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Golden Master One

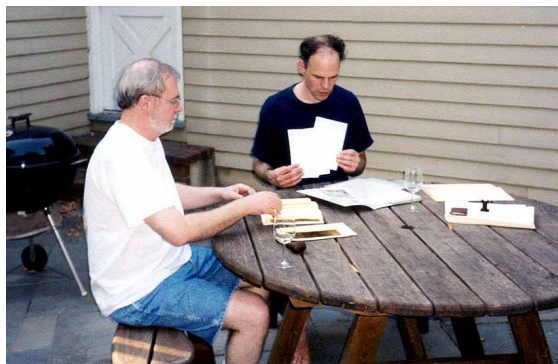
by Paul Rhoads

By the time this is published, Sfera will have printed, and sent off, 'blues' (proofs) of the 22 Wave 1 volumes for final review at GM2 in France. The files from which these will have been prepared were given final form at Golden Master One ('GM1'), a five day meeting, beginning at the end of July, hosted by John Foley at his house in New Jersey, USA. John Foley is the VIE 'Project Designer', author of the Master Plan which defines VIE work procedures, and head of the Composition team. Besides John, GM1 attendees included Joel Anderson (VIE Master Composer), Marcel van Genderen, a member of the CRT (Composition Review Team) one of Robin Rouch's 'proud few', Bob Lacovara (who needs no introduction to Cosmopolis readers), and myself. Marcel and I flew in from Amsterdam and Paris; Joel flew in from Minneapolis. John met us at the Newark airport, and Bob, who was visiting relatives near Philadelphia, drove in.

We went into GM1 with our composed texts, so carefully readied by volunteers over the last year and more, and front matter for the 22 volumes set up by John Schwab and already pre-reviewed by Robin and others. We also had a list of final errata from various sources, such as Patrick Dusoulier, John Schwab and Robin, for various texts and front matter files. A particular problem was *Wyst*, whose PP errata had not yet been controlled, entered or verified. Because Joel, Marcel and I could all be in the same room, this job was expedited.

GM1 output was unified files for each volume: front matter plus text, or texts. These volume files, to give but a single example of a volume specific requirement, needed correct page numberings for tables of contents and frontispiece caption references.

The basic work procedure was as follows: Joel gathered and prepared the material for each volume (all of which needed a certain amount of tinkering of a technical nature). Outstanding errata were then applied. The files were then reviewed for aesthetic issues. The volume was then 'constructed'. A volume bis file was created which tracked its contents and errata, and will continue to follow the volume through to printing. The volume was then 'CRTed' by Marcel.

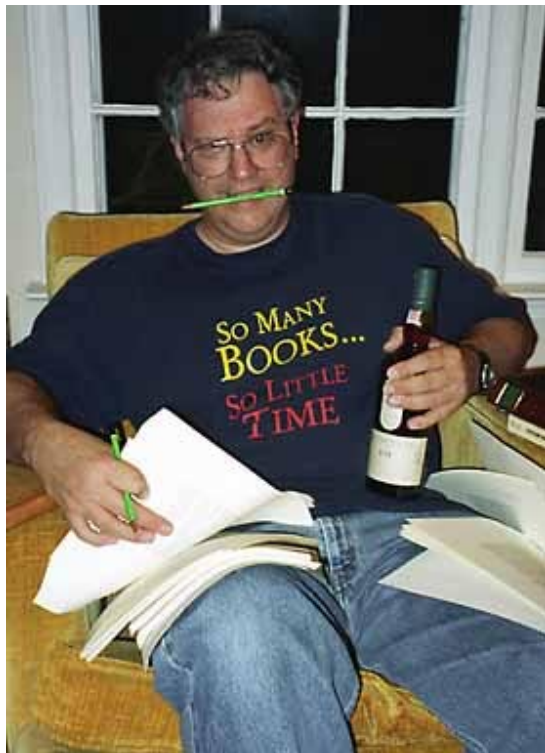


Joel and Paul caught in the actual creative process. Photo by Marcel van Genderen.

Errors caught by Marcel were noted in the bis file, corrected, then, as always, the corrections were noted in the bis file, reviewed and signed off. John Foley tracked overall work and ruled on outstanding problems, as well as doing as much 'second pair of eyes' CRT work as his host duties permitted.

The way, as always, was not smooth. John's computer had suffered motherboard failure shortly before GM1, and was only partly revived upon our arrival by reason of a 'terminally dead' modem. We also discovered unanticipated networking problems (*inter* Joel's Mac laptop, my PC laptop, and John's PC desktop) which we were unable to resolve with the material we came in with. Finally—and this will provoke in VIE old-timers a disabused smile—we discovered the need for a new set of file names for composed volumes and ancillary files (such as volume bis files), defining which absorbed unexpectedly large quantities of brain power and time. This problem was settled between John and Bob.

Bob got us up and running technically, in the first hours of Sunday afternoon with rapid assessments of the situation and lightning trips to the hardware store. We had our file naming conventions and volume bis file format by that evening. Bob is the technical VIE-Sfera go-between, and these are file names that Sfera also will be using. Bob continued to do technical support work during the meeting.



Bob gets down to work. Photo by Joel Anderson.

Work proceeded, with many hitches and windings, most of the volumes offering surprise problems, and we were lucky to complete all by the deadline of Thursday night. However, we were forced to leave aside certain things which, in an ideal world, we would have massaged or corrected. The 'worst' of these was that some of the texts had been set with an incorrect metric setting in InDesign. The result is texts set with Adobe's idea of letter and word spacings, rather than ours. Though we did correct some of it, correcting it all would have added days of work on these texts alone. These included approximately 15% of Wave 1 word count. We consoled ourselves with the thought that if Adobe prefers such 'metrics', perhaps others will as well, and that the difference has gone unnoticed by almost everyone—with the notable exception of Norma Vance.

Adobe's settings cause greater letter spacing and lesser word spacing. In practice, at least in many cases, this difference might be called a 'justification bias'. It is a subtle matter, most apparent in looser lines. I suspect these Adobe settings are an ill-conceived attempt to cope with the over-large letter proportions, at 10 and 12 points, of most contemporary fonts. Since Amiante does not use these flawed proportions the fix is doubly nuncupatory. However, we hope the problem will continue to 'fail to exist' for most readers. It will surely fail to exist for Wave 2 volumes, reducing its total effect on VIE volumes to something under 10%. Blame? I am surely at fault for, though I saw texts wrongly set, I assumed I was merely seeing local incidents resulting from justification exigencies.

'Justification' is what makes each line of text on a page the same length, creating a tidy block of text with an even right margin. Except in the case of a 'monospaced' font, like Courier, since letters are all different widths and the numbers of characters and spaces on any given line will vary, particularly given our understandable prejudice against line-end hyphenation, spacing of letters and words on lines must be somewhat elastic. This elasticity is determined both by the metric settings of a font *and* how a typesetting program (InDesign and Quark in our case) deals with them. Lines that are not justified will have the pure font metrics, but book pages are always justified.

Could the problem have been dealt with using 'VIE methods', which is to say farming the work out to non-GM1 operatives? The jobs would have been almost equivalent to resetting the texts in question and full CRT would have been required, with the inevitable post-CRT update; given our time constraints this was out of the question.

I do not mean to imply that this problem is dramatic; I assert that few will be able to distinguish

one type of metrics from the other without having it pointed out, and even then, given the nature of justification, even in the correct texts there will be lines and paragraphs where the metrics are not as good as some in the 'bad' texts. It is too bad, but to a certain extent it is a subtle matter of degree and frequency. As for upstream guilt, let those who have not themselves erred—to say nothing about whether they have done as much VIE work as those who have—cast the first stone. We are not 'professionals' and are working on *terra incognita*, where our non-professional status is probably an advantage. I doubt any other group of people could have done better in the same amount of time. The VIE remains the act to beat.

Another problem also had to do with fonts: the controversial 'Space-gram'. Space-gram is a 'special' created for *The Moon Moth*, but also used in *Vandals of the Void*. From the beginning it has been decried as 'illegible' by erstwhile CRT and PP folk, and others, and has gone through many revisions as a result. In a final effort to save it I created a 6th version, which was found to be 'legible', but which, on consideration, was so void of the elements which make this font what it is, that I preferred abandonment. It was decided to replace Space-gram in *The Moon Moth* with one of our two Small Caps fonts, but to use Space-gram, in its essential version 3, in *Vandals*. The reasoning was that the space grams in the former text are crucial to the plot, while the 'fun' aspect of Space-gram is appropriate for the latter, which was written for children and abounds in puzzles. This is not the place to detail the thinking underlying Space-gram, so I will only say that it is Vancian in that it arises out of consideration of what such a thing would 'have to be'. Those interested in Space-gram will find it in volume five.

Work was intense and non-stop, not counting the remarkable meals prepared by chef Foley. We often indulged in a pre-dinner aperitif of chilled Vouvray. The meals came in glorious variety—John Foley designed a week of menus worthy of his VIE Master Plan!—but I will mention only the grilled filet mignon with a salad of Jersey tomato, cheese and fresh basil from the garden, accompanied by a Margot, and followed by three flavors of a most excellent sherbet. This dinner was served on the flagstone terrace surrounded by a lawn giving way to all sides on a wood of oak and beech. The sunset could be glimpsed between the tall trunks, and then the stars came out overhead. The meal ended with a glass of fine calvados, and then it was back to our still smoldering computers to finish up a volume before bed.

It was great fun too for me to, at last, meet face to face with Joel Anderson with whom I have been

working intensely for the last two years, and to work with him side by side. All of us greatly enjoyed making the acquaintance of Dutchman Marcel van Genderen, a professor of chemistry, whose VIE work has been consistently swift and accurate. He was a valued companion in merry-making and conversation, to say nothing of his exactness and the quickness of his fast speed as a worker. I look forward to seeing him at GM2.



The Golden Master Meeting

by Bob Lacovara

Paul Rhoads has written a description of this important meeting. As he relates, the first 22 volumes of the Vance Integral Edition, Wave 1, were prepared for our printer's use. Curiously, what he doesn't say is almost as interesting as what he does say, or at least he describes a meeting which I do not recognize as attending. Let me explain. . .

I arrived on Saturday, July 27 to a deserted home in the wilds of the hills of New Jersey. I made myself comfortable, reading *Tristram Shandy*. A few hours and several bottles of water later, I was looking for a discrete place to answer a call of the flesh. By a window on the side of the house seemed a good choice, and I narrowly avoided discovery and arrest as some sort of pervert by the sound of tires on a gravel drive. John Foley had arrived with Paul, Marcel, and Joel.

We got settled in John's home, his family being away (or, possibly, locked in the basement—I'm still not entirely sure—there were rooms in the house *we did not enter*) and discussed the work to be done. We were clearly in trouble. We had a mismatch of computers (a Mac, John's virginal HP, and Paul's 'computer') and few ways to interconnect them. It was becoming clear that the order of the week would be: Joel composed everything while the rest of us lazed away.

In order that we could use some of these computers, I ran off and purchased a few items of hardware. . . trips to Circuit City were to keep me busy for the week. Joel's Mac connects to anything, of course, but has little to say; John's HP had a fast processor but the hard drive seemed to be in Texas; Paul's computer—well the less said about Paul's laptop, the better. But if you'd like a clue, imagine that someone drops a keyboard, and a child replaces all the keycaps. This is what's known as a Dvorak keyboard, and I have been afraid to tell Paul that it is a tool of the Left for fear that he will stop working.

Yes, I know what you are thinking . . . a Dvorak keyboard is only intended to speed up typists by reducing the distance that their fingers must traverse to common letters. Yeah. Sure. In fact, typing errors are so frequent that simple correspondence takes two or three times as long as a Qwerty keyboard, and consequently, far less work is done in eight hours. Oh, and of course, if one does master a Dvorak keyboard, one has lifetime employment. These sound like Lefty goals to me. I wonder why Paul hasn't noticed. Could be the screen flashes subliminal messages at him, or something, like 'vote Democrat'.



*Marcel realizes that Paul's computer sports a Dvorak keyboard.
Photo by Joel Anderson.*

John's computer wasn't too bad, despite disk access times measured in seconds. I loaded up Eudora, and began a week of firing off frantic notes to volunteers for help, information, and other responses. I printed the responses, and took them to the work room, where they joined a cubic meter of other paper chaff.

John's working environment on the computer wasn't optimal, though. So I changed his toolbars, and added a few programs of my own, including a time server, my Palm Pilot stuff, some unusual and interesting pictures, a scheduler to show the pictures at random times, and many other good things. So far, John hasn't noticed.

Well, in any event, we awaited our first meal. John said he'd handle it, and sent us off for, uh, a liquid accompaniment to dinner. Booze, in other words.

We arrived at the recommended liquor store: Spirits of the Valley. Oh, great, I thought. How am I going to cover this one up on an expense report? Well, I decided to call the expenditure 'Groceries'. To make sure that our meals were balanced, and that 'groceries' wasn't an outright lie, I also purchased a vegetable.

Tobacco is a vegetable, right? I like mine Partegas style, although H. Upmann will do as well. If John Vance asks, I'll tell him that the 'Spirits' referred to in the store's name were the Sashimi Indians of Fort Lee, New Jersey.

Suitably fortified, we returned to dinner to find that John is quite a cook. True, I dumped a few extra spices in the sauce pan while he was looking at our 'groceries' but he didn't seem to notice (no one noticed), and all praised his pasta, including me.

Meals, by the way, were a high point of each day . . . John outdid himself: delightful lasagna (I'm of Italian extraction [or expulsion, I'm not sure which] so I know), filet mignon, many very fine meals. Lord knows he did little else but restrain me from strangling Paul whenever Paul began to talk about his files. I wonder who paid for all of the meals, though? I know that they had peanuts at Spirits of the Valley, but I'm sure there was no steak.

Sometimes breakfasts were a bit scary, though. First off, there were these five grizzled men trying desperately to wake up. That was a sight which could scar one for life. Marcel, who speaks excellent English, turned out to be some sort of foreigner. This was made clear the first morning when he appeared to be putting dead ants on his toast. But no, in between sips of caffeine with a bit of coffee, he assured me that the little brown things were chocolate pieces. Since he made good coffee, I let it pass. I didn't eat any of the ants, though.

At one breakfast conversation, Marcel confided that there were concerns at home that the US would be marching into Holland any day now. I quietly made sure that (a) I understood him and (b) that I had a clear path to the nearest exit, and asked, "ah, invade Holland, Marcel? ah, why would we want to invade, ah, Holland?" Marcel explained that there were people who felt insecure because the US wouldn't put its troops under UN legal jurisdiction. I explained that here in the land of the free and the brave and the wealthy and the powerful and the well-armed that this was something like expecting wolves to agree that a large flock of sheep should vote, debate, and have the wolves come and go at the sheeps' pleasure. Very democratic sounding, but also very unlikely an unworldly expectation of wolf behavior. (As Woody Allen points out, the lion may lie down with the lamb, but the lamb isn't going to get much sleep.) I suggested that these fearful souls were perhaps mostly the descendants of the people who did not emigrate to the US in the 1880s . . . Marcel thought the émigrés were people of a sort not ordinarily seen in the daytime. Despite this we did agree most heartily that both the US and Europe were vastly improved by the migration of these individuals from one continent to another.

