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Jules Verne's English Translations

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Jules Verne's English Translations

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Arthur B. Evans

Jules Verne's English Translations

I would therefore describe a good translation to be that in which the merit of the original work is so completely transfused into another language as to be as distinctly apprehended, and as strongly felt, by a native of the country to which that language belongs as it is by those who speak the language of the original work.

—Alexander Fraser Tytler, *Essay on the Principles of Translation* 8-9

I am the most unknown of men.

—letter from Jules Verne to Mario Turiello, March 2, 1895

On October 5, 1897, in a letter to an Italian admirer, Jules Verne made the following remark: "I'm not surprised that the translations you've been speaking to me about are bad. That is not particular to Italy; in other countries they are no better. But we can do nothing about it, absolutely nothing" ("Correspondance avec Mario Turiello" 124).

This brief comment by Verne during the final decade of his life says volumes about the overall quality of his translations. Scholars now unanimously agree that the early English translations of Verne's *Voyages Extraordinaires* were extremely shoddy and often bear little resemblance to their original French counterparts. In a rush to bring his most popular (and profitable) stories to market, British and American translators repeatedly watered them down and abridged them by chopping out most of the science and the longer descriptive passages (often from 20 to 40% of the original); they committed thousands of basic translating errors, mistakes that an average high-school student of French would have managed correctly; they censored Verne's texts by either removing or diluting references that might be construed as anti-British or anti-American; and, in several instances, they totally rewrote Verne's narratives to suit their own tastes (changing the names of the characters, adding new scenes, deleting others, relabeling the chapters, and so on).

As early as 1874, the slapdash nature of Verne's English translations was already becoming common knowledge. That year, in a preface to his own—very poor—American translation of Verne's *De la Terre à la lune* (1865) entitled *The Baltimore Gun Club*, Edward Roth expressed his righteous indignation over the

hasty translations of Verne's works by English hands, in which—either through ignorance, incapacity, or prejudice—his errors ... were uncorrected, his defects exaggerated, and even some of his best passages omitted. These translations, reprinted by American publishers, spread like wild fire last year over the country and were everywhere hailed with the greatest delight.¹ (4)

Around the *fin-de-siècle*, Verne enthusiast and collector Willis E. Hurd—who would much later, in 1940, establish an American Jules Verne Society²—was among the first to point out that some of Verne's works had more than one

English translation available and that their overall lengths seemed to vary considerably:

In 1891 I first became aware of the fact that one of Verne's books had been translated into English by more than one translator. That year I became the possessor of a Ward, Lock & Co. (London) edition of "A Journey into the Interior of the Earth." I compared it with my Scribner edition of "A Journey to the Centre of the Earth" and met with astonishment. Both in style bore the earmarks of the romancer, but how different otherwise they were! The story was practically the same, but several chapters in each translation did not appear in the other. The names of the characters, even, were different.... The American edition, I noted, contained several thousand more words than the English edition.... (88)

As he continued to collect them, Hurd soon found that more than one English translation also existed for several other Verne novels, e.g., for *De la Terre à la lune* (1865, *From the Earth to the Moon*, *The Baltimore Gun Club*), *Les Enfants du capitaine Grant* (1867, *The Children of Captain Grant*, *In Search of the Castaways*), *Aventures de trois Russes et de trois Anglais dans l'Afrique australe* (1872, *The Adventures of Three Englishmen and Three Russians in South Africa*, *Adventures in the Land of the Behemoth*), *Le Tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours* (1873, *Around the World in 80 Days*, *The Tour of the World in 80 Days*), *Les Indes noires* (1877, *The Black Indies*, *The Child of the Cavern*), *Hector Servadac* (1877, *Hector Servadac*, *Off on a Comet*), *L'École des Robinsons* (1882, *The Robinson Crusoe School*, *Godfrey Morgan: A California Mystery*), *L'Étoile du sud* (1884, *The Southern Star*, *The Vanished Diamond*), and *Sans dessus dessous* (1889, *Topsy-Turvy*, *The Purchase of the North Pole*). Hurd reacted to this discovery with both bibliophilic excitement ("Once more the collector's thrill had me" [88]) and bemused puzzlement over the "fascinating angles attending the collection of works of our famous French author" (89).

Less sanguine was the reaction of American literary scholar Walter James Miller who, during the 1960s and 1970s, was the first to compare the standard English translations of two of Verne's most popular novels—*Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* (1870) and *From the Earth to the Moon*—against their French originals. As he encountered dozens upon dozens of errors, omissions, and alterations in the English-language versions, Miller quickly came to understand why Verne's reputation in Great Britain and America was so different from how he was known in France and in most other countries:

All the world regards Jules Verne as the first real popularizer of the *romance* of science. After that basic agreement, however, critical opinion is strangely contradictory.

French and other Continental readers go on to admire Verne for his attention to scientific *method*, his concern for technical accuracy, his ability to work wonders with authentic facts and figures.

But American readers have the impression that Verne is somewhat casual with basic data and arithmetic, even with details of plot and character....

Could they be talking about the same author?

The answer is tragically simple. Europeans read Verne in the original French or in good, full-length translations. *Americans have based their opinions on slashed and slapdash versions rushed into print in the 1870s and reissued ever*

since as “standard” editions. Ironically, although Verne’s books pay full tribute to American daring and know-how, Americans have never been able to judge the true nature and extent of *his* genius. (“Jules Verne in America” vii; italics in original)

In several compelling articles (appearing most often as prefaces or appendices to his own new translations of these two works), Miller outlined in great detail the damage done to Verne’s reputation by insensitive and incompetent translators. Miller’s conclusion was concise and categorical: “The English-speaking world has never had a fair chance to know the real Jules Verne” (“Foreword” ix).³

In the past few decades, the situation has improved greatly—thanks mostly to the efforts of a handful of translators and scholars such as Miller, William Butcher, Edward Baxter, and Stanford Luce and certain university presses such as those at Oxford, Nebraska, and Wesleyan.⁴ But, even today, many of those hackneyed nineteenth-century translations that were for so long the “standard” versions of Verne’s works continue to be available on the shelves of American and British bookstores or online through booksellers such as Amazon.com. Commercial publishing houses, generally unwilling to spend money on retranslating Verne (or simply unaware of how bad these translations are), persist in recycling the old public-domain editions. Consider, for example, the omnibus volume of *Jules Verne: Five Complete Novels* published by Gramercy (New York) in 1995 and distributed by Random House or the many facsimile reprints such as *Dick Sands: A Captain at Fifteen* (1878), *Robur the Conqueror* (1886), or *The Floating Island* (1895) distributed by Fredonia Books in Amsterdam (who have over 30 Verne titles currently available in paperback). These reprints feature some of the worst public-domain translations ever done of Verne’s works.

Even more distressing is the fact that these same defective translations can also now be found in full-text digital format on websites such as Project Gutenberg (<www.gutenberg.net>) and can be purchased on CD-ROM or as downloadable e-books. Examples include the *Jules Verne Collection CD-ROM* marketed by QVision Publishing (Sandy, UT) published in 1998 or the e-book version of *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, which I purchased and downloaded from Amazon.com recently, only to discover that it was the dreadful 1872 Mercier Lewis translation denounced by Miller (see above). Such indiscriminate recycling is unfortunately giving a second—electronic—life to these Verne travesties, extending their influence into the twenty-first century and beyond.⁵

Even university presses are not exempt from this practice. For instance, in 1998 the University of Nebraska Press republished Verne’s posthumous *La Chasse au météore* (1908, *The Hunt for the Meteor*) in its “Bison Frontiers of Imagination” series—a facsimile reprint of the error-filled 1908 British translation entitled *The Chase of the Golden Meteor*—with no mention of the fact that the novel had largely been rewritten by Verne’s son Michel. In a book review published in *Extrapolation* the following year, Brian Taves expressed the sentiments of all Verne scholars when he admonished the Press, saying:

It’s happened again. A reputable publisher ... has attractively reprinted a Jules Verne book whole from the first British edition, on that basis calling it unabridged.... Regarding turn-of-the-century translations as adequate translations

of Verne is surprising for a scholarly publisher.... For more than 30 years, editions of Verne have deliberately explored textual issues surrounding their translation.... For a publisher striving for academic standing to simply ignore these aspects is no longer acceptable. (181-84)

This time, however, the story ends happily. In an amazing demonstration of publisher integrity and good conscience, the University of Nebraska Press agreed to retranslate this Verne title and republish it as a critical edition, with Walter James Miller as editor-translator (forthcoming in 2005).

