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Recommended Citation

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Science Fiction

ARTHUR B. EVANS

Paralleling socioliterary trends in both America and England, France has witnessed a continual rise in the popularity and the academic study of "SF" during the latter half of the twentieth century. Heavily eclectic during the 1950s and the early 1960s (reflecting the dominance of Anglo-American SF in the French marketplace), SF writers in France have nevertheless succeeded, during the seventies and eighties, in carving out a special niche for *la science-fiction française* in world literary circles. Described by one critic as "a demanding cocktail of Verne, selective American and British genre influences (the paranoia of Dick and Ballard, Herbert's global galactic politics), and French pragmatism and popular romance, with an added zest of structuralism, existentialism, political commentary, and absurdist preoccupations"[1] and by another as "a special combination of acute political awareness, psychological insight, surrealistic whimsy, imaginative fertility, and sheer metaphysical brain power,"[2] contemporary French SF is an intellectually spicy dish that offers a variety of new and unusual tastes to those with a palate for modern speculative fiction.

HISTORICAL OUTLINE

Although the French neologism *science-fiction* has only quite recently gained critical acceptance in France as a generic label for this brand of writing—as opposed to *roman d'anticipation*, for instance—its tradition in the history of French literature is both long and rich. The earliest works of French SF (to the extent that utopian fantasy and imaginary voyages qualify as such) are undoubtedly Rabelais's *Gargantua* and *Pantagruel* along with his *Tiers Livre*, *Quart Livre*, and *L'Isle sonnante* (1532–64). From their creation of the idyllic Abbey of Thélème to their adventure-filled travels to distant lands of wonder, Rabelais's

Renaissance giants exemplify an unabashed nonconformism, a penchant for encyclopedic erudition, and a passion for exploration beyond the limits of the known. These traits will later characterize much of French science fiction.

More identifiably scientific (although just as fantastic) in nature are Cyrano de Bergerac's *Histoire comique des états et empires de la lune* (1657) and *Histoire comique des états et empires du soleil* (1662). In these comically satirical works, the author journeys to the "States and Empires of the Moon and Sun" in order to discuss issues ranging from physics to metaphysics with the indigenous life forms located there. In so doing, Cyrano portrays varying methods of interplanetary travel—bottles of dew attached to the body, spring-and-rocket machines, a lotion of beef marrow (!), lodestones and iron chariots, and even a solar-powered vessel containing an "iconsahedron crystal"—as well as an astonishing number of other wonders like phonograph-books, mobile cities, molecular shape-shifters, and so on. As fast-paced yarns combining cosmic travel, *libertin* philosophizing, and a host of technological marvels, Cyrano's works are perhaps France's first true SF novels.

In a less risqué and more pragmatically didactic mode (a variant followed by a good deal of early French SF), Fontenelle's *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* (1686) sought both to teach the rudiments of astronomy and to rationally speculate on the possibility of human life elsewhere in the universe. The fictional format used—that of a series of instructive dialogues between a learned scientist/mentor and a curious young noblewoman/acolyte—established a particular SF narrative recipe that would become highly conventional in France from the late seventeenth century through the end of the nineteenth century.

During the *Siècle des Lumières*, French SF generally continues to oscillate between the dual poles of overt didacticism à la Fontenelle (either scientific or moral) and polemical "alien encounters" à la Cyrano. With the growing popularity of the *conte philosophique* and the reports of faraway exotic cultures brought back by explorers like Bougainville and Cook, French writers increasingly chose the "imaginary voyage" narrative to frame their utopian hypothesizing, their pedagogical (and ethical) demonstrations, and their social satires. Such works as Marivaux's *L'Île des esclaves* (1723), Voltaire's *Micromégas* (1752), Diderot's *Rêve de d'Alembert* (1769) and *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville* (1772)—not to mention the futuristic *L'An 2440* by Louis-Sébastien Mercier (1771), Casanova's subterranean *Isocaméron* (1788), and Restif de la Bretonne's highly imaginative *La Découverte australe* (1781) and *Les Posthumes* (1796, 1802)—all reflect this passionate interest in distant locales and radically different social perspectives.

During the nineteenth century, under the dual impulses of a new freedom of expression in chosen subjects and narrative form (Romanticism) and the revolutionary social—and ideological—impact of unprecedented technological growth (the Industrial Revolution, Positivism), the SF genre flourished in France as never before. During the first half of the century, many new SF variants were born (although most, unfortunately, failed to gain widespread recognition until late twentieth-century SF scholarship succeeded in resurrecting their memory): Cousin de Grainville's realistically apocalyptic *Le Dernier Homme* (1805), Nodier's futuristic short stories *Hurlubleu* and *Léviathan-le-Long* (1833), the first great uchronia in Louis Geoffroy's *Napoléon apocryphe* (1836), Grandville's Robida-like illustrations in *Un autre monde* (1844), the first anti-industrial dystopia in Émile Souvestre's *Le Monde tel qu'il sera* (1846), the sociology of an entire alien civilization in Charles Defontenay's *Star, ou psi de Cassiopée* (1854), and even the first SF literary theoretician in Félix Bodin's *Le Roman de l'avenir* (1834).

