



Jules Verne
Twenty Thousand Leagues
under the Seas

A new translation by William Butcher

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JULES VERNE

The Extraordinary Journeys
*Twenty Thousand Leagues
under the Seas*



Translated with an Introduction and Notes by

WILLIAM BUTCHER

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TWENTY THOUSAND LEAGUES UNDER THE SEAS

I

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INTRODUCTION

If you ask people for the name of probably the world's most translated writer,¹ the popular writer to have increased in reputation the most over more than a century, you will get some surprising answers. If you further enquire as to the identity of the only Frenchman apart from Napoleon to have achieved universal renown, some odd looks may be forthcoming.

Verne, Nemo, and the *Nautilus* have entered the world's collective unconscious; but the only visible signs of their existence, dragged up from the murky depths, are invariably confused. These apologies for a reputation need to be put out of their misery. Thus Verne cannot be considered a science-fiction writer; he did not wish to write for children; the poor style often associated with him is not his. And Captain Nemo does not speak with a mid-Atlantic drawl.

In order to understand how such ideas came to life, primarily in America and Britain, we should start by briefly examining the author's life and the publishing history of *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Seas*.

Jules Verne was born and brought up in Nantes, studied and worked in Paris, and spent the rest of his life in Amiens. His first known foreign visits were to Scotland in 1859 and Norway in 1861, experiences which deeply marked him. From about 1870 Verne displayed an increasing pessimism about many of his early enthusiasms, with the admiration for technology replaced by apprehension on social and political issues, and with the 'Anglo-Saxons', the heroes of his first novels, sometimes now the villains. The Franco-Prussian War may have been one of the catalysts for the change. *The Chancellor* (written in about 1870, but published in 1873) was the clear turning-point; but signs of uneasiness are already visible in *Twenty Thousand Leagues*.

At the beginning, recognition for the series of the *Extraordinary Journeys* was slow in the English-speaking countries. The first novels to be translated appeared after Verne had already written most of his best work. It must have been disappointing for the author of *The British*

¹ On a cumulative basis since 1850; Unesco's *Index Translationum* lists the number of new translations appearing worldwide each year.

at the North Pole to see this book unavailable in Britain itself. But when the works did begin to appear, it might have been better if they had not.

The books were sometimes radically altered. The translators, frequently anonymous, were not always fully competent in French. In the process, they produced some wonderful howlers: the hero visits the 'disagreeable territories of Nebraska' or 'jumps over' part of an island; reference is made to 'prunes' or 'Galilee'; and Napoleon dies broken-hearted in 'St Helen's'. Verne himself wrote of 'the Badlands', 'blowing up', 'plums', 'Galileo', and 'St Helena'. If we examine in particular *Twenty Thousand Leagues* (written in 1868-9, published in 1869-70), there have been thousands of editions of this work, possibly making the English version the most frequently published novel of all time. Lewis Mercier's 1872 translation was typical of the time: adequate on 'style' but extremely weak on details. Also, about 22 per cent of the novel was missing! Since then, the majority of editions have reproduced Mercier, many of them making further minor changes, unfortunately without referring back to the French.

There has also traditionally been a low level of critical commentary on the *Extraordinary Journeys* in the English-speaking world, sometimes the result of monolinguals studying these inaccurate translations. Nor has the basic textual work been done, in either English or French. The different original editions of *Vingt mille lieues sous les mers* have hardly been compared; to date no one has studied the manuscripts in detail; and there is no established text, meaning that we should be wary even of modern French editions.

Twenty Thousand Leagues is Verne's most ambitious work in terms of themes and psychology. (Readers who do not wish to learn details of the plot are advised to omit the rest of the Introduction.) It recounts a circumnavigation of the globe by submarine, with Nemo ('nobody' in Latin) as the sombre hero. It includes many dramatic episodes: the underwater burial of a dead crewman, an attack by Papuan natives, a battle with giant squid, a passage under the Antarctic ice-cap, a farewell to the sun at the South Pole, and a vision among the underwater ruins of Atlantis. But much of the interest comes from the intense if distant relationship between Nemo and his passengers, Dr Aronnax, Conseil, and Ned Land, and from the anguish gripping the captain. Nemo seems to have an unhealthy interest in shipping lanes and vessels in distress. On one occasion he imprisons Aronnax in a cell. Further

mysteries are the portraits in his room of nationalist figures and of a woman and children, later revealed to be his murdered family. At the end of the novel the captain is attacked by an unidentified ship, and responds by sinking it. The three guests escape as the *Nautilus* fights the Maelstrom.

Verne's mastery of the genre is demonstrated by the interlocking and superimposing literary devices and the many vibrant episodes presenting new settings. The number of themes is also impressive: technology of course, biology, the study of the seas, exploration of unknown areas, life on desert islands, history, biblical themes, mythical ideas, even international politics. The characters, too, are more complex than in many of Verne's works.

Inspiration

Much of the inspiration for *Twenty Thousand Leagues* came from Verne's own experience. He was born on an island in a major slave port; and while preparing the book he consulted his brother Paul, a retired naval officer. In the late spring of 1868 he bought a fishing-boat of 8 or 10 tons, which he claimed to use as a study while sailing along the Normandy and Brittany coasts. In September he sailed to Gravesend, where he wrote: 'How beautiful [the scenery] is and what fuel for the imagination!' [19 August 1868].²

For two scenes, Nemo's elevated surveying of the ruins of Atlantis and his claiming of the new continent of Antarctica, the author may be drawing inspiration from the King's Park in Edinburgh. On Verne's second day outside France, the volcanic Arthur's Seat dominating the park was the first mountain he had visited. Imbued as he was with Scott and Romanticism, in love with this exotic land, he generated a sublime vision from the classical and marine view. Equally surprisingly, Nemo's plumbing, furnishings, and general life-style in the heart of the raging depths may be drawn from Verne's visit a couple of days later to a rain-swept but luxurious 'château' in Oakley, Fife. Verne seems indeed to be hinting at the Scottish source when he shows Nemo at

