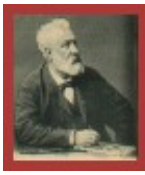
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Triumphant Translating: It's a Matter of Style

(two companion reviews of two translations of *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Seas*)

Frederick Paul Walter — William Butcher

1. First review

Verne, Jules. *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Seas*. Revised translation and notes by William Butcher; introduction by Margaret Drabble; illustrations by Jillian Tamaki. London: Folio Society, 2014. xxiv + 360 pp.

For sixty years the Folio Society has published elegantly typeset, gorgeously bound editions of classic books, often with new artwork from top contemporary illustrators. In 2001 the Society reissued William Butcher's 1992 translation of *Journey to the Centre of the Earth*, complete with sumptuous color plates and a zesty introduction by Michael Crichton. Now another of his Verne texts gets the deluxe treatment.

Vingt mille lieues sous les mers was the third of four Verne novels Butcher would translate and annotate for Oxford World's Classics. Titled *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Seas*, it appeared in 1998 as a trade paperback, a new and distinctive rendering backed by a huge amount of innovative critical material. Butcher not only translated the novel, he clarified it in over a hundred pages of front and end matter.

Most of my review will spotlight the characteristics of Butcher's translating, the focus of the new edition. But as Butcher remarks in a note for this reissue (xxi), his OUP rendering

"benefited from original research on the sources and the manuscripts, proofs, and editions." That research included an exploration of the novel's development, plot, themes, structure, and characters. It also weighed the physical evidence: two manuscripts at the Bibliothèque nationale, the *Magasin* serialization, softcover in-18 edition, and clothbound octavo edition. Lastly the book provided a thorough critical framework: translating policies, a generous bibliography, a full chronology of Verne's life, an appendix on submersibles, and sixty pages of explanatory notes that not only dealt with textual issues but offered dozens of manuscript variants, all deftly translated.

The spadework was essential for Butcher, because he faced back then what we still face today. As he states in his Folio note (xxi), "There is unfortunately no reference edition of *Vingt mille lieues*, not even an attempt to produce a standard text by collating the three main editions [i.e., the serialization, and the in-octodecimo and in-octavo editions], let alone by examining the proofs or manuscripts." As somebody who has also labored in this vineyard, I'm likewise amazed at this state of affairs. In English-speaking countries the works of Shakespeare, Melville, Austen, Poe, Dickens, Twain, and other anglophone greats are widely available in authoritative critical editions, some dating back a century or more. Even Doyle's Sherlock Holmes tales, fiction comparable in public esteem to Verne's, have enjoyed no less than *four* such editions, the first published only a couple of decades after their author's death. Yet neither *Twenty Thousand Leagues* nor Verne's other masterworks has inspired anything comparable from French scholars. It beggars belief.

So there are textual challenges here for every translator. In his Folio note (xxi) Butcher attests that the French "contains a fair number of factual and spelling mistakes; grammar and syntax are also occasionally faulty." Manuscript evidence notwithstanding, it's often unclear

which mistakes were Verne's and which the blunders of typesetters or proofreaders—or even Hetzel himself, apparently not above revising an author without querying him.

In that 1998 edition, therefore, Butcher was careful to explain his policies and procedures (xxxv). Using the Presses Pocket reprint (1991) as his working text, he limited himself to amending "clear spelling mistakes in real-world names and words found in dictionaries, normally indicating such changes." Elsewhere, as in Anthony Bonner's 1962 Bantam translation, Butcher couches Verne's miles as knots, also disclosing that "indications of interlocutors, ellipses, and exclamation marks have been slightly reduced, and very long sentences broken up."

Which points to a prime feature of his translating: an air of speed and economy. By reducing "indications of interlocutors," Butcher cuts down the number of *he saids*, picks up the pace, and gives us some of those zippy exchanges the ancient Greeks called stichomythia—as when Conseil captures a bird of paradise in I 21:

> 'Congratulations!' I exclaimed.
>
> 'Monsieur is too kind.'
>
> 'But no, my good fellow, it was a master-stroke. To capture one of these birds alive using your bare hands!'
>
> 'If monsieur will study it closely he will see that my merit is not so great.'
>
> 'But why, Conseil?'
>
> 'Because this bird is as drunk as a lord.'
>
> 'Drunk?'
>
> 'Yes, monsieur, tipsy from the nutmeg it was eating under the nutmeg tree where I caught it. See, Ned, the terrible effects of intemperance.'
>
> 'My God! Considering how much gin I've drunk in the last two months, you can hardly talk.'

