Mr. Gunter. . . cannot stand him. . .

But, in another impersonation of Hache-Moncoure, Feht once wrote:

To paraphrase Voltaire, I strongly disagree with most of the things [Rhoads says] but, unlike Mr. Gunter, I [would] rather die fighting for [his] right to speak [his] sick mind. . .

Even abstracting from Feht's compulsive hostility, it cannot be left at that, because he spent years trying to drive me out of COSMOPOLIS. Feht has constantly accused me, in his colorful phraseology, of the *moral crime of over-filling Vance-dedicated publications with [my] religious and political propaganda*, and of *using the VIE project as a vehicle of unethical self-promotion at Jack Vance's expense*. His efforts were even successful; at one point I was obliged to abandon COSMOPOLIS. So much for his defense of anyone's *right to speak*.

Now, what Feht claims is his agreement with me is banal. Opposition to *moral and cultural rot endangering the existence of civilization* is as common as dirt—the only exception are cynically indifferent post-modern dandys—but when you get specific about the rot, no one agrees. The 'Left' mourns we are falling into the hands of Christian fundamentalists, that our society is islamophobic, homophobic and misogynist, that global capitalism is inflicting racist neo-colonialism, and technology is destroying the bio-sphere. Ayn Randian palio-Darwinists, by contrast, crab that resurgent religiosity is degrading rationalism. They urge a regime of genetically and culturally superior supermen. Dan Gunter calls Feht a 'conservative' because Feht might complain that rock Western lack of self-assurance in the face of Islamism reveal weakness, but Feht would howl like a stuck pig if, as I have timidly done on a few occasions, Christianity were evoked as an aspect of the remedy. The definitions of 'cultural rot' are diverse.

I am no different from Dan and Alexander in having opinions, and I am not pleading, here, that mine, as opposed to theirs, are more correct, more moderate, or in some other way superior.

* See Appendix, page 23, for full text of 'Paul Rhoads: a view from afar'.

The difference I wish to bring out is that I do not merely give lip service to democratic ideals. I am actually willing, even interested, in honest engagement, in what used to be called the 'search for Truth', and not just with friends but with enemies as well. To put this another way, I try to live the Socratic ideal of being more concerned about my own ignorance than the possible errors of my fellows. This does not mean I tolerate evil. Nor does it mean I sit still for being rhetorically roughed up. Socrates was no push-over, and evil should be taken down. But having a robust attitude is not the same as being 'out of control' or 'extremist'. It is even essential to a meaningful defense of openness, and thus crucial to the health of modern democracy.

Openness is like a big room. It is not cramped, it is spacious, but it is not unlimited; it has walls. But it is only for people of good will. Malice, specifically excluding ideological opponents in the name of imaginary crimes, must be out of bounds or all is lost. The bar, however, must be set low. No one is perfect. Opinions need time to develop. Anyone might slip, might let escape intemperate words or ideas*. These are not manifestations of deliberate evil. What must be excluded is hostility. People must work for the truth, as they understand it, but they must also work to be friends. If the two sides of the Oakland fronde had refused to cooperate afterwards, the project would have been doomed. Willingness to engage opponents, or even enemies, is not necessarily mere pugnaciousness, even when it manifests itself in a 'knock-about style'; it might be motivated by goodwill.

I hope no one can justly accuse me of feeling contempt.† I think some people behave deplorably, and I don't mind saying so, or exposing their lies and nastiness. But I do not feel—I even carefully try to avoid expressing—the sort of rooted and anxiously withering contempt they are willing to use.

This is my conception of the essential dynamic of 'modern democracy'. It is a balancing act, requiring 'discernment', as Norma Vance might say. It is a constantly renewed and never exact resolution of an equation between the individual and the group. The field of discourse must be as wide as possible, but no wider. If it is too small, the individual is cramped and cannot breath. If it is too large all possibility of collective action is swamped in a flood of disharmonious forces. Maintaining this equation at the heart of the project seemed to me to be my essential VIE work, just as, in my opinion, it is at the heart of successful modern democracy.

THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ARISTOCRATIC, OLIGARCHIC AND DEMOCRATIC ART

The briefest description of these differences would be: aristocratic art is spiritual, oligarchic art is mental, and democratic art is physical, but, the taste for such formulas not being universal, I will try to give a more circumstantial account. Such formulas, in any case, must be interpreted largely. The essential difference between classes of people does not obliterate their common humanity. Art, likewise, is art before it is an expression of class, so that all art has important things in common.

* I am not slyly referring to myself in an effort to appear humble. Most of my mistakes are spelling mistakes. I am talking about people who are not really that bad, but find it hard to get it together.

† A legalistic attitude which measures attitudes by specific words is stupid. A playground taunt such as "I'll kick you in the balls, you dog", is proof of nothing. The Final Solution was certainly elaborated in a climate of the utmost decorum with everyone using exquisite manners.

Aristocratic art, such as Venetian painting of the 15th century, features portraits of superb noblemen with their armors and rich clothing. Their religious art is rife with sophisticated allegories and mysticism. Their historical images glorify bravery, sacrifice, triumph and tragedy.

Oligarchic art, such as Dutch 17th century painting, features portraits of worthy burgers in elegant but sober garments. Their landscapes are modest and realist, featuring familiar surroundings. Their still lives are somewhat sybaritic displays of flowers and familiar household objects, celebrating comfort and security. Their religious art tends to be narrative rather than mystical, sentimental rather than symbolic. In societies where there are aristocrats and oligarchs at the same time, both sorts of art flourish. In 18th century England the homely portraits of Hogarth express the just-us-folks middle class attitude, while Reynolds and Gainsborough often satisfied aristocratic, or would-be aristocratic, sitters in a higher style.

As aristocratic art fades into oligarchic, so democratic art first comes to light as a modification of aristocratic and oligarchic art. The WPA painting of the 1930s, like the Socialist Realism from both Mexico and Russia which it imitated, was, in its most basic structure, traditional aristocratic or oligarchic art coarsened in manner. Rather than celebrating mystical religious scenes (the transfiguration, the resurrection, the miraculous catch) or celebratory portraits of royal families, it exalted factory and agricultural workers, scenes of the common man at work and play. Italian Futurism, 'fascistic' in its inebriated celebration of modernity, (machines, speed, the sheer force of technological mass war) was closer to the real thing. But Surrealism was the heart of it. This form of art is reduced to the lowest denominators: instinct, impulse from the unconscious, sheer caprice; common to all men, the theoreticians of Surrealism pretend these are the ultimate basis of all art. They are certainly the basis of the art of the common man.

The common man, being uneducated, is unaware of, or unconcerned about, the 'finer things'. Without glorious family traditions, with no pedigree or rank to maintain, no financial empire to run, he is free to concentrate narrowly upon his human pleasures. These, of course, are given even to uncommon men, and they are of such importance, so absorbing, that most common men waste few bitter thoughts on the lowliness of their place on the social ladder. Poverty, as long as it is not extreme (and in that case one's problems are too serious to worry about anything else) is no bar to the best things in life, like watching the sunset over a glass of beer with an attractive companion—to say nothing of the rest of the evening. And what sharpens the appetite, or favors sound sleep—two crucial pleasures of the body—like hard, outdoor labor? A turnip boiled with a slab of lard is more delicious than caviar and champagne when you are actually hungry. Poverty and the simple life are by no means the tragedy they are thought to be by the foolish affluent. They might even be called a blessing. Who is happier; the dour grandees painted by Holbine, or the working, dancing, drinking, peasants of Breugel?

The poor traditionally practiced homey arts. They decorated their houses and clothes with colors and patterns. But industrialization put an end to that. The arts for the modern poor are mass produced, mostly concocted by the oligarchs; radio shows, movies, cheap novels, photographs of puppies and Yosemite Falls, pornography. For the slightly more sophisticated there are smarmy reproductions of

'paintings' in a degraded style, crudely imitative of aristocratic and middle class arts.

I am too severe! Art, like society, is mixed. Still these distinctions are not sterile. Jane Austen is a Bourgeois writer. Her novels concern middle class people, the English oligarchs, and their kinds of problems, material, moral, sentimental. We encounter no Aeneas founding Rome, no Roland combating the Saracen. Her style is homely, witty and suave, like a still life by Chardin with a cat surprised by a dead fish.* These English oligarchs were different from the ancient Greek oligarchs, because they were marked by the Reformation. They were Protestants who took their religion seriously, unlike the Catholics who coasted along in an all-too-human manner. Jane Austen's father was a clergyman, which contributed to the subtle moral richness of her art. But, fundamentally, all oligarchs have certain things in common. They are not worried about military glory or the prestige of commanding empires. They love not conquest and victory but order and plenty. These depend upon discipline. Oligarchs, moralist or not, are serious minded and diligent. They are halfway between the crude sensationalism of democrats and the disincarnate enthusiasms of aristocrats.

Charles Dickens, compared to Jane Austen, emphasized sentiment over morality. Where Austen dipped a delicate toe, he wallowed. But Raymond Chandler is a fully democratic writer. His novels abandon morality for a kaleidoscope of grotesque situations, intense sensations and vicarious gratifications. Hitchcock is another: his dramas, as masterly in construction as Chandler's stories, vehicle no fine sentiments, nothing tragic or patriotic, nothing moral and wise. They intrigue, titillate, excite. Pointless passions, meaningless murders, a labyrinth of plot through which the artist, like a drunken charioteer, exhilarates us on a wild ride from nowhere to nowhere. Democratic art is art for art's sake. The gesture for the gesture. What could be so empty and meaningless, yet so charged with style, as Lauren Bacall, at the end of *The Big Sleep*, telling Humphrey Bogart there's nothing wrong with her he couldn't fix?

Science fiction, with its technology, space travel, cataclysmic wars and alternate realities, recalls Futurism, and like the crime drama is fully democratic.

VANCE'S ART

The seed of Vance's art sprouts in this democratic soil. Early stories like *The Rapparee*, or *Big Planet*, even to a large extent *Mizirian the Magician*, are exotic tapestries. Their action and imagery are surreal and extravagant. In the essential democratic fashion they are sensational, weirdly intriguing, inconsequent, brutal, burlesque. They offer a wondrous experience but have no meaning. When Guyal of Sfere masters the Museum of Man it allows him to continue slaking his curiosity, enlarging his experience for the sake of experience itself. Myron Tany (of *Ports of Call-Lurulu*), Vance's last hero, is another Guyal. The argument of the latter book is superficially identical to *Guyal of Sfere*. Myron, driven by polymorphic curiosity, by an itch to move, has a set of experiences, and, in the end, will have more of them. But the resemblance is only superficial. If something else had not germinated in Vance's art it would have remained purely democratic.

