
COSMOPOLIS

Volume 1, Issue 6

June 2000

Visiting Jack Vance

From May 15 - 19 I attended the *2000 Apple World Wide Developers Conference* in San Jose. I'd been to one of these conferences in 1996 and had contemplated visiting the Vances at that time. Then I thought that I didn't want to inflict myself at a moment's notice. This time, however, I planned it well ahead and thanks to the intermediary services of Mike Berro, managed to reach John Vance. John told me that I was welcome to visit – and visit I did.

May 20 was a hot day in the Bay Area. Unseasonably so, as everybody assured me. I rented a car in San Jose and drove up to Oakland, to show up in the late morning at the house that Jack had built.

Trepidation! When I got out of the car it was one of those moments where I wasn't really too sure that it was happening.

John, the only one at home, welcomed me and immediately put me at ease. Uneasiness receded to the background. We chatted. John offered to put me up for the night – unless I had other plans. I accepted: even if I had had other plans, I think I would have accepted anyway. There are more important things than “other plans.” At some point during our chat, little Glen came crawling down the stairs – very gingerly and tiredly. He eyed me with some suspicion, and gladly accepted the offer of his father's lap as a safe vantage point from which to observe me.

Norma, Tammy, and Alison (John and Tammy's little daughter) arrived some time later. Alison played shy. That didn't persist for long. She is a charming little cutie, who reminded me very much of my own daughters when they were that age. Norma and Tammy proceeded to practice what John had started: putting me at ease. It's been a long time since I've found it so easy to talk to people I'd never met before, and to like them so much. If there's a role model for hospitality, here it is.

I presented Norma with a coffee-table book about the city I live in (Dunedin, South Island, New Zealand) and two bars of genuine New Zealand Whittaker's chocolate (the next best thing to Swiss chocolate). Norma made all the right noises, and promised to be good about making sure that she and Jack didn't scarf it all at once.

(A good piece of chocolate, as “Fletcher,” in that enchanting romance, *Still Breathing*, points out, needs the right time and place to be properly enjoyed. I hope Jack and Norma have found a right time and place by now.)

Some time later John and Tammy went off to do parent-things (kiddies' birthday parties – how well I remember them...) while I followed Norma to their new residence: John and Tammy's former house, just a few minutes' drive away. When my flimsy rental pulled up behind Norma's American tank outside their house, trepidation reared its head again.

From inside, I heard a strange robotic voice. Norma explained that Jack was writing. He's got a customized computerized setup to get the work done. I have a professional interest in such matters and I'm in awe of what people have done to help facilitate his activities. Even more in awe that Jack can produce such marvels as *Night Lamp* (which is one of my favorites) under such difficult circumstances.

Presently, Jack appeared in the kitchen. Trepidation peaked. We shook hands.

He was human. Good! My nerves stabilized.

Norma procured beer (for Jack) and a cup of tea (for me) and began to prepare lunch – while Jack started quizzing me about my not-exactly-common name. Norma continued with taco-making (allowing me to do the odd bit of chopping, thus enhancing my feeling of usefulness) as the three of us chatted away. Jack propounded on the topics of his choice. He expressed disdain for physicists like Stephen Hawking, who think they will be able to construct a theory-of-everything – a disdain I share. He also declared

(and I paraphrase) that jazz was the most advanced form of music created and practiced by humankind – an analysis with which I don't necessarily agree. I would put it in #2 place, right next to blues – the #1 spot in my musical hierarchy of preferences being taken up by the symphonic work of Jean Sibelius. Never got around to mentioning that though. Jack had other things to say.

The conversation ranged far and wide. With all the chatting, lunch was late-ish, but who cared about lunch? I was talking to my hero; literally, the only guy for whom I've ever felt anything approaching admiration. I hope I hid it well. Maybe Norma noticed, but if she did, she didn't let on. Bless her. I was in a state. This was Jack!

Late lunch over, with the temperature and humidity climbing to dizzying heights, Jack excused himself and returned to his work. I was sad and glad at the same time. Sad because the meeting was over, glad because I had felt vaguely guilty about interrupting his work – and maybe in the process depriving the world of some critical piece of *Lurulu*. A scary thought!

Norma and I chatted some more. She filled me in on matters relating to the *VIE* and the January Work Festival. We talked about Jack's writing; writing in general; writers; family; life; stuff. Norma's a delight to chat with.

Time to go. I said goodbye to Norma and Jack and returned to John and Tammy's. Tammy offered me pecan pie for dessert – with whipped cream. Real whipped cream – not the ghastly American substitute gunk that comes from pressurized cans. Now, two of the ways to my heart are through good chocolate and fresh whipped cream. Need I say more? I was in love with these people.

We chatted and presently everybody went to bed. On Sunday morning Tammy made waffles. Another nostalgic memory of the days when I lived in Atlanta, just over ten years ago. Maple syrup, strawberries and cream, too. Omigod, can I bear to leave here?

I had to. I was planning to see another friend near San Luis Obispo and then there was a plane waiting, too. I took some pictures of the family. Alison posed like the actress she's going to be one day. Little Glen squinted suspiciously – or maybe he was just more interested in his food than the guy wielding a camera. Ryan was off playing technological games with a buddy.

That was just over a week ago. Hard to believe. But there are pictures, and so I guess it did happen.

They say you should never meet your heroes, because you might find they have feet of clay. Well, no worry here. I met some remarkable human beings, whom I wish I could get to know better.

Maybe one day...

Till Noever

The Question of Format

The format of the *VIE* volumes will be approximately 12.5 by 19.5 cm. We can categorize the book as an octavo volume, which ranges from 18.5 cm - 22.5 cm in height.

When I began publishing in 1995 I confronted the question of format. Of course I knew the fine Underwood-Miller books. What bothered me about them was that they began in one format, but the format changed in the late seventies. So I decided that I would have a format that I would keep until the end of my publishing days.

In November of last year, when Paul came through the deep snow to visit us in Bergneustadt, Germany, he asked me how I had arrived at the format of my books. I told him, "I like to read lying in bed, and this format is perfect for that." But, of course, this is only one aspect of the matter.

I had the idea to make books which mirror the craftsmanship of their writer, so for Vance I wanted high quality books in all respects (binding, cover material, and so forth). On the other hand the books should be for reading, not for collecting and display. So I wanted a format of roughly trade-paperback size, for handiness. In German publishing we have a reference book called *Der Verlagsbuchhändler* (not literally translatable, a blend of *The Publisher* and *The Bookseller*). This book had (and still has) just this format and for me that format was a stamp of quality. After a long discussion with my printer I learned that the use of this format would be good in other ways as well: we would avoid waste material, because we could use a DIN A3 format sheet (29.7 by 42.0 cm), which later would become 8 pages in the book, without a great deal of excess paper to be trimmed. Also, we could use a less expensive

offset printing process, based on 8 pages as opposed to 16 pages. But the main thing was, and still is, the handiness.

If I had to do it over I would still make the same decision.

Andreas Irle

Tract: On Typography

Systems for graphically recording and passing on human speech go back perhaps fifty-two hundred years, and have taken many forms – syllabaries, abjads, alphabets, and less easily described styles. Writing is almost as large a part of our heritage as farming, building houses or making beer. It's one of the activities that define civilization.

One of the most commonly used alphabets today is the Roman, inspired by those of the Greeks and Etruscans which were, in turn, inspired by that of the Phoenicians. It has been modified and perfected over more than two millennia of use, and is now stable in its formal norms. This stability is based on fixed, even rigid, expectations for our alphabet. When we sit down to read more than a few words, tolerance for variation is small, and there are practical reasons for our demanding attitude.

The Roman Alphabet is part of the cultural equipment of a large fraction of humanity. It's the property of everyone who can read in whatever language uses it, and has proved considerably less mutable over time than the languages it represents. Beside their ordinary purpose, letters are used as elements of design, as decorations or logos on coffee cups, refrigerators, sports utility vehicles and spacecraft, and these forms are often so stylized that some decipherment is necessary. But the method by which we ordinarily read does not involve decipherment in this sense. Though it is possible in English, and many are first taught to read this way, we don't study each grapheme in its context and deduce a pronunciation for that word, sounding it out. Some languages use the alphabet in a way which gives one sound for one letter, but English hasn't been one of them for hundreds of years. Even when a language does use the alphabet in a more or less strictly phonetic manner (Finnish for example), its user still does not consciously "sound out" each letter in a group to determine its coincidence with a particular word. Once we learn to read and become familiar with the process, we see groups of symbols and interpret them as a word or phrase at a

glance, without dealing with each grapheme individually. Rapid comprehension is impossible otherwise.

We are unlikely, perhaps unable, to accept much deviation in the shapes we've been used to seeing for many generations. A well known precept in the publishing arts, though often violated, tells us that a sans serif typeface, while fine for headlines or other short text, is clumsy or unpleasant to read for more than a few lines, and will frustrate the reader. Logically there's nothing wrong with a letter without serifs. They were a favorite with Modernists and the Bauhaus movement and are still very popular today – but the lack of the extra little features and terminating strokes leaves the shapes of the letters simpler, less definite, and allows for a word shaped differently than what we expect. This sort of type was in fact called "grotesque" when first introduced.

Rules like this are pragmatic rather than based on any aesthetic or prescriptive principle, and given type's purpose in stories and novels, they are necessarily somewhat conservative. The typographer Jan Tschichold said that good book design is more a science than art. It is art, but utilitarian art, and it functions under a set of specialized requirements.