One evening Joel gave me cause for concern. We were sitting outside, smoking, and Joel mentioned that he hadn't flown in 20 years. I said, "You mean, you haven't come East in 20 years?" No, he meant that he hadn't been on an airplane in 20 years. . . he showed no signs of imminent insane violence, and I had plenty of room to run, so I wasn't too worried. But I know that they have airplanes in Minnesota. I've been there. By airplane. No one noticed, though.

Poor Joel had a severe shock coming his way. One evening, John proudly put in front of each of us a green, leafy, smoking, bulbous thing as a sort of appetizer. The thing looked like a small green grenade with prickly points. I recognized it as an entire artichoke, steamed. . . It looked nothing like the 'artichoke hearts' that I get in my salads. I had no idea what to do with it, but I thought I'd wait until Paul and the others had started in, and I'd imitate them. I covered my slowness in attacking the artichoke heart with an anecdote, but I needn't have worried. Joel was at a loss. . . I don't think there are any artichokes in Minnesota, or if there are, they don't eat them in a state of grace, since many of them are Lutherans. Joel could hardly be convinced that you tore off a leaf, put one end in your mouth, and scraped a small, soft, pulpy mass into your mouth with your front teeth. Worse, after you went through about 200 of these little leaves, and got about as much material from each one as you might get by taking your fingernails to your own teeth after a long hard night at the bar, you came to something green and hairy, which looked like something from another planet. "Don't eat that furry stuff. . . you'll regret it." Paul told us. Joel looked as though he regretted it already. "You pull off the fur, and the stalk and center are the heart! It's delicious!"—that from John. Joel regarded the green stalk and denuded heart with all the relish of finding a preying mantis in one's pasta. . . but he was game.

After the second or third meal, we had exhausted our supply of, er, groceries. I was sent back alone to replenish our supply. I was a bit skeptical at this time. . . they were drinking some plonk from the Gironde province of Bordeaux, but I couldn't find Gironde or Bordeaux anywhere in California. Not only that, the damned stuff was \$5 per liter, not per gallon. I think it was some sort of fake. Didn't taste any different to me than an old college favorite, Lake Niagra. So while the boys were digesting their meal, I grabbed a few of the empty bottles, and put them in my car. After that, I bought two gallon bottles of a very highly recommended white wine, (was it from Manischewitz?) and just refilled the bottles of Vouvray. I made sure that I seemed to open the bottle and draw the cork. . . guess what: no one noticed.

One night Paul scared me with the wine. . . he was about to demonstrate some sort of religious observance or other ritual in regard to opening the wine, decanting it (I thought decanting was what we did on Cosmopolis when we cut some of Paul's articles down to novella size) and then tasting it. I quickly pointed up and said that there was a transit of the International Space Station *right now*, and while everyone looked up at the transit of Continental flight 1412, LaGuardia to SFO, I put in one of my spare 'real' bottles. No one noticed the *plonk!* as the bottle went into the ice bucket.

I know I make it sound as though John just cooked, I just drove around on errands, Paul just supervised Joel, and Joel did the work, but that's because I'm basically telling the truth. Usually, no one notices.

Paul mentioned in his article that we worked out some issues regarding his type face Space-gram. Now, this is an odd thing. In its first appearances, many people felt that it was difficult to read, but this masked the real value of the font. Space-gram looks 'spacey' in any language! English, French, Russian, Japanese, Hebrew, Aramaic, Vietnamese. . . you name it. A reader in any of those languages would get exactly the same import from Space-gram as any other reader. Regrettably, Paul modified Space-gram, and now it can only be understood in English.

It wasn't all fun and games, though. At one point I entered the work room and found Paul and Joel arguing about something they called 'metrics'. I thought at first that they had been brainwashed by the Software Quality Assurance gnomes from the Software Engineering Institute from Carnegie Mellon, but luckily, it was only some whining about the way InDesign spaces characters. My little joke, a suggestion that we just use Garamond, was rejected. Poor Joel—he usually came out of these work sessions puffing away on his pipe, eyes glazed, muttering something like, "Pica's really not 72 per inch, did you know that? Not really. . . no. . . it's not. . ." I wanted to change out the Dunhill in his pipe for something more soothing, but I thought he *might* notice.

Alas, all good things draw to an end. Files were ready, late nights were ended. A few embarrassing pictures were safely stored away for future, ah, use. On Friday morning we went our separate ways. . . Joel to Minnesota, probably to eschew air travel for another 20 years, and artichokes forever. Marcel, to Holland, where even now fingers are being readied to be pulled from dikes at a moment's notice in case the US invades a low spot. Paul, after a short stay with relatives, to France. I returned to Houston. . . first class, by the way. . . Continental bumped me for some reason, probably my distinguished air of worldly savoir-faire. John returned home to a week's worth of dishes.

A Yokel's Account of the GM1 Meeting

by Joel Anderson

The New Jersey freeways were surprising to someone from 'Minnesota-Nice' country. As I rode with John Foley from the Newark airport to his nearby town, I saw that everyone was driving at about the same speed, that no one was tailgating, and that they made lane changes only when necessary, usually even using the turn signals. In Minneapolis such skill and civilized behavior is unheard of. I suppose folks out east are forced to behave better, given the number of people crammed into those States lining the coast.

I got a glimpse of the New York City skyline through the haze as we left the airport, so now I can say I've seen the place. But almost immediately on leaving the airport the countryside became very hilly and wooded, and I spotted at least one corn field. I saw almost no ruined 19th century factories, brownstone tenements, marauding gangs, or subsidized highrises about to be blown up. Amazing.

John's house was almost invisible from the road, and his neighbors couldn't be seen from the backyard, although deer often were (he wouldn't let us shoot them). The house was large and rambling, a comfortable and interesting structure. John made us feel instantly at home, and that feeling was reinforced every day.

The food and drink were excellent and plentiful. I think Paul may have a fuller account of what we ate, and another description might make those who didn't attend the meeting feel left out, so I'll just say I've never had such well done gruel, cabbage, and good cold water.



Bob, Marcel, and John at John's special Canadian Ouija Board, which we used to settle certain thorny textual problems. Here we witness everyone's amusement at the Board's spelling of 'noncupatory'. Photo by Joel Anderson.



John is astonished to see that Paul has been enveloped by a stray Influence from the Other Side, which had escaped from the Ouija Board. Happily the Influence was quickly despatched by dosing Paul with a malt distillation. Photo by Joel Anderson.

The photographs illustrate our working methods pretty well, at least the occult variety, so I won't say much about them either, other than that each day we rose at the crack of dawn (or so it seemed to someone from my time zone) and dosed ourselves well with coffee; a 'demitasse' with a spoon to get it out of the cup was sufficient when Bob made it. Paul and I usually did our work in what had been the Foleys' dining room before the meeting (and I'm sure they'll have it back in use as such before long), hammering the keyboards of our little computers, hollering at each other about this or that alteration, and generating a lot of new and more or less perfect files (Golden Master Two workers, N.B.!). As Editor-in-Chief, Paul also saw to our better understanding of religion and philosophy during breaks, and not surprisingly the works of Jack Vance were also discussed from time to time. Marcel, as representative of the RDVPCRC (Revolutionary Democratic Vancian People's Composition Review Committee), participated in and oversaw the work, doing reviews either with Paul and I or up in one of Foley's attics, where he and Bob maintained a connection with the outside world via the Internet. As well as overseeing and hosting, John participated in the review chores, mixing them with what I think was the management of his community's local government and fire department. Besides his duties in the attic, Bob dealt with cabling, motherboards and Zip drives, and he assisted John in the Morale department, including the provision of healthful beverages.

All in all we got a lot of good and productive work done. Paul and I have worked on the books' aesthetic issues for what seems a lot longer than the year or two it's been, but it was surprising how quickly such stuff went when we were both in the same room. What we got done at John Foley's house was very

worthwhile, and almost the last step before the first half of the books go to press. I'm looking forward to seeing them as soon as I can clear off some shelves.



Meeting the High Ones . . .

by Marcel van Genderen

In June, I am at a conference in Prague (still dry at that time), when an e-mail from Paul Rhoads arrives about the unexpected absence of Robin Rouch at GM1. A replacement is now needed from the CRT (Composition Review Team) 'proud few'. When in the following weeks it turns out that Charles King can not go, I am designated volunteer . . .

With trepidation I fly into Newark: finally this lowly Dutch volunteer will meet some of the high-ranking members of the Institute in the flesh. All fears disappear at the smiling faces of John Foley and Joel Anderson over a 'J. Vance' sign (definitely of historical value!). After a small wait Paul turns up as well: he's not French at all, but American (news for me). John drives us to his home through part of New Jersey: it turns out to look very nice! (This area is more properly known as the colony of New Holland, of course.) We all ooh and ahh in surprise, and Joel is making comparisons to Minnesota. It is definitely not like Holland.

Later at John's home we find Bob Lacovara. These top-level VIE people turn out to be (fairly) normal human beings. Behind the names I knew from Cosmopolis, the VIE website and various e-mails are some great guys (no sexism: I've only met the guys up to now), each with distinct individualities, which keeps the whole week interesting. Our host immediately declares an evening of relaxation in the garden, and for the rest of the week treats us to peaceful surroundings, good Aerobeds and delicious meals.

In this setting, the fault is with us if work is not done, so Sunday sees the actual start of GM1. Bob sets up our computer infrastructure, and Joel and I smile quietly when we see the difference in ease of installing a Zip drive on a Mac (click, done) and a Windows box (various curses deleted; granted, it was the horrible 98 version). After some wrangling over procedures, I am kept busy with proofing work and other odd jobs in an ever-increasing heat at our host's PC. In between, Bob and I conspire to bring the coffee slowly up to the industrial strength we are used to.

The main interaction of GM1 occurs between the dynamic duo of Paul and Joel. I look on between jobs, and learn a lot about the creative process, and about the reasons why PWR (Paul) would brutally deny some

changes (nunc!) that CRT or PP would suggest. There really are reasons that (engineering) mortals can understand! Nevertheless, some heart-wrenching concessions have to be made to get the work done in the allotted time. As the deadline comes closer, Joel takes ever more pipe-smoking breaks, but we manage to finish up on Thursday evening, and all sign the official checkmark board (more historical value!) to celebrate this.

Between work, we have very interesting conversations on all kinds of subjects at the excellent meals (thank you, John!) and drinking times (ah, the difficult choices of wines and whiskeys . . .). Vance obviously attracts a lot of different individuals, but all seem to share a (high) minimum of civilization and good manners. It is very stimulating to meet these people. I seem to fit in: I am invited to come to GM2. Hurrah!



The job is done! Photo by Marcel van Genderen.



Donations, and Argentina

Donations

by Bob Lacovara

Along with the call for payments, a few problems and situations have surfaced.

One of our volunteers and subscribers lives in Argentina. Although he has paid his deposit, the meltdown in Argentina's economy has left him with little alternative than to abandon his subscription. He offered to refuse the return of his deposit as a donation to the VIE.

In three other cases, subscribers have reported serious medical conditions which arose after their deposits were paid. Again, the VIE offered to return the deposits, but in one case the spouse of an ill Vance

fan pointed out that Jack's work makes her husband feel good: would we consider terms?

We thought about these cases. On the one hand, we would gladly provide a set to each of the individuals who have met with singular misfortune. On the other, we are a non-profit organization, and all of our funding comes from the sale of the various VIE books. We are in a position to extend terms to these folk, but not, regrettably, to take the entire brunt ourselves. Some of the VIE managers have made donations towards a set for the fellow in Argentina, and this gave us the notion to make an appeal to all Cosmopolis readers.

Therefore, if you would like to help the VIE defray the cost of providing these people with the sets which they have subscribed for, you are welcome to send funds via any mechanism you currently use to pay the VIE for your books. Make sure the payment is marked 'donation'. We will acknowledge the donation.

I would also like you to know that in each case, I or other VIE managers have personal knowledge of the people involved and their situation.

On a related topic, from time to time someone asks me about a set of works for Jack Vance himself. We intend to present Jack with a set of his own works, but we have not asked for any donations. There will be for both the Readers' Edition and the Deluxe Edition a printing overrun, and we expect to be able to present Jack and Norma a set from those books. (If Jack Vance would like them signed, we suspect that he may do so himself!)

Help Argentina!

by Paul Rhoads

Of the hundreds of VIE volunteers/subscribers, one only is from Argentina. As everyone ought to know Argentina was recently hit with the most dramatic economic crisis of its history. The Argentine Peso has dropped—like a two ton statue of a dead dog—and our subscriber, having already made his down payment—and to say nothing of violent domestic inflation—has seen his remaining VIE dollar debt shoot up into the stratosphere, and completely out of sight. He first wrote to us wondering if he could have a payment extension but as the crisis has worsened he now believes it will be totally impossible, in the foreseeable future, to finish paying for his set, and he has, as regrettably as one can imagine, informed us that he is withdrawing his subscription.

This is an agonizing situation. Not only has this subscriber been waiting and hoping for his books as much as the rest of us, but he is a working VIE volunteer, an artist with a special interest in Vance, and his set was to be the only VIE penetration of

Argentina, a country with a long and important literary tradition. Suddenly, and at the last moment, because of national and international political and economic instability, he is being denied his books.

This exceptional situation seems to me a golden chance to foil the grandiose and terrible forces that rule the world. Norma Vance also, as soon as she learned about the situation, wrote to me:

. . . I certainly believe the intelligent brave [name withheld] should receive his Vance Integral Edition. I can do 20 too. Also, if things [do not improve] in Argentina [. . .] I can manage another installment. Just let me know how it should be done. Cash? Check? Or what? And where?

Norma is not the only one. Most of the few people I have contacted privately have been just as eager to help. I am not surprised. Vance's work is often called cynical but this is a superficial reading. As Arthur Cunningham points out in a recent e-mail, Vance's work is an advocacy for 'all that is good in our world'. Much as we may have differing opinions, at a deeper level, by our very taste for him, Vance readers have something important in common. Our Argentine subscriber has long since made his down-payment, and thanks to the casting of only a small net already some \$200 of \$20 and \$40 pledges have been promised. This leaves \$700 outstanding. At \$20 a pledge 35 more are needed. If this money is raised before October 1st we can ship books to Argentina on schedule.

The volunteer/subscriber in question, while deeply touched by our offer of help, has been extremely hesitant about accepting it. I prevailed upon him at last with sheer pestering, but also by pointing out that it is not just about him. Having a set, in good hands, in a country like Argentina is not unlike having a set in an important library; the archival mission of the VIE would be served. The Argentine subscriber insists he will pay us back the day it is possible for him; I have suggested to him that, instead, he pledge to will his set to an Argentine library—but this is a detail that can be worked out later. For the moment the important thing is foiling the forces of chaos with brisk decisive action.

