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## The Abbé Bethléem and Jules Verne

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### Abstract

As France entered the twentieth century, the traditionalist Catholic Church found itself out of step with political and social changes taking place in the nation, and the Church's authority over the family, education, and culture under assault. The secularist policies of the Third Republic, a rising mood of anticlericalism among the middle classes, and the liberalization of press censorship had resulted in substantial losses of the Church's former power and prestige. In this context, ongoing transformations of print media and press distribution, and the effects of rising literacy rates among the working classes, women, and children, were met with particular alarm from French clerics, who feared that unsupervised recreational reading by women and workers would stimulate dangerous dissatisfactions and ambitions among the new classes of readers, upend the traditional structure of the family, and thereby accelerate the Church's decline. Among clerics' responses to these concerns was the publication of reading guides for devout readers, modeled on the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* but focusing on works of popular fiction. For the first three decades of the twentieth century, Louis Bethléem's *Romans à lire et romans à proscrire* (1904–32) was the most important of these censuses of *des bonnes et des mauvaises lectures*.

This essay examines the career of abbé Bethléem and his role as a traditionalist bulwark against the rising tide of modern literature. Bethléem's taxonomies of good, bad, and indifferent reading are discussed and examples of his critiques of authors who influenced Jules Verne or were among Verne's significant contemporaries are noted. Finally, Bethléem's ambiguous evaluations of Verne's *œuvre*, in *Romans à lire* and in the monthly review journals edited by the abbé, are discussed and his specific recommendations and omissions analyzed. "Les Meilleurs Livres de Jules Verne," a 1921 bibliographic essay by Bethléem is reprinted in full in an appendix.

### Résumé

Au début du vingtième siècle, l'Église catholique traditionaliste se trouvait déphasée par rapport aux changements politiques et sociaux en France : l'autorité de l'Église sur la famille, l'éducation, et la culture étaient remises en question. La politique de laïcité de la Troisième République, un climat d'anticléricalisme dans les classes moyennes, et la libéralisation de la censure de la presse, avaient diminué de manière

importante le pouvoir et le prestige de l'Église. Des raisons de cette désaffection sont à chercher dans les transformations en cours des médias et des moyens de distribution et une amélioration des taux d'alphabétisation au sein de la classe ouvrière, des femmes, et des enfants. Le clergé craignait que la lecture récréative et incontrôlée par les femmes et les ouvriers puisse stimuler des insatisfactions et des ambitions dangereuses parmi ces nouvelles catégories de lecteurs et ainsi, compromettre la structure traditionnelle de la famille, et accélérer le déclin de l'Église. Une des réponses du clergé à ces défis furent la publication des guides de lecture pour les lecteurs dévots, sur le modèle de l'*Index Librorum Prohibitorum* mais centrés sur des œuvres de fiction populaire. Pendant les premières trois décennies du 20e siècle, *Romans à lire et romans à proscrire* (1904–32) de l'abbé Louis Bethléem fut le plus important de ces recensements des bonnes et des mauvaises lectures.

Cet article examine la carrière de l'abbé Bethléem et son rôle comme rempart traditionaliste contre la marée montante de la littérature moderne. Ses taxonomies de lecture bonne, mauvaise, et négligeable sont étudiées, ainsi que des exemples de sa critique des auteurs qui influençaient Jules Verne ou qui étaient parmi ses contemporains importants. Enfin sont abordées les évaluations ambiguës de l'œuvre de Jules Verne, dans *Romans à lire* et dans les revues mensuelles éditées par Bethléem, et les recommandations et omissions spécifiques de l'abbé sont analysées. "Les Meilleurs Livres de Jules Verne," un essai bibliographique de Bethléem publié en 1921, est reproduit dans son intégralité en annexe.

## Des bonnes et des mauvaises lectures

As France entered the twentieth century, the traditionalist Catholic Church found itself out of step with political and social changes taking place in the nation, and the Church's authority over the family, education, and culture under assault [1]. The post-Revolutionary resurgence of the Church's power during the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century, at risk during the Second Republic and the constitutional and military crises of the late Second Empire, began to be reversed with the establishment of the Third Republic. After the expulsion of the remaining royalist elements in the late 1870s, the policies of subsequent republican governments were openly hostile to the Church's interests, aggressively embracing a national ethos of *laïcité* (approximately, "secularism") with dramatic consequences for the Church's prestige and influence [2]. The liberalization of political press censorship (1881) had also opened the door to widespread publication of anti-clerical satire [3]; the Ferry and Goblet laws mandating free secular education (1881–82, 1886) had ended the Church's monopoly on schooling; the Naquet law (1884) had re-established the legal right to divorce; the Law on Associations (1901) had resulted in the dispersal of hundreds of religious congregations not authorized by the State. After several months of rancorous parliamentary debate, the Law of Separation of Church and State (1905) unilaterally dissolved the 1801 Concordat that had guaranteed the Church's dominance among religious institutions, forbade the display of unauthorized religious iconography in public spaces, ordered a state inventory of ecclesiastical properties, and asserted freedom of conscience, not freedom of religion, as a founding principle of the Republic [4].

These legislative victories by the reformers occurred in a general climate of the Church's diminishing influence. General Boulanger had briefly united in anti-German fervor urban workers, royalists, and rural traditionalist Catholics, but the defeat of the Boulangists in 1889 had damaged political prospects of the conservative elements of society that had most strongly opposed secularism. The intransigent antisemitism of traditionalists during the Dreyfus Affair had, rather than rallied Catholic France, solidified Protestant, left, and center-left opposition to the perceived joint menaces of militant nationalism, antisemitism,

and clericalism, and given republicans grounds for more aggressive restrictions on religious institutions. The Radical Party government's attacks on the Antidreyfusards, prosecution of the extremist Assumptionist religious order, and forced closure in 1900 of *La Croix*, the most widely-read Catholic newspaper and the traditionalists' most powerful press organ, had shown that the anticlericalists could prevail in their aim of *désacralisation* of French society. Divisions within the Church, between hardline, anti-republican traditionalists and a smaller number of moderate Catholic republicans (also opposed to desacralization), and the fragmentation of parties on the Right, further isolated the Church from political power (Harris 2007). Rising anticlericalism among the growing French middle class, which rejected many traditionalist positions as throwbacks to the *ancien régime*, was nourished by a new culture of consumerism and new opportunities for economic self-determination and self-expression [5].

In this context of wrenching institutional and social change, ongoing transformations of print media and press distribution, and the effects of rising literacy rates among the working classes, women, and children, were met with particular alarm from French clerics. The relaxing of censorship laws and new technologies of printing and distribution had released a flood of inexpensive popular newspapers on the model of *Le Petit Journal*, *Le Petit Parisien*, and *Le Matin*, aimed at working class readers and specializing in sports, entertainment, and *faits divers*. Despite their conservative political leanings during the Dreyfus Affair and later (and more dramatically) during the collaborationist Vichy era, the "unserious" character of these newspapers rankled Catholic critics and educators who preferred that their charges keep to more elevating pastimes. The freedom of lay readers to pursue uncontrolled literary interests appeared especially dangerous, as the costs of admission were now within the reach of even the lower echelons of the working classes [6].

The novel's rise during the nineteenth century also had been accelerated by technical and economic changes in printing and publishing, by increased literacy and leisure time, and by shifts in taste that elevated fiction to a privileged status in private reading, especially feminine and proletarian reading [7]. The corrupting influence of the "wrong" sort of literature, thought to be especially perilous for youth and women, had long been a concern of religious and secular censorship. Now, the deluge of new novels and new literary movements and genres (realism, naturalism, *roman feuilleton*, *littérature de gare*) elicited a veritable moral panic. Traditionalist clerics and educators complained that the allures of Bovarism would stimulate dangerous dissatisfactions and ambitions among the new classes of readers, upend the traditional structure of the family, turn formerly devout persons away from the Church, and invite all manner of infection into the nation's psyche [8].

One traditionalist response to the specter of these imagined pathologies was the rise in the 1870s of "la bonne presse": newspapers, practical guides, and fiction, and booksellers and newspaper vendors specializing in these media, that would help to fill the growing appetite for new reading with appropriate fare. Religious publishers (including most prominently La Maison de la Bonne Presse) promoted, and even secular publishers seized upon, an expanding market for morally improving recreational reading [9]. These included traditionalist Catholic newspapers and magazines such as *La Croix*, *Le Pèlerin*, and *La Libre Parole* [10], and openly- or quasi-devotional texts considered safe for young women and children, as well as new genres of fiction that emulated some of the methods, and therefore some of the pleasures, of dangerous genres (namely, the *roman feuilleton*) while avoiding their pernicious effects. Perhaps more pragmatic than cynical, these books — the ancestors of the "Christian romances," "Christian young adult fiction," "Christian fantasy,"

etc., which today can be found for sale at any large French (and especially any large American) bookseller — insured that the reader's *divertissement* did not stray far from approved behaviors. Whatever the elements of melodrama or romance their stories involved, virtue was rewarded, vice punished, correct behaviors modeled without irony: a homeopathic strategy that might, it was thought, safeguard the faithful from the noxious influences of the emerging media landscape (Chartier and Hébrard 2000, 66–70; Sapiro 2011; Stora-Lamarre 1990, 105–16) [11].

A second response involved more surgical interventions in the form of censorship, either imposed by the reader on him– or herself or recommended by his or her confessors, with the aid of comprehensive reading guides tailored to traditionalist tastes. Such guides could, their proponents promised, warn the user of texts to be always avoided, those which could be read safely by only some readers or only under some conditions, and those which could be read with little or no peril by anyone, with perhaps only restrictions related to age and gender. For four centuries the Roman Church's *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* had served as the standard of literary censorship and the final authority for the devout reader [12]. But the *Index*, essentially a catalog of heretical works, had not kept up with the deluge of novels or the growing influence of secular literary professionals and educators whose endorsements of dangerous works demanded more developed responses than the *Index*'s usual brevity — *Omnes fabulae amatoriae!* [13] (Amadiou 2004, 420–21). The *Index*'s design as a tool for administering religious error, its inclusion of many obscure authors and titles, and its silence on works and genres of fiction which seemed dangerous in the new reading culture, appeared to justify the need for more nimble and user-friendly guides for the faithful (Mollier 2014, 12). For the first three decades of the twentieth century in France, Louis Bethléem's *Romans à lire et romans à proscrire* was the most influential of these censuses of *des bonnes et des mauvaises lectures*.