The act of reading is very different than taking in a painting or a movie. A book must cooperate with this process to make reading easy and pleasurable. The type must look and be set in a manner that attracts no overt attention to itself, yet still give the reader a sense of looking at something pleasing or beautiful. Defining the visual qualities of a good book is tricky, and bringing them to life trickier still.

After five hundred years, a group of once exclusive, very specialized arts and crafts has been opened to anyone with a computer and the appropriate software. The temptation to cut corners and remain ignorant of historical precedent is great, and this applies to the design of typefaces as well as any other visual art.

Some of the sans serif fonts were conceived by artists with an agenda. They wanted to purify type, to make it agree with ideals of industrial design and architecture popular in the 1920s and '30s, to make it logical and geometrically sensible. Even so they usually did it with certain aesthetic considerations in mind, and their work was rarely done only with a compass, T-square and triangle. An echo of nib and inkpot remained. But a more easily applied version of the

compass and T-square method can be used today in the digital creation of any style font, and is usually employed without even the benefit of something like the Bauhaus aesthetic. Production can be streamlined, made less of a chore, and seem fine and efficient. A few basic elements are more or less precisely drawn, then mixed and matched to create the various letter forms. Time is saved, mechanical regularity achieved, any remnant of hand and pen expunged.

It seems, however, that the assembly line precision of modern manufacturing techniques was never much applied to pre-digital type, not during the long life of metal type, or even the brief one of photo type. Each character was created individually. Others were referred to of course, but as skilled as they were, the punch cutters saw fit not to apply common forms too rigorously. Each letter had its unique qualities, its own identity, and all this in each size. An entire set of characters for each size used was obviously necessary with metal type, and each was cut to suit its dimensions – a bit heavier and more widely spaced for small sizes; lighter and tighter for larger ones, with more developed detail and thinner, more pronounced serifs. The technology used today doesn't require this, and it is a little cheaper and easier to use one face for everything from 6 point ingredient panels on cereal boxes to *War Is Declared* newspaper headlines.

But we don't need to do that, and we don't need to give up centuries of proven and accepted method. Our computers give us plenty of opportunity to stumble artistically, but so do a pencil and paper, and computers make possible achievements we could not have attempted or even imagined a few years ago. We are constrained only by will and time, and there have been plenty of both applied to *Amiante*. This family of typefaces was designed specifically for the *VIE* and its particular needs. Current techniques have allowed us to restore the old practice of building fonts to suit the books, and the spirit of the books. With *Amiante* we have tried to maintain the good and useful traits of traditional typography while taking advantage of the versatility of the digital environment.

I don't think any part of this remarkable and unprecedented *Vance Integral Edition* would have been possible ten or fifteen years ago. *Amiante* is one of these parts, and I hope it will be as successful as the rest of the project.

Joel Anderson

VIE Statistics

Part I: Comparative Analysis of Vocabulary Size

When Paul Rhoads asked me last May if I wanted to assist in some full-scale *VIE* data analysis projects, I naturally jumped at the occasion. Being curious by nature, and enjoying making computers and software do things they were probably never intended to do, I set out to construct a database in which to load the full set of digitized *VIE* texts. At the time of this writing, I have a system in place that holds the most advanced versions of the 119 texts currently in the *VIE* archive. Each of these is stored both in simple text format, as well as in the RTF format (Rich Text Format) which preserves all formatting characteristics of the original Word documents.

Besides providing a solid foundation upon which to build various analyses, my database effectively constitutes a European backup *VIE* archive. But let's get down to business. The main task upon which I have spent my every waking moment – well, nearly so – for almost a month now, is the following: the designers (Paul Rhoads, Joel Anderson and Andreas Irle) of the *Amiante* font in which the entire *VIE* will be typeset, need to know exactly which characters, symbols and glyphs appear in what kind of formatting throughout the entire opus. Should an ampersand appear in italics in some footnote, they'll need to know that and design one! Not to mention the more exotic characters that may pop up sporadically.

While making slow but steady progress, it struck me that the word-count tables which emerged from my work could easily be used to do a little investigation into Jack's vocabulary, the results of which I wish to share with you in this article. I won't go into much technical detail about how exactly I identified a *word*. Let it suffice to say that the figures included here were obtained essentially by taking an unformatted text, replacing most punctuation marks and other non-alphabetic characters by spaces, transforming what was left to lowercase, and counting frequencies. Various factors need to be taken into consideration when deciding upon a procedure for counting words in a text. Different people will take different approaches. Hence, my results are *a* version of the truth, but they should not be considered absolute. Suan Yong has been implementing similar analyses with slightly different results.

This said, however, applying the same counting method to a large number of texts will still allow *comparative* results between texts. The first question that suggests itself is whether there exists a relation between the size of a given text – in total number of words – and the size of the vocabulary of which the text consists. Intuitively, the answer should be *yes*. Indeed, the larger a text is, the more room it provides for different words. But still, whether the vocabulary size will keep increasing with text size, or whether it will stabilize after a while, that’s hard to foretell and it depends solely on the author’s linguistic giftedness! To end all speculation, Figure 1 below shows all *VIE* texts in a diagram of vocabulary size versus text size.

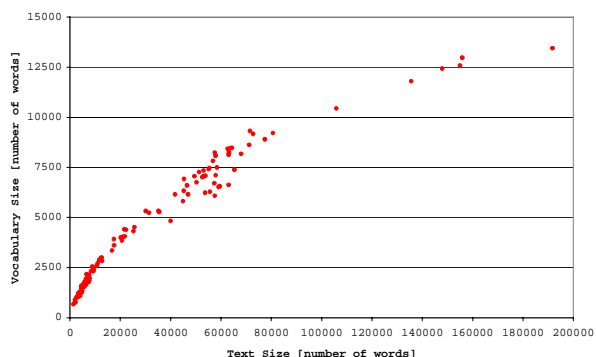


Figure 1: Scaling of the vocabulary size as a function of overall text size, 119 *VIE* texts.

These results are quite remarkable: not only does the vocabulary that Jack uses keep getting richer toward the larger novels, but it does so in an extremely smooth way! The points in the graph are almost perfectly fitted by a simple power law. If anything, Figure 1 clearly shows that Jack’s prose is, overall, very consistent in verbal quality.

While this is an interesting discovery in itself, it makes one wonder where other authors fit into this diagram. This is where *Project Gutenberg* makes its entry. *Project Gutenberg* is an online repository holding hundreds of digitized and proofed copyright-free texts. I downloaded 80 texts from the *Project Gutenberg* web site at <http://www.promo.net/pg> and subjected them to the same analysis as applied to the *VIE* texts. Some of my choices were arbitrary. Some texts were chosen for their size, filling a gap in the 0 to 200,000 word range of Figure 1. Some authors were suggested to me as being potentially interesting for comparison: Daniel Defoe, Thomas Hardy, Jack London, P.G. Wodehouse. The choice was limited of course by what is available from *Project Gutenberg*. The results are presented in Figure 2, overlaid on the *VIE*-only data of Figure 1.

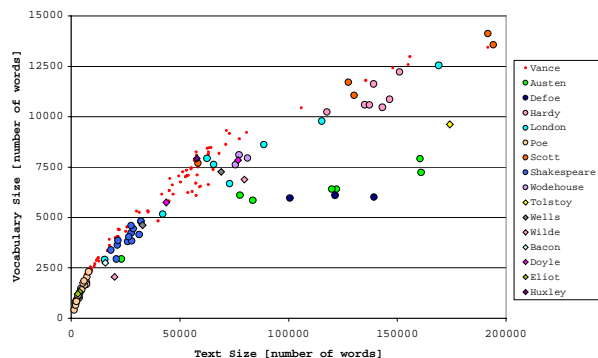


Figure 2: Scaling of the vocabulary size as a function of overall text size, Vance vs. 15 other authors.

If Figure 1 was remarkable, then the results displayed in Figure 2 should be no less than astonishing! For any given text size, the size of Jack’s vocabulary either matches or exceeds that of the included third party texts! It is as if the *VIE* texts form some sort of natural upper limit – let us baptize it the Vance Limit – in the above diagram. It would be imprudent, however, to draw any qualitative conclusions from these results. One reason is that serious selection effects may be at play: selecting 80 different third party texts might change the picture radically. Another aspect is that size really doesn’t matter: Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* falls far below the Vance Limit in terms of vocabulary size, but still it is a “good read.”

Other notable details: in the short story range I included a bunch of Edgar Allen Poe’s works, which seem to fit the Vance Limit perfectly. In the domain of the large novels, say those having more than 100,000 words, Sir Walter Scott’s adventure novels are the only ones that consistently match the Vance Limit. Baffled by these results, and somewhat wary, I tried to consciously break the Vance Limit by introducing a number of plays and even some poetry thinking that theatre and especially poetry might on the average yield a more varied vocabulary than a story of a similar size. However, from looking at the position in the diagram of the cluster of Shakespeare plays and the T.S. Eliot poems, it is clear that my efforts were thwarted.

Finally, I’d like to stress once more that the results presented herein should be taken at face value, and one should not attempt to extrapolate from them to make qualitative statements about the authors and texts included in the study. Those concerned with the concept of quality are urged to read Pirsig’s *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, and then think again. Further, I wish to thank the *VIE* management for their useful comments on this matter, some of which are incorporated in the above. And

as this is not just work in progress but also serious fun for me, I'll keep you all informed of any new discoveries through future rants in these very pages...