That VIE volunteers and subscribers should help another in such a situation would underline what this project is about. We are not a business. We are not a 'service provider'. We are Vance's readers doing what needs to be done for Vance's work. But not just for the work itself; we are doing this work—that could be done no other way 'short', as John Foley recently put it, 'of a thirty million dollar grant'—*for each other*. Only by our sustained and loyal cooperation in a fantastical endeavor can any one of us ever have at our disposition a corrected, integral edition of this oeuvre, which most of us, I believe, agree is one of the most

important in literature. By the same token we also seem to agree that great Art is something that counts very much.

If you want to help, send me an e-mail with the amount of your pledge (prhoads@club-internet.fr); I'll send you instructions.

Our Argentine volunteer is actually the only subscriber in South or Latin America. For your information, here's the VIE subscription breakdown by continent, supplied by Suan Yong:

Reader's	Deluxe	Continent
1	0	Africa
4	0	Asia
17	1	Australia-Oceania
106	5	Europe
228	33	N.America
1	0	S.America
7	3	N/A (unspecified/undecided)
364	42	TOTAL



Work Tsar Status Report

as of August 25, 2002

by Joel Riedesel

Wave 1

Various artwork is being finalized for the 22 Wave 1 volumes. Golden Master 2 will be held in Chinon, France, from September 14 to September 20. All text has been sent to Sfera and the blues will be reviewed at the GM2 meeting. Publication of Wave 1 is imminent!

Wave 2

Wave 2 work consists of approximately 1981.5 thousand words. This represents 45.35% of the total approximate word count of 4369.2 thousand words. Besides having less words to work with overall, Wave 2 has the benefit of the full process being well defined (the likelihood of adding new tasks to the process is very slim).

- There are 2 texts in special handling (*The Stark* and *The Telephone Was Ringing on the Desk*). These texts will end up in Volume 44. They need a bit of special input work and possibly some Pre-proofing (do you all remember what that is?).

- There are only four texts left to finish DD scanning. These four texts represent 248.8 thousand words and 12.56% of Wave 2.
- There are currently 9 texts in the Jockey step and they represent 178.5 thousand words and 9% of Wave 2.
- There are currently 4 texts in the Monkey step and they represent 53.8 thousand words and 2.71% of Wave 2.
- There are currently 19 texts in the Techno-proofing step and they represent 383.6 thousand words and 19.36% of Wave 2. Techno could use some additional volunteers for the next few months!
- There are 37 texts currently in TI! Of these, 27 are assigned and represent 966.6 thousand words and 48.78% of Wave 2. The 10 that are not yet assigned represent 101.1 thousand words and 5.1% of Wave 2. At least 207.5 thousand words (10.47% of Wave 2) are close to completing TI.
- There are 3 texts in Board Review and they represent 30.6 thousand words and 1.59% of Wave 2.
- There are 2 texts ready to be composed for 54.1 thousand words and 2.73% of Wave 2.
- And there is one text (*Cat Island*) that simply needs final reviews and updates to be ready for its volume.

Almost 45% of Wave 2 has not yet entered TI but is rapidly moving (half of that is in Techno, the step prior to TI). And just over 50% is in the TI step. Now that Wave 1 is essentially complete, expect to start seeing Wave 2 texts move through the rest of the process and through Post-proofing (we know you are all anxiously awaiting more work) in the next few months.

The SFV

The Science Fiction Volume has been printed, and the covers have been made; it remains only for the books to be bound into the covers. Delivery should begin sometime in September.

The Colorado Contingent

On August 24, 2002, Robin and I entertained Dave and Pam Reitsema and Ken and Ada Roberts. We noticed since there are at least our three sets of volunteers and possibly others, that Colorado may have a Vancian quorum (in the sense that there may be a large enough group of us that can get together quickly and decide some fates). I might suggest that others move to

Colorado to make their opinions known or otherwise develop their own quorums!

Ken can be found in the pages of *The Cosmopolis Literary Supplement*. Dave will be joining us at GM2 and should prove capably entertaining.



Plot, Schplot!

by Jeremy Cavaterra

The persistent claim that plot is Jack Vance's weakness: is it true or false? Or is it, to use his own word, nuncupatory?

What, in fact, is meant by the word 'plot' when used to signify an alleged shortcoming in Vance's work? The term as it's usually taught in college writing classes usually means some kind of architectonic infrastructure that's supposed to propel the reader forward through the pages like a bullet. Protagonist-seeks-goal-protagonist-must-undergo-change-to-achieve-goal-protagonist-achieves-goal-the-end.

But is this doctrine necessarily the only way to sustain a reader's interest? Is there some divine interdict that proscribes other manners of story-telling? We've heard that a story can be 'character-driven'. But could it be—dare I ask—'sense-driven'?

Jack Rawlins, in his critique *Demon Prince: The Dissonant Worlds of Jack Vance* (The Borgo Press, 1986), offers some intelligent clarification on the issue. I appreciate his observation that the protagonist—and likewise the reader—in his maniacal drive to get *there* will almost certainly miss the riches along the way.

... The poorness of the plots is not Vance's failure, but rather his message to us that plot is not the thing that matters in his fiction. In The Star King, Marmaduke in The Avatar's Apprentice is reprimanded by the wise Eminence for missing the Eminence's point during a lesson. "The way along the Parapet is not to the forward-footed," the Eminence admonishes. The forward-footed reader, he who assumes that the purpose of fiction is to move ahead to Outcome, has like Marmaduke missed the point, and Vance will educate him to a new orientation. The linear reader learns what Vance's heroes repeatedly learn: that living linearly always proves to be a sham. Plots abort, or are maintained by sleight-of-hand, or prove barren in completion—this is life's failure, Vance says, not his.

Rawlins remarks that *Trullion* protagonist Glinnes embodies the Vancean philosophy that 'linear living, living with one's heart in the plot, is ultimately dissatisfying':

Comfortably settled in a society where the favorite activity is gazing at the nighttime stars and telling stories about them, Glinnes is approached by a Fanscher, a member of a new movement for progress, who proposes to Glinnes that he join them in their plans to found a

'college of dynamic formulations', an 'academy of achievement'. Glinnes replies,

"And... give up... star-watching? By no means. I don't care whether I achieve anything or not. As for your college, if you laid it down on the meadow you'd spoil my view. Look at the light on the water yonder; look at the color in the trees! Suddenly it seems as if your talk of 'achievement' and 'meaning' is sheer vanity: the pompous talk of small boys."

Vance means this—the light on the water is worth a lifetime's appreciative contemplation, and achievement spoils the view.

The point is a worthwhile one. It applies to a good many masterpieces of literature. Do we really read *Through The Looking-Glass* to get to the end where Alice wins the chess game and becomes queen? Or is most of the fun in the remarkable episodes that befall her along the way? It's understood that in certain literary traditions there are conventions the author is expected to observe: the capture of the murderer at the end of a mystery novel, for instance. But in works like *Trullion*—or *Ports of Call*—which are not hidebound by generic imperatives, is it possible that the reader's experience is more akin to the effect produced by gazing at a great painting or sculpture for the first time? Granted, it takes less time to see the whole of Vermeer's *Girl with a Pearl Earring* than it does to read *Trullion*, though both could be studied infinitely. But when one considers the merits of a work of visual art, they usually amount to the emotive effect produced upon the observer. One doesn't talk of getting to the *end* of a painting, or look at it with any such goal in mind. Painters speak of structure and balance, composition—but a triptych is also a composition, in which the panels are related by common elements but not necessarily connected.

Could the same merits commend a book? And if not, why not? If *Ports of Call* is 'a string of beads without a string', then I ask: Who needs a string, when the beads themselves are so exquisite?



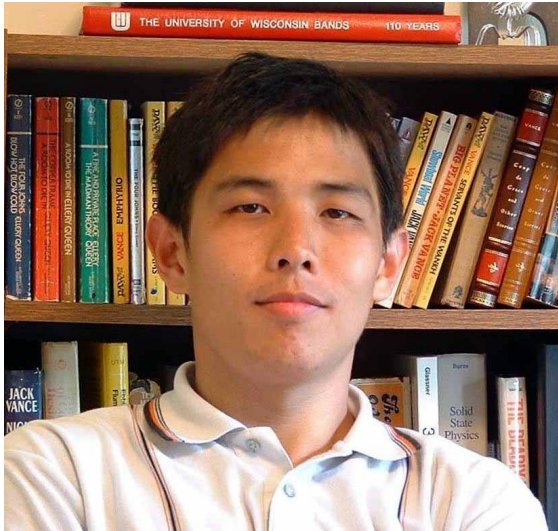
38's Crucible

by Paul Rhoads

A Special *Gold Star* for a Special Volunteer

Rather than once every year—more like each week—special mention should be made of Suan Yong. This young man, in addition to the general ecstasy and terror of being in his early twenties, of slaving away at the University of Wisconsin over a hot degree, of a life that obliges him to encompass—physically, mentally and spiritually—two hemispheres, two cul-

tures and several languages, performs services for the VIE that a normal corporation of our size would be happy to procure by paying several people nice salaries, plus health benefits. Suan does it for us, which is to say *for you*, gratis.



His is not only a position of the highest trust, but an ongoing technical feat of computer engineering, organizational intelligence and human skills. I don't know how he does it, but he does; and it is easy to take for granted because he does it all so modestly and so well. It is one thing to do sexy text work, which is both punctual and more or less straightforward. These jobs, in the last analysis, even if irksome at times, are their own reward, and furthermore can be accepted or not as our mood and the exigencies of our life dictate. Quite another thing is the grinding, daily, unsexy *labor* absolutely necessary to keeping track of hundreds of subscribers, volunteers and jobs—to say nothing of Suan's crucial role managing work teams and even doing normal VIE work (and a great deal of that as well!). Suan has truly lived up to his original VIE 'Olympian name': Lares, God of the Hearth. So this is a gold star for Suan Hsi Yong, whose contribution to the VIE *cannot be overestimated*:



Work Notes

In his announcement of the monkeying of *Sjambak* by Chuck King, Suan reported that Chuck made this comment: "This is another one where the v-text and the DD scans came from different sources: magazine text for v-text; UM text for DD. And, the UM version was heavily edited from the original (and clearly to dumb down and 'modernize' JV's language). So, rather than changing it where there were differences, I simply end-noted them. The result was over 140 new end-notes. If anyone ever needs to graphically illustrate the mangling of Jack's text by editors, I nominate this text as a chilling example. God, what an ordeal!"

I have suggested to Chuck that he pull out some instructive examples for *Cosmopolis* readers. On the DD front Damien Jones reports: "Joel Hedlund has sent me the first half of *Cugel: The Skybreak Spatterlight*, after that he is scheduled to give me the last ocr for *Space Opera*. Christopher Reid completed ocr3 of *The Killing Machine*. Hans is no doubt working diligently on *Son of the Tree*. I've sent e-mail to Mark Adams requesting status for *The Palace of Love*."

On the general work front, John Foley wrote: "Composition in general is burned out right now for good reason. Post-Proofing teams are now idled—which is not a good thing since they have been so finely honed. We'll need to examine the specific transfer of resources back up to *early processes* in order to stimulate the flow of material downstream. There are, I expect, some (if not many) hands on the project who are available to press the Wave 2 projects forward. The urgency for moving these many texts along now is as follows. You know that last year I analyzed the general situation and declared a *line in the sand* of all texts into composition by no later than March 31, 2002. This was a stringent requirement, it was actually met, and through fanatic work on the part of Composition and Post-Proofing, we were able to reach GM1 by the skin of our teeth. I have not yet declared the next line in the sand, but in conversation with Paul during GM1, we began to formulate an idea of the next goals. It was greatly desirable to me for us to be able to establish the second wave's 'GM1' (which will be called 'GM3') next August, 2003. You will be relieved to know that Paul thought that this was possibly too aggressive. This may or may not be so. One motivation for me—on behalf of all of us volunteers—is to seek and find *the end of the tunnel*. I have not yet determined what the goals shall be, I will be watching the flows via Joel Riedesel's reports and other comments, but I want to emphasize that Joel's expressed urgency is correct and necessary."

Tim responded: "I would anticipate, again, that TI will be the bottleneck for Wave 2. I don't know how many people have started their first Wave 2 assignments yet, although Steve is certainly underway. We may be in a position to do some scoping on this at Chinon. We should also be giving some thought to widening the TI pool—I'm thinking here of people like Chuck who would appear to have 'the right stuff' and fewer monkeying-type jobs this time round."

From Steve Sherman, administrative head of TI, comes this: "Chuck [King and] Robin the Goddess [have] joined the TI team. Both will be present at GM2, along with their second, Rob Friefeld. I hope to make more Wave 2 assignments from the pool of texts that have cleared DD and Techno after GM2; however, some Wave 1 wallahs have expressed a desire not to continue in TI work. Others have expressed the opposite desire. We can certainly talk about this in Chinon, and after GM2 I will post to the list, asking those not working if they want to. TI's biggest deficit right now is people willing to travel to Boston. John's indication that the Wave 2 line in the sand will be later than August* means that I can make one more useful visit to the Mugar in June; therefore at least *Nopalgarth* will be unassigned until then, and possibly *The Blue World* and *Space Opera*† as well. There are currently three texts waiting for Board Review (*The Gift of Çab*, *The Howling Bounders*, *The King of Thieves*). I anticipate this number increasing significantly by the end of September, including some novels. Composers should attempt to achieve the necessary serenity to go back to work no later than October."

Damien Jones reports: "Joel Hedlund has completed ocr3 of *The Starbreak Spatterlight*, Dave Reitsemá has finished jockeying *Chateau d'If*, *Sanatoris Shortcut* and *Crusade to Maxus*."

Literary Depth Redux

I am still thinking about the issue of 'depth' in literature.

Any writer shows us the world and human life. Some writers, like Vance, do not pretend to show us 'the depths'. They show us the surface and, while they provide clues, leave us to decide what it all implies. By this I do not mean that they play a coy game of peek-a-boo, withholding information they might well provide. But what can a writer say about the roots of things other than what he thinks, and why should an author know so much more about it than his readers?

*Note, Steve seems not to have noticed that Foley will indeed designate August, if possible.—38

†I believe that Alun H. has already done the Mugar work on *Space Opera*?—38

And whatever a writer 'knows' about the depths, how much can it be? His knowledge, however great, is limited like all human knowledge. Also, a direct explication of a thing, particularly in a work of fiction, is not necessarily as good as hinting at it, or pointing to it by the drift of a dramatic situation. Doing more veers fiction into non-fiction. Iris Murdoch and Ford Madox Ford (whom I happen to be reading at the moment), if they do not pretend to have penetrated the ultimate secrets of the world and life, do tell us, directly, about a great deal of stuff under the surface, the springs and cogs, the motivations of human behavior. This is, on one level, a difference of narrative point of view. One writer uses the 'fly on the wall' technique, while the other uses one of the 'omniscience' techniques. Great writers, like Jane Austen and Vance, mix these techniques, but it is fair to say that Ford and Murdoch use omniscience much more than Vance.

