

# Mysterious Masterpiece

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‘Edom’: the disturbingly modern short story published after Jules Verne’s death in 1905. Its brilliant rehearsal of the whole *Voyages extraordinaires* in fifty dense pages has generated considerable controversy. But the short story published as ‘L’Eternal Adam’ still remains largely unknown. There has been little examination to date of, for example, the links with *Vingt mille lieues*, the real-world references, the ethnic allusions, the biblical borrowings, or the linguistic and evolutionary ideas. Nor has external evidence as to the tale’s authorship been produced to date. The present essay will accordingly survey the background to ‘Edom’ before attempting to decipher the tale itself.

Until recently Verne studies were dominated by research in French, often carried out by non-literary specialists. Many imaginative and wide-ranging studies have thus been produced, revealing a multi-layered complexity and depth in what was once considered a straightforward corpus. Verne is now amongst the French writers generating the most critical material, in marked contrast with the situation only twenty years ago. What is surprising, nevertheless, is that the most basic extrinsic research has not been carried out. Whereas writers of lesser significance, however measured, have been minutely edited and had their least source investigated, even Verne’s pivotal works still suffer from a lack of detailed exploration. Thus the correspondence has not been systematically collected; not one of the manuscripts of the pre-1905 works has been thoroughly studied to date, let alone published; nor is there available a systematic indication of published variants for any of the novels.<sup>1</sup>

We should not be too surprised, therefore, at the lack of textual information on ‘Edom’. This story of about 13,200 words was first published in *La Revue de Paris* of 1 October 1910 (no. 19), under the title ‘L’Eternel Adam’ and with the subtitle ‘Dans quelque vingt mille ans...’ It was republished by Hetzel *fiils* in the volume *Hier et demain* (1910) with the subtitle now an epigraph and with seven illustrations by Léon Benett. The proofs, edited by Louis Ganderax, *normalien*, are in the Bibliothèque nationale (B. N. n.a.fr. 17000, fo. 1–61), with the amended proofs

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1. Olivier Dumas has published most of Verne’s letters to his family (*Jules Verne* (Lyon, 1988)). The *Bulletin de la Société Jules Verne* (BSJV) has published extracts from the pre-1905 manuscripts, especially the conclusions. The manuscripts are studied in detail in *Around the World in Eighty Days* and *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Seas* (tr. and ed. William Butcher (Oxford University Press, 1995 and 1998)). As another indication of the work yet to be done, the existence and location of a manuscript of *Voyage au centre de la Terre* were unknown until 1995.

*Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Seas* (tr. and annotated Walter James Miller and Frederick Paul Walter (Annapolis, Maryland, 1993)) provides details of some of the published variants. *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* (tr. and ed. William Butcher (Oxford University Press, 1992, revised 1998)) gives full information about the different editions.

An additional obstacle to detailed textual study is the lack of machine-readable versions of Verne’s works, which would aid stylistic analysis and cross-referencing of the large number of proper names across the canon.

generally corresponding to the published versions.<sup>2</sup> The manuscript of 'Edom' was seen by scholars before 1981, but no information about it has been published to date.<sup>3</sup>

In the pre-1978 critical literature on 'Edom', many commentators expressed surprise at its brilliance and density, in contrast with most of the *Voyages* published between 1895 and 1905.<sup>4</sup> Two main explanations were proposed: that Verne's son Michel might have contributed to its composition, or that the novella might date from a more vivacious earlier period and that Verne had held back its publication because of its radical nature. Jean Jules-Verne, Michel's son and the inheritor of the family papers, deliberately muddled this posthumous question when he wrote, in *Jules Verne* (1973) (pp. 374–6), that 'Au XXIX<sup>e</sup> siècle' (1889) was 'écrite en collaboration avec Michel qui a tenu la plume', that in Michel's work on *L'Etonnante aventure de la mission Barsac* (1914) 'il ne s'agissait que de retouches mineures', and that 'Edom' was entirely Jules's.

Then, on 11 July 1978, a dusty Italian sports car drew up at the Colloque de Cerisy. Piero Gondolo della Riva gave a paper claiming that complete chapters of eight of the posthumous works, including virtually the whole of *L'Agence Thompson and Co.* (1908), were in fact written by Michel. His arguments were based on correspondence between Michel and Hetzel, on the manuscripts in Jules' hand, and

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2. Throughout this study, the tale is referred to as 'Edom', apparently closer to the intention of the author(s) than 'L'Eternel Adam'. The proofs have been transcribed by Christian Porcq (*BSJV*, no. 100, 4e tri. (1991), 21B48), but without the footnotes and with the words 'Jules VERNE' added at the beginning and the end! All quotations here are taken from this transcription, using, however, page references from the more accessible *Livre de poche Hier et demain* (1979).

