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An Annotated Bibliography of "Imaginary Subterranean Worlds"

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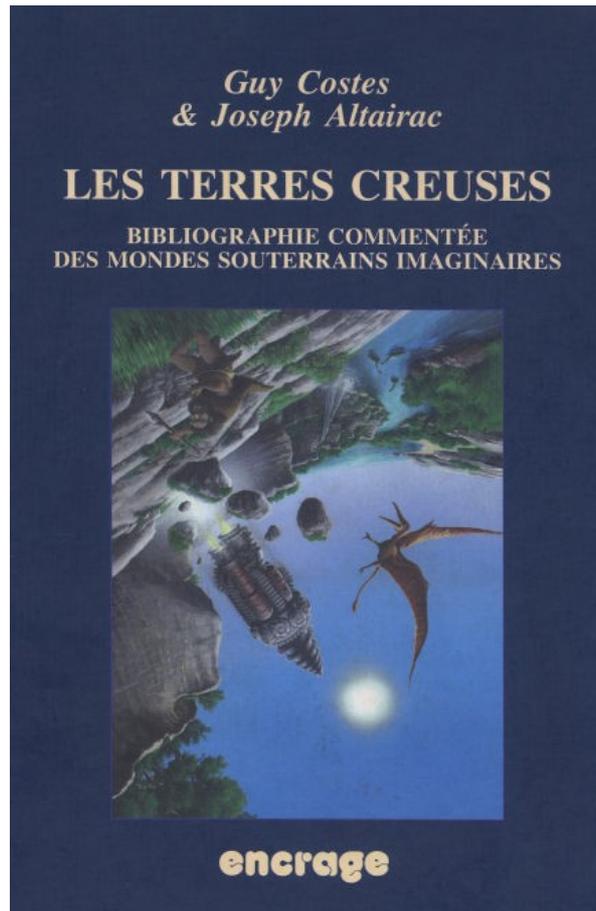
Guy Costes & Joseph Altairac. *Les Terres creuses : Bibliographie commentée des mondes souterrains imaginaires.* Amiens: encre & Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2006. 800 pages. ISBN : 9782251741420.

The idea that the earth is hollow has an illustrious history. The invention of the idea of a hollow earth has been attributed to René Descartes, who speculated that the earth's interior was dotted with gigantic subterranean cavities. It is also indebted to the astronomer Edmond Halley, who speculated that the interior of the earth was composed of concentric spheres that were inhabited by creatures of various kinds. These possible worlds have drawn writers of utopias, fantasy and science fiction alike.

In *Les Terres Creuses* [1], Guy Costes and Joseph Altairac present an annotated bibliography of "imaginary subterranean worlds." The authors attempt an exhaustive compendium of references to a hollow earth. Their 2211 entries are arranged in chronological order, from the accounts of Atlantis in Plato's *Timaeus* and *Critias* to 2005. Each entry provides brief entries on initial publication, French editions (if any), and representative passages. The authors also provide an excellent and very readable introduction, which introduces the history of hollow earth theories. An annotated critical bibliography presents some 125 key references.

This is not an academic book, but it is well researched and clearly written. One of the book's charms is its illustrations; every page (though not every entry) contains at least one black and white illustration of a book or magazine cover or author, with the science fiction pulps well represented. Its lists of the initial publication, sometimes in obscure magazines, is particularly useful, as is the lists of French translations. Less complete or useful is the index, which makes no distinction between authored works and secondary references.

Jules Verne is well represented by both well known and lesser know works, beginning with *Aventures du capitaine Hatteras* (*Les Anglais au pôle Nord* and *Le Désert de glace*) (No. 94), *Voyage au centre de la Terre* (95), *Vingt mille lieues sous les mers* (105), *L'île mystérieuse* (116), *Hector Servadac* (124), *Les Indes noires* (125, not listed in the index), *La Maison à vapeur* (135), *Les cinq cents millions de la Bégum* (137), *Voyage à travers l'impossible* (149), *L'Etoile du Sud* (156), *In the Year 2889* (189b, again not in the index), *Sans dessus dessous* (190), *Face au drapeau* (258), *Le Sphinx des glaces* (268), *Le Testament d'un excentrique* (299), *Maître du monde* (353), *Les Naufragés du "Jonathan"* (445) and *L'Oncle Robinson* (1998). This list also shows some of the difficulties of a chronological listing, partly remedied by a separate index of titles.



The book does have its weaknesses and omissions. Its perspective is not global; its subterranean world are limited to European and North American imaginaries, mostly of the nineteenth and twentieth century. Curiously, it omits the two most famous subterranean voyages of antiquity: the Nekyia, or journey to the underworld by Odysseus in *Odyssey* 11 and accounts of the journey of Orpheus to retrieve his dead bride Eurydice from the land of the dead (both in the original myth and in modern retellings, such as Cocteau's *Orphée*). From Plato it jumps to Dante's *Divine Comedy*; only the first 44 entries address texts published before the 19th century. Nonetheless, this volume is a pleasure to browse, and shines in its true focus, the coverage of twentieth-century popular culture.

NOTES

1. Guy Costes & Joseph Altairac, *Les Terres creuses : Bibliographie commentée des mondes souterrains imaginaires*. Amiens: encrage & Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2006. 800 pages. ISBN : 9782251741420.

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