* This sort of wit is also used by Jacques Tati, notably in 'Mon Oncle'. It is 'democratic' because, despite Tati's admirably light hand, this sort of humor is sheer buffoonery.

The art of Marcel Proust is democratic. Proust dramatizes the individual without reference to a larger frame. Proustian love is a cycle of attraction, possession, disenchantment and escape. The ultimate separation provokes attraction anew; the 'beloved' again becomes an intriguing exotic object thanks to non-possession. Such love is not a relationship but a private restlessness. Possession, in which the 'lover' can only discover the banality of his object, kills 'love'.

This scheme, which is full of psychological truth, has no room for the beauty of loyalty. It is no vision of humanity in which intimacy between persons is a process of deepening and expansion. The individual is a sybaritic solipsist, stripped of anything but self-referential impulses. He is the disassociated democratic monad, for democratic man is physical man, the man devoted not to an external ideal but to his personal bliss.

Love is not the major Vancean theme, but in Vance love never has a Proustian cast. In Vance attraction tends to be fatuous. It is not the essence of love, as in Proust, but a callow illusion, a foolish and selfish impulse. Aillas' crush on Tatzel is the most characteristic example. Once he comes to actually know her he sees not her banality—to the contrary learning of her reality makes her richer to him—but his own fatuity. There is no equivalent to the Proustian cycle of disenchantment, revulsion and escape. Forced together, coming to know each other, Tatzel and Aillas begin to have a true relationship, a dynamic of actual communication, or communion, with another human being. That relation, such as it is, is a process in which they come to an ever deeper understanding of their respective humanity, and even if that understanding is far from perfect they part with a certain mutual respect infinitely more valuable than Aillas' initial infatuation or Tatzel's initial contempt.

In Vance true love, from such untroubled meetings of hearts as Glawen and Wayness or Gersen and Alice, to the obstacle course of Efraim and Maerio, or the baffled situations of Glinnes and Duissane, or Gerd and Schaine, is not about possession, but about coming together to form a couple of which the joy will be a process and a growth. Vance's view may be naive—he does not explore the foundations of his approach, which is very close to a tranquil faith in the beauties of marriage as traditionally understood. Love's bliss in Vance is the pair of lovers living together in a cabin in the country, and the summit of that bliss is not possession, not physical passion, but sitting together on a porch, watching a sunset, sipping drinks and conversing quietly. The image, if not actually Socratic, is certainly Platonic.

Myron Tany's love adventures, with the nameless waitress at the Glad Song Tavern, and then Tibbet Garwig, call up a faint echo of Turgan of Miir's relations with T'sais and T'sain. But where the latter is barely more than a decorative gesture, Myron's infatuations, choices and experiences bring him face to face with the confused mixture of good and evil which inhabits everything, and to a tragic confrontation with himself.

The difference between Turgan, or Gyal of Sfer, and Myron Tany is the theme of the Winged Being. Vance modifies the democratic form not toward oligarchic or aristocratic art. He introduces neither moral suavity nor patriotism. The modification is philosophical.

Pangle writes:

The classical political rationalism to which Strauss gave new life is in essence the moral, political and theological justification or vindication of the Socratic way of life. Strauss dedicated himself to advancing and to testing in argument this seemingly outlandish series of suggestions: that in the life of Socrates, in his relentless but erotic or loving skepticism, is to be found the model of a truly free, truly awakened, truly rational human existence; that this way of life affords the firmest foundation of lasting friendship and true generosity; that despite an inevitable and continuing tension between Socrates' erotic skepticism and the loyalties, commitments, and attachments required by family, religion, and citizenship, a fragile and mutually fruitful coexistence in dialogue is possible; that from such dialogue [...] there emerge norms of civic justice, of civic virtue and vice, which, while not absolute in the sense of being susceptible of articulation in the form of natural laws or categorical imperatives, are yet transhistorically valid because grounded in rational insight into the nature, the permanent and deepest needs, of mankind; and finally, that the highest potential of liberal [modern] democracy is its capacity to keep alive and even to reverse the model of Socrates, the Socratic dialectic, and the Socratic way of life.

IBID, PAGE XII.

The open space of friendship and discourse, the utility of which I have tried to explain in this article, is the same space Strauss was eager to remind us that Socrates opened for mankind, and concern for the importance and fragility of which he was eager to generate and foster. It is this same space, this same dynamic between, to express it as compactly as possible, skepticism and loyalty, which is, I say, what Vance introduces into democratic art, and which gives his art transhistorical importance.

I will not make a fuller demonstration of this Socratic element in Vance's art, since so many of my other reflections already do this. But, for clarity, I will rehearse a certain example, previously treated.

Gold and Iron flirts with the aristocratic theme of patriotism, though in the democratic jingoist form of cultural pride debased to the point where it might best be labeled chauvinism.* It flirts with the romantic Bourgeois theme of the man struggling to raise himself to the moral or cultural height of his beloved, though the romance proceeds in the crude democratic context of jazz clubs and exotic adventure. But Vance melts these elements down in his Socratic crucible. American supremacy is not merely relativized, but reduced to almost nothing by the transcendent technological and cultural superiority of the Lekthwans, and Barch, who would otherwise be a typically democratic vessel of vicarious experience for its own sake, is not only physically mutilated, ruining him in this capacity, but when he fails to win his beloved Lekthuan girl Vance sabotages the debased middle-class dénouement to which the story seemed to point—and back to which its democratic editors forced it in the non-VIE published versions. And yet this story has not the slightest taint of post-modern cynicism which these turn-about would seem to suggest. It remains patriotic and romantic, but its patriotism and romance are infused with philosophy. America is lovable, but not because there is nothing stronger or better; and

* Debased patriotism is not democratic as such, but democratic in tendency. In pure democratic art patriotism would not appear in any form, since the individual would be all. But Communism, which crushes the individual, in the name of the individual, is not, therefore, aristocratic. It is a tyrannical anti-democratic strategy. Tyranny, of course, is different from monarchy in that it is illegitimate, based on force, and benefits only the ruler. I don't know if there is a Greek name for a tyranny by a group, but that would be the dark mirror of aristocracy; not rule of the best but rule of the strongest.

though Barch's love fails, it is beautiful because it refines and enlarges him, while carrying him as far as possible into a real relationship with an object of selfish infatuation. In the beginning Barch is a weak fool groping in a labyrinth of mindless prejudice and hopeless desire. In the end he is mutilated and alone, but a man of strength and wisdom who knows what he does not know.



POLITICS AS USUAL

WESTERN REGENERATION

After the un-programmed finish to Milosovic's trial, Victor Davis Hanson made a series of telling points:* how is it, he asks, that a bunch of cowboys can run Guantanamo Bay without a single death among their Muslim captives while, in The Hague, the Western captives are committing suicide and dropping dead? Why all the squawk about Saddam's trial taking time, when Milosovic's trial dragged on for four years? Why all the finger pointing about failure to catch Osama while several Serbian butchers wanted by The Hague still run free? Why so much emphasis on alleged American failure in Iraq when the international effort in Afghanistan is having just as much trouble? Why such indignation at Bush's 'smoke-em out' cowboy talk, and indifference when Chirac lets it all hang out with a threat to nuke terrorists who menace France? Why the on-going hullabaloo about the libertycyde Patriot Act when several European countries are pushing security legislation which will go well beyond the American measures?

To these points many more might be added, such as European finger pointing at allegedly massive American poverty while the economic situation in many European regions is so deplorable, or scoffery at Bush's slow reaction to natural disasters when the French government remained tranquilly on vacation during the heat wave of 2004 which killed thousands of 'senior citizens', or emphasis on American racism when the situation of immigration and cultural non-integration in many European countries is giving rise to measures which, if taken by Bush, would be decried hysterically—to say nothing of a, well, if not actually racist, then at least 'clash of civilizational' French reaction to the initiative of Indian steel mogul, Mittal, to buy French steel giant Arcelor. Had it been Bush instead of Chirac, the yelpy would have bored us for weeks.

These hypocratic positions, however, are not merely European, they are also taken by the American Left. There are, happily, a few dissenting European voices, and I have the impression that, under the pressure of reality, these voices are timidly being allowed a growing forum in the tightly controlled European media. The land of the free, by contrast, has a non-leftist media 'major', Fox News, which apparently enjoys a 60% market share. And I am delighted at the American Army's plan to dump their unmanageably large stock of documents, captured in the recent raid on Samara, onto the Internet. This is more than a clever way to harness volunteer labor, it is an act of faith in Truth, Freedom and the Common Man world wide. I doubt, however, that this chance to participate in the war against terror will enthrall those who crow most about world government, and dream of planetary citizenship.

The problems faced by the West are common to Europe and America. The worn-out modes of thought (which I label 'leftist'), and the elites they nourish, cannot affront the current world situation and, I am confident, these elites are withering under the weight of their own incapacity. Bush, Blair and Merkel (the new German Chancellor) are symptomatic of the change taking place. Bush's 'compassionate conservatism', like Blair's 'new labor', introduce non-leftist elements into the post-Christian utopianism which, I say, is the essence of Leftism.

Watch the Dutch! They may be extremely post-Christian but they have turned their backs on the essence of multiculturalism. They don't want Muslim fanatics messing up their tranquil hedonism, and they are putting their foot down.* Eventually they will see the link between their dogmatic hedonism and their post colonial failure to cope with Muslim immigration. The link is this: you cannot even encourage new-comers to integrate your society if that society has no content. The 'universal human rights' which the European elite crows about, fails to weave a social fabric not because it is universal and not because it is a question of rights as opposed to duties, but simply because it is not about a universality or rights anyone ever heard of prior to 5 minutes ago (historically speaking), but is really a set of baseless sanctions for such brave new things as homosexual marriage, abortion, and universal free health care.

That said, I will now be accused of thinking the solution is a 'return' to 'Christian morality' and *laissez faire* capitalism, 19th century style, and it will be demanded what that has to do with the heart of the contemporary crisis, namely millions of Africans who dream of living in Europe, or millions of South Americans who dream of living in the USA? But I am neither one of those abashed Christian Leftists who feels we must return to morality or disappear under a horde of holler'in, dagger wielding jihadists, nor one of the mythical neo-cons who supposedly dream of slave factories within US borders. And since I reject relativism, I think that some things are better than others. Since I think the Truth is hard to know, I value the multiplicity of approaches to the problem of how to live. I am glad there are other societies than Western society, and I do not exclude the reality or even the necessity, of social evolutions. I believe, however, that Western society must reaffirm its basis not because that would be a soothing spectacle to Muslim eyes, or because it would restore the crusading spirit we need to fight them off, but because exacerbated hedonism, including elements of utopian collectivism, is not a viable social system since it fails to accord with the reality of both human society and human individuality.