But it was especially during the latter half of the century that French science fiction was heralded into what might be called its "golden age" by the *Voyages Extraordinaires* of Jules Verne. Verne's huge influence on the historical evolution of the genre—not only in France but worldwide—was both pervasive and long-lasting. Although generally conservative in his speculations (there are no alien life forms or future societies in his novels) and heavily didactic in his narrative recipes, Verne's *romans scientifiques* succeeded in firing the Industrial Age imaginations of several generations of readers. His fictional journeys target very real but highly exotic and/or then-inaccessible regions of earth, sea, and space; his heroic protagonists—often via extraordinary travel machines and invariably armed with encyclopedic scientific knowledge—methodically explore these regions, brave untold numbers of dangers, faithfully recount their observations and discoveries, and then return (unscathed and triumphant) to their original place of departure. From his first "scientific fiction" *Cinq semaines en ballon* (1863), through his early pro-science works *Voyage au centre de la Terre* (1864), *De la Terre à la Lune* (1865), *Vingt mille lieues sous les mers* (1870), and *L'Île mystérieuse* (1874) and his later somewhat antiscience novels *Sans dessus dessous* (1889), *Face au drapeau* (1896), and *Maître du monde* (1904), to the posthumous (and much revamped, by his son Michel) *L'Étonnante Aventure de la mission Barsac* (1919), Jules Verne's 64-volume output of exciting and educational "armchair voyages" gained him fame, fortune, and the reputation of being (along with H. G. Wells) one of the "founding fathers of modern SF."

Although this latter attribute is not entirely accurate (narratologically speaking), Verne did accomplish something vital for the SF genre: he was the first to firmly establish a large readership for this type of writing—that is, the first to succeed in popularizing the narrative juxtaposition of science with adventure fiction. Of course, the term "popular" (at least during Verne's lifetime) precluded recognition of the *Voyages Extraordinaires* as being sufficiently "literary." And it has only been during the last few decades that Verne's oeuvre has achieved, in the words of one contemporary critic, "a first-rank position in the history of French literature" (Angenot).

The imprint of Jules Verne's *romans scientifiques* on the developing SF genre was deep, and during the latter years of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, a host of French novelists imitated his style (some with commercial success, others without). Included in this sudden influx of "Verne

School'' didactic narratives into the French marketplace were Paul d'Ivoi's series of novels (very suggestively titled) *Voyages excentriques* (1894–1914), Louis Boussenard's *Les Secrets de Monsieur Synthèse* (1888) and *Le Tour du monde d'un gamin de Paris* (1890), Henry de Graffigny's *Voyages fantastiques* (1887) and—with Georges Le Faure—his serial *Aventures extraordinaires d'un savant russe* (1889–96), and Maurice Champagne's *Les Reclus de la mer* (1907) and *Les Sondeurs d'abîmes* (1911).

Also inspired by Verne's example during this *fin-de-siècle* period, but refusing to follow in his exact narratological footsteps, were the astronomer Camille Flammarion, the illustrator Albert Robida, the literary *décadent* Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, and two SF authors who would carry the genre well into the twentieth century and leave a permanent mark on its narrative identity: Gustave Le Rouge and J.-H. Rosny Aîné.

Scientific popularizer and enthusiastic zealot of a kind of cosmic spiritualism, Flammarion was an accomplished astronomer who sought both to teach the rudiments of astronomy and to proselytize his own scientifico-religious beliefs through such works as the Académie-recognized series called *Astronomie Populaire* and *La Pluralité des mondes habités* (perhaps an adaptation of Fontenelle's title?) as well as through a number of unusual fictional romances in which his protagonists broach the mysteries of both the physical and the metaphysical universe. This latter group of texts includes *Les Récits de l'infini* (1862), *Rêves étoilés* (1888), *Uranie* (1889), *La Fin du monde* (1893), and *Stella* (1897).

Albert Robida, satirist *par excellence* and the best-known SF illustrator and caricaturist of this era, also penned a considerable number of futuristic novels where technological conjecture was interlaced with (mostly humorous) social commentary. Beginning with a serial parody of Verne's works in *Voyages très extraordinaires de Saturnin Farandoul dans les 5 ou 6 parties du monde et dans tous les pays connus et même inconnus de Monsieur Jules Verne* (1879–82), Robida's most characteristic SF works of futuristic speculation include *Le Vingtième Siècle* (1883), *La Vie électrique* (1893), and the more pessimistic *L'Ingénieur Von Satanas* (1919).

Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, in his very Faustian *L'Ève future* (1886), initiated yet another modern SF variant with his wondrous android named Hadaly: a self-aware Asimovian robot who, invented by Thomas Edison as the ''perfect'' female and the ideal companion, serves to trigger a variety of ontological and aesthetic questions about the fundamental nature of reality and artistic creation in a progressively synthetic world where things are not always what they seem.

It was in the works of Gustave Le Rouge and especially J.-H. Rosny Aîné, however, that ''modern'' French SF was truly born. Partially in the former and more fully in the latter, the SF *novum* reaches a more polysemic configuration and the diagetic structure of the narratives themselves venture well beyond the traditional French patterns of utopian postulation, scientific didacticism, social satire, or pseudo-gothic fantastic. In these two more speculative types of SF, the reader's cognition is increasingly challenged by what Angenot has labeled

''absent paradigms'' in the reading process itself. And the many ''alien encounters'' within these fictions tend to be just as often narratological as they are extraterrestrial.

In Gustave Le Rouge's *Le Prisonnier de la planète Mars* (1908) and *La Guerre des vampires* (1909), for example, the functional role of science and technology in the narrative shifts from principal subject to plot accessory—that is, from a means of explaining and ''dealienating'' the unknown to becoming a verisimilitude-builder of the plot and a purveyor of obscurantist ''special effects''—in order to enhance the interplanetary and telepathic adventures of its young scientist-hero. Instead of conveying science via fiction, these texts convey the fiction via science. And the science itself is most often invented, imaginary, and wholly fictional. Written in the ''pulp'' vein of *Amazing Stories* and Edgar Rice Burroughs' Martian tales, Le Rouge's novels thus exemplify the growing paradigm of *space opera*-cum-*heroic fantasy*—an SF variant very popular in France during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth (predating the era of Hugo Gernsback). Ironically, this popularity made a strong comeback in France in the form of a massive influx of translated Anglo-American SF during the 1950s.