## The Abbé Bethléem

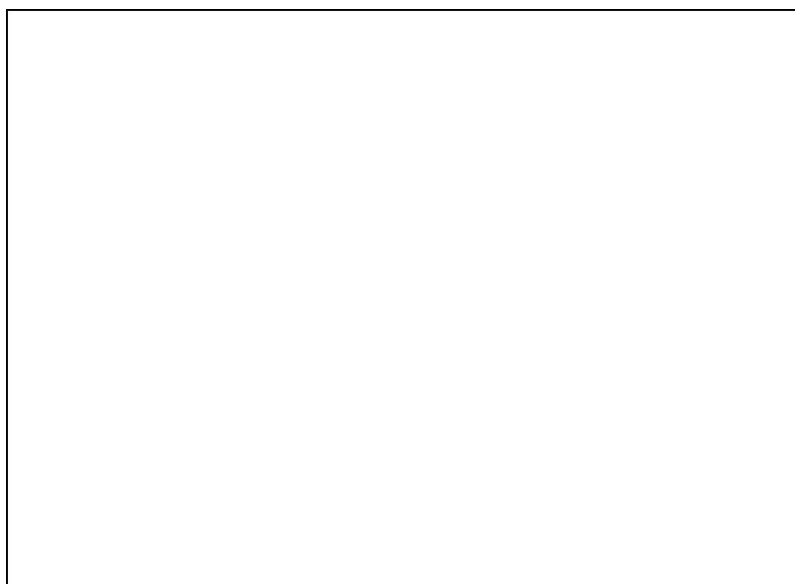


Figure 1. “L’Abbé Bethléem déchire des journaux « licencieux », 1920. *Editors’ note: Due to copyright restrictions, this image is available only from the Getty Images Archive, at <<http://www.gettyimages.com/license/106503172>>.*”

Born on April 7, 1869 in Steenwerck, French Flanders, to a French-speaking family of modest means, Henri Louis (sometimes “Louis-Henri”) Bethléem trained in the Grand Seminary of Cambrai (1888–94) and was ordained a priest in 1894 [14]. Since the time of the Revolution, the Church in the département du Nord had resisted desacralization (Lapierre 1995, 165–7, Mollier 2014, 37–43), and Bethléem followed in this tradition *in extremis*. After service as the vicar of Cateau (now Cateau-Cambrésis), and appointments to the parishes of Saint-Joseph de Tourcoing and Sainte-Catherine de Lille, he assured his role in the traditionalist resistance to modern literature and culture I’ve outlined above with the publication in December 1904 of a slender volume of just over 200 pages, *Romans à lire et romans à proscrire. Essai de classification au point de vue moral des principaux romans et romanciers de notre époque (1800–1904) avec notes et indications pratiques* (hereafter, *Romans à lire*). A second edition appeared in August 1905 [15], augmented by another hundred pages of reviews and prefaced by endorsements from the Archbishop of Cambrai and the Archpriest of the Cambrai Metropolitan Basilica and a number of letters of appreciation by traditionalist newspapers, priests, and lay readers [16]. Nine revised and expanded editions would follow, in 1906, 1908, 1911, 1914, 1920, 1922, 1925, 1928, and 1932 — a new edition every two or three years, which rhythm was interrupted only by the Great War. With each edition, the historical range of the survey, the numbers of authors and works covered, the lengths of entries devoted to them, and the number of copies sold, increased [17]. The eleventh and final edition (1932), 620 pages long, classifies approximately 1500 authors and 50,000 titles, equal to half the number of authors (3000) but ten times the number of individual works (5000) included in all editions of the *Index Librorum* during its four centuries of publication (De Bujanda 2001, 8). Whereas only a modest 1000 copies of the first two editions of *Romans à lire* were printed, by the eleventh edition more than 140,000 copies had been sold throughout the French-speaking world, including Belgium, Canada, Africa, and Asia (Mollier 2014, 11, 19; Seillan 2005, 243). Because the principal readers of the book were clerics, educators, publishers, and booksellers, the book’s sphere of influence was probably greater than this already impressive number suggests (Mollier 2014, 13).

All the while, the industrious Bethléem expanded the range of objects under his scrutiny, publishing other books and pamphlets decrying the corrupting influences of: the theater (*Les Pièces de théâtre*, two eds., 1910 and 1925), opera and musical theater (*Les Opéras, les opéras-comiques et les opérettes*, 1926), modern literature in general (*La Littérature ennemie de la famille. Les faits, les droits, les devoirs*, 1923), and advertisements, the fashion industry, and the emerging consumer society (*Les Annonces. Les dangers qu’elles représentent surtout pour la clientèle féminine*, 1933) [18]. In 1908, Bethléem founded *Romans-revue* (1908–14), a monthly journal of book reviews and criticism. Described in advertisements in subsequent editions of *Romans à lire* as the “necessary complement” to the reading guide, the journal’s severe editorials, decrying the decline of French morals, the corrupting influence of popular culture, and the many conspiracies mounted against the Church, were signed by Bethléem [19]. The reviews were credited to him, to several pseudonyms he used, or to the many corresponding journalists and clerics for whom he acted as instigator, coach, and editor.

The journal’s editorial offices were moved to Lille in 1912. Publication was interrupted by the war but resumed in 1919 with Bethléem’s move to Paris. In keeping with its new title, *Revue des lectures: Critique, Littéraire, Pratique* (1919–39), the journal expanded its compass beyond novels, adding reviews of poetry, newspapers and magazines, nonfiction publications in the social and natural sciences, commerce, technology, and religion, and in later years recent works in the theater, radio, and cinema. Regular features included

reprint digests of other journals and newspapers (sometimes with editorial commentary), summary catalogues of new and reprinted titles in “les collections les plus répandues,” (Bibliothèque verte, Bibliothèque rose, Collection ‘Le Masque,’ Le Livre de demain, etc.), literary news (prizes, author deaths, judgments against publishers of pornographic and indecent literature), correspondence from the journal’s devotés, and articles and anecdotes on the family and cultural initiatives of the Church. Essays exposing the omnipresent, toxic influence of Freemasonry — the journal’s *idée fixe* — were common. At its peak circulation in 1932 *Revue des lectures* had nearly 15,000 subscribers, and 25,000–30,000 copies were sold each month. Subscribers were somewhat fewer than those of other literary reviews of the period such as *NRF* and *Revue des Deux Mondes*. However, given the greater numbers of titles reviewed in each issue of *Revue des lectures* and the nature of the subscriber base, which included more than 6,000 publishers, booksellers, and literary professionals, the reach of the journal was at least as extensive as those of its secular competitors (Mollier 2014, 13).

In later years, Bethléem was among the most vocal French critics of American comic books, Italian *Giornali*, and French *bandes dessinées*, opposing most of the new weekly magazines for young readers that featured comics and serialized adventure fiction [20]. He was also a prominent critic of “immorality” on public beaches after sunbathing became a popular French pastime with the introduction of mandatory annual paid leave for workers under the Matignon Accords of 1936 (Mollier 244–55). Bethléem died on August 18, 1940 in Perros-Guirec, France, shortly after the fall of the Third Republic and the installation of the Vichy Government.

The commercial success of *Romans à lire* is a clear indication of the book’s popularity and influence. Jean-Yves Mollier has observed that *Revue des lectures* must be considered among the major cultural magazines of the interwar period, with an impact that no publisher of the time, religious or secular, could afford to neglect, and no historian of the period should ignore. And yet Bethléem, *Romans à lire*, *Romans-revue*, and *Revue des lectures* are for the most part missing from canonical dictionaries of French literature and the press of the 20th century (Mollier 2014, 12–14). The first long academic study of Bethléem, a Master’s thesis in history, was published in 1994 (Pellerin). The first substantial essays on Bethléem in the contexts of traditionalist Catholic responses to modern French literature and of censorship under the Third Republic were published in 2000 (Chartier and Hébraud, Seillan). Mollier’s critical biography (2014) is the first single-author monograph treating Bethléem’s career and influence. I am aware of no substantive English-language treatment of Bethléem published before this essay. Mollier reports that there are some 15,000 dossiers on authors and works, comprising more than 30,000 pages by Bethléem and his collaborators — a unique collection of information on some of the most divisive cultural debates of the interwar period — which are today available in public archives but which have remained largely unexamined.

Perhaps, Mollier and others have proposed, Bethléem’s influence in the interwar period has been ignored — one is tempted to say *repressed* — because the counterrevolutionary worldview he defended seems grotesque and anachronistic in a pluralistic and progressive age [21]. But Bethléem’s theology — whatever its deeper logic his project is always couched in the discourse of religious obligation — was fully consistent with the Church’s virulent antimodernism during this period [22], and his political leanings and bigotry were in line with the French Church’s undisguised preference for institutions and attitudes of the *ancien régime*. He was nationalist but anti-republican, anti-socialist, and an unsubtle apologist for authoritarian politics of the worst sort. (An open admirer of Mussolini and Pétain, Bethléem detested Hitler, it appears, chiefly because he was German.) [23] He

was obsessed with the supposed diabolical subterfuges of Freemasonry, which show up often in his editorializing and as non-sequiturs in the margins of *Revue des lectures*. Typical of leading Catholic traditionalists of his era, he was an extreme antisemite and remained an unrepentant anti-Dreyfusard long after Dreyfus's exoneration and rehabilitation in 1906 (Mollier 2014, 81). The merest hint of an author's Dreyfusard sympathies will score her or his banishment to one of Bethléem's categories of forbidden and dangerous reading. All the categories of treachery against the Church and the nation tend to merge in Bethléem's editorializing and his calumnies describe always the same detestable opponent: "socialist" = "mason" = "jew" = "our enemy" = "agent of laicization." Racism and religious bigotry are ignored or accepted without comment in the abbé's reading recommendations, even of books for children. Above all, for a text to be categorized as safe reading there must be no mention of female sexual life outside of its domestication, if not its complete abnegation, in the figure of the chaste wife and mother. More than Freemasonry, the perils of erotic Bovarism is transparently the thing that concerns Bethléem [24].

Yet, the basic paradox of Bethléem's project, in evidence throughout his writings and noted by the few scholars who take him seriously, is that the reactionary brutality of his thinking is paired, and sometimes overcome, by something like a genuine appreciation of literary excellence. He reviled Hugo's "blasphemous, lying, immoral" prose but admired the beauty of his poetry and plays (Bethléem 1905, 28). He detested every page of George Sand except the pastoral novels *La Mare au diable*, *La Petite Fadette*, *François le Champi*, which he praises, though the *Index* had until 1900 forbidden without reserve all of her works (Bethléem 1905, 34; De Bujanda 2002). Dumas père, formerly condemned in the *Index* for the "Protestant tendencies" of his works, is judged by the abbé as suspect for his "historical errors," moral lapses and the excesses of his love scenes, but is celebrated for his fertile imagination, inexhaustible wit, and charming *bonhomie* (1905, 24). When they are not crippled by his more repellent tendencies (e.g., the antisemitism of his analysis of Anatole France and Zola), Bethléem's discussions of forbidden authors can be sympathetic to aspects of the work. Of Maupassant, for example, he notes that "les contes ont une valeur littéraire de premier order, mais montrent un répréhensible indécence" (Bethléem 1905, 90). Etc., etc. Paradoxically, Bethléem's response to literature suggests by his own example that aesthetic pleasure and intellectual reward may be found in reading that imperils the soul.