The needs of society and the needs of the individual are in conflict. In traditional Muslim society the needs of society are over-emphasized. For the sake of social stability men are not allowed to think, and women are simply reduced to property. Western society is moving towards an opposite extreme, where the most extravagant individual projects are sanctioned, no matter how deleterious to society. This is the dynamic underlying, for example, the Western prejudice in favor of criminals which erupted into the popular mind with such movies as *Bonny and Clyde*, and which persists and flourishes in the American under-class in such forms as 'gangsta-rap'. It is the force behind uncompromising libertarian positions.

Demands for individual liberty seem ideologically

* See 'Teflon Europe (They're just as bad as we are, only worse)' March 17
<http://victorhanson.com/index.html>

* They have already restricted immigration to speakers of Dutch, and Germany is about to follow that example

irresistible in the West today. How could anyone dare interfere with a person's desire to divorce their marriage partner? 'Personal happiness' which now means nothing but personal pleasure, has become a sovereign idea. The result, however, is cultural, social and demographic collapse. The other extreme, crushing the individual in favor of society, is equally catastrophic, as conditions throughout much of Africa, South America and Asia demonstrate—though, in many cases, the sorry situations suffered in these areas are caused by tyranny, a criminal system whereby one man, or clique, gets all the benefits while the others are reduced to slavery, but this comes to much the same thing.

The solution is the traditional Western compromise, largely, but by no means exclusively, based on Christian ideas, which has led to centuries of unprecedented and unsurpassed Western success and ascendancy. This compromise, nourished by Christian transcendence of the individual, opened a space for atheism which exists nowhere else. In this compromise individuals are equal where it really counts, in the eyes of God, and social cohesion is based not on arbitrary strictures which, in the final analysis, benefit a ruling class, but in natural laws which the up-right heart recognizes as just. Thus Christian marriage is a sacred union, or a contract signed in heaven, under the eye of God who sees to the bottom of our souls. It excludes polygamy because that deprives women of individual dignity. The fundamental problem with divorce is not that it destabilizes society by generating economic precarity and neurotic children, but because it destroys society at the foundation, by degrading the possibility of communication itself. When the phrase "I promises" ceases to mean anything language itself is destroyed, and human interaction becomes a mute ballet of meaningless polymorphic arabesques, which, as I have explained elsewhere*, eventually results in actual loss of consciousness. We are dancing our way into personal oblivion.

Can China continue to integrate the system of international commerce while remaining a slave state? With chaos descending upon central and eastern Africa, with the persistence of Islamism in the Arab world, can these regions continue to remain part of the so called 'international community'? I am pessimistic about this. I am optimistic, however, at what seems to me the spectacle of re-emergence of Western self-consciousness, however sluggish.

VIEW FROM FRANCE

After the winter riots, of Arab and African youth trashing the state subsidized housing they live in, it is now the turn of the nice white kids to take riot vacation from their state-subsidized studies, and fling precious books and computers out of library windows at the police—at least a million dollars of damage to the Sorbonne in one night alone, not counting the inestimable value of the books. Why? Why not. The democratically elected government enacted a law, which another democratically elected government could change, and elections are next year. But what of that? The French Left, which is about 75% of the population, has decamped to a La-Land of street democracy.

What is really going on? In France it is impossible to fire an employee. You can commit the grossest negligence, the special court (the Prudhomme) which rules on any firings, always favors the employee. The only way for one of those

fat, cigar-chewing bosses, with diamond pins in their lapels, to get rid of an employee is to go out of business. More and more French companies do that. The new law, which has provoked the current hullabaloo, would allow Employers to fire employees without having to justify it, if the employee is under 26 years old, and only for a period of 2 years. There is already a law allowing this in companies with less than 20 employees. The new law allows it in all companies, and the idea is to do something about youth unemployment, which is a massive in France. The big international companies, however, will not use the new law, because it would create internal problems by introducing a separate status for workers of the same type at the same pay-levels. In any case the big boys don't need that kind of help; they can flaunt the incomprehensible tangle of French labor law by menacing to close factories on French territory, putting thousands out of work. They pay taxes, or not, as they like. It is the smaller companies, who happen to be the majority employer in France, which take the hit of French bureaucratic venom. In addition French norms and regulations are constantly changing. Small French companies are exhausted trying to comply. A retirement home here in little Chinon, which underwent a major renovation less than 10 years ago to meet safety norms, is now obliged to do a complete new renovation, thanks to a new set of norms. The aging nuns who run the place are bewildered. Let's hope the pensioners are getting their soup.

The French economy has many other problems. French workers are badly paid, but they cost more to their employers more than, say, American workers, thanks to huge social charges. The social services these charges are supposed to provide, however, are steadily collapsing. French hospitals are poorly run. I do not mean the doctors are not good, or that the nurses are not dedicated. They are. But dealing with a French hospital is a kafkaesque adventure. No one is in charge. No one is there. Information is impossible to get. You can wait weeks for an appointment with the head of a service to whom the state has accorded some sort of mysterious control of your relatives. The rate of in-hospital infection is dangerous high by international standards. French citizens, with each passing month, are required to pay a greater and greater percentage of the cost of their medicines which, 10 years ago, were paid for 100% by the state. The doctors are exhausted and exasperated. The number of nurses is dangerously insufficient. The money which is supposed to be paying for all this is drying up at the source, frittered away in the 35 hour work weeks paid at the 40 hour rate, or filtered out by the leftist unions which control the state funds for retirement, health and other services—a compromise from the post-war period when the Communists were the largest organized force in France, while today their voter base is under 3%.

The arguments being thrown around regarding the new law, the 'CPE',* are mind-numbingly silly. A federation of youth organizations, the Socialist and other Leftist parties, and the Unions, all ultra-left but representative of only 8% of the French work-force, demand that the law be 'abrogated'. The government, currently run by Eveready Bunny, poet and historian, Dominique de Villepin (of anti-Iraq war fame),

* Contemporary French is so overburdened with acronyms that my wife has taken to saying 'B' [bey] for 'bonjour', 'A' [ah] for 'au revoir' and 'VVEC?' [vey, vey, eu, say?] for 'voulez vous un café?'. 'CPE' stands for 'Contrat de Premier Embauche', or First Hiring Contract, yet another among a bewildering tangle of employer-employee relation control instruments which have stalled the French economic motor.

gesticulated as best it could, but finally, after enough university libraries were burned down, after the economies of Nante and Poitiers were brought to a standstill by students blocking highway exists, after wide-spread looting by the African and Arab youth who brought you last November's riots, and are now parasiting the student protests (including robbing and raping the nice white kids), 'president' Chirac, instead of 'abrogating' the law, has 'promulgated', but has not 'applied', and will now 'replace' it. Clever, huh? The victorious mob has announced plans to continue protests until Villepin resigns. After two months of this the vintage 2006 diplomas are in jeopardy.

With ponderous deliberation France continues it slide into 3d world status.



CYBER FOLLIES

THE GUARDIANS OF THE PORTALS

Vus and Vuwas, the devils who guarded the postern . . .

MADOU, CHAPTER 11, SECTION 3, VIE EDITION PAGE 528.

Last March, in little statement he intitled DAN GUNTER PAUSES TO CONGRADULATE HIMSELF,* the moderator of the VanceBS wrote:

Those who visit the Gaeen Reach—and can manage to read the posts made there—will note that I am despised and reviled by both Alexander Feht and Paul Rhoads. Further, both Feht and Rhoads put me in the camp of the other.

The unanimity of their opinion gives me a well-earned sense of satisfaction. . .

This, whatever else it may be, is not news. Several years ago, in another typically witty remark (why is his satisfaction 'well earned'?) Dan posted:

Paul Rhoads and Alexander Feht are one and the same. . .I'm inclined to think that they were conjoined twins separated shortly after birth.

One would think that Dan Gunter, whose alternately haughty and cataclysmic condemnations of the Gaeen Reach, as well his disapproval, not to say contempt, of EXTANT, which apparently he has also been peeking at, would exclude his ever stooping to read such stuff. But he seems to be among those who *can* manage to read them, presumably because he masters the art of holding his nose—a technique, Dan implies, unnecessary to these who feed at nicer cyber troughs, like the VanceBS.

At any rate it is good to see Dan satisfied for a change. Usually he seems pretty nervous. Any little thing, a few lines of comic verse, the word 'sourpuss', and he goes to pieces, yelping and bawling like a gryph. Reading sympathetically between the lines, however, I wonder if, to use the biblical description Alexander Feht occasionally applies to himself, he is not really a 'man of sorrows'? The moderator of the VanceBS tries so hard. He is vigilant. He does not balk at harsh measures. And what does he get for thanks? Yet another sly rejoinder in EXTANT!

But that is how it goes, so, superb as Dan may be, he will not escape the fate of the common ruck, namely the Judgement of History, of which, peering into our crystal ball, we presume to give a preview.

* See the Robles, VanceBS, March 14, 06

THE JUDGEMENT OF HISTORY

HISTORY

The trial will come to order. Who are the defendants?

SLANDER

Well, today we have a couple of trolls, Vus here, and a certain Vuwas, and some obscure person named 'Paul Rhoads'.

HISTORY

Who are these creatures, and what are their crimes?

SLANDER

Vuwas, this fat, bearded fellow. . .

HISTORY [addressing Vuwas]

Put out that pipe! There will be order in my court!

VUWUS

[puts pipe in pocket; pants catch on fire.]
Yes Madam.

HISTORY

Go on, Slander.

SLANDER

Our main charge against Vuwas is disturbing the peace.

HISTORY

How so?

SLANDER

Massive bellowing and noisiness.

HISTORY

A vulgar display! Of what nature was the noise?

SLANDER

At first glance it was deceptively sensate, but upon closer examination it turned out to be belching and farting sounds.

HISTORY

Disgusting. Vuwas, what do you have to say for yourself?

VUWAS

. . .brrrraaaaaapgh!

HISTORY [leaning back, holding nose,
waving at air]

Throw him away.

[period of disturbance]

HISTORY

What a stench! . . .what next? What about that other troll? What did he do?

SLANDER

Very little, if it please your Honor.

HISTORY

Very little, or nothing? because if the latter. . .

SLANDER

No no! Not nothing, but almost.

HISTORY

Come now, let's have the substance, however slim! Vus will not escape the judgement of History!

SLANDER*

Well, he is a "freedom-throttling scavenger".