The place of J.-H. Rosny Aîné in the evolution of French SF (and the genre as a whole) is curiously underestimated. In many respects, Rosny could—and should—be considered the true ''father'' of modern French SF, both chronologically and narratologically. Remembered far more for his exotic prehistoric novels like *Vamireh* (1892), *La Guerre du feu* (1909, Hollywood's version: *Quest for Fire*, 1982), and *Le Félin géant* (1918), Rosny also left an indelible mark on French SF with an astonishing variety of narratives featuring inscrutably alien life forms, parallel worlds, and unexplained natural phenomena—fictions that are highly visionary in nature but, at the same time, firmly anchored in scientific plausibility. Rosny's *Les Xipéhuz* (1887) was the first realistically portrayed tale of humanity's encounter with intelligent (yet totally impenetrable) alien organisms constructed wholly of energy. This basic theme was transposed to an end-of-the-world scenario in *La Mort de la Terre* (1910), where the human species is finally superseded by higher (albeit mineral) life forms called the *ferromagnétaux*. In the same line, *Les Navigateurs de l'infini* (1925) and its posthumous sequel *Les Astronautes* posit a highly evolved Martian race whose physical configuration is based on a ternary symmetry, who reproduce by parthenogenesis, and with a female specimen of whom (for the first time in SF, to my knowledge) a visiting Earthling has a very ''alien'' love affair. Examples of SF narratives developing the alternate world-parallel dimension motifs range from *Un autre monde* (1895) to *Dans le monde des Variants* (1939) and include *Nymphée* (1893), *Les Profondeurs de Kyamo* (1896), *Le Voyage* (1900), *Le Trésor dans la neige* (1922), and *Les Hommes-sangliers* (1929). In addition, those dealing with strange (though not supernatural) unexplained phenomena include *Le Cataclysme* (1888) and *La Force mystérieuse* (1913), the latter most likely the source for Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Poison Belt* appearing later during the same year. Expanding the frontiers of SF into previously unexplored

thematic domains and hermeneutic patterns, Rosny Aîné brought a new level of sophistication and vision to the genre (similar, in some respects, to that of Campbell's *Astounding Stories*) and set the stage for much of what was to follow during the late twentieth century.

Other SF writers and works of this very rich period from 1880 to 1940 include André Laurie's (Paschal Grousset) *Les Exilés de la Terre* (1887), the militaristic Capitaine Danrit's *La Guerre de demain* (1889–1896), Jules Lermina's *À brûler, conte astral* (1889), John-Antoine Nau's unusual but Goncourt-prizewinning *Force ennemie* (1903), the incredibly prolific Jean de la Hire's *La Roue fulgurante* (1908), André Couvreur's *Une invasion des microbes* (1909), Gaston de Pawlowski's highly imaginative *Voyage au pays de la quatrième dimension* (1912, 1923), Claude Farrère's pessimistically Darwinian *Les Condamnés à mort* (1920), Théo Varlet and Octave Joncquel's Martian epic *Les Titans du ciel* (1921) and *L'Agonie de la Terre* (1922), José Moselli's surprisingly prophetic *La Fin d'Illa* (1925), Ernest Pérochon's *Les Hommes frénétiques* (1925), Octave Béliard's *Les Petits Hommes de la pinède* (1927), H.-J. Magog's super-brainy *Trois ombres sur Paris* (1928), André Mad's (Max André Dazergues) *L'Île de Satan* (1931), René Thévenin's tale of mutants *Les Chasseurs d'hommes* (1933), Régis Messac's de-evolutionary *Quinzinzinzili* (1935), Jean d'Aigraives' (Frédéric Causse) *L'Empire des algues* (1935), and René-Marcel de Nizerolles's more conventional Verne-like sagas *Les Voyages aériens d'un petit Parisien* (1933–38). During this "golden era" of French SF, even a number of mainstream literary authors successfully dabbled in the genre: Léon Daudet with his *Les Morticoles* (1894) and *Le Napus, fléau de l'an 2227* (1927), Anatole France's *L'Île des pingouins* (1909), Maurice Leblanc's *Les Trois yeux* (1919) and *Le Formidable Événement* (1920), and André Maurois with his *Le Peseur d'âmes* (1931) and *La Machine à lire les pensées* (1937). But two SF authors of this period deserve special attention: Maurice Renard and Jacques Spitz. Maurice Renard succeeded in fusing together a kind of speculative Wellsian SF with Hoffmannesque horror in works such as the very *Moreau*-like *Le Docteur Lerne, sous-dieu* (1908) and his famous *Le Péril bleu* (1911), *Les Mains d'Orlac* (1920, Hollywood's version: *Mad Love*, 1934), and *L'Homme truqué* (1921). Jacques Spitz, writing during the socially turbulent pre–World War II years, perpetuated Renard's hybrid SF/fantastic narrative recipe—but added a pinch of cynical black humor and a dash of political overtones—with such darkly symbolic works as *L'Agonie du globe* (1935), *Les Évadés de l'an 4000* (1936), *La Guerre des mouches* (1938), *L'Homme élastique* (1938), and the very existential *L'Œil du purgatoire* (1945).

This "golden age" of French SF, however, came to an abrupt halt with the advent of World War II and, among other factors, the disappearance of an until-then booming "pulp" industry of SF journals and magazines like *Lectures pour Tous, Sciences et Voyages, Je sais tout, La Petite Illustration*, and—the flagship of such periodicals—the popular *Journal des Voyages* (which, shortly after the war, was briefly resurrected but soon went the way of its companion publications). A small number of SF veterans from the 1920s and 1930s continued to publish an occasional work—Léon Groc with *Une invasion de Sélénites* (1941) and *La Planète de cristal* (1944), Jacques Spitz with *L'Expérience du docteur Mops* (1939) and *La Parcelle "Z"* (1942), and the Belgian writer Jean Ray with *Malpertuis* (1943)—but the once voluminous flow of SF production in France suddenly dwindled to a mere trickle. The only new SF writers to emerge from the chaos of war-torn France during this period were René Barjavel with *Ravage* (1943) and *Le Voyageur imprudent* (1944) and the playwright Jacques Audiberti with his *Carnage* (1942). Both in tone and narrative subject—pessimistic and antimachinism, escapist time travel, etc.—these few works largely reflect the troubled tenor of their times.