Before providing some concrete examples of how many of Verne's texts were mangled by his English-language translators, a few words should be said about how these translations were originally published. Why? Because, at least in Verne's case, *how* his novels were published often determined *what* was published. A very shrewd businessman, Verne's French publisher Pierre-Jules Hetzel had great success in marketing his books to readers both young and old. American and British publishers adopted many of Hetzel's successful strategies, but they chose to promote Verne's English translations exclusively to a juvenile audience. And they did so in one of three ways: with elegant cloth-bound luxury editions that could be offered as holiday gifts, with collectible editions like those of the "Every Boy's Library" series by Routledge, or with magazine serials such as *The Boy's Own Paper* (a popular periodical for adolescents begun in the late 1870s and somewhat reminiscent of Hetzel's own *Magasin d'Education et de Récréation*). Did the editors of these English-language publishing houses deliberately shorten, simplify, and "cleanse" Verne's narratives in order to enhance their appeal to this youthful public? Or were the translation manuscripts they received for publication judged to be so unsophisticated in content and tone that only adolescents and pre-adolescents could reasonably be targeted as their potential readers? It is impossible to know. But whatever the sequencing of these events, the outcome was the same: Verne's works were marketed primarily to British and American boys. And, until very recently, his literary reputation among adult readers has suffered proportionately.⁶

In surveying the 160+ different English translations of Verne's *Voyages Extraordinaires*, I am aware of no standard or universally recognized method to gauge their individual quality. But simple logic would seem to dictate that three important aspects to consider would be their *completeness*, *accuracy*, and *style*.

Completeness. Many of Verne's English-language translations contain fewer chapters than their original French counterparts. Such is the case, for example, in the 1870 Chapman and Hall translation of Verne's *Cinq semaines en ballon* (1863), accurately titled *Five Weeks in a Balloon* but containing only 37 chapters of the original's 44. Furthermore, this translation condenses the first six chapters of Verne's novel into one large summary chapter. Sometimes, heavily abridged chapters adjacent to each other in the text are combined, as was done for chapters 10 and 11 of the Lewis Mercier/Mercier Lewis (he used both names) translation of *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea*. Or sometimes a chapter is simply edited out entirely, such as the lengthy pedagogical chapter about comets in Verne's *Hector Servadac* (II§3) that was excised from the I.O. Evans "Fitzroy

Edition” of this novel, or the chapter in *The Steam House* (1880) in which Verne explains in great detail the historical background to the 1857 Sepoy Revolt in India (I§3), which is missing from the “Fitzroy Edition” of this novel as well.⁷ The 1874 Shepard translation of Verne’s *The Adventures of Three Russians and Three Englishmen in Southern Africa* titled—perplexingly—*Adventures in the Land of the Behemoth* features both types of cuts: chapter four—a pedagogical explanation of the main scientific focus of the expedition, measuring an arc of the meridian via triangulation—was dropped entirely and chapters seven and eight, also very didactic in nature, were abridged and then combined. But one of the worst cases of abridgment, in my opinion, may be the first English edition of *The Children of Captain Grant* published as *In Search of the Castaways* by Lippincott in 1873. The anonymous translator chopped a total of 10 chapters from Verne’s original 70, gathered the remainder into one volume instead of three, and cleverly adjusted the typography and page size so that the resulting book boasted a full 620 pages—seemingly identical to the 622 pages of the original Hetzel luxury octavo edition.

While several of Verne’s English translations have been shortened by the wholesale removal of chapters, by far the most common method of abridgment is by paraphrase—where a lengthy portion of Verne’s narrative is replaced by a short summary. In the interests of “streamlining” the story (i.e., deleting the passages of scientific pedagogy and foregrounding the action sequences) translators often cut the long exchanges of didactic dialogue between the Vernian mentor character and his “students.” One typical example is from *The Voyages and Adventures of Captain Hatteras*, where the good-natured scientist Dr. Clawbonny has a quite humorous and highly instructive exchange with some of Hatteras’s crew members on the subject of polar cosmography and astronomy. In the 1874 Routledge translation of this work, this entire scene—which occupies four pages of text in the original French edition—is now reduced to the following two declarative sentences:

Clawbonny then went on to describe the diurnal and annual motions of the earth—the one round its own axis, the extremities of which are the poles, which is accomplished in twenty-four hours, and the other round the sun, which takes a whole year.

Bell and Johnson listened half incredulously and couldn’t see why the earth could not have been allowed to keep still, till Altamont informed them that they would then have had neither day nor night, nor spring, summer, autumn, and winter. (166)

Further, the removal of this multi-page dialogue then allowed the translator to combine the remainder of this chapter with the previous one. As a result, in this translation of *Captain Hatteras*, there is one chapter less in Book II than in Verne’s original or in the other available English translations of this novel.

As mentioned, when early translators abridged Verne’s texts, they tended to zero in on those passages they saw as expendable—the technical explanations, the geographical or historical descriptions, and the many episodes of scientific pedagogy. Removing these passages, however, not only impoverishes the plot of Verne’s stories but also undermines their very identity as “hard” science fiction

(or, as Verne called them, *romans scientifiques*—scientific novels). And it seriously compromises Verne's authorial credibility among anglophone readers. As a direct consequence of such cuts, for example, one American book reviewer in 1883 castigated Verne's works as teeming with scientific errors:

The astonishing vogue of these productions constitutes their chief claim to criticism, but they may be said to challenge it by a special eminence in worthlessness. In most works of the kind, extravagant blunders are only occasional, or at worst sporadic, relieved by intervals of tolerable accuracy; but our French author's unverity must be accounted chronic, since he can rarely complete a dozen pages without some perversion of fact. (Hazeltine 345)

Or consider the following case, cited by Walter James Miller in *The Annotated Jules Verne: Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea*. The traditional, "standard" English translation of this novel by Mercier Lewis was notorious for how it continually abridged Verne's scientific content. For instance, in the chapter "All by Electricity" that explains in detail the engineering of Nemo's *Nautilus*, the translator chooses to omit Verne's description of the sodium batteries that power this vessel. According to Miller,

By omitting this crucial passage, Mercier Lewis made Verne vulnerable to sneering attacks on his integrity as a science-fiction writer. For example, Theodore L. Thomas, in his influential article "The Watery Wonders of Captain Nemo" (*Galaxy*, December 1961), charged that Verne had failed to provide adequate descriptions of "the storage batteries used aboard the *Nautilus*. There are none," he said flatly.

Oddly enough, Thomas preferred to accuse Verne rather than suspect the translator. (76)

Quite often, the translators omit Verne's enumerations and lists, such as in the very long—and hilariously excessive—roster of African explorers toasted at the end of the first chapter of *Five Weeks in a Balloon*, replaced in the 1893 Hutchinson edition with the following sentence: "Many toasts were drunk to the names of celebrated African travelers, either past or present, and of all countries, in alphabetical order, and concluded with the name of Ferguson who, by his incredible attempt, was to form the last link connecting these explorers' labours, and complete the series of African discoveries" (4). Another very common type of excision—and one that also deletes important self-referential biographical material (Verne was secretary of Nadar's "heavier than air" aeronautics club)—is the list of pioneer aviators cited near the beginning of chapter six in Verne's helicopter novel, *Robur the Conqueror*:

From 1854 to 1863 appeared Joseph Pline with patents for several aerial systems; Bréant, Carlingford, Le Bris, Du Temple, Bright, whose ascensional propellers turned backwards, Smythies, Panafieu, Crosnier, et al. Finally, in 1863, thanks to the efforts of Nadar, a "heavier than air" club was founded in Paris. There, inventors could experiment with these machines, of which many were patented: Ponton d'Amécourt and his steam helicopter, La Landelle and his system of combining propellers with inclined planes and parachutes, Louvrié and his aéroscaph, Esterno and his mechanical bird, Groof and his apparatus with wings worked by levers. The impetus was given, inventors invented, calculators calculated all that could make aerial travel practicable. Bourcart, Le Bris,