I'll explore this speed and economy in both the 1998 text and its 2014 revision. But first let's address a basic issue that's often overlooked in translation theory: Who is the audience for translations like these?

In his *Retranslation through the Centuries* (2011), Dublin researcher Kieran O'Driscoll scrutinized the English versions of another Verne favorite, *Le tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours*. O'Driscoll reported in that context (150) that Butcher's editions target "both a general and a scholarly readership." However, to echo Otto Lidenbrock, what would Verne specialists want with a translation? Wouldn't they study him in the original? Wouldn't Butcher's critical materials be their main interest? Clearly, then, the translation itself will be of greatest value to ... blush ... *the general reader.*

Already noses are wrinkling.

But I'm not being snooty. In this case lay readers would include every anglophone individual who has no professional or personal reason for being fluent in French. Yet such readers may well be astute and accomplished *otherwise*—scientists, for instance, are fond of Verne, often claiming him as a childhold influence ... not to mention film historians, sci-fi buffs, balloonists, submariners, cavers, antiquarians, teachers, school kids, and oldsters with long memories. They deserve Butcher's translating as much as the specialists deserve his detective work.

No doubt Butcher is aware that such subgroups are a big part of his audience: as his Folio note indicates, he has continued working to "make the text more readable." Because his publisher is Oxford University Press and he himself hails from the UK, it's also likely that he sees Britons as his primary readership. Certainly his renderings have an unmistakable British accent, from idioms to cultural perspectives to units of measure. Of course this doesn't mean that U.S. readers can't appreciate his achievements, but it *does* mean that Butcher's choices will often differ from those of American translators such as Peter Schulman, Edward Baxter, Walter Miller, or myself.

For an example drawn from *Twenty Thousand Leagues*, take his adjustment of the narrator's academic status. Aronnax is addressed in the French as *monsieur le professeur*, like Lidenbrock and Palmyrin Rosette before and after him. The title presents no problem in the United States, since "professor" is an honorific commonly given to tenured faculty members. But Butcher's translation designates Aronnax as a *lecturer*, on the principal that a full professor in the UK would occupy an awarded chair (except, of course, those at Hogwarts).

Instead Butcher styles him as "Dr Aronnax," presumably because of his medical studies early on—though this could be an occupational rather than an academic title, since holders of masters degrees *did* practice medicine in the nineteenth century. However, even though he isn't addressed as "doctor" in the French (unlike Fergusson and Clawbonny), Butcher's modification is justified and understandable in a translation aimed particularly at British readers.

Unfortunately, only the Oxford paperback gives the reasoning behind this and other choices that Butcher makes. Folio's reissue offers merely an updated excerpt from his original introduction, a tiny fraction of his scholarly apparatus. Luckily the Oxford paperback is readily available and modestly priced—I fervently recommend it as a supplement to this 2014 reissue. But it all means, at bottom, that the Folio version is a *reading edition* rather than a scholarly one. From this point on, therefore, I'll highlight the *stylistic* accomplishments of Butcher's translation.

Those accomplishments make him that uncommon entity among translators: an enjoyable read. I'll start with his 1998 text.

Possibly the most likable aspect of Butcher's work is its *vernacular flavor*. In I 13, for example, Aronnax compliments Nemo on one of his engineering feats: *« Ah ! bravo, trois fois bravo ! capitaine.* » Right off Butcher is faithful to the spirit as much as the letter, going for sense, feeling, and English as we speak it: "Oh congratulations, captain, heartiest congratulations!"

He gets such naturalistic effects by choosing attractive English equivalents, again not literal but aptly communicative. In II 12, for instance, Ned Land has a rousing experience that recalls *ses beaux jours de harponneur ...* which Butcher matches perfectly with *his glory days as a harpooner.* And something similar happens two paragraphs later: Aronnax predicts that whalers will reach the pole, *ce point inconnu du globe ...* which becomes, in Butcher's idiomatic phrasing, *those virgin points of the globe.*

A regular feature of Butcher's translating is exactly this succinctness and directness—yet, somehow, he never abridges or abuses. When the *Nautilus* cruises off Crete in II 6, her captain sends a shipment of gold ingots ashore, and Aronnax wonders *Quel était le correspondant du capitaine Nemo?* Once more Butcher ducks a literal translation and nails the sense instantly: *Who had Captain Nemo sent them to?* And it happens again when the *Nautilus* raises the Falklands (II 17), where *La profondeur de la mer était médiocre.* As before, the translation doesn't waste a syllable: *The sea was not very deep.*