HISTORY

I'll make a note: '...throttles freedom... scavenges'... That doesn't seem particularly notorious. We'll disregard it. What else?

SLANDER

He uses a fancy-dan style. He gesticulates. He strikes high-toned moral poses.

HISTORY

[shakes head in deprecation]
He did that?

SLANDER

In his defense I will say that, though it was his duty to ban people, he always did so sadly and reluctantly. He got no pleasure from it.

HISTORY

No pleasure from his work?

SLANDER:

He did it, but he didn't like it.

HISTORY

He failed to like it?

SLANDER

Yes. He failed to love it.

HISTORY

An erotic failure!

VUS [leaping erect]

I protest!

SLANDER

Silence! You have not been given the floor. All you get for the moment is the shaft.

HISTORY

If there is any more disorder in my court you will be banned!

VUS

But...

HISTORY [looks menacingly at Vus]

Stop it, Vus! I am in no mood for any discussion on this issue—none! The past is history! If you dare, even one more time, to raise this issue... †

VUS

ulp...

PAUL RHOADS

hee hee!

SLANDER

Silence in the court!

HISTORY [glaring all around]:

Ok then! What other pestery has this preening troll perpetrated?

SLANDER:

There is very little that can be said for him.

HISTORY

He is of no consequence?

SLANDER

I would hate to so express it.

HISTORY

He is, shall we say, 'of little consequence'?

SLANDER

The formula is more diplomatic.

HISTORY

So be it! Vus; you are proclaimed 'of little consequence' in the judgement of History. What do you have to say for yourself?

VUS

I hold you and your court of so called 'history' in contempt! My well-earned sense of satisfaction is incruited! I am very satisfied with myself!

SLANDER

[whispering in History's ear]:
His coterie of sycophants appear to agree!

HISTORY

[waving Slander away, yawning, and addressing Vus]
Sign your condemnation agreement as you leave.

[disturbance, shouting, bustle]

HISTORY

What next?

SLANDER

... I forget his name. Let me check the list...
Oh yes, a certain 'Paul Rhoads'.

HISTORY

What are his crimes?

SLANDER

He has committed 'multiple moral crimes'.

HISTORY

Indeed?

SLANDER

And worse!

HISTORY

Go on, my ears are flapping!

SLANDER

He involved Jack Vance in a 'dirty scandal'.

HISTORY

No!

SLANDER

But yes!

HISTORY

What was it all about?

SLANDER

It had to do with his ridiculous self-aggrandizement.

HISTORY

How so?

SLANDER [reading from document]

First of all... let's see; he over-filled Vance-dedicated publications with his religious and political propaganda.

HISTORY

He "over-filled" them, did he? Not good. What else?

SLANDER

He used the V.I.E. project as a vehicle of unethical self-promotion at Jack Vance's expense.

HISTORY

What are you talking about? What is this 'V.I.E.'?

SLANDER

I'm not sure. Some sort of club.

HISTORY

Ok, never mind. Nobody cares about that. Go on with the inditement.

SLANDER [reading]:

In the course of his seven-year ego trip Paul Rhoads insulted and alienated quite a few worthy and talented people.

HISTORY

Quite a few? How many? Please be exact.

SLANDER

Oh, lots and lots!

HISTORY

Hm. Who were these people?

SLANDER

Innocent victims he tricked into his trust.

HISTORY

[peeking over Slander's shoulder]
He 'betrayed his friends'?

SLANDER

Worse than that! He organized petty persecutions of the 'indignant best' by the 'vulgar worst'.

HISTORY

Heh! Quite a nice turn of phrase there Slander! Remind me to award you a little commendation for style.

* See Appendix, *Paul Rhoads: A View from Afar*, page 23.

† This speech, as my alert readers will have noted, is adapted from a 'rant' by Dan Gunter.

SLANDER

Oh, thank you, your honor!

HISTORY

Yes yes. Go on.

SLANDER [reading]

The opponents of Paul Rhoads continue to dislike him, quite objectively.

HISTORY

I'm beginning to see how they might.

SLANDER [shuffling papers]

...The list of his crimes is quite long, perhaps I should cut it short?

HISTORY

No no! The Truth must out. Let's have the whole thing, no matter how long it takes.

SLANDER

Very well. Let's see. It seems Paul Rhoads designed books which were much-too-expensive.

HISTORY

We should be able to verify that one; how much did they cost.

SLANDER

One book for \$1500!

HISTORY

Ha! That's one crime he won't get away with! What a scandal. Paul Rhoads; are you not ashamed?

PAUL RHOADS

It was not one book, it was...
[hand of Vus reaches up from a hole in the floor and cuffs Paul Rhoads in the mouth]
...mmph!

HISTORY [looks around in perplexity]

What's that... Oh, never mind. Go on!

SLANDER

Paul Rhoads designed a font that strains the eyes.

HISTORY

He should be made to pay for everyone's glasses. Ha ha! ...Is anyone else getting hungry?

SLANDER

Ha ha ha! ...ahem. [consults paper] He engaged in a great deal of shameless pep-talk.

HISTORY [snorting]

How tasteless. Paul Rhoads, what do you have to say for yourself on that score?

PAUL RHOADS [indignant]

What is wrong with congratulating people for...
[hand of Vus reaches up from a hole in the floor and cuffs Paul Rhoads in the mouth]
...mmph!

HISTORY [looks up, but sees nothing]

Eh?... Slander, go on!

SLANDER

Worst of all Paul Rhoads failed in his unique opportunity to remove or fix the most glaring errors and inconsistencies in Jack Vance's books.

HISTORY

How could he have failed to do a thing like that? What else?

SLANDER

The other charges are not really worth mentioning, because they are 'below criticism'.

HISTORY

Tell anyway.

SLANDER

He perpetrated amateurish illustrations.

HISTORY

Perhaps he lacked the talent to take on such a job?

SLANDER

Exactly. He was only able to achieve what has been termed a 'shallow and artless level of achievement'.

HISTORY [glancing at ceiling]

In that case it was, we might say, 'less a crime than simply a tragedy'?

(etcetera)

A BIT OF A LESSON

Several years ago Dan Gunter banned me from the VanceBS because, he said at the time, he was *appalled* at *off-board conduct*† the nature of which he will not specify, beyond two characteristics he has deigned to reveal: 1) it *reflected badly on the VIE* and 2) it *failed to improve Jack Vance's reputation*. Dan was further aggrieved, if, again, we credit his statements at the time, by my lack of gratitude for his removal of *slandorous comments regarding* [myself] *and the VIE*.*

I made no protest about any of this, and meekly accepted being banned. Dan, for his part, presented himself as uniquely concerned with the VIE, even if he was protecting it from its own E-in-C.

Then last November Dan offered to unban me, on condition I make public apologies to members of the VIE board of directors. I complied, without protest or delay.† Once again, as Moderator of the Jack Vance posting board, Dan presented himself as acting for the good of Jack Vance and the VANCE INTEGRAL EDITION volunteer project.

More recently, in March of this year, Thomas Rydbeck posted a lament about the decline of the VanceBS. His brief message ended with these words:

Paul's participation might have livened things up, but I must say I'm surprised that so few, if any, have stood up for him... I find it completely abnormal that he is excluded from the Jack Vance BBS; a more knowledgeable and articulate Vance promoter is hard to find.

This was gratifying to me, but called for no reply. Thomas neither criticized Dan's procedures nor demanded explanations. None-the-less Dan proffered *apologia* which, in as much as they concern myself, may best be characterized as 'snarkish diatribes rife with novelty and contradiction'. In one remarkable post†† Dan states that *[providing] a*

† This phrase suggests the 'conduct' has nothing to do with the board, while defining it in terms of the board; it has its cake and eats it too.

* See Extant #1.

† See Extant #9. I was rebanned a day latter for using the word 'sourpuss'.

†† See Appendix, page 22, A BIT OF A HISTORY LESSON.

forum for someone who [engages in certain conducts places] an implicit imprimatur on that conduct. This, he insists, is an issue of ethics, i.e. much larger than any mere VIE matter—even though he also specified that my *off-board conduct should have been an embarrassment to the VIE and to anyone on the board of the VIE*. Furthermore Dan now claims he assumed Moderators'hip of the VanceBS to *alleviate a conflict of interest that Rhoads perceived*, i.e. to help out with an imaginary situation existing exclusively in my own mind. In line with this, Dan claims that *David banned Feht, not because Rhoads wanted him to do so, but because David felt that he should be banned*. Why did David feel that way? Another ethical issue? We are to understand it had nothing to do with the VIE.

Yet Dan and David had taken on responsibility for the Vance Message Posting Board in the context of a famous VIE crisis. The transfer was negotiated with VIE board members. At that time, in a gesture I thought very handsome, Dan called me on the phone, more than once, to discuss the VIE situation, the gravity of which he seemed to understand perfectly well. Furthermore, shortly afterwards, the 'Green Legion' was created by John Vance, a shadow-group of VIE managers, plus Dan Gunter, charged with monitoring anti-VIE activities and standing ready to take over project management in case the E-in-C washed out.*

So much for the contradictions. As for the novelties, Dan has deigned to get specific about my *off-board conduct*, those inexcusable behaviors upon which failure to ban me would place an implicit imprimatur. I have committed three crimes:

- 1) Writing scatological verse.
- 2) Accusing Alexander F. of beating his wife.
- 3) 'Bating' Bruce Y. as a homosexual.

If we give Dan Gunter the benefit of the doubt, and assume I am guilty as charged, why was Dan willing to unban me last November without demanding reparation for these crimes against poor Alexander and poor Bruce, to say nothing of securing guarantees against my tendency to violate Victorian standards of comporture? How do apologies to VIE managers, presumably for 'behaviors' relative to the VIE, atone for defamatory, scatological homophobia? When he unbanned me, did not Dan place his own implicit imprimatur upon my inexcusable conduct?

Unlike God I cannot see into the murky soul of Dan Gunter, not very far anyway, but I can point out that my new crimes (with the exception of scatology) were committed *after* I was banned the first time, so they could not have motivated that *sanction*; and since Dan refuses to reveal what I was supposed to be apologizing for, and since the second ban cannot reasonably be justified solely because, as he complains, I *engaged in petty personal attacks rather than discussing Vance*, since that is even truer of himself, what are we to conclude?

Let us, despite the above objections, continue to give Dan the benefit of the doubt. All I can ask, then, is the opportunity to defend myself, which, as luck would have it, I can offer myself right here and now.