Kaufmann, Smyth, Stringfellow, Prigent, Danjard, Pomès and De la Pauze, Moy, Pénaud, Jobert, Hureau de Villeneuve, Achenbach, Garapon, Duchesne, Danduran, Parisel, Dieuaide, Melkisff, Forlanini, Brearey, Tatin, Dandrieux, Edison, some with wings or propellers, others with inclined planes, imagined, created, constructed, and perfected their flying machines that would be ready to take to the skies once some inventor developed a motor of adequate power and lightness. (my translation)

This passage, in the English-language version of the novel published by the American publisher George Munro in 1887, is reduced to:

From 1854 to 1863 appeared Joseph Pline, Breant, Carlingford, Du Temple, Bright, Smythies, and Edison, some with wings, others with screws, imagining, creating, and perfecting machines and preparing the road for the time when some inventor shall evolve the perfect work. (*Robur the Conqueror, or A Trip Round the World in a Flying Machine* 56)

Lastly, many British and American translators did not hesitate to “embroider” Verne’s narratives with additional fictional material of their own invention. Examples are too numerous to cite, but they range in significance from a few words added here and there to whole paragraphs to entirely new scenes and episodes that were never in Verne’s original texts. As an example of the first, consider the following passage from the 1878 translation by Ellen Frewer of Verne’s *A Captain at Fifteen* retitled *Dick Sands, The Boy Captain*, describing the eccentric entomologist Cousin Benedict (translator additions are shown in italics):

Every available hour did he spend in the pursuit of his favourite science: hexapods ruled his thoughts by day and his dreams by night. The number of pins that he carried *thick* on the collar and sleeves of his coat, down the front of his waistcoat, and on the crown of his hat defied computation; *they were kept in readiness for the capture of specimens that might come his way*, and on his return from a ramble in the country he might be seen *literally encased* with a covering of insects, transfixed adroitly *by scientific rule*.

This ruling passion of his had been the inducement that had urged him to accompany Mr. and Mrs. Weldon to New Zealand. *It had appeared to him that it was likely to be a promising district*, and now having been successful in adding some rare specimens to his collection, he was anxious to get back again to San Francisco and to assign them to their proper places in his *extensive* cabinet.

Besides, it never occurred to Mrs. Weldon to start without him. *To leave him to shift for himself would be sheer cruelty*. As a matter of course, whenever Mrs. Weldon went on board the “Pilgrim,” Cousin Benedict would go too. (9)

These various “improvements” to Verne’s prose, although they do violate the code of translator non-intervention and are therefore unacceptable, may seem somewhat less reprehensible since they supplement rather than replace Verne’s original text.

Of a very different order of magnitude, however, are the many additions and rewrites evident in the infamous Roth translations of Verne’s *From the Earth to the Moon* and *Around the Moon* (collectively retitled *The Baltimore Gun Club*) and *Hector Servadac* (retitled *To the Sun? Off on a Comet!*). In addition to creating an entire chapter *ex nihilo* and adding it to the story of *Around the Moon*—detailing Maston’s (who is renamed “Marston”) journey from Long’s

Peak to San Francisco by stage and Pacific Railroad—Roth repeatedly uses Verne's texts as a launching pad for his own idiosyncratic rants. One example should suffice to give a flavor of Roth's "amplifications." Not a word of the following tirade can be found in Verne's original.

Not only was the railroad completed as far as Cedar Keys, but also the latter town was connected with Tampa by a branch constructed along the low marshy Gulf coast at great trouble and expense. Barbican had made the company a present of *his* route, strongly recommending it as being higher and healthier, more picturesque and fertile, besides being shorter and less expensive. But Barbican, through a great artilleryman, was unfortunately only a Baltimore man, and no mere Baltimore man could by any possibility teach a Boston man, as the President of the *Gulf Railroad Company* prided himself upon being.

For, outside of Boston, as you must know, everything in the United States is provincial; literature, fashion, society, at best second rate; all the boys and girls in the Union learn their lessons out of Boston newspapers, Boston magazines, and Boston books; the Revolutionary War began and ended within sight of Bunker Hill; the Boston people single handed had licked the British in 1812; aided a little by some other New Englanders, they had put down the great rebellion of '61; Faneuil Hall, "the cradle of American Liberty," was the only place where the "Centennial" should be celebrated; her municipal system was unequalled; her fire department was simply perfect; no act of cruel bigotry had ever disgraced her lofty minded and enlightened people; her men were all corresponding members of learned societies, and her women read so much that they all wore eyeglasses; her public schools produced the profoundest of scholars and the most virtuous of citizens. Such, at least, was the Nicene Creed repeated every Sunday by every good Bostonian. The President of the *Gulf Railroad* happened to be an extra good Bostonian. A Baltimorian to dictate to *him*? Never! Of course, he had his way; the branch followed the worst possible route because a Baltimorian had pointed out the best possible one. What matter if it cost the company an additional million of dollars and five thousand poor Irish laborers their lives? A grand moral principle had been successfully vindicated. If Boston is not to have her way, the world is not worth living in! (114)

Another charter member of the Jules Verne Translation Hall of Infamy is the "Hardwig" edition of *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* published by Griffith and Farran in 1871. Sadly, this atrocious translation was the first English version to be published of this popular Verne novel. Even more sadly, it is still sometimes published today as the "standard" version. As in the horrid Roth translations, the translator of this edition felt little need to remain faithful to Verne's original narrative. For instance, compare the following two excerpts: the first is a reasonably accurate modern translation of the beginning of the opening chapter of Verne's text, and the second is the "Hardwig" version of this same passage:

On 24 May 1863, which was a Sunday, my uncle, Professor Lidenbrock, came rushing back towards his little house, No. 19 Königstrasse, one of the oldest streets in the old quarter of Hamburg.

Martha must have thought that she was very behindhand, for the dinner was only beginning to sizzle on the kitchen stove.

"Well," I said to myself, "if my uncle is hungry, he'll make a dreadful fuss, for he's the most impatient of men."

“Professor Lidenbrock here already!” cried poor Martha in astonishment, half opening the dining-room door.

“Yes, Martha; but don’t worry if the dinner isn’t cooked, because it isn’t two o’clock yet. St. Michael’s clock has only just struck half past one.”

“Then why is Professor Lidenbrock coming home?”

“He’ll probably tell us himself.”

“Here he is! I’m off, Mr. Axel. You’ll get him to see reason, won’t you?”

And our good Martha went back into her culinary laboratory.

I was left alone. But as for getting the most irascible of professors to see reason, that was a task quite beyond a man of my rather undecided nature. So I was getting ready to beat a prudent retreat to my little room upstairs, when the street door creaked on its hinges, heavy footsteps shook the wooden staircase, and the master of the house, passing through the dining room, rushed straight into his study.

On his way, he found time to fling his cane with the nutcracker head into a corner, his broad-brimmed hat onto the table, and these empathetic words at his nephew:

“Axel, follow me!” (Penguin, trans. Robert Baldick, 1965)

Looking back to all that has occurred to me since that eventful day, I am scarcely able to believe in the reality of my adventures. They were truly so wonderful that even now I am bewildered when I think of them.

My uncle was a German, having married my mother’s sister, an English-woman. Being very much attached to his fatherless nephew, he invited me to study under him in his home in the fatherland. This home was in a large town, and my uncle was a professor of philosophy, chemistry, mineralogy, and many other ologies.

One day, after passing some hours in the laboratory—my uncle being absent at the time—I suddenly felt the necessity of renovating the tissues—i.e., I was hungry, and was about to rouse up our old French cook, when my uncle, Professor Von Hardwigg, suddenly opened the street door and came rushing upstairs.

Now Professor Hardwigg, my worthy uncle, is by no means a bad sort of man; he is, however, choleric and original. To bear with him means to obey; and scarcely had his heavy feet resounded within our joint domicile than he shouted for me to attend upon him.