² The correspondence cited—in abbreviated form—follows Olivier Dumas, Piero Gondolo della Riva, and Volker Dehs, eds, *Correspondance inédite de Jules Verne et de Pierre-Jules Hetzel, 1863-1886*, vol. 1 (Geneva: Slatkine, 1999); the dates they attribute are sometimes subject to caution.

the organ, 'only us[ing] the black keys, giving his melodies an essentially Scottish tonality'—in *Journey to England and Scotland* (1859–60), Verne's friend 'Amelia', a young hostess who guides and enchants him, had similarly recommended 'play[ing] using only the black keys' (ch. 24).

Verne's other sources are wide-ranging, taken from literature, science, geography, and history, and are often openly acknowledged. In 1865 the novelist George Sand suggested to Verne that the sea was the one area of the globe where his 'scientific knowledge and imagination' had not yet been put to use. There is clear influence from the Bible, Hugo, Michelet, Scott, and Poe. *Moby-Dick* presents many affinities in details and plot (see Appendix 2: Sources, which includes full references).

The most important non-literary sources are the scientists and popularizers Maury, Figuiet, Mangin, Agassiz, and Renard. Many of the naturalists *Twenty Thousand Leagues* quotes, including Buffon, Gratiolet, Lacépède, Milne-Edwards, d'Orbigny, Quatrefages, and Tournefort, were researchers at the Museum of Natural History in Paris, like Dr Aronnax. Although the novel cites one contemporary encounter with a giant squid (at the time dismissed by science), an unquoted source, Denys de Montfort, is probably the main origin of the captain's epic battle. The life of Nemo himself may be based partly on Gustave Flourens, a French scientist and international freedom-fighter.

Many commentaries have concentrated on the originality of the *Nautilus*, but it should be emphasized that Verne's technology was not innovative. The captain's presentation of his vessel provides more than enough information about its length and girth, but his only explanation of its motive power is in terms of an electricity which is 'not the commonly used sort', multiplied by 'a system of levers'! Submarine craft had in any case been used in the American War of Independence and Civil War; and there were even submarine vessels named *Nautilus*, including one the author must have seen on his visit to the Paris Universal Exposition of 1867. At least three books with titles like *Journey to the Bottom of the Sea* and *The Submarine World* were published in France in 1867–9 alone. So crowded indeed were the deeps that Verne feared being accused of plagiarism.

The novelist himself was categorical: 'I am not in any way the inventor of submarine navigation.' He even claimed he was 'never particularly interested in science', only in creating dramatic stories

in exotic parts. Amongst the tales of submarines, only Verne's has survived—undoubtedly because of the living nature of his text. His originality lies in his unbridled *literary* imagination.

Inception

The book seems to have been planned over a considerable period. The correspondence, predominantly with his lifelong publisher, Jules Hetzel, shows what Verne considers the novel to be about, and reveals his mounting excitement:

I'm also preparing our *Journey under the Waters*, and my brother and I are arranging all the mechanics needed for the expedition. I think we'll use electricity, but it's still not completely decided. (10 August [1866])

After 15 months of abstinence [while writing *Geography of France* (1867)], my brain greatly needs to burst: so much the better for the *Journey under the Waters*, there will be abundance, and I promise to have myself a great time. [29 July 1867]

In about March 1868, Verne began writing his most ambitious book. Over the next few months, his excitement continues to grow at the idea of what he called the 'unknown man' and the 'perfect' subject:

I'm deep in *Journey under the Waters*. | I'm working on it with tremendous pleasure . . . I very much want this machine to be as perfect as possible. [10 March 1868, to his father]

This unknown man must no longer have any contact with humanity . . . He's not on *earth* any more . . . the sea must provide him with everything, *clothing and food* . . . Were the continents and islands to vanish in a new Flood, he'd live the same way, and I beg you to believe that his ark will be a bit better equipped than Noah's . . . I've never held a better thing in my hands. [28 March 1868]

What is difficult is to make things that are highly implausible seem very plausible. [23 July 1868]

Oh the perfect subject, my dear Hetzel, the perfect subject! [11 August 1868]

It is certainly serious, very unexpected, and no one has ever done anything like it before. [14 August 1868]

In addition to the novel as 'machine', we may note the metaphor of what Verne heatedly holds in his hands and the 'abundance' of his textual production. But we can also observe the emphasis on sea-based self-sufficiency and the biblical reference.

In the autumn of that year, Verne submitted the first volume to Hetzel, with the proofs ready at year's end. From the end of April until mid-June 1869, however, the publisher sent a series of harrowing letters about the second volume, very critical especially of the ending.³

The number and severity of the changes the publisher proposed or imposed can be seen by reading the second of the two manuscripts. These complex questions, which go to the very heart of the novel, and which mean that the published version must be considered fundamentally flawed, are studied in the Explanatory Notes and Appendix 1.

The Nautilus

One initial way of coping with the complexity of the novel is simply to study the behaviour of the submarine. Its very freedom and power mean that, to create tension, it must encounter dangers of some sort. Most of the threats to its shiny self-containment fall into four categories: perforation, invasion, immobilization, or suffocation. (Mechanical problems are out of the question. That the hatch might let in water never seems to cross anybody's mind, either.)

