
COSMOPOLIS

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March 2000

Keeping the Gate

On February 4 of this year, I received mail from Paul Rhoads, asking me if I were interested in joining *VIE* management. I answered with a hesitant “yes”; hesitant, because I was standing in a different line when management skills were passed out. He responded that he had the “gatekeeper” function in mind, a job that had previously been done by him, as well as Mike Berro, Suan Yong, and now Tim Stretton, whose function as head of the proofreading team was keeping him busy enough, thank you. I accepted.

So from that day, I have been the human being on the other side of subscribe@vanceintegral.com and volunteer@vanceintegral.com, the first person to get the good news that another discerning reader has thrown his lot in with the *VIE* or offered to assist in its realization. I have received mail from Europe (Scandinavia and the Netherlands), North America (including the LA suburb I grew up in), Australia and Asia, all united by the common thread of admiration for the work of Jack Vance. Many of you have said that you consider the project long overdue and a fitting tribute to an exceptional author. Many of you have spontaneously expounded on your experience of his work, sometimes at considerable length, and I have read those with great pleasure. On a couple of occasions, I was so delighted that I passed them on to the rest of *VIE* management.

In particular, I was surprised by how many of you have come to your appreciation of Jack Vance’s work by reading it in your own languages. It will never cease to amaze me that a writer whose work is so strongly characterized by the grace and originality with which he uses the English language is if anything more widely appreciated by those who read that work in translation.

But my favorite is the one that follows in its entirety, from Jeff Ruszczuk of Potomac Falls, Virginia:

Please sign me up for one copy of the VIE...my sequin-hoarding begins ;-)

Cheers,

Jeff

“This is preposterous! Must we welcome each scoundrel of time into our midst, to satiate himself on our good things, meanwhile perverting our customs?”

Jack Vance, Rhalto the Marvellous

When Bob Lacovara asked me to write this article, I immediately asked Jeff’s permission to quote him. This was his response:

I’m flattered...please quote whatever you like, with full attribution.

After all, I’m proud of my Vance geekness ;-)

Of course, the gatekeeper isn’t simply there to sign people up and pass them on to the webmasters and team leaders. A certain amount of time is spent answering questions that many of you have about various aspects of the *VIE*. Often the answer is available on the web site and I can satisfy the questioner simply by pointing him or her at a URL. The web site is, after all, more authoritative than I am.

Sometimes a bit more verbiage is required. A number of people wrote to wonder what will happen with new subscribers, now that the magic number of 200 has been reached. Of course, I responded that 200 was the *minimum* number of subscribers needed for the *VIE* to become a reality. (Some people thought that 200 sets was the *maximum* number.) The maximum number of sets will probably be 600, but this is not yet firmly established; I understand that copyright considerations will come into play.

Others have wondered if their location was an obstacle to their functioning as volunteers. My response is that we are located all around the world, and if we can be said to be anywhere, it is the Internet. I myself am in Munich, others in management are in France, Great Britain, Germany, and scattered across the United States. Follow the “Where We Are” link on the main page, and you’ll see that our volunteers span the globe.

A few have asked about our electronic tools, and I have responded by telling them a bit about my own proofreading methodology, as well as pointing them to the directive on the web site (you do all know about that, don't you? Go to <http://www.users.uswest.net/~jschwab/textentry.html>, and download *directive.pdf*).

In summary, I have enjoyed being the gatekeeper hugely. The interactions with you subscribers and volunteers have been immensely gratifying and the opportunity to work with the management team is irreplaceable. In my more than 30 years in the data processing industry, I have worked on any number of collaborative projects, and I can honestly say that none has been as collegial as the *VIE*.

Finally, I'd like to make a request. I encourage any of you, subscribers, volunteers or other friends of the *VIE* to turn to me with any questions you may have that are not directly concerned with your work in one of the teams. But please don't write to my company email address, rather direct your mail to the addresses at vanceintegral.com, either "subscribe" or "volunteer". There are two reasons for this: first, I have my mail client set up to redirect postings to those addresses into a special directory, which simplifies processing. Second, if for any reason the gatekeeper function devolves on another volunteer (as it will for six weeks in May and June, when I'm on vacation), your mail will not languish in my inbox until I return, but will be redirected to the volunteer who is filling in for me.

Steve Sherman, Gatekeeper

A Report from the Treasurer

The documents for the establishment of the *VIE* as a California nonprofit corporation were executed during the "work festival," as previously reported in *Cosmopolis*. These documents have been filed with the appropriate California agencies, and issuance of the state's corporate certification is in process. As soon as the necessary documents are received from the state, we will open a corporate account for deposit of *VIE* funds, including the Paul Allen foundation grant, and further reports will ensue.

Ed Winskill, *VIE* Corporate Treasurer

Statistics

Current *VIE* Progress as of March 21st, 2000

TOTAL NUMBER OF STORIES IN <i>VIE</i>	133
Assigned for digitization	129
Digitized	101
Assigned for 1st proof reading	98
1st proof completed	68
Assigned for 2nd proof	15
2nd proof completed	7
Assigned for correction:	6

John A. Schwab, Text-Entry Coordinator

Proofreading Update

The pre-proofing stage continues apace with over 2.4 million words now proofread by volunteers. The number of proofing assignments completed now stands at seventy-five. Those proof-readers who have been active since the start of the project have managed to proof some impressive quantities. Those who have proofread over 100,000 words to date are:

PROOFREADER	COMPLETED ASSIGNMENTS	K WORDS PROOFED
Steve Sherman	6	360
Michel Bazin	3	180
Patrick Dusoulier	7	164
Rob Friefeld	6	151
Bob Lacovara	5	115
Tim Stretton	2	109
Ron Chernich	5	109
Evert Jan de Groot	3	107
Till Noever	2	105

The ranks of the Hundred Thousand Club are unlikely to be swelled for a while – at this stage I'm still trying to make sure that everybody has had at least one job to do. If you are

available for proofreading but haven't yet had an assignment, click on this link and let me know: tim.stretton@bigfoot.com. I can't promise an immediate assignment, but I can guarantee that you will be given priority as new tasks come in.

