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Superb Jules Verne Translations. [Review of Jules Verne's *Journey to the Centre of the Earth*, trans. William Butcher, Oxford UP, 1992, and Jules Verne's *Around the World in 80 Days*, trans. William Butcher, Oxford UP, 1995]

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BOOKS IN REVIEW

Superb Jules Verne Translations.

Jules Verne. *Journey to the Center of the Earth.* Trans. William Butcher. The World's Classics. Oxford & NY: Oxford University Press, 1992. xxxviii+234. \$7.95 paper.

Jules Verne. *Around the World in Eighty Days.* Trans. William Butcher. The World's Classics. Oxford & NY: Oxford University Press, 1995. xlv+247. \$7.95 paper.

I have been meaning for some time to call attention to the recent excellent translations/critical editions of several Jules Verne works done by my British colleague and fellow Vernian scholar William Butcher. His latest, a new version of *Around the World in Eighty Days*, now provides me with that opportunity.

Known internationally as a top-notch Vernian scholar, Butcher's first translation was of Verne's previously untranslated short story *Humbug* (Edinburgh: Acadian Press, 1991). His second was another previously untranslated Vernian text called *Backwards to Britain* (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1992). That same year, he published for Oxford UP a new translation of Verne's *Journey to the Center of the Earth* for their World's Classics paperback series. This latter translation, in particular, is a true pearl of a book: the translation is accurate yet smoothly readable, the 23-page introduction is insightful and reflected very up-to-date scholarship, and the 12+ pages of explanatory notes at the end (annotations keyed to certain terms, places, or people cited in the text) are extremely useful. Prior to Butcher's (re)translation of this novel, the best one available

was done by Robert Baldick (NY: Penguin Books, 1965). Both are very good translations, especially if compared to that hackneyed and maimed original English translation done in the mid-1870s and still reprinted today by many publishers (e.g., the Signet Classic paperback version which-- perplexingly--is also published by Penguin). But between the Baldick and the Butcher translations, I personally prefer Butcher's. His rendering of Verne's stylistic idiosyncracies is more faithful to the original, he follows more closely the original published format of *Voyage au centre de la Terre* (e.g., the absence of chapter titles, the mock footnotes, etc.), and he retains the use of Axel's present-tense first-person narration in the log-book portion of the text (when the three explorers are on the raft). Moreover, the additional reference material published in Butcher's book--his introduction and notes, a select bibliography, a chronology of Verne's life, and excerpts of Verne's critical reception over the past 125 years or so--combine to make the OUP "World's Classics" version the one to buy.

Much the same can be said of Butcher's more recent OUP publication of *Around the World in Eighty Days*. Since the original English translation of this novel done in 1873 was of good quality, the merit of Butcher's work on this text comes less from his translation--excellent though it is--than from his close examination of the original manuscripts and his first-rate analysis of how this famous novel came to be what it is. Discussing, for example, Verne's initial ideas for this work, his orchestration of the complex interplays of time and space in it, certain (never before noticed) undercurrents of sexual desire and psychological ambivalence in the story's main characters, and the masterful use of humor and satire throughout, Butcher's critical introduction is one of the most interesting I have read. This introduction, coupled with a select bibliography, a chronology of Verne's life, more than 30 pages of explanatory endnotes, and three very informative appendices ("Principal Sources," "The Play," and "*Around the World as Seen by the Critics*") make Butcher's and OUP's version of this classic Verne text by far the best available, in either hardcover or paperback.

--ABE