And tests the reader's resolve to the extreme: 50,000 titles surveyed in *Romans à lire* alone, plus many many others reviewed in *Romans-revue* and *Revue des lectures*. Seillan (2005, 245) estimates that the imagined library catalogued by the eleventh edition of the reading guide alone would include between 15 and 20 million pages! The only comparable engine of religious editorial production in modern France may be the abbé Jacques-Paul Migne's Ateliers catholiques de Montrouge, which between 1836 and 1868 had turned out something approaching a thousand volumes of theology, dictionaries, encyclopedias, and writings of the Church Fathers in Greek and Latin [25]. But Migne's gargantuan opus — also undertaken out of traditionalist fervor with the aim of supplementing the resources available to priests and other opinion-makers, and with unusual, keen understanding of the potential of new media technologies to advance counterrevolutionary ideas — was basically the product of "editing with scissors" (Bloch 1994, 39). The Migne patrologies and *Bibliothèque universelle du clergé* were great patchworks of texts pirated, often with little editorial intervention, from older and contemporary sources. His enterprise and the Ateliers catholiques were staffed by scores of editors, typesetters, and printers, badly-paid and cruelly exploited, mere cogs in the atelier's sprawling apparatus of textual

reproduction. Migne's editorial role was primarily one of visionary entrepreneur and taskmaster, the whole of his publishing empire moved forward and held together by his monomaniacal drive to commercialize Christian tradition [26]. Abbé Bethléem's editorial regime must also have employed a substantial number of individuals working in the material production of the reading guide and journals, though many fewer than were employed by Migne. It is clear that Bethléem had help with the editorial content of the journals, though it isn't always possible to separate his correspondent editors from the several pseudonyms under which he wrote, and much of the content and commentary of the journals is indifferently— or unattributed. The editions of *Romans à lire* are all attributed to the abbé, the avant-propos under his signature is reprinted from the first edition to the last, the letters of appreciation all are addressed to him, and no sign is given in later new or updated entries that are obviously cribbed from the journals that they may have been written by someone other than the abbé. In all cases, it is implied that the reading guide and the journals are, within ambiguously-defined limits of energy and time, the work of, or at least they have been supervised closely by, a single individual who has dedicated his professional life to the invention and dissemination of practical criticism for the anxious reader.

Which assumption is on its face unrealistic. Bethléem cannot have closely read, or his editorial staff cannot have closely read, all of the texts they have categorized, and they could not hope to keep up with the burgeoning, bon marché secular literature that concerned them most. Many of the critical assessments in *Romans à lire* show that the author has thought seriously about the contents and significance of some novels, and the relations between several novels by the same author and the circumstances of her or his life. But other assessments are too brief to be convincing in this regard, or are too prejudiced by *a priori* criteria (the author's Dreyfusard sentiments, for example) to suggest that Bethléem has done more than skimmed the works in question with a prior conclusion in mind, or that he hasn't relied on someone else's judgment for his own. But the master's discourse needs only appear unassailable in order to inspire confidence in his adherents. Given the perils they imagine confront them without his support, they aren't inclined to examine the details closely, lest they lose faith [27].

Despite its perils and practical limitations, the endless work of sorting the good from the bad is, Bethléem insists, morally and intellectually *necessary*. He is sensitive to the risk of appearing merely dogmatic or, worse, *unthinking*. In an age in which literature — and here he means first and foremost, *fiction* — has been granted “sovereign and inalienable” privilege, any censorship will seem to advocates of a free press a form of barbarism and an outrage against *l'esprit humain* (1905, 2). Such criticisms, he affirms, do not apply in his case. First, objections to a stringently moral method of reading only come from women or men of letters (*les lettrés*) who have surrendered to literature's allures all reflection on the reader's final destiny. Literature that blasphemes or insults the Church must be set aside because it is immediately dangerous, but also dangerous is literature that distracts the reader, even slightly or subtly, from the pursuit of a righteous life. If literary professionals are able to abstract the formal beauty of the work from the moral sophisms it contains and the dangerous sensualities it inspires, they are free to do so, though at the risk of sin (1905, 5). Second, such women and men are rare; most people are susceptible to the dangers of the literary imagination and in need of firm and direct guidance. The creative and critical classes, secular and religious, must be mindful of their responsibility to these more vulnerable readers. If the professionals and the artists do not accept this obligation it will fall to representatives of the Church, who alone may be presumed to take always the long view of things. (1905, 5).



On its face and within a traditionalist worldview that felt itself to be under unrelenting attack, these are not unreasonable assertions, nor is the care for the other they recommend necessarily an assault on the other's freedom of conscience. But, and always, this small quotient of moral and intellectual consistency is countered by the baleful energies discharged throughout the abbé's project. Bethléem's national, racial, and sexual prejudices regularly overrun his estimations of literary quality. His considerable talents as a reader of a corpus that he professes to find at best of passing merit, or which he openly detests with the fury of a Jeremiah, are overdetermined by his unwillingness to surrender the Church's increasingly out-of-step opposition to modernity. He reads widely (!) and diversely, but evidently he doesn't read *well*, as he reads always, even in contradiction to his obvious gifts, as if fixated on the lay reader he aims to protect: one who is easily swayed by what a work of fiction represents and the allures of its representing. He is little concerned with the corrupting apparatus of fiction, which is always suspect precisely because it has a power of representation and a power of influence which are distinct from the immediate and ecstatic force of religious truth.

## **Romans à lire et romans à proscrire**

The presentation of *Romans à lire* resembles a gastronomic guide (Seillan 2005, 245) or a *catalogue raisonné* (Bethléem's analogy). Entries are arranged by authors' last names in alphabetical order, within six categories according to the moral offenses, relative neutrality, or positive qualities that "dominate" in each author's works [28]. In some cases Bethléem finds value in specific works by an author who is classed in the forbidden or cautionary categories, but there is no ambiguity as to the general assessment; the author remains prohibited or suspect. Authors considered in the balance to acceptable may have been occasionally in moral error, or their pernicious works or traits outweighed by newer works that reject past faults; they cannot be "absolutely forbidden" to the careful reader who is aware of dangers posed by a mixed case (10). Overall, Bethléem's taxonomy is set against an absolute limit: spiritual and moral instruction and labor are the better pursuits of a reader in search of recreation; the pleasures of fiction are, strictly speaking, unnecessary and liable to overcome the strictest moral probity. Citing Dante, the abbé proposes that prohibited and suspect authors belong to descending circles of literary Hell and the intermediate cases to the terraces of literary Purgatory. But like the pagan poet-guide no author of fiction may, unconditionally, pass higher:

Nous ne disons pas le « paradis », car il en est bien peu de parfaits ; *nil ab omni parte beatum*, comme dit le poète... Si nous affirmons qu'ils sont *à lire*, nous ne prétendons pas, tant s'en faut, qu'ils soient toujours nécessaires au perfectionnement de l'homme ; nous voulons faire entendre surtout que ceux qui les fréquenteront sont sûrs de se trouver en honnête compagnie (Bethléem 1905, 10–11) [29].

**1 – “Romans à proscrire parce qu'ils sont à l'Index.”** [30] This category includes texts cited in the *Index* as well as those forbidden to be read under pain of

excommunication by Papal bull. They are condemned for heresy, apostasy, or attacks on God, the Sainted Virgin, the Saints, the Sacraments, the Church, or the Holy See. Also condemned are works that promote moral corruption, suicide, and divorce, works that support the views of Freemasonry, and works judged obscene or pornographic. Bethléem warns of the spiritual peril posed by even the briefest contact with such texts: “Il est donc défendu, sous peine de transgresser la loi positive de l’Église — et le plus souvent la loi naturelle — de lire, de garder et de prêter ces écrits condamnés” (18). Authors famously condemned by the Church are included: Balzac, Casanova, Champfleury, Lamartine, Rousseau, Voltaire. A number of authors whose careers or works have literary or historical-biographical significance for Jules Verne appear in this group [31].

– Alexandre Dumas *père* – “Malgré ses nombreuses invraisemblances, ses atteintes à la morale et au bon sens, son style à la « diable », ses erreurs et contresens historiques très graves... [La plupart de ses livres], spécialement visés par l’ancien *Index* à cause de leurs tendances protestantes, semblent ne pas tomber aujourd’hui sous la censure de l’Église, au moins comme *fabulae amatoriae*” (23–24). His  *récits de voyages* may be read with precaution. His *romans de mœurs et d’amour* (notably, *Isaac Laquedem*, “œuvre sacrilège”) are more dangerous.

– Alexandre Dumas *fils* – “Il fit... de nombreuses pièces où il peignit les mauvaises mœurs, défendit le divorce et prêcha l’union libre” (25).

– Gustave Flaubert – *Madame Bovary* is admitted to be a masterpiece but is judged “malheureusement perverse” (27).

– Victor Hugo – “à côté [des] splendeurs, que d’assertions mensongères, de blasphèmes, de calomnies contre l’Église, le pape, les évêques, le clergé ! Que d’immoralités !” (29).

– Jules Michelet – “ses œuvres d’imagination... renferment des pages exquises, mais aussi des descriptions sensuelles et des erreurs doctrinales” (31).

– Nicolas-Edme Restif de la Bretonne – “écrivain étrange et très fécond, qui publia 150 volumes où il raconte ses écarts et ceux des créatures dépravées, justement nommé le Jean-Jacques du Ruisseau” (113).

– George Sand – “Elevée dans l’irréligion et le cultes des philosophes, [elle] est encore la prêtresse de l’esprit laïque, de l’incrédulité et du scepticisme moderne” (34).

– Stendhal – “Cet homme vicieux, cet écrivain aride qui semble ne noter que des idées, ce psychologue profond, ce philosophe supérieurement « détestable », comme dit Sainte-Beuve, a exercé une influence considérable sur la pensée contemporaine” (36–37).

– Laurence Sterne – “Son *Voyage sentimental* déconcerte toute analyse : c’est la perfection du genre. Mais au point de vue moral, il n’est pas plus recommandable que son *Tristan [sic] Shandy* et son existence privée” (37).

– Émile Zola – “Ses œuvres sont tellement ignobles que ses amis mêmes finissent par en avoir la nausée. On y trouve une habile facture, mais elles sont toujours immorales et fausses, souvent d’une obscénité et d’une crudité répugnantes... Il a pris une part considérable à l’affaire Dreyfus et il est mort misérablement le 28 septembre 1902” (38–39).

**2 – “Romanciers dont la plupart des œuvres considérées en elles-mêmes sont à proscrire en vertu de la loi naturelle et de la morale chrétienne.”** [32] Novelists who, though not condemned by the *Index*, are apologists for spiritual error. These works secrete (*distillent*) skepticism, impiety, pessimism, and nihilism, but with nuance; a reader who is

not steeled in opposition to sin may be seduced by them. Bethléem allows that a cautious Catholic can resist their false allures; moreover, it would be rash, he concedes, to prohibit reading of such works by scholars or critics who understand the dangers of their professions (54). But average readers — “les étudiants, les gens du peuple, les bourgeois oisifs, les blasés du plaisir, les petites apprenties, les ouvrières, les employés des deux sexes, les collégiens, les jeunes filles...” (50–51) — are too easily captured to allow such freedoms. And they have been captured, Bethléem laments, by the untrammled growth of this category of works and authors since the middle of the 19th century (50) [33]. Among the authors listed are:

– Camille Flammarion – “[il] n’est pas athée, ni même absolument panthéiste... mais il laisse presque sans réponse les questions de la destinée, de la vie future et d’autres qu’il est amené à traiter” (72).

– Anatole France – condemned for his part in the Dreyfus Affair “et depuis, à toutes nos luttes politiques et religieuses” (75). “Par son scepticisme, son dédain du christianisme et de la chasteté, son fatalisme, son « renanisme » ondoyant [34], voluptueux et faux, [il] est l’un des écrivains les plus malfaisants de notre époque” (76).