Butcher will also use slang unabashedly if it offers clarity, speed, and impact. Back to Ned Land: when his escape plans are thwarted (II 19), the French relates that *une circonstance fâcheuse contrariait absolument les projets du Canadien ...* which Butcher renders pungently as *an unfortunate circumstance scuppered the Canadian's plans.* In fact, he's often salty with Ned, whose culinary skills earn genteel praise from Aronnax in I 21: *Il s'entendait admirablement à toute cette cuisine.* Yet Butcher will have none of it, implies rather than spells out, and puts it over in four snappy syllables: *He knew his stuff.*

There are other arrows in Butcher's quiver. He can convey Verne's meaning simply by sailing on the opposite tack, favoring positive rather than negative strategies. In II 19, for example, Nemo shows Aronnax the records of his oceanographic work, intending to enclose them in *un petit appareil insubmersible ...* clearly and literally translated as *a small unsinkable container.* Yet Butcher is clearer still: *a small floating container.* He chooses a positive adjective over its negative counterpart, an efficient shortcut.

However it's essential to recognize that this cogency and economy differ sharply from the practice O'Driscoll (2014, 30) diplomatically describes as "reduction, concision, and simplification." In the United States we would bluntly call the tactic "abridging and condensing." And with Verne's fiction, as Arthur B. Evans explains (85), the procedure "tended to zero in on ... the technical explanations, the geographic or historical descriptions, and the many episodes of scientific pedagogy."

So this is the rule of thumb: *Are substantive details being omitted?* In Butcher's translation they are not.

Finally Butcher's renderings boast an unexpected extra value: sometimes he furnishes valid *alternate readings* for lines that have been rendered quite convincingly by earlier translators. The result? Bonus examples of Verne's wordplay.

For a choice specimen, look up the episode in II 18 where a squid seizes a crewman with one of its tentacles, *brandissant la victime comme une plume ...* or in practically every prior translation *brandishing its victim like a feather.* Yet Butcher has spotted a detail hidden in the very next paragraph, *waves of blood and black ink*, and he exploits those inky waves with an ironic variant: *brandishing its victim like a quill.* As Butcher comments in his endnotes (431), Verne is "perhaps referring to the struggle of writing."

Valid? Of course. It's just the sort of finesse we expect from Verne.

With its stylish renderings, trailblazing investigations, and lavish critical paraphernalia, the Oxford edition remains one of the Verne bestsellers of our era. And now the core of it, Butcher's translation, has reappeared in this luxury guise. But as I've mentioned, the inquiries and endnotes have been left behind and this is now a reading edition—a book for dipping into, for relaxation and enjoyment. The big news, however, is that Butcher has reworked his admired rendering, as he reveals (xxi) in his Note on the Text and Translation:

> This Folio Society edition represents a full revision [of the OUP text]. In addition to the correction of a few misprints, it has undergone a systematic stylistic revision, aiming to smooth out the rough edges, increase the flow, and generally make the text more readable, while attempting to retain a high level of fidelity to the original.

He makes a few substantive changes: *Mobili* for *Mobile* ... "diving suits" for "frogmen's suits" ... Ceylon for Sri Lanka, etc. More significant are his thousands of stylistic tweaks, and since this *is* a reading edition, aimed even more directly at a general audience, it's not surprising that his revisions have a still greater vernacular flavor, are even jauntier and more conversational than before.

Try II 5, where Aronnax and company sight an unidentified swimming object in the Red Sea. Conseil insists they'll soon find out *« à quoi nous en tenir.* » ... smoothly rendered in 1998 as "*what we're dealing with."* Yet Butcher's revision is still more colloquial, substituting "*what we're up against."* And there's a similar edit in the novel's penultimate chapter, where Aronnax asks Ned if he recognizes a nearby coast:

> — Quelles sont ces terres?
>
> — Je l'ignore.

The Oxford rendering is both faithful and readable:

> "What land?"
>
> "I don't know."