Koen Vyverman, the Laughing Mathematician

Who's Who in *VIE* Management

VIE management includes a hidden branch known as *Process Integrity*. The head of the Process Integrity team is Suan Yong. Suan is a 25 year old student of Computer Science at the University of Wisconsin. He is a Malaysian of Chinese descent, speaks several languages (Malay, English and a couple of Chinese "dialects"), plays hockey and windsurfs. He spent the summer of 1998 working for Microsoft.

In August of 1999, when the *VIE* had just been launched on the 'net, we were scrambling to cope with the explosive growth of the project. New subscribers and volunteers arrived every day, but we only had ideas, no organization for the various aspects of the project, no structures allowing us to actually begin work. It got to a point where there was so much going on at once that it was decided to divide up all the tasks, and that people working on each task would only talk to each other. This reduced the e-mail blizzard to manageable proportions. But what if the various groups went off in different directions? Suan, already a volunteer, had come to management attention thanks to his prompt, intelligent and good humored interventions on the *VIE* bulletin board. He was therefore invited into management where he accepted the job of internal control. All letters were copied to Suan, and he made sure we proceeded in (relative) harmony. He soon got saddled with the Gatekeeper job as well, but has long since had so much other work that this has been passed on to others. Suan was also one of the participants at the Oakland work festival last January.

Things have evolved a great deal since last August. Currently Suan maintains all our databases, the subscriber and volunteer lists, the work records – which are cross-referenced and very extensive – and one of the back-up text archives. He is also responsible for producing and maintaining other data in various areas, like word counts, the *VIE* book list, the Vance libraries of each volunteer, errata, and so on.

From the beginning, Suan has been one of the pillars of the project. He is a tireless worker, and always ready to take on any special job. More than that, he has done most of his work on his own initiative, and it is thanks largely to his independent efforts that many aspects of the inner workings of the project function with smooth efficiency. His databases give management clear, up to date information in all needed areas. Without these remarkable databases we would not be in the solid posture we are today. Suan's technical expertise has also been an important help in establishing our procedures and he is active in solving the various problems that constantly arise. His insightful and good humored voice is always present in important internal discussions. Sometimes those managers who have a few gray hairs worry that Suan does not allow himself enough time for his schoolwork, or reproach him for an occasional excess of youthful exuberance. But all value his energy and wide-awake intelligence. Without Suan's selfless and long-term commitment to all sorts of really important, but unglamorous work, this volunteer project would not be where it is today.

The Management of the Vance Integral Edition

The *VIE* Font

Amiante is now a family of several fonts. They have been designed specifically for the *VIE*, by Paul Rhoads (who writes these words) and Joel Anderson, under the control of John Foley, head of the Composition team, with both Vance's prose and the *VIE* format, firmly in mind. The insights and encouragement of certain *VIE* managers have also been important in *Amiante*'s development, notably John Schwab and Suan Yong. In a previous article I exposed some of the reasons why I felt it necessary to create a special font for the *VIE*. The present article will go more deeply into that question, as well as discussing aspects of *Amiante*. But some historical background is required.

The history of font design is not one of uninterrupted progress. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries have seen some unhappy typography, as a the result of three factors: 1) thoughtless exploitation of increasing technical possibilities, 2) sterile nostalgia, 3) a pathetic thirst for originality. The nadir of font design occurred at the

beginning of the 19th century. In reaction, the advocates of *Old Style* rejected the rigid, exaggerated forms of *Modern Face* in favor of fonts inspired by the best 16th century models. Almost 200 years later we have arrived at the zenith of this reaction: contemporary book publishing is totally dominated by Old Style fonts, now in their digital incarnations, e.g. Adobe Garamond. However, this triumph over Modern Face (a triumph less absolute in continental Europe) is not without problems, problems compounded by the advent of digital typesetting. But I should begin the history of typography at the beginning (what follows is a precis of a most useful book: *An Introduction to the History of Printing Types*, by Geoffrey Dowding):

The history of printing begins in Mainz, in the early 15th century, where Gutenberg and his fellow printers modeled their fonts on the handwriting of the time: *gothic* script.

**patores paucos; hominū allerit puer-
la cōtentio: quibus utiq; nec in veteri
instrumēto post septuaginta interpre-**

“Gutenberg” Bible - 1455

The sack of Mainz (1462) had the fortunate effect of dispersing these printers throughout Europe. Those who went to Italy found that the scholars of the Italian Renaissance had rejected gothic script (named “gothic,” meaning barbaric, by the Italians) in favor of a 9th century French style of writing: *Caroline minuscule*, which had been used by the French monks in Tours in the 9th century. This script was familiar to them through their interest in antiquity: many of the classical manuscripts to which they had access were the copy work of these monks. Inspired by Caroline minuscule they had developed a script known as the *neo-caroline hand*, on which the German printers based new fonts.

**hoc confessus eris q̄ in foro palam syracusis
negato sanc̄ si uoles pct̄ accepisse. recipies cito
gesta sūt uidcat: q̄rat q̄ tu occulte geris: aut c**

Humanistic, or neo-caroline hand, 1476

But it was a Frenchman, Nicolas Jenson, working in Venice, the great center of book making of the late 15th and 16th centuries, who made the first fonts which mingled a restoration of the Roman letters (our capitals) taken from

inscriptions on stone ruins, with these medieval style minuscules (lower case), in a harmonious ensemble. Jenson’s font had immediate pan-European success. This font, and the fonts it inspired, are known as *Venetian*. Jenson’s innovation defined the basic letter forms common to all later fonts.

**atius excogitari potest? Nōne uitā: lucis: ueritatis
ipse fons atq; largitor est? Annon ipse ut cuncta &
m in se ipso complectitur? qua ergo re indigebit q̄
is est? qui reꝝ omniū creatorē caritate sibi coiūxit?**

Nicolas Jenson’s Roman, 1470

At the beginning of the 16th century another Frenchman, Claude Garamond, working in Paris, designed his celebrated fonts, which, though closely based on Jenson’s, are more recognizably modern. Garamond’s style of font, in turn, swept Europe and, in particular, influenced William Caslon in England. Caslon’s fonts are wholly Garamond in type, though with individual characteristics still distinguishable in differences of taste between continental and English/American fonts. Specifically, Caslon’s forms tend to be wider, more rounded and feminine, while Garamond’s are more sober and masculine. These fonts are called *Old Face*.

**mise & descripte au dos dudict astrolabe.
Icelle eschelle a deux costez egaulx, eleuez
perpendiculairement l’vn sur l’autre qua-
dran d’iceluy dos soubz l’horizon, dont**

An authentic Garamond font, 1545

**se effrenata jactabit audacia? nihilne te
nocturnum praesidium palatii, nihil ur-
bis vigiliae, nihil timor populi, nihil con-
A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S**

William Caslon’s Great Primer Roman, 1734

Beyond this point the history of fonts is driven importantly by technological developments: the increasing smoothness of paper, the greater precision and delicacy of printing machines. These factors begin to be felt in the *Transitional Romans*, the development of which is mostly a French affair; but such stars as Fleischmann, a German

working in Haarlem, and the Englishman Baskerville, were well known.

Den 28 January kreeg men door de uytgezonde Patrouillen kondschap, dat de Marfchal Graaf van Saxon, die daags te voorent' Aloft overnacht had, met 30000 Man in Afche op Marfch was en verder na Lippe-lo, Willebroek en Grimbergen: Waar op terfond een Krygs-Raad by den Graaf van Caunitz gehouden en vervolgenseen Huffaar na Leuven

Johann Michael Fleischman's Gallaird Roman, 1845

**Poculaque inventis Acheloia miscui
Et vos agrestum præsentia numina
Ferte simul Faunique pedem, Drya
Munera vestra cano. Tuque o, cui
Fudit equum magno tellus percussa**

John Baskerville's Roman, 1757

**communiqué à leurs enfans,
font autant d'ennemis qui at-
taquent notre raison & nos
sens, & qui corrompent no-
tre jugement.**

**L'habitude non seulement
adoucit les disgraces de notre
condition présente, mais en-
core elle semble changer la
qualité des choses auxquelles**

Pierre Simon Fournier's 12 point Cicéro ordinaire, 1766

**lui donner moins de vingt ans à la
mort de Cyrus: elle avoit donc
foixante-quinze ans lors qu'un
nouveau Roi la demande comme
une grace particuliere.**

Fleischmann's Paragon Roman, 1870

These developments, tending toward ever greater precision, lead to *Modern Face*. *Modern Face* is characterized by the progressive triumph of a full, enthusiastic and, in the end, tasteless exploitation of new technical possibilities. The *shading* (placement of swells in the curves) becomes fully *rationalized*, or vertical. (Old Face, which had still been based on

handwriting, had oblique shading, so that the swells in the 'O' for instance, are at lower left and upper right as they would be as written with a pen. Fully oblique shading was progressively abandoned by the Transitional Romans.) The *modeling*, or difference between the thickest and thinnest strokes, became extremely pronounced, taking advantage of the new smoother papers which could register such nuance, and the new printing machines which did not cut up the paper with these fine lines – in fact tiny blades. In *Modern Face* the letters become more and more uniform, boxy, and mechanical looking.

**ad finem sese effrenata jactabit au-
dacia? nihilne te nocturnum præsi-
dium Palatii, nihil urbis vigiliæ, ni-**

Giovanni Batista Bodoni's Modern Face, 1810

The Italian, Bodoni, was the most celebrated printer of the best *Modern Face* period. His fonts were mostly based on French models. Though Bodoni's fonts are very handsome, late *Modern Face* feels as archaic to our eyes, in its own way, as Venetian. The blocky lettering we associate with the Wild West is typical of *Modern Face* display fonts.