Before Porcq's transcription of the proofs it had not generally been realized that the corrections to them, including the change of title, were carried out by an editor. It is also interesting to note that in the proofs the tale is divided into three parts, headed 'I', 'II', and 'III', corresponding to the alternation between Sofr and the anonymous narrator. However, nearly all of the other changes in the proofs are minor, and were presumably carried out with Michel's consent--or at least knowledge--and in any case do not throw light on the origin of the tale.

3. Simone Vierre writes 'Nous avons pu consulter le manuscrit, *de la main de Jules Verne*' (*Jules Verne et le roman initiatique* (1973), p. 736); Piero Gondolo della Riva states 'le manuscrit original [d' 'Edom'] qui appartient aux héritiers de Jules Verne *est de la main de Michel*' ('A propos des œuvres posthumes de Jules Verne', *Europe*, novembre-décembre 1978), 73–82). The town of Nantes acquired the surviving manuscripts from Verne's descendants in 1981, with the notable exception, however, of 'Edom'. The manuscript has therefore disappeared from public view--to such an extent as for Christian Porcq to imply that there is no manuscript ('*Edom*, ou l'arche de Noé de tous les *Voyages*', *BSJV*, no. 100, 4<sup>e</sup> tri. (1991), 49–57 (49)).

4. Most notably Michel Butor, 'Le Point suprême et l'âge d'or à travers quelques œuvres de Jules Verne', in his *Essais sur les modernes* (1960), pp. 36B94; François Raymond, 'Jules Verne ou le mouvement perpétuel' (*Subsidia pataphysica*, vol. 8 (1969), 21–52); Jean Roudaut, "'L'Eternel Adam" et l'image des cycles', *L'Herne: Jules Verne*, ed. P. A. Touttain (1974), pp. 180–212; and Françoise Gaillard, "'L'Eternel Adam" ou l'évolutionnisme à l'heure de la thermodynamique', in *Colloque de Cerisy: Jules Verne et les sciences humaines* (1979), ed. François Raymond and Simone Vierre, pp. 293–325.

on five posthumously prepared typescripts. Manuscripts and typescripts were almost identical, but radically different from the published versions, thus allowing Michel's changes to be identified. Apart from Jean Jules-Verne, no one has substantially contested Gondolo della Riva's published conclusions that Michel was responsible for substantive parts of the eight novels and one collection of short stories.<sup>5</sup> Further proof came with the publication of five typescripts between 1985 and 1989.<sup>6</sup>

However, for two of the posthumous works, *L'Agence Thompson and Co.* and 'Edom', there is no surviving typescript—and 'Edom', in particular, is not even alluded to in any known extant material.<sup>7</sup> In his paper Gondolo della Riva indicated that these two manuscripts were in Michel's hand, and so concluded that the two works 'furent vraisemblablement écrits par Michel' (76).

Reactions have varied. Writing about 'Edom' in 1979, I pointed out that 'un doute subsiste néanmoins, car personne ne sait si Michel Verne n'a pas, par exemple, recopié une version antérieure', and similarly Porcq maintains that, most probably, 'l'œuvre est de Jules Verne, remaniée par Michel'.<sup>8</sup> Boia, on the other hand, accepts Michel as the author; and Dumas categorizes the tale as 'écrite par Michel'.<sup>9</sup> In 1991, however, Dumas 'discovered' the proofs in the Bibliothèque nationale and decided that 'Edom' was by Jules after all, declaring: 'vers 1910, Michel Verne ... recopie le manuscrit original'.<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately, his only evidence is ... a misquotation of my phrase above!

Critical opinion is equally divided about Michel's literary ability. One problem is that the only publications he signed appeared in 1888, were in the field of journalism, and seem generally unexceptional.<sup>11</sup> Also, the only work for which we

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5. Jean Jules-Verne, 'Une Lettre de Jean Jules-Verne', in *Europe*, (novembre-décembre 1978), 89–93; Gondolo della Riva, 'A propos des œuvres'.