In Ford's *The Good Soldier* the omniscience is of a particular kind because the story is an account, given after the fact, by a first-person narrator who, during the events in question, both lived them and was unaware of them. Since these events concern the intimate lives of his wife and his best friends, his ignorance itself is part of the story. And, as should go without saying, the narrator's omniscience—what he pretends to know about the motivations of others—should not be taken as equivalent to Ford Madox Ford's omniscience. But the narrator's account itself is almost exclusively concerned with the motivations of the characters and his explanations of these are rife with such formulations as he/she did [whatever] because of such and such (for example: an English/American Catholic/Protestant background) with accompanying socio-psychological commentary. Constantly interlaced between such psycho-sociological assertions, it should be emphasized that the narrator expresses perplexity about the ultimate causes of the actions or attitudes in question.

I am not yet in a position to assert it positively, but I sense that Iris Murdoch does something similar; without pretending to resolve the ultimate mysteries she none-the-less carries us down several levels below the surface, showing us the alleged springs and cams. The final nature of good and evil are perhaps not explicated, the purpose of existence may not be spelled out in so many words, but we are shown the alleged whys and wherefores of a great deal of human activity.

Now all this is very fine and educational, on the crucial condition that it be true, that the explanations correspond to realities. For the truth of such fundamental things depends upon true 'deep' knowledge, otherwise known as philosophy. On the other hand, if

there is irony in the explications, if they contradict each other, or contradict the facts as presented in the narrative, these are pointers to something truly deeper. For example, in *The Good Soldier*, the narrator is constantly expressing admiration for a certain man, because he is such a fine fellow from a certain point of view (the conventional view, one might say). But the whole thrust of the book leads us to understand that, from another point of view, he is not so admirable.

However, such complications aside, to the extent we are shown the mechanics of human motivation, rather than human acts themselves, we leave the realm of fiction and enter the realm of psychology, or 'human science'. What begins as a story can take on elements of the treatise. Iris Murdoch is famous for actually being a 'philosopher' (scare quotes because I don't think she is). Her philosophy seems to be close to what can be called the median average 'philosophy' of today. In my opinion this philosophical 'position'—to be polite and not call it an 'error'—is an unemulsification of atheism, materialism and moralism, which is more or less unconsciously shared by most members of the cultural elite and, via intellectual pollution, many ordinary folk. To be more explicit, this is a mixture of the beliefs that there is no god and that the universe is wholly materialistic, but soft-headedly ignores the logical consequence of these doctrines which is the banishment of morality. Morality would be saved by a platonic attitude (belief in an eternal realm of spiritual reality truth) but I do not know enough about Murdoch's position to assert whether or not her morality is this or just warmed over positivism (meaning merely expedient morality of the non-religious 'do unto others' type). The platonic position would differ in that there would be an obligatory morality not necessarily 'beneficial'—by the materialist standards—to individuals or the 'collectivity'. A writer like Paul Auster is a similar case, except that his 'philosophy' is more vulgar, or to put it another way, more confused and politicized.

Art is not philosophy. Art can be *philosophical*, but that is something else. To the extent art tells us *how it is*, it is doctrinaire. This is also true of so called 'philosophy'; to the extent it makes pronouncements it is not philosophical but doctrinaire. So if *philosophical* art is not the spring of knowledge, what is it? It should be an inspiration of philosophical thirst.

It seems to me that, compared to Ford and Murdoch, Vance's art is more truly philosophical. The idea, in Ford, that a woman will tolerate infidelity more if she is an English Catholic has nothing philosophical about it, it is psycho-sociological doctrine. If it were true, human life would be a sort of mechanical puzzle in which we are mere counters that can be explicated with reference to our backgrounds. Though the

doctrine that a Catholic tolerates infidelity better than a Protestant may be concealed behind an impressive front of 'complexity', such an impoverished explication of the mystery of human motivation is banished to the extent such doctrines are taken as final truths. On the other hand take, once again, *Wyst*. This book could easily have been a work of sociological doctrine, since it's theme seems to be egalitarianism. Vance could hardly write about egalitarianism if he did not have ideas, and thus opinions, about it, so how does he make a philosophical book rather than a doctrinaire book?

Of course he does not write a treatise about the idea of egalitarianism, but he does express ideas about it. Here, in the mouth of Ryl Shermatz, is the most positive statement on the subject in the book:

"...the Arrabins...are now confirmed city-dwellers, and generally indecisive. Each person is isolated; among the multitudes he is alone. Detached from reality he thinks in abstract terms; he thrills to vicarious emotions. To ease his primal urges he contrives a sad identification with his apartment block..."

This is no typical indictment of egalitarianism. The crux of it is not that egalitarianism is inferior to, for example, *individualism* because of x, y or z, but that it is debilitating to human nature because the flowering of man requires a wider purview, more real contact with other souls and nature. But even such an indictment would be doctrinaire were it not all of the following: a) in the mouth of a character, b) extremely brief, c) already demonstrated by the action of the book, d) supported by tertiary considerations of a non-psycho-sociological nature.

The philosophical nature of Vance's art is also seen in *Wyst* as Vance *explores* egalitarianism rather than *exposing* or *analyzing* it. The obvious example is Jantiff's experience in Arrabus, which includes not only the realities of life in Arrabus, good and bad, but the arguments put forward by Arrabins in favor of their way, such as:

"...Man's great enemies are tedium and drudgery! We have broken their ancient tyranny; let the contractors do the drudge for their lowly pittances. Egalism shall ensure the final emancipation of Man!"

This statement, by one of the false Whispers, is internally contradictory, but it does represent what might be called 'the vulgar' argument in favor of egalism. More serious arguments are also given, but even the vulgar argument contains elements which are compelling. Tedium and drudgery as such, certainly, are not emancipating!

Not only does Vance demonstrate his theme by giving a fulsome picture of Arrabin life, but by the counterpoint of life in the wildlands where people are not city-dwellers, indecisive or detached from reality.

Yet life there turns out to be just as desperate and dangerous for Jantiff as life in Arrabus. On another level, contrast Jantiff in Old Pink, rooming with the self-indulgent and giddy Kedidah, and Jantiff in his shack by the sea, caring for the mute 'witch' Glisten, who will eventually be, so we are led to assume, his wife. Regarding these contrasting situations Vance gives many hints. Included is this remark by Ryl Shermatz about the Arrabins:

" . . . these essentially decent, if indolent, folk . . . "

And this account of Jantiff's opinion of certain denizens of the wildlands:

Jantiff found most of these folk somewhat coarse and not altogether congenial, especially the farmers, each of whom seemed more positive, stubborn and curt than the next.

But there are further references which point us toward aspects of human nature that lie much deeper than these, and it is these references that give the more 'superficial' statements—such as those quoted above—their true life and color. A single example would be the following description of a moment in Jantiff's inner life:

What strange people these were, and also, for a fact, all other people of the Gaean universe! He studied the faces carefully, as if they were clues to the most profound secrets of existence. Each face alike and each face different, as one snowflake both simulates and differs from all others! Jantiff began to fancy that he knew each intimately, as if he had seen each a hundred times.

Here Vance is giving us Jantiff's thoughts and feelings at, one might say, the deepest possible level. And yet he explains nothing. The passage remains superficial; it does not tell us why Jantiff has such a thought or what it means. Elsewhere in his work (in *Marune* and *Lyonesse* for example) Vance does toy with an explanation of such phenomena; the notion of racial or cellular memory. This is a stab at a materialist explanation of the how and why of such experiences. But clearly, Vance never started from such a premise as cellular memory (a dubious concept of pseudo-science) but worked back to the idea from direct human experience—an open-ended, if quixotic, struggle to penetrate the human mystery. But even this explanation remains pure poetry because Vance never presents it as theory but, through drama, makes us feel and live the explosion of racial memory or, as above, the opening of the mind to wider sympathies. Whatever the true explanation—perhaps meditations on generations and geography—Vance makes these phenomena live for the reader, and thus real in our own experience; we empathize with all generations and our consciousness inhabits the vastness of time! Vance awakens his marvelling readers to experiences

that, whatever their source or cause, are authentic. We have had them ourselves, and we know them better because Vance evokes and articulates them with poetic power, enriching us with the secret language of the shadowy movements of our souls. Their cause, whatever it may be, must be real, because the phenomena are inherent in the human situation, part of our own lived experience. Vance does not explain them, but by dramatizing them he makes us feel our participation in the totality of human experience and that we are brothers with all men. So while it remains on the surface I fail to see how it could be more profound. Vance *shows*; the glory of his art is that what he shows is real, or to put it more robustly: true.

A Visit to Llalarkno

GMI was held in a recently developed section of Warren township, a place which even 25 years ago was a sleepy farming area. However, too close to New York, too near the 'corridor' linking together the 'megapolis' which punctuates the east coast of the USA from Washington to Boston, and too near the great hub of corporate headquarters of central New Jersey, it has supinely succumbed to the pressures of development. Vast developments have covered crop lands and infiltrated wooded areas. Foley's is a simple and handsome house, of more or less neo-colonial design, standing on an acre of semi-cleared woodland. It was built by its first owner about 30 years ago, in a place that has since been developed in all directions. The bordering woods mask this; from the grounds one catches only occasional glimpses of the adjacent establishments. However, venturing out into the roads, the reality soon becomes clear; the neighborhood is evenly covered in 'starter mansions' of various styles.

The most shocking section is to the east, where a development of some 50 structures has been crowded onto continuous strips of lawn on both sides of a system of the *de rigueur* winding roads all of which terminate in dead ends. These edifices, all built in the last two years, are notable for pretentious aspect; most feature a 'brick' or 'stone' facade, going up three stories. I was able to establish that the bricks are brick, but only half-brick, so these facades have a thickness to height ratio of around 1 to 80, which means their structural integrity depends upon the wood framing behind them. But wooden houses twist and bend, and I estimate the life of these silly facades at under 10 years. Some of them do not even bother descending to the ground, but terminate on roofs of projecting sections, giving the impression that the wall will topple through the roof. As for the stone, apparently vast rough hewn field stones, I was not able to make close approach. Were they molded plastic? If

so it is very cleverly done, and in fact gives the impression of amateurish, or at least extremely capricious, masonry work; but, given other indications, these 'stone' facades can occupy no more width than the brick. I suspect they are real stone cut into thin slices and patched onto a plywood backing with glue, with mortar added; an irresponsible disposition. The other walls are shielded in vinyl siding, some of which, notably on the 'wooden' chimneys, is already askew. The contrast of the half brick or 'stone' with vinyl siding often arraigned in surprising mixtures, I found infelicitous.

While the first impression is of harmonious variegation, one quickly sees that a single standard plan has simply been juggled in several ways. The basic 'mansion' appears both *recto* and *verso* and, in addition to choices of facade 'materials' (vinyl siding, brick or two types of 'stone' facades, or stucco) allows several facade 'upgrades', including central section thrust forward, or back, columns to flank entrance, and so on, up to the ultimate: an entrance colonnade supporting an open second-floor balcony protected by a neat railing of turned balusters, painted white. The whole concept is an extreme example of know-nothing post-modernism. Shreds of neo-colonial and neo-classical design whisper to each other across an aesthetic emptiness vaguely discolored here and there by a hazy memory of Frank Lloyd Wright. But the tonic chord is ignoramus posing. Apparently many of these houses are sold to oriental families of the type I used to know in the 1970s in Manhattan who ran businesses 24 hours a day while living, sardine style, in tiny apartments somewhere hell-and-gone in Brooklyn or Queens. Anyone who has read Michener's *Hawaii* knows, and admires, how this works. I wonder if such people would not prefer a more honest house, but we are now in the *Age of Image*, and you never know. Orientals are not the only buyers of course, and during my morning walks I did spot one or two autochthons, all Caucasian, to all appearances of the 'nouveau riche' type—more power to them; I myself am of the 'non-nouveau pauvre' type, and would gladly change places with them. Foley informs me that no one there knows anyone else, and is not trying to find out.

Speaking of walks, I should mention the roads; they are wide, but without sidewalks. The separation between road and lawn is a curb of granite stones. These arise from the ground about 10 inches, are some 4 inches wide, with a mortar joint between stones every 8 inches or so. I do not know how deep these delicate 4 by 8 slabs extend into the ground, but I doubt they go down the 48 inches that would assure them vertical stability against the yearly north-eastern freeze. As for horizontal stability, they have it on one

direction only, on a 4 inch surface. I expect to see these curbs a snaggy mess in short order.

Some of these mansions sport a mini two story 'sextagonal' wing, usually 'bricked' on two faces only; a most peculiar and unsatisfactory effect. There is also the optional bay window, of one or two stories, with its optional copper roof. Asphalt shingles come in about five standard shades from grey to beige, as does the vinyl siding. The brick sometimes has a 'pepper and salt' effect which, so John Foley informed me for having watched the process, was created with judicious—so to speak—painting. In short, a Disneyland of ersatz effects.

The development to the west does not seem to be a Levitt town of mansions, but each appears to be its own individual desecration of taste, architectural traditions and constructional integrity. The plots are somewhat bigger, and though the continuous lawn effect here also offers its illusion of community, there is room to put up fences and plant barriers, which some owners have begun to do.

Such places are instant Llalarknos (see *The Face*), exclusive and gracious neighborhoods of family mansions, gardens and parks. Such places abound in Vance. It might be added that his own house and neighborhood is, if in a different way, also a dream of Llalarkno. Perched in the steep Oakland hills, it is surrounded, at a proper distance, by other houses in all directions, each with its grounds, though the extreme slope makes much exploitation of these impractical. The houses are too small to pretend to mansion status but they are usually well built, genuinely individual, and often attractively eccentric, or otherwise appealing by reason of coziness or style. The oldest are low snug cabins of brick built on the more level areas. The most recent are large boxy affairs clinging to the steepest slopes with spacious verandas perched out into green emptiness, the latter marked out in all directions—particularly up—by the grass-stalk like trunks and shaggy canopies of gigantic swaying eucalyptus.

In Vance's work such neighborhoods are too numerous to list. But think of Morningswake in its 'neighborhood' of domains, or of Glawen and Wayness planning and building their house in the new section of Araminta Station. The family house, the familiar neighborhood, the community of families—the basic units of tribe, canton, and finally nation—these are things close to Vance's heart, and obviously not only his. May John Foley's new neighbors, whoever they be and from wherever they hail, find the happiness of their dreams in their new homes! I suspect a great deal of rebuilding will occur in the coming decades, doubtlessly for the better.