SCATOLOGY

This is an ancient art. Famous, respected and beloved persons, such as Mozart, were scatological. One might take Dan's anti-scatological attitude a bit more seriously if he had not, in a letter to me, used the phrase: *you have had your head too far up your ass to listen*, which is not even scatology but gross insult, a style which I fastidiously avoid. Some may charitably assume that Dan, rather than a hypocrite, is merely a prude. In either case, my fairly mild stuff can hardly justify his rancor. Here is a sample, chosen at random, celebrating some forgotten victory over Alexander Feht:

COUP DE GRACE

*Did you try to crucify
The innocent Pet-boys?
It didn't work, you silly jerk,
and now you have no toys!*

*Those little marbles that you had
Have both been clipped away;
Let that be a lesson, lad,
When next you wanna slay!*

*So put a sock inside your jock
If you show your face,
To give the lie you qualify
To join the human race.*

I admit I'm letting Feht have it in no uncertain manner, and if Dan is really so equisite that such couplets are a shock for him he is not alone in his pose of proud prudery; Feht himself, speaking of the 'Gaeen Reach', complained that: *the appearance of Mr. Rhoads is what made it a sewer*.* I addressed such disingenuous nose-holding in that place in a verse which may fit Dan's case as well:

*Here's a troop of prissy nerds,
Don't like pee pee
Don't like turds,
Don't like farts
Or stuff like that,
Messy stuff that might go 'splat'.
They're a pack of clean-cut guys;
What they like is telling lies.*

So much for scatology, and since, of my three crimes, being only a question of taste—for which there is famously no accounting—it is certainly the least, let us move on to my next crime, a traditional domestic sport.

ALEXANDER FEHT: WIFE BEATER

What to do about a relentless slanderer like Feht? Here, in his own words from 2003, is his program to solve *all of these grave and multi-faceted problems throwing shadows on the good name of Jack Vance*:

Mr. Rhoads must resign or be removed from the VIE

* The Gaeen Reach, August 2003.

* The Green Legion even ran a flaim war on the 'Gaeen Reach', a *fait d'arme* commemorated in 76 lines iambic pentameter: *The Rout of the Ten-Cent Trolls*.

organization. This solution will. . .restore peace and productivity within the ranks of the VIE volunteers. . .and free the future of the Vance readership from denigrating, shameful presence of hatred, vulgarity, primitive prejudices. . .

Alexander Feht's way of defending Jack Vance and the VIE may be different in method from Dan's, but the fundamental strategy is the same: get rid of that devil Paul Rhoads. In pursuance of this goal Feht did many things, on and off the Internet. In the context of explaining his methods, he mentioned how he copes with my counter measures:

The main purpose of my Internet campaign against Mr. Rhoads is to expose him, to let him and his goons to show their real faces to as many people as possible. . .

I shrug off most of the things Rhoads says about me, personally and professionally, because these things are so far from reality as to be totally irrelevant. On the other hand, Rhoads reacts with violent threats and protests to many things I say about him—exactly because I frequently stumble upon the truth.

Admittedly, I occasionally grope in the dark, and some of my conjectures about Rhoads may be far-fetched or biased. . .this way I was able to scare up several very important truths about Rhoads, and [force] him to try to justify his immoral actions in "Cosmopolis", thereby confirming my suspicions.

I don't really know if Rhoads has a Jesuit "handler" who stands behind his propaganda. . .an hysterical, impressionable dimwit connected with [Jack Vance] is a valuable tool. This is a possibility, and I am going to investigate it.

No matter how personally indifferent I may have been to Feht's slanders, some of them could not be ignored, and I was by no means the only person who felt that way. One of Feht's 'gropes' was his claim that I had married for money. Since my wife is much older than I am, and because she lives in a 'château', she can shabbilly be called 'rich', and I can shabbilly be called 'gigolo'.

Feht's accusations might have been merely personal nastiness were my wife, and her house, personal matters. But St. Louand was a major locus of project activity. Dozens of volunteers spent many weeks here on many occasions, as guests of my wife. Meanwhile St. Louand is no château. As any VIE volunteer who has been here can report, while it may have charm, it is in fact a super-annuated summer-house in the 'maison bourgeois' style, never meant for winter habitation. To make it livable, in modern terms, even in the summer, would require money which, sadly, my wife fails to have. We just spent a very cold winter huddled in our single heated room, with folded paper plugging the gaps in the woodwork against the freezing winds. In any case St. Louand is not even my wife's house. It belongs to other members of her family who permit her to use it 10 months in the year. It is true that she, earning her living as a painter, has more money than I do, but this is because I have spent most of the last 5 years devoting most of my time to the VIE, for which I am rewarded not in dollars per hour but with public vilification on the VanceBS.

Feht developed the gigolo theme along several lines, which quickly extended to VIE volunteers. He claimed they were benefitting from largesse allegedly dispensed at St. Louand, thanks to my arraignment, and therefore tolerated my otherwise *intollerable behaviors*. Certain VIE managers did not feel it was advisable to let these public accusations go unchecked. In July of 2003 Tim Stretton, in one of several posts on the Gaean Reach, wrote:

I don't intend to address the more detailed and in many cases absurd criticisms which have filled the Board in recent days, with the exception of Alex's oft-repeated fulminations about VIE 'drinking parties'. I have been present at two VIE meetings hosted by Paul at Chinon. One lasted for four days, another for seven. During this time, perhaps unsurprisingly, it was necessary to eat and drink; and we did so, sometimes several times in the same day. The first of these meetings established the principles by which Textual Integrity work would proceed, and set down detailed practical guidance. The second meeting was to carry out final checks on the VIE Wave 1 volumes. Both were entirely necessary to publish the VIE; both improved the product and as such represent a perfectly reasonable part of the subscription cost. Tales of sybaritic excess from those who were not there are necessarily of dubious veracity; and I can assure anyone who might be interested that these work meetings at Chinon represented hard, solid, even if enjoyable, work.

Steve Sherman also felt it prudent to address this matter:

The Textual Integrity aspect of the project being unprecedented, it did indeed require that all volunteers understand the principles involved. The head of TI prepared extensive lectures on the subject and there was a good deal of give-and-take that would not have been possible via phone or email. . .at the conference at Oakland, [and] the Golden Master session. . .I should note that not all volunteers had their expenses paid for the various gatherings. Only those whose attendance was desired and who were unable to bear the expense themselves were reimbursed, in whole or part.

My conscience is 100% clear on how this aspect of the project was realized. The VIE is better for these expenditures, which in any case can't account for more than a small part of the cost. The charge of 'corruption', as I think any unbiased subscriber will agree, is absurd.

Why did such important managers as these, not to mention others, occasionally feel it necessary to make such public remarks, on the 'Gaean Reach' itself, in reaction to certain anti-VIE slanders? I will not speak for them, but I believe they understood that certain kinds of public accusations, by confusing lower-level volunteers, subscribers, and would-be volunteers and subscribers, could harm the project.

Dramatic proof of the justice of such suspicions was given when an extremely important manager quit the project indignantly casting at me many of the accusations Feht, and others, had developed on the Internet. I subsequently made an unrelenting effort of private conversation with this person, which eventually succeeded in changing their opinion, but this aspect of the ordeal was private.*

This was a victory for the anti-VIE camp, and it had heavy consequences inside the project. But it was only their most spectacular victory. It will never be accurately known how many persons never subscribed, never became volunteers, or allowed their volunteer efforts to lapse, due to anti-VIE slanders.

The VIE board of directors, meanwhile, remained convinced that the only possible response was no response. To me this was like Clinton doing nothing after the first World Trade Center attack, or as if Chamberlain had never been replaced by Churchill. Despite the high-toned detachment it is easy to assume when you are not on the front line, to me non-reaction was not a choice, but I was neither able to get the

* I did not do this in an effort to get the manager to return to the project. It never occurred to me not to respect their choice; I did it to make sure they did not remain convinced they had spent several years cooperating with the dishonest and even evil person they had allowed themselves to become convinced I was.

board to react†, nor could I generate concerted action by managers. This problem was complicated because most of the slanders were against me personally. Many of my colleagues satisfied themselves with the opinion that this was a problem only for my *amour-propre*. But why should anyone take notice of totally obscure me, except in my capacity of VIE E-in-C? And why should I care, personally, about the fabulations of anonymous malefactors?

Despite constant efforts I failed to mobilize much concern about these tactics to catch hold of the minds and hearts of project insiders, potential subscribers and volunteers, aimed at poisoning relations and making a difficult task more so. When I opposed the slanderers publicly I was barraged with complaints that this could only make things worse. That the project succeeded, however, is no evidence I was mistaken and, given my part in that success, reconsideration of my methods might now seem reasonable. Furthermore, certain other important project managers did a good deal of skirmishing on the 'Gaeen Reach' too, including those who have criticized me for doing so.

The goal of my public reactions was never to hurt anyone personally, though this, on Churhillian principles, was occasionally a necessary tactic. Therefore, at a certain point after my initial VanceBS banning, and certainly not 'routinely', I accused Feht of beating his wife. This was done in what could not be mistaken for anything but a comic manner, as illustrated in these 4 stanzas from a slam-verse entitled *Paul to Alexander*, and another entitled *Monster Man*:

*As is 'fact' to 'shot-in-dark',
As is 'score' to 'wide-of-mark'
As Equanimity to flander;
So is Paul to Alexander.*

*As is eloquence to burbles,
As Winston Churchill is to Goebbels,
As diatribe is to slander;
So is Paul to Alexander.*

*As parry to bait,
As love to hate,
As 'caress her' is to 'slammed her';
So is Paul to Alexander.*

*As Vance to Gorky,
As Bugs to Porkey,
As 'vivid' is to that what's blander;
So is Paul to Alexander.*

*Oleg Zander
Monster Man;
Head like bolder
Heart like clam,
Paunch a pumpkin
Feet a stump,
He's a kinda Heffclump!
Beats his wife down
With a staff,
When she begs
It's belly laugh!
Poor Miss Puffy,
Her black eye,
Is not enough To satisfy
Oleg Zander's
Passion strange,
Truely he is out of range!
Oleg Zander
Kicks her can:
Oleg Zander
Monster Man!*

† Among the actions I fruitlessly urged upon the VIE board were:

- To return subscription fees to people who made project work harder with public slanders, and even to make such actions public.
- To publicly deny certain requests for cooperation from translators or scholars, when such requests were to be refused anyway (in practice such decisions were made collegially by VIE managers).
- To make a strong and unambiguous public statement of support for the E-in-C.
- With cooperation from the Vances, to deny the copyrighted name 'Gaeen Reach' to Bruce Y for his message board.
- Again though the Vances, that Bruce Y be firmly reminded of Jack's request not to publish the articles Bruce had dug up from Jack's old college newspaper, which Bruce had none-the-less published on the 'Gaeen Reach'.
- To approach Bruce Y directly with a request to stop making and facilitating attacks on the project.