In SF, as in many other aspects of French society, the late 1940s in France was a period of slow rebirth and reevaluation. A few seasoned warhorses of the genre continued to produce: Léon Groc with *Le Maître du soleil* (1946) and *L'Univers vagabond* (1950), Paul Alpérine with *La Citadelle des glaces* (1946) and *Demain dans le soleil* (1950), and Maurice Lionel (Maurice Limat) with *Un drame en astronef* (1947) and *La Comète écarlate* (1948). A few authors who had begun their SF careers during the previous decade persisted in their craft, such as René Barjavel with the apocalyptic *Le Diable l'emporte* (1948) and Jacques Audiberti with *L'Opéra du monde* (1947). And a few younger writers tried their hand at SF for the first time: B. R. Bruss (Roger Blondel) with his antinuclear Hiroshima-inspired *Et la Planète sauta . . .* (1946) and Pierre Devaux (editor of the newly launched SF collection "Science et Aventure," oriented toward adolescents) with his *X.P. 15 en feu!* (1946) and *L'Exilé de l'espace* (1947). But despite these isolated efforts, the SF tradition in France during the immediate post-World War II years could be generally described as weak and weary, sputtering back to life but lacking the vigor of its old prewar self.

Then, between 1950 and 1955, a second (ultimately more salutary, but just as jarring) invasion of France occurred: hordes of translated "golden age" Anglo-American SF novels from the 1930s and 1940s—authors like Asimov, Bradbury, Clarke, Heinlein, Sturgeon, Simak, Van Vogt, et al.—began to find immediate success in the French SF marketplace. Sensitive to their public's desire for more of the same, a number of French publishers quickly responded with imprints: the "Anticipation" series by Fleuve Noir and the "Rayon Fantastique" collection by Gallimard and Hachette in 1951, the French reprints of the American SF magazines *Galaxy* and *Magazine of Fantasy and SF* (called *Galaxie* and *Fiction* respectively) in 1953, and the "Présence du Futur" series by Denoël in 1954—all of which served as major conduits to this growing Anglo-American SF presence on French soil. And, spearheaded by the efforts of a few forward-looking authors and critics like Boris Vian (musician, translator, critic, and writer of a few highly surrealistic SF novels), Raymond Queneau, Stéphane Spriel, Michel Carrouges, and Michel Butor, the SF genre was (once again) very *à la mode* in French popular and literary circles—along with American gadgets, Hollywood films, and jazz.[3]

The effects of this tidal wave of Anglo-American SF into postwar France proved to be both positive and negative. On the one hand, it served to suddenly reawaken French interest in SF and to infuse "new blood" into the French SF genre—new visions of the future, new narrative techniques, and new publishing outlets for aspiring novelists.

On the other hand, it encouraged knee-jerk imitation of these successful foreign authors, temporarily suppressed the development in France of a more identifiably indigenous SF, and created a publishing market strongly prejudiced toward translated imports.

Yet during the fifties and early sixties, a number of French SF authors did manage to rise above the tide. They can generally be divided into two overlapping groups: those who specialized in eclectic space operas (most often publishing in the "Anticipation" collection of Fleuve Noir) and those somewhat more original authors (most often first published in the journal *Fiction* and the "Présence du Futur" series) who would ultimately lead French SF into its sudden renaissance of the 1970s and 1980s.

In the former "space opera" group: the two pulpy but highly prolific writers using the pseudonym F. Richard-Bessière with such works as *Les Conquérants de l'univers* (1951), *Sauvetage sidéral* (1954), *Fléau de l'univers* (1957), and *Les 7 anneaux de Rhéa* (1962); the equally pulpy but no less prolific Jimmy Guieu with *Pionnier de l'atome* (1951), the award-winning *L'Homme de l'espace* (1954), and *L'Ère des Biocybs* (1960); B. R. Bruss with his *S.O.S. Soucoupes* (1954), *Terre . . . siècle 24* (1959), and *La Guerre des robots* (1966); and the sometimes quite innovative J. G. Vandel with *Les Chevaliers de l'espace* (1952), *Naufrage des galaxies* (1954), and *Le Troisième Bocal* (1956).

In the latter more "original" group: Francis Carsac (François Bordes) with his metallic descendants of Rosny Aîné's *ferromagnétaux* in *Ceux de nulle part* (1954), his "Spaceship Earth" voyages in *La Terre en fuite* (1960), and his alien ethnography in *Ce Monde est nôtre* (1962); the incomparable Stefan Wul (Pierre Pairault) with his award-winning *Retour à "O"* (1956), his post–World War III portrait of New York in *Niourk* (1957), the astonishing and evolutionary *Le Temple du passé* (1958), the SF/spy novel *Piège sur Zarkass* (1958), and the apocalyptic *La Mort vivante* (1959); Charles and Nathalie Henneberg with their award-winning mythological epic *La Naissance des dieux* (1954) and their exotic Leiberesque *La Rosée du soleil* (1959); Kurt Steiner (André Ruellan) with his *Menace d'Outre-Terre* (1958) and especially his future-medieval *Aux Armes d'Ortoq* (1960); Gilles d'Argyre (Gérard Klein) with his Stapledon-like galactic voyages in *Le Gambit des étoiles* (1958) and *Les Voiliers du soleil* (1961) as well as *Les Tueurs de temps* (1965); the prolific pharmacist Pierre Barbet (Claude Avice) with his nova-induced mutants in *Babel 3805* (1962); Daniel Drode with his award-winning but controversial SF *nouveau roman, Surface de la planète* (1959); Philippe Curval (Philippe Tronche) with his highly imaginative alien life forms in *L'Odeur de la bête* (1957), *Les Fleurs de Vénus* (1960), and his award-winning *Le Ressac de l'espace* (1962); Jacques Sternberg with his absurdist