Thus it risks rupture by man's most advanced ballistic technology or by massed sperm whales and intrusion by giant squid. The most frequent problem, however, is that the 'cigar-shape' has an uncontrollable desire to slip into passages for which 'it's too big', as Farragut's sailors put it. This enables it to reach its home base via an underwater tunnel and to find the passage connecting the Red Sea to the Mediterranean, and hence to visit the seven seas without retracing its steps. But under the ice-cap its bold thrusting creates dangers, as the submarine manages to get into a tunnel which is not only closed at both ends but shrinking by the hour. In another episode, potentially involving all four dangers, it chooses to pass through the 'most dangerous strait on the globe', duly gets stuck on the rocks, and attracts hundreds of natives.

³ Another irritation was that, after Verne had finished the book, Hetzel casually suggested adding a new volume to increase its length by half, rather like a butcher measuring out sausage. To achieve this, he wrote on 25 April 1869, episodes could easily be added, such as the escape, capture, and reconciliation of one of the guests, an episode involving John Brown (the abolitionist murdered in 1859), or a scene where Nemo could save a few Chinese boys from Chinese pirates and keep one on the *Nautilus*, thus 'cheering things up on board!' Fortunately, the ideas were not implemented.

Getting into so many scrapes does imply that something is going on. At the beginning, when the *Nautilus* keeps exposing itself to ships, rubbing up against them, or even penetrating them, the captain may indeed be drawing attention to his marvellous equipment. But Nemo also has a secret agenda that will become slightly clearer only at the end.

The *Nautilus* conditions the whole structure of the novel. Because of its hothouse atmosphere and Nemo's aversion to setting foot on land, those occasions when he does leave the submarine are all the more heightened. During such episodes, Aronnax has to be there as well, to tell the tale; but Conseil and Ned are often excluded. Typical is Nemo's sudden night-time invitation to visit the underwater realm in diving suits. This poetic adventure is worth studying in detail.

Atlantis

Aronnax is fidgety from the start. He jumps when he hears rain pattering on the surface and feels acutely conscious of his leaden feet crunching a 'bed of bones'. He wonders at the giant furrows on the ocean floor, the distant glow, and the clearings in the petrified forest. His over-excited mind starts imagining castles and cities—even seabed friends for the captain. His photographic vision sees everything in fine black-and-white silhouette and his movements are light: leaping tree trunks, snapping creepers, flying over chasms. Aronnax's exaltation, Nemo's pace, and the imperfect tense produce a strange mood. A metaphor converts the sea back into land, the living into the man-made, tentacles into brush, and crabs and lobsters into suits of armour. After a climb up a volcano, after the vegetable and animal kingdoms have led the way up the Great Chain of Beings, Aronnax again imagines human works.

But an eruption suddenly steals the scene—revealing a glowing sunken city. In an elegiac vision and the longest sentence of the book, teasing glimpses appear of technology and religion, Greece and Tuscany, triremes and temples, even a sea within the sea. All this provides an unusual chance for Nemo and Aronnax to communicate in depth, for although they cannot talk, they do touch, speak through their eyes, and even use the intimate second-person singular form; above all, Nemo uses a convenient piece of chalk and rock-wall to write the briefest of messages: 'ATLANTIS'.

Feverish as he is, Aronnax runs through the whole gamut of legends

about the lost continent. He conjures up, pell-mell, biblical and pre-historic scenes, a land bridge to America, the giant contemporaries of the first man. He conflates geological, biblical, and mythological time to return to the origins where, paradoxically, man was at his most evolved. But he is careful to leave his mark on the living past, subtly smudging the backdrop so as to prove to himself that it is not a dream. The transcendental scene closes with the footlights on a rare relaxed Nemo. He is 'leaning on a mossy stele', as if on his reading desk, contemplating time past, empathetically 'turned to stone' in 'his' landscape. 'Was it here that this strange being came to commune with history and relive ancient life—he who wanted nothing to do with modern times?'

And this is the Verne who has been argued to be a positivist, a scientific apologist, a blind technological anticipator! He is in fact a high Romantic, with his poetic language, nostalgia, and mystical yearning for significance. The grandeur of the novel comes not only from the many 'privileged' locations the submarine takes us to but from its reference to a higher destiny.

Lists

The structure of *Twenty Thousand Leagues* is punctuated—punctured?—by many long lists. Even the paroxysm of Atlantis is interrupted at the vital moment by the eruption of names of authors on the lost continent. The lists apocryphally made the poet Apollinaire exclaim, half in admiration: 'What a style! Nothing but substantives!' There are indeed a bewildering number of common and proper nouns in the novel.

In the carefully crafted opening chapter about the 'monster' terrorizing the seas, ambiguity is already maximized between fact and fiction, persistent legend and documented reports, authorial information and the narrator's misinformation. The lists are similarly a massive importation of real-world documentation, proof that Verne has done his homework, a guarantee of seriousness or plausibility. On another level, nevertheless, they are devoid of significance. A procession of obscure fish hardly advances the plot. Scientific knowledge does not consist merely of the names of scientists, nor exploration, of those of explorers.

Although Verne's lists may no longer have the resonances they had for a contemporary French reader, some do provide an archaeology of

knowledge. The substantives often come from Verne's sources, to which he adds adjectives and context. The resurgence at the South Pole of Nemo's romantic, rebellious ecstasy is again suspended by the quoting of authorities on the question. Complete with date, nationality, and successively greater latitudes, they provide a structured but reductionist history of Antarctica.

Hidden amongst the names of the pro-Atlanteans are allusions to Bailly's notions of a tropical Atlantis at a North Pole heated by exhalations from the Earth's core; and to Malte-Brun, from whom Verne undoubtedly derived the idea of going 'around the world in eighty days'. His passing mention of George Sand may acknowledge an inspiration for the novel; his reference to 'Edom' again points to biblical influence, and thence to a brilliant short story of that title published in 1910 under his name.