“Harry! Harry! Harry!” (Griffith and Farran, trans. anon., 1871)

Beyond the initial shock of wondering if these two translations were drawn from the same novel at all, it is interesting to analyze some of the alterations made in the second one and to speculate about what might have inspired them. The translator for this Griffith and Farran version is not named but was undoubtedly British: note the anglicizing of the names of the principal characters (Lidenbrock-Hardwigg, Axel-Harry) and the ancestry of Axel-Harry, who now comes from English parents and whose mother is still alive and presumably living in England. This nationalist undercurrent is reinforced by such phrases as “My uncle was a German” and “the fatherland” and “our old French cook.” But there are other oddities in this text as well: the attempt at a kind of anti-scientific *entre nous* humor in “and many other ologies” and the speaker’s circumlocutory speech patterns which are intended, one supposes, to add character and depth to the portrayal of Axel-Harry.

And consider the important differences in the narrative flow of these two texts. For example, Verne first posits two identifier sentences—explaining time, place, and characters—and then follows them up with a brisk interchange of dialogue. This provides an effective *in medias res* introduction to the narrator Axel, certain information about the family maid and Lidenbrock, and a tinge of mystery to this opening scene. The 1871 translator, on the other hand, connects together a long series of descriptive statements, leaning heavily on denotative background-building, paraphrasis, and pseudo-stylistic register shifts for his effects. In so doing, he destroys the crispness and drama of Verne's original text in addition to changing its basic content. Reading such translations, one can easily understand the recurring complaints of Anglo-American critics who have always contended that Verne's narratives have little literary merit and that his prose is often as wooden as his characters.

Finally, the authorial hubris of this anonymous translator rivaled that of Edward Roth. Not content to rewrite Verne's original story line by line and paragraph by paragraph, he too added to the novel entire plot episodes of his own invention. The most incredible of these occurs late in the novel: young Harry's nightmare encounter with two ferocious prehistoric monsters—a hybrid shark-crocodile and a carnivorous “antediluvian gorilla” fourteen feet high ([New York: Tor, 1992] 226-29). The chapter that features these events is itself retitled and is now called “The Ape Gigans.”

Accuracy. Speaking of titles, British and American publishers had no compunction about retitling Verne's novels as they saw fit, creating a bewildering labyrinth of references for the Vernian bibliographer. Many of Verne's translations were published separately in two or three distinct volumes with each part titled individually (e.g., *At the North Pole* or *The English at the North Pole* for the first part of *The Voyages and Adventures of Captain Hatteras* and *The Desert of Ice* or *The Field of Ice* for the second part); sometimes two independent novels (e.g., *From the Earth to the Moon* and *Around the Moon*) were packaged together under one omnibus title. For this reason, any given work in Verne's *Voyages Extraordinaires* might carry as many as five or six different English titles. Most English-language titles of Verne's novels are fairly easy to recognize: *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea(s)* or *At the Bottom of the Deep*, *Deep Sea* for *Vingt mille lieues sous les mers*, for example; or *Journey/Voyage/A Trip to the Centre of the Earth* or *Into the Interior of the Earth* for *Voyage au centre de la terre*; or *Propeller Island* or *A Floating Island* for *L'Île à hélice*. But some English translation titles are much less obvious: *Adrift in the Pacific* for *Deux ans de vacances* (1888, *A Two Years' Vacation*); or *In Search of the Castaways* for *Les Enfants du capitaine Grant* (*The Children of Captain Grant*); or *The Child of the Cavern* for *Les Indes noires* (*The Black Indies*); or *The Clipper of the Clouds* for *Robur-le-conquérant* (*Robur the Conqueror*); or *The Purchase of the North Pole* for *Sans dessus dessous* (1889, *Topsy-Turvy*); *Foundling Mick* for *P'tit-Bonhomme* (1893, *Lit'l Fellow*); or *A Package Holiday* for *L'Agence Thompson and Co.* (1907, *The Thompson Travel Agency*); or *Seventy Degrees North Latitude* for *Le Pays des fourrures* (1873, *The Fur Country*); or *Simon Hart: A Strange Story of Science and the Sea* for *Face au drapeau* (1896, *Facing the Flag*).⁸

In many of these early English translations, the fictional protagonists' names have also been changed. In the "standard" English version of *The Mysterious Island* (1874), for example, the American engineer and leader of the castaways, Cyrus Smith, has been renamed Cyrus Harding, his compatriot Pencroff is now called Pencroft, and the name of the young man accompanying them, Harbert, is changed to the more familiar Herbert. As mentioned, in the most prevalent translation of *Journey to the Center of the Earth*, Professor Otto Lidenbrock becomes Professor Von Hardwigg, his nephew Axel becomes Harry, and his daughter Gräuben becomes Gretchen. In *The Steam House*, Lady Munro's first name is Anglicized from Laurence (probably deemed to be too androgynous) to the unquestionably feminine Laura. In *Topsy-Turvy*, the name of the British emissary representing England at the auction of these northern territories has been (predictably) changed from Dean Toodrink to Dean Todrin and J.T. Maston is now called (for no obvious reason) J.T. Marston. And finally, in the posthumous *The Amazing Adventure of the Barsac Mission* (1919), the heroine Jane Buxton becomes Jane Blazon (perhaps to appear less buxom?).

In terms of simple vocabulary and lexicon, the number of errors in these early translations is astonishing. And some are painfully comical if compared to the original French texts. A random but fairly representative sampling of such mistakes include the following "jewels" (identified in each edition by book part, chapter, and page):

Five Weeks in a Balloon - New York: Vincent Parke, 1911:

"Cela est attristant" [It is saddening] is rendered as "It is melancholy." (I§23.303)

"Fergusson ne tarda pas à avoir l'explication de ce phénomène" [Fergusson did not delay in having an explanation for this phenomenon] has its meaning reversed as "Ferguson [sic] did not stop to ascertain the cause of the phenomenon" (I§30.339)

"voilà l'un des plus grands chagrins qu'il m'ait été donné de ressentir!" [this is one of the greatest sorrows I've ever had to endure] is now "this is one of the greatest troubles I have ever had to deplore!" (I§34.355)

"Il est heureux ... que j'aie eu cette pensée" [It was fortunate I had this idea] is translated as "It was a very happy idea of mine" (I§35.357)

"Le ballon se relève-t-il?" [Is the balloon rising again?] becomes the inadvertently comical "Is the balloon relieved at all?" (I§41.389)

From the Earth to the Moon Direct and Round the Moon - London: Routledge, 1877:

"les Arcadiens prétendirent que...." [the Acadians claimed that....] is literally translated as "the Acadians pretended that...." (FI§5.30)

"le président intervint" [the president intervened] becomes "the president interfered" (FI§8.47)

"je voudrais être au premier coup de pioche" [I'd like to be present at the first blow of the pickaxe] is changed to say "I should like to see the first stroke given at once" (FI§13.75)

“Je suis un homme d'intérieur” [I am a stay-indoors man] is unintentionally made humorous when translated as “I am a homely man” (AI§1.167)

“l'écorce terrestre” [the earth's crust] now sounds a bit fruity as “the rind of the earth” (AI§5.200)

“parallèlement” [in parallel fashion] becomes the delightfully alliterative “parallelly” (AI§15.263)

Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea - New York: Tor, 1995:

“les mauvaises terres de Nebraska” [the Badlands] become “the disagreeable territory of Nebraska” (I§2.8.)

“le passage du Nord-Ouest” [the Northwest Passage] is called “the passage of the North Sea” (I§3.13)

“faire un crochet” [making a detour] is literalized as “making a curve” (I§3.14)

“A un autre plus adroit! cria le commandant” [Give it to another (gunner) who is more adroit! shouted the commander] is—predictably—rendered as ““Another more to the right!” cried the commander” (I§6.32)

“un fil électrique” [an electric wire] is labelled “an electric thread” (I§11.63)

“Le capitain pressa trois fois un timbre électrique” [an electric bell] becomes “The Captain pressed an electric clock three times” (I§13.72)

“un tranquille cabinet de travail” [a quiet study] is changed to “a quiet repository of labour” (I§21,127)

“Et armé d'une lentille, il alluma un feu” [And armed with a magnifying lens, he started a fire] is hilariously translated as “And provided with a lentil, he lighted a fire” (I§20.114)

But there also exists a more sinister type of inaccuracy in many of Verne's English translations. This brand of betrayal to the integrity of Verne's texts has little to do with linguistic incompetence, streamlining plots for an adolescent audience, or creative additions to his prose. It constitutes one of the worst crimes that a translator, editor, or publisher can commit: ideological censorship. A number of Verne novels were rewritten to adhere to a pro-anglo political agenda and were methodically “purged” of any perceived anti-British or anti-American content before being published.