Whereas the Folio text changes Ned's "*I don't know"* to something saucier: "*Not the foggiest."*

Occasionally, if there's a prospect of improved readability, Butcher will even pull a few chestnuts out of the fire. See II 2, where Aronnax worries about facing sharks in a pearl fishery: *rencontrer des squales, c'est autre chose !* Here Oxford is clear and straightforward: *to bump into sharks ... is another thing!* But the rewrite offers an old standby complete with wordplay: *to bump into sharks ... is another kettle of fish!* And II 16 has more of the same when antarctic ice surrounds the *Nautilus:* Aronnax predicts the submarine *« s'aplatirait comme une feuille de tôle » ...* or in the OUP paperback, "*would be made as flat as a sheet of metal"* ... or in the Folio edition, which can't resist a surefire simile, "*would end up as flat as a pancake."*

Butcher also builds on already attractive renderings: when swarms of fish escort the *Nautilus* in I 14, the French calls them *toute une armée aquatique ...* which Oxford words as

a whole army of aquatic creatures ... and the revision tops by making *a whole army* more appropriately maritime: *a whole armada*. In the same vein, Butcher will replace a word or two for a more idiomatic feel, as when Aronnax wakes from his undersea nap in I 17: *Combien de temps restai-je ainsi plongé dans cet assoupissement, je ne pus l'évaluer.* Oxford saves time on *plongé dans cet assoupissement* by giving *I slept*, the full sentence reading *How long I slept I could not calculate.* And then the revision goes colloquial: *How long I was out I could not calculate.*

In fact, the new edition continually searches for such perkier expressions—e.g. II 3, which features a diving expedition in East Indian waters: Ned and Conseil are *enchantés de la « partie de plaisir » qui se préparait ...* or in the Oxford rendering, *delighted at the prospect of a 'pleasure party' ...* finally, in the stylish Folio improvement, *delighted at the prospect of a 'holiday outing.'* And I 19 gets the same treatment when Butcher replaces *false trails* with *red herrings*. Likewise I 4, early on in the *Abraham Lincoln*'s cruise, where *la mâture était peuplée de matelots auxquels les planches du pont brûlaient les pieds, et qui n'y pouvaient tenir en place !* Here the 1998 edition offers a close rendering, *the rigging was full of people unable to remain in one place and who found the planks on deck too hot for their feet ...* while the revision offers a street-smart rewrite, *the rigging was full of people unable to remain in one place on deck, like cats on hot bricks.*

The next chapter is even more playful when Ned displays his whaling prowess. Here's the French: *au lieu d'une baleine, il en harponna deux d'un coup double.* Now here's Oxford, featuring some apt UK slang: *he harpooned not one whale but two in a single go.* Finally here's Folio, just as colloquial but with a sidelong grin: *he harpooned two whales for the price of one, so to speak.*

The payoff? Such earthy, idiomatic expressions can create a triumphant clarity. Turn to I 9, where the just-imprisoned Aronnax sizes up his situation: *Une fuite, dans les conditions où le hasard nous avait jetés, était absolument impossible.* First we have the Oxford version, both resourceful and respectful: *In the circumstances that fate had dealt us, leaving was out of the question.* Now compare the revision, which takes "fate had dealt us" and shapes it into a cagey metaphor for the entire thought: *Given the hand fate had dealt us, leaving was absolutely not on the cards.*

In the final analysis Butcher's revisions often produce wordings more communicative than his originals or almost *any* literal rendering. His secret: aim for meaning rather than surface fidelity. Head back to II 5, where Aronnax and friends determine that the swimming object they've sighted is a marine mammal, a dugong whose *mâchoire supérieure était armée de deux dents longues et pointues, qui formaient de chaque côté des défenses divergentes.*

The 1998 text renders this scrupulously, favoring cognates and respecting Verne's word order: *its upper jaw was armed with two long, pointed teeth, which formed divergent tusks on each side.* But the Folio version is a startling improvement—Butcher goes for the thought rather than the grammar and recasts the final phrase: *its upper jaw was armed with two long, pointed teeth, which formed splayed tusks.* That's what I mean by triumphant clarity.

It's interesting that O'Driscoll seems to have foreseen this shift in Butcher's procedures. "Imitative" is the industry term for translators who mimic the structures and verbiage of the original, and O'Driscoll concludes (2011, 251) that Butcher is "a generally imitative translator

[who] will sometimes opt, unpredictably, for non-imitative strategies." Why would Butcher adjust his tactics? O'Driscoll cites "a different target audience" as a possible motive ... which is clearly borne out by this Folio reissue.

I need to reemphasize, however, that this is a British publication, intended particularly for UK readers. By contrast, my own translations in the Verne omnibus *Amazing Journeys* have "the U.S. public" as their target market (657). This means that they adhere to different standards of punctuation, usage, and orthography ... also that they tap into a separate body of idioms, colloquialisms, and vernacular traditions. Consequently, where Ned Land says "*Bah!"* in Butcher's rendition (I 5), he says "*Phooey!"* in mine. Or when Ned whips out *une clef anglaise* to undo some bolts (II 22), Butcher supplies him with an *adjustable spanner* while I give him a *monkey wrench*. It's apples vs. oranges.