Thanks again to you all for keeping the wheels of the project oiled.

Tim Stretton, Proofreading Lead

Textual Integrity Status Report

There are some new TI web pages accessible via <http://www.vietexts.btinternet.co.uk/tihome.html>. As you will see, work remains to be done on them but I hope that over time this will become a collaborative rather than a solo effort. When you read this, the TI work should have started in earnest: there are just a few technical details (to do with how we record the work) to be sorted out. We'll be starting with those texts where we already have good evidence – i.e., where the publication history is uncomplicated and the manuscript evidence clear – and moving on to the harder stuff later. I'd still have some hopes that we might turn up manuscript evidence for some of the most difficult texts – these include *Big Planet*, *Gold and Iron*, *Crusade to Maxus*, *The Dragon Masters*, and others. If any readers of *Cosmopolis* have leads to manuscripts not in the Mugar Library or Vance collections, please let me know.

Volunteers for the TI team are still solicited. If you already volunteered – even did the *Emphyrio* group-read! – and have heard from me, do not be surprised if you don't hear again immediately; each assignment will be the result of negotiation with the TI worker, and it will take a while to get through the list even for the first round. If you haven't heard, or are a new volunteer, please get in touch.

Even those of you who are not TI volunteers can still help. There will be – not yet, but it's coming – a page on the TI site where I will list questions that anyone can answer, especially if you have the right editions to hand. Keep looking for a chance to get your name in the *VIE* – somewhere ... Here's a starter: would someone with access to the Underwood-Miller and NEL editions of *The Dark Side of the Moon* undertake a representative sample comparison and confirm (or not) that

they can be assumed to be essentially the same text (typographical errors excluded)?

There'll be a TI update in each issue of *Cosmopolis* from now on. There is some fascinating work to be done, though I confess to some nervousness, bordering on panic, as to the scale of the job ...

In the next issue of *Cosmopolis*: **will the texts really look different after TI?**, and the policy on library donations.

Alun Hughes, Textual Integrity Lead

Publicity

Publicity for the *VIE* will occur in three phases. Phase one, spreading the word in the science fiction community, is well advanced. Here is an update on what has been accomplished in phase one. Letters have been sent to the editors and book reviewers of all the major science fiction magazines – *Analog*, *Asimov's*, *F&SF*. Also to smaller publications like *Aboriginal Science Fiction*, etc. and finally to magazines such as *Science Fiction Age*.

After this mailing, I shifted to the Internet. I had found the URLs of 25 to 30 sites from the magazines. Each hit led to another 25 to 30 addresses. *Science Fiction Weekly*, *Locus*, *Interzone*, *SciFi.com*, *SFFnet*, *SF site* and on and on. The initial sites led to hundreds of other SF web sites. This phase one work will continue as we move to phase two about which there will be a notice in the next *Cosmopolis*. In brief it will be to publicize the project in the mainstream media.

What has been accomplished so far:

Science Fiction Age mentioned the *VIE* in their Internet column. SF site will publish an interview with Jack Vance soon. Interzone published the email I sent them in their last issue. Many other sites have added links to the *VIE* site.

Tammy Vance got *The Montclarion* (the local Oakland newspaper) to print a full page two article spread about Vance. "Legion of volunteers help author achieve dream" and "Vance keeps writing despite loss of eyesight." This is a foretaste of phase two.

Robert Silverberg learned of the Vance site from the Locus mention. He ended up visiting the Vances during the Festival in Oakland and seemed very impressed by the *VIE* project.

(Editor's note: Mr. Silverberg is a long-time acquaintance of the Vances.)

Publicity for the *VIE* is both about fueling the project itself with subscribers and volunteers as well as about the basic *VIE* goal of projecting Vance into the mainstream. With respect to the former goal it should be noted that almost all *VIE* subscribers and volunteers have come to us by discovering the *VIE* site. People who have read about the *VIE* have posted about it on their SF sites more and more. People are coming in because they learn about us on other Web sites: wherever you surf remember to mention the *VIE* – <http://www.vanceintegral.com>. Talk about it in chat rooms. Post the URL on sites that allow it. Publicity is a job for all Vance lovers and *VIE* workers.

John Robinson Jr., Publicity Coordinator

The Font in Question

As part of the *VIE* format work we spent several months last year considering fonts. The main, though not the only, actors in this process were Andreas Irlé, John Foley, John Schwab, Suan Young and myself. We finally agreed that Garamond was clearly the best choice. Our goal is to get the most *classical* feel to the format, given our page size, margins and other formal givens – which Andreas and I had established based on the best examples. John Schwab then took us through a long and useful exercise, involving much back and forth, trying to realize Andreas' specifications in an actual PageMaker 6.5 file. The sample title page on the site is a fruit of this work. However, as we refined the setting of text pages I became ever more dissatisfied with the font. None-the-less, further research convinced me that, indeed, there is no existent font preferable to Garamond for the *VIE*.

Fonts such as Bergamo, Savoy, Palladio or Baskerville all display eccentricities incongruent with the uncompromising sobriety we seek. Garamond owes its special character to how it reconciles classical letter shapes with flowing forms. This is made possible by the wide proportions in what is called the *x height*, or body of the Garamond letters. This width allows the horizontals to develop great finesse, while the tall Garamond stems rebalance the letters, adding a further measure of grace. However, Garamond was conceived in the Renaissance for use at large point sizes such as 24. At smaller sizes, like 12, 10 or 8,

the proportions of the font, which call for generous spacing both of letters and lines, give words that are unpleasantly strung out.