Characters

Another way of approaching the complexity of *Twenty Thousand Leagues* is to study the characters themselves. Their number is severely curtailed: apart from the four main protagonists and Captain Farragut, no speaking part survives for more than a paragraph or so. Nor does a single woman feature in the work, apart from Nemo's dead and nameless wife: the painter Rosa Bonheur and a painting of a 'courtesan' were deleted at proof stage. Even the ships' names, including the submarine's, are in masculine mode.

As Roland Barthes has brilliantly noted, Verne's vehicles provide a near-absolute division of the world. On the exterior can be interplanetary space, flowing lava, or murderous savages, but within all is calm, security, food, and—in *Twenty Thousand Leagues*—the world's 12,000 best books. Nemo, Aronnax, Conseil, and Ned inhabit a closed universe. As in Pinter or Beckett, the submarine is the *in camera* locus for the intensive interaction of the four possible threesomes and the five pairs: only Nemo and Conseil never communicate with each other.

Verne's first-person narrators seem shadowy sorts of people. They are generally middle-class and comfortably off, a similar age to the author, and long-term travellers without family or attachments. Most come from hard-nosed professions like journalism or science, with their work their publication. They exist to narrate, and narrate to exist.

Aronnax is no exception. He is practical, serious, cautious, detached, unimaginative, characterized indeed by what he himself calls his 'cowardice' and 'complete negativity'. Or, as Nemo tells him, 'you only see snags and obstacles'. The doctor mainly serves to organize knowledge, to ask naïve questions, to act as a foil, and to transcribe Conseil's classifications. Even his manservant is sometimes livelier, with his acrobatic ability to ascend and descend the biological hierarchy; he alerts his master when unduly hypocritical or intellectually lazy.

If nothing else, Aronnax is systematic. He is an adept of Linnaeus's binomial taxonomy, with its 'phyla, divisions, classes, sub-classes, orders, families, genera, sub-genera, species, and varieties'. His deductions follow sequences of branching alternatives, separating the known knowns from the unknown unknowns, order from chaos. He considers many objects whose shape is a branching 'arborescence': spiders, squid, and especially coral, characterized by its multiple 'branches', 'ramifications', and 'arborizations'. His science, in other words, has the same positivistic structure as many of the objects it studies.

Just as Aronnax's lists attempt to cram everything in, so his classifications go down to the finest detail. Everything inside is neatly labelled, as in Nemo's museum; but the unintelligible or uncontrollable are banished. His systems give up in panic on encountering the new. The good doctor exhaustively picks over the meagre details of Nemo's visible life, often revising his perceptions, but cannot answer any of the essential questions about him. What he lacks is the ability to connect, to go beyond. Creativity is absent from his reproductive, convergent mind-set. He is almost schizophrenic in his attempt to abolish the murky subconscious and to conceal his lack of invention. Perhaps his real problem is a fear of writer's block?

Aronnax exploits his position as narrator. Thus he only notices the body being carried on the crewmen's shoulders after two hours underwater; and he does not spot the portraits of Nemo's heroes and family until his second and third visits to his bedroom. In his discussion with Ned about the monster, the uneducated sailor is a model of accuracy while the scientist's affirmations are dubious. The naturalist is conditioned by his immediate impressions, which he does not correct when he records his notes or writes them up. An unreliable narrator is an unusual feature in the popular literature of the nineteenth century. Many readers will give Aronnax the benefit of doubt—but may have to think again before the end of the novel.

The plot may leave the reader confused on first reading. All information is filtered through Aronnax's first-person narration, and although his observations attempt to be scrupulously exact, his forecasts are invariably wildly out. Many of the events of the novel are indeed beyond the ken of a naïve bachelor from a sheltered background. The episodes of Atlantis, the underwater burial, and the Maelstrom are typical in being misinterpreted by him until nearly the end—when it is too late to study the evidence. The central enigma, above all, remains unsolved, for we never know Nemo's real name or nationality, his past life, or his reason for going round sinking ships—apart, that is, from self-defence.

Verne thus has the best of both worlds. Aronnax's stolidity lends credibility to his fantastic descriptions. But his unreliable interpretations conceal the captain's nature until the end. Nemo's wish not to be 'judged' is respected, for we only see him tête-à-tête with Aronnax and so never have an objective basis for assessing him.

Nemo

What we do know about the captain is that he shares many of the characteristics of Verne's heroes, who emulate Renaissance man in the variety of their intellectual, physical, and cultural qualities. Evans neatly sums these up as: 'courage, aesthetic sensitivity, idealism, devotion to justice, humor, thirst for glory, compassion, love of freedom, and "grandeur" in general'.⁴ But Nemo and other heroes also have paranoid and self-destructive tendencies: abrupt withdrawals alternating with impassioned speeches or cold anger.

From the beginning, conflict is probable. Aronnax, Conseil, and Land arrive uninvited on the submarine, indeed as part of an attempt to destroy it. As Nemo explains, his only choices are to betray the secret of his life, throw them back into the sea, or take them in for ever. One reason for his decision is that he already knows Aronnax from his learned work, *The Mysteries of the Ocean Depths* (c. 1865²). But he appears disappointed by the man behind the book. In any case, the two have opposing interests: Nemo's, to conceal information about his mission; Aronnax's, to gather it for his next book.

⁴ Arthur B. Evans, *Jules Verne Rediscovered: Didacticism and the Scientific Novel* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), 75.

The Frenchman gets off on the wrong foot. Nemo intones: 'Our voyage of underwater exploration begins at this precise moment.' Aronnax (or perhaps Hetzel) replies: 'May God protect us!' The remark is unflattering for the submarine, untactfully religious—and results in the captain taking his leave. Nemo will repeat his sharp exit after his ardent speech about an under-sea utopia, and indeed whenever his guest appears lacking in understanding.