Consider, for example, portions of the Griffith and Farran edition of *A Journey to the Centre of the Earth* discussed earlier. In the first chapter, a close reading reveals that certain “ideological adjustments” have been made to Verne's narrative. Compare the two following excerpts—the first, what Verne actually said, and the second, the “adjusted” version:

Lidenbrock's name was accordingly very much honoured in the gymnasiums and learned societies. Sir Humphry Davy, Humboldt, and Captains Franklin and Sabine made sure they visited him on their way through Hamburg. Messrs Becquerel, Ebelmen, Brewster, Dumas, Milne-Edwards, and Sainte-Claire Deville liked to consult him on the most stimulating questions in chemistry. That science owed him some wonderful discoveries. In 1853 there had appeared in Leipzig a *Treatise on Transcendental Crystallography* by Professor O. Lidenbrock, printed in large-folio pages with plates—but without covering its costs.

Add to that that my uncle was the curator of the mineralogical museum of Mr Struve, the Russian ambassador, which was a valuable collection much esteemed throughout Europe. (trans. William Butcher, 1992 Oxford, 5)

He corresponded with all the great, learned, and scientific men of the age. I was therefore in constant communication with, at all events the letters of, Sir Humphrey Davy, Captain Franklin, and other great men. (trans. anon., Griffith & Farran, 1992 Tor, 3)

In the original, Lidenbrock is said to have corresponded with and been consulted by many famous scientists and explorers of the time. In his version, the British translator—no doubt in order to restrict the membership of such an exclusive group to those of English nationality—chose to delete from their ranks the German Humboldt, the American Sabine, and the French scientists Becquerel, Dumas, and Sainte-Claire Deville. As for mentioning Lidenbrock's "wonderful discoveries" in his "Treatise on Transcendental Crystallography" published in Leipzig (a good example of Verne's tongue-in-cheek humor and his toying with referentiality) or the Russian ambassador's mineralogical collection "much esteemed throughout Europe" in the next paragraph—our translator simply axed these non-British references entirely.

Other examples of such "patriotic" censorship in Verne's works can be found in the standard translation of *The Mysterious Island* by W.H.G. Kingston. Compare the two following passages—the first a faithful rendering of what Verne wrote, and the second Kingston's version—to see how this British translator politically "corrected" Verne's text:

The British yoke had weighed perhaps too heavily on the Hindu population. Prince Dakkar became the spokesman for the malcontents. He instilled in them all the hatred that he felt for the foreigners. He traveled not only to the still independent areas on the Indian Peninsula but also to those regions directly subject to British administration. He recalled the great days of Tippo Saib who had died heroically at Seringapatam in the defense of his country.

In 1857, the great Sepoy revolt broke out. Prince Dakkar was its soul. He organized the immense uprising, and he devoted both his talents and his wealth to this cause. (trans. Sidney Kravitz, 2001 Wesleyan UP, 590-91)

Instigated by princes equally ambitious and less sagacious and more unscrupulous than he was, the people of India were persuaded that they might successfully rise against their English rulers who had brought them out of a state of anarchy and constant warfare and misery, and had established peace and prosperity in their country. Their ignorance and gross superstition made them the facile tools of their designing chiefs.

In 1857 the great sepoy revolt broke out. Prince Dakkar, under the belief that he should thereby have the opportunity of attaining the object of his long-cherished ambitions, was easily drawn into it. He forthwith devoted his talents and wealth to the service of this cause. (1986 Signet Classic, 463)

Here, Verne's chastizing commentary on the British rule in India is transformed into a glowing testimonial to their "civilizing" influence. The anti-colonial revolt is now attributed to ambitious and "designing" Indian princes who turned the ignorant masses against their enlightened foreign rulers. Incidentally, this same

pro-British bias is also evident in the English translation of another Verne novel that focuses on India, *The Steam House* (1880), where sentences such as “Lord Clive, free of competitors and with nothing more to fear from Portugal or France, then undertook and assured the conquest of Bengale, over which Lord Hastings was named governor general” (I§3.34) become “Lord Clive’s brilliant successes having assured the English power in Bengale, Warren Hastings consolidated the empire Clive had founded” (I§3.35).

Such blatant political rewrites are disturbingly frequent. In *The Children of Captain Grant*, the protagonists come across in Australia a young aborigine boy named Toliné who has been schooled in the British educational system and who has recently won first prize in geography. He asks Paganel to question him on his geographical knowledge and, during a very funny give-and-take dialogue that continues for six pages, it quickly becomes evident that Toliné has been taught that the British own or control virtually all the nations of the world. Finally, an incredulous Paganel observes

“So that’s how they teach geography at Melbourne! ... Europe, Asia, Africa, America, Oceania, the whole world, all belonging to the English! With such an ingenious form of education as this, I understand the submissiveness of the natives! Well, Toliné, how about the Moon, does that belong to the English, too?”

“It will belong to them someday,” gravely answered the young aborigine.

Thereupon Paganel got up. He could not keep still any longer. He walked a quarter of a mile from the encampment and burst into uncontrollable laughter. (my translation)

This entire six-page episode is expunged from the first English translation of this novel—produced, ironically, not in London but in Philadelphia and titled *In Search of the Castaways*—and in its place is found the following:

Paganel and the others had now gathered round, and Toliné had to answer many a question... [T]he fact that he had taken “the first prize in geography” was sufficient introduction to Monsieur Paganel, who forthwith tested his knowledge, greatly to his own satisfaction and considerably to the credit of his young pupil. The curiosity of his discoverers having been fully satisfied, Toliné was made welcome and partook with the others of the general repast. (I§36.342)

Similar modifications have been made to the English version of Verne’s *Topsy-Turvy* (retitled *The Purchase of the North Pole*, trans. anon., 1890 Sampson Low): “But there are no desert islands left nowadays—the English have taken them all” becomes “But there are no desert islands now” (I§13.99). Later in the novel, where a sultan who is “right considered to be one of the most remarkable sovereigns of the peoples of Central Africa who are striving to escape the influence—or, more accurately, the domination—of the English” is, in the translation, simply “considered to be one of the most remarkable sovereigns of Central Africa” (I§17.118).

Another case of heavy-handed censorship can be seen in the standard English translation of Verne’s 1895 *Propeller Island*, translated as *The Floating Island, or The Pearl of the Pacific* (trans. W.J. Gordon, 1896 Sampson Low). The equivalent of dozens of pages have been cut from this Verne story because they were viewed as being somehow critical of the Americans or the British. Such

unacceptable passages included a description of the United States doubling its size by annexing Canada and Central America (I§1), a short blurb making fun of England's refusal to adopt the metric system (I§5), several very anti-American paragraphs focusing on the colonial history of Hawaii (I§9), a discussion about corrupt British politics (I§13), a few paragraphs concerning the lack of manners of many British citizens (II§1), a lengthy discussion where the British are condemned for introducing snakes onto the islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe before handing them over to the French (II§6), and a comical dialogue comparing the British to cannibals (II§9). Sometimes such changes, though distressing, can be inadvertently humorous. In one problematic passage—a long anti-missionary diatribe that the translator apparently decided could not be easily cut from Verne's narrative—a simple but ingenious solution was found: the nationality of the rapacious cleric was simply changed from British to German (II§1.190).