– Théophile Gautier – “il cultive l’art pour l’art, il se pose lui-même en « dilettante du scandale » (77).

– Edmond and Jules de Goncourt – “dans leurs romans, [ils] ont pris comme décor les endroits mal fréquentés et les coins les plus perdus de Paris ; comme héros, des types d’exception, bohèmes et l’art ou de lettres, des malades, des nerveux et de détraqués” (78).

– Paul de Kock – “de nombreux ouvrages débordants de gaieté rabelaisienne, sans distinction de langage, dans style et surtout sans pudeur” (82) [35].

– Guy de Maupassant – “les contes ont une valeur littéraire de premier ordre, mais montrent une répréhensible indécence” (90).

– Prosper Mérimée – “[ses] œuvres sont presque toutes immorales ou impies” (92).

– Octave Mirbeau – “écrivain malpropre et sectaire écœurant” (93).

– J.-H. Rosny *aîné* – “[ses romans] sont opposés à la foi et au mœurs : ils tendent à substituer au culte de Dieu le culte de l’humanité” (104).

– Léon Tolstoï – his works are a mélange of mysticism, socialism, rationalism, and nihilism. “Comme tous les écrivains de sa race, [il] est atteint de cette commisération qui va surtout aux gens dépravés et qu’on appelle « la pitié russe »” (108).

**3 – “Romans mondains ou romanciers dont certaines œuvres peuvent figurer dans la bibliothèque des gens du monde et être lues par des personnes d’un âge et d’un jugement murs.”** [36] Authors of diverse, generally frivolous genres: “les feuilletonistes, les psychologues, les analystes, les romanciers à thèse, les écrivains politiques et social, les peintres de la grande vie”. Their novels take such liberties with morality and truth that they must be read with care (115). Their plots *appear* to reward virtue and punish vice, but also extol the former only hypothetically and depict the latter with such vivacity that impressionable readers can be carried to the wrong conclusions. The motto of this section of the guide is the phrase Prosper Mérimée is said to have had engraved on a signet ring, “Souviens-toi de te méfier.”

- Edward-George Bulwer-Lytton – Bethléem notes only that in England his popularity is nearly equal to that of Dickens or Scott (133).
- Alphonse Daudet – His sensibility, humor, and “meridian” imagination are praised, but “au point de vue moral, il n’est cependant pas toujours irréprochable” (137).
- Gustave Droz – His novel of Lourdes *Autour d’une source* (1869) is criticized for its “inspiration de fond antireligieuse” (141).
- Adolphe D’Ennery – “...toutes ces pièces, habilement charpentées et très émouvantes, ont fait verser des flots de larmes et rapporté des millions à leur auteur” (143) [37].
- Jules Bandeau – Noted as a friend of George Sand. “Il décrit les désordres, mais en même temps les déchirements auxquels se condamnent ceux qui s’abandonnent [à l’amour passionné]” (169).
- Robert-Louis Stevenson – “écrivain anglais... qui exerça une grande influence sur le mouvement littéraire de son pays” (173).
- Mark Twain – “Ses parodies et ses cocasseries sont populaires dans tous les pays de langue anglaise” (176).
- Auguste Villiers de l’Isle-Adam – “Ecrivain très original, d’une imagination déconcertante, d’un symbolisme qui touche à l’hallucination” (177).

**4 – “Romans honnêtes qui peuvent être lus sans danger par des jeunes gens et jeunes filles sagement formés”** [38] Like any work of fiction, these novels may lead to an overstimulation of the creative imagination (*la folle du logis*) and to disorders of the will and judgment. Overall they respect the sense of good [*le bon sens*], stylistic clarity, and virtue. If they fail to escape all the risks of light fiction for young readers, and if not all are suitable for everyone, these novels offer many benefits to the well-instructed reader who has pure intentions (179–80).

- François Coppée – “Malgré ses défaillances regrettables... ses œuvres saines et son action courageuse, et malgré tout, utile, font de lui, à beaucoup d’égards, un « maître » pour la jeunesse catholique” (196) [39].
- Charles Dickens – “Il n’est jamais immoral. Cependant ses romans ne doivent pas être confiés à des lecteurs trop jeunes ; les qualités littéraires qui en font l’intérêt leur échapperaient, et les scènes d’amour dont ils sont remplis, les troubleraient bien inutilement” (199).
- Paul Féval – “Converti en 1876, à la suite de revers de fortune et sous l’influence de sa femme, il racheta à ses éditeurs ses 209 ouvrages et eut le courage de les corriger pour en faire des éditions catholiques... Il y en a pourtant qui, n’ayant pas été corrigés, sont bannis des bibliothèques chrétiennes...” (203).
- [H.] Rider Haggard – Bethléem compares him to Verne. “Nous croyons savoir que toutes ses œuvres ne sont pas également irréprochables au point de vue moral” (210).
- André Laurie – his works on the education of children and his fantastic and adventure stories are cited approvingly (212).

– H.G. Wells – “honnête, mais ses romans ne sont pas toutes absolument irréprochables au point de vue moral, ni au point de vue religieux” (227).

**5 – “Récits, nouvelles, romans divers qui peuvent être généralement laissés entre toutes les mains et qui conviennent spécialement aux grands collegiens, aux jeunes filles récemment sorties de classe, etc.”** [40] Bethléem invites his reader to imagine a young girl returning home from her classes or boarding school — “tout sourit autour d’elle, comme à une fleur qui va éclore, dans une matinée de printemps — *O gioventù, primavera della vita*” (229) [41]. In search of something to read in the security of her parlor or bedroom, her choices should not be left, he insists, “aux hasards de ses caprices, aux attraites d’une curiosité toujours périlleuse” (230). Trained well, perhaps by a parent who has followed the Abbé’s advice, the girl’s sense of spiritual duty should draw her to the right sort of reading, encouraging virtue and obedience and leaving her satisfied and untroubled. The young male reader must be handled differently. He enters a time when his muscular curiosity is unsatisfied with the opinions of his elders; he seeks to master their world via the books they have read, for which he is not yet prepared (231). In his case also caution is advised: he cannot be turned loose with just any books; the rising energies of youth must be controlled and directed toward noble ends. In this category of books young readers will find wholesome actions, recreation, comforting refuge, and from the right perspective, appropriate instruction (232).

– La Bibliothèque rose illustrée – “cette collection déjà ancienne s’enrichit tous les jours de nouveaux ouvrages : après avoir été franchement chrétienne, elle se contente aujourd’hui d’être incolore, au point de vue religieux” (246).

– François-René de Chateaubriand – his defense of the Church, *Le Génie du christianisme* (1802), is praised. Several of his novels are too troubling for young people but happily are available in “corrected” (i.e., expurgated) editions which may be read freely (253).

– [James] Fenimore Cooper – complete translations of his novels should not be given to children, but adaptations that delete “les longueurs insipides, propres aux romans anglo-saxons” are acceptable (255).

– Paul d’Ivoi – “universellement connu par ses « voyages excentriques » (270).

– Xavier de Maistre – “[il] a utilisé ses loisirs à composer quelques petits ouvrages qui le rendent immortel” (278).

– Edgar Allan Poë – “Ces ouvrages sont inoffensifs au point de vue moral. Mais ces peintures saisantes, ces situations heurtées, ces hallucinations, ces scènes où les héros poussent des cris et gesticulent comme des hystériques pourront produire une impression très funeste chez certains esprits. Les noms de Baudelaire et de Mallarmé, [ses] traducteurs, renseignent suffisamment sur [ses] tendances” (285–6).

– Elisée Reclus – his geographical works are not suitable for children because they are teeming with religious error (287).

– Walter Scott – “Ses romans sont moraux dans leur but : mais ils renferment des intrigues étranges, des tableaux passionnés et des aventures très peu édifiantes” (290).

– Jules Verne – see below, “*Bethléem on Verne.*”

**6 – “Romans enfantins ou histoires amusantes pour les petits jeunes gens, les petites filles et les enfants.”** [42] This is the briefest category in Bethléem’s taxonomy. It is also the most sentimental, and measures its titles against an innocence and natural spirituality of young children which, the reader is left to imagine, must fade as they approach sexual maturity. For the present, however, “ils savent, selon l’expression d’Ernest Legouvé, lire au plus beau de tous les livres, au front de Celui d’où émanent toute lumière” (302). Bethléem recommends that parents read to children from illustrated editions of the Gospels and the lives of the saints, or from a mostly anodyne list of authors such as the Brothers Grimm (“leurs Contes populaires, amusants et moraux, eurent, dès leur apparition, un succès immense et furent traduits dans toutes les langues (306) [43]), or Stahl (pseudonym of Verne’s publisher, Pierre-Jules Hetzel: “l’éditeur parisien... a publié pour la jeunesse nombre de livres pleins d’humour et de naïveté” (308)). Most of the authors in this category are women from titled families, and most of the works recommended have all but disappeared from French children’s literature, having had no lasting influence on its development (Seillan 205, 253).

## Bethléem on Jules Verne

The entry on Jules Verne in the second through ninth editions of *Romans à lire* is just short of 230 words long:

**Jules Verne**, né à Nantes en 1828, mort à Amiens en 1905. Son premier ouvrage *Cinq semaines en ballon* inaugura un genre nouveau, le roman scientifique et géographique ; pendant 40 ans, il a déployé, dans une série de romans piquants, ingénieux, empoignants et instructifs, toutes les ressources d’une imagination intarissable, et il restera l’un des vulgarisateurs les plus populaires de la science amusante et des voyages fantastiques.

Il a exploré toutes les contrées, il a décrit les continents, les mers et les vastes espaces stellaires, il a étudié la civilisation et les races ; il fut chimiste, mécanicien, astronome, géologue, botaniste, zoologiste, et quand il cessait d’observer, son génie lui permettait de créer les formes futures auxquelles devait atteindre l’expérience et l’ingéniosité des hommes ; il fut instructif et précurseur, en même temps que compilateur, conteur et vulgarisateur.

On a loué chez l’écrivain, outre l’imagination et la science, la bonhomie, la bonne humeur et la netteté précise avec laquelle il dessine ses figures. Il est seulement regrettable qu’il n’ait jamais mis les influences de sa vogue prodigieuse au service de la religion : ses livres sont en effet toujours neutres et laïques. Certains catholiques le lui ont même amèrement reproché et l’ont proscrit de leur bibliothèque à l’égal d’un malfaiteur... D’autres plus indulgents lui font une place de choix... Il nous semble ne mériter,

*Ni cet excès d’honneur, ni cette indignité.* (Bethléem 1905, 295–6)

The tone of the entry is detached, despite a few formulaic superlatives (“il a déployé... toutes les ressources d’une imagination intarissable... l’un des vulgarisateurs les plus populaires de la science amusante...”). Much of the entry is boilerplate praise of familiar

trajectories of the *Voyages extraordinaires*, echoing perhaps Hetzel, *père's* famous “Avertissement de l'Éditeur” from the first in-8° edition of *Capitaine Hatteras* (“Son but est, en effet, de résumer toutes les connaissances géographiques, géologiques, physiques, astronomiques, amassées par la science moderne...”). Only one of the *Voyages* is mentioned by title (*Cinq semaines*), apparently for its inaugural role in the series [44]. An unambiguously evaluative statement is credited to an unnamed, theoretical enthusiast: “On a loué chez l'écrivain... la bonhomie, la bonne humeur et la netteté précise avec laquelle il dessine ses figures.” But immediately the critic's voice intervenes: “// est seulement regrettable qu'il n'ait jamais mis les influences de sa vogue prodigieuse au service de la religion.”