Aronnax apparently embodies Nemo's social life, for the captain seldom goes out—and Conseil and Ned never come in. His only external contacts seem to be wordless signs to a diver, dreams of launching a message-in-a-bottle, and violent interchanges with passing ships. Outside his submarine he is only too aware of humanity's depredations and unprovoked attacks; within his bedroom he appears anguished, lost in mathematical calculations or memories of his heroes or family. Even on the platform Nemo is less than welcoming, perhaps because it is part of his workplace or because Conseil and Ned are often there. Although Aronnax visits him in his room, with unfortunate results, the captain almost never goes to his and rarely seeks out the naturalist's company.

One exception is when Aronnax is about to escape, having already put on his coat. On this occasion Nemo takes deliberate pleasure in spinning out the conversation, leading even the doctor to wonder whether his plans have been discovered. The captain chooses this precise occasion not only to reveal his financial contributions to the 'oppressed races' and especially the Cretans, but also to invite him to visit Atlantis—which persuades Aronnax to stay after all.

Stretching out on the sofa is Nemo's only relaxed posture. The huge ship's library is the only place where he and Aronnax can freely meet. Unlike later heroes, Nemo has none of Verne's books, despite his collection of 'the modern and ancient masters': indeed, there are virtually no nineteenth-century novelists. The library—the true control room of the submarine—may contain hints of Verne's father's study or of Hetzel's bookshop in the Latin Quarter; in any case it symbolizes established authority. Hetzel was himself a well-known writer, older than Verne. The presence within Nemo's library of Aronnax's volumes reflects this complex relationship. It also focuses two connected tensions: change and stasis; and reproduction and creativity.

The yellowing newspapers are a sign of the problem. Like the prehistoric but nineteenth-century cavern in *Journey to the Centre of the*

Earth, Nemo's library is both brand-new and classical, contemporary and *passé*. New books are of course no longer arriving. Nemo claims that the concept of 'modern artist' no longer exists for him: they are out of time or else 'two or three thousand years old'; he is an exile in time or a time-traveller. His decision to halt his world is a conscious one: 'I would like to believe that humanity has thought or written nothing since then' (I 11—Part One, chapter 11). The captain uses 'you' to mean Aronnax or France but also for 'terrestrial' or 'living' objects. Everything is perfect in his library, the perfection of death. His timeless existence means that he too is 'dead', as he himself implies. And the tragedy of the living-dead is that, although eternally young, they are prone, like Rider Haggard's *She*, to topple over into exponentially accelerating decay.

The library is stranded uneasily between the 1865 newspapers and an adolescent or artistic eternity. The only disruption to the sterile stasis would be by creative works. Aronnax asks Nemo whether he is an 'artist', who seems to reply in the affirmative, but then paraphrases it as being a mere collector: creation is tantamount to accumulation. But in fact Nemo does write. For a start, he annotates Aronnax's book, but this was perhaps done in the past. As in a Beckett endgame, however, the slightest sign of change must be sought, the most round-about route out of the existential cul-de-sac. The notes may form an embryo of Nemo's story or even of Aronnax's next book, for both men eventually admit to writing first-person sea tales. Both authors look as though they might have no readers (except each other?); both books may indeed end up in the sea whence they came; and neither volume can admit to its title or its author's name. Writing is a secretive, even shameful activity.

Other aspects of Nemo's character develop more slowly. Although most of the incidents initially puzzle Aronnax, many are in fact connected: hindsight (and a good memory) are required to put the plot back together again at the end.

More of Nemo's deeds are going to be influenced by Aronnax's presence than he will admit. One example is the decision to open the hatches when the submarine is grounded and covered with aggressive-looking Papuans. The result, predictably, is an invasion, soon repelled by administering an electric shock. But there is little reason to open the hatches so soon before leaving—apart from a wish to impress the Frenchman. The scene is more surprising when juxtaposed with

Aronnax's pompous but humane remarks about merely retaliating against 'savages'. It anticipates the killing at the end of Part Two, which in turn echoes the incidents with the liners in the opening chapter. 'A pure accident,' says Nemo of the collision with the *Scotia*. Possibly, but he omits to account for those with the *Moravian* and the *Etna*.

Equally unclear is Nemo's attitude towards Aronnax. He often ignores his presence; and at the end knocks a telescope out of his hand. Aronnax decides that he is not the object of the hatred, on the debatable basis that Nemo is not looking at him. Common sense will tell us that when confronted with an unwelcome guest, a man without friends or intellectual equals is likely to oscillate between extremes, that any apparent indifference may be feigned. On the other hand, there are occasions when the captain does seem unaware of the naturalist; and his last words, 'God almighty! Enough! Enough!', sound sincere enough. But does Nemo dislike his guest enough to wish his death? If we think Nemo is aware after all of the evasion plans, is it impossible that the captain hopes his captives will go, but chooses for them the spot 'from which no ship has ever been able to escape'?

The ultimate mysteries, carefully built up in the episode when Aronnax is secretly drugged, are the motive for Nemo's attacks and the nationalities of his adversaries. Revenge may possibly be at work, but in the published version the rest of the evidence is inconclusive.

Nemo thus remains an enigmatic figure—we do not even know who he eats with. His chosen crew reflect him in being anonymous, mute, repressed. Only at the end do we discover that these blank, interchangeable ciphers actively support Nemo's campaign. But it is still not clear why many different nationalities are apparently represented on board.

In sum, we know very little about Nemo. In an interview in 1903 Verne described him as 'a misanthropist', and, in a letter in 1894, as 'confining himself in his [*Nautilus*]'; but this does not get us much further. What determines his route? Why has he not visited either Pole before? Does he try to influence his depiction in Aronnax's ongoing book?