A Dying World

I too have a house. It is a two room 'farmhouse' with walls 30 inches thick, the stones neatly arraigned and mortared with the clay that is the ground. It is one of eight farms clustered along a now asphalted track running east-west across the plain of Sammarçolles* in the canton of Loudun (where the witches were) north of Poitiers (where Charles Martel turned back the Arabs). This hamlet, or 'lieu dit' (*place called*) is not highly picturesque like Chinon, seven miles to the north; it is nondescript. The uneven plain stretches away, checkered with wheat, rapeseed, sunflowers and patches of woods as neatly delineated as 'islands' in a highway intersection, all like the most imbecilic of abstract paintings. Other hamlets pock the distance like clusters of dried barnacles on the hull of a washed-up abandoned boat. Metal or concrete silos dot the horizon, and high tension wires are held aloft on the out-stretched arms of a column of gigantic, skeletal, ironwork demons. Industrialized pig-concentration-camps, if the wind blows right, diffuse stink. When the deportation trucks rumble by, the condemned animals peer out from between the bars.

It is all a far cry from Llalarkno where the houses, like maidens in wide skirts of silk and lace sitting among flowers, are poised graciously in their cool parks. On the plain of Sammarçolles each house, huddled in groups like a gaggle of hags clutching their cloaks, wall each other in with a crabbed labyrinth of ruinous out-buildings—sties, stables, shelters, wine presses. In the hidden courtyards, fenced away from the scratching chickens, the householders have flower gardens like jewels in locked caskets. To the back, extending away in exact strips, are vegetable gardens; rows of cabbages and onions, interrupted by the occasional peach tree. Such are the 'parks and gardens' of La Goilarderie.

My place is at the northwest corner. Since I have come to La Goilarderie—thanks to a series of unforeseeable accidents—about eight years ago, the owner of the house at the southwest corner has died—too much drink. The other inhabitants are a varied group, including one family who never show their faces, and two older couples—in one case the man is a suspicious, reclusive and angry person—some sort of farmer; in the other he is a beneficent, intelligent and artistic iron worker, though now paralyzed and bed-ridden. Then there is Valentin Bonnenfant, whose name would lull you into imagining he is loving, sweet and innocent, but this retired mason is ruled by an evil spirit; he dreams of ruling our little corner of the universe and bringing us all 'to heel'. He

takes us to court, one after the other, to enforce his absurd edicts and recently, during his 6th case against me, the judge in Poitiers fined him \$3,000 for abusive litigation—he is, naturally, appealing, a process that requires several years. Next comes a group of sedentary gypsies living, now illegally, in collapsing caravans on a strip of ground lent to them by the man who died—they pass their time in drinking, fighting, love-making, the occasional theft or swindle. Then there is a harmless couple of dunderheads, who pass their time going from house to house, to all who will receive them, repeating the news—she is known as 'Pedalline' for her habit of going about by bicycle, and he is a 'jolly customer', a former employee of a piggery, the smell of which still clings, and an ex-small-time tobacco grower.

Finally, there is Gabriel Chevalier. Gabriel is one of the last true peasants of France. He is a bachelor. His house is a low dark room, with one tiny dirty window, heated in winter by a wood range, which serves likewise for cooking in summer. His 'garden' is a single pink rose bush on the wall in a small courtyard of raw ground. His out-buildings used to be full of rabbit hutches (when the rabbit merchant passed each week, a thing that stopped happening five years ago). Out back he grew beets and cabbages to feed all the rabbits of La Goilarderie, mostly his own and those of Giselle, wife of André the paralyzed man (who, long ago, shod horses for the French army—André wooed Giselle from a town south of Poitiers, riding 40 miles here and back on his bicycle, after work). Gabriel also made wine, a no-name local varietal known as 'dixhuit mille' (18,000)—there is no better wine with a rabbit paté, and I still have a few bottles in my cave (La Goilarderie is all caves, originally the quarries of building stone) but there will be no more. Gabriel has been failing this past year. His mind, never too clear, has become even less reliable. He has come to spend most of his time roaming around collecting news. Giselle calls him *l'Inspecteur*. Recently he has grown weaker, lost his sense of balance and been restricted to his house. His sister and niece, who live a few stone throws away in the neighboring hamlet of Crué, come each day with his lunch, and Giselle does the rest: breakfast, afternoon hot milk, dinner—including the cat's.

Just before I left for GM1 Giselle reported that Gabriel had been hospitalized. Fearing his time is nigh I went to visit him—Loudun being a mere ten minutes away by car... Gabriel has no car, and his tractor must be thirty years old.

Gabriel is a little fellow with a round head, no neck, small blue eyes, and a smile that splits his face in half. I found him in a white and featureless room, number 113, shared with a similar invalid, both

*pronounced 'sam/are/soul' + French accent. . .

slouched in their chairs. In fact the entire patient population of that section of the hospital, without exception, were men of the Gabriel type, tossed in there to rot and fade out, like the abandoned rubbish, worn out tools and rusty bits of machinery cluttering cramped lofts and cave-like stables all across the plain of Sammarçolles. Here, I thought, are the last remnant of a peasantry stretching back through modern times to the middle ages, back through the Roman era to pre-history, and on into the mists of the past. The houses they built, maintained and expanded over the aeons are falling into ruin—or being transformed, modernized, put to other uses, by newcomers such as myself. Their ancient meadows, fields and forests are being obliterated under the pressure of industrial farming, a process that is already mostly complete—only pockets of the old human-scale organization remain, or hints of it here and there across the land, persistent marks in the stubborn soil; a crook in a road, not yet straightened; a great walnut tree still not removed to make way for lumbering combines and hay-balers where once a leafy colonnade shaded the way; a mouldering heap of stones where a house sheltered the joys and sorrows, woeful adventures and triumphs of departed generations; or, even fainter, a discoloration on the ploughed ground in the morning, an occasional hydrometric trace of where, in other times, that place, now absorbed in the voracious vastness beloved of tractors, was put to other uses. Giselle, who quit school in the sixth grade to spend the rest of her youth at La Goilarderie as a shepherdess of goats and cows, has given me indications of this now obscure geography.

Gabriel was at first disoriented by my arrival; he asked me confused questions about his sister; had I seen her? But soon he came to himself, and—what else?—offered me drink. Such is the iron etiquette of the peasant; if you enter his house, be it only half a hospital room, you will not leave without a glass of wine, or other drink, properly poured into your mortal body. The rules of this ceremony are subtle and elaborate. Glasses are placed, and no woman's hand touches the bottle! but the host lets a drop of wine into his own glass—a symbol for the more formal testing that happens in restaurants or at any 'proper' table—the wine is now poured, usually to brim-full. Then comes a long period of talk; the glasses are not touched. Finally, to some subtle signal I have not yet learned to perceive, all reach for their glass, and now the brief, almost perfunctory, and even more mysterious process of the toast occurs, and at last the liquor is quaffed. Then begins the second round, with its own rules...but Gabriel's present establishment offered only a plastic bottle of tepid 'spring' water, and his single dirty glass; both lacked all appeal. In the

end however there was nothing for it, and of course Gabriel's roommate must also partake. Liquid was poured. Glasses (one shared by Gabriel and me) were raised, and the consecrated potation was imbibed satisfying an ancient urgency whose origins are beyond the lore of archaeologists.

I told Gabriel that I would soon leave for a visit to America. His typically quick-witted response was: "perhaps I'll be dead when you get back" and then, with a sly smile, "I understand there are plenty of beautiful women 'up there'?" I agreed that such was the report, and expressed my confidence in its truth. We even arranged a heavenly rendezvous in case of failure to meet again in this world. My incursion livened up the ignored and somnolent men. We chatted with Monsieur Blé, the roommate; where we live, how we do, news of the people we knew in common. M. Blé, it seems, is from Les Trois Moutiers where I was married, and Father Pasquier is a friend in common—so here was an intimate connection with a dying stranger... Gabriel wanted to stand, and I helped him up, but he has become too disoriented, and had to slump back into his chair. I pronounced the most cheerful words I could muster, shook hands with him and M. Blé (another sacred French ritual), imprinted their lively parting smiles and *mercis* upon the tablets of memory, and took my leave. Sad, if not surprising, the neglect suffered by these uncomplaining fellows, the last whispers of a world that is gone.

VIE Texts in Action

With the accord of the Vances and the VIE, Electric Story is publishing *Lyonesse*. See their site at: www.electricstory.com/authors/jack_vance.asp The VIE is already having its effect in 'real world' publishing!

GM2 Neat

Tim Stretton has been organizing this gathering, scheduled to take place in France for a week beginning on September 13. The proofs from the printer will then and there be given final inspection. Texts needing updates will go through the usual channels; the others will be printed directly. November delivery is still anticipated.

Patrick Dusoulier has been working out the complex logistics of how to assign GM2 work (22 volumes) to volunteers (17 as of this writing) over time (5 days, or less, depending).

We will also have a chance to discuss launching Wave 2 work which, like Wave 1, will come to fruition in two meetings: GM3 and 4. GM2 will have particular importance as a chance to debrief VIE work so far,

adjust trajectories, and make final plans for the addenda of volume 44.

All are welcome to drop by and get acquainted with fellow project volunteers. The Loire Valley is a wonderful place to visit in September. Trans-Atlantic air-fares are surprisingly economical, and hotels, in the words of Edward Lear, 'are plentiful and cheap'.

Meanwhile, as is, perhaps, right and proper for a bunch of Vancians planning a get-together, there is much e-talk about amenities, though perhaps not:

"Laphroaig or Lagavulin for me, occasionally Talisker, though my 'local' malt would now be Glen Ord. I'll see if I can't bring an *interesting* bottle along."

—Alun Hughes

". . . no one has waxed rhapsodic over any Lowlanders yet. I guess I'll have to bring some Glenkinchie or Auchentoshan, just to round out the assortment."

—Chuck King

"All this talk of uisquebaugh bodes well for the future. I plan to bring a few bottles of champagne myself. If one of the Yanks could bring some real genuine bourbon, I must confess I have a weakness for this satanical drink, with two ice cubes, and enough bourbon to submerge them. . . I'll bring my. . . guitar. That, and a few glasses of Oban, should make for lively evenings. . ."

—Patrick Dusoulier

"Perhaps, in lieu of bourbon, we should have some of that sour mash rye whiskey, which Hilyer referred to as 'nectar of the gods'. . . I will bring [such] a bottle. . . since (a) it's very good, (b) it is the subject of a Vance reference in *Night Lamp*, and (c) I imagine it's tougher to find in Europe—hell, it's pretty obscure here in the States."

—Chuck King

"Why is nobody mentioning Glenmorangie? The Wood Finishes series, of course: 12 years in oak, then port, madeira and sherry barrels for the final years. Well, I'll know what to bring."

—Marcel van Genderen

"My favourite dram is usually Macallan—although I partook of a 21-year-old Springbank last year, which made my tastebuds smile in contented bliss. . . We're going to work really hard at this meeting—who wouldn't, with such incentive to diligence?"

—Library Babe (aka 'ask not how she know things' Linnéa Anglemark)

"I can see we're all getting into the proper *proofing spirit*. . . Hopefully, all this sampling of the various ingenious ways humankind has found to transmute grapes and cereals into near-ambrosia will leave us time enough to look at the blues, while preventing us

from getting them. . . Unless some of us have *le vin triste?*"

—Patrick

"The debate on the merits of the various refreshments has become moribund. Here's how it works:

1. The offerings are deposited in a safe place (let's call it 'Tim's Room') at the beginning of the conclave.

2. I conduct rigorous sample tests on the malts, sour-mash etc. while other members of the party pore over the blues.

3. At the end of GM2 I emerge from my laboratory and announce the most satisfactory tipple.

4. Everyone is allowed a small glass* of the winning libation to ratify my judgement. What could be simpler and more practical?"

—The Margrave (aka Tim Stretton)

"As established methodology requires double blind testing, I'm happy to assist Tim to ensure reliable results. With the large number of samples coming in, the 'blind' part should be no problem at all."

—Rob Gerrand

"Enough worries about fermented grapes and grains. . . do any of you smoke decent cigars? I can only bring in 25, so if there are other smokers, I'll need help."

—Bob Lacovara

"I'm having trouble understanding all this pre-arranged debauchery that will be GM2. Why, at GM1, I let them out of their cells for one hour's exercise each day. Otherwise, they got gruel and old water as the staple, and if they worked until midnight without complaint, I fed them a treat, such as toast and jam, heavens, how lucky they were. I am ashamed, amazed and disgusted to see this party atmosphere for GM2. I assure you, it wouldn't happen if I were overseeing the affair."

—Lodermulch (aka John Foley)

"Lodermulch exaggerates. In fact he provided several styles of gruel: degermed wheat, whole wheat, and what may have been some kind of soy product; and sometimes we were given it warm, with a pat of oleo-margarine. Still, some of us exhibited tastes that may have been too adventurous. One afternoon while our host was napping, a member of our squad picked the lock on the back door and acquired a quantity of road-salt from a sack in the garage, with which we surreptitiously garnished our bowls, thinking to add an extra bit of savor. What a jolly time we had then, laughing behind our hands at our secret! But the salt made us thirsty, and although Lodermulch allowed us generous rations of what he calls *old water*, it had also

*subject to availability

been stored in *old* bottles from France and certain obscure parts of Scotland—21 years old, said one's label!—and I think the water had been tainted by them. At least it had a distinctly different flavor and appearance than the wholesome *sky-blue waters* of my home in Minnesota. Perhaps New Jersey has little fresh water and the folk there are compelled to import it or add preservatives to what they do have.”

—Joel Anderson

“Let's review the situation.

GM1: A hardy, straightened band of individuals, joined by force into a sarissa-laden formation, marching across deserts with Alexandrian fortitude.

GM2: A herd of porcine-cheeked, hungover anarcho-syndicalists, a veritable pack of purple prose-eaters, sharpening their pencils on the wrong ends.

Go, ye, forth to your bottles, and thereby, tread the sorry road to perdition. Alas. Woe.”

—Lodermulch, the latter-day Jeremiah

“What is remarkable is the protean characters of those attending both the Spartan and Epicurean festivals. This may also be the first—and only—occasion on which Paul is characterized as an ‘anarcho-syndicalist’, potentially a life-changing moment . . .”

—The Margrave

“For the unwary, Bob's Rule of Thirds* can be invoked ad infinitum, ad nauseam, Anno Domini and nolo contendere. If applied from a Biblical perspective, one became caught, like Ezekiel, in a hazy dream, the wheels within the wheels. If applied scientifically, it would turn any conversational idea into a fractal. Thus:

-1/3 of the bottle must be spat out upon opening (in a quixotic gesture proving its worth).

-1/3 of the bottle is Bob's.

-1/3 of the bottle is for the rest of you.

Which third of that bottle will be the bad third? You'll see!

Thus, the rule of thirds, a magnificent and flexible philosophy, insinuates its way into *all* matters. Willy-nilly. Hocus-pocus.