short-story collections like *La Géométrie dans l'impossible* (1953) and *Entre deux mondes incertains* (1957); and, of course, the mainstream writer Pierre Boulle, whose futuristic satire on the human species in *La Planète des singes* (1963) inspired the popular—and loosely adapted—Hollywood movie and seemingly interminable number of cinematic sequels.

Following a brief slump during the early and mid-1960s (and the demise of the "Rayon Fantastique" collection in 1964), French SF truly began to come into its own during the late sixties and especially throughout the seventies and early eighties. No longer imitating the imported "space opera" models prevalent during the postwar decade, new French science fiction surged into the marketplace and increasingly ventured into previously uncharted cognitive and narrative realms. The reasons for this sudden and unexpected renaissance in French SF are very complex and undoubtedly the result of many different factors. But, among them, one must note the following: the social upheaval in France begun by the May 1968 revolutionary protests (and its accompanying anti-Americanism); the pervasive influence of certain antiestablishment Anglo-American "New Wave" SF writers like J. G. Ballard and Philip K. Dick; the advent of structuralism and poststructuralism in university literary studies; the rediscovery and republication of a variety of French SF "ancestors" such as Jules Verne, Rosny Aîné, and Gustave Le Rouge; the rising popularity of adult SF comic magazines like *Métal Hurlant;* and, finally, the sudden proliferation of SF collections among French publishing houses (Gérard Klein's "Ailleurs et Demain" series begun by Laffont in 1969) as well as the establishment of several yearly SF conventions and annual awards (the Prix Apollo in 1972 and the Grand Prix de la Science-Fiction Française in 1974).

A small number of seasoned SF writers—survivors of the difficult 1950s and 1960s—became the recognized standard-bearers of this new boom. In general, their works reflected the new ideological preoccupations of the times—authors whose fictional goals were more political and social in nature and whose narratives foregrounded psychology and experimental hermeneutic structures more often than star cruisers and laser weapons. Riding the crest of this "new golden age" was Philippe Curval, who was awarded the Grand Prix in 1975 for his obsessively Freudian *L'Homme à rebours* and who, two years later, won the coveted Prix Apollo for his prophetic utopia/dystopia *Cette chère humanité*—the first French author to receive the award—and whose popularity has extended into the early 1980s with the erotic *La Face cachée du désir* (1980), *En souvenir du futur* (1983), and *Comment jouer à l'homme invisible en trois leçons* (1986). Michel Jeury, whose first novels (published under the pseudonym of Albert Higon) *La Machine du pouvoir* (1959) and *Aux étoiles du destin* (1960) were successful space operas, expanded and matured his repertoire with a series of imaginative psycho-socio-politico-time-travel tales in *Le Temps incertain* (winner of the Grand Prix of 1974), *Soleil chaud poisson des profondeurs* (1976), *Le Territoire humain* (1979), and other multidimensional and somewhat mystical works like *Les Écumeurs du silence* (1980), *L'Orbe et la roue* (1982, Prix Apollo

remains, to date, very meager and—with a few notable exceptions—consists of approximately two dozen articles in scholarly journals and an occasional thumbnail overview in SF encyclopedias. Monographs on individual SF writers of France are rare. Surprisingly, even the legendary Jules Verne himself—by far the most universally recognized French author in this domain and the one whose novels have, during the past 125 years, drawn the bulk of Anglo-American critical attention—has had only a small handful of book-length English-language studies devoted to him. And most of these are either very dated, very shallow and stereotypical, or very recently translated from the French.

The most reliable and up-to-date books on Jules Verne available in English include the bibliography by Edward J. Gallagher et al. titled *Jules Verne: A Primary and Secondary Bibliography* (1980); the translated biography by the author's grandson Jean Jules-Verne titled *Jules Verne: A Biography* (1976); the translated study by Jean Chesneaux, *The Political and Social Ideas of Jules Verne* (1972); Andrew Martin's *The Knowledge of Ignorance from Cervantes to Jules Verne* (1985); William Butcher's *Verne's Journey to the Centre of the Self* (1990); and—in all modesty—my recent study titled *Jules Verne Rediscovered: Didacticism and the Scientific Novel* (1988).