The obvious solution – and one which is universally used – is to squeeze the letters closer together. This is easy to do in programs like PageMaker. But such adjustments, while indeed making Garamond more appropriate at small point sizes, disturbs the harmony of the font. Lacking the room they naturally require, the letters become crowded and cramped and the words lose a degree of legibility. These flaws are at a certain level of subtlety, still: they are real.

Times Roman does not suffer from these inconveniences. At smaller point sizes the words remain well proportioned and agreeably legible. But Times, though all its letter shapes are beautifully classical, is too bold, too thick and heavy. This is appropriate for newspapers or letters, but it gives book pages a clumsy and crude feeling.

French fonts have none of the shortcomings of Times or Garamond. They are classical – in the French mode! – but with very narrow proportions which make them beautifully legible in smaller point sizes. The objection to them, for the English reader, is that they lack Garamond's suavity. They are rigid and tight, and lack the classical *aisance* English readers seek.

It finally occurred to me that here is a typographical niche unfilled by any available font. It was this realization which pushed me to try to design a font myself. My plan is to build a font closer to the highly legible French proportions, using Times' classical shapes but trying to capture something of Garamond's lightness and grace. Set in such a font the *VIE* would enjoy a degree of harmonious and sober elegance unique in contemporary typography. To create this font I am drawing letters by hand and using a program called Scan Font.

Figure 1 shows several fonts. The comparison is merely a collage of scans of low resolution print-outs and is intended only to illustrate the points in the following paragraph. Amateurs of questions typographical may enjoy puzzling it out before reading the commentary.

It is simply not possible to judge a font outside a typeset page in a particular point size, so this table of comparison serves only to give some idea of what I am talking about with respect to letter forms. The first column is Times. The second is Garamond. Note how Garamond is proportionately wider than Times. The fourth column is the French font. Compare it to Garamond's open forms and note the severe and dry serifs,

the tight curl of the a and r, a French characteristic which can go as far as the striking loop on the lower g lobe. The third column is my font – in development – Amiante. Note how the belly of the d is as high, but narrower, than the Garamond d, though the stem is shorter – closer to the French d proportions though the serifs are in the more suave Garamond mode. Note the increased legibility of the e, compared to Garamond, thanks to the lower horizontal bar which approaches the unattractive, if highly legible French e, as well as how it escapes the Times/Garamond c form by even greater openness. Note how the a, essentially a Times or French form, uses a degree of relaxation approaching by one step the somewhat eccentric form of the Garamond a. The Amiante n and g are distinctly narrower than the Garamond forms, while the r is a sober compromise between the Times/Garamond forms and the French proportions. All the Amiante letters are, of course, merely working sketches.

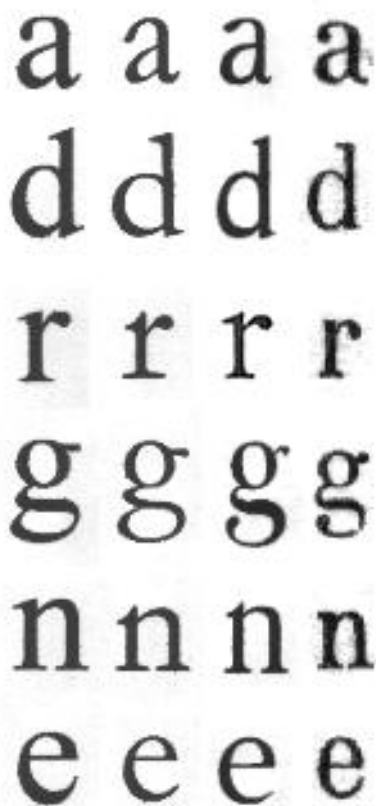


Figure 1: Sample Letters of Four Fonts Compared

Amiante will require italics and so on and, should this font prove viable, it would be advantageous to modify it for footnotes at 8 points – by suppressing part of the line width

variation and simplifying the serifs to increase legibility in the French manner. There would be another modification as well for titles, where bigger letters will permit more Garamond-ish breadth and elegant line width variations. By next month I should have a better idea if Amiante will be technically adequate. If technical trials work out Amiante will then receive an aesthetic scrutiny where it must prove itself superior to Garamond in the *VIE* context. Should Amiante fail these tests we will, of course, be using Garamond.

Scan Font exports Postscript 1. If anyone with direct access to a professional resolution printer would be interested in participating in the development of Amiante by helping with tests, this would be appreciated.

Paul Rhoads

Is Vance a Science Fiction Author?

The purpose of the *VIE* goes beyond printing some books. It also goes beyond fabricating a time capsule to fix and perpetuate Vance's work – as important as this purpose is. The personal gratitude which, for each of us, is a primary *VIE* motivation, has behind it a larger even more generous feeling. If the *VIE* were so structured that its only result were book set ownership by a privileged group, we could not fuel our effort with the necessary human energy. Our goal is the wider one of projecting Vance into mainstream literary consciousness.

The present essay is about how Vance's relation to science fiction ought, in my view, to be understood – in the perspective of that goal. Our publicity campaign has three phases: 1) contacting the science fiction community as a way of alerting Vance readers to subscribe and become volunteers. 2) Calling attention to the *VIE* in the general media by emphasizing the unique aspects of the project. 3) Based on the result of phase 2, calling the attention of the literary elite to Vance himself. The thoughts expressed in this article have phase 3 in mind particularly.