Such ideological censorship was not limited to politics and nationalism. Many references to the Catholic religion—especially if portrayed in competition with Protestantism—were systematically chopped out of Verne's translations. One such passage, in *Propeller Island*, describes a good French missionary as follows: "This missionary has devoted himself body and soul to the spread of Catholicism. And it was not without certain difficulties, for he has had to compete with a Wesleyan pastor who presented him with serious competition in the neighborhood" (II§9). Another, describing a thriving Catholic mission, was also excised from the same novel:

These religious men did regret their native land so far away. But isn't it true that such regrets are more than compensated for by all the good they are doing in these islands? Isn't it a consolation to see themselves respected by the people of this part of the world that they have saved from the influence of the Anglican ministers and converted to the Catholic faith? (II§5)

Lastly, some portions of Verne's narratives that were viewed as being of dubious morality or "good taste" to Anglo-American sensibilities were also either expunged or wholly rewritten. Sentences deemed to be too graphic or risqué, such as "tu têterais encore ta maman" ["you'd still be sucking at your mother's breast"] in *Five Weeks in a Balloon* (I§9) were euphemized in translation as "you'd be toddling after your mammy yet" (trans. Lackland, 1869 Appleton, 65) or "you would not be weaned yet" (trans. anon., 1911 Vincent Parke, 217) or "you'd still be drinking your mother's milk" (trans. Chambers, 1994 Wordsworth, 196). In *The Mysterious Island* (II§13), alcohol is the culprit, where "Le capitaine Pencroff était absolument satisfait de son équipage, et ne parlait rien moins que de le gratifier 'd'un quart de vin par bordée!'" ["Captain Pencroff was fully satisfied with his crew and spoke of rewarding them with nothing less than a quarter liter of wine by watch!"] is reduced to "Captain Pencroff was perfectly satisfied with his crew" (trans. Kingston, 1986 Signet Classic, 272). And several paragraphs of *humour noir* in the first chapter *From the Earth to the Moon*, where Verne praises the exquisite battlefield carnage afforded by bigger and more lethal artillery, were apparently too much for the British co-translators Mercier and King who decided to delete them entirely from their 1873 English version of this novel.

It is interesting to observe that Verne's own anti-Semitism—as evident, for example, in his highly racist portrayal of the Jew Isac [sic] Hakhabut in *Hector Servadac*—seems to have caused no problem for his English translator, who even intensified Verne's already unflattering portrait of this Shylock character. When Captain Servadac and his orderly Ben-Zouf pay an unannounced visit to Hakhabut's home, the latter at first refuses to greet them and then, realizing who they are, says: “‘Ah! It is you, your excellency governor general,’ he said without budging from his cabin” (my translation). The standard English translation of this sentence is “Oh, your Excellency, my lord, I did not know that it was you,” *whined the Jew*, but without emerging any further from his cabin” (II§7, trans. Frewer, 2000, Univ. Press of the Pacific, 252, my emphasis). Later in the same chapter, Servadac and Hakhabut begin to negotiate the loan of a weighing scale:

“Master Isac,” Captain Servadac then said, “we have come here quite simply to ask a favor of you.”

“A favor?”

“In our common interest.”

“But I don't have any common interests!”

“Hear me out, and stop complaining, Hakhabut. We're not here to take advantage of you.” (my translation)

The Frewer translation reads as follows:

“Listen to me,” said Servadac; “we have come to ask a favour of you.”

Imagining that at least half his property was to be confiscated, the Jew began to break out into his usual formula about being a poor man and having nothing to spare; but Servadac, without taking any heed of his complainings, went on:

“We are not going to ruin you, you know.” (253-54)

If one also examines how Blacks are portrayed throughout Verne's works, it seems that many of his English translators misrepresented him here as well. Whereas Verne almost always used the terms “Nègre” (Negro) or “Noirs” (Blacks), several of his translators opted for more pejorative terms such as “darkeys” or “niggers.” The various English editions of Verne's first novel, *Five Weeks in a Balloon*, clearly demonstrate this:

“Shall we let this darkey drop all at once?” inquired Joe. (I§15.119, trans. Lackland, 1869 Appleton)

“But how are we to scatter those wretched niggers?” asked Kennedy. (I§14.71, trans. anon. 1870 Chapman and Hall, rpt. 1995 Sutton “Pocket Classics”)

“How astonished those niggers do look!” (I§20.122, trans. Frederick A. Malleon, 1875 Ward Lock)

“Hollo!” cried Joe. “Niggers instead of crocodiles! Faith, I prefer the former. But how do these fellows dare to bathe in such places as this?” (I§35.359, Routledge, trans. unknown, 1876 Routledge, rpt. 1911 Vincent Parke)

“That might be a nuisance,” replied Kennedy. “In the interests of civilization it would be better to be taken for ordinary men. It would give these niggers a different idea of European power.” (I§30.294, trans. Arthur Chambers, 1926 Dent/Dutton)

As readers we must not, of course, fall into the trap of making anachronistic value judgments and condemning certain words that we find offensive but that were acceptable (albeit colloquial) at the time they were published. But it is nevertheless true that if these translators had been more competent in French and/or had chosen to be more faithful to what Verne had originally written, such terms would never have found their way into the English versions of these novels in the first place.

Style. Translators often have difficulty conveying an author's style. Verne's early translators were no different, just worse. Reading Verne's works in French and in English, one is continually amazed at how much is "lost in translation"—not only because of the latter's incompleteness or inaccuracy when compared to the originals but also because of their very different style. The French Verne is intelligent, humorous, witty, theatrical, socially aware, and surprisingly self-reflexive as a writer.⁹ The English Verne, the one encountered in most of his translations, seems shallow, one-dimensional, melodramatic, and naive. Anglophone literary critics have generally only read the English Verne, and their reactions are predictable. According to one early critic: "The almost life-long métier of Jules Verne was the pseudo-scientific novel, but he was the most superficial of all who have practised the art" ("Science in Romance" 414). Another more contemporary critic has also said of Verne: "His tone is flat, his characters are thin, and he pauses all too frequently for lectures: his is a non-sensual world" (Aldiss 96).

To effectively communicate an author's style, a good translator must strike a delicate balance between (often conflicting) goals: remaining scrupulously faithful to the original and trying to create a similar aesthetic effect in the target language. Too much of the former will lead to stilted prose and even comical awkwardness as in Mercier's *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, where a sentence like "les mantelets furent rebattus extérieurement" [the hatches were opened outwards] is rendered as "the port lids were pulled down outside" (I§21.129, 1995 Tor). Too much of the latter will result in excessive translator interpolation, as in the following scene from Verne's *Hector Servadac* as "adapted" by the American translator Edward Roth in his 1877 translation called *To the Sun? Off on a Comet!* (rpt. 1960 Dover):

"Gentlemen," said Count Timascheff, "the disaster has been immense. Along this whole eastern section of the Mediterranean, we have not found a single trace of the old lands: neither those of Algeria nor of Tunisia, except one little point—a rock emerging from the sea near Carthage, and which contained the tomb of the king of France..."

"Louis the Ninth, I believe?" said the Brigadier.

"More known by the name of Saint Louis, Sir!" countered Captain Servadac, to whom Brigadier Murphy offered a half-smile of concession. (my translation)

"Gentlemen," calmly continued the Count, "the disaster, I am sorry to say, has been immense. Along the whole of the eastern portion of the Mediterranean we have not been able to find a single trace of the old countries—neither Algeria—nor Tunis—except one little point, a rock emerging from the sea, near the ruins of Carthage, and containing the tomb of Saint Louis."

“Saint Louis? Saint Louis?” asked Murphy, who was no stronger in hagiology than in geography. “Oliphant, who was Saint Louis?”

“Saint Louis—hum—haw—” answered the Major, a little more diffidently this time; “Saint Louis is a seaport town in the United States famous for cotton and corn and Indians. But—haw—the Saint Louis spoken of by the Count—hum—was some martyr of that name in the old times—hum—haw—yes, in the old times.”

“You’re right, Major Oliphant,” observed Servadac, more impatiently than ever before; “Saint Louis was a martyr; but he was more, he was a king of France; he was still more, he was the best and greatest king that ever sat on a throne in any age and in any country!”

The automatons showed their appreciation of this volunteered information by a stiff formal bow, and the Count, rather disliking to be interrupted so often, hastened to conclude his narrative in as few words as possible. (I§14.118)

One stylistic change common to most of Verne’s English translations is their use of anglicized names and American or British slang. The names of the main characters are sometimes changed, either slightly as in Kurtis to Curtis (*The Wreck of the Chancellor*, 1875) and Captain Hod to Captain Hood (*The Steam House*), or moderately as in Jean-Jacques Langévol to John James Langevol (*The Begum’s Millions*) and Doniphan to Donovan (*A Two Years’ Vacation*), or in somewhat more radical fashion as in Cyprien Méré to Victor Cyprien (*The Southern Star*, 1884) and Lidenbrock to Hardwigg (*Journey to the Centre of the Earth*). Even more frequent is the anglicization of certain interjections such as “By Jove!” or “Egad!” for “Parbleu!” and “The deuce!” for “Diable!” or the use of certain colloquial expressions such as “we are eating humble pie” [“nous nous humilions,” we have been humbled] in *From the Earth to the Moon* (trans. Linklater, I§1.11) or “these thoughts were racking [sic] my brain” [“ces réflexions tourbillonnaient dans ma tête,” these thoughts were spinning around in my head] in *Journey to the Centre of the Earth*, (Routledge, I§41.223). Needless to say, converting Verne’s French idiom to English slang can sometimes be dangerous because colloquialisms tend to change rapidly over time, and a sentence such as “he was soon completely knocked up” [“il fut bientôt sur les dents,” he was soon exhausted] in *From the Earth to the Moon* (Routledge, I§22.127) might well perplex the contemporary American reader.