The history of italics, like that of regular, or *roman* letters, begins with 15th century handwriting styles. But rather than the neo-caroline scripts, italics imitate the *humanistic cursive* or *chancery hands*, named for a style of writing used by the Papal Chancery for the ease and speed it allowed. The letters are compressed, simplified, and many are ligatured – a practice carried to extremes in 16th century italic fonts, but which progressively waned for reasons of legibility. Early italics were not necessarily slanted, but they were always *cursive*. These italics were intended as stand-alone, space saving fonts for the production of smaller, cheaper books, mostly of poetry.

**mostrava il modo di acconciarti la penna, cosa in tal
esercizio molto necessaria, E pero in questo mio secon-
do librecino, nel quale anchora a satisfatione de molti,**

Antonio Blado's Formal chancery italic, 1553

Early fonts, for technical reasons, were generally no smaller than 16 or 20 points (a *point* is 1/72 inch), and most Renaissance books were folios or quartos. (A *folio* is a book where the basic sheet of paper – measuring, with great variation, about 24 by 36 inches – is folded once, giving 2 leaves and 4 pages, while a *quarto* has two folds, giving 4 leaves and 8 pages. Three folds give the *octavo*, or 8 leaves and 16 pages. A typical book today, a trade paperback for instance, is an octavo; a coffee table book is a quarto, and a large atlas might be a folio, though these terms and distinctions are now blurred given our capacity to manufacture paper in gigantic, endless rolls.) Italics, being compressed, allowed more words per page. However, as technological developments permitted smaller and smaller roman fonts, italics began to be used only for emphasis and eventually were designed in alliance with specific roman fonts, as they are today.

In the nineteenth century, exasperated by the exaggerated and ugly characteristics of late Modern Face, the Old Style reaction – already mentioned – began in England. Old Style fonts were based mostly on English Old Face (Caslon and Baskerville) models.

however the faces which were cut in the early part of the last century are now unpleasing both to the eye of the critic and to the general reader, on account of their inequality of *size* and consequent irregularity of *ranging*, the Subscribers
Miller and Richard's 20 point Old Style, 1866

The hairline serifs and extreme and rationalized modeling of Modern Face were rejected for the softer feel and the wider, more suave forms of Old Face letters. But aspects of the modern fonts – cleaner shapes, homogenized sizes and spacings – were retained. Contemporary Old Style fonts, like Adobe Garamond, dominate book publishing today. Fonts such as Times Roman and Perpetua are called *Twentieth-Century Types*. Though marked by the Old Style reaction, they are based on contemporary needs and tastes, as well as harking directly back to the very Roman inscriptions Nicholas Jenson studied, while mostly skipping over the whole history of typography. Times, designed in the thirties, is ideal for newspapers but marred for book publishing by its dark *color* (the degree of blackness it imparts to a page). Perpetua was

designed in the twenties. It is handsome but dated because of its art-deco mannerisms.

***Amiante* and the History of Typography**

Having drawn *Amiante* before I learned any of this history, it was particularly interesting for me to read Dowding. In the introduction to the 1998 edition, Alan Bartram explains how *...subtly or, sometimes, how extensively, the design of metal types was modified in different sizes in order to look the same. Although we have learnt to live with it, meanwhile availing ourselves of the many advantages of digital filmsetting, the use of one master for all sizes is one of the more regrettable developments of the last 25, 30 years.* Without my realizing it, this was one of the aspects of currently available fonts which prompted the creation of *Amiante*. Contemporary Old Style digital fonts (like Adobe Garamond) are inappropriate in form to sizes in the 8 to 12 point range, to say nothing of their numbing homogeneity. Their wide proportions, pronounced shading and light color were originally conceived with much larger letter sizes in mind. Even the rage for bloated 12 point that presently dominates book publishing does little to get us nearer the much larger sizes for which these letter forms were conceived. Indeed, Adobe Garamond's proportions and shading work best at about 16 points.

In the 18th century, as technological development permitted smaller letters, other letter forms became required. These forms, it seems to me, are more inherent in Claude Garamond's fonts than Jenson's, Caslon's or Baskerville's. Today's book fonts obviously prolong the Old Style reaction, though in France the trend is less pronounced, and the influence of Modern Face is still to be felt, in newspaper fonts for instance. The Old Style reaction, however, neglected the deeper virtues of Modern Face and Transitional Romans: their proportions. In rejecting them it threw out the baby with the bath water. As a result, Old Style fonts tends to be pretty and clean, but bland. They lack the stylistic sobriety of true Garamond, and the excellent proportions for 10 points of Transitional and Modern Face. Furthermore, in spite of their Old Face forms, they retain the most profound vice of Modern Face: bland, cold, mechanical repetitiveness. There are many such fonts currently available and, although some are much better than others, there is really little to choose among them. The Adobe series of classical book fonts, for instance, gives rise to the suspicion that there is really only a single master Old Style font in the Adobe library. This *basic* is then flavored with a squashed "gothic" 'a' for "Jenson" or taller

ascenders for “Garamond.” (Though Adobe “Garamond” might just as well, or better, be called “Caslon” or “Baskerville” for all it really has to do with Claude Garamond’s actual fonts.) This may be an unfair statement, but whether it is or not, the wide and rounded Old Face letter forms were originally conceived for much larger letters, and are inappropriate for today’s books – despite the world-wide digital publication behemoth, which probably produces more printed matter each day than was ever churned out in the three centuries from 1500 to 1800!

As a font changes size it is not enough simply to scale it up or down, and to add “global” style changes, like compression and so on. The actual shapes and proportions, not just of the font overall, but of each letter, must change. The principles which underlie these transpositions have been firmly and boldly employed for the various sizes of *Amiante* (8, 10, 18 and 36 points). Another aspect of *Amiante* is something totally neglected in today’s electronic euphoria. It is not only possible, but also easy, with font creation software, to make clean and even letters. These two qualities seem aesthetically evident to the mechanistic mentality dominating the digital world. But consider this: the lower case alphabet, which is close to 100% of what we actually look at when we read, consists of 26 letter shapes which in fact display little variation. ‘a’ and ‘e’ are modified mirror images of each other, while ‘e’ is also a barely modified ‘c’ or ‘o’, and though ‘j’ has a certain originality, it is really just an ‘i’ with a tail. ‘a’, ‘g’, ‘r’ and ‘s’ are the most distinctive letters, but all the others can be unequivocally classified in four heavily overlapping groups characterized by the four basic forms which build the letters: vertical stroke, circle, arcade, and cross:

lbdhjkpqrft

obdpqcesg(sa)

nmhu(frs)

xzkwvyft(s)

This leads to a whole web of similarities. Consider the following strings:

aecdqopbhnmwvAWMNZ

CGQODPRAHILTXKBg

Contemporary fonts insist on homogeneity. This means that all vertical strokes (the ‘l’ forms: d h b k i j r) are of equal width and/or height, and carry identical serifs. The descenders of ‘p’ and ‘q’ are identical. The lowercase letters with neither

ascenders nor descenders (aceimnorsuvwxz) are identical in height and normalized in weight and width. In short, in whatever way letters are similar, they are made to be identical, if possible. This contention should be nuanced: while it is strictly true for Times, Adobe Garamond does have many of the variations I claim a font should have. Still, these variations are introduced with such restraint that they are effectively absent. The result gives clean, machine-like regimentation to the printed page, but numbs the faculties and even impedes legibility. Legibility depends on recognizing letters and words. But if the letters are identical in every possible respect, they are that much less individual, and so harder to recognize. Take the words “mason” and “maven.” They are differentiated by four letters: ‘s’, ‘o’, ‘v’ and ‘e’. But if ‘e’ and ‘o’, already close in their natural forms, are made identical in height, width modeling and, as far as possible, shape, and if ‘s’ and ‘v’ are distinguished by nothing but shape when they might also be distinguished by height, width and modeling, distinguishing between the words is as difficult as possible since their profiles will be as identical as possible. In the days before it was easy, to say nothing of expected, to make letters identical in this way, the natural effect of hand work introduced differences which improved legibility. I am not referring to accidental “errors,” but the deliberate differences which occur naturally to the mind of a handworker. Of course the older, cruder, processes also had aspects which impeded legibility, ink splashes in particular, so there are ways in which a clean form and evenness are desiderata. But they should not be used as the all important norms they are today. (These considerations will explain to alert Vance readers the choice of the font’s name.)

This mania for uniformity not only penalizes legibility, but is anti-artistic. The word “artistic” has come to be identified with chaos and disorder, instead of harmony and order, the way it used to be (shades of Modernism!). So I do not blame engineers for this trend. They are doing the best they can in a conceptual vacuum created by philosophers and the artists themselves. By *artistic* I mean conceived in a spirit of true order and beauty, not just uniformity, or with the idea of giving the impression of a *style*. True order is not regimentation, it is what underlies grace and gracefulness. And further, style is no substitute for beauty. Style can be striking, but in the end it is always obtrusive and silly. Beauty reaches for what is true and expresses itself as a style. But style, when sought for its own sake, only gives a sort of faked beauty. So, while letters must express what

they are and contribute to the order of the font of which they are a part, they should be as different as possible. On a practical level this means, for instance, that the ‘l’, ‘b’, ‘d’, ‘h’, ‘k’, ‘i’ and ‘j’, should be different widths, different heights, and should each have a unique serif. These differences should be subtle but real, neither distracting nor even noticeable as such to the reader, and certainly not obtrusive, but they should be there to be felt and seen, distinct and definite. I will also mention that these differences should be conceived according to rather obvious principles – but I will not develop them here. The modern obsession with homogeneity (already evident in 1860!) is an example of a merely accessible virtue masquerading in the place of deeper virtues more difficult to attain. In the circumstances imposed by our era, the artistic typographer must accept the additional work of becoming fully aware of, and thereby articulating these aspects of beautiful typography, which have been obliterated by technology.