Many *Cosmopolis* readers, in addition to being Vance readers, are science fiction readers. In my soon to be published essay (in: [Jack Vance, Critical Appreciations and a Bibliography](#)) I develop the points about science fiction that

will only be sketched out here. An abridgement of the essay has been published in French as an afterword in Press Pocket's *Night Lamp (La Memoire des Etoiles)*. One French web commentator's reaction was: "Astonishing, and irritating!" and some *Cosmopolis* readers may have similar feelings. However, the following should be kept in mind:

1. Vance himself deplores science fiction and does not consider himself a science fiction author.
2. The *VIE* is about Vance, not science fiction.
3. I am persuaded that the *VIE* goal can never be realized without detaching Vance from the stigma of this genre.

The Campaign to Legitimate Science Fiction

Art, it might be said, is an ambassador between Reality and our intimate conscience. It is linked to, and about, real things, but in itself is *art*-ificial. For this reason the consequences of artistic decadence, though real, are indirect – unlike, say, the decadent civil engineering practiced in Turkey. For many decades there has been pressure to change the definitions of Art, to break down traditional hierarchies in favor of "under privileged forms of expression" – a sort of cultural de-colonization. Science fiction, like one more minority claiming victim status, is demanding admittance to the citadel. So far it has been successfully excluded, but the defense of a certain understanding of literature is under pressure, and may not hold out.

In Music it is becoming hard to relegate jazz, or *world musics*, or even rock, to a lower status than classical music. Those of you who know Vance personally may smile, since he considers jazz – as he carefully defines it – superior to all other music, including classical. He even calls jazz "the most aristocratic music" and makes an elaborate argument for his case. Note however – and this is consistent with the whole thrust of his oeuvre – that though he rejects the present musical hierarchy, he by no means rejects musical hierarchy itself. Nor does he militate to impose his view, which he considers accessible only to a minority intellectual elite. In the plastic Arts the situation has long passed the point of crisis. Leveling has been *de rigueur* for decades, and no one now even thinks of claiming higher status for painting or sculpture, traditionally understood, than for, say, basket weaving. Many people approve this situation, pointing out – correctly – that basket weaving is an art. But is it an art on a level with that which gave us Praxiteles' *Hermes*, Michelangelo's *Pieta*, *The Thinker* or the *Statue of Liberty*? Others can't see the problem;

what difference, they say, do these words make? Anti-hierarchical leveling may be supported by ignorance, but it is driven by questionable projects and passions. This is neither inoffensive nor innocent and the levelers have had many successes. In Art today ugliness is beauty, nonsense is meaning, up is down. Go to the museum and look at the *Contemporary Art*. Are they kidding? No. Where is real Art? Gone – "and good riddance," they will say. But this loss is an important cultural setback. The dilution of literature by the legitimization of science fiction would be a step in the same direction.

What are the claims of those who advocate the legitimization of science fiction? They use two arguments. The first seeks to legitimate science fiction's themes by claiming they prolong the tradition of Ovid, Dante, Rabelais, Swift and so on. But the phantasmagorical aspects in the works in question have purposes not in common with the specifically nineteenth century progressivist roots of science fiction – of this more later. The second, and far more subtle and dangerous, argument was famously expressed by Theodore Sturgeon: "95% of science fiction is crap, but 95% of anything is crap!" The implication is that the non-crap 5% of science fiction is just as much Art as the non-crap 5% of so called *literature*. But is it? Sturgeon's formulation obfuscates that to answer this question we must be able to say what science fiction is, and have a literary standard to judge it by.

Untangling all this is made difficult by the grains of truth in these arguments and the degeneration our culture has already suffered which make pronouncing any statements like: "X is more important or beautiful than Y" an almost criminal act. But it is essential for the *VIE* to advocate that Vance is not just a far better writer (read *artist*) than those who crowd the science fiction field, but a different *sort* of writer: a traditional writer. This effort must be accompanied by a critique of science fiction. Some may object that to raise up Vance there is no need to tear down science fiction. I must disagree. Anyone who has tried to get family and friends to read Vance knows he is completely bogged down in the genre; people refuse to read him *for this reason*. I believe it will be impossible to move Vance into the mainstream without proving that he does not belong in science fiction. This can not be done without defining science fiction, because if you can not say what a thing is, you certainly can not say what it is not. If we use another strategy and say: science fiction is fine, but Jack Vance isn't a science fiction author, we send a confused message about *ourselves* to people convinced that, to paraphrase

Sturgeon: 100% of science fiction is crap. So why not try a third strategy; leave sci-fi out of it, and just say: “Jack Vance is great!”? Because, again, Vance must be extirpated from science fiction before people will even consider him!

What Kind of Writer is Vance?