Now you may regret bringing all those bottles to France because you'll only sip from the bad third. You will long for the clever strategy—wrongly called ‘Puritan’ by Steve Sherman—employed by me: Cells! Locks! Hardtack!”

—Lodermulch ‘Lowly Cook’ Foley

And then, on a related thread:

“ . . . Bus 1 will have to circle the Eiffel Tower, and

*One third of anything is worthless, one third is average, one third is good.

the Arch of Triumphs . . . does anyone know which model Triumphs are on display there? [The] Paris highways were obviously planned by a Parkinson's sufferer who spilled a bowl of pasta on his drawing board in 1712.”

—Bob Lacovara

“Circling the Eiffel Tower, eh? Depends what radius you'd expect that circle to have . . . I'd feel quite comfortable with 15 kilometers, give or take a few. As long as it keeps me well out of the Paris city center traffic. Oh, and don't forget to bring a sextant for navigational purposes as well as some gyroscopes to stabilize the van in sharp curves . . . as the driver-to-be for this unruly troupe of bottle-brandishing VIE elite: I don't care what manner of liquids you imbibe back there among the cheaper seats, as long as nothing gets spilled onto my person and the level of sloshing liquids remains below the rims of my boots.”

—Koen Vyverman

“Actually, Paris was designed in three phases. First, in the dark ages, St. Genevieve conceived an inextricable maze to confuse the Mongols. Then in the 19th century came Baron Haussman who bulldozed his criss-crossing of famous boulevards down which artillery could control sneekery from one island of maze to another in discouragement of revolutions which French low-lives like to start. Thirdly came the 20th century's faceless technocrats who have put in highways along the winding Seine and a famous belt-way known as the ‘periferique’. The latter is often so clogged that struggling with St. Genevieve's mazes becomes the prudent choice, while the former have, this summer, been covered in sand—and called ‘beaches’—or had cars excluded in favor of rollerbladers, by the new and proudly homosexual ‘mayor’. Another series of interlinked highways, called the ‘francilienne’, ringing Paris at a safe distance, is more like it. Evade the city by the east and south, to join the A10. Tolls, one way, come to about \$40 but the drive can be done in 3 hours *sauf erreur*. In fact the only instructions you really need are: *follow signs to ‘Bordeaux’ until the signs for Chinon*. Amazing at first, but with time you may appreciate this sort of Cartesian paternalism, everywhere operative, less.”

—Paul

“p.s. A few more useful facts. *Chateau* de St. Lounds†* is

*A word with a large meaning; in this case denoting a large decrepit 19th century summer ‘cottage’ of three gables, primitive plumbing and modern heating in two rooms only. Forewarned is forearmed.

†I mentioned red and I mentioned white but when I mentioned rosé, Patrick, speaking of the TI conference, commented: “This cache of ‘nice rosé’ is in the nature of Russian Roulette. We had to open a few bottles, taste each, make a wry face and spit it out, until we hit an excellent bottle, in which I found some slight madeira undertones, most fitting, a bit like the better *Tavels*. I hope we'll play again at this interesting game!”

one of the most famous wines of the chinonais. My cello will be in tune. There is a piano in the salon. I have made a special tool, named Panak, which will frustrate attempts to pass GM2 in either torpor or idleness.

“To get to Chinon by compass simply fare south to the Loire, follow it downstream counting nuclear power plants—unmistakable by reason of mile-high steam clouds. Chinon will be found under the shadow of the second—if the wind is in the northeast.”

Saving the West

John Derbyshire is not sanguine about the prospect. See *Unpleasant Truths*, *National Review* August 2, at: www.nationalreview.com/derbyshire/derbyshire080202.asp

Thanks to David Rose for the link. To say nothing of Jack Vance and the VIE, I would add that Christianity—particularly through the leadership of John Paul II—offers at least Hope. Derbyshire’s insights are of a somewhat ‘Vancian’ type, so here is one sample:

Quality Health Care for All is not Possible

Quality health care is what rich people get. (Actually, according to one of the depressingly tiny number of rich people I know, even they have trouble getting it.) The rest of us must wait on line to be misdiagnosed by ill-trained, paperwork-swamped, litigation-shy doctors, assisted by nurses imported from the less hygienic parts of the Third World, and unionized hospital staff with no-way-you-can-get-me-fired attitudes. This could only change if the U.S.A. devoted her entire Gross National Product to health care; and even then, it probably wouldn't stay changed for long.

Derbyshire discusses many other topics, both more and less dire. Political conservatives, he feels, should not be optimistic but gloomy; I agree but am not, because I am a you-know-what instead of a ‘political conservative’, and you-know-who advises: ‘Dare to hope’. (I hope my detractors will appreciate this effort at self-restraint and concern not to offend ‘tolerance and diversity’—so goes the West. . .)

Book Quality Control

Karl Radtke reported: “I [have received] my copy of *Coup de Grâce*, and have thoroughly enjoyed it. I thought I needed to report to the group that some of the printing (actually the border artwork) on the front cover has worn off prematurely. This is a concern since the first printing of the 44 volumes will commence soon and we would not want the books to have this problem.”

I have noted the same phenomenon on a ‘GV’ (Gift Volume) that I have been carrying around. The ink has worn off the catalogue on the back (exclusively). This

is the first time I have seen this. These covers are not just printed, but stamped; the ink is pressed into the covers by a form, with a pressure great enough to make permanent dents so the ink is in a trough lower than the surface of the paper. Could it be an effect of improper ink (ink for leather rather than paper) or some other mysterious technical problem? Both Karl and my observations concern a single part of the stamping on a given book; could the covers in question have been stamped before the machine was in proper adjustment (not enough pressure)? Our binder is the oldest in Italy and, presumably, the man doing our work, Sr. Biffi their top craftsman, knows his technical stuff. The errors we have been concerned to catch have been our own, and so far these have been the ones we have found. I will bring this wear-away phenomenon to their attention. I suspect, however, that it is in the nature of the beast. Note also that the Deluxe leather, while basically robust, is also aesthetically fragile; the ‘machiata’ effect (the color) will wear away at corners and edges if abraded. This will give the books an agreeable ‘patina’ but those who want to keep them pristine should avoid rough handling of them. The Readers’ spine leather is the same, but the contrast between the ‘machiata’ of the Readers’, and the natural leather color underneath is less dramatic. Since these books are meant to be used hard, and are priced that way, wear-away of ‘machiata’ at the edges of the Readers’ volumes should be regarded as aesthetic augmentation.

Byron Marshall Speaks

Byron Marshall, by now well known to Cosmopolis readers, sent out one of his typically exuberant announcements of Cosmopolis 29 to his e-mail chums, from which the following restatement of the nature and activities of the VIE: “Cosmopolis—an elegant publication edited by Derek Benson—is the newsletter of the mind-staggering Vance Integral Edition project, something that looks as if it could only take place in the age of the Internet, with people—all of them volunteers—all over the world working to produce high quality, well-proofed, standard editions of everything that Vance wrote; much of which, apparently, is out of print; in other cases, the original ms. is lost; and earlier publishers often altered the text, even in one case changing an ending.

“To create this standard edition series, volunteers scan in text, check it and cross-check it and check it again; repeat the process at another stage; run it through spell-checkers and hyphen formula and decide which innovative features were in fact Vance’s intention, which were corruptions, and which were

errors introduced in creating the new digital versions...

"What an impressive project the VIE is, and everyone involved in it deserves kudos and support. I know I'm saving up so I can buy at least the first errata page for the second edition—if I can afford it!"

An interesting view of the project as seen by a non-participant.

Byron also comments to his chums on the censorship question: "It appears that grousing took place to the effect that *Cosmopolis* should not include the wide range of topics that appears in Paul's *Crucible*, and should limit itself to the proper technique for grafting Concord grapes, *Cosmopolis* having apparently been bought up by the Grape Growers Annual, a narrow topic hobbyist's journal. 'Censorship!' cries Paul, and has great fun denouncing such mundanity. He kindly includes a few lines of mine that I sent in, in defense of a broad and unfettered *Universal City*... People should be heartened when free and exciting discussion takes place, *wherever* it does. Especially when it is not balked by the shields declaring off limits the grand topics of metaphysics and human creativity... especially when the English language is used as it was created, and still existed around 1915... and with gifted authors like Vance, continues vigorously to grow."

Byron also makes a threat, which I hope is not only that: "I'm presently about 2/3 of the way into *Night Lamp*. What a dazzling book, but it seems redundant to say that about any work by Vance. I may attempt to persuade the editor of *Cosmopolis* to publish my reaction to *Night Lamp*, as soon as I have finished, and can compose my thoughts, and have collected my wits from the demolition act any Vance book commits on the serene and conventional opinions one has, on anything. I may also submit a few stories (though whether they are 'Vancean' I do not know) to the companion journal of original fiction 'inspired by Vance'."

Till take note!

A Thought about Thought

(Lovers of tolerance and diversity, hide your eyes and stop your ears!)

The trouble with that group known as 'intellectuals' is that they pretend to think, but really do not. Thought means... well, *really* thinking about something; looking at it from all sides, contemplating it, penetrating it. What 'intellectuals' do, and what they teach others to do, is learn a set of formulas which can be laid over undigested facts like a stencil. Vance is a poet, not a thinker per se, but he does not do his thinking with formulas.

An example: some people are absolutely sure that Socialism is good because they think, to put it charitably, that it is 'fun to share'. Others think Capitalism is great because it *produces wealth* and *creates a middle class*. But 'thoughts' like these assume that things like Socialism and Capitalism are, indeed, *things*—like 14 pounds of gravel or two gallons of 87 octane gasoline—that can be contemplated as such, that have some kind of independent existence like Platonic ideas, or that they are dynamic principles, like the force of the sun that drives the winds, or the gravity of sun and moon that generates tides. But 'Socialism' and 'Capitalism' are only formulas that exist exclusively in speech. There is nothing, so far as I can see, corresponding to these words in reality. It is said that they are *ways of organizing society*, but Socialism, obviously, has never existed. You cannot dispossess and enslave a population and thereby make them happy, because such an approach completely misunderstands how people are. Socialism is, therefore, at best, a stupid daydream. Capitalism is supposed to be such things as *the ownership of the means of production by a few*, or *the society built on the accumulation of capital*. But, as far as that goes, such things are described perfectly well by the Greek term Oligarchy, or *rule of the rich*. But, in normal circumstances, when some sort of tyranny is not in effect, the rich always have power out of proportion to their numbers—until, by superior force, they are dispossessed, at which point 'possession of the means of production' passes into other hands, and these new people become the Oligarchs, and nothing has changed, structurally. When 'possession of the means of production' passes into the 'hands' of the 'State' (democratic tyranny), things fall apart because most State employees cannot resist the temptations that sudden control of 'the means of production' offers, and few employees of any kind can resist the temptation of guaranteed employment; so between corruption and sloth...

I just read an opinion of a Catholic thinker, Brent Bosell, to the effect that the particularity of Capitalism is that it replaced the medieval system whereby 'the means of production' (stuff like land, tools, buildings and working capital) that makes producing 'wealth' (things people need or want) possible, was controlled and shared widely through the power of professional guilds, which suppressed competition among their members, excluded competition from outside, and disciplined their members ('quality control'). According to this idea, when the 18th century, with its rise of State power, wrecked the guilds, it was possible for a small group of individuals to take possession of 'the means of production', with a consequent diminution of freedom and augmentation of insecurity for the majority. Bosell thinks the

industrial revolution could have happened just as well under the guild system, which would have insured that a greater number of people participated in the possession of 'the means of production', and that the result would therefore have not been 'Capitalism' but a perpetuation of the 'medieval system'.

Much as I am astonished and delighted by the rest of Bosell's thinking, I find this unconvincing. It is true that the early part of the industrial revolution was, in some places, pretty fierce for the workers, and so on. But the guild system was not all wonderfulness either. It is enough to read *Emphyrio* to get a sense of the abuses it can perpetrate: imposed conformity and stifling protectionism. That the protectionism practiced in Ambroy was organized by the Damarans, who were excluding the humans from the profits generated by their work, changes nothing. The medieval guilds imposed impossible import taxes on the competition and excluded foreign workers, thus stifling regional development (a bad thing?). (This still goes on, as in protectionist measures in favor of this or that industry, like, recently, in favor of American steel to save steel jobs, but on the other hand driving up costs in steel consuming sectors, like cars, making American auto jobs less secure.) The guilds were organized by city, a unit too small to resist the forces that drove the creation of modern States, which went beyond the personal ambition of kings, and included, in particular, the need for protection against massive invasions, such as the Mongols—not every city had a St. Genevieve to protect it! So the creation of the 'Modern State' was inevitable, and good, from that point of view, and it also insured greater prosperity (and consequent augmented security) since in a larger unified country, territories could share things like food and tools more easily, the exchange of which had, before, been hampered by the protectionist tolls and taxes of the protectionist cities and guilds.

Bosell thinks that the defining element of Capitalism is the small number of oligarchs. But what difference does it make whether many people 'own the means of production' or few? The lowly worker, whether apprentice candle maker or bolt-tightening machine technician, will be treated well or badly, depending upon, above all, the character of his boss. If the boss is a sincere Christian he will be treated well. If the boss is a hypocritical Christian, greedy and exploitative, he will be treated badly. Or the workers can 'organize'—into guilds—and negotiate the price of their labor, entering a contest of force with their boss—and the atmosphere in shop, factory or office becomes, at best, one of smoldering strife.

I think Socialism is a term invented by Marxists as a shiny object to attract attention, and 'Capitalism' is nothing more than invective invented by Socialists

(which is what Marxists automatically are) to undermine people's sense of reality. I don't think the Marxists were totally cynical in this, but I don't think they were honest either. They did not examine their motivations to see, and certainly not root out, the underlying nastiness.

Does anything remain of 'Capitalism' once the Socialist tactical element is washed away? Nothing, as far as I can see. There have always been people who, by possession, invention, energy or some other quality—inherited, earned, stolen, deserved or undeserved—have had a handle on 'the means of production', and I do not see that it is possible, or even imaginable that it could be any other way—though it is dreamable, in the way we can float through the air in a dream. Again, the basic point of this Catholic idea I am referring to seems to be that Capitalism is defined by the smallness of the number of people who 'control the means of production'. But, to come at this idea again from a different angle, what possible difference can it make to a given poor individual that he is part of 90% or part of 30%? In the former case he might think he could run a revolution more easily, and in the latter he might get an inferiority complex because it would be harder to blame his condition on someone else, but both ideas are nasty-minded and if he is a Christian he would exclude them. The non-possessors, independently of that proportion of the population they constitute—though dependent upon several other factors some of which could be nobody's fault, like rainfall—might be richer, or poorer, freer, or more enslaved. The only thing that makes a real human difference in this situation, as far as I can see, is Christianity. If the boss is a sincere Christian, if, in other words, he loves obedience to God (consciously or unconsciously) more than he loves himself, he will treat his workers as well as he can—given his intelligence and circumstances. If the workers are likewise sincere Christians they will better bear the faults of the boss (and vice versa) and profit more from his benefactions (if any) in an atmosphere of mutual (if applicable) charity. But charity works, at least spiritually, even in one direction, and if practiced assiduously wears down even demonic solipsism. Life will remain a 'veil of tears' whatever we do—though walking with God is a pretty good idea because he is your shepherd and with him you will have everything you need—see the 23rd Psalm for all the great details!