Two aspects of an author’s style that can often help to distinguish between good and bad translations are poetic descriptions and humor (especially ironic wordplay). Both are inherently difficult to convert into a foreign tongue and, predictably, most of Verne’s jokes and evocative passages have either been glossed over or ruined in his early English translations. The following “sensual” description of the polar “open sea” in *The Voyages and Adventures of Captain Hatteras*—a passage that was singled out for praise by Michel Butor¹⁰—is quite typical:

The waters of this liquid plain, which were tinted with the faintest hues of ultramarine, proved to be unusually transparent and endowed with a wonderful dispersive quality, as if they were made of sulphur carbide. This diaphanousness allowed one to see clearly to immeasurable depths. It seemed that the Polar basin was lit from below like a vast aquarium; no doubt some electrical phenomenon,

produced at the bottom of the sea, illuminated its deepest recesses. As a result, their boat appeared to be suspended above a bottomless abyss. (II§21, my translation)

With its meaning twisted and its tone emptied of poetry, here is how this passage appears in the most commonly available English translation of this novel (still in print today):

The water of this Polar Sea presented some peculiar features worth mentioning. In colour it was a faint ultramarine blue, and possessed such wonderful transparency that one seemed to gaze down into fathomless depths. These depths were lighted up, no doubt, by some electrical phenomenon, and so many varieties of living creatures were visible that the vessel seemed to be sailing over a vast aquarium. (anon. trans., 1874 Routledge, rpt. as *The Desert of Ice*, 2002 Fredonia, II§21.102-03)

As for humor and wordplay, the following examples show how anglophone readers have never been able to savor Verne's wit. The first, from *The Tribulations of a Chinaman in China* (1879), features a noble Oriental who is always properly "oriented":

As for Wang, he had opened his huge yellow umbrella decorated with black monsters and, keeping himself "oriented" to the east as all highbred Chinese men should be, he looked around for things worth observing. (my translation)

But this clever piece of word play is entirely lost in translation:

Wang had opened his huge yellow umbrella decorated with figures of black monsters, and walked along, suffering very little to escape the keen eye of his observation. (trans. Frewer, 1879 Sampson Low I§3.30)

The second, from *Caesar Cascabel* (1890), is typical of the omnipresent *entre nous* humor in Verne's texts, as the narrator "winks" at the reader:

"Long live reindeer!" exclaimed young Sandre, this shout having, of course, nothing monarchical about it. (my translation)

But even such inconsequential humorous asides are frequently sacrificed in translation:

"Hurrah for the reindeer!" shouted young Sander. (trans. A. Estoclet, 1890 Cassell, II§11.320).

Finally, as the third book of a trilogy beginning with *From the Earth to the Moon* and continuing with *Around the Moon*, Verne's satiric novel *Topsy-Turvy* (a.k.a. *The Purchase of the North Pole*) is another work that is teeming with double entendres, authorial "winks," and self-referential parody. These comical effects operate on many levels. The novel's very title emphasizes the text's purposeful sabotage of the "Science-conquers-Nature" ideology implicit in most of Verne's earlier novels. And consider the tongue-in-cheek and highly phatic chapter titles such as "In Which Reappear Some Old Acquaintances of Our Young Readers" or "In Which One Sees Appear a *Deus Ex Machina* of French Origin." And, finally, there is the plot itself—a satiric, caricature-like portrayal of Verne's erstwhile Gun Club heroes Barbicane, Nicholl, and Maston (and a new character,

Alcide Pierdeux [πR^2]) who are now attempting to straighten the Earth's axis with a giant cannon blast—and fail miserably.

Let us examine just two of the many stylistic gems to be found in this novel and compare them with their English-language equivalents. First, in a delightful adaptation of Newton's gravitational formula, Verne describes the love-sick Mrs. Evangelina Scorbitt as follows:

Yes! These scientists appeared worthy of her admiration and fully justified a woman's feeling attracted to them proportionally to their mass and in inverse ratio to the square of their distance. And indeed J.T. Maston was corpulent enough to exercise on her an irresistible attraction.... (my translation)

In the American translation of this work, this clever Newtonian simile is nowhere to be found:

Yes, these wise people seemed to her worthy of all admiration and support. She felt herself drawn strongly towards them. And J.T. Maston was exactly that kind of man and one she adored.... (trans. anon., 1890 Ogilvie, rpt. 1960 Ace, I§4.47)

In this novel (as in several others, such as *Claudius Bombarnac* [1892] and *The Sphinx of Ice* [1897]) Verne repeatedly engages in a kind of good-humored auto-referentiality—simultaneously plugging his own works while citing characters and events in them as if they really existed, thereby blurring the line between fact and fiction. In the following passage, for example, he makes a comparison with the hero of his 1877 novel *Hector Servadac*, who had earlier journeyed through the solar system:

Who knows? Perhaps President Barbicane and Captain Nicholl regretted not being able to take their places inside the projectile. In the very first second, they would have travelled more than two thousand eight hundred kilometers! After having penetrated the mysteries of the lunar world, they would have penetrated those of the solar world, and under conditions somewhat different but just as interesting as the Frenchman Hector Servadac, who was carried off on the surface of the comet *Gallia!* (my translation)

In the translation, however, this rich intertextual reference is simply cut:

Who knows, perhaps President Barbicane and Capt. Nicholl regretted that they were not able to get into the projectile. In the first second they would have travelled 2,800 kilometers. (trans. anon., 1890 Ogilvie, rpt. 1960 Ace, I§18.141)

As these many examples clearly illustrate, readers who read Verne exclusively in English translation are not reading the *real* Jules Verne. Measured by any standard of completeness, accuracy, and style, these translations have committed to Verne's oeuvre what can only be described as “a massacre” (Butcher 131).

Yet one might legitimately ask: why does all this matter? Why should today's sf readers be concerned about the faithfulness of Verne's translations? Is it not true that—whatever their quality may have been—Verne's tales succeeded in capturing the imagination of generations of anglophone readers on both sides of the Atlantic? Did they not popularize an entirely new literary genre and make him one of the top-translated authors of all time?¹¹ And, furthermore, is it not conceivable that these often shoddy English translations just might have become 19th-century bestsellers *because* they were abridged, anglicized, and “adapted”?

Perhaps. But one must also remember that it was these same bowdlerized English translations that established Verne's reputation in anglophone countries as a prescient but non-literary¹² writer of adventure stories for children—an author whose works were, for well over a century, not deemed fit for academic study. It is, of course, impossible to know in retrospect how more accurate English translations of Jules Verne's works might have affected—either positively or negatively—his literary reputation and his cultural legacy in the United Kingdom and America. But I tend to agree with Brian Aldiss, who once observed that “The poverty of English translations of Verne has not diminished his popularity, merely his chance of a better critical appraisal” (96). In the year 2005, the centenary of Jules Verne's death, we celebrate his memory. What better time for the anglophone world to rediscover the *real* Jules Verne?

NOTES

All translations from the French are mine unless otherwise attributed.

1. In this preface, Roth goes on to outline how, in his own translation, he intends to “improve” on Verne's texts for the American reader:

Then my resolution was taken. It was to make an original translation, the best I could, of works of such undeniably inherent merit, a translation which, while strictly following the spirit of the author—this it could not do if slavishly bald and literal—would try to make the most of his strong points, throw the weak ones into shade, soften off extravagances, give the names a familiar sound, correct palpable errors—unless where radical, and then say nothing about them—simplify crabbed science, explain difficulties, amplify local coloring, clear up unknown allusions, put a little more blood and heart into the human beings—in short, a translation which should aim as far as possible at that natural, clear, familiar, idiomatic style which Verne himself would have used if addressing himself in English to an American audience.