Then how can I fairly assess Butcher's qualities as a translator? Since he works with a palette of UK English, it might be more instructive to compare him to two compatriots: Sophie Lewis, recent translator (2012) of Verne's *Sans dessus dessous* under the title *The Earth Turned Upside Down*, and O'Driscoll himself, recent translator (2014) of Verne's *Le beau Danube jaune* under the title *Golden Danube*. (NB: though American publishers commissioned O'Driscoll's rendition, they've kept his orthography and usage.)

Like Butcher, the two are completists; they omit nothing substantive, aren't remotely guilty of "reduction, concision, and simplification." But their approaches *do* differ from Butcher's taut, honed, often sportive style. Lewis tenaciously honors the French structures, creating a loftier effect. O'Driscoll often glosses, explains, and amplifies the French, creating a more genial effect.

I'll start with Lewis's work. In Chapter 13 of *Sans dessus dessous*, a scheme to shift the earth's axis creates worldwide pandemonium:

> Il résulta de là, que, tout en tenant compte des changements produits dans les esprits par l'influence des idées modernes, l'épouvante n'en fut pas moins poussée à ce point, que nombre des pratiques de l'an 1000 se reproduisirent avec le même affolement. Jamais on ne fit avec un tel empressement ses préparatifs de départ pour un monde meilleur! Jamais kyrielles de péchés ne se dévidèrent dans les confessionnaux avec une telle abondance! Jamais tant d'absolutions ne furent octroyées aux moribonds qui se repentaient in extremis! Il fut même question de demander une absolution générale qu'un bref du pape aurait accordée à tous les hommes de bonne volonté sur la Terre – et aussi de belle et bonne peur.

Lewis's translation goes like this:

> It followed that, even considering psychological changes wrought by the influence of modern ideas, the general terror now reached such a point that a number of practices adopted in 1000 were taken up again, in response to the same impulse of panic. Never had preparations for departure to a better world been made in such a hurry! Never had cascades of sins been so abundantly spouted inside the confessionals! Never had so many absolutions been granted to those dying and repenting in extremis! There was even talk of asking for a general absolution, by means of a papal brief applying to all men of good will upon the Earth – and there was also, simply, full-blown terror.

Lewis follows the French so closely, her word count (115) nearly matches Verne's own (117). To be sure, she's alert to idioms and even mild slang: at the outset she offers *psychological changes* in place of *changements produits dans les esprits*, then at the end *full-blown terror* for *belle et bonne peur.* In between, however, she proceeds word by word,

translating literally, preferring cognates, underplaying Verne's innuendos, consistently favoring the passive voice ("were taken up," "been made," "been granted"). Undoubtedly this is clear, literate translating, but there's a stateliness that gives it an archaic feel.

O'Driscoll's work has a warmer ambience. In Chapter 9 of *Le beau Danube jaune*, a pair of smugglers are casing the situation:

> Ce dont ils s'enquirent plus particulièrement, ce fut de savoir si des escouades de police ou de douane rôdaient à travers la campagne. Qu'il n'en eussent point rencontré sur ces chemins détournés, entre les dernières ramifications des Petites Karpates, cela se comprenait. Sur ces contrées désertes, loin de toute ville ou de tout village, les agents ne se hasardaient pas volontiers, les voyageurs non plus d'ailleurs. Mais à l'endroit où ils venaient de s'arrêter le matin même, à l'angle occupé par l'auberge, la plaine commençait à se dégager; une route plus fréquentée suivait la rive gauche de la Morave. Elle traversait des bois assez profonds, elle desservait quelques fermes dont les fermiers allaient vendre leurs produits dans les bourgades voisines et jusqu'à Presbourg. Or, comme cette route était la seule qui conduisait à la jonction de la rivière et du fleuve, il y aurait nécessité de la suivre, et il était possible qu'elle fût surveillée depuis les nouvelles mesures prises par la commission internationale en vue de réprimer la fraude par l'arrestation des fraudeurs.