6. *Le Secret de Wilhelm Storitz (version originale)* (1985), *La Chasse au météore (version originale)* (1986), *En Magéllanie* (1987), *Le Beau Danube jaune* (1988), *Le Volcan d'or* (1989).

7. *Le Secret de Wilhelm Storitz (version originale)* (1985), *La Chasse au météore (version originale)* (1986), *En Magéllanie* (1987), *Le Beau Danube jaune* (1988), *Le Volcan d'or* (1989).

Michel does say in 1905 that *Hier et demain* will contain 'deux nouvelles absolument inédites' (quoted by Porcq, p. 50): these are presumably 'Pierre-Jean' (published as 'La Destinée de Jean Morénas') and either 'Le Humbug' or 'Edom'.

8. William Butcher, 'Le Sens de "L'Éternel Adam"', *BSJV*, no. 58, 2e tri. (1981), 73B81 (73); Porcq, p. 57. Similarly Arthur Evans characterizes 'Edom' as 'undoubtedly much revamped by ... Michel' (*Jules Verne Rediscovered* (New York, 1988), p. 97).

9. Lucian Boia, 'L'Éternel Adam et les fins du monde', *BSJV*, no. 67, 3e tri. (1983), 127B32, and 'Un Ecrivain original: Michel Verne', *BSJV*, no. 70, 2e tri. (1984), 90–5; Dumas, *Jules Verne*, p. 514. Similarly Andrew Martin says 'mainlyCperhaps wholly by Michel' (*The Mask of the Prophet* (Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 192).

10. 'Les Avatars d'Edom', *BSJV*, no. 100, 4e tri. (1991), 15B18 (15).

11. Nine pieces under the general title *Zigzags à travers la science* in the *Supplément littéraire* of the *Figaro* in 1888 (some pieces were subsequently reprinted). Michel Verne also signed a twenty-seven-line song entitled *Dans le cloître* (s.d. 1911–15, reproduced by Piero Gondolo della Riva in *BSJV*, no. 106, 2<sup>e</sup> tri. (1993), 4–5): interestingly, it refers to 'l'éternel hiver', a general Michelian trait being to antepose 'l'éternel'.

have an explicit listing of Michel's changes is 'Le Humbug',<sup>12</sup> where we can observe that very little was added and that original ideas were excised, although some overall coherence was gained. Gondolo della Riva points out that Michel 'altered' the works from Jules' intentions, perhaps in order to 'get his own back' on his father; he praises, however, the philosophical conclusion of *Les Naufragés du 'Jonathan'* (1909). Dumas, for his part, prefers Jules's original manuscripts on principle,<sup>13</sup> even when most editors might have amended them as inconsistent or distasteful. Without 'Edom', in sum, it is difficult to argue for Michel's credentials as a writer of the first order.

We thus have a work whose brilliance is not in dispute, but which cannot easily be ascribed to either Jules or Michel. We have no information from the documentation, no author's proof corrections, and no definite information about a surviving manuscript.

There remains 'Edom' itself, and accordingly the rest of this study will concentrate largely on an internal analysis of this strange tale.

Its order of publication within *Hier et demain* may not be innocent. The collection opens with 'La Destinée de Jean Morénas' and 'Au XXIX<sup>e</sup> siècle', both first published before 1905, implying that the other four stories may also be in approximate order of Michel's contribution (as well as chronological setting and amount of scientific content). The title of each of the six narratives has a footnote, the last four footnotes being signed 'M.J.V.'. <sup>14</sup> In these, 'Le Humbug' is characterized as a 'boutade', 'Au XXIX<sup>e</sup> siècle' as a 'fantaisie', and 'Edom' as a 'nouvelle ... sous une forme assurément fantaisiste'. Michel indicates only 'Morénas' and 'Edom' as being by Jules Verne, and merely admits that 'Morénas' has been 'considérablement modifiée' and 'Au XXIX<sup>e</sup> siècle', slightly revised. However, in these few lines, the only properly literary output carrying Michel's signature, there are several mystifications, including the erroneous claims that 'Au XXIX<sup>e</sup> siècle' was written in English and that a 'fier optimisme' inspires Verne's works. The opposite of what Michel says may generally therefore be closer to the truth.