Like the number of Lady Macbeth's children, questions as to Nemo's nature and the meaning of the novel are virtually unanswerable, because of the narrator's very presence on board. As with a married couple, Aronnax and Nemo's behaviour cannot be separated out: each action is modified by those of the other half, each variable in the interactive

equation is fed back in, each conclusion seems undermined by its complementary opposite. Narrator and narratee are in symbiosis. Nemo-as-seen-by-Aronnax cannot be broken down.

Many of the enigmas of course serve to displace the author's unanswered questions on to the characters. What seems probable is that Verne himself feels torn between the captain and his guest. He identifies with Aronnax in his logical and systematic aspects, but with Nemo in his imagination, energy, and freedom. Equally probable is that the clash of personalities reflects the slightly incestuous relationship between Verne and Hetzel. The intense but secretive writing activities on board the submarine ultimately result in an overabundance of manuscripts, proofs, and letters flying forth between the two. Hetzel's blue pencil may be connected with Aronnax's literalness and 'realism', but his exile in Belgium may correspond to Nemo's political idealism.

The Question of Nationalities

Like Phileas Fogg, who flies over France without a single mention, the submarine crosses the Mediterranean without giving it a single glimpse. Then in another flash we are transported past Verne's beloved northern France. The only indication, itself ambiguous, is: 'we were passing near the mouth of the English Channel' (II 22). But even this short remark is unusual, because Verne never depicts France or its surroundings in his novels published with Hetzel.⁵

Admittedly, Aronnax climbs aboard the *Abraham Lincoln* with the thought of heading to his native country; Nemo goes so far as to mention 'the ten billion francs of France's debts' (I 13); the Marquesas and the Gambier group are described as French, although Aronnax hardly sees them. Certainly metropolitan France is mentioned several times in the novel, but as a distant past or an impossible dream.

This absence is linked to another, that of the nationality of Nemo and his crew, the secret key to his campaign and his exile from inhabited lands. In the novel many clues are strewn, which however point in every direction.⁶

⁵ Among the rare exceptions is chapter 2 of *The Begum's Fortune* (1879), whose original manuscript was not by Verne.

⁶ In *The Mysterious Island* (1874), Verne, under great pressure from Hetzel, claims that the captain has been Indian all along, but the idea simply does not make sense at this stage.

The exception is the climax. In the published version of II 20, the *Nautilus* passes Land's End to port. It eventually locates the *Vengeur* and Nemo declaims the glory of the scuttled ship's cause. In the waters west of Nantes, a 'great warship with a ram: an armour-plated double-decker' (II 21) attacks the *Nautilus* for no apparent reason, which lures it eastwards. Nemo intones 'I am the law, I am the justice! . . . I am the oppressed, and they are the oppressor!'—then sends his submarine clean through the vessel. As a horrified Aronnax watches the sailors' death-throes, the chapter closes.

The doctor belatedly raises the question of the warship's nationality. The position of the sinking seems significant; the captain himself attributes the ship to 'an accursed nation' (II 21), appearing amazed that the doctor does not realize which one. Indeed, the only warships in the world to comply with this description are of French construction and nationality, with an instantly recognizable shape.

If the attackers are French, what nationality would Nemo be? At the end of the 1860s, the Franco-British wars are a distant memory. Perhaps the obvious opponents of Napoleon III's Empire are Frenchmen, among them famous personalities, like Hugo, Hetzel, or Verne himself. In sum, the closing chapters indirectly imply the same nationality for the captain.

Nemo claims to know French, English, German, and Latin, in that order; his declamatory soliloquies are in the language of Racine. His books, fiction or otherwise, as well as his musical taste and his quotations and allusions, are predominantly French. He studied in France, among other places. He emphasizes the existence of the Paris meridian; the crew member lifted aloft by the giant squid cries spontaneously in French. The captain seems to be especially interested in the French navy at the Battle of Vigo Bay; his sympathy for the *Vengeur* is evident; the submarine's route seems to be designed to culminate in the Channel.

In sum, Verne's intention in the published version of the book could be twofold. On the one hand, according to its description, the frigate is French, as is perhaps Nemo himself.

But, on the other hand, by scattering contradictory clues throughout the novel, Verne tries to avoid any clear identification of nationality and thus create a stateless, or universal, captain, like his name and his ship. His life is devoted to the last areas without a master, perhaps without God, in any case without a flag—except his own.

Conclusion

Exile, intertextuality, atemporality. The 'unknown man' yearns for both the future and the past, but stands outside his own period. The captain's technology is well in advance of its time, enabling him to discover a new continent or two. His social vision seems futuristic, his causes espouse the tide of history. He is anti-slavery, internationalist, individualist, rationalist, against entrenched privilege and intellectual sloth. But if he is so much of a modern, why does a whiff of nostalgia still hang about him, an air of things we shall not see again? Part of the answer may lie in the all-embracing nature of his talents, but also in his unwillingness to use social means to effect change, his reluctance to get involved. Even at the time, his mysterious cause could be seen to be a losing battle, his way of life a dead end.

But part of the answer may also lie in our own ahistorical perspective, our post-everything-ness. We no longer believe that an individual can change the world, or even defy humanity for long. The *Nautilus* would have been reverse-engineered or turned into a tourist attraction. Nemo is a prisoner of his era. He has a Quixotic and classical soul, but we feel we have got past all that. We believe we have absorbed the Byronic and '68 rebellions: we are all post-revolutionaries now, at least in stylistic externals.