Here's O'Driscoll's just-published translation:

> The most pressing enquiry which the two men made was whether squads of police officers or customs officials were wandering about the countryside. It was understandable enough that they hadn't run into any of them along these meandering roads, off the beaten track, between the last ramifications of the Lower Carpathians. Through these deserted regions, far from any town or village, officers did not willingly choose to venture, nor, moreover, did wayfarers. But in the place at which they had just stopped that very morning, in the corner occupied by the inn, the plain was beginning to become clearer; a more widely-travelled road followed along the left bank of the Moravia. It crossed through quite deep forests and served several farms whose farmers used to go to sell their produce in the neighbouring villages, and as far as Pressburg. And, as that road was the only one leading to the meeting point of the smaller river and the Danube itself, it would be necessary to follow it, and it was possible that it was under surveillance since the new measures which had been taken by the international commission with a view to cracking down on the smuggling, through arresting the smugglers.

Like Lewis, O'Driscoll is alert to idioms (*cracking down* for *réprimer*), but his distinction lies in the roomy, relaxed way he sells the sense. As early as the second sentence, he adds a gloss, "off the beaten track," to insure we get the point. He's similarly expansive with Verne's *cette route était la seule qui conduisait à la jonction de la rivière et du fleuve* , helpfully spelling out the specifics: *that road was the only one leading to the meeting point of the smaller river and the Danube itself.*

It isn't surprising that O'Driscoll's word count (201) is distinctly higher than Verne's (174). Yet his renderings seem fluent and natural ... maybe not as sculpted and economical as Butcher's, but adroit all the same.

So there you have three skillful UK translations, each creating its own effect: O'Driscoll is spacious and eagerly communicative, Lewis vigilant and by the numbers, Butcher sly, thrifty, and down-to-earth, regularly transmitting the bite and cogency of Verne's original. For me he's the old hand, the ultimate professional, the translator I can bank on for An Enjoyable Read.

A few closing words on Folio's production values. They're as appealing as expected—cloth-covered boards, Abbey Wove paper, amiable introduction by UK novelist Margaret

Drabble. The artwork by Canadian cartoonist Jillian Tamaki is more adventurous: wraparound binding design, ichthyological endpapers, and nine tinted plates that are both theatrical and mischievous—Reao Island illustrates the tiny-acorn principal, and Atlantis boils down to a bust of Athena covered with kelp and barnacles. Verdict: ideal for gift-giving.

Frederick Paul Walter

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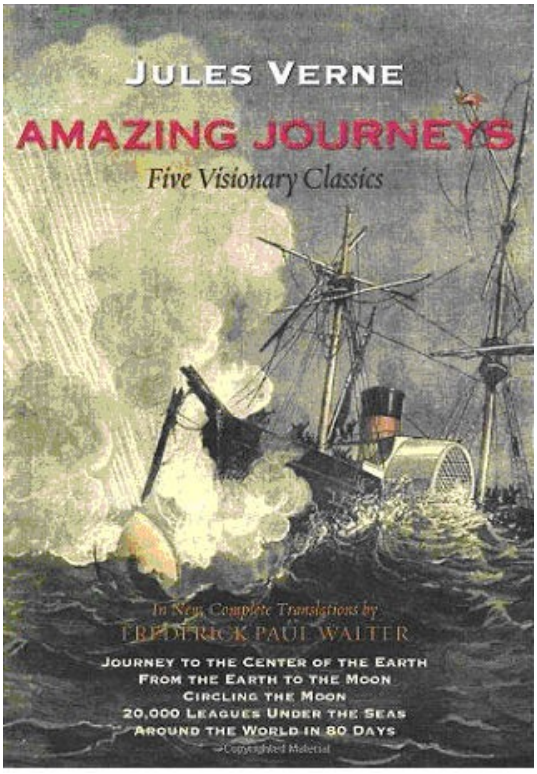
2. Second review

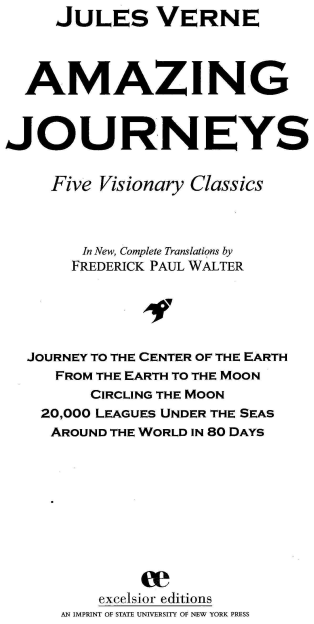
Jules Verne. *20,000 Leagues Under the Seas*. Translation and notes by Frederick Paul Walter. In *Amazing Journeys: Five Visionary Classics*. Albany: State University of New York, 2010. viii + 670 pp.

Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Seas is one of the best-known works of all time in every language, and is perhaps the most successful classic novel ever. As many as a couple of thousand editions are currently listed on Amazon. The aim of this piece is dual: to attempt a summary of the textual issues surrounding *Twenty Thousand Leagues* and to provide a brief review of Frederick Paul Walter's recent translation of that novel.

The text, as generally known in the English-speaking world, is triply faulty. The novel published by Jules Hetzel in serial form in the *Magasin d'éducation et de récréation* in 1869-70 was not the one the author Jules Verne wished to see: the plot, the hero and the

"message" had been radically altered. In addition, since then no attempt has been made to collate the different French editions, to make a reasoned choice as regards the variants and so to produce a text that could stand as canonical. The best-known translations into English, finally, cannot be regarded as adequate, since they fail to correspond sufficiently to the French original or to work as literary texts in their own right.





Perhaps as a result of these infidelities, the public reputation of the novel is, I believe, grossly inaccurate. The main protagonist has been misunderstood, his nationality distorted, and the conceptual core of the book, its aim according to the author himself, has been falsified.

Modern French editions reproduce a – generally unidentified – Hetzel volume, nearly always the first large in-octavo edition of 1871, which may possibly be inferior, at least in the second part, to the 1869-70 edition. They do not attempt to undo, or even fully pinpoint, the censorship the publisher imposed, and nor do they provide an "established" text, one with clear inaccuracies identified. As a result, the Livre de poche editions (1966 and 2001), together with facsimiles Hachette (1966) and Rencontre (1967), as well as Garnier Flammarion (1978), Presses pocket (1991) and Gründ (2002) contain manifest errors. Folio junior (1994) claims to have removed the mistakes, although perhaps simply those involving latitude and longitude. Folio classique (2005) similarly claims to correct inconsistencies and clear misprints, together with biological terminology wherever possible, but the task is far from complete. (The text still has, for example, "Liarrov" "Paramatta", "Kittan" and "Arfalxs", whereas "Lyakhov", "Parramatta", "Kiltan" and "Arfak" are apparently more correct.)

La Pléiade (2012) follows the 1871 text, but omits to declare the principles followed; it also contains notably the four slips noted above. It is the first French edition to include a few manuscript variants, but unfortunately reproduces the transcription of the closing chapter from Marcel Destombes' pioneering "Le manuscrit de *Vingt mille lieues sous les mers*" (*Bulletin de la société Jules Verne*, 35-6, (1975), 59-70), errors included. Not taking into account other published studies (or translations!), it notably omits for instance the passages set in the English Channel, visible in both manuscripts.

Yet the variants in the published novel are not negligible. Inman is spelled Iseman or Inmann in some editions, Moby Dick occasionally as Maby, "*Mobilis in Mobili*" as "*in Mobile*", Edom as Edrom, Hystaspe as Hytaspe, or Terres Adélie as Terres Amélie. France's national debt is sometimes 12 billion, sometimes 10, a distance sometimes 5 miles, sometimes 500; "these two unknown points" are sometimes "this unknown point"; the painter Daubigny, the composer Victor Massé, the *Tampico* or even a paragraph explaining the death of a crewman can be present or absent. All editions have Burnach for Burma and the untraceable Kulammak whale for the attested culammak. There are scores of marine fauna and flora whose name have invariably been mis-spelt.

In *Science Fiction Studies* (March 2005) Arthur Evans authoritatively analysed and evaluated the 13 English translations to date. The first was the notorious one by Mercier (1872 -- with "signalised" in the first line), which contained howlers, cut 22% of the text and reduced the number of chapters: it is still the one most often reprinted today. Four others followed between 1876 and 1960, all inadequate in at least one respect. Bonner (1962) and Brunetti (1969) were the first to approach acceptability, although still lacking in accuracy: Bonner seems to contain borrowings from Mercier, and omits from chapter two the following segments: "dilemma", "enlarge its offensive weapon(s)", "It won over a number of supporters" and "Preparations were made in New York for an expedition to hunt the narwhal", as well as translating the earth's "core" as "shell". In a generally fine translation, Brunetti nevertheless replaced Verne's footnotes with (over-long) ones of his own; the slips include "un procès-verbal" (official memorandum), which appears as "a highly objective survey", or "Kulammak and Umgullich Islands [*sic*]". Similarly, the Barnes and Noble Classics edition (2005) is pure Mercier. Pocket Books (2005) is again unadulterated Mercier, but also contains critical material plagiarised from my 1998 OUP World's Classics translation and edition.

