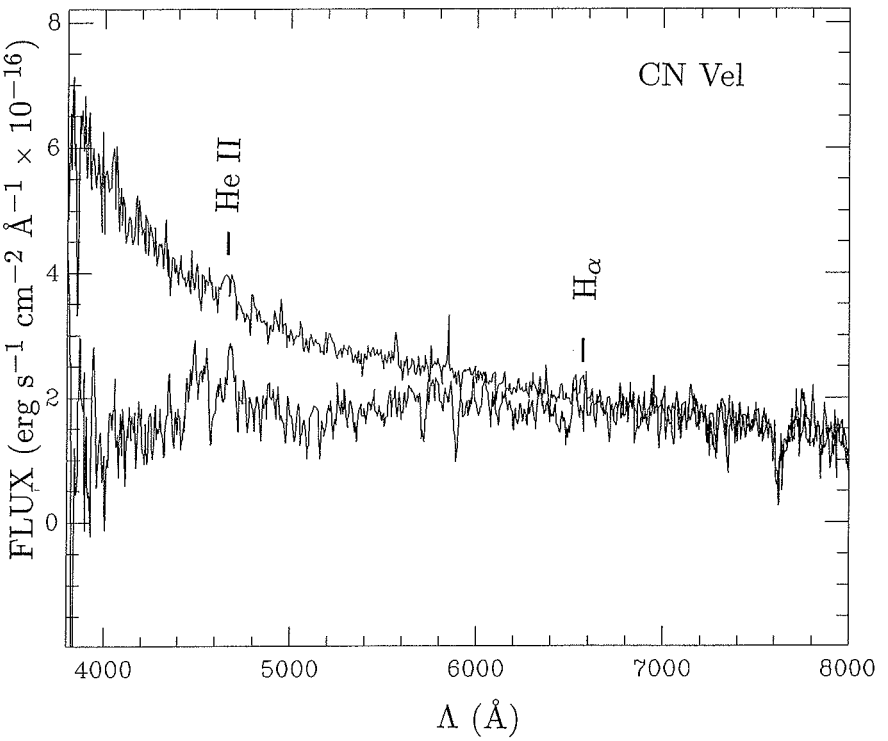

Figure 2: *The "blue flare" of CN Vel. The spectrum taken on February 21, compared to the average of the spectra of February 18 and 19, when the nova was at quiescence.*

(1934) does not appear as a classical nova, and even the suggested dwarf nova nature is extremely unlikely: the characteristic features of its spectrum are a hot continuum and H lines in absorption like a B star. An interesting possibility could be that of an X-ray source that bursted also in the optical range. Also the spectrum of N Car 1953 is not nova-like, but a late-type star absorption spectrum, casting doubts either on the classification as a nova or on the position recorded. An even later-type spectrum is that of AR Cir (1906), previously classified as a very slow nova, but probably a symbiotic star. Gl Mon (1918) shows a blue continuum with weak H and HeII emission lines. The spectrum of HS Pup (1963) has an F-type continuum, very strong Hα emission and a strong Balmer decrement (≥ 4) that could be ascribed to interstellar material. XX Tau (1927) shows a blue continuum and strong Balmer emissions.

Among the novae for which the spectrum at quiescence is already known, there are BT Mon (1939), with a flat continuum with strong emission lines and HeII fainter than Hβ; T Pyx (recurrent), whose continuum is very blue; RR Pic (1925), which is very blue and has very strong lines of HeII and λ4650 (CIII); CP Pup (1942) with a blue continuum and equally strong Hβ and HeII; the optical and X-ray nova V616 Mon (A0620-00) (1975), black hole candidate (Mc Clintock and Remillard, 1986). We also observed N Cen 1986, that has Hα in emission and weak HeII overimposed on a very red spectrum that resembles a symbiotic star rather than a classical nova (Fig. 1b).

The most interesting finding is a flare of the very slow nova CN Vel (1905). The nova was observed for 3 nights and in the 3rd the continuum seemed to flare in the blue region, as it is shown in Figure 2. More observations of this interesting object are undoubtedly needed.

The variety of the observed spectra, noted also in the pioneering survey of Williams (1983) is very interesting and confirms that the nova phenomenon is still poorly understood, so that systematic studies of the old nova population are requested.

References

Bianchini, A., 1990, *Astron. J.*, **99**, 6.

Dürbeck, H.W., 1987, *Space Sci. Rev.*, **45**, 1.

Livio, M., Shankar, A., Burkert, A., and Truran, J.W., 1990, *Astrophys. J.*, **356**, 250–254.

Mc Clintock, J.E., Remillard, R.A., 1986, *Astrophys. J.*, **308**, 110.

Ögelman, H.B., Krautter, J., and Beuermann, K., *Astron. Astrophys.*, **177**, 110.

Shara, M.M., Livio, M., Moffat, A.F.J., Orio, M., 1986, *Astrophys. J.*, **311**, 163.

Starrfield, S., 1989, in *The Physics of Classical Novae*, A. Cassatella and R. Viotti eds., in press.

Vogt, N., 1986, in *Classical Novae*, M.F. Bode and A. Evans eds., Chichester: Wiley and Sons.

Williams, G., 1983, *Astrophys. J. Suppl. Ser.*, **53**, 523.

New Items from ESO Information Service

Among the new items recently prepared by the ESO Information Service, the following may be of particular interest to the readers of our journal:

- A video film: "Paranal: The Best Site for the Biggest Telescope" which describes the extensive site testing that was carried out by ESO in order to select the very best site for its 16-metre equivalent Very Large Telescope. It includes aerial views of Paranal and conveys the isolation of this remote desert location. Duration 15 min.; Price: 70 DM; available in VHS, S-VHS, Betacam, M II; English commentary.
- A new series of spectacular posters, showing astronomical objects, photographed with telescopes at La Silla. Topics available by June 1991: (1) The "Rim" Nebula; (2) The Milky Way in Sagittarius; (3) The Rosetta Nebula; (4) The Star-Forming Region NGC 3576; (5) Spiral Galaxy NGC 300. Price for one poster: 15 DM; for each additional: 12 DM.
- Coming soon: A very large photographic poster, showing the entire Milky Way band and with identification of the major nebulae, etc., is presently in production and will be announced in the next *Messenger*.

Orders should be placed with the ESO Information Service (address on last page). Please note that the delivery time will be about 4 weeks.