The vector of flame wars, as I once explained in COSMOPOLIS, is personal embarrassment. To anyone not blinded by prejudice my maneuver can be seen for what it is: an absurdly gratuitous mirror of Feht's maliciously gratuitous charges against me. My wife and I were important project elements. Mrs. Feht, to say nothing of her husband, are unknown persons, without any VIE roll whatsoever. Furthermore, it cannot be claimed that my tactic was not effective because, though Feht is willing to repeat many of his slanders, he has, until again very recently, not mentioned my marriage.

Unlike my absurdist and punctual moves against the dangerous Mr. Feht, relentless suggestions of a serious nature against me, like Martin Read's *idee fixe* that I am a Nazi sympathizer, is not a problem for Dan because, as he says, *even though they pushed the envelope, didn't break through it*.

Tim Stretton once wrote:

Personal insult is unedifying, but Paul is by no means alone in adopting a knock-about style.

Apropos of which idea Dan claims:

The fact that Feht and Bruce Y have carried on their own campaign against Rhoads also does not excuse Rhoads's conduct. Defamation is defamation. . .

To say nothing of how all this might relate to the VIE project and, as others constantly insisted to me, 'the reputation of Jack Vance', Dan unwillingness to make obvious distinctions, or to use a flexible and discerning perspective, like Tim's, would be surprising if his motivation were not obvious.

HOMOPHOBIA

At a certain point I calculated that 'outing' Bruce would embarrass him. Contrary to Dan's insinuations I neither made a 'host of statements', nor even 'numerous comments'; I wrote *two verses*. These I posted on Bruce's own 'Gaeen Reach'. As was perfectly within his possibilities, he deleted the first. Why, if this 'homophobia' is so horrid, did the alleged victim not then delete the second? And why, when I reposted the first, did he let it stand?

My purpose was to defend the VIE from the 'Gaeen Reach' trolls. My method, the only one available to me, was to publicly embarrass and baffle them. The only thing, in the course of those efforts, which I did 'routinely', was to delete my own posts,* including the two verses, once they had served their purpose of making Bruce understand that if he fooled with me he would be fooled with in turn. The evidence of my alleged homophobia, therefore, 'fails to exist'. Luckily for Dan Gunter, in the spirit of giving him

* On April 11, 06 on the 'Gaeen Reach', Alexander Feht, copying one of my posts into his own, writes:

I am quoting here the previous post by Mr. Rhoads, in order to save it from deleting (Mr. Rhoads has a habit of deleting everything he has posted in those rare moments when he comes to his senses). As far as I can understand his jabber, we are being presented with another attempt by Mr. Rhoads to justify his self-promotion on Jack Vance's account, his abuse of Vance-dedicated publications, his dishonest behind-the-scenes maneuvering and use of personal contacts to persecute and silence all who disagreed with him, as well as many other moral crimes committed by him during the last seven or so years. It will suffice to say that practically every line of the following post is a distortion of truth or an outright lie. Deleting posts, after a thread is created, is a way to make a board less interesting to outsiders.

the benefit of the doubt, I will republish both verses:

Bruce in Pink

*Bruce, in pink, with all his brag,
Heaps of verbal dust and slag,
Dogs his slandermonging jag,
Though his mental poop doth sag.
Snag him, drag him, gag the wag!
Spill the peanuts from his bag!
Wipe his nose with a dirty rag,
The mincing, whimpy, flaming . . . !*

Bum Bruce

*Bum Bruce's neck is long and thin,
His head is round and pale.
There is a pimple on his chin
And all his efforts fail.*

*Bum Bruce's feet are splayed and big,
His bottom's large and baggy.
His legs are skinny as a twig,
His mannerisms faggy.*

*Bum Bruce's thing is extra small,
Or so his boyfriends say.
In fact it's hardly there at all,
Which hampers Bruce's play.*

*Bum Bruce's mom has fleas and crabs,
His dad lives in a trailer.
His paunch is speckled o'er with scabs,
Cause Bum Bruce is a failure.*

*Just white trash who sleeps on straw,
But trash or not, dear Bruce;
The California courts of law
Will cook your silly goose!*

Under these and other pressures Bruce eventually removed my name from the 'Gaeen Reach's' front page, where he had set up a special forum dedicated to organizing my removal from the VIE. He even gave up attacking me altogether, though he allows others to carry on.

Prior to this he was an extremely dangerous enemy. He wrote a long, venomous letter to COSMOPOLIS urging I be thrown out [see COSMOPOLIS #42, page 45], and joined Feht in his famous anti-Rhoads visit to Oakland.* Contrary to hypocritical claims that 'The Gaeen Reach' (which came into being when Dan mishandled the VIE crisis in the spring of 2003) was created to discuss Jack Vance in an *uncensored environment*, it's unique object was always to attack the VIE, mostly though attacks on me. A review of the board will confirm this. The name 'Paul Rhoads' is mentioned more often than 'Jack Vance' and the subjects of discussion are most often anti-VIE. Bruce's anti-VIE engagement was as extreme as possible, and since there was no other countervailing force,

* John Vance organized this visit in hopes of converting Alexander and Bruce into friends. It was a generous idea but a bad one. I pleaded with him to abandon it. Alexander, on the strength of this personal contact, published a set of accounts in which Jack Vance supports his ideas and disapproves of Paul Rhoads. Eventually Feht used the meetings to substantiate disgusting slanders against the Vances themselves.

and since his progressive steps backing down were, in each case, reactions to my tactics, it is hard to argue that his ultimate renunciation was motivated by anything else.

As for the substance of my alleged 'bating', there are 4 principal points: I pretend that Bruce a) has 'boyfriends' who, I pretend b) 'say' his 'thing' is 'extra small'; c) I claim his 'mannerisms' are 'faggy' and, d) that he wears 'pink' clothes. Now, I'm sure Dan doesn't think there is anything shameful about having boyfriends, for he himself says that *sexual orientation is entirely irrelevant*; so on what basis could he complain that suggesting someone has boyfriends is 'anti-homosexual'? Therefore we may ignore point a.

What of point b, the 'small thing' to which I make perhaps indelicate reference? If Dan thinks it is something shameful, he can say so. Being the author of the verse, however, I am in a unique position to clarify all ambiguities, and I will, here and now, officially state that the 'thing' is Bruce's nose. If Dan thought anything else, maybe he has a dirty mind. As to it's size, I give Bruce the benefit of the doubt. I have never seen his nose, or any other part of him, and it is not I who claim it is small, I only say his boyfriends say so.

As for pink clothes; many people wear them, including myself.

As for faggy mannerisms, many famous and respected people, such as Boy George and The King of Pop have them. Perhaps Mozart, or even Dan Gunter himself, has them? Who cares? Is this truly an 'issue of ethics'? If my comments bothered Bruce (which I intended and hoped they would, and which they did) it is a reflection on Bruce; I'd add "screw him", but Dan might take that for an anti-homosexual remark—or, even worse, a pro-homosexual remark.

PETTY PERSONAL ATTACK

Regarding my second banning, Dan writes: *During his brief second appearance, Rhoads showed that he is far more interested in engaging in petty personal attacks rather than discussing Vance.* But, to say nothing of 63 issues of COSMOPOLIS and 13 issues of EXTANT, largely filled up with exactly my discussions of Vance's work, an œuvre which fair-minded persons must consider the most extensive, and possibly even the most important, contribution to a critical understanding of Vance's work, what are we to think when Dan, without any provocation whatsoever, choses to characterize himself, in his VanceBS descriptive title, as *Irker of Paul Rhoads*? If this is not 'petty personal attack', what is it? In fact Dan engages in such 'petty attack' 'routinely'. On June 1, 2005, in a thread concerning the hacking of the ez-board, Dan wrote: *a thread about Rhoads' ezine Extant has disappeared. (Wow. Am I ever sorry about that.)* Who asked him?

But if I start cataloging the petty attacks we'll never get to the non-petty ones, such as Dan's pretention I owe apologies to Mike Berro and John Vance. Having published this incredible, derogatory and mendacious suggestion, which makes the VIE project look like a pathological pavanne of craven nurosis, Dan still refuses to explain what I should apologize for, and even though he now pretends this event never occurred, he has not retracted the insinuation. My crimes are so blatant, my guilt is so evident, that it is just fine to treat me as a pariah.

Dan has silently dropped these accusations; he would now have me perceived as a rogue homophobe, roughing up poor, delicate Alexander Feht to get warmed up, and then stomping the defenceless creator and Moderator of the 'Gaeen Reach'. Sheesh.

DEFENDING THE VIE

In an accusation much wider than those he throws at me, Dan wrote:

The fact that the VIE board failed to curb Rhoads speaks more about the VIE than about the propriety of Rhoads' conduct. It appears obvious to me that the members of the VIE board turned a blind eye on inexcusable conduct to ensure that the VIE was completed.

Is Dan suggesting that, for 'members of the VIE board', combatting homophobia is less important than completing the VIE? And if not, why is he tolerating those who have tolerated my *intolerable conduct*?

As I mention elsewhere in this issue of EXTANT, after the publication of *Lurulu* Feht wrote a nasty review of it which was posted on the VanceBS, to Dan's indifference. In this review Feht suggests that *Lurulu's* weaknesses are a result of *the substandard milieu [Vance] must lean upon and endure*, than which I can imagine no more low, nasty and eventually dangerous attack not on the VIE, but on Jack Vance's personal and literary reputation. Why is this not a problem for Dan Gunter? I do not know, but I can't help wondering if Dan didn't get outside one of Feht's slanders, namely the suggestion that I have some kind of strangle-hold on Vance's work, so that, even though I am a scoundrel, guilty of everything from artistic mediocrity to pugnacity—not to mention Christianity, racism, fascism and holocaust denial—the VIE board must truckle to my revolting whims. But the VIE board includes not only Jack Vance's wife and son, the core of the *substandard milieu*, but Mike Berro and the VIE Treasurer, Ed Winskill. The latter is a principal VanceBS regular. Why does Dan not 'sanction' Ed, or even just upbraid him a little for this *implicit imprimatur* of my *inexcusable conduct*?

If I had a nickle for every time I've been described as 'out of control' I might not be a millionaire but I'd certainly have at least two or three bucks. But if I were Dan Gunter, and I were determined to do in Paul Rhoads out of pure animus, I think I could fabricate a more presentable cover.