The most valuable English-language articles on Verne include the following: Marc Angenot's "Jules Verne and French Literary Criticism, I, II" (*Science-Fiction Studies*, 1973, 1976) and "Jules Verne: The Last Happy Utopianist" (in Patrick Parrinder's *Science Fiction: A Critical Guide*, 1979); Roland Barthes's translated "The *Nautilus* and the Drunken Boat" (*Mythologies*, trans. 1972); Ray Bradbury's "The Ardent Blasphemers" (preface to Jules Verne's translated *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea*, 1962); Ross Chamber's "Cultural and Ideological Determinations in Narrative: A Note on Jules Verne's *Les Cinq cent millions de la Bégum*" (*L'Esprit créateur*, 1981); Michel Serres's translated "India (the Black and the Archipelago) on Fire" (*Sub-Stance*, 1974) and his "Jules Verne's Strange Journeys" (*Yale French Studies*, 1975); André Winandy's "The Twilight Zone: Image and Reality in Jules Verne's *Strange Journeys*" (*Yale French Studies*, 1969); Peter Aberger's "The Portrayal of Blacks in Jules Verne's *Voyages Extraordinaires*" (*French Review*, 1979); David Ketterer's "Fathoming *20,000 Leagues under the Sea*" (in *The Stellar Gauge: Essays on Science Fiction Writers*, 1980); Andrew Martin's "The Entropy of Balzacian Tropes in the Scientific Fictions of Jules Verne" (*Modern Language Review*, 1982) and his "Chez Jules: Nutrition and Cognition in the Novels of Jules Verne" (*French Studies*, 1983); Marilyn Gaddis Rose's "Two Misogynist Novels: A Feminist Reading of Villiers and Verne" (*Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, 1980–81); Mark Rose's "Filling the Void: Verne, Wells and Lem" (*Science-Fiction Studies*, 1981) and his "Jules Verne: Journey to the Center of Science Fiction" (in George Slusser et al., *Coordinates: Placing Science Fiction and Fantasy*, 1983); Marie-Hélène Huet's "Anticipating the Past" (in George Slusser, *Storm Warnings: Science Fiction Confronts the Future*, 1987); and my own "The Extraordinary Libraries of Jules Verne" (*L'Esprit créateur*, 1988).

Apart from these studies of Jules Verne, examples of English-language books on French SF are fewer and farther between. Standing almost alone in this regard are Paul Alkon's *Origins of Futuristic Fiction* (1987) and Darko Suvin's *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* (1979)—both of which discuss a number of pre-twentieth-century French SF writers (the latter being more diachronic and theoretical in nature; the former being more synchronic and detailed). Also very useful as historical—albeit necessarily cursory—overviews of the genre in France are Maxim Jakubowski's contribution titled "French SF" in Neil Barron's *Anatomy of Wonder* (2d ed., 1981; 3d ed., 1987, each with a selected and annotated bibliography of French SF); Patrick Parrinder's somewhat pejorative "European SF" in *Science Fiction: A Critical Guide* (1979); John Dean's "French Science Fiction: The Intergalactic European Connection" in the *Stanford French Review* (1979); and those entries (listed under "France") contained in a few SF encyclopedias—the most satisfying being the one in Peter Nicholls' *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* (1979).

And finally, those few scholarly articles available in English on non-Vernian French SF include Marc Angenot's "Science Fiction in France before Verne" (*Science-Fiction Studies*, 1978), his "Albert Robida's Twentieth Century" (*Science-Fiction Studies*, 1983), and his "The Emergence of the Anti-Utopia Genre in France" (*Science-Fiction Studies*, 1985); J.-P. Vernier's "The SF of J.-H. Rosny the Elder" (*Science-Fiction Studies*, 1975); Daniel Walther's "Political SF in France" (*Foundation*, 1980); Ceri Crossley's "Émile Souvestre's Anti-Utopia: *Le Monde tel qu'il sera*" (*Nottingham French Studies*, 1985); Anthony Zielonka's "Defontenay's *Star* as Poetic and Philosophical Science Fiction" (*French Forum*, 1986); and my own "Science Fiction vs. Scientific Fiction in France: From Jules Verne to Rosny Aîné" (*Science-Fiction Studies*, 1988).

French

Fortunately for contemporary scholarship in this field, the situation is far less bleak in France and in Quebec. During the French SF boom of the 1970s, and paralleling the substantial rise of home-grown SF narratives published, an increasing number of critical and reference works began to appear on the market as well. They were generally of two types: those devoted specifically to Jules Verne (who, during this period, was enjoying a veritable renaissance of popularity) and those critical studies targeting Anglo-American and French SF writers, both old and new.

Although far too numerous to cite here (consult the Gallagher bibliography mentioned above or the extensive bibliography on Verne included in my book), a few of the more important book-length studies on Verne published in French include the following: Piero Gondolo della Riva's *Bibliographie analytique de toutes les œuvres de Jules Verne* (1977–85), Charles-Noël Martin's *La Vie et l'œuvre de Jules Verne* (1978), Marcel Moré's *Le Très Curieux Jules Verne* (1960) and his *Nouvelles Explorations de Jules Verne* (1963), François Ray-

mond's continuing series titled *Jules Verne* (1976–), Christian Robin's *Un monde connu et inconnu* (1978), Michel Serres's *Jouvences sur Jules Verne* (1974), Simone Vierne's *Jules Verne et le roman initiatique* (1973) and her *Jules Verne* (1986), Olivier Dumas's recent *Jules Verne* (1988), and the several published accounts of Jules Verne colloquia such as *Jules Verne et les sciences humaines* (1979) held at Cérisy-la-Salle in 1978 and *Modernités de Jules Verne* (1988) held at Amiens in 1985.

Among the hundreds of scholarly articles published on Verne during the past two decades, one must mention those few which led the way—Roland Barthes's "Nautilus et Bateau Ivre" (in his *Mythologies*, 1957) and "Par où commencer?" (*Poétique*, 1970), Michel Butor's "Le Point suprême et l'âge d'or à travers quelques œuvres de Jules Verne" (in his *Répertoire I*, 1960), and Michel Foucault's "L'Arrière-fable" (*L'Arc*, 1966), being the most influential—and those many excellent studies by contemporary Vernian scholars like Alain Buisine, Simone Vierne, Daniel Compère, Olivier Dumas, François Raymond, Christian Robin, and others who, throughout the 1970s and 1980s, have succeeded in rehabilitating the myth-worn reputation of Jules Verne and firmly establishing the many novels of the *Voyages Extraordinaires* as "literary" masterpieces. At the forefront of this ongoing effort has been (since 1935) the Société Jules Verne and its quarterly journal the *Bulletin de la Société Jules Verne*.