The basic *Amiante* font was created before I learned the history, or became fully aware of some of the problems, exposed above. As I worked, I referred to Adobe Garamond, a self-consciously Old Style font; Times, a Twentieth-Century Type; and an early 19th century French font which I can now identify as characteristically Modern Face. *Amiante* was, in part, a reaction to the problems I sensed in each: Times’ dark color and mechanical regularity, Adobe Garamond’s inappropriate proportions, modeling and color for 10 points (plus some unpleasing letter shapes such as the squashed gothic ‘a’ or the bloated lower lobe of the ‘g’, foreign, as it turns out, to Claude Garamond’s fonts, and apparently an English innovation) and the Modern Face font’s boxy, rigid forms and exaggerated modeling. On the other hand Times helped me understand that Adobe Garamond’s *color* is too light for good legibility at 10 points and I used the Old Style shapes of Adobe Garamond, altering them to the Modern Face proportions. I rejected the dull, mechanical, and almost identical, Adobe and Times numerals, as well as the fad of ‘lower case’ numbers (despite its historical legitimacy), and followed the pleasing French 19th century models, though I had to invent (mainly, simplify) some of the forms to achieve harmony in the more suave *Amiante* esthetic.

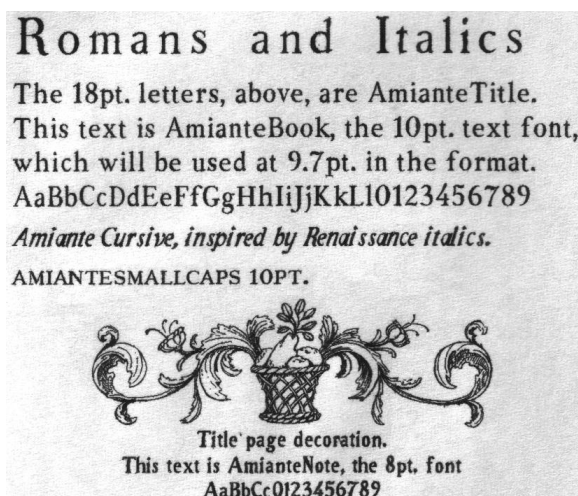
As for originality in *Amiante*: I thought I had invented a subtle curve for the ‘G’, but have since found this obvious idea in one of Baskerville’s fonts. What appears to be an innovation for the ‘q’ is also an obvious idea, though I find it nowhere. But it was not the possible originality of these ideas that tempted me, it was their obviousness. The most important

quality a font can have, given the situation where it is used, is *inevitability*. As for the descender of the ‘q’, it was designed, above all, to distinguish it from the ‘p’. I instinctively followed a system of shading which seemed logical and obvious given the letter proportions I was after (vertical shading: PRGCOUDQBco6890; Oblique shading: Spdaesqbpd23457). This solution, to my delight, turns out to be consonant with Transitional Romans: in other words, it is obvious in itself. Right reflection leads inevitably towards the ideal solutions.

It is not until the 18th century that styles really appropriate to small type appear. *Amiante* reaches for a union of the advantages of the best Modern Face proportions and the classical Garamond shapes – the very union achieved by the best 18th century models. *Amiante* is indeed much like Fleischmann’s and Fournier’s fonts. As it turns out, it also feels closer to Claude Garamond’s actual fonts than Adobe Garamond does. It is also gratifying that *Amiante* recalls French, Dutch and German sensibilities: places where Vance is so well appreciated. It should be noted that *Amiante* is certainly not in all respects similar to, say, Fleischmann’s fonts. It is more suave; its serifs are less pronounced, and it can afford to be lighter in color given modern papers and printing techniques. It is identical to such fonts, however, in being conceived not generically, but for a specific job.

The computer revolution has given us bad habits. People are excited by the nifty tools that allow us to manipulate images in all directions. But artistic results in typography can only be achieved by the altogether human work of conceiving each individual letter for each size and context. The letters of *Amiante* were, with few exceptions, drawn on paper. There is no magical virtue to ink or paper (of course!) but there *are* special disadvantages to electronic drawing tools. In the excitement these new tools have generated, their serious deficiencies are systematically neglected. In fact, it is far easier to draw a letter by hand than with electronic tools – which is not, in itself, a reason to do so. But what cannot be done by hand, and what should not be done in font work, is what electronic drawing does best: generating, copying and combining geometrically pristine forms. The temptation to rationalize on the one hand, or to be “creative” on the cheap using transformations and combinations so easy to manipulate in the electronic milieu, is very strong. It leads to the proliferation of repetitive and bizarre forms currently

dominating the aesthetics of the minor arts. The *VIE* must avoid these errors. To make the statement that the prose of Jack Vance is for the ages, we must digest the old lessons and “mine our rich cultural heritage,” to drag out a hackneyed – though in this case justified – phrase. While digital Old Style fonts may be the best solution commercially available at present, they are emasculated. They lack legibility, sobriety, and verve. Their virtues are parodies of really artistic typography. Ours will be looked back upon as a vapid and unsatisfactory period of book design. May the *VIE* escape the opprobrium of a wiser age with a robust and elegant typographical éclat!



Amiante, 2000

Paul Rhoads

Quoins, Tympan & Frisket

Paul Rhoads and Joel Anderson have continued working very closely together to complete the *Amiante* font family. In addition to the basic master font of *AmianteBook*, they have produced a specific version for notes, *AmianteNote*, and an italic version, *AmianteCursive*, to cover the various needs in the text body. They have also made particular versions of *Amiante* for various components of the volumes' front matter.

Frequently fonts are viewed in isolation from the entire page and presentation, leading one to the potential error of specifying a font and size that may not work well at all with the chosen page size and format. The work of developing this unique font family has gone hand in hand with exactly

specifying the page design itself, including careful adjustment of numbers of lines per page, line length, point size and leading. Truly, this work contributes to enhancing legibility given our page size, to say nothing of the aura of literary probity it achieves.

Building on the solid foundation of our basic format, closely based on Andreas Irlé's beautiful German editions, Joel Anderson, in addition to his important contribution to the fonts, is the architect of a set of subtle, important and exciting refinements which will give the pages of our books a character and perfection all their own. This attention to design directly supports the major goal of the *VIE* project. Sample pages will be made available in *Cosmopolis* Volume 1, Issue 7.

As I mentioned in last month's update, I and the other critical members attending to the book design endorse this development. Some few details and refinements remain, but so few that it is now time for us to begin to attend more directly to the development of the composition team processes and get ready to publish them.

A few remaining notes:

– The tutorial prepared by John Schwab has been a complete success: my thanks to John for working so hard to push us forward in this (and other areas).

– John Schwab and I are beginning to work on the team process definition.

A note to people who are interested in composition work:

– From time to time people kindly volunteer their services to join this effort, only to discover that their offer is not accepted. As a matter of premeditated design, I have chosen to keep the composition team very small.

There are a number of important reasons for this. However, I intend to be flexible if the case warrants, and it may be necessary at some point in the future to involve some others on the team (if the process throughput is not sufficient). In this case, if you are interested, please provide Deborah Cohen, our project gatekeeper, with information about you and your experience with typesetting.

John Foley, Composition Team

Statistics

Current *VIE* Progress as of June 20, 2000

TOTAL NUMBER OF STORIES IN <i>VIE</i>	131
Assigned for digitization	131
Digitized	120
Assigned for 1st proof reading	114
1st proof completed	87
Assigned for 2nd proof	74
2nd proof completed	37
Assigned for correction:	20
Completed initial correction:	2

John A. Schwab, Text-Entry Coordinator

VIE Errata Repository

This is just a reminder that the *VIE* maintains a repository of errata discovered outside of *VIE* assignments. We welcome any errors or queries you may discover in Jack's published texts. To submit an erratum, send e-mail to suan@cs.wisc.edu with the following information:

- the title and edition of the story,
- the location of the error (page and paragraph number, or enough context to precisely identify the error), and
- the nature of the error (typo, inconsistency, etc.)

You may view the contents of the repository at the bottom of the Process Integrity website:

<http://www.cs.wisc.edu/~suan/vie>

Thanks to those who have already contributed (and those who will in the future).

Suan Yong, Process Integrity

The Gastric Imperative

There is a hole that's in my head.

I have to fill it or I'm dead.

In this hole I put dead pigs,
artichokes and smyrna figs.

Crabs and fishes from the sea,
dead as well, go into me.

A squad of teeth is in this mouth.

They mash these things and send them south.

Below, my stomach, in a hurry,
turns this mush to slime and slurry,
speeds it through intestines kinky,
transforming into something stinky.

I find this process quite unseemly,
ill-conceived and unredeemly.

Must my energy derive
from creatures who were once alive,
like me, and willy-nilly
eating others? It's so silly.

Excuse me now. I must go
and see to matters down below.