Overall, the entry balances positives and negatives, signalling a tepid acceptance of Verne: *certain* Catholics have reproached him for his errors and prohibited him from their homes; others, *more indulgent* — ever a freighted adjective from this cleric's pen! — have accorded him a place of honor on their shelves. But the censor remains non-committal and the closing line from Racine's “Britannicus” — a classic motto for equivocation — leaves the matter unresolved [45]. The secular rewards of reading, even in the case of an author such as Verne who can be put into the hands of nearly all young men and women, will always be trumped by the imperatives of religious education and the prudent domestication of the creative imagination.

Beginning with the tenth edition (1928), the entry was substantially revised. The last three sentences of the last paragraph cited above and the citation from “Britannicus” are replaced with a compact list of works by Verne judged suitable for the adolescent reader, with brief parenthetical notes on a few titles:

[...ses livres sont en effet toujours neutres et laïques.]

Nous ne citons ici que les plus célèbres : *Aventures du capitaine Hatteras* ; *Les Cinq cents millions de la Bégum* ; *Cinq semaines en ballon* ; *De la terre à la lune*, suivi de *Autour de la lune* (pour les futurs astronomes) ; *Deux ans de vacances* ; *Les enfants du capitaine Grant*, formant une trilogie avec *L'île mystérieuse* et *Vingt mille lieues sous les mers* (les deux premiers particulièrement intéressants) ; *Hector Servadac* (pour ceux que n'effraient point les mathématiques élémentaires) ; *Les Indes noires* ; *La Jangada* ; *Kéraban-le-Têtu* ; *La Maison à vapeur* ; *Mathias Sandorf* ; *Michel Strogoff* ; *Mistress Branican* ; *Les Naufragés du Jonathan* (plus sérieux ; fera réfléchir les adolescents) ; *Le Pays des fourrures* ; *Pilote du Danube* ; *P'tit bonhomme* ; *Le Tour du monde en 80 jours* ; *Un capitaine de quinze ans* ; *Le Volcan d'or*. (Bethléem 1932, 582–3) [46]

The source of the new material is a short bibliographic essay on Verne published in May 1921 in *Revue des lectures* under the byline “Jean de Lardélec,” a frequent pseudonym of Bethléem [47]. An unsigned editorial on the preceding page, presumably also by Bethléem, describes the essay as the first of a peripatetic feature in the *Revue* offering “extensive and varied lists of works both interesting and edifying [*bienfaisants*] which may be entrusted to children without prior review,” without the distracting critical glosses of the journal's regular reviews. (“Des livres pour nos infants,” 289).

“Les meilleurs livres de Jules Verne” fits this model well. Apart from a brief (and again, formulaic) introduction — “Jules Verne a gardé auprès des enfants une vogue et un prestige incontestés, malgré les centaines d'imitateurs qui lui ont succédé sans le dépasser...” — it is for the most part an inventory of selected titles and prices of editions for sale by Hachette. The 1921 version of the inventory (in *Revue de lectures*) divides the titles into two categories, according to the novels' emphasis on science and technology, and a third category reserved for a single work found suspect for its embrace of

unsanctioned geologic history. The 1928 version (in *Romans à lire*) omits the categories and cites the titles in a different order. In both inventories the rationale for the order of individual titles is obscure, not alphabetical, nor by date of publication, nor by rank of commercial popularity. Across the two lists the titles cited (twenty-five in *Revue des lectures*, twenty-four in *Romans à lire*) represent fewer than half of the published *Voyages extraordinaires*. The omissions may be as telling as the titles included.

The presence of *Hatteras*, one of Verne's most popular and enduring works, is unsurprising. (Perhaps Verne's original plan for the novel's hero to commit suicide at the pole would have removed it from this cohort?) *Cinq semaines en ballon* appears as before. *De la terre à la lune* and *Autour de la lune*, "intéresseront surtout les futures astronomes," are included but the third Baltimore Gun Club novel, *Sans dessus dessous*, is not. *Les Cinq cents millions de la Bégum's* darker satire of the military-industrial complex is mentioned, perhaps for the patriotic example of Dr. Sarrasin's Franceville and the novel's Germanophobe depiction of Schultze. (But then why is the more openly nationalist *Face au drapeau* not included?) *Deux ans de vacances*, among Verne's most child-friendly titles, is included, with — in the same vein — *P'tit Bonhomme* (more so) and *Un capitaine de quinze ans*. The observation that *Vingt Mille Lieues sous les mers* is the least interesting (!) novel of a notional Nemo "trilogy" that includes *Les Enfants du capitaine Grant* and *L'Île mystérieuse* is out of keeping with most critics' assessments of these novels. Perhaps the dismissal of *Vingt mille lieues* betrays a discomfort with the anti-authoritarian, individualist subtext of the novel? [48] *Servadac's* cartoonish anti-semitism does not concern the Abbé, who expects the novel's celestial mathematics to be the more distracting element for young readers [49]. *Les Indes noires* is included; Nell's response to her first view of sunrise is among the purest instances of religious ecstasy in the *Voyages* [50]. *La Jangada*, *Kériban-le-Têtu*, *La Maison à Vapeur*, *Le Tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours*, and *Le Pilote du Danube* are included: Vernian circuits with strong currents of dark humor and exoticism and few critical reflections on realities of colonial power. (But then why leave off *Aventures de trois Russes et de trois Anglais*, *César Cascabel*, *Claudius Bombanac*, or *Mirifiques Aventures de maître Antifer*, and *L'Agence Thompson and Co?*) *Mathias Sandorf*, *Michel Strogoff*, and *Mistress Branican* are included: grand geographic adventures with sympathetic heros. (Perhaps Verne's Sandorf is a safer version of Dumas's Edmond Dantès — *Le Comte de Monte-Cristo* — forbidden by the *Index*?) *Les Naufragés du Jonathan* is recommended for promoting philosophical reflection from young readers, but this surely oversells the Kaw-djer's retreat from anarchism at the novel's end. The floating island drama *Le Pays des fourrures* is included, but comparable novels are not: *Une Ville flottante* (a woman driven mad by a regretted marriage! her abusive husband struck by a bolt of lightning! perhaps not...), *L'Île à hélice* (merciless satire of Protestant and Catholic cultures) or *Le Chancellor* (perhaps too unwavering in its depiction of suffering and hopelessness). *Le Volcan d'or* is on the list, probably for its critique of gold fever and materialism. (But then why leave off *La Chasse au météore*, *Seconde Patrie*, or *L'Étoile du Sud*?)

*Le Château des Carpathes*, *Le Sphinx des glaces*, and *Le Secret de Wilhelm Storitz* are missing: too strong Gothic elements? *Robur-le-Conquérant* and *Maître du monde* are absent; perhaps Robur, in his puckish and insane versions, is too secular a figure of power? [51] *Le Testament d'un Excentrique* is absent: the novel's comic resurrection of William J. Hypperbone, long supposed dead — accompanied by Jovita Foley's exclamation, "Grand Dieu!" — more than verges on sacrilege [52]. Kin-fo's determination in *Les Tribulations d'un Chinois en Chine* to commit positive, indirect suicide would have violated the Church's teachings on the issue. The omission of *Le Rayon Vert* is puzzling,



as it would seem inoffensive on moral grounds. Perhaps the erotic tensions of the climactic scene in Fingal's Cave would be too stirring for young readers? Or the labile gender identities of Sam and Sib Melvill might present confusing role models? The latter justification would explain also the absence of *Le Superbe Orénoque*, in which cross-dressing intrigue and unsubtle homoerotic attraction play key roles. *Hier et Demain* is missing from the 1928 list, though it is included in the 1921 list with a cautionary note on its unorthodox vision of human history. *Le Phare du bout du monde*, also missing: too violent? *L'Invasion de la mer*: too sympathetic to the Tuareg Beber? *L'Étonnante Aventure de la mission Barsac*: too sympathetic to the African inhabitants of Blackland? The most obvious omission in the list is *Voyage au centre de la terre*, certainly one of Verne's "plus célèbres" and most enduring titles. But this cut may be the easiest to diagnose: the novel's embrace of geological and paleoanthropological discoveries that cast doubt on a literalist reading of Biblical creation would have been unacceptable to Bethléem. Verne's other novel featuring (at greater length) not-quite-human protagonists, the ape-men Wagddis of *Le Village aérien*, is also missing [53].

*Cura te ipsum*. At this historical remove, decoding the reasons for which particular titles were included in or excluded from these inventories can only be speculation. The wider context of Bethléem's writings and his unwavering commitment to the traditionalist cause provide some basis for this, but the published record is inconsistent in several respects, parts of it are not easily accessible, and gaps in our understanding remain.

For example, notices of newly-published works and reissues of older works often appear in *Romans-revue* and *Revue de lectures* but these titles are never mentioned in *Romans à lire*. Several Verne titles that I have flagged as having been omitted from the 1921 and 1928 inventories were reviewed in *Romans-revue* prior to the publication of "Les Meilleurs Livres de Jules Verne." *La Chasse au météore* is classed among the "romans à lire" in the March 1908 issue of *Romans-revue* (231–32), and described as "roman qui fait regretter davantage encore le délicieux écrivain qui charma les jeunes gens et les enfants" (231–32). *Storitz* is recommended in the November 1910 issue of *Romans-revue*: "Jules Verne est très moderne, voyez-vous, même quand il écrit des romans du XVIIIe siècle" (945). There are, moreover, reviews of titles missing from the 1928 list but which appeared in *Revue de la lecture* after 1921: too late to have influenced the earlier inventory but still before the later inventory. Most of these were prompted by Bibliothèque verte editions of Verne and rarely amount to more than a few lines acknowledging the reprint. *Un drame en Livonie* is described as "parmi les plus attachantes du fécond romancier" (May 1923, 372). *Le Chancellor* is "tellement palpitant que les personnes cardiaques feront bien de ne pas lire certaine scène de cannibalisme!" (August 1925, 667). There may be other such reviews published before 1928 which could be expected to inform the 1921 or 1928 lists. As of this writing, the incomplete nature of the digital archives of the Bibliothèque nationale de France (Gallica) requires a careful survey of surviving physical copies of the journals, to which I have for the most part not had access.