Having given 6 years of my life to the VIE project, at considerable personal sacrifice, I must now live under the cloud of this malicious opprobrium which, whenever one of my friends raises the matter, is justified with substanceless, humorless and shifting arguments, or a pose of indignant silence. It is a situation which, as I have already said, is personally painful. Of course I don't relish insults and slanders, but they come with the territory and I'm a big boy. And of course I don't care to live under opprobrium broadcast from the VanceBS, particularly when it is so unjustified, but I have no illusions about what may be expected from Dan, and my VIE life is almost over anyway, so that's not what really bothers me either. The sting, as Thomas suggests, is in how this heap of lies and malice inspires so little reaction from the men with whom I worked so long and sacrificed so much, to the triumphant accomplishment of our purpose. Perhaps I am not

supported because, after all, I am guilty as charged? Perhaps it is because everyone is just indifferent to this sort of thing. In either case how can it fail to tarnish the reputation of the VIE, or perhaps of Jack Vance himself, who, though not a board member, was heavily implicated in the project—apropos of which Dan's suggestion that a *blind eye* has been turned *on inexcusable conduct to ensure that the VIE was completed*, seems unfortunate.

I have repeatedly stated that I am ready, even eager, to apologize or make amends for anything wrong or bad I have done. What, in truth, justifies Dan's attitude?

HUGHSIAN VIEWS

The now famous and popular Violanthe recently asked the VanceBS 'community' whether it preferred long or short novels, provoking the usual flabby chatter, in the course of which David B. Williams introduced a geometric aspect:

You simply can't publish short novels anymore as a mass-market paperback. When the price on the cover is \$7.99, consumers won't buy a paperback that's only half an inch thick.

In response to which the published author, Matt Hughes, who is quickly replacing Jack Vance as the subject and object of the VanceBS, advanced an opinion of amazing originality:

...this is the result of the corporatization of the publishing and bookselling industries. The only thing that matters is the short-term return on investment. The long-term effects are irrelevant when industries are dominated by "footloose" senior management whose ultimate loyalty is not to the industry, and not even to the individual companies that employ them, but to themselves.

Those selfish and greedy captains of industry are at it again, just wrecking everything up! In the olden days things went otherwise; senior management was loyal to industry, not themselves! One remembers with sad nostalgia the 19th century industrial barons, who, like papa Bush's America, may well have been kinder and gentler.

...When will the people rise up and make vancian cyberspace safe for normal readers of Vance?

APPENDIX

A BIT OF A HISTORY LESSON, by Dan Gunter*

Mr. Rydbeck, you're apparently a friend or fan of Paul Rhoads. That's fine. But your perceptions are partial at best.

There is nothing "abnormal" about Rhoads's banning from this board. I'll give you a bit of a history lesson. I initially banned Rhoads because he was contributing posts on the Gaeen Reach in which he accused Alex Feht (among other things) of beating his wife. Rhoads was also contributing to that forum scatological doggerel attacking Feht and Bruce Y. Rhoads also routinely baited Bruce Y as a homosexual. (I don't know whether Bruce Y is a homosexual. His sexual orientation is entirely irrelevant. But Rhoads made numerous anti-homosexual comments on the Gaeen Reach.)

I did not and do not approve of that conduct. In my opinion, defamation and homophobia are inexcusable in anyone. But it was particularly incredible coming from the man who was, at the time, the Editor-in-Chief

* VanceBS, The Robles, March 14,

of the Vance Integral Edition. Anyone searching for information about the VIE* could have readily been led to Rhoads' writings on the Gæan Reach. And those writings should have been an embarrassment to the VIE and to anyone on the board of the VIE.

The fact that the VIE board failed to curb Rhoads speaks more about the VIE than about the propriety of Rhoads's conduct. It appears obvious to me that the members of the VIE board turned a blind eye on inexcusable conduct to ensure that the VIE was completed.

I applaud the fact that the VIE was completed, and I recognize that Rhoads deserves much of the credit for that work. But that work does not and cannot excuse the fact that Rhoads made a host of defamatory and homophobic statements about Feht and Bruce Y.

The fact that Feht and Bruce Y have carried on their own campaign against Rhoads also does not excuse Rhoads's conduct. Defamation is defamation, no matter who utters it. Homophobia is homophobia, no matter who practices it.

I would not have permitted Rhoads — or anyone else — to post such comments on this board. Nor was I going to provide a forum for someone who was engaging in such conduct elsewhere. To do so would place an implicit imprimatur on that conduct.

In this regard, recall that Rhoads insisted that Feht (at least) be banned from this board because of Feht's comments here. Rhoads insisted on that banning even though Feht's comments were not being made on the VIE message board (which was a moderated forum). Rhoads was angry with Mike Berro — another member of the VIE board of directors — because Berro refused to ban Feht. Mike passed on ownership of this board to David Pierce to avoid the conflict of interest that Rhoads perceived. David banned Feht, not because Rhoads wanted him to do so, but because David felt that he should be banned.

I'm going into this bit of history to explain why I do not feel any compunction about banning Rhoads for his off-board conduct. Rhoads certainly felt no compunction about blurring the lines between the VIE and this board (which is not and never has been the voice of the VIE). Consequently, neither he nor any of his supporters can complain about my banning Rhoads for his conduct on the Gæan Reach.†

Moreover, my initial banning of Rhoads was the right thing to do. I do not need to provide a forum to someone who engages in such conduct.

The reasons for Rhoads's second banning have been discussed before.** During his brief second appearance, Rhoads showed that he is far more interested in engaging in petty personal attacks rather than discussing Vance. He was banned — and not by me, but by axolotl. Of course, I would have banned Rhoads myself, but axo beat me to it.

In short, Rhoads earned his banning twice over . . .

PAUL RHOADS: A VIEW FROM AFAR, by Alexander Feht*

To my surprise, after a long consideration I find in myself an urge to say a word in defense of my arch-enemy, Paul Rhoads. It is obvious to me that he is being ostracized by his former stooges and collaborators not because of what he is saying, and not because of how he is saying it.

Paul Rhoads is in opposition to the all-pervading moral and cultural rot that encompassed our world during the 20th century, and now endangers the precarious existence of civilisation itself. This is the main reason why morally and culturally insolvent people like Mr. Gunter (whose blackguard services Mr. Rhoads used in the past for his own self-centered purposes) cannot stand him.

* This is true. Is it not also true that 'anyone searching for information about the VIE' would find the anti-VIE slanders still tolerated on posting boards.

† See: The Gæan Reach, The Palace of Love, March 31, 06.

‡ Who ever complained?

** The 'discussion' consisted of refusal to discuss.

I do not remove my accusations: Paul Rhoads committed multiple moral crimes by involving Jack Vance into the dirty scandal around Mr. Rhoads's ridiculous self-aggrandizement, by over-filling Vance-dedicated publications with his religious and political propaganda, and by using the VIE project as a vehicle of unethical self-promotion at Jack Vance's expense. In the course of this seven-year ego trip, Mr. Rhoads managed to insult and alienate quite a few worthy and talented people, betrayed the trust of his friends, and organized a petty persecution of the indignant best by the vulgar worst.

I continue to dislike, quite objectively, Mr. Rhoads's design of the much-too-expensive VIE books (especially his eye-straining, poorly designed "space-saving" narrow typeface), all the shameful fuss and pep-talk around the VIE project, and, most importantly, the inability of the hapless VIE "volunteers" to use the unique opportunity to remove or fix, with living author's permission, the most glaring errors and inconsistencies in Jack Vance's books. The amateurish illustrations by Mr. Rhoads are below criticism — though not having enough talent to do what one has volunteered to do is not a crime, it is rather a tragedy.

We will never be friends again with batty, drivelling Mr. Rhoads, and I will never shake his hand — motivated by utter selfishness, he has crossed the line between good and evil. But it is not for stoolpigeons . . . or for freedom-throttling scavengers of Gunter's ilk to judge Mr. Rhoads. Try what they may, they could never reach even his shallow and artless level of achievement.



SILLY SCIENCE

SICKNESS IS THE CURE

If you think Jack Vance's *Institute* is sinister, check this out,* according to Forrest M. Mims III, editor of *The Citizen Scientist*, and Chairman of the Environmental Science Section of the Texas Academy of Science, the 109th meeting of the Texas Academy of Science, at Lamar University on 3-5 March 2006, had as speaker a 'world-renowned ecologist', one Dr. Eric R. Pianka, a.k.a. 'Doctor Doom'. Mims reports that Pianka's presentation, a plan to murder most of the world's human population with airborne Ebola virus, was extremely well received: ". . . almost every scientist, professor and college student present stood to their feet and vigorously applauded . . . Some even cheered," writes Mims.

Pianka, of course, is an enemy of anthropomorphism; "We're no better than bacteria!" he declared, rejecting human superiority. According to Pianka, human population increase since the beginning of the industrial age is "devastating the planet." The Earth "as we know it" will not survive without drastic measures, and the only feasible solution is a quick reduction of human population by 90%. "We need to sterilize everybody on the Earth," Pianka enthused, after complaining that war and famine are not efficient enough. Though AIDS is too slow, disease, he states, is the fastest way to kill billions.

It seems too good to be true, but Mims claims that Pianka gave his talk in front of a projection of 'rows of human skulls, one of which had red lights flashing from its eye sockets'. Mims was scandalized that Pianka failed to mention how Ebola, though much faster than AIDS, causes a 'torturous death as the virus initiates a cascade of biological calamities inside the victim that eventually liquefy the internal organs', but

* Link to 'The Citizen Scientist', from 31 March 2006, courtesy of Till Noever: <http://www.sas.org/tcs/index.html>,

that doesn't bother me; if it's good to punish humanity with death for their arrogance and greed, it makes sense to torture them as well. Mims complains that Pianka had the cameras turned off before his lecture because, according to his opening remarks, the general public is not yet ready to hear his ideas, but the precaution seems elementary.

Pianka is a 'DNA fascist': "*Smarter people have fewer kids . . . those who don't have a conscience about the Earth will inherit the Earth . . . because those who care make fewer babies . . .*" We are, therefore, evolving into an "*uncaring people*", and "*IQs are falling for the same reason*." Steps must be taken to assure that, though the less evolved strains of humanity are breeding faster, they are eliminated in favor of more evolved strains.

The convenient thing about DNA fascism is that the degree of each individual's evolution can be measured simply by the opinions they hold. Unconcern for ecology, and religious belief, are the markers of the inferior strain. Catholics, with their pro-family doctrine, are particularly backward and need priority elimination.

What now? Should we start wearing gas masks all the time, or just destroy the universities?

(ref. *Frankenstein*) against the termites, to no avail.