George Rhoads

Notes from Readers

We have received a record amount of mail this month ... and all of it welcome. When you write to tell us what you thought of an article, comments positive or negative, we know that someone is listening. Here they are, in approximate order of reception...

From John Vance II:

Dear *VIE* Subscribers,

These *VIE* events deserve special mention.

Ed Winskill and Bob Nelson have prevailed in their effort to achieve the status of California non-profit corporation for the *Vance Integral Edition, Inc.* Their first application to the Office of the Secretary of State of California was lost, but the second emerged complete with stamps, signatures and an official number.

Many thanks to Ed and Bob for getting this job done.

This month the graceful *Amiante* fonts are officially introduced. My quotable mother says that the fonts “are clear and open,” and that they “achieve Paul’s goal of clarity and beauty.” She also thinks that the plan to draw fonts specially for the edition was “a grand idea.”

I agree with her completely. *Amiante* will enhance our edition with classic qualities that will always be in perfect taste.

As always, we gratefully acknowledge the dedication of our volunteers, and the continued support of our subscribers.

From Rob Gerrard:

Bob,

Another fine issue, beautifully produced.

Paul Rhoads’ long piece is very thought provoking, and fascinating in its detours, but does not convince me about the importance of whether Jack Vance’s work is science fiction or not.

I do agree with Paul that what is important is to remove barriers to Vance reaching a wider market.

As to definitions of science fiction, I do find them time-wasting. It’s similar to the problem of how do you define a chair? Does it have four legs? Then what about an armchair that has a solid base? Etc. etc. The practical definition is: something that can be sat upon.

In similar vein, maybe science fiction is simply that which is published as science fiction!

Your classifications of writing make some sense, and when I apply them to science fiction, then certain writers are clearly

interested in writing about the human condition in a way that conventional literature makes difficult if not impossible.

In fact, Paul Rhoads touches upon an important point when he says my (provisional) definition of science fiction as speculative fiction would include Plato’s Republic or Swift’s Gulliver’s Travels.

Forgetting the huge amount of dross published as science fiction (not to mention the huge amount of dross published in any other genre or in “mainstream” fiction), what is interesting about quality science fiction writing is that it couldn’t deal with the ideas or issues unless it used some form of science fiction.

That is why Vance is special, and why Stapledon, Ballard, Le Guin or Dick are special; why Plato and Swift and Orwell are special.

Leslie Fielder once edited a fine anthology, *In Dreams Awake*, in which he made the point that dreams – I think at this remove his term for science fiction – could convey a better understanding of the world than realism.

So, getting back to the science fiction issue, while I believe we should make Vance available as unencumbered with labels as possible, we should not attack the field that nurtured him and was greatly improved by him.

Bob replies:

Thanks for the kudos, and your response to Paul’s piece.

True, one does get involved in semantic badminton when trying to form the definition of a thing after the fact. It is only in technical fields that one gets to define terms unambiguously ... and that is not the case here at all. Still, I tend to feel that the activity of *defining* sometimes helps to shed light on the underlying issues.

The purpose of *defining terms* is to assist in classification, discussion and study. This activity is performed by all who seek to understand, in any area of human knowledge. Without some means to classify, or place a number of “objects” in a single box, we would be forced to consider each and every physical object, idea, emotion, action as a unique and individual point in space-time unique unto itself. This would make it impossible to organize our studies, apply the benefits of generalization, or perhaps really think about systems of objects or ideas at all.

Of course, we understand that in some cases it isn't possible to form a category in which things fit neatly. Categories may be rigidly defined, but only the most naive person would imagine that the world will provide only good fits to the category. In some special cases, we may adopt rigid categories and accept only those objects as members which fit precisely. This is typical of some technical fields: it won't help us with science fiction!

I suspect, however, that no matter what definition of science fiction is adopted that there will always be stories which don't fit the category neatly: I doubt that many people would argue this point.

But the great danger is this: if a category exists which has only a vague definition, then anything may be said about the members of the category. For surely, if the "walls" of a container are fluid, one really can't know what's inside, or outside.

I'll never feel certain of the classification of Jack's work as science fiction because I'll never be certain that I know what science fiction is. I suppose I have to consider each and every story on its own merits ... not such a bad idea, of course. Now to get others to consider stories "on their own merit."

It would be nice to avoid the negative connotations of the label "science fiction" when referring to Jack's work, since this might make it easier to introduce his work to those who have a knee-jerk reaction to the genre, but this is difficult at best. We've an uphill struggle.

From Andy Gilham:

Bob,

After reading *Cosmopolis* (the one hefty download I do anticipate each month!) I was spurred (in a fit of devil's advocacy) to write the following brief article, which you may consider for publication if you see fit.

Is Jack Vance a Science Fiction Writer?

Recent discussion, especially a strong case made by Paul Rhoads, suggests that Jack Vance is, in fact, not a science fiction writer. Indeed, after reading Paul's articles, one may be forgiven for wondering why one would entertain such a ridiculous notion in the first place.

I would instead claim that Vance is *obviously* a science fiction writer! The vast majority of his work has been published in science fiction magazines, or in specialist science fiction imprints. I expect he is a member of the SFWA (Science Fiction Writers of America); and while I would not necessarily suggest guilt by association, many of his close friends have been indisputably writers of science fiction – friendships made in the course of his profession. He has won Hugo and Nebula Awards for science fiction, surely not under false pretences? I suggest that, regardless of textual discussion, intrinsic merit, or genre definition, *in practice* Vance is a science fiction writer. (One is reminded of the apocryphal economist, who asked, "Well, it seems to work in practice but what about in theory?")

Why would anyone claim that Vance isn't a science fiction writer? Paul answers this explicitly enough: because science fiction is commonly despised. But while that may be true enough (and often for good reason), I submit that that is irrelevant. We all agree that Vance is a good and sometimes a great writer; is it such an oxymoron to suggest that he is a good science fiction writer?

There are some, if few, precedents for good science fiction writers to be recognized as such, notably Philip K. Dick, whose reputation seems to grow each year (though sadly not in his own lifetime). (Michael Moorcock and J. G. Ballard are perhaps less strong cases, as they owe their good reputations at least in part to mainstream novels such as *Mother London* and *Empire of the Sun*.) The example of Dick, though, shows that it is possible for science fiction to be regarded as literature, if it is of sufficient merit.

Of course, it is clear that Vance isn't a typical science fiction writer, not only in his first-class skill as a writer, but in his attitude towards his work. Vance might even be a science fiction writer by accident; in an earlier time, when maps of the world bore large empty spaces with the words terra incognita, perhaps his fiction would have been set on our Earth, in the tradition of Swift, or even Burroughs. It is easy enough to come up with a definition of science fiction that excludes Vance. And yet science fiction is notoriously hard to define; any definition hinging on the word science is likely to exclude much that common sense would include.

Most of my books are in storage at present, awaiting a house move, but I am currently reading *La Mémoire des Etoiles* (*Night Lamp* in French translation, as an enjoyable exercise in retaining such fluency as I have). It is labeled "Science-Fantasy." This hybrid label seems to have fallen

into disuse in the English-speaking world, but is perhaps more appropriate, if even less flattering!

Oddly, we seem to have no trouble with labeling Vance's crime novels as such – maybe this is because they clearly are such from simply reading the text, but maybe because crime as a genre is somehow more respectable. (And yet, giants of the field such as Raymond Chandler and Jim Thompson were originally published in the pulps, too.)

Ultimately, however, while I disagree with Paul's reasoning, I agree with his course of action! Because if, as I assert, science fiction is that subset of fiction which is labeled science fiction, and as the task of the *VIE* is to publish the same body of work without the label then, hey presto, it isn't science fiction any more.

And if the work as presented in the *VIE* becomes the accepted edition of Vance, then he will no longer be a science fiction writer.

(As an addendum, the notion that Vance is a writer of boys' books is given some large measure of support by perusing the list of *VIE* subscribers and this is a matter I would prefer not to correct by re-labeling, at least not personally.)

Bob replies:

I had to laugh out loud at "guilt by association!" *Touché*, my friend! Indeed, in looking through Jack and Norma's photo-album I came across snapshots of Frank Herbert and Poul Anderson. Robert Silverberg showed up one evening for snacks and cocktails. These folk are often suspected as science fiction authors. But now I defer to Paul, who replies to your letter.

Paul replies:

The Trouble with Science Fiction

Is it, or not, important whether Vance's work is labeled science fiction? In my opinion it is, but only to the extent that the freer it is of this label, the more people will have the pleasure and profit of it. Therefore we are touching the major *VIE* goal. There is no arguing with the point made by Andy Gilham: Vance's work is published as science fiction, so this is what it "is." I am reminded of Edelrod's famous discourse from *The Palace of Love*.

"This is the meng. From one of his organs comes a substance which can be distributed either as ulgar or as furux. The same substance, mind you! But when sold as ulgar and used as such, the symptom are spasms,

biting off of the tongue and a frothing madness. When sold and used as furux, the interskeletal cartilage is dissolved so that the frame goes limp. What do you say to that? Is that not metaphysics of the most exalted order?"

The point is: labels have metaphysical importance. The metaphysics of Vance's situation is that he is almost completely unknown – even in the science fiction world, if you please! A point I did not repeat in my last article is that Vance is not popular within science fiction because he does not give science fiction readers what they want, namely: science fiction. (By *science fiction readers*, of course I am designating the vulgar majority, not that distinguished group, with whom I am proud to be associated: *Cosmopolis* readers.) This is not altogether a matter of opinion: walk into any book store where they sell science fiction, and try to buy some Vance.