For French SF writers other than Jules Verne, the most comprehensive (although yet to be translated) compendium on the topic continues to be Pierre Versins's mammoth 1972 (2d ed., 1984—with index) *Encyclopédie de l'Utopie, des Voyages Extraordinaires et de la Science-Fiction*: more that 1,000 pages covering both famous and obscure French and Anglo-American authors and works, facts and figures, themes and publisher collections, and other assorted miscellanea—all arranged alphabetically with extensive (though highly idiosyncratic) commentaries on each.

Supplementing Versins's encyclopedia, and an unsurpassed reference for French SF of the period from 1976 to 1983, is the annual series entitled *L'Année de la science-fiction et du fantastique* edited by one of the publishing deans of French SF, Jacques Goimard (replaced during the final year by Daniel Riche). This 300-page yearly publication features book reviews, club news, critical articles, and detailed summaries of SF from the prior year as it appeared in films, comics, television, music (!), and art. A very rich source of research material for the genre, it sadly was discontinued after the 1982–83 edition.

A variety of bio-bibliographical and historical-thematic works appearing in the 1970s and 1980s (and almost all yet to be translated into English) span both Anglo-American and French SF and offer a broad range of valuable critical perspectives on the genre. In the former (more enumerative) group: Stan Barets' *Catalogue des âmes et cycles de la SF* (1979), the most recent *La Science-fiction* by Denis Guiot, J. P. Andrevon, and G. W. Barlow (1987), Claude Aziza and Jacques Goimard's *Encyclopédie de poche de la science-fiction* (1986), Henri Delmas and Alain Julian's *Le Rayon SF* (1983, 1985), and Alain Villemur's *63 auteurs: bibliographie de la science-fiction* (1976). In the latter (more expository) group: Jean-Jacques Bridenne's *La Littérature française d'imagination scientifique* (1950), Jacques Van Herp's *Panorama de la science-fiction* (1973, 1975), Jacques Sadoul's *Histoire de la science-fiction moderne (1911–1975), Vol. 2, Domaine français* (1973, 1975), Jean Gattégno's "Que sais-je?" publication *La Science-fiction* (1971, 1983), Henri Baudin's *La Science-fiction: un univers en expansion* (1971), and Igor and Grichka Bogdanoff's *Clefs pour la science-fiction* (1976).

Also of special interest are certain issues of periodicals devoted wholly or in part to SF, such as *Europe* 139–40 (1957) and 580–81 (1977), *Opus International* 64 (1977), *Change* 40 (1981), and *Le Français dans le Monde* 193 (1985), which offer a condensed selection of both theoretical and analytical articles on the genre—its evolution, its social and literary significance, and how it is perceived in France.

Finally, one must acknowledge the growing collection of scholarly articles on French SF that have appeared in specialized French journals and fanzines since the 1950s. Foremost among such periodicals is *Fiction* (begun in 1953 as the French equivalent of *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*), featuring studies by such veteran SF critics as the late Jean-Jacques Bridenne, Jacques Van Herp, and Pierre Versins as well as contributions by noted contemporary SF writers like Jean-Pierre Andrevon and Gérard Klein (see Bibliography).

As a brief addendum to this overview of French SF criticism available in French, special mention should be made of two Quebec-based SF journals: *Solaris* (begun in 1974 as *Requiem*) and *Imagine . . .* (begun in 1979, both of which, in addition to their frequent studies of francophone SF published in Canada, occasionally offer very informative essays on their counterparts in France as well.

RESEARCH COLLECTIONS AND SPECIALIZED BOOKSTORES

The most comprehensive (if somewhat museum-like) research collection on French SF and related materials continues to be at the Maison d'Ailleurs located in Yverdon-les-Bains, Switzerland. With over 10,000 items—ranging from original manuscripts and first editions to SF posters, toys, and paintings—and over 5,000 French SF novels and critical works, the Maison d'Ailleurs was originally established by Pierre Versins and Martine Thome to house their private collections. During the past few years, the Maison has experienced financial and legal woes, and (at this printing) has yet to find a permanent home. Its current director is Roger Gaillard. Along with Versins's *Encyclopédie*, the Maison d'Ailleurs should be one of the fundamental touchstones of anyone interested in French SF.

Although geared more to English-language SF, the Spaced Out Library of the

Toronto Public Library (40 St. George Street, Toronto, Ontario M5S 2E4) also contains a good deal of French SF, including an impressive Verne collection.

For the study of Jules Verne, the best collections are in the French cities where the author was born and where he died—Nantes and Amiens. In Nantes, the Centre Jules Verne located at the Médiathèque (15 rue de l'Héronnière, 44041 Nantes cedex) houses not only a complete collection of first editions of the *Voyages Extraordinaires* but also a number of original manuscripts, correspondence, and other valuable research materials relating to this legendary author. Also in Nantes is the Musée Jules Verne (3 rue de l'Hermitage, 44000 Nantes) and the Centre universitaire de recherches verniennes (Université de Nantes, Chemin de la Sensive du Tertre, BP 1025, 44036 Nantes cedex), directed by the noted scholar Christian Robin, which maintains a collection of critical works devoted to Verne. In Amiens, with the help of the city fathers, the Société Jules Verne has converted Jules Verne's residence into a very impressive Centre de documentation directed by Cécile Compère—an essential research collection of both primary and secondary materials. The current president of the Société, Olivier Dumas (himself a respected scholar in the field), maintains a complete collection of first-edition *Voyages Extraordinaires* at his home at 11 bis, rue Pigalle, 75009 Paris and—speaking from personal experience—is most gracious with both his time and resources to all Vernian scholars pursuing research in this field. Finally, on this continent, a sizable collection of Jules Verne materials has been amassed by Andrew Nash (133 Wilton Street, Toronto, Ontario M5A 4A4), including hundreds of novels and critical works, comics, posters, films, postage stamps, and other Vernian miscellanea all collected since 1973.