Such services rendered to Jules Verne's stories, if done honestly, unobtrusively, and with even tolerable success, could hardly fail to be of decided advantage to the American public. (4-5)

2. See Michaluk.

3. In part because of Miller's pioneering efforts in blowing the whistle on these horrid versions which had become the standard English translations of Verne, literary critics today are aware of the problem. Note, for example, Everett Bleiler's comments that

Verne has been very badly served in translation. The Victorian “standard” translations are inaccurate, without literary merit, and often severely abridged. Verne's comments on social matters are often omitted.... All this is not satisfactory, but the reader often has only a choice between bad translations and no translations at all... (582)

Sf critic John Clute also observes that “Verne was served astonishingly badly by his contemporary translators” (“The Facts” 5) and that

The reputation he long had in English-speaking countries for narrative clumsiness and ignorance of scientific matters was fundamentally due to his innumerate and illiterate translators who—along with the publishers who commissioned their work—remained impenetrably of the conviction that he was a writer of overblown juveniles and that it was thus necessary to trim him down, to eliminate any inappropriately adult complexities, and to pare the confusing scientific material to an absolute minimum” (“Jules Verne” 1276-77).

4. See Miller's retranslations of *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea* (1965, 1976) and *From the Earth to the Moon* (1978) as well as his more recent co-publication with Frederick Paul Walter of *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea* (US Naval Institute, 1993); Butcher's fine translations of *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* (1992), *Around the World in Eighty Days* (1995), and *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Seas* (1998) in the “Oxford World's Classics” series published by Oxford UP; Edward Baxter's *Family*

Without a Name (NC Press, 1982) and *The Fur Country* (NC Press, 1987); Baxter's English translation of Verne's *Invasion of the Sea* (2001) as well as Stanford Luce's *The Mighty Orinoco* (2002), *The Begum's Millions* (forthcoming 2005), and *The Kip Brothers* (forthcoming 2006) as well as Teri Hernandez's translation of *Travel Scholarships* (forthcoming 2006), all in Wesleyan UP's new "Early Classics of Science Fiction" series. Other updated Verne translations since the 1960s include Anthony Bonner's *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea* (Bantam, 1962); Robert Baldick's *Journey to the Center of the Earth* (Penguin, 1965), *Around the World in Eighty Days* (Dent/Dutton, 1968), and *From the Earth to the Moon and Around the Moon* (Dent/Dutton, 1970); Evelyn Copeland's *Adventures of the Rat Family* (Oxford, 1993); Sidney Kravitz's *The Mysterious Island* (Wesleyan, 2001) and Jordon Stump's version of the same (Modern Library, 2001); Benjamin Fry's *Magellania* (Welcome Rain, 2002); Stephen Gray's *The Star of the South* (Protea, 2003); Andrew Brown's *A Fantasy of Dr. Ox* (Hesperus, 2003); and Michael Glencross's recent *Around the World in Eighty Days* (Penguin, 2004).

5. On the other hand, I was pleasantly surprised to discover that the e-book of *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* that I downloaded from Amazon.com (published by the Modern Library, with a preface by sf author David Brin) was *not* the infamously poor "Hardwigg" version of this novel but, rather, a more faithful public-domain translation first published by Routledge in 1876.

6. For more information on the publishing history of Verne's works in English, see Brian Taves and Stephen Michaluk's excellent *The Jules Verne Encyclopedia* (89-194).

7. I.O. Evans's "Fitzroy Editions," published during the late 1950s and 1960s, constitute undoubtedly the most comprehensive series of modern Verne translations in English (far more than the 1911 "Vincent Parke" collection, edited by Charles F. Horne). In fact, for many of Verne's later novels and virtually all of his posthumous works, no other English translations exist. Unfortunately, I.O. Evans often abridged Verne's texts and made other changes to "adapt" them to an anglophone audience. In an essay published in the *Bulletin de la Société Jules Verne* in 1968, he defended himself, saying:

I have been chided for not publishing an unabridged version of Verne's work and for having, in fact, subjected it to editorial cuts that were too extensive. I will only say that, if I had published it in its entirety, I would have risked discouraging the reader. Even during Verne's time, certain parts of his narratives must have been considered off-putting. And the contemporary public, partly as a result of radio and television, no longer has the patience to assimilate long passages of geographical information, many of which are outdated.

Instead, I tried to remain faithful to the spirit of Verne, presenting him in a manner that would please today's readers. And the fact that these corrected versions now number 60 volumes shows that I was not mistaken. Stripped of their excessively long passages, Verne's stories take on a new life. They are more interesting than one might imagine, compared to their originals.

Jules Verne believed strongly in Providence, and I think that he himself would judge that I have been guided in my work by Providential inspiration. (5-6, my translation)

Although the purist might view the "Fitzroy" editions as a betrayal of Verne's original texts, it must not be forgotten that an entire generation of Anglo-American readers have discovered Jules Verne through these popular editions—readers who probably would not have otherwise become familiar with Verne's oeuvre. As one such reader explained:

Until the Evans editions came along, I had no idea of the quantity and scope of Vernian works. If nothing else, he introduced me to the much wider world of Verne than I ever knew existed. Many of the earlier English translated works I have acquired since then are a result of my knowing of their existence through the Evans translations. If some of the translations were not entirely accurate or some of the translations were abridged, so what? They were enjoyable reading and provided a firm foundation for continuing. For that reason, I have always been grateful for his work. (Mark Eckell, e-mail message to the Jules Verne Forum [listserv of *Zvi Har'El's Jules Verne Collection*], Nov. 1, 2004).

For more on these (and other) English-language editions, consult *The Jules Verne Encyclopedia* and Andrew Nash's very informative website <<http://julesverne.ca/>>.

8. For a relatively complete listing of alternative English titles for Verne's works, see Taves and Michaluk (95-102).

9. See Compère, especially the chapter entitled "J.V. en ses miroirs" [J.V. in his Mirrors] which discusses the "metatextuality" of Verne's writing—those moments where the text focuses on itself and its own functionality as a semiotic system (see especially pp. 124-52).

10. See Butor, especially 145-48.

11. According to the most recent survey in the "Index Translationum" (at <<http://databases.unesco.org/xtrans/stat/xTransStat.a?VL1=A&top=50&lg=0>>), the top ten most translated authors in the world are: Walt Disney Productions, Agatha Christie, The Bible, Jules Verne, Lenin, Barbara Cartland, Enid Blyton, William Shakespeare, Hans Christian Andersen, and Danielle Steel.

12. Even literary critics who are pro-sf have sometimes characterized Verne's writing as hopelessly non-literary. Kingsley Amis in his *New Maps of Hell* (1960), for example, speaking of Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea* (the very poor Mercier Lewis translation), describes the venerable French author as follows:

With Verne we reach the first great progenitor of modern science fiction. In its literary aspect his work is, of course of poor quality.... Even the more active passages are full of comically bad writing....

One would have to blame Verne's translator for some of those ineptitudes, but such was the form in which the novels reached English-speaking readers, none of whom, to my knowledge, has bothered to complain. The story and the ideas were the thing. (28-29)

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- (for a complete listing of Verne's novels cited in this article, see "A Bibliography of Jules Verne's English Translations" which immediately follows)
- Zvi Har'El's *Jules Verne Collection* (the best Internet website and listserve on Jules Verne). Ed. Zvi Har'El. January 2005. <<http://jv.gilead.org.il/>>.

ABSTRACT

This article offers a detailed comparison of the original French editions of Jules Verne's *Voyages Extraordinaires* and their English translations. Many of Verne's most popular novels were severely abridged, simplified, and ideologically censored in their English-language versions. Several of these bowdlerized translations became the "standard" editions of Verne's works in the UK and the US and are still being published today. As a result, most anglophone readers of Verne have never had the opportunity to read the *real* Verne. It seems clear that these poor translations are largely responsible for Verne's reputation in anglophone countries as a prescient but non-literary writer of adventure stories for children. More modern and accurate English translations of Verne's oeuvre are needed to correct this misconception.