(Editor's note: Something else that Jack Vance has never given much of to science fiction readers: self-serving appearances at science fiction conventions. This sort of relentless self-promotion is more typical of an Asimov than a Vance, with the dully predictable results. And yet, a genuine fan may, with little effort, find himself in private conversation with Jack Vance, and enjoy the generous gift of Jack's undivided attention. I wonder how easy it was to approach Asimov as a fan.)

I hope Rob Gerrand understood my point that while science fiction, as he would define it, might seem to include Plato's *Republic*, in fact it cannot – for reasons I will not repeat. If the term *science fiction* is replaced by *speculative literature*, then *The Republic* and the books we call *science fiction* could be grouped together, if uneasily, though the problem does not go away: at that point the difference between what we used to call science fiction and what we used to call *political philosophy*, *social satire*, and so on, would still have to be accounted for. The question of what is the best way to live (the theme of *The Republic*), and the question of how it would be if mysterious masters controlled how the world appears (the theme of both Lem's *Futurological Congress*, and the film, *The Matrix*) are different kinds of questions in their essence. Upon the former depends all our happiness in life, while the latter is mere sophomoric intellectualizing, with no possible consequences of any imaginable importance.

Rob wrote that science fiction could not do what it does unless it used the forms of science fiction. I am willing to accept this, but he must inform us what science fiction is, so that we can understand why only it can do whatever it is that it does. Also, though Rob deplors my attack on

science fiction – and I am sorry to have to be so contrary – particularly with a star *VIE* volunteer! – he does not address my point that in order to unencumber Vance of the genre label of science fiction so as to make him more available to the world, we can not escape the task of defining it. You cannot say what a thing is not, if you cannot say what it is. We are obliged to define science fiction, and if the definition shows it to be an inferior genre, this must be faced. If Rob’s idea is that we simply should not address the question, I cannot accept this. I have spent enough time trying to convince non-science fiction readers to sample Vance, to know whereof I speak; not to mention that as Editor in Chief. of the *Vance Integral Edition* I am the person ultimately responsible for its success.

Bob points out that science fiction is mostly a question of décor. I think this is true. But again, what I am trying to discuss is not the mass of science fiction, but the essence of it. The term *Western* really means something. It means books that are set in the Wild West. They will include: cowboys, Indians, outlaws, the U.S. Calvary, ranches, sheriffs, a girl in a bonnet, buggies, covered wagons, showboats on the Mississippi, trains, and so on. Books that don’t have these elements are not Westerns. They may be *like* Westerns, but they are not Westerns. Westerns are about décor, as well as the values and moods they tend to evoke: namely rugged individualism and nostalgia for a certain American past. Science fiction also, in essence, is about more than décor. I have tried to define what this essence is.

From Lee Lewis:

Just to throw my two pennies in on the “Is Jack a science fiction writer debate.” It really doesn’t matter how much Paul Rhoads tries to rename, reclassify or re-invent Vance. The only people he might convince are Vance lovers who aren’t happy with the science fiction writer tag. I have on numerous occasions lent a book to a non-Vance, non-science fiction reader (usually *Araminta Station* because it has the least “Spaceships and Aliens” and is in fact a whodunit), and they invariably return the book within a couple of days saying “Sorry, I can’t get into science fiction.”

You see the problem is that a large majority of Vance’s books contain all or at least most of the elements of what is seen as science fiction: “Spaceships and Aliens” (albeit human ones mostly), strange worlds and advanced technology.

So Paul Rhoads can argue that Vance is not a science fiction writer until he’s blue in the face, you can print the books in lovely leather covers, but nothing will stop the fact that your average man in the street will consider Vance to be a science fiction writer the moment he starts to read him. The only way to stop this is to remove or rewrite all elements that might be considered science fiction (not an option, I hope). So instead of trying to reclassify the genre, how about trying at least to elevate awareness of it? If we can in some way reduce the perceived geekish element to reading science fiction, we will have gone a long way to getting Vance read in wider circles.

Personally, I would classify Jack as a “science fantasy mystery writer” as he moves between the three genres. The majority of his books are science fiction, though of the soft type (i.e., non technical). The *Lyoness* series and the *Dying Earth* books are definitely of the fantasy genre (a genre that is even looked down upon by science fiction readers) and lastly there are the mysteries. Many of his books contain elements of two or even all three of these genres, but if I were pressed to describe Jack’s work I would have to say that he is a science fiction writer. When it comes down to it, it should not matter under what genre Jack Vance is classified, the important point to remember is that there are a lot of people who are missing out on a truly great writer and if the *VIE* project can reach even a small portion of these people it will be worth it.

Bob replies:

I wish it were easier to dismiss the effects of genre and move on to promote Jack Vance. But indeed, the cognomen “science fiction” is enough to discourage many potential readers. At times I say to myself, “so what?” – who needs these narrow-minded individuals? The difficulty here is that some of these folks are academicians whose good opinion, critical opinion, would do much for the literary reputation of Jack Vance.

Oh, I am interested to hear that you use *Araminta Station* as your Vance lightning rod. That’s a good choice. I personally use *The Moon Moth*. It does not require the commitment needed to read an entire book, and I have several copies of it.

I take this approach: I bore right in, saying, “This is science fiction, but only because it happens to take place on another planet. That’s not important. Here’s what’s really

neat about this story – there’s a human society which behaves in a really strange way: everyone wears a mask.”

At this point, the person I’ve collared is at least paying attention, and I’ve gotten the dreaded phrase “science fiction” out of the way. Then I continue, without quarter: “the masks are supposed to represent the personality of the wearer.” I know I’ve made a sale if the mark is beginning to think, “but that’s what we all do, wear a mask ...”

I then describe the plot: our protagonist must find a criminal hiding behind his mask, and note that by the way, the language in this strange place is partially sung ...

Usually, the person will read *The Moon Moth*, either because my enthusiasm has reached them, or they want me to just go away.

In any event, we plod on ... knowing that we have gems for the world to see, hidden in a back room, in a dull box, but shining in the ultraviolet spectrum.

From David Hecht:

I hope you will not mind my throwing my two cents in on this by now well-worn debate. By now it is clear that there is a certain – not tension exactly – but, shall I say, asymmetry, between the *VIE* editorial staff and the “typical” Vance reader (of whom I consider myself one).

Let me start out by saying that, when I read fiction, it is almost without exception what is nowadays referred to as “science fiction.” This is how I came into contact with Vance in the first place, and, like it or not, it is how his work has been categorized for the last half-century and more. The genre has been in recent years decoupled into “fantasy” and “science fiction” and I am quite happy to read what I would call “hard fantasy” which is how I would characterize many of Vance’s works (e.g., pretty much all the *Dying Earth* stuff).

While I agree that “science fiction” can be defined in a variety of ways, I would argue that science fiction can be defined as follows (the definitions are not original): (1) speculative fiction: a work that asks a “what-if” question, and (2) scientific fantasy: a work that postulates changes, whether evolutionary or revolutionary, whether plausible scientifically or not, and extrapolates the impact.

The key criterion that separates science fiction from “traditional” fantasy is that the extrapolations and the “what-

if” are logically worked out: the author confines himself to working out the story within the limitations of the changes that he has set forth. The key criterion that separates science fiction from other literary forms is that the changes and speculations are inseparable from the work: one cannot merely substitute (say) horses and six-shooters for rockets and rayguns and maintain the integrity of the story.

Now this is not to say – as I think some seem to be arguing – that science fiction is a genre separate and exclusive: many works that properly belong to other genres contain science fiction elements, and many works of SF partake of other genres as well. It seems to me that, at some level, the debate over whether Vance is SF or not loses sight of this fundamental fact: that the taxonomy of literature is much fuzzier than the taxonomy of, for example, plants or animals.

Using the criteria above, allow me to provide some examples of the “SF-ness”(or lack thereof) of Vance’s work:

1. My favorite of Vance’s short stories, *Sail 25/Dust of Far Suns*, is clearly not science fiction: the scenario is one that could as easily take place in a naval or maritime academy (and training vessel) from the most ancient times to the present day. The scientific elements are clearly severable: hence, *Sail* is not science fiction.

2. From the same collection, *The Gift of Gab* would clearly be science fiction: the central speculative element, the universal ability to establish abstract communication (for want of a better phrase) cannot be removed without destroying the integrity of the story. The other “scientific” elements can be removed: the story could as easily take place on Earth and be about dolphins as about dekabrats. But, although there are indications that dolphins (among others) use language, there is no hard evidence that they are capable of using it to the level of abstraction needed to demonstrate “intelligence” as defined in the story. *Gab*, then, is clearly science fiction, and a fairly straightforward “what-if” at that.

3. Again, from the same collection, *Dodkin’s Job* and *Ullward’s Retreat* are sociological meditations. Since there is nothing particularly science fiction-ish about the societies portrayed, one could well argue that they are not science fiction. Yet, there is a subtle science fiction issue in *Retreat* that pushes it over the line into science fiction: the notion that, in a society where population pressure has made access to “real” open space impossible, people’s perceptions will

change to consider the “fake” spaces that are available to be more desirable. *Retreat*, then, should be considered science fiction. By the same token, *Job* postulates a principle of organization that is clearly unattainable within present sociological limitations: hence, the society presented is in and of itself science fiction-ish, albeit within the limitations of the genre of utopian (or dystopian) literature of which perhaps the best known examples are Huxley’s *Brave New World* and Orwell’s *1984*.