As you all know, Vance is an exceptionally multifarious writer. Early stories like *Dead Ahead* or *The World Between* are indeed science fiction to a certain extent, though the specifically sci-fi aspects are tongue-in-cheek. *Green Magic* or *The Miracle Workers* fall halfway between science fiction and fantasy. The Joe Bain books are mysteries, but recall neither the polite, English, rural model, nor the gritty, American, urban model. Vance’s other mysteries are even more idiosyncratic, like his fantasy. Pure fantasy is on the Tolkien model; a twentieth century development of Hans Christian Andersen and such writers, folk tales and mythologies; it has two qualities: it takes itself seriously, and has something magical as a central theme which drives the story. Of course there can be more, or less, to fantasy than this. Dunsany, like Vance, has a comic strain. C. S. Lewis’ *Narnia* books do not fit the model properly, lacking *mythopoeia*, or consistent internal logic. But Vancian fantasy – *Lyonesse* is the purest example – not only lacks *mythopoeia*, it is not even driven by magical, or supernatural, things. *Lyonesse* is a collection of different quasi-mythopoeiac worlds tumbled together; magic realms like Irerly and Xabiste; normal places where magic penetrates more – the forest of Tantrevalles– or less, or not at all, like in the Ska castles. There are Greek dryads and English fairies, while the slime eaters of Tanjecterly hail from some anthropological corner of Vance’s imagination. As for magic driving the story: on those occasions when it does, it is usually comical, or has metaphorical or satirical purpose. Madouc finds her father by an ordinary process, after elaborate biological magic fails. Persilian and the Never-fail are comically exasperating adjuncts. The fairy king refuses to grant Glyneth the power to understand insect speech, because what bugs have to say is too horrid, and forewarns her that she will hear no wise sayings from animals – and she never does. The Joald incident, though hair raising, is a comical version of the Atlantian myth which ties up the war of the magicians – itself a serious metaphorical treatment of the war of the sexes – and merely one section of an essentially human story. *Lyonesse* is really a vehicle for such things as the despair of Suldrun, the comic vignettes which begin *The Green Pearl*, the social/sexual struggle between Aillas and Tatzel. The Cugel and Rhalto stories are unique in literature, but come much closer to the Oz books or *Gulliver’s*

Travels and *Gargantua*, than to what we think of as fantasy, since their major components are not magic but whimsy, comedy and satire.

Science Fiction

But the bulk of Vance’s work falls into the science fiction category. What is science fiction? The answer is simple enough: fiction about science. Though each sci-fi author has their own approach, science fiction is speculation about the future driven by interest and excitement about scientific – particularly technological – progress. The quintessential science fiction story is Wells’ *The First Men on the Moon* wherein a technological development allows men to travel to the moon and discover a race of giant, intelligent insects. Wells’ *The Time Machine* veers toward a kind of satire – really a Socialist inspired cautionary tale designed to scare the bourgeoisie. But compare these books to *1984* or *Brave New World* – whose classification as science fiction is not clearly accepted by the people most interested in them.

These stories are not driven by interest in technology. They are not about exploring the *consequences* of such possible technological developments as universal television surveillance (*1984*), or artificially manufactured humanity (*Brave New World*). Instead, the authors, desiring to articulate the nature of totalitarianism, or the effects of technology on our humanity, use these technologies as artistic devices for exploring human things. The difference is one of intention. It is subtle, but important. What counts about the futuristic aspects of *1984* and *Brave New World*, is not the speculation, but how they help articulate and defend basic and eternal human values: individual freedom, and human nature. Science fiction authors are, strictly speaking, interested in technology, while first rank literary artists are, above all, interested in humanity. Because humanity is more important, more interesting, and fuller of artistic possibilities than technology, science fiction, as a *genre*, has secondary status – whatever the quality of particular works. Of course, even the hardest science fiction book may contain some genuine human interest: but to the extent it does; it is not science fiction. To illustrate this by an exaggerated example; Lord Emsworth’s favorite reading, a manual on the care and feeding of pigs, can never surpass a certain degree of artistic importance however much more entertaining and well written it may be than many books of more pretension, because the genre itself is simply too limited. Art of the first rank must fully exploit the natural possibilities inherent in the medium in question.

Is Vance a Science Fiction Author?

Of all science fiction there may be no purer example than *Vandals of the Void*, a boys' book Vance wrote at a publisher's request in 1952. It is as scientifically literal-minded as possible in its plodding, even educational, insistence on real physics for space travel. In its debunking of the notion of space monsters it turns *The First Men on the Moon* on its head. But in the great mass of Vance's science fiction the emphasis is elsewhere. *Gold and Iron* is about the relation of colonized to colonizer. *The Domains of Koryphon* is a critique of de-colonization. *Wyst* is a critique of egalitarianism. *Cadwal* is about questions of green politics. *Trullion* is about reactionary flux in society, and so on and so on. The planets and societies and travel in these stories are not there for their own sake. Everything is constructed so that Vance can tell the story he has to tell; and the center of interest, as with Orwell and Huxley, is always human things, actual and eternal concerns immediate to the human heart and soul. Books where science, technology and magic are the deepest concerns, lack the same *gravitas*.

Does this constitute an insult to science – or to science fiction? No. Some things are of greater dignity than other things. This does not degrade anything. Everything has its own importance and its unique place. The head and the stomach, the hands and the feet, must all work together. But the head has more dignity than the stomach, and the hands have more dignity than the feet. All would be handicapped – or worse – without the others, but this does not negate the differences, differences which permit us to be what we are. Science and technology are of special importance in our society, but that does not mean they are more important than what makes us human. It is what makes us human, after all, that allows science to come into being.

The *raison d'être* of books by writers like Niven, Aldiss or Clarke, is speculation about technologies, like ring-worlds, generational star ships, or computers with emotions. These things have their fascination, legitimacy, and even importance (particularly if they start becoming realities – which, unlike video surveillance and genetic engineering, they have not). While it is not illegitimate to read and enjoy science fiction, in literature, as in all the fine Arts, it is things like the nature of love and hate, beauty and ugliness, goodness and evil, that count most. Why? because they are of deeper and wider human interest, and thus give more artistic scope.

There are no robots in Vance and his rare aliens have little real importance. In Tschai they mainly provoke problems among humans, like the Whanshmen (previously: *Wankhmen*),

who stand in the way of human flowering. They are metaphors for government bureaucrats who take care of themselves to the detriment of their countrymen (the Wannish [Wankh] standing for an impersonal and indifferent state power). Anacho's problems with the Dirdir also are metaphors for strictly human problems, from the status involved in sexual identity, to the very human desire for superiority. Anacho's problems, as Vance articulates them almost between the lines and through the filter of his artistic imagination – which operates illuminating transpositions – touches our humanity and the temptations to which it is heir. Its interest is not generated by mere mythopoeic integrity.