Nemo's principled refusal to set foot on the inhabited continents exemplifies the *Extraordinary Journeys*. The series can only prosper by visiting virgin territories; but the quicker they are deflowered, the sooner the subject will be exhausted. *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Seas* occupies the fatal point of no return: the dark continent and the North Pole have already been done, snapshots taken of the dark side of the moon. The ocean deeps and the South Pole form the ultima Thule of a certain mode of being and writing. The *Nautilus* can only be the end of the line.

Nemo is the last outlaw. He is in a geographico-historical cul-de-sac, and the absolutism of his fight cannot be permanent. He is suspended between George Stephenson and R. L. Stevenson, born too late or too early, post-Romantic but pre-modern. The captain's oceanic freedom is a mortgage on things to come. Technologically-inspired rebellion forms a rapidly shrinking option for meridionals in the 1870s, but Nemo's passion for music and the sea are surely destined to be eternal.

NOTE ON THE TEXT AND TRANSLATION

FOR this edition the translation has been systematically revised. The Introduction, Note on the Text and Translation, and many of the Explanatory Notes in the original 1998 edition have largely been retained; but the Chronology, Select Bibliography, and Appendices have been updated or replaced.

The Three Main Editions

Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Seas first appeared in fortnightly instalments in the *Magasin d'éducation et de récréation* (*MÉR*) from 20 March 1869 to 20 June 1870, with the subtitle 'Submarine Tour of the World' ('Tour du monde sous-marin'). Its structure seems to reflect its initial publication; however, Verne complained that the novel was 'fragmented' by the serialization, which often changed length. What is more, Hetzel used the pretext of the juvenile audience of the *MÉR* to impose changes to the text.¹

The *MÉR* publication of 1869 had a dedication on the first page, which was never reprinted. Although signed 'Jules Verne', it is rather patronizing, and Hetzel may have contributed to it.

The first volume of the first book edition, 18mo without illustrations, was placed on sale on 28 October 1869, but the second one only on 13 June 1870. The large octavo edition, with 111 illustrations by Riou and de Neuville, appeared on 16 November 1871.

Astonishingly, there has never been an attempt to explicitly identify and publish the canonical Hetzel edition, in the sense of the text most revised by the author (and astonishingly, this is probably not in fact the celebrated octavo edition, the basis for all modern publications).²

¹ In the *MÉR* of 5 September 1867 it was falsely announced that 'M. Jules Verne is putting the more or less final touches to a book which will be the most extraordinary of all, a *Journey under the Waters*. Six months spent beside the sea, in total retreat, have been necessary for the conscientious and dramatic writer to collect together the materials for this curious book.'

² The occurrences of typographic symbols [in the second manuscript, to indicate the ends of successive typesetters' work, invariably correspond to the ends of lines in the octavo edition, which shows that the first proofs were also in the octavo format. The *MÉR* and 18mo editions, although published first, must therefore have been

Again, there has been no systematic initiative to identify mistakes in the various editions, often in the spelling, but occasionally touching on the syntax.

The Present Translation

The text here normally adheres to the Presses Pocket one (1991), which generally follows the 1871 edition.³ This translation is an entirely original one, benefiting from the most recent scholarship on Verne and closely following the French text.

There are perhaps 2,000 rare words and proper names in the French edition, but more than 100 are incorrect. The policy here is to amend clear spelling mistakes in real-world names and dictionary words, plus simple arithmetic mistakes—in other words, changes that can easily be made within a single word or number—often noting such changes. However, substantive information will not be amended, even when clearly erroneous, although generally identified in the notes.

Verne often Gallicizes proper names and words. Thus he (or his editor) writes 'the *Castillan*' for 'the *Castilian*', 'the *Albermale*' for 'the *Albermarle*', 'oaze' for 'ooze', or 'ice-blinck' for 'ice-blink'. Even some of the French terms he uses have not been located, such as 'déponté' ('with its cover off'); others seem to be erroneous, such as 'crécelles' ('screechings') for 'crécerelles' ('kestrels').

Geographical Information

Verne is not always consistent, using for example 'Bourbon' and 'Réunion' for the same island. In many cases obsolete names have been replaced here.⁴

produced from the descendants of these proofs—and as a result are often more intensively corrected.

³ Although modern French editions have invariably followed the illustrated 1871 edition, its text seems on balance slightly inferior to the unillustrated 18mo editions.

⁴ 'Propontis' by 'the Sea of Marmara', 'the Asphaltite Sea' by 'the Dead Sea', 'the Sandwich Islands' by 'Hawaii', 'New Holland' by 'Australia', 'Viti' by 'Fiji', 'the New Hebrides' by 'Vanuatu', 'Lazarev Island' by 'Matahiva', 'Clermont-Tonnerre' by 'Reao', 'the Friendly Islands' by 'Tonga', 'Navigators Islands' by 'Samoa', and 'Edo' by 'Tokyo'; but not for instance 'Ceylon' by 'Sri Lanka'. A relatively traditional spelling system is used.

A number of Verne's names are erroneous, like 'Liarrov' for 'Lyakhov', 'Hadramant' for 'Hadramaut', 'Paramatta' for 'Parramatta', 'Kittan' for 'Kiltan', or 'Arfalxs' for 'Arfak'. This is confirmed by variant spellings (both 'Tikipia' and 'Tikopia') and what must be total misreadings, such as 'Captain Bell on the *Minerve*' for 'Captain Bellingshausen on the *Mirny*'.

Despite emphasizing the political importance of the difference between the Paris and Greenwich meridians (I 14), Verne often uses one or the other indiscriminately. In any case many of the coordinates quoted are approximate or simply wrong, such as those for Fiji and Vanuatu (I 19). Other information is occasionally as unreliable. Thus a direction cannot be 'east-north-easterly' and then still 'north-north-east' (I 14-15); the '476-fathom-high Mount Kapogo' (I 19) reaches at most 810 metres; 'Mannar Island, whose rounded shape loomed to the south' (II 3) should probably read 'the north'; 'the eastern point of the Gulf of Carpentaria' (I 23) should read 'western'; and the crater above Nemo's home port is described as '500 or 600 metres high' but then 'not . . . more than 800 feet' (II 10).