The entry on Verne in *Romans à lire* in the eleventh and final edition (1932) repeats the entry from the tenth edition; no reviews appearing in *Revue de la lecture* after 1928 can have influenced the entry in the final edition. These include: *L'Etoile du Sud* (in the BV, October 1930, 1196); *Le Rayon vert* (in the BV, July 1932, 814); *L'École des Robinsons* (in the BV, January 1933: "Nous retrouvons dans ce roman, assez peu connu, ce qui fait le charme de toutes les oeuvres de Jules Verne : imagination débordante, entrain, bonne humeur, et jusqu'à un certain souci de la « crédibilité » que n'ont pas toujours eu ses imitateurs. Ajoutons que la Providence y est invoquée dans les périls remerciée quand apparaît le salut"); *Le Chancellor* (in the BV, September 1934, 1206: "pages

hallucinantes — pas pour lecteurs trop jeunes”); *L’Invasion de la mer* (in the BV, March 1935, 303); *Robur-le-conquérant* (in the BV, October 1935, 1205: criticized for its paucity of lines indicating a belief in God but approved for its lack of immorality); *Maître du monde* (in the BV, November 1936: “fertiles en péripéties imprévues... très correct. Un mot pourtant sonne mal...: l’existence du « diable » est donnée comme une simple légende qui permet aux cerveaux peu cultivés d’expliquer ce qui est inexplicable. Assertion fautive et contraire à la doctrine chrétienne.”) The brief editorial comments on these titles may indicate why they were not included in 1921 or 1928. There may be, of course, other reasons for omissions from both lists. Bethléem was aware in 1921 of “les soixante-dix volumes de l’infatigable conteur,” but he may have thought a title too minor to be considered; perhaps he or his deputies never read it. We do not know enough about his editorial workflow to decide.

Further ambiguities are suggested by Bethléem’s endorsement of *Ma Bibliothèque. Choix, classement, présentation en catalogue modèle*, a brochure published in 1930 by l’Action populaire in the collection “Les Cahiers du blé qui lève.” [54] *Ma Bibliothèque* is sometimes credited to Bethléem — it was in this respect that I became aware of it (Mollier 2014, 475) — but his precise contribution to the book is unclear, apart from an approving introduction bearing his signature. (The introduction credits the book to an unidentified “Chercheur.”) The design of the catalogue is certainly in keeping with the abbé’s mission: instructions on the inside cover to “Choisis tes lectures” warn the reader that prudent reading requires conscious selection (“Quand on cueille des champignons, on ne les prend pas au hasard, on les trie, gardant les bons, rejetant les mauvais”), as well as foreknowledge of the potential risks of careless reading (“Pourquoi ne goûtes-tu pas tous les poisons pour « savoir » s’ils tuent?”). Most of the book is given over to doctrinal and devotional texts, and practical titles with traditionalist emphases; less than a fifth is devoted to fiction. In the section on approved “Récits d’aventure” there is a brief mention of Verne: “J. Verne — Voir ses œuvres — Hachette — Broché : 9 fr » Rélié... 12 fr. et 15 fr. ” (1930, 55). The entry’s brevity doesn’t give us much to go on, and none of Verne’s individual titles is singled out for praise or criticism. But: 1) the entry is no shorter than all the others in the book, which is more a checklist of approved titles than an annotated census like *Romans à lire* or the notices in Bethléem’s monthly journals; 2) just below, there is an entry on Léon Ville (1854? — 19..?), “dit le J. Verne chrétien.” [55] Suggesting perhaps that Jules Verne is *not*... the christian Verne.

Taken as a broad measure of Bethléem’s assessment of Verne, these lists, fragmentary reviews, and passing references to the author indicate that a definite reading of Verne is marked in texts published between 1905 and 1930: for the most part, a pietistic, narrowly pedagogical, B.C.-B.G. Verne whose works can be fitted, with some reservations and with exceptions, to a Catholic traditionalist agenda, and always under the cloud of suspicion that Bethléem attaches to any work of fiction that doesn’t wear its Catholicism proudly on its cover [56]. The expansion of Bethléem’s later discussions of Verne, in 1921 in *Romans-revue*, and again in the entry in the tenth and eleventh editions of *Romans à lire*, suggest a broadening of his initial, noncommittal reaction to the novelist (*Ni cet excès d’honneur...*). However, such an interpretation must be acknowledged as only speculative. Entries on an author were often expanded over the course of successive editions of *Romans à lire*. This was typical for authors who continued to publish new works and it was not uncommon that reviews in the journals would reappear, in a more compressed form, in new editions of the reading guide [57]. That explanation for expanded coverage doesn’t apply to Verne, who died in 1905, before publication of the second edition, and whose last credited work was published in 1919, before the seventh edition. Nonetheless it was not unusual for even a

deceased author's entry to increase in length in later editions. Such expansions never reflect reversals of opinion on the merits or faults of an author, though they may indicate subtle shifts in what is emphasized by the critic. The revised entry in the tenth edition preserves the abbé's statement of regret that Verne did not turn his considerable talents to religious ends, but this reproach is only implied in the 1921 essay, the strongest complaint of which is that Verne's narratives can be carried off by excessive technical details [58]. This complaint, and the equivocal endorsement of *Hier et demain*, faulted for a cyclical theory of geological history in one of the stories in the collection, are not included in the 1928 entry. The journals and the reading guide appear to serve different functions for the censor: the journals are the more timely and more documentary report of good and bad reading (apart from Bethléem's editorials in the journals, which are more heated and varied in their targets than is the book's preface); the book is the more critical and more definitive catalog, on the model of the *Index*.

The dropping from the 1928 entry in *Romans à lire* of an acknowledgement that some Catholics refuse Verne and others admire him, and the addition of a selective list of approved titles is accompanied by a new emphasis in Bethléem's assessment of the proper literary register to which the author belongs. Verne's popularity "aussi bien dans le peuple que parmi les enfants des autres classes" — an entire sociology of readership is encoded in that phrase! — is accepted [59]. Good, bad, or indifferent, the Jules Verne that emerges from the margins of the journals, in comparisons made between him and other authors, begin to have a familiar ring that will be recognized by any reader of Verne after the Gernsback era, when the novelist was appropriated to membership in a pantheon of authors of science fiction ("scientifiction") and adventure fiction valued for their anticipations, their thrilling stories, and their appeal to young and forever-young readers (Westfahl 1992). A 1909 review of the musical spectacle *en quatre actes* "Les Aventures de Gavroche" — which promised to display a real aeroplane nightly on the stage of the Théâtre du Châtelet — concludes "voilà un spectacle copieux, brillant, une sorte de cinéma d'après Jules Verne" (*Romans-revue* March 1909, 224) [60]. The immense literary productivity of adventure writer Louis Henri Bousсенard "fait penser à Jules Verne" (*Romans-revue*, January 1912, 616). Marcel Roland's *La Conquête d'Anthar* (1913) is "un conte de fées accommodé à la Jules Verne" (*Romans-revue* June 1915, 481). Jean de Kerlecq's *Urfa, l'homme des profondeurs* (1931) is "fantastique, un peu à la manière de Jules Verne" (697) — though Kerlecq's merpeople are a stretch for Verne — but is criticized as pessimistic, "trop invraisemblable, et [son] ton général fort agaçant" (*Revue des lectures*, June 1931, 697). Jacques Spitz's apocalyptic *L'Agonie du globe* (1935) is "[à la] manière de Jules Verne, mais de Jules Verne pour adultes" (*Revue des lectures*, October 1935, 1190) [61].

Verne's popularity, which is to say his commercial success and the classes of his readership, and his innovations as to plot, locale, and technologies (but not his innovations as to form or style, which Bethléem never acknowledges) are summoned thus to situate Verne's achievement in language which is in fact modern but also misjudged: Jules Verne the technophile, the graphomane, the fabulist of boys' (and with some restrictions, of girls') adventure tales, whose indulgences of childhood imagination are pleasurable and rewarding within their limits. Or in Jean-Michel Margot's evocative terminology: Verne the *icon*, a proper name for a certain, durable but today mostly nostalgic strand of modernity and its cleverest stagecraft (Margot 2013–14). That this estimation is partly distinct from — but in Bethléem's anxious literary universe not *entirely* distinct from — an estimation of the moral values of Verne's œuvre, and that it is shaped by a basic suspicion of modernity, means that in the abbé's view the effort of reading Verne is better directed to

other ends; Verne, though he is mostly harmless for those who like that sort of thing, isn't so serious a writer as to deserve readerly care (*Souviens-toi de te méfier...*) One need not be a devoted partisan for Verne (in Bethléem's time or now) to see that the Gernsback characterization of Verne's achievement is a way of compartmentalizing the author's originality, or that this is what this characterization has come to signify today, more than a century after Verne's death. What is striking is that Verne's post-Gernsback reputation and Bethléem's persistent moral skepticism, no less officious in its own, negative, way than Gernsback's positive pantheon-building — ...*ni cette indignité* — may be two faces of a worn and depreciated coin [62].

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## Appendix – “Les Meilleurs Livres de Jules Verne”

This short essay appears in the May 1921 issue (vol. 9, issue 5, pp. 290–91) of *Romans-revue* under the byline “Jean de Lardélec.” It is reproduced here in full, including inconsistencies in orthography and punctuation and a misidentification of Verne’s son, Michel. (As of October 2016, this issue is not among the digital reproductions of *Revue des lectures* available online in Gallica (<http://gallica.bnf.fr>).

### I. — Les meilleurs livres de Jules Verne

Jules Verne a gardé auprès des enfants une vogue et un prestige incontestés, malgré les centaines d’imitateurs qui lui ont succédé sans le dépasser. Pourtant, tous ses livres n’ont pas le même intérêt ; parfois les notions scientifiques ou géographiques envahissent l’ouvrage et ne laissent plus au récit qu’une place insuffisante.

Voici, parmi les soixante-dix volumes de l’infatigable conteur, tous en vente chez Hachette, ceux qui paraissent devoir répondre le mieux à l’attente de leur jeune public :

1° D’abord, ceux où la science reste discrètement au second plan, et où dominent les aventures. Tels *Michel Strogoff* (in-8, 30 fr. ou 2 vol. in-16 à 9 fr.) ; *La Maison à vapeur* (id.) ; *Cinq semaines en ballon* (in-8, 15 fr., ou in-16, 9 fr.) ; *Un Capitaine de quinze ans* (in-8, 30 fr. ou 2 in-16 à 9 fr.) ; *Les 500 millions de la Bégum* (in-8, 15 fr. ou in-16, 9 fr.) ; *La Jangada* (in-8, 30 fr. ou 2 in-16 à 9 fr.) ; *Le Volcan d’or* (in-8, 30 fr. ou 2 in-16 à 9 fr.) ; *Les Indes-Noires* (in-8, 15 fr. ou in-16, 9 fr.) ; *P’tit Bonhomme* (in-8, 30 fr. ou 2 in-16 à 9 fr.) ; *Pilote du Danube* (in-8, 15 fr., ou in-16, 9 fr.) ; *Mistress Branican* (in-8, 30 fr. ou 2 in-16 à 9 fr.) ; *Kériban-le-Têtu* (in-8, 30 fr. ou 2 in-16 à 9 fr.) ; *Mathias Sandorf* (in-8, 35 fr. ou 3 vol. à 9 fr.) ; *Le tour du monde en 80 jours* (in-8, 15 fr., ou in-16, 9 fr.) ; *Deux ans de vacances* (in-8, 15 fr., ou 2 in-16 à 9 fr.) ; *Aventures du Capitaine Hatteras* (in-8, 15 fr. ou 2 in-16 à 9 fr.) ; *Le Pays des fourrures* (in-8, 15 fr. ou 2 in-16 à 9 fr.).