They arrange a conference with the queen of all termite queens, who sends a surrogate in the person of Alice Green (Holly Hunter) to meet them. All three discover that they have mutual reincarnational connections. Dennis and Alice fall in love and after cleverly solving the termite problem by means that cannot be revealed here (in order to surprise the audience) travel to a paradise outside of time where Alice carves a temple out of a limestone cliff and Dennis decorates it with paintings.

Along the plot line audiences experience human miniaturization, a trip through a termite colony, a fire walk, a termite queen the size of a dirigible, several exotic locales, an optional interracial sex scene (Nathan and Connie) and two magnificent Vancian sunsets.



NEW MUSIC

THE WHORES, BACTERIA AND THE KLEPTONICS

by Mathew Paris

The Whores will sing anything at all for money. They aim at a grudging and niggardly competence in their music like any professional corps on salary. The Whores began as a rock band but now occuppies every wage earning job in America.

Bacteria is the retro group that brings old time music from the planets longest living kingdom of life. Authentic bacterial warbling is more than silent; it can't be heard. Always from the beginning brainless, unadorned by any design whatsoever, it sounds if you hear it at all like a dim marginal hiss at the edge of your raucous sonic envelope.

Bacteria has no hits, makes no appearances on the media, has no profile, no name. They are invisible, locked in vapor; they will move you like a plague.

The Kleptonics sound like every other groups in the world. They are five of the world's accomplished mimics. In fact you hear them constantly if you think they are everyone from Enrico Caruso through Frank Sinatra. Your lover on the phone might be a Kleptonic. Your children are Kleptonics. Your president is certainly a Kleptonic.

The Kleptonics don't bother to make albums; they cover other people's hits. They are always cheaper than the original. The business world loves their profit margins. Whatever you buy or steal or listen to in a restaurant when you hear music at all is now done by *the Kleptonics*.

We are giving away a free CD, *Peggy Sue Got Divorced*, by *the Sequels* for the first five million customers for *Bacteria's* cosmic hit: *Whoosh*.

Whoosh was really done by the Kleptonics.

The Whores are selling their famous golden platter, *Daycare College, Welfare Stomp, The Tender Loving Care Cha-Cha*, and *That's Justice*, for money. These songs are also really done by *the Kleptonics*.

The Whores and *Kleptonics* are all infected by *Bacteria*.



PRÉCIS FOR MOVIE

TERMITE NATION, by George Rhoads

The organization OITH (omniscient ineluctable temporal help) consists of, and is known to, only a handful of people. OITH deals with menaces to earth from the insect world, the parasite world (including bacteria), the worlds of undersea and underground organisms, also geologic and meteorological events. We see earthquakes, hurricanes, tidal waves, locust devastations, volcanic eruptions and disgusting parasitic invasions. OITH is aided by the knowledge that there is nothing that is not alive, including earth, air, fire and water, and that the motions of the planets influence events on earth (see astrology). OITH knows also that time is an illusion (Einstein) and that time periods are malleable and fungible (quantum Mechanics).

Dennis Foley (Brad Pitt) is recruited into OITH (ref. *Men in Black*) by Connie (Kathy Bates), chief and agent coordinator. She chooses Dennis because he has no close friends or family and has seen "the other side of the mountain" (ref. *Zen Buddhism*) and thus has the requisite courage, objectivity and cool for the job. Dennis is also independently wealthy (see Batman) which is crucial, since OITH is funded only by its members.

Connie chooses Tim and his partner, Nathan Vanderhoop, a full blooded native American, who has also seen the other side of the mountain, to tackle the problem of termites, who are disobeying their queens and laying waste to human civilization. In order to subdue the termites, Tim and Nathan become miniaturized and visit and study a termite mound. They employ ancient Druidic ritual and alchemical procedures

* Alexander Feht also advocates this doctrine.

A MESSAGE FROM:
THE LEAGUE AGAINST EROTIC ELDER ABUSE

by Mathew Paris

We at LAEEA have noticed that all communities in the world—except Iceland, two paltry Arab emirates, Vietnam and Tijuana—have wisely set a minimum age for carnal intimacies. None of these realms have comparable laws making them a crime after a certain sensible age.

Accordingly, we have begun a campaign in the U.N.—and in certain select countries like Madagascar, Pitcairns' Island and the Falklands—to remedy this clear lack of concern by the governments of the world for the welfare of their oldsters.

In Bolivia we are pressing the new government of idealistic indigenes to make sexual congress after eighty eight a felony. We don't want to lock up crones for their amours; we merely want to exile them. LAEEA legislation will exile any felonious octogenarian lover to Bolivia, Paraguay, Ecuador, or the posh erotic spas on Easter Island. Let these people indulge their proclivities in these hinterlands, much as Cain went to those nasty Cities Of the Plain.

At the U.N. LAEEA has introduced into the General Assembly a resolution to make erotic intimacies over forty a misdemeanor. Each liaison is punished by a pecuniary fine much like a traffic ticket. This may seem cruel to some in the West; in most of the world humans with poor diet, or no diet at all, age fast and badly; they need to be protected by their governments, to whom they pay taxes, from habits that weren't all that salubrious for them at thirty.

Most of the politicians of the world are in favor of our proposal, though they cavil at our 'age of dissent', so to speak, preferring that the date of measure be pushed up to ninety or a hundred. They do see a chance to create many social agencies to educate the common people to accept this guidance from our experts. They foresee a novel realm of jobs for their clubhouse veterans, monitoring professionals, educators, probation offices, guards, wardens, caterers of rice and beans for Erotic Abuse penitentiaries, even high echelon and high salaried benign Elder executioners and grave diggers. Most, however, are ignorant of the pickle-down theory of economics. Trickle down economics is well known; tickle-down theories are merely absurd. Pickle-down theory has about the same effect on an economy as trickle-down ideas, or for that matter any economic ideas whatsoever.

Write your Congressman; ask him to pass laws making America an Elder Abuse-free, as well as Child Abuse-free, community. Does your representative stand for sanity and measure, or is he for crones gambling, feasting, and taking up stray amours? Does he want his grandmother making love when she would be better off baking cookies? In Tasmania we have made nonagenarian revels an offense punishable by slow torture and death. In Patagonia, of course, such insufferable folly and wickedness is a mere misdemeanor. We are the sort of people who have more power in Tasmania.



ECHOES IN THE ETHER

Paul,

. . . last night I inventoried my JV paperback collection. I have a fair number of them (41, with a few duplications) and they're near & dear to my heart. However, as they were stacked on the table my wife walked past, wrinkled her nose and exclaimed: "Those books are so ugly! Why can't you buy pretty hardcover books that will actually look good in the bookcase?"

Heh . . . amusing that such a complete Jack Vance ingenue could state the case for the VIE so succinctly.

I confess I'm not a regular reader of EXTANT, though I have been reading old issues of COSMOPOLIS on the vanceintegral website. I've come away with a feeling of awe for the sheer scale of the project. What's more, I feel an odd sense of loss . . . and not entirely because I missed out as a subscriber. I feel sad and perhaps a touch guilty that I wasn't there to answer the pleas for volunteers, to "do my part" as it were in bringing the project off. Hats off to the VIE volunteers, yourself in particular.

Greg Hansen

Paul:

I was exposed to Vance at a relatively young age—late elementary school, certainly no later than jr. high (I'm 52 now). One of my older siblings had a copy of *The Dying Earth*, which I read repeatedly. However, Vance's works weren't readily available; the major ones I read in high school were the *Demon Princes* and *Tschai* series. The former remains one of my all-time favorite SF series, perhaps because the tone is personal and melancholy. I've picked up other Vance novels over the years, but, as I said, they can be hard to come by, so my exposure to the rest of his work was relatively limited.

I did have the honor of visiting the Vances in their home back in the late 80s. I had moved to the Santa Cruz area to do work for a local software company (Borland). I got to know Kim Kokkonen, who also lived in the area and who developed software tools that worked with Borland products. Kim apparently also developed software to help Vance do work processing by greatly enlarging the text on the screen. He was making a visit to their home and asked me if I would like to come along. I jumped at the opportunity and passed an enjoyable hour or so there.

I think I first heard of the VIE through a close friend, Jerry Hewett, who co-authored *The Work of Jack Vance*. I signed up early on, though my deposit just beat the deadline.

Reading the VIE was an absolute delight, since the vast majority of the work was new to me. It underscores how under-appreciated Vance is, both as an author and as a social commentator. Perhaps the most interesting thing I notice is that Vance has three distinct voices or styles for his three main genres (fantasy, science fiction, contemporary). The fantasy tends to be, well, fantastic, a maelstrom of forces, with humor and tragedy close to



one another — and his voice there is clear at the very start (cf. *Dying Earth*). His SF voice struggles at first — I found the *Gadget Stories* volume to be the hardest to read of the entire VIE — but then he shifts into his 'travelogue' approach to SF and manages to create more sense of wonder talking about bearded women and mudflats than most SF authors can with exploding galaxies and interstellar war fleets, all while working in a great deal of social commentary (I think that *Wyst: Alastor 1716* deserves to be on bookshelves with *1984* and *Brave New World*). While I found his contemporary work interesting, I also found it the least compelling — almost too mundane a canvas for Vance to work on — but I came to enjoy his quiet, low-key approach, particularly in the Joe Bain novels.

So — did the VIE change my view of Vance? Yes, in that it has greatly expanded my appreciation and admiration for his work. For that matter, the various articles (particularly yours) in the VIE newsletters allowed me to appreciate Vance's wordsmithing and composition more

even as I read it. I think that Jack Vance is one of the great authors of the English language — particularly when you consider the product of the quality of his work with its sheer volume. Most 'great authors' produce a few great works and some number of forgettable ones; very few have ever generated 44 volumes of work with such a high rate of quality throughout.

Once again, thanks for undertaking such a massive project. If Vance is studied and appreciated 100 years from now, I believe it will largely be because of you and the VIE.

Bruce Webster

Paul,

Just finished *White Gold* by Giles Milton, which is a fairly well written look at the enslavement of hundreds of thousands of Europeans by our Musselman friends.

It turns out that the chief goon of Morocco, one Moulay Ismail (who claimed direct descent from Mohammed and who, in turn, is claimed as a forbear by that country's current chief arsehole), wore different colored outfits to match his moods: red when benign, yellow when in a killing mood, and so forth. Sound in any way familiar?

The great thing about Vance is that his stuff feels real, even when the reader is unaware of any factual background, e.g., Venetian sequins, Portuguese percebes, etc.

His imitators, R. Silverberg, Matt somethingorother, and the rest just make shite up, and it feels phoney from the get go.

Hope all is well with you —

D.R.



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