This clearly illustrates the point that, within the science fiction genre, certain sub-genres are more clearly science fiction than others, and those others have a heritage that is more ancient than the science fiction genre. I have already discussed the utopic/dystopic genre as one such: another example would be alternate history. Clearly there is a difference between a historical novel whose principal characters are fictional, but that adheres faithfully to “real history,” such as the Hornblower or Aubrey/Maturin novels, and a historical novel that takes place in a timeline quite different from ours, such as Harry Turtledove’s *How Few Remain* or Harry Harrison’s *Stars and Stripes Forever*, each of which is a speculation on a different outcome to the American Civil War based on a changed event, requiring no “scientific” intervention of any sort. Is “pure” alternate history science fiction? I certainly think so. Others may differ. Is it also “historical fiction,” of the Hornblower genre? Clearly.

I could provide additional examples: such as Isaac Asimov’s science fiction mysteries, anthologized and prefaced by him that it is exceedingly difficult to write a science fiction mystery because of the inherent temptation to deal from the bottom of the deck. But I will simply conclude as follows:

1. Vance is a great writer;
2. Vance has “made his bones” as a writer in science fiction and fantasy;
3. Vance may yet, like H.G. Wells and Jules Verne, transcend the limitations of the science fiction genre;
4. But if he remains so categorized in most people’s minds, I will not shed a tear.

I hope this does not get my name crossed out of the *VIE* family Bible.

Bob replies:

Well, you’re hardly going to be tossed from the *VIE*’s family Bible for taking the time to express your considered opinions! But I have a few thoughts in response.

First off, that’s enough of this “two cents” business. David is the second writer who wishes to throw in two cents. C’mon guys – have you any idea of the effort involved in mounting *Cosmopolis* every month? I doubt it. I’m tempted to do these two things: write an article on just what goes into production of the issue, giving long overdue credit to the work of our editors and proofreaders, and to raise the fee to toss opinions into the hat from two cents to a few dollars.

But more seriously, my interest in the label “science fiction” is merely that it is a pejorative one to many people. It makes it difficult to introduce Vance to people who might enjoy him greatly, but are simply shunted aside by the taint of the genre.

This is really very frustrating. Few enough people read, and of those, much of their reading is for pleasure. Certainly, the opportunity to discover another author who brings pleasure should be greeted with joy. Why then the frowns when the words “science fiction” are uttered?

And why is it that anyone has the effrontery to dismiss everything labeled as science fiction as dross? That is, who are these people, these Nobel prize winners and Pulitzer winners who so casually dismiss this body of work? What have they written? I suspect that they merely ape the attitude of academics in liberal arts programs ... I’m not sure, since I don’t know where the disdain of science fiction is rooted.

Personally, I enjoy some science fiction. I have a library of about 3000 volumes, not very selectively chosen, but a reasonable sample of the genre nevertheless. Over the years I have become more selective, but the name “science fiction” itself doesn’t frighten me. (And despite my comments above and elsewhere, I enjoy much of Asimov’s work, at least much of the earlier work.)

If, through arguments similar to Paul’s or my own, we show that the work of Jack Vance transcends the genre classification, all the better. It might then be possible to attract a larger readership to this remarkable author.

Of course, in the way of such discussions, science fiction may come under some attack for its more glaring faults. But this shouldn’t be construed to be an all-out attack upon the field. (It wouldn’t hurt if some of those faults disappeared, however.)

Thanks, Amy. I hope this is better.

From Amy Harlib:

Another great issue of a 'zine that keeps getting better and better. Vance's greatness as a writer is perpetually confirmed because his work generates such stimulating philosophical discussions as were featured in another fine article by the inimitable Paul Rhoads, *Some Reactions to Critical Appreciations*. I just got my copy of *Critical Appreciations* but I haven't had a chance to read it yet – looks wonderful though.

Must take STRONG exception to closing comment by Bob that window trappings of magic, far stars and far times do not matter at all.

Quite the opposite!!!! If I want mundane reality and dreary modern everyday life – I read non-fiction and journalism and lots of it. But, I crave works of invention, imaginative creation that transport me to non-ordinary reality and invoke a sense of wonder and awe – only the “window trappings” of the genres of science fiction and fantasy literature can do this. Personally – I DETEST “mundane, mainstream” fiction, even the so-called great classics – life is too short to waste and there's not enough time to read everything and I'd rather marvel at how a great science fiction and fantasy writer can invent this stuff out of his head which I can't do at all – there's nothing so exciting as great world-building and exotica in a story as a colorful backdrop for the essential fully rounded characters and unpredictable plot that all good fiction will have. Vance is an exemplar of creating the best “window trappings” – long may he and his ilk continue to do so!!

Bob replies:

Ah-ha. The truth outs, or is it, the truth ouch? Ms. Harlib seeks the exotic window trappings of science fiction for the escapism of it. Oh well – I may as well 'fess up – so do I, Amy, so do I...

Amy has caught me looking. It may be too late to correct myself, but when I wrote that

Now I assert: much of the writings of Jack Vance are literature of the first kind, the literature of human condition, and the window trappings of magic, far stars and far times do not matter at all.

I should have written

Now I assert: much of the writings of Jack Vance are literature of the first kind, the literature of human condition, and the window trappings of magic, far stars and far times do not matter at all to the quality of his writings.

From Alexander Feht:

Vance in Russian

(excerpt of a letter to the *VIE* from a Russian poet, musical composer, and translator who hopes to publish Vance in Russian)

... piracy is the way of a publishing life in Russia. This is why I hope to translate at least some of Vance's books into Russian in a legal, appropriate way. Also, most of the science fiction translations currently published in Russia are of the “cheap and fast” kind, that is, of terrible quality. A proper, well-written translation of Vance's books would be a long, hard, and, most probably, unprofitable work. He is worth it, though.

I have read only one of the early Vance short stories in Russian. I believe it was published, together with a collection of short stories by other science fiction writers, during the 60s, more than 30 years ago. Generally, Vance's works would not be published in the USSR for political reasons, because many of his novels reveal, in a realistic satirical light uncomfortable to authorities, the many repulsive details of the socialist society. Vance is the only one of the Western writers known to me who completely understands that nothing more than basic human weakness (envy, ignorance, laziness, parasitism, and theft), rudely camouflaged by some quasi-Christian moralization, is the foundation of socialism. Sometimes (reading *Emphyria*, for example) I wondered: what experience allowed Vance, who never lived in a purely socialist society, to understand so well the pathetic ugliness and the deadly danger of totalitarian spirit? Is Western society already socialist to the extent that the most sensitive and intelligent observers can correctly describe its logical derivative?

Bob replies:

It is most gratifying to hear Mr. Feht on the topic of Jack's insight into political systems. His observation lends weight to my thesis that Jack's work transcends the genre in which it is commonly lumped.

Mr. Feht, however, is more generous than I would be in ascribing, as foundations to socialist society, envy, ignorance, laziness, parasitism, and theft. This is entirely too

long a list of virtues, even considering ignorance and laziness to be endemic everywhere, and admitting that the other virtues listed are negative ones. By observations of socialist leaders, and in drawing comparisons to American politicians and their spawn, career bureaucrats, one can see that the primary foundation of socialism is merely brigandage. In defense of socialism, on the other hand, it seems that it could be a most desirable society, if one happens to be one of the brigands.

I'm sure that Jack Vance, in correctly describing pathological systems such as socialism, merely extrapolated from observations of fringe behavior of the political system in which he lives.

I have read my e-mail with delight this month: my in-box has been flooded with thoughtful commentary by these readers who have taken the time and trouble to share their thoughts with me and the readership of *Cosmopolis*.

As is always the case, we appreciate your comments, praise and criticism. Again, I invite all of our readers to contribute to our letters section.

Bob Lacovara, Editor of *Cosmopolis*

Bob's Closing Comments

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

I will travel to Japan on business at the very end of July. I have contacted a few of our readers there, and plan to meet with them. It will be interesting to hear how a Japanese reader found and then came to enjoy Vance. One respondent tells me that he has all of Jack's work in Japanese, a collection I look forward to seeing.

This month's issue contains a great deal on the font created particularly for Jack's work, *Amiante*. Next month I hope to provide our readers with a good sample of the font, as it is likely to be seen in the *VIE* volumes themselves. It may be necessary to provide a URL for you to obtain the sample: we are working on technical details at this time.

***Cosmopolis* Keeps Getting Larger**

It is impossible not to notice that the size of *Cosmopolis* keeps increasing. This is due mostly to the inclusion of images, the number of which vary from issue to issue. If receiving large attachments via-email is a problem for you, do have a look at "delivery options" on the next page.

Notice to Letter Writers and Article Authors

Because I will be on travel at the end of July, the deadline for Issue 7 of *Cosmopolis* will be advanced to July 17. Sorry for the inconvenience.

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The Fine Print

Letters to the Editor

Letters to *Cosmopolis* may be published in whole or in part, with or without attribution, at the discretion of *Cosmopolis*. Send your e-mail to Bob Lacovara, with indication that you'd like your comments published.

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 an e-mail.

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Publication Information

For reprint information, address Bob Lacovara.

Cosmopolis is assembled, edited and transferred across the Gaeon Reach from Houston, Texas, United States of America, Sol III.

Cosmopolis is delivered as an Adobe® Acrobat® PDF file. If you wish to have the most current version of the free Acrobat reader, follow this link:



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