Although not classifiable as formal collections, a number of bookstores in France specialize in French SF and are often a veritable treasure trove of research possibilities. Generally run by helpful proprietors who are well versed in SF, such bookstores sometimes constitute the researcher's best hope for locating long-out-of-print SF texts, in learning the who's who of contemporary SF circles, and in gleaning some insight into the SF publishing industry in France. Among a few of the more notable in Paris are the following: Temps futurs (8 rue Dante, 75005), Florence de Chastenay (76 rue Gay-Lussac, 75005), Roland Buret (6 passage Verdeau, 75009), Librairie Fantasmak (17 rue de Belzunce, 75010), L'Introuvable (25 rue Juliette Dodu, 75010), and Cosmos 2000 (17 rue de l'Arc de Triomphe, 75017). And, of course, there are the *bouquinistes*.

FUTURE RESEARCH POSSIBILITIES

As a conclusion to this overview of French science fiction, I can only repeat the words of my colleague and friend, Olivier Dumas: "Until now, we have only scratched the surface of this subject matter. There remains so much to discover and to make known." Dumas was speaking of Jules Verne, but the same observation could apply to French SF as a whole. Painfully few French SF novels are being translated into English; fewer still are being discussed in

American universities; and English-language critical studies of French SF, though on the rise during the past decade, still remain far too few in number.

The field is rich. It awaits cultivation. SF is a literary genre which, perhaps more than any other, is the product of the dreams, fears, and creative imagination of an entire culture as it peers into the future and envisions "what if. . . ." The science fiction of France, as one of the world's oldest and most varied, provides unparalleled research opportunities in this regard: both for investigating the historical evolution of such visions and how they were articulated through fiction, and for exploring the various social and epistemological roots from which such visions sprang.

NOTES

1. Maxim Jakubowski, "French SF," in Neil Barron, ed., *Anatomy of Wonder: A Critical Guide to Science Fiction*, 3d ed. (New York: R. R. Bowker, 1987), p. 405. Jakubowski's 36-page study (with an extensive historical outline of the genre's evolution and an alphabetized and annotated listing of authors and works) is by far the best critical English-language overview of French SF to date—at least insofar as the twentieth century is concerned. His treatment of earlier periods is more cursory and occasionally marred by errors in the names of the SF authors and works which remain uncorrected in the third edition: like Fontenelle's 1686 *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*—mistakenly attributed to Fénelon and cited as *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes habités* (evidently confused with Camille Flammarion's 1862 *La Pluralité des mondes habités*)—or Cyrano de Bergerac's 1662 *Histoire comique des états et empires du soleil* (cited as, and confused with, Cyrano's previous publication: *Histoire comique des états et empires de la lune*). It should be noted that Jakubowski, in addition to his critical work on French SF, is also responsible for one of the very few English-language anthologies of modern French SF—*Travelling Towards Epsilon* (New York: New English Library, 1976)—along with Damon Knight's earlier collection *Thirteen French Science Fiction Stories* (New York: Bantam, 1965).

2. John Dean, "French Science Fiction: The Intergalactic European Connection," *Stanford French Review* 3 (1979): 404. Dean's brief but interesting five-page synopsis, interspersed with useful quotes from interviews with some of the foremost French writers of today, is intended less as a diachronic study of the genre (he discusses only the post-World War II period and contemporary writers and works) and more as a plea to the anglophone world to become more familiar with French SF. Implicitly addressing the American publishing industry, he contends that "If only more French SF were translated and published in the States, it thus would provide American readers with that kind of intelligent SF which has reached such heights with Huxley, Orwell, and, more recently, with Stanislaw Lem" (p. 409).

3. See "France," in Peter Nicholls, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* (London: Granada, 1979), pp. 230–32. This thumbnail but very lucid discussion of French SF (despite one or two minor errors in titles) is now somewhat dated as far as contemporary developments are concerned. But it does a very credible job of treating pre-1970s French SF and, further, passes on some valuable insights into the social fabric of post–World War II France. For example, "At the end of the War, two factors were to bear heavily on the future of SF in France. The first was the growing separation, at school, in the

universities and in all thinking circles, between *les littéraires* and *les scientifiques*, which made for a lack of curiosity about science and its possible effects on the shapes of our lives on the part of aspiring novelists. . . . Secondly, whatever interest in these matters existed was satisfied from another source, the USA" (p. 231). See Gérard Klein "Pourquoi y a-t-il une crise de la science-fiction française?" *Fiction* 116 (1967): 122–28.

4. The most important (and illustrative) being the disappearance of the *Année de la science-fiction et du fantastique* yearbook. Edited by Jacques Goimard and published yearly by Julliard from 1977 to 1982 (and by Daniel Riche and Temps futurs for one last time in 1983), this extraordinarily rich annual compendium of French SF information will be sorely missed by scholars and researchers.

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The following bibliography is not exhaustive, but it does represent an attempt to compile into one listing a large number of critical studies devoted to French SF (plus a selection of theoretical discussion by French writers and critics) through 1987–88. I have, for the most part, omitted those references which focus exclusively on utopias and/or the fantastic. Further, I have not included those many fine studies targeting French SF produced in Quebec; other SF scholars—like Norbert Spehner, Élisabeth Vonarburg, and Jean-Marc Gouanvic—being far more capable than I in this realm. For purposes of concision, the considerable amount of criticism on Jules Verne has been limited to those sources currently available in English; for more complete bibliographic references on Verne, the reader may wish to consult *Jules Verne: A Primary and Secondary Bibliography* by Edward Gallagher, Judith A. Mistichelli, and John A. Van Eerde (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1980) or my own *Jules Verne Rediscovered* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1988).

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