As for Socialism and Capitalism, Vance has no truck with these formulaic substitutes for thought. He looks at realities only, and teaches us to do the same by example.

Iris Murdoch

I know several people mad about this writer, and as a result I am reading *An Accidental Man*, her 14th novel, published in 1973. It reminds me of the depressing London novels of Huxley, and seems very much in the 'classic', if now degenerated, line of Anglo-American novel writing out of Henry James and E.M. Foster. I have gotten up to page 70, where I find this line:

Sometimes she thought that her own failure to marry Matthew was actually the cause of Austin's marrying Dorina.

The whole thing, so far, is like that. The characters and plot are an intricate mechanism of causes, effects and counter-causes, fudged together with the cheap *sfumato* effect of shoving in lots of 'sometimes's and 'actually's, plus the further layer of Chinese-puzzle type complexity of giving us each character's (distorted) view of the others. This bravura method, which seems to give some people the impression of 'depth', depends on, to me, unacceptable simplifications. It is not that I think humanity is even more complicated than I think Iris Murdoch thinks it is, nor that I think she is wrong about the sort of things that might motivate people, but that she creates what is, in the end, a very tidy closed system, clever and entertaining in its way (if always squalid). The novel as a whole may give a better effect, but the tissue of it, so far, is like a patchwork quilt; pleasing—if it pleases you—intricate two-dimensional decoration. What do you know after you know everything that Iris Murdoch can tell you about the nature of human nature? No more than students of psychology or sociology think they know, which is—once the scientific pretension is cleared away—purely formulaic; *if you pour cause A into person of type B, the result will be C.*

I do not assume that Jack Vance has 'deeper' ideas about humanity than Iris Murdoch, or other such writers. However, writers like Wodehouse or Vance who can seem unserious, give an impression not of a closed system, but of life. The reason, I say, is that they are great artists, and such as Iris Murdoch are not. Take Lugo Teehalt, and his relation to Malagaté's beautiful planet in *The Star King*. Teehalt is a minor character and like so many of Vance's minor characters he is unforgettable because he is *like us*. Without Vance saying a word about it, he gives a fulsome impression—pathetic, hesitant, cringing, but also grandiose and bold, and he is touched with poetry which he communicates to the much dryer, less romanesque character who is Kirth Gersen (talk about 'character development'). Though Lugo Teehalt fills a proper place in the plot of *The Star King* he is no mere

cog in a mechanism, but seems to us to extend, in himself, out to infinity.

James' *Sacred Fount* is a book that may have impressed Iris Murdoch and, given what I take to be her artistic insufficiency, been a negative influence. James, like Vance, is interested in mysterious phenomena. The 'sacred fount' of the book is love, or marriage, by the intimacy of which lost youth, for example, can be regained. James presents several couples who show the effect, and one in particular where an intelligent older person marries a younger person and the qualities of youth and intelligence are exchanged; the older person becomes more youthful, and the younger one seems more aged but gains intelligence. Presented in *précis*, as here, the idea seems abstract and mechanical, which in itself it is. But James keeps it full of life by the artistic effect of open-endedness. Such examples are tempting to lesser artists because they seem to offer an easy way, a formula, which can be extended to all aspects of novel writing, and I get the impression that Iris Murdoch's characters are elements of a pattern where, if one thing is shifted, all change in orderly sequence, like a geometrical kaleidoscope. To put it another way, they are like dolls being played with by a little girl (*here is the mommy, and here is the daddy; the daddy comes home from work, and here are the children. . .*) grown up into a novelist (*Sometimes she thought that her own failure to marry Matthew was actually the cause of Austin's marrying Dorina.*).

I will give a further report when I have finished the book.



About the CLS

by Till Noever

Cosmopolis Literary Supplement 15 is being published concurrent with this issue of Cosmopolis; thanks to the timely intervention of Malcolm Bowers, who has just been appointed CLS composer—until such time as he's had enough of it! CLS 15 will be a tad thin, with just more *Coralia* and a couple of letters, but it's better than nothing.



Letters to the Editor

To the Editor,

I can never leave well enough alone and the way to hell is paved with good intentions. I was going to leave Rhoads alone but, given the various attempts at censorship, I can't.

Rhoads “do[es] not doubt that [the statistics on the rich and poor] are as distorted as Brian Gharst points out.” Whoever the pointing gentleman is, the statistics emanate from the Federal Government whom I have trouble seeing as an instrument of the poor. But then, of course, Rhoads would agree with Avelis’ own throwaway edict that “society [...] is yielding to egalitarianism more and more every day”.

Regarding Rhoads’ “a growing gap between rich and poor does not mean that the poor are getting poorer; they could simply be getting richer more slowly than the ‘rich’. But, after all, what if, while the rich get richer the poor really are getting poorer? It is certainly too bad that the poor should become poorer, but why is this assumed to be related to the growing riches of the rich? The connection is completely obscure, except to minds dominated by Marxist ideas”, and while he is a conservative, I am just a total believer in the Laws of Conservation.

For example, when I started to teach at Community College of Philadelphia, in 1966, my salary was \$7,500. Taking into account an official inflation factor of 5.56, this would be equivalent to \$41,700 today. Today, my salary is \$72,118. This is a 9.62 factor. So, I will admit—mostly for the sake of the argument though—to being paid more today than when I started. But starting salaries at CCP are now around \$32,000! While this is only anecdotal evidence, it certainly does not contradict the Laws of Conservation and, indeed, an analysis of all salaries at CCP over the years has shown that my salary has increased at the expense of the more junior faculty.

The reason I have no interest in throwaway edicts is that I am only interested in thinking that goes *logically* from well-specified premises to the claimed conclusions. I think that this is the difference between, say, fiction and non-fiction.

All this being said, I must reiterate, as forcefully as possible, that I cannot possibly agree with, say, Mr. Gerrand’s “can Paul please turn his massive intellect to the things we have in common, whether religious, political or literary, rather than to the things that divide us”. Mr. Gerrand, *please*, leave it to Rhoads to decide what he wants to *write*. *You* need only *not read* it. As for myself, I am holding on to my option to Rhoads’ edition of his Complete Writings. *I will just have to sift through*. And *that*, Mr. Gerrand, is as it should indeed be or else *you* might wind up, one day, being censored.

Regards,

Alain Schremmer



To the Editor,

Just a brief note to lend my unequivocal support for Paul’s recent notes on censorship and free—and, if so desired, vigorous—expression of one’s opinions.

There are limits to what’s tolerable, but Paul for one has never stepped over these. That some apparently find his writings offensive is not his but their problem. If, as Paul’s last epistle implies, they indeed choose to express their thoughts personally and ‘privately’—choosing refuge in ‘netiquette’, instead of having the courage of their convictions and making them as public as Paul makes his—the only suitable adjective to attach to them is ‘cowardly’.

Human society and its development and health depends critically on free expression of opinion and debate, a fact of which the writers of the American Constitution were very much aware (Amendment 1: “Congress shall make no law [...] abridging the freedom of speech [...]”); and though excesses will occur as a result, this, alas, is a price we must pay. The other ‘price’ is that we’re all going to be exposed to opinions other than our own. And what’s wrong with that?

I’m one of those folks who will disagree with Paul on just about every religious issue he brings up, and on many social ones as well—though there are some interesting overlaps. As a result I’ve copped some hefty verbal flak from Paul, as well as from some of those aligning themselves with his position, especially as far as religion is concerned. Some of ‘those’ have behaved with a distinct lack of grace, occasionally drifting into self-indulgent intemperance and loutishness. Still, to paraphrase my friend Malcolm Bowers: louts will continue to be born and there’s no helping it.

However, the ill-mannered antics of these folks fade into insignificance when compared to those who set themselves up as adjudicators of what ought to be published and what should be suppressed. The latter rank somewhere next to child molesters and terrorists. Members of these groups also depend for their continued existence on suppression of the free flow of information. So, I say to Paul: expose them for all to see, and feel free to attach their names! Then let’s all watch them scuttle back under their rocks.

On another matter. While proofing this issue of *Cosmopolis* I came across a gem entitled *A Dying World*, by PWR. It’s one of those pieces of writing that makes *Cosmopolis* into something ‘different’. I have proofed this magazine for a while now, and there is, for the proofer who doesn’t have the luxury of being able to ‘skim’, a lot of skimmable material here: like treatises on French politics and religion, and ‘letters’ that go on and on and on. But a piece like *A Dying World* makes up for all of that, and more. It is sad and poignant and insightful all at once, revealing not only the subject matter, but also the true depth of the writer.

The piece may have touched me more than expected, because I spent a significant part of my childhood and teens in Galicia and Asturias, provinces

of northern Spain, and the men Paul describes very much resemble those I remember; and their fate also has a haunting ring, only that here it wasn't tractors and all they represent, but 'Europeanization'—which was just beginning in the 70s, with the advent of the 'guest worker' phenomenon. It killed their style of life just as surely as the drive for industrial efficiency on the land did it for Gabriel.

Not that I object to Europeanization as a goal: if nothing else it will guarantee that no more wars will be fought between the nations on that continent. But the price is high—sometimes maybe too high?—and it is, *inter alia*, the likes of Gabriel who get mangled in the process.

*Regards,
Till Noever*



To the Editor,

Mr. Rhoads does a very dubious favor to Solzhenitsyn, unwittingly praising him by quoting Tvardovsky, one of the most obsequious apologists of the Soviet censorship. [The Tvardovsky quote and comments were e-mailed from Dave Reitsema, reprinted by Paul in last issue's *Crucible*—Ed.] Tvardovsky's terrible versifications were as ubiquitous in Soviet newspapers and elementary schools as Communist party slogans. Which brings me straight to the point: what Mr. Rhoads can possibly understand about censorship?

I supported Mr. Rhoads in the past. Being honest to myself, I cannot support him any more. After reading, time and time again, what he allows himself to say in *Cosmopolis*, I withdraw everything I wrote in his defense, publicly or privately. Enough is enough.

It wouldn't do any good to try to explain to Mr. Rhoads the definition of censorship, and how it is different from editor's discretion. Every magazine, every newspaper in the world has an editor who limits the content and the size of material printed in his publication, according to his own view of topical propriety and good taste. Otherwise, no publication would exist, for it would inevitably scare off all possible readers. Mr. Rhoads doesn't know this. For him, freedom of speech means that he has a right to bore anybody, for any length of time, with any subject he chooses to expatiate upon, regardless of the degree of its connection with the publication's stated goals.

It wouldn't do any good to appeal to Mr. Rhoads' temperance or taste: he obviously has none. It is futile to bring forward any rational critique, amicably or otherwise, of his incessant self-aggrandizement, his shameless using of the VIE project in general (and of *Cosmopolis* in particular) as a personal propaganda vehicle, his cowardly habit to evade lucid questions by distorting the opponent's words and changing the

subject: a born-again flat-earther, he is far beyond reason. Virulent, obsessed with conspiracy theories, spitting out ambiguous insults resembling Saddam Hussein's speeches, this unemployed dictator-illustrator threatens to excommunicate himself from the VIE project if the size or the content of his infantile stultiloquence should be limited in any way. Proud 'high-level volunteers' are trembling in cold sweat. I, for one, would be relieved: Vance's books would be safe from the Vatican's 'editing'. Leave, Mr. Rhoads, by all means!

How did it come to this? Who is responsible? Not Mr. Rhoads, for he doesn't know what responsibility is. The grown-ups who fail to discipline him? The successive editors of *Cosmopolis*? Definitely! These people should have established, from the beginning, the strict set of rules defining the topical content of their publication, and the maximum size of the materials submitted, as is done in every periodical on our planet. However, they bent under Mr. Rhoads' hysterical demands, gave in to his paranoid tantrums, stood helplessly aside while he literally flooded us with amateurish cultural and historical nonsense, with unsolicited religious proselytizing, with a canonical, indisputable, uniquely true version of 'Jack Vance according to St. Paul the Secondary'.

I know what to do. I will use Mr. Rhoads' own definition of freedom of speech, and turn it against him. For the next issue of *Cosmopolis* I will submit my father's fundamental work on elementary particle physics (400 pages, in my own excellent translation from Russian), lavishly illustrated with hard-core teen porno photographs. Surely, quantum mechanics is closely related to Jack Vance's works: both touch upon virtually everything in life. Surely, size cannot be a problem: Mr. Rhoads has wasted much more electronic paper. And surely, hard-core pornography cannot insult an innocent nun more than Mr. Rhoads' religious blague insults my intelligence. So, be prepared: next 'Comsomopaulice' will be thick, sapid, and meaty!

*Sincerely,
The Obstreperous Free-Vancer,
Alexander Feht*



To the Editor,

In reply to:

Alain Schremmer: why discount 'throwaway edicts'? Are they not useful shorthand in a letters-to-the-editor section of a publication like *Cosmopolis* where it would be cumbersome to inflict actual treatises upon each other? Regarding *your* slyly injected edict; *property is, indeed, theft*; at least that is the premise of *The Domains of Koryphon* and a proposition—properly understood—impossible, in my opinion, to dispute. As for citing Sen out of context, as

you note I pretended to do nothing else and continue to hope for public guidance for further perusals of this *rebarbative* book and the unpleasant, to me, thesis which it seems to advocate. Please retrieve your towel.

John Rappel: I am glad to learn more about your understanding of your position; your restated question, however, is different than the one I responded to. The original included a second sentence (see *Cosmopolis 27*, at the end of your letter):

“What is it about Christianity which makes the evidence for it more compelling than the evidence for Islam or Mormonism to any objective observer? *And if there is nothing, does it not seem more reasonable to reject all three rather than embrace one?*”

The point I was struggling to make was a very limited one; simply that there *is* evidence in favor of Christianity, and it has the same status, as such, as any other evidence. Meanwhile, and notwithstanding a careful reading of your letter, I remain with the impression that you are uninterested in the evidence regarding the objective truth of Christianity—concerning which, in any case, you do not clearly ask for a discussion. If you are correct that such evidence, for or against, can have no effect on a mind polluted by faith—which is how I read you—one wonders why you bother approaching *me* about this, unless it is to trick me into making a spectacle of myself by provoking a public display of, according to your logic, necessarily irrational attempts at ‘reasoning’, as part of a clever campaign to educate the public? Since this public is already, in the majority, on your side, my bemusement is all the greater. Be this as it may, and overlooking everything but your inviting insistence, I will, as briefly as possible, respond to the short version of the question which, as far as I can see, touches only the problem of evidence regarding the *relative truth* of Christianity and Islam (I set Mormonism aside both for brevity and because, in regard to the problem of evidence in a structural sense, it is similar to Islam).