Such themes, and the way they are treated, are what give high rank to Vance's art. It is even the human dimension of his art itself which gives his worlds their satisfying realness. By contrast, Wells' intelligent insects are a mere exercise in pseudo-science grotesquerie – however successful and amusing. The Dirdir, Chasch, and Wannish, though grotesques also, are, like the Lekthwans, metaphors for human types – like the exotic tribes and groups in the Oz books or *Gulliver's Travels*. The Pnume are like people obsessed with bookish information to the point where their humanity dries up – though Vance, as always, can appreciate the virtues such people might have. The grotesque in itself interests Vance for comic reasons or for how humans react to the projected symbols – the Pnume are carefully conceived in this respect. There are always overtones and real literary purpose. An obvious example: Blikdak, the demon confronted by two young lovers in *Guyal of Sferg*, is a personification of lust.

In early work, like *The Houses of Iszm*, *The Dragon Masters*, *The Gift of Gab*, *Nopalgarth*, or *The Narrow Land*, the science in the science fiction is mostly biology, but it all seems less like the cerebral, ruminative, futurological fabrics of science fiction than a jolly encounter of a fertile and whimsical imagination with delight in the multifariousness of nature. Science fiction? Think of the fizzled-out ray guns of *The Last Castle*, or the weed killer used to subdue *The Son of the Tree*. From the pen of a lesser artist these would be out-and-out spoofs.

Of course Vance is not the only author who escapes the bounds of science fiction. Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles* has less to do with science than generating a wistful mood. So I am not trying to distinguish Vance as unique in this respect. In one way, however, he is unique, and it is a most telling point; science fiction is always in earnest, but Vance is a comic. I don't mean that every line is a joke but, like Gogol, Jane Austen or Shakespeare, Vance is one of those rare artists who

sees the tragic and the ridiculous together. It is a mark of his greatness.

One example. In science fiction, space ships are things of high seriousness – for a whole set of reasons which need no exposition. Never in Vance:

...the Glodwin: a ship of moderate size, enameled in shades of gold and green, with trim and sensor bosses picked out in plum red. Dame Hester was favorably impressed by the glossy exterior surfaces, the vessel's size and solidity, and its interior appointments, which she found unexpectedly luxurious. "It is a handsome craft," she told Myron. "The saloon is quite commodious and the fittings seem of good quality. Nor could I complain of the décor; it is quaint but in good taste. I am surprised that anything connected with a blatant brute like Gower Hatchkey could be anything other than slovenly. His remarks concerning my person were truly beyond the pale!"

Ports of Call

There is nothing even remotely like this in all the rest of science fiction. But how like Balzac, Thackeray or Wodehouse! To begin with, a name like *Glodwin* runs counter to what the science fiction reader wants, and no mention is made of faster-than-light drives, only the *décor*, the *appointments*, the *glossy exterior surfaces*. These are the aspects that interest Dame Hester, whose preoccupations have nothing to do with those of the science fiction reader. She is concerned about retaining her youth and punishing her enemy Hatchkey, who wounded her in the most delicate spot: her self image as a young sylph. None of this very human story has a place in science fiction, strictly speaking. Of course there are human stories in all *science fiction* but the human stories serve to animate invented worlds. In Vance the invented worlds serve a human story.

There is an economic aspect to why Vance is a "science fiction author." He would rather have written mysteries, but those publishers who accepted his work sell science fiction. They have their stables of writers, illustrators, their network of distributors. Such commercial enterprises are hard to build and maintain. Vance wanted to make a living with his pen and, for an artist, it is important to have a relation with a promoter. His work never fit well in the category, but it sold; never very well, but well enough.

What About Style? Is That Not What Makes Literature Literature?

Read aloud the passage from *Ports of Call*. Note how the phrases roll out with poetic meter, and how each word comes as a pleasant surprise. The procession of ideas is also

surprising, yet proceeds with inevitability; from a description of the ship, to Dame Hester's approval of it, to her disparagement of Hatchkey, to her obsession with the wrong he has done her! Vance is a *Writer*, or, as I am always insisting; an Artist. Such prose is exceptional and may be boldly compared with the best in literature. This, in spite of all the talk about Vance as stylist, is not a mere matter of word-smithing. Style means nothing outside what it serves; meaning is what counts. Words have no *raison d'être* without meanings. Arabesques of words that carry no useful meanings are wearisome in the extreme, worse than abstract painting, which at least might have decorative appeal. In Vance, important human themes are explicated with the highest degree of artistry. The very tossed-off frothiness of it, ideas and all, the very lightness of touch, is the first mark of this artistry.

There is, as I have mentioned, other science fiction which is not centered on technology. The première example may be *Dune*. This book is still ubiquitously available in science fiction sections, and is, without a doubt, one of the great classics of the genre – part of Sturgeon's famous 5%. The genre must stand or fall on the artistic merit of such classics. Herbert's evident and admiring approval of jihad and drug culture – the two major underlying elements of the book – have nothing intrinsically to do with science fiction. His desert world is just the Sahara made into a planet, again, not really sci-fi. On the other hand, his worms are fantasmagorical monsters, though lacking either the biological and satiric overtones of Vance's dragons, or the comic uses of worminger Drofo and Fuscule's beasts. Of course the link between space navigation, the alien navigators, and *spice*, drag the drug aspect into the science fiction universe. To me, personally, many of the themes of *Dune* are distasteful. I feel, perhaps unjustly, that they pander to the self indulgent and lustful tendencies in adolescent boys; a thing Vance never does. Furthermore, Herbert's prose does nothing for me – or even less. I can find no virtues in this book at all, and when I read it I had to force it down in successive spasms of open-mindedness. Had I read it at age eighteen, instead of much later, my feelings might be different, but this icon of science fiction seems to me to fall into Sturgeon's 95% category. This is a point on which honest men may disagree; some of my best friends admire *Dune*. I would be interested to read a serious defense of this book, with excerpts *à l'appui*, and a treatment of the themes that takes seriously the objections they face – perhaps in *Cosmopolis*?