Les deux plus intéressantes livres de la série semblent bien être *Les Enfants du Capitaine Grant* et *L’île mystérieuse* (2 vol. in-8 à 35 fr. ou 6 in-16 à 9 fr.). Ils forment une trilogie avec *Vingt mille lieues sous les mers* (in-8, 30 fr. ou 2 in-16 à 9 fr.) : mais ce dernier ouvrage rebute quelques enfants par ses énumérations de poissons et ses développements scientifiques sur la mer.

2° Enfin, certains livres comme *De la terre à la lune* (in-8, 15 fr. ou in-16, 9 fr.) et sa suite *Autour de la lune* (id.), ou encore *Hector Servadac* (in-8, 30 fr. ou 2 in-16 à 9 fr.), intéresseront surtout les futures astronomes, ou du moins les enfants que n'effraient point les mathématiques élémentaires.

*Les Naufragés du Jonathan* (in-8, 30 fr. ou 2 in-16 à 9 fr.) donneront à réfléchir aux adolescent sérieux ; ils y trouveront une vivante démonstration de la nécessité d'une autorité sociale, et comprendront l'absurdité des utopies anarchistes.

3° Ajoutons que dans un volume composé de nouvelles, et publié par M. Maurice [*sic*] Verne après la mort de son père [63], *Hier et demain* (in-8, 15 fr. ou in-16, 9 fr.), se trouve un récit qui laisse une impression un peu trouble, et insinue sur l'origine et la vie de l'humanité des idées d'une orthodoxie douteuse.

Nous ne détaillerons point, pour les autres volumes cités, l'âge auquel convient chacun d'eux ; l'expérience montre que dès huit ou dix ans, certains enfants s'éprennent de Jules Verne, et que des adolescents éprouvent le même attrait jusqu'à dix-huit ans et plus. Le public de Jules Verne se recrute aussi bien dans le peuple que parmi les enfants des autres classes ; on sait qu'une statistique récente a établi que Jules Verne était l'auteur le plus lu par les gardiens de phare !

Jean de Lardélec.

## NOTES

1. Throughout this essay I use the term "traditionalist" to describe an array of reactionary attitudes on matters of faith, politics, family, women, education, the status of Jews, etc., that were for the most part typical of the Catholic Church in France from the early nineteenth through the early twentieth centuries. Catholic "Traditionalism," *stricto sensu*, had also a specific theological meaning in France during this time, viz., the anti-rationalist doctrine of figures such as Joseph de Maistre and Louis de Bonald, according to which religious and moral truths can be known only through divine revelation handed down in unbroken religious traditions (cf. Homan 1998). Though officially rejected by the (otherwise anti-rationalist) First Vatican Council in 1870, Traditionalist doctrine was, because of its royalist, ultramontane, and counter-Enlightenment positions, affiliated in several respects with "traditionalist" Catholicism in the looser sense of the term.
2. "Approximately, 'secularism'": As Caroline Fourest argues (2016), the practical meaning of "secularism" in the "anglo-saxon" world has shifted away from the more rigorous French definition of *laïcité*. In the United States during the last several decades in particular, civic barriers separating Church and State have been substantially eroded and "secularism" has, increasingly, come to stand for a shopworn political compromise. To its critics it signifies a pugnacious atheism or positions more sinister; to its defenders, it names a well-intentioned but battered scheme for acknowledging civil and religious spheres of influence but not their absolute division: a humane pluralism that admits, tacitly, of legitimate roles for religion in a modern civil society. French *laïcité*, the product of a more complex and contested history of the Church's interference in civic life is more... agnostic concerning the proper role(s) of religion(s)

in a secular democracy, in that it insists on a fundamentally nonreligious social contract between citizens and the State. (Cf. Delfau 2015, Fourest 2016.) In this essay I will use “secular,” “secularist,” and “secularism” as the best English translations of the corresponding variants of *laïcité*, trusting that the reader will appreciate the cultural and historical nuances of the French and Anglo-American terms.

3. See Dixmier’s contribution to Dixmier, *et al.* 2007.
4. *Vehementer Nos*, Pope Pius X’s 1906 encyclical condemning the 1905 law, galvanized opposition to it, particularly in predominantly traditionalist regions of France such as the département du Nord, home to the Abbé Bethléem at the time.
5. On the vicissitudes of *laïcité* and anticlericalism in France see (among others) Delfau 2015, Fourest 2016, Lalouette 2002, Mellor 1990, Ouzof 2007, and Scott 2005. Harris 2007 compactly surveys divisions within the Church in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, between traditionalist and moderate/republican factions and the role of anti-Masonic and antisemitic thinking among traditionalists.
6. On the effects of rising literacy rates and economic and technical transformations of the popular press in France during this period, see Chartier and Hébraud 2000, Furet and Ozouf 1977, Lyons 2001, and Mollier 2001. Ironically, *La Croix*’s success as a beacon of antirepublican views was due in large part to the newspaper’s mastery of the new technical and commercial regimes of print.
7. Bollmann 2006, Brown 2012. Cf. the discussion of image-texts of solitary and feminine reading in popular nineteenth century French culture and in the illustrated *Voyages extraordinaires* in particular, in Harpold 2015.
8. On conflicts in France between Church, state, and society reflected in debates regarding the morality of popular fiction see — in addition to texts cited below regarding the career of Louis Bethléem — Chartier and Hébraud 2000, Sapiro 2011, and Stora-Lamarre 1990.
9. La Maison de la Bonne Presse (today Groupe Bayard) was formed in 1873 by Emmanuel d’Alzon (1810–80), founder of the Augustins de l’Assomption.
10. *La Croix* and *Le Pèlerin* were both published by La Maison de la Bonne Presse. In August 1890, the editors of *La Croix* described their journal as “the most anti-Jewish in France.” (As Delfau [2015] points out, the politics of today’s *La Croix* bear no resemblance those of its notorious ancestor.) *La Libre Parole* was published by Catholic royalist Édouard Drumont, author of the two-volume antisemitic tract *La France juive* (1886, 1892), a bestseller in France that ran to nearly 200 editions by 1914.
11. The emergence of this popular and for the most part ephemeral literature was paralleled by a Catholic literary revival with more lasting artistic and intellectual effects, beginning in the 1880s and including such authors as Paul Bourget (1852–1935), Léon Bloy (1846–1917), Paul Claudel (1868–1955), Joris-Karl Huysmans (1848–1907), François Mauriac (1885–1970), and Charles Maurras (1868–1952). Their work is marked by many of the right-wing attitudes that informed traditionalist popular journalism and fiction, with greater subtlety (e.g., Mauriac, 1952 winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature) or greater vitriol (e.g., Maurras, a major figure in Action Française and in the anti-Dreyfusard Ligue de la patrie française). Griffiths 1965 is a good, if at times partisan, introduction to this revival.
12. De Bujanda’s introduction to Librairie Droz’s comprehensive reprint of the *Index Librorum*, vol. 11 in their *Index des livres interdits*, reviews the history and method of the *Index*. Amadiou 2004 surveys the principal French authors and works added to the *Index* during the nineteenth century.
13. “All novels [romances by this author] are forbidden,” one of the categories of condemnation in the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*. Most entries in the *Index* are little more than a list of forbidden works by an author, or a summary judgment of all of her or his writings.
14. “Bethléem” was not a pseudonym. That spelling of the family name (originally “Beddelem” or “Bethlem”), without the accent, had been adopted by Louis Bethléem’s parents upon their



marriage in 1868. He appears to have added the accent around the time of his ordination (Mollier 2014, 30–32). Bethléem's younger brother René (1870–1944) was also a priest and the author of several books on the education of Catholic youth, including *Catéchisme de l'éducation* (1919–46, eleven editions, with combined sales of more than 30,000 copies) and *L'Éducation en exemples* (1929–32, 4 vols.).

15. Fewer than six months after Jules Verne's death in March 1905. Unless otherwise indicated, my discussion of *Romans à lire* draws mostly on the second edition because it marks this — perhaps tenuous — coincidence with Verne's biography. However, in researching this essay I have reviewed physical copies or digital reproductions of all editions of the book apart from the exceedingly rare first edition.
16. These endorsements multiplied and diversified with subsequent editions, reflecting the growing influence and international readership of the book. In later editions, they were removed and a postface was added, including a 1919 letter from Cardinal (Pietro) Gasparri, then the Cardinal Secretary of State of Pope Benedict XV, congratulating Bethléem for the success of the book and awarding him a subvention of 2000 francs. In 1912 *Romans à lire* had been praised by Pope Pius X — more traditionalist than his predecessor Leo XIII — who granted an audience to Bethléem and described his book as an *Opus mirificum* ("marvelous work") (Mollier 2014, 125).
17. The first through 8th editions surveyed novels published between 1800 and the year of the edition (1905, 1906, etc.). Beginning with the 9th edition (1925) the starting point of the survey was rolled back to 1500.
18. See Mollier 2014, 475 for a complete list of Bethléem's published books.
19. Later editions of *Romans à lire* often mined the journal and its successor, *Revue des lectures*, for updates to author entries. Advertisements in the back of the reading guide and the journal encouraged readers to purchase both, and to purchase annual collections of the journal.
20. Some francophone comics, such as Hergé's *Tintin* series or *La Semaine de Suzette*, a Catholic girls' magazine, were judged acceptable reading for properly supervised youth. Comics of American or Italian origin, and those published in France by Jewish or expatriate editors, were never acceptable (Mollier 2014, 284–5).
21. Only partly true. Mollier notes the lasting influence of traditionalist strains of Catholicism, in the décret-loi of the Code de la famille of 1939, which encouraged childbirth in marriage and increased penalties for abortion, and in the 1949 law creating the Commission de surveillance et de contrôle des publications destinées à l'enfance et à l'adolescence, the principal mission of which was to protect the flower of French youth from the unwholesome influences of comics. Mollier describes the Commission, which though modified is still in place, as the "final victory of the abbé Bethléem" (401–37). As I write this, given the resurgence of European and American debates concerning *soi-disant* religious "freedoms," racial *ressentiment*, anti-immigrant nativism, and "fake news" (i.e., propaganda), and the adaptability of counterrevolutionary discourse to modern media — just the condition of self-determination that Bethléem envisioned for his publishing empire — any notions that traditionalists' refusals of modernity has been left behind seem more aspirational than descriptive readings of the facts. The recent American presidential election suggests that the effectiveness of alliances between reactionary religious and racial ideologies, post-industrial capital, and ubiquitous but durably partisan electronic media may exceed Abbé Bethléem's aspirations.
22. E.g., Pius XI's and X's rejections of the errors of modernism (*Syllabus of Errors [Syllabus Errorum]*, December 8, 1864; *Pascendi Domini gregis*, September 8, 1907. Note this passage from the latter: "We bid you do everything in your power to drive out of your dioceses, even by solemn interdict, any pernicious books that may be in circulation there. The Holy See neglects no means to put down writings of this kind, but the number of them has now grown to such an extent that it is impossible to censure them all. Hence it happens that the medicine sometimes arrives too late, for the disease has taken root during the delay."
23. Mollier 2014, 9.

