

DePauw University

Scholarly and Creative Work from DePauw University

Global Languages Faculty publications

Global Languages

2007

Review of *Jules Verne: Journeys in Writing*

Arthur B. Evans

DePauw University, aevans@depauw.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarship.depauw.edu/mlang_facpubs



Part of the [French and Francophone Literature Commons](#), and the [Modern Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Arthur B. Evans. Review of *Jules Verne: Journeys in Writing*, by Timothy Unwin (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2005). *Modern Language Review* 102.7 (2007): 517-518. Copyright held by the Modern Humanities Research Association. Reprinted with permission.

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Global Languages at Scholarly and Creative Work from DePauw University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Global Languages Faculty publications by an authorized administrator of Scholarly and Creative Work from DePauw University.

In the third section of his 'Livre II', Destruel examines the pivotal interrelated texts of 1852, *La Bohème galante* and *Petits châteaux de bohème*. He shows how Nerval's aesthetic of continuous deferral, with its ironic digressions and fragmented narrative, its comings and goings between past and present, and its nods in the direction of the textual games of Sterne and Nodier, amounts to an abandonment of diachronic time in favour of a perpetual present open to the future. On the other hand, his study in 'Livre III' of the 'autofictional' prose texts of *Les Filles du feu*—in particular, of *Sylvie*—points to Nerval's realization of the limitations of memory and the impossibility of reliving the past. The chapters on *Les Chimères* consider the poems as explorations of intense moments isolated from the duration of Time: Destruel interprets these as Nerval's ultimate attempts to transcend Time and reach towards the infinite.

Destruel's original achievement in this book is to show how Nerval reappropriates his experience of time and reintegrates his own biography by recomposing it via a radically new autobiographical project based not upon a return to the past, but upon a continually evolving recombination of the past and the present oriented towards the future life of the autobiographical subject.

UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

MAURICE BLACKMAN

Jules Verne: Journeys in Writing. By TIMOTHY UNWIN. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press. 2005. xii + 242 pp. £20. ISBN 978-0-85323-458-6.

In 2005 Jules Verne aficionados from around the world commemorated the centenary of the death of this ever-popular author. As a result, scores of new Verne-related publications—of varying quality—appeared in the marketplace. Some were by serious literary scholars, some by well-meaning but idolizing fans, and some by media journalists who seemed to know Verne only as the putative 'father of sci-fi'. *Jules Verne: Journeys in Writing* stands squarely in the first group. In fact, it constitutes one of the very best scholarly monographs on Verne to appear in English or French in several years.

As its title suggests, this study offers a refreshingly new focus on the legendary French author. Rather than treating Verne as a cultural icon of futurism or technological prophet (as most critics tend to do), Timothy Unwin chooses instead to concentrate on Verne as a writer. He argues that Verne should be viewed first and foremost as a nineteenth-century 'novelist who renews and revitalises the genre' (p. 6) and whose literary talents have too often been ignored, misunderstood, or underestimated. Unwin explains:

It is true that Verne has been plundered, pilloried, and appropriated in such rich and inventive ways that his massive cultural legacy can quite simply overshadow his real literary output. A significant part of the purpose of the present study, then, is to step back from the myths, indeed to challenge the clichés about Verne, and to re-examine his writing from a more strictly literary perspective. [. . .] In what ways is his writing subversive, innovative or experimental? What are its ideological or philosophical undercurrents? How does he adapt the conventions of the realist novel to his own particular enterprise? To what extent does he, literally and literarily, push back the frontiers of fiction? (pp. 2–3)

To answer these questions, Unwin examines the many building-blocks of Verne's unique narrative recipe—his ubiquitous intertextuality (scientific and literary), his 'narrativization' of non-fictional discourses, his theatrical modes of characterization, his self-reflexive narrative voice, his tongue-in-cheek use of irony, etc.—in order to highlight the stylistic originality of Verne's *Voyages extraordinaires*. Interesting comparisons with other French authors of the 'realist' tradition such as Balzac and

Flaubert are included. Pertinent studies by other Vernian scholars such as Pierre Macherey, Piero Gondolo della Riva, Volker Dehs, Andrew Martin, Alain Buisine, and especially Daniel Compère are referenced (in-text and/or via profuse footnotes). And, throughout the book, Unwin showcases a wonderfully broad selection of Verne's fiction, underscoring the 'polyphonic, composite nature' (p. 52) of this writer's œuvre.

The book is logically structured, reads smoothly, and contains almost no typos or other editorial glitches. It begins with a six-page introduction and ends with a six-page conclusion. In between are six chapters entitled 'Science, Literature, and the Nineteenth Century', 'Textual Environments', 'All the World's a Text', 'Theatre and Theatricality', 'Self-Consciousness: The Journey of Language and Narrative', and 'Writing and Rewriting'. A brief chronology of Verne's life is included in an appendix, and a selected critical bibliography and topical index complete the volume.

As a veteran Vernian, I learnt much from this book; its scholarship is up to date, and its analyses are both original and insightful. A few of the discussions that I especially enjoyed were those describing how Verne's early experiences in the theatre influenced his style as a novelist, how he explored in highly creative ways the problematic link between narrative and knowledge, and how his playful manipulation of metatextual narrative voice 'More, perhaps, than any other novelist in nineteenth-century France' (p. 134) continually offers the reader a unique behind-the-scenes look at Verne's own 'journey in writing'. Highly recommended for both university and public libraries as well as for all Jules Verne enthusiasts who wish to gain a greater appreciation for Verne as a *littéraire*.

DEPAUW UNIVERSITY

ARTHUR B. EVANS

Léon Bloy 6: Bloy critique. Ed. by PIERRE GLAUDES. (La Revue des Lettres Modernes) Paris and Caen: Lettres Modernes Minard. 2005. 275 pp. €26. ISBN 978-2-256-91094-4.

Scholarship on Léon Bloy, the prophetic nineteenth-century forerunner of the relationship between creative writing and Christian belief in France, is in a healthy state. His journalism, autobiographical novels, and *Journal* express one man's absolute conviction that truth exists in the face of absurdity and that the virtue of hope depends on the expression of that truth in the fight against evil. Bloy was aware of the multiple abuses of language by organs of information and social justice, which brings him close to contemporary concerns, and he chose clearly between the compartmentalization proposed in modern times by the Tree of Knowledge and the unity offered by the Tree of Life. This volume on Bloy the critic is the sixth in the series directed by Pierre Glaudes at Minard since 1989 and concentrates on Bloy's critical output (the lesser of two evils according to Antoine Compagnon (p. 271)), thus using to advantage, as the editor points out, the recent publication of critical works by the author and recent theses, while recognizing that other avenues of approach also contribute to the contemporary renewal of interest in Bloy studies. In customary Minard style Part 1 consists of seven articles (Joseph Royer, Dominique Millet-Gérard, Jérôme Solal, Gilles Negrello, Gaëlle Guyot, Michèle Fontana, Émile Van Belberghe), followed by three articles in 'II Varia' (Lioudmila Andreeva, Lydie Parisse, Theodor Paleologu), and ending with the 'Carnet critique', six book reviews principally by the editor and several of the authors in Part 1.

Giovanni Dotoli has defined elsewhere the key principle of literature for Bloy as the belief that life alone is not sufficient, because literature is about the adventure and challenge of surpassing life itself (Giovanni Dotoli, 'Le pèlerin de la parole', in *Léon Bloy: polémiste de la vérité* (= *La Presse Littéraire*, 6 (May–July 2006)), pp. 8–24). Bloy