Promoting Vance

All this hair-splitting would be nuncupatory if the world were a different kind of place. But the *VIE*, like it or not, is a battalion marching toward an objective in a cultural war. By promoting Vance and lifting him from the genre mire we, willy-nilly, defend hierarchical standards and enter a discourse on *the nature of the best*. Our task is far from impossible. Vance would hardly be the first artist to enjoy a dramatic change of status. Such changes can happen quickly – even in publishing. The Harry Potter books, for instance, were destined for children but parents started reading them. The publishers were sharp; they reissued the books with adult style covers. Demand exploded and is still growing. Donna Adams, one of our most stalwart volunteers, wrote this to a journalist who did a recent piece about the *VIE*: “I knew smoking and alcohol were addictive, but nobody told me about reading Jack Vance.” Vance is literature’s best kept secret. If just a few of the right people were to sit down with *The Face*, or *Cugel* or . . . heck, name your own favorite! – the literary landscape could change overnight.

Paul Rhoads, Editor-in-Chief, *VIE*

Notes from Readers

Responses by Bob Lacovara

Mr. Lacovara:

First I want to thank you, and all the rest of the crew, for this wonderful thing you are doing (not just *Cosmopolis*, which is excellent and very professionally done, but the whole *VIE* effort). I guess it’s unprecedented, and I am astounded by it still. Yes, he’s my favorite author, and yes I’m on the subscriber list!

I want to volunteer for proofreading, but haven’t done so yet, being unsure of the amount of time I will be able to devote to it. I have a business(used bookstore), and am a docking pilot, and tugboat captain.

It’s my understanding that the *VIE* is incorporated. Is it possible for it to take donations, to help defray some of your costs? I know there are a lot of little expenses (not to mention the big ones) that you all incur, in a project of this magnitude.

I “in no way, shape, fashion, form, color, or smell”(Night Lamp), intend this to be a part of the subscription price. I simply view this as something I can do, in lieu of, or in addition to, volunteer work. I would also like to help pay for the set for Jack or his family. They have given me so much through my life, it’s the least I can do.

Please advise if I can help, and feel free to print all or any part of this letter, if you like.

Sincerely, and with much thanks and admiration,

Chip Clemmons

Chip’s letter speaks for itself.

Thank you again for your kind letters and notes. We are always happy to hear from volunteers and subscribers, and hope to publish more of your thoughts in the next edition of *Cosmopolis*.

Bob Lacovara, Editor, *Cosmopolis*

Bob’s Closing Comments

With these last few paragraphs, I bring this third issue of *Cosmopolis* to a close.

Curiously, I am always surprised, pleasantly, to receive e-mail from one of you to tell me just why you are so devoted to the work of Jack Vance. That is not the surprise, however: the surprise is that your reasons are so often close to my own. Imagine, if you will, the flush of pleasure when a total stranger tells me that he or she feels as I do about such wonderful writing.

Let me take advantage of my position as editor and spend a few lines telling you of my involvement with Jack’s work.

Sometime around 1963 or thereabouts I happened across a copy of Andre Norton’s *Galactic Derelict*. It was so neat! Time travel, spacecraft, lost civilizations, adventure! I had read my first work of “science fiction” and the hook was firmly set for the next thirty-seven years. I exhausted the small local library, and found the paperback section of the local stationery store.

Paperbacks cost thirty-five to seventy-five cents at that time: I think Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* cost me about \$4.75.

(One of my happiest memories is sitting on my parents' porch and reading *The Lord of the Rings* at lunch time: book in one hand, Italian roll with sharp Italian cheese in the other.) But in and among those paperbacks a literary mine was waiting: eventually I stumbled across *The Last Castle* and *The Moon Moth*.

This was the real McCoy! This author's mind had traveled to these places: they were *alien*, but they were *real*. I had found Jack Vance, and he was immediately placed on my list of "just buy anything he writes." No more pseudo-human robots. No more invincible fighting automatons. Jack Vance could conceive strange worlds, and invest them with the light and clarity of reality.

I have often wondered just what has kept Jack Vance's work from the literary limelight. A facile answer is that his work is categorized as "science fiction" or "fantasy" and that this categorization has "done him in" with the literary crowd.

Although this is perhaps true in part, a more subtle cause is at work: it is not that his work *is characterized* as science fiction or fantasy, but: Jack's work *is almost impossible to categorize*.

What is *The Moon Moth*? Science fiction? Not hardly. Fantasy? Perhaps, but it lacks elements of the truly fantastic. (Fantasy: the fiction of the impossible.) It depicts a society which might easily exist here on earth in the present time. It explores a matter of hidden identity and human ego, and artificial barriers to free communication. These themes are so widespread that this short story has found its way into a variety of languages and cultures.

I believe it is one of the finest short stories ever written, but how many readers know of it? (It has, by the way, been published about forty times, in about eight languages. A Japanese friend, curious about my devotion to the *VIE*, looked up Jack Vance. He found, among other things, *The Moon Moth*. How gratifying.)

What of *Trullion*? Devoid of its locale in a far place and time, it is a tale of social struggle and intrigue.

The Grey Prince? Where are the aliens? We have met the aliens, and they are us. (Apologies to Pogo.)