Verne says 'The British foot is only 30.40 cm long' (I 1), but this seems to be a slip for 30.48. In any case, he uses both French and British feet and miles. (Perhaps as a result, the depth required to increase underwater pressure by 1 atmosphere is quoted as both '30 feet' and '32'.) He uses leagues 'of four kilometres' (II 7)—French land ones (whereas an English league is three miles, or 4.8 kilometres). No adjustment has been made here to measures, since otherwise the title would become something like *Sixteen Thousand Six Hundred and Sixty-Seven Leagues under the Seas!*

Marine Terminology

Verne often uses the vague term of 'poulpe', corresponding to the obsolete English 'poulp' or 'polyp' and including both squid and octopus. However, the contextual information indicates that he is probably thinking of squid. One exception is when he says that 'Bouyer's squid' has eight, rather than ten, tentacles: a perhaps understandable slip, for the animal was not even recognized by scientists at the time.

The long lists of names of marine life in *Twenty Thousand Leagues (20T)* are a translator's nightmare. The lists are occasionally mixed up without regard for habitat; many of the names quoted are Latin ones,

but Gallicized to some degree. They also contain some spelling mistakes.⁵ Spelling occasionally even varies within the same passage, with both 'hyales' and 'hyalles' ('hyales'), 'pirapèdes' and 'pyrapèdes' ('pirapedas'), and 'coryphèmes' and 'coriphènes' ('coryphènes' or 'dolphin-fish'). In other cases, Verne writes just half the binomial name, for instance 'parus' ('*Pomacanthus paru*' or 'French angelfish'). Sometimes hyphenated names are not really compound: Verne often conjuncts a French version with a learned or foreign variant of the same name, or attaches adjectives like 'American-' simply to mean 'found in America'.

Implausibilities

The text of *20T* contains a number of implausibilities, where the translator and editor has to be especially careful not to further obscure the situation. A select list of textual mysteries might include the following. Why are the *Scotia*'s passengers having 'lunch' at 4.17 p.m.? How do you 'push' someone along when he is floating 'motionless on his back, with arms folded and legs extended'? How do people stay dry on a platform only three feet above the sea? How is Aronnax able to describe his own facial expressions? How does the *Nautilus* manage to remain motionless in the depths using just its inclined planes and the thrust of its propeller? Why does lightning strike fish, and not the much larger metal submarine? What happens to the fragile displays in the salon when the submarine lists dramatically or collides with objects? How are pitching and rolling avoided? Why do Nemo's apartments take up so much space, when his twenty crew members have a living space of 5 by 2 metres? How can the disappearance of footprints in the sand be caused by water pressure? Can a boat that two men are able to remove carry ten people or ship 'one or two tons' of water? How does 'an unbearable sulphurous smell' reach 60 feet

⁵ Thus Verne writes 'gymontes' for 'gymnotes', 'chrysostones' for 'chrysostoses', 'thétyts' for 'Tethys', 'xhantes' for 'xanthes', 'molubars' for 'Mobula', 'albicores' for 'albacores', 'aulostones' for 'aulostomes', 'munérophis' for 'murénophis', 'melanopteron' for 'melanopterus', 'thasards' for 'thazards', 'spinorbis' for 'spirorbis', 'dauphinules' for 'dauphinelles', 'cacouannes' for 'caouannes', 'alariées' for 'araliées', 'Rhodoménie' for 'Rhodyménie', 'pantacrines' for 'pentacrines', 'dorripes' for 'dorippes', 'chrysaores' for '*Chrysaora*', 'Jamettosa' for '*Jamellosa*', 'Cyproea' for '*Cypraea*', '*Laurentia primafetida*' for '*Laurencia pinnatifida*', 'apsiphoroïdes' for '*Aspiphoroides*', and 'phyctallines' and '*Phyctalis*' for '*Phyllactina*' and '*Phyllactis*'.

down? If Nemo loves the sea so much, why does he avoid contact with sea water?

Gagneux also poses a number of pertinent questions. How does the sun shine brightly at 100 metres depth, and how does it produce a rainbow underwater? How does Aronnax hear rain 300 metres down? How does Nemo extract sodium from salt water, which requires a temperature of $3,000^{\circ}\text{C}$? How does a compass work inside a metal hull? How does an 8-metre wide cylinder resist a pressure of 1,600 atmospheres? How do you reverse a submarine at 20 knots through a narrow ice-tunnel? Where does the *Nautilus* find the power required to do 50 knots? Does the 16,000-metre rise in four minutes not equal more than 120 knots? What about the bends? What happens to the inclined planes when the submarine goes clean through the ship? And finally, where are the toilets?

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More than a dozen annotated editions of *20T* have appeared in recent decades; none, however, establishes the text or contains research on the manuscripts.

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¹ All places of publication are London or Paris unless otherwise indicated; publication details are often omitted for pre-modern volumes. Dates of Verne's works are those of the beginning of their first publication, usually in serial form.

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'I am going to sink it.'

'You are not!'

'I am,' he coldly replied. 'Do not take it on yourself to judge me, monsieur.'

French naturalist Dr Aronnax embarks on an expedition to hunt down a sea monster, but discovers instead the *Nautilus*, a self-contained world built by its enigmatic captain. Together Nemo and Aronnax explore the underwater realms of the globe, undergo a transcendental experience amongst the ruins of Atlantis, and plant a black flag at the South Pole. Nemo's mission is finally revealed to be a violent one—and his methods coldly efficient.

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