24. “[La terreur de Bethléem] est de voir s’introduire au sein de la famille le roman qui éveille le désir féminin hors du mariage ou avant le mariage, son scénario favori le sacrifice de la passion féminine aux devoirs, présents ou à venir, de la conjugalité et de maternité” (Seillan 2005, 248). The obviously staged photograph shown in Figure 1, of Bethléem triumphantly destroying “licentious” journals while watched by an approving bourgeoisie and a young girl, tells a compact morality tale. Are we to interpret from this that Bethléem has seized the corrupting pages from the newsstand racks or from the girl? That he is, just in time and with a grand flourish, preventing the girl from reading them? In any case, madame and mademoiselle will have been preserved from temptations they may not comprehend but for which they are evidently grateful. (What the little dog makes of the proceedings is more obscure.) Such muscular interventions in the newspaper and book marketplace were a regular habit of Bethléem in the 1920s, for which he earned the outrage of vendors and the irritation of police. The cover of Mollier’s biography includes a color caricature by Eugène Damblans for *Le Pèlerin* (January 23, 1927). It shows the abbé grimly shredding a newspaper while startled passers-by look on and a male vendor angrily complains to a policeman, who seems powerless to intervene.
25. Bloch 1994. I am indebted to Bonnie Effros for bringing to my attention the abbé Migne and Bloch’s excellent short study of his publishing empire.
26. Bloch argues that Migne’s genius was to combine his religious mission with the industrial production, distribution, and marketing technics of nineteenth-century wholesale and drygoods economies (1994, esp. 113–28).
27. Lacan 1991, *passim*. An interesting psychoanalytic study could be written on the theme of this notional totality of the author’s literary-critical grasp and its role in the reader’s fantasy of authorial jurisdiction: editorial juggernauts such as Migne and Bethléem, “creative” writers with famously complete worldviews, such as Balzac, Dumas père, and... Verne.
28. Bethléem 1905, 9. The six categories were preserved across all editions of *Romans à lire*, but were condensed for *Revue des lectures*, which arranged its reviews of novels into four, slightly more encompassing groups: *Romans mauvais, dangereux ou inutiles pour la généralité des lecteurs*; *Romans dont les personnes suffisamment averties pourraient se permettre la lecture*; *Romans dont la lecture est recommandée aux grandes personnes malgré le fond ou certains pages, en raison du profit ou du délasserment sans péril qu’ils procureront*; and *Romans recommandés pour les lecteurs d’âge convenables ou sagement formés*.
29. “[*Nihil*] *ab omni parte beatum*” — “Nothing is good in every part” (Horace).
30. Bethléem 1905, 13–42.
31. The authors I include here and below as representatives of Bethléem’s six categories are meant to give a sense of the compass — and the distortions — of Bethléem’s assessments in relation to Jules Verne: the authors are mentioned in the *Voyages extraordinaires*, Verne is known to have read or discussed their work — a rough guide in this case would be his published correspondence with Hetzel père and fils — or they are writers, such as Haggard, Rosny aîné, Twain, and Wells, who were important contemporaries. In nearly all cases, I quote only representative fragments of Bethléem’s entries.
32. Bethléem, 43–114.
33. In a rare moment of optimism, Bethléem observes that the annual production of new novels, estimated to exceed 3500 titles each year, has diminished from its apex between 1875 and 1890. (His estimation seems very high.) Perhaps, he proposes, the puerile strata of society (“les mondains et mondaines”) prefer to dedicate their free time to sports and to reading history and biographies (50n1). The rest of his project would suggest otherwise.
34. Bethléem refers here to France’s 1903 eulogy of Ernest Renan, philologist, historian of Christianity, and author of *Vie de Jésus* (1863) — which notoriously rejected the divinity of Christ — on the occasion of the installation of a monument to Renan in his home town of Tréguier. Renan’s works are included in the summary list of books condemned in the *Index* at the end of Bethléem’s first category.

35. “Rabelaisienne”: a particularly freighted adjective in Bethléem. By the eleventh edition of *Romans à lire*, it is applied to forbidden or cautionary writers such as Hugues Rebelle, Jean Richepin, Charles Monselet, Louis Pergaut, and Antonin Seuhl. The rolling back of the starting point of the survey from 1800 to 1500 in the ninth and later editions would appear to have been made to capture the works of Rabelais, forbidden by the *Index*.
36. Bethléem 1905, 115–78.
37. In *Les Pièces de théâtre*, Bethléem recommends as suitable for all audiences D’Ennery and Verne’s stage adaptations of *Les Enfants du capitaine Grant* (“très intéressant”), *Michel Strogoff*, and *Le Tour du monde en 80 jours*. He rejects their *Voyage à travers l’impossible* as “sans intérêt” (Bethléem 1910, 117–19).
38. Bethléem 1905, 179–228.
39. Bethléem refers here to Coppée’s reconversion to Catholicism, documented in *La Bonne Souffrance* (1875) — which Bethléem praises — and to Coppée’s later extreme nationalism and leading role among the anti-Dreyfusards.
40. Bethléem 1905, 229–300. From the 3rd edition onward this category was retitled “Romans d’adolescents ou récits, nouvelles, romans divers qui peuvent être généralement laissés entre toutes les mains.”
41. “O Spring, youth of the year.” Bethléem’s source may be Claudio Monteverdi’s madrigal (1592) based on lines from Giovanni Battista Guarini’s 1590 play *Il pastor fido* (Act III, sc. 1), but variants of the Italian phrase are common. I am indebted to Mary Watt for her help in identifying the source of this line.
42. Bethléem 1905, 301–10.
43. Another indication of Bethléem’s tolerance for brutality so long as a story’s libidinal registers are occluded. See, for example, Zipes 2002 on reappraisals of the extreme violence of many of the Grimm Brothers’ tales.
44. In fact *Cinq semaines* was grandparented into the series after *Hatteras*, the first true volume of the *Voyages*.
45. The cited line is from Junia’s complaint to Nero, Act 2, Sc. 3.
46. The revised entry on Verne is identical in the 10th and 11th editions.
47. Cf. Mollier 2014, 9, 201. The 1921 essay is reproduced in full below, in an appendix.
48. Bethléem would, one imagines, have been better satisfied with Hetzel’s revision of the final line of Nemo’s deathbed speech — “Dieu et patrie!” — than with Verne’s original text, the unbowed and unrepentant “Indépendance!” (II, xvii). On the revision of Nemo’s deathbed speech, cf., among others, Butcher 2015, 341–44, and Evans 2001.
49. Context is all. Beneath Lardélec’s byline for this essay, there appears without commentary a paragraph-long excerpt from the appalling anti-Semitic forgery *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. The excerpt decries French journalism’s secret compact with the Freemasons, which “no editor has the courage to reveal” to his readers (291). Other issues of *Revue* during this period include similar marginal excerpts from the *Protocols*.
50. “La pieuse enfant tomba à genoux, s’écriant: ‘Mon Dieu, que votre monde est beau!’” (ch. XVII).
51. I am grateful to Alex Kirstukas for reminding me that Verne’s working title for *Maître du monde* was: “Maître après Dieu.”
52. II, xv. This scene, of the self-asserting, self-aggrandizing secular hero, is the opposing pole in the *Voyages* to Nell’s religious ecstasy before the beauty of God’s creation.
53. Also in a cryptozoological vein, *Les Histoires de Jean-Marie Cabidoulin* is absent.
54. Founded by Jesuits Henri Leroy and Gustave Desbuquois in Reims 1903, *l’Action populaire* was a propaganda initiative originally sanctioned by Pope Pius X to promote traditionalist Catholic values among the working classes, by way of regularly-published brochures on

practical aspects of Catholic life and the initiative's periodical, *Le Mouvement social*. An early advocate of "social Catholicism," despite its impeccably orthodox positions on doctrinal questions l'A.P.'s close relations with Christian syndicalism brought it under suspicion from traditionalist elements of the Church.

55. The BNF reports very little information on Ville, who appears to have been the author of several adventure novels published in the 1890s through the 1930s. See [http://data.bnf.fr/12134718/leon\\_ville/](http://data.bnf.fr/12134718/leon_ville/).
56. Verne's degree of adherence to the predominant positions of the Church is difficult to sort out. By all evidence he was exposed within his family and during his youth to traditionalist beliefs. His father Pierre's extremity in religious matters is well-established. Verne's early education, typical for a boy of the rising bourgeoisie before the Jules Ferry reformations, was mostly in seminary schools with reputations for doctrinal conservatism. The state-run Collège Royal (Nantes) where Verne earned his baccalaureate, was derided by Pierre Verne for its "Voltaireanism" (Butcher 2006) but seems to have been a more nuanced environment than this criticism suggests; its alumni included both General Boulanger and Georges Clemenceau (!) Though he cannot be called a Catholic novelist — in the sense of consciously promoting Catholic values in his fiction — Verne's commitment to Catholicism is never suspect in the novels. Yet there are indications that, especially later in life, he moved away from doctrinal positions we might associate with Bethléem. Families in Verne are generally constituted on a conventional model, but there are a number of unconventional formulations and instances of something like female self-determination. Pietism in Verne is mostly, transparently formulaic (when it was not outright added to his texts by Hetzel); religious debate is usually absent. Verne's skepticism of colonial power and its abuses, and his fierce criticism of slavery, are conditioned somewhat by a soft racism that insists on unbreachable divides between white Europeans and racial others. And there is Verne's plain anti-semitism, though it was never so cartoonishly ferocious as the Abbé's. The best evidence that Verne perhaps did not identify with much of the traditionalist agenda is the fact that Bethléem appears to have found most of his novels suspicious on this account.
57. For example, the entry in the eleventh edition on Rosny *aîné*, who published up until his death in 1940, is more than three times as long as his entry in the second edition.
58. We may recall that even so respectful a reader as Roland Barthes also complained of Verne's mania for plenitude (Barthes 1973).
59. The August 1921 *Revue des lectures* reprints a story from *La Démocratie Nouvelle* of June 30, under the title "Ce qu'on lit," summarizing the circulation of popular fiction in public libraries in Paris and the provinces. In nearly all cases, Verne's works are reported to be the most often requested by library patrons (484–85).
60. "Les Aventures de Gavroche," text by Victor Darlay and Gaston Marot, starring Alexandre Arquillière (Burck), and Hamilton (Gavroche). (See [http://data.bnf.fr/41290074/les\\_aventures\\_de\\_gavroche\\_spectacle\\_1909/](http://data.bnf.fr/41290074/les_aventures_de_gavroche_spectacle_1909/)). In 1876, Verne and D'Ennery's version of *Le Tour du monde en 80 jours* had played to packed houses on the same stage.
61. Perhaps Bethléem (?) is thinking here of the world-tilting scenario of *Sans dessus dessous*, less extreme but equally calamitous, than the literal world-*splitting* scenario of Spitz's novel?
62. I am grateful to Volker Dehs, Arthur B. Evans, Jeanne Ewert, and Marie-Hélène Huet for their insightful readings of early drafts of this essay.
63. Possibly Bethléem confuses Jules Verne's son, Michel (1861–1925) with his nephew Maurice (1862–1947), or more likely with the novelist, playwright, left-leaning journalist, and Secretary General of the Folies-Bergère, Maurice Verne (1889–1943). The eleventh edition of *Romans à lire* (p. 399) includes an equivocal entry on the latter Maurice Verne, noting that his novels "peuvent être lus par des personnes averties." There are no entries in *Romans à lire* on Michel Verne. The extent of the younger Verne's editorial interventions in his father's posthumously published works was not known at the time of Bethléem's death in 1940.

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