In your letter to *Cosmopolis 27* you emphasized textual questions such as historical authorship of the sacred texts, and since, as you seem to pretend, the textual trail is clearer in the case of Islam, this seemed to suggest to you a higher evidential status for the latter. But this issue does not touch the basic question, because clarity concerning authorship has nothing to do with the relative truth of the documents. Given statements are true or they are not true, whomever wrote them; do you not agree? And even if it were demonstrated that St. Matthew really did write the Gospel of St. Matthew (why doubt it?) could he not have been fibbing all the way? Let us therefore, at least provisionally, take the texts as we find them, and see what is what. We must leave aside, of course,

larger questions such as whether or not God exists or whether or not religion, as such, is ‘valid’—if God does not exist, these texts are reduced to nonsense from end to end, whoever wrote them. Therefore, contrasting the Gospels to the Koran in the briefest possible way, we can make the following points:

Point 1: Both the Gospels and the Koran pretend to communicate true things about God and, in particular, information regarding his interactions with Man, through such allegedly historical people as John the Baptist, the Virgin Mary, Joseph, Jesus, Peter, Mary Magdalen, Paul etc. on the one hand, and Mohammed on the other.

Point 2: The Gospels assert that Jesus is the Son of God, and that our souls are saved through belief in him and adherence to his Commandments (the two being reciprocal, belief making obedience possible through grace), that he takes away our guilt by sacrifice (of himself on the cross), that we are cleansed of sin by his sacred blood or, at the most basic level, gratitude for his benefaction—and other such spiritual things.

Point 3: Mohammed, author of the Koran, several centuries later, does not contradict the Bible (both Old and New Testaments) on most basic points. Regarding Jesus, however, Mohammed teaches that, though he was not the Son of God he was a great prophet (thus basically endorsing Jesus’ moral doctrines) but that he, Mohammed, is the greatest, and final, prophet of God. While the Gospels, unlike Genesis or the Wisdom books, are strictly accounts of certain alleged historical events purported to have occurred in the Middle East in the first half of the first century, I have it on good authority (certain Arab scholars) that the Koran is a 360 degree magpie galamophry of Jewish, Christian, and Arab animist religious elements, all rife in the Arabian peninsula at the time, so that the Koran, theologically speaking, is a sort of throw-together counter-bible. However this may be, the Koran agrees with the Bible regarding such things as the origin of the universe (the work of a creator God) and the necessity to human life, from—to mention only this aspect—a moral standpoint of submission to God’s will and, in particular or at least in broad outline, to his interdictions upon theft, prevarication, faithlessness in marriage, envy and murder.

Point 4: Regarding Jesus himself, excepting the single occasion he used a whip—and then only to chase a few dozen people out of a certain building—he carried no weapons and led no army, but amazed and confounded friend and enemy alike with words that remain astonishing, including the ‘Sermon on the Mount’, generally considered the most striking moral statement of all time from the point of view of brevity and importance. He then, in the most mysterious act in all human history, allowed himself to be crucified by

his enemies and was resurrected three days later, appearing to Mary Magdalen, the disciples and the travellers to Emmaus.

Note: the evidence I am presenting is of the type known as 'internal'. It concerns, again, not the truth status in an absolute sense, but the *relative credibility*, of Christianity and Islam, which is the substance of your question, in its short version.

Point 5: Now, what is your *objective observer* to think when he sees that Mohammed—by contrast to Jesus—who is, on his own say-so, both the greatest prophet *and* the author of the Koran, began as a brigand, became a great war lord and can ultimately be termed a 'pro-Arab expansionist military and political leader', that he was an accessory to massacre—notably, on one famous occasion, of 900 Jews—as well as massive enslavements; and finally, as if all that were not enough, in the manner of both Joseph Smith and Henry VIII, used his status as supreme religious leader to legitimize his eventual polygamy? (Jesus, of course, remained celibate; note his famous 'noli-me-tangere' to Mary Magdalen.) The *objective observer* may also note that Islam served the aggrandizing military designs of its founder by making his followers regard him not merely as a good chief, but as the very mouth-piece of God, who promised them special rewards for death in battle—specifically the personal attentions of 70 *houris* in paradise, a feature of Islam that is still highly functional, with, for example, the Palestinian suicide bombers. Finally it may be mentioned that Mohammed's most noted skill was not such things as moral discourse but division of spoils to the satisfaction of all clans and retainers—contrast, to take but one example, Jesus feeding the multitude, which tagged after him, with a few loaves and a couple of fish. Jesus then escaped from them.

I leave it to you to think through the consequences of these points of evidence with regard to the relative truth of Christianity and Islam. My own conclusion, which I offer without argument, would be: *Christianity is a genuine spiritual phenomenon, Islam is a rip-off scam, its only value being in the scraps it retains of Judaism and Christianity*. Do you agree, and if not, why not?

I will not address your contention that, to restate it as I understand its essence, *men of faith are incapable of reason*, except to assure you that, *au contraire*, I do not misunderstand it, deliberately or otherwise.

Should it turn out that you have not stated your question to your own satisfaction, that, in other words, you would have preferred that I address the problem of evidence as it relates to the *objective truth* of Christianity—in other words the problem of the *relative truth of Christianity and atheism*, the implication of your question in its longer version, as I read it—I stand ready to do so, but only if expressly invited, in

which case you will continue to share with me the blame, and censure, for the appearance of such matters in *Cosmopolis*.

Do not be ironic in this serious matter. If you are in fact uninterested in such explanations, please do not ask for them. I assure you that I am not avoiding or dodging. The evidence in favor of Christianity is abundant and even overwhelming and there is a long tradition of its presentation, including Augustine and Aquinas. I am a very humble scion of this tradition, but *I am* one, and stand ready to do my duty.

David B. Williams: I was well aware that Brooks Peck implied Vance's plotting used to be superior, and even stated as much: *Peck implies that only now is Vance losing his grip on plot, but similar complaints have been made for decades*. Apparently it was not clear enough that I was referring not to his opinion but the opinion of many other critics. Peck's critical powers seemed too flimsy to bother with, other than as a sorry example of what one science fiction periodical is producing in that line.

As for *Ports of Call*, as I have stated elsewhere (notably in the soon to appear preface to the Science Fiction Volume) Vance's story construction cannot be judged by ordinary standards. He is not the only such writer. The apparent incoherence of the narrative of Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier* confused some readers in the 1910s who were not used to that type of organization, but relating a story completely out of order, with internal contradictions, has now become something we can understand and savor. Likewise, Virginia Wolff's *To the Lighthouse*, with its unprecedented subjectivity and disconnected, apparently hazy and ambiguous storyline is also, now at least, regarded as a legitimate innovation. So we should be open to Vance's way, and not judge by standards that may be inappropriate to him. *Ports of Call* is not *The Aristotelian Adventures of Myron Tany*. It is, I say, a meditation on mortality. In the beginning we meet a young boy who is confronted with life choices; Vance presents this in a way to emphasize not the possibilities that thereby open up but the possibilities that thereby close down. We are then treated to an aging woman's hysterical attempts to recapture her fading youth. Following this introduction to the basic theme come a suite of episodes centered on various characters, such as Wingo the poet cook, which, both individually and collectively, shed new light on the question of death. *Lurulu* may, or may not, reintroduce Marko Fassig but, given what Vance has mentioned about it to me, the work expands into the larger theme of our mortal quest. Let those who have eyes . . .

Rob Gerrand: I *have* stopped to think about how many VIE subscribers might be Muslims, and though I have done no racial profiling among our name lists (I'll have to remember to do so) I believe the number is

zero—a point in favor of Huntington’s ‘clash of civilizations’ thesis, and a figure I would be gratified to see corrected upwards. Anyway, I don’t see how a Muslim could possibly be scandalized by a Catholic who thinks his religion is demonic! This would not only be a situation familiar to him, but even an historically venerable, as well as reciprocal, opinion—which obviously does not exclude personal respect, such as between the great Saladin and the Crusaders. The people I *know* will be offended by such definite statements are PC ‘tolerance’ bugs, whom I delight in provoking—at a safe distance only!—particularly as I thereby do them a good turn: they need loosening up!

In regard to your own atheism and your friendship with the Pope; if you were a *militant atheist*, which is not the same thing as an *atheist*, you would not have shaken John Paul II’s offered hand, you would have spit on it. The militant atheists do not mind being direct and even rough with Christians—to say nothing of slaughtering them as they are busy doing *right now* in China and other places—and I do not object to their being so because I understand their nature; it is useless to object that a wasp will sting. I, in turn, am direct with them. To mix some metaphors: if they can’t take what they dish out they can grab their balls and go home. Meanwhile, as far as I am concerned, they are perfectly welcome in the pages of *Cosmopolis*.

As for whether Jack Vance is, or is not, a science fiction writer, I will *repeat*, first; this issue is a matter of total indifference to me, excepting in how it impacts Vance’s reputation with people who have not read him. I continue to come across prejudice against Vance, meaning refusal to even sample him, because of his genre classification. It may not be important to others, but it is important to me to help these people to Vance by offering what I think is a correct definition of the nature of his work. Second; Vance himself has made the following statement to me and others: “I am not a science fiction writer.” This statement was made with a certain heat. Thirdly, what the heck do Vance readers, or *Cosmopolis* readers, care whether or not someone tries to separate Vance from the SF genre? Is it because they are Vance fans?—and if so, what does their concern with SF have to do with their love of Vance? Or because they are SF fans?—in which case what does their love of Vance have to do with it? Does SF, by some mysterious thread, depend on Vance? Glancing at the state of the genre this would seem a difficult assertion to defend. You will agree, will you not, that the SF genre and the writer Jack Vance are separate phenomena? I have never claimed that there is no relation between the two, but unless people are confounding them to an extent that seems irrational to me, I fail to see why anyone should object if they are treated separately and therefore even opposed to each

other at certain points. What if I said that Aldous Huxley was ‘not a science fiction writer in essence’; would anyone object? Would I be wrong? What of *Antic Hay*, *Chrome Yellow* or *Point Counter Point*? As for the publishers, who are largely responsible for the association, they themselves are separating Vance from SF as well; they fail to publish him in the SF genre by failing to publish him. Why not complain to them? They are in a position of force, I am not.

In regard to H.G. Wells, Vance himself, in the interview cited in *Cosmopolis* 28, opines that Wells did not write science fiction but social commentary. This may or may not be correct but, as far as I know, it has caused no readers of that interview to write indignant complaints to Vance. Why only pick on poor little me?

Finally, in regard to turning my ‘massive’, not to say ponderous, ‘intellect’, away from things that divide us; since we (*Cosmopolis* readers) seem to disagree about almost everything except, so far as I can tell, interest in Vance—a fact, as has been noted, greatly to his credit—this would seem to eliminate *all* topics, to say nothing of reducing *Cosmopolis* to a starvation diet and to encourage suspicious and jealous refusal to share new, surprising or controversial insights. However, since my own particular interest in Vance—inevitably and naturally my basic reference as a *Cosmopolis* contributor—is the only thing I write about, with fallout discussions in various directions, I fail to see what more, or less, I can do in this regard.

I am gratified you engage my opinions, but I wish you would complain about them on grounds other than their alleged power to alienate. *Cosmopolis* readership, as well as subscriber numbers, as far as I can tell, seems to always be growing. Is this *in spite* of me, and if so, how do you know? See you at GM2!

Paul Rhoads



To the Editor,

I have followed the progress of the VIE project with keen interest. As someone whose life has been considerably enriched by Jack Vance, any attempt to bring his writing to a wider audience would always be fine with me.

The first part of this massive undertaking now seems to be on the point of completion. Vance’s texts have been thoroughly reviewed, revised and restored. This has been done using new and sophisticated techniques, many of which have been devised by members of the project. Following the various reports in *Cosmopolis*, it’s clear that much more violence had been done to Vance’s texts than most of us would have thought, and that this went much further than ‘details’ of grammar or punctuation. Vance’s language, plots, characterizations, intent . . . all have suffered.

Projects like this only work through the intelligent cooperation of large numbers of contributors over an extended period of time. Even so, no one who knows even a little about the VIE project can believe it would have come this far without Paul Rhoads. Though others have also made unique contributions, the fact is that the project would never have come into being without Paul's creative vision.

The VIE, however, it seems to me, is only part of Paul's vision. The VIE project was born from a conviction as to the artistic merit of Vance's writing, and its place in the larger intellectual and cultural landscape. It is this broadness of vision, insight and understanding which, for me, makes Paul's essays and contributions to *Cosmopolis* so valuable, instructive, and entertaining.

I am surprised therefore that so many people, in *Cosmopolis* and on the VIE Discussion Board, complain and protest at Paul's contributions. These criticisms fall into two categories. On the one hand, any attempt to compare Vance with the great names in the literary canon are immediately ridiculed. Vance may be a great fantasist, but his plots and characters are flimsy and it is absurd to think they will survive the test of time. There is a contradiction in this criticism which I frankly don't understand, as it is a view most usually espoused by those who clearly have enjoyed Vance's work to a high degree, far more than any other author, and often have been moved by their Vance reading experience to essay some artistic creation of their own—in the form of pastiche stories, web sites etc. etc. It is as if they feel threatened by the thought that Vance may not be 'theirs' but belong to some alien pantheon from which they feel excluded. . . .

The other criticism is one I find more invidious. It rebukes Paul for his forays into economic or political analysis and refuses to acknowledge his comments on religion, culture, or art as in any way relevant to the VIE, *Cosmopolis*, or Vance himself. They assert that he is harming Vance by association.

What do these people think Vance is writing about?

If they can only enjoy his books on the level of well-written adventure stories, well, so be it. But they should not let this narrowness of vision or understanding censure the analysis of someone who can see beyond their horizons.

I would never insult Vance by saying that his books are mere allegories, in the style of those odious nineteenth century religious tracts for children which were intended to make them good through the example of fictional characters. Or that they espouse a particular political or social view of man and his world. What I do know, is that his work is suffused by a deep, discerning knowledge of what it is to be a human being, of what is good and what is bad, of what

can be allowed and what must not be condoned. And I know that he does this superbly well in an idiom which makes him more accessible to many more people than will ever read *The Brothers Karamazov*, and be moved to fresh knowledge of themselves by Dostoevsky's tale. He uses the science fiction and fantasy modes to make us examine parts of the human condition insufficiently addressed in better known literary fiction.

Disagree with Paul Rhoads if you must, and surely he gives us all plenty of opportunities for genuine disagreement. But do not stifle the discussion itself, or the scope of topics to be raised.

Paul's contributions invite us to participate in an intelligent, wide-ranging debate on a whole raft of issues legitimately derived from a consideration of Vance's creations. I for one am grateful to him for taking critical appreciation of Jack Vance to an altogether higher, more interesting, and more insightful level than ever existed before.

Arthur Cunningham

York

August 2002



Closing Words

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Derek W. Benson, Editor

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