Space Opera? It is a satire of science fiction.

The Demon Princes? Folks, if you just had to supply a category, it would be one of the most American of forms: the Western.

I invite you to supply your own examples of Vance works which do not easily fit a genre. Better still, you might try to

find any of Vance's works which are unambiguously and clearly science fiction. A few of the early pulp novels may qualify: Paul Rhoads mentions one of these in his article in this issue. Basically, however, it's difficult to label any of his works as science fiction for the simple reason that "they ain't."

That said, I would like to observe another author whose greatest work was denied critical acclaim for a long period. That author is Thomas Pynchon, and the work is *Gravity's Rainbow*, arguably the finest work written in the English language in the 20th century.

Gravity's Rainbow concerns a search for a special German V2 rocket at the end of the second world war. It occasionally mixes high technology into the brew, without apology to those who may have disliked math in high school. (At one point, a differential equation appears in the text, describing yaw control for a rocket. The equation is correct.) Elements of the drug culture, the Absurd, the obscene and the sublime come and go.

In one of the most astonishing analogies ever written, a V2's time-to-impact, in a mathematical limit approaching zero, is described as an infinite series of rooms with transparent walls, stretching off further and further to an unreachable, but ultimately transcendent, *ultimate zero*.

Being constantly derailed by the intrusion of the technical world of mathematics and engineering, many early reviewers just blew their fuses and turned Pynchon off. And why? Because he did not fit the neat categorical description: historical fiction.

I suspect that much the same process has worked against the entry of Jack Vance into the wider arena of literature. He doesn't fit a box, so the reviewers can't get a handle on his work. It's soooooo much easier to label him "a science fiction author" or "a fantasy author" and let it go at that. It really doesn't matter that Jack Vance writes about people who try to solve their human problems, and not robots or spacecraft: once delegated to "fantasy" there seems to be no channel to serious literary consideration.

Thomas Pynchon, however, has begun to arrive. Will Jack Vance? We will try to help...

Why Does Paul Rhoads Get So Much Space?

The first answer to this is trivial: he sends me tons of copy.

The second answer is somewhat more responsive to the question. Paul writes long and thoughtful articles on the nature

of Jack Vance's work and how his work is perceived by the reading public. *Cosmopolis* is a good vehicle for these essays: I presume that my readers are interested in such matters. Further, all are cordially invited to make their own submission to *Cosmopolis* on these and related topics.

I also note, however, that Paul Rhoads is the captain of our ship. It is his vision and knowledge that helped the *VIE* into existence, and that now shape and guide it. Along with one or two others, Paul successfully turned the idea of the *VIE* into a functional corporation.

Because of his vision of a goal, we have a path to follow.

In his articles Paul tends to expound his philosophy. Since his vision for the *VIE* arises from this philosophy, it is interesting to understand "where he's coming from."

Under the circumstances, I allow Paul considerable space to present his views.

Naturally, not everyone will agree with Paul's viewpoints. However, if you are reading this it is clear that you agree substantially with his goals: the enhancement of the literary reputation of Jack Vance, and of course the publication of his works in the *Vance Integral Edition*.

Commentary on Paul's articles are welcome. You may send your comments to me at lacovara@infohwy.com.

Could you help me?

This has little to do with the *VIE*, but: do any of you remember a short story from the 60's or earlier called *The Brightly Shining*? I read it in an anthology many many years ago. It involved a tripartite intelligence which somehow was the consciousness of the Earth itself. These intelligences were, if I recall correctly, the ants, bees, and whales. If any of this rings a bell, please drop me a line.

Cosmopolis sans Italics

I received only three responses to my question: where in issue 2 was "*Cosmopolis*" not italicized? The first response was from Paul Rhoads, who correctly noted that the only place that the name wasn't italicized was in our banner. But Paul can hardly count: he sees each issue of *Cosmopolis* as it evolves in editing.

The first "real" reader to reply was Clifford Abrams. He doesn't win a car, but I promised him a mention in Issue 3.

Of course, it isn't really fair to state that someone is "first" in a search of this sort. *Cosmopolis* goes out to everyone at one

time, but many of you are asleep at that "time." E-mail shortens temporal distance: it does not produce a single time zone.

Cosmopolis Delivery Options

Some of you have written me asking about alternate delivery options for *Cosmopolis*. The most common request is that the Adobe Acrobat file not be attached to e-mail, but be posted on a server to be picked up at your convenience.

To accommodate you, we have divided our reader list into two groups. The default group receives *Cosmopolis* as an attachment, usually around 100K+. If you request it, we will only send you a notice that a new issue of *Cosmopolis* is available, and you may then access it as either a PDF file or HTML.

If you have a special circumstance and need another arrangement, contact me and I'll see what can be done to help you out.

Deadlines for Publication

Deadlines for any particular issue for *VIE*-related articles are the 21st of the month, but for short story inclusion I must have your copy by the 14th. If you have any questions about publishing your story in *Cosmopolis*, drop me e-mail.

Useful Addresses

The *VIE* Web Page

www.vanceintegral.com

Bob Lacovara, Editor of *Cosmopolis*

Lacovara@infohwy.com

Paul Rhoads, Editor-in-Chief of the *VIE*

prhoads@club-internet.fr

John Robinson, Publicity Coordinator

johnange@ix.netcom.com

Steve Sherman, Volunteer Coordinator

volunteer@vanceintegral.com

Team Leaders:

John Foley, Composition

johnfoley@lucent.com

Alun Hughes, Textual Integrity

a.hughes@newi.ac.uk

Tim Stretton, Proofing Text Entry

tim.stretton@bigfoot.com

John Schwab, Digitization

jschwab@uswest.net

The Fine Print

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