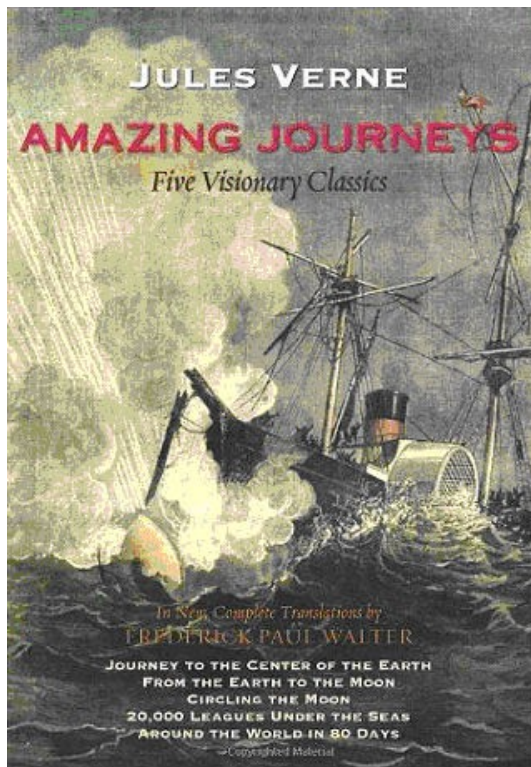


2. Second review

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

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



JULES VERNE
**AMAZING
JOURNEYS**

Five Visionary Classics

In New, Complete Translations by
FREDERICK PAUL WALTER



JOURNEY TO THE CENTER OF THE EARTH
FROM THE EARTH TO THE MOON
CIRCLING THE MOON
20,000 LEAGUES UNDER THE SEAS
AROUND THE WORLD IN 80 DAYS



excelsior editions
AN IMPRINT OF STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK PRESS

The text, as generally known in the English-speaking world, is triply faulty. The novel published by Jules Hetzel in serial form in the *Magasin d'éducation et de récréation* in 1869-70 was not the one the author Jules Verne wished to see: the plot, the hero and the “message” had been radically altered. In addition, since then no attempt has been made to collate the different French editions, to make a reasoned choice as regards the variants and so to produce a text that could stand as canonical. The best-known translations into English, finally, cannot be regarded as adequate, since they fail to correspond sufficiently to the French original or to work as literary texts in their own right.

Perhaps as a result of these infidelities, the public reputation of the novel is, I believe, grossly inaccurate. The main protagonist has been misunderstood, his nationality

distorted, and the conceptual core of the book, its aim according to the author himself, has been falsified.

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

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

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

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

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

In 1993, Miller and Frederick Paul Walter provided a generally very good translation, entitled, like all translations up to 1998, “... under the Sea” (sous les mers). It unfortunately again claims in the subtitle to be “definitive”, and on the cover to “restore[s] nearly one-quarter of the original manuscript”, although containing no manuscript text whatsoever. It reads well and is virtually complete; however, due to a degree of “domestication” and rephrasing, the meaning is not always fully carried over into the English.

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

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

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

The novel above all reads beautifully, and could generally pass as a text originally written in English. A decision is made to systematically use contracted forms, even for the formalist third-person-speaking Conseil. Walter benefits from his scientific background to put some order into the extensive biological terminology and is excellent on nautical terms. Additional information is added where thought useful, for example “the French historian” to

“Michelet”, “old French scientist” to “Bailly”, “such other authors as” to “Byron and Edgar Allan Poe” or “the *Son of Marseilles*” to “the *Marseillais*”. The many gems include lines such as “... our blood frozen in our veins, our nerves numb, dripping with cold sweat as if we were in our death throes!”.

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

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

William Butcher

Frederick Paul Walter (rick1walter@comcast.net) is a reference librarian, scriptwriter, and former vice president of the North American Jules Verne Society. He lives in Albuquerque, has generated many articles and programs on Verne, and also has translated several of his novels for major academic presses, including the popular omnibus *Amazing Journeys: Five Visionary Classics* (Excelsior, 2010).

William Butcher (wbutcher@netvigator.com and <http://www.ibiblio.org/julesverne>) has taught at the École nationale d’administration, researched at the École normale supérieure and Oxford, and is now a Hong Kong property developer. His publications since 1980, notably for Macmillan, St Martin’s and Gallimard, include *Verne’s Journey to the Centre of the Self*, *Jules Verne: The Definitive Biography* and *Salon de 1857*. In addition to a series of Verne novels for OUP, he has recently published a critical edition of *Voyage au centre de la terre*.