Although immodestly subtitled "A Definitive Modern Translation", and although lambasting Mercier, many sections of Walter James Miller's text (1965) are in fact little more than a paraphrase of the 1872 version, with some of the errors carried over; it also cuts a number of cultural references. It contains notably the wonderful misunderstanding -- "… that island, which I could have jumped across if I had wanted to", for "which I would have blown up [fait sauter] if I had been able to" – a howler which Miller himself would later ascribe exclusively to Mercier. In 1976, Miller reprinted Mercier, simply adding the missing 22% to the text. Mickel's version for Indiana University Press (1992) again borrowed from Mercier, for instance "Kulammak and Umgullich Islands" again or "common sailors" for shipowners (armateurs).

In 1993, Miller and Frederick Paul Walter provided a generally very good translation, entitled, like all translations up to 1998, "… under the Sea" (sous les mers). It unfortunately again claims in the subtitle to be "definitive", and on the cover to "restore[s] nearly one-quarter

of the original manuscript", although containing no manuscript text whatsoever. It reads well and is virtually complete; however, due to a degree of "domestication" and rephrasing, the meaning is not always fully carried over into the English.

It also seems to sometimes borrow from Miller (1965) and thus even occasionally from Mercier: "en délire" (delirious) appears as "drunken", "un procès-verbal" as "dead-earnest reckonings", "Linnaeus" as "Linneaus", "quinze jours" ("two weeks") as "fifteen days", "à de longs intervalles" (at infrequent intervals) as "for long periods", "Nous verrons bien" (We shall see) as "Let's find out", or "Adelphi Hotel" as "Hotel Adelphi". While additions are made, such as "spurning Phaedra" (absent from the French text), other segments are largely or totally omitted, for instance: the decidedly ill-fated Kulammak and Umgullich; "of an essentially 'deep-based' composition" (d'une organisation essentiellement "fondrière"); "these musings which I no longer have the right to mention" (des reveries qu'il ne m'appartient plus d'entretenir); or "I yielded less easily to the urgent need for slumber" (je cédai moins facilement à ce violent besoin de dormir).

Since then, Walter has published two revised translations, each of which is closer to the original and rethinks nearly every phrase: Project Gutenberg (2001); and in the volume, *Amazing Journeys* (Excelsior 2010). These two, as might be expected, share elements with the joint 1993 text with Miller (the 2001 one may even have been at the root of their collaboration), but are much improved.

A large number of the slips identified above are amended; Walter is consistently more faithful than previous American editions. He at least attempts to address some of the textual issues, in particular taking the bold steps of amending the French where clearly erroneous (with two pages of textual notes) and converting metric measures. The register, above all, strikes a near-perfect balance between Mercier-style convolutions and the over-modernised, unliterary and informal style that has marked many previous attempts, between the archaic and the anachronistic, between the obscure and the over-amplified. If the terminology of "submarine" or "you're welcome", for example, are avoided, "go forth", "dwell", "fearsome", "snuff out", "appeased", "encompassed", "mankind" or "archaeology" (with an *e*) happily cohabit with "a leak that big", "scouted out", "right now", "kept getting smaller and smaller" or "hang on tight".

The novel above all reads beautifully, and could generally pass as a text originally written in English. A decision is made to systematically use contracted forms, even for the formalist third-person-speaking Conseil. Walter benefits from his scientific background to put some order into the extensive biological terminology and is excellent on nautical terms. Additional information is added where thought useful, for example "the French historian" to "Michelet", "old French scientist" to "Bailly", "such other authors as" to "Byron and Edgar Allan Poe" or "the *Son of Marseilles*" *to* "the *Marseillais*". The many gems include lines such as "… our blood frozen in our veins, our nerves numb, dripping with cold sweat as if we were in our death throes!".

Of course, as in all translations, quibbles are possible, although caution is necessary, because of the multiplicity of French editions and the slipperiness of meaning: is "sick to my stomach" stronger than "ce tournoiement relatif", "repentence [*sic*]" than "remorse", "his latest mass execution" than "cette dernière hécatombe" or "executioner pass away" than "justicier s'efface"?

Overall, then, this recent translation by Walter must surely count as the best American version, ahead even of Brunetti. The effort of producing more than 140,000 words of fluent, idiomatic and accurate text is almost unfathomable. If only as much attention was devoted to textual issues in Verne's homeland!

William Butcher

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