The internal construction of 'Edom' further indicates its uniqueness within the collected works. It is the only *Voyage extraordinaire* fully to justify a use of first- and third-person narrators in equal proportions. The dual structure also motivates complex, self-reflecting debates on such ideas as the nature of repetition, the

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It is now known from the correspondence that 'Au XXIX<sup>e</sup> siècle', of considerable interest, was entirely written by Michel (although borrowing from Jules' unpublished *Paris au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (written in 1863, but published only in 1994) and Albert Robida's *Le XX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (1882), and although subsequently revised by Jules). Jules himself commented that Michel has 'une remarquable facilité d'écrire' (letter to Paul Verne of 12 October 1895, reproduced in Dumas, *Jules Verne*, p. 481) and 'writes ably on scientific themes' (reported by R. H. Sherard, 'Jules Verne at Home: His Own Account of his Life and Work', *McClure's Magazine*, no. 2 (January 1894), 115–24 (120)).

12. In *Humbug*, (tr. and ed. William Butcher (Edinburgh, 1991)).

13. 'Les Avatars d'Edom' and countless other articles in the *BSJV*.

14. The repeated 'M.J.V.' ('MJV' in the proofs), which was often interpreted as 'Monsieur Jules Verne', must now be understood as 'Michel Jules Verne', and is therefore misleading, for Michel is referred to as 'M. M. Verne' in the correspondence.

importance of writing, the role of science, the origin of civilization, and the future of mankind. The whole tale seems to resemble an anonymous 'récit d'outre-tombe' (262), a message without a return address assigned to the hazards of an indefinite sojourn underground (260). Even the questions the critic might ask, such as the reliability of interpretations based on etymology, mythology, or extrapolation, are mockingly present in the text.

What does seem clear in 'Edom', nevertheless, is the existence of a very large number of affinities and allusions to the whole *Voyages extraordinaires*, whether from the beginning, middle, or the period 1905–14.<sup>15</sup> Similarities with *Vingt mille lieues* (1869) appear particularly sustained. Both involve: a hint of the pleasure of smoking; an allusion to the famous battle of 1862 between the *Virginia* and the *Monitor*, the first semi-submerged ironclad; the idea of limbs becoming cold as a sign of approaching death; an overwhelming dominance of the oceans and an exclusive diet of seafood; the incorporation of Old Testament language into the text; an interest in archaeological remains as a way of investigating the truth of legends or biblical narratives; a fascination for the lost continent of Atlantis, destroyed by volcanic action, with descriptions of its arches and broken columns giving rise to heady contemplations on human destiny; the idea of the ruins being brought up from the depths by volcanic activity; an interest in the word 'Edom'; an invented language containing teasing hints of European and non-European languages; a new and totally masculine society; a contrast between a French narrator and his mainly Anglo-Saxon companions; uncertainty as to what language is used in the dialogues; a surprising re-emergence of French to convey a personal message; the idea of entrusting a written narrative to a random, even aleatory, destination; and the contrast between a scientific composition, written by men of superior learning but destined to be lost, and a personal narration, composed by a slow-witted and self-centred author but surviving many vicissitudes to great effect.

This brief summary demonstrates, then, that the two works, although separated by thirty-six years, have a great deal in common. It would undoubtedly be possible to establish a similar density of borrowing, allusion, and pastiche with a number of other *Voyages*. 'Edom' forms part of a closely knit network of literary themes and structures, with its author(s) demonstrating a quite remarkable knowledge of the collected works.

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15. In particular, many technological ideas are shared across several works. Thus the concept of fax visible in 'Edom' (233) already occurs as 'photo-télégraphie' in *Paris au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (1863), although the term is recorded (as 'téléphotographie') only in about 1890; again neither the strange term in 'des tubes pneumatiques ou *électro-ioniques* sillonnant tous les continents' ('Edom' (233)) nor its English equivalent 'electro-ionic' are recorded in the dictionaries: 'ionique' (in the electrical sense) is first recorded as 1907, although it appeared in English in about 1885–90. The phrase 'tubes pneumatiques' (233) is borrowed from 'Au XXIX<sup>e</sup> siècle' (p. 188) and from the 'pneumatic Tubes' [*sic*] in Michel's seventh 'Zigzag'. 'Immanente énergie' (233) seems to refer to the equivalence of matter and energy, more fully developed in *La Chasse au météore* (1908); the famous equivalence ' $E = mc^2$ ' was first formalized by Einstein in 1905. These cross-borrowings over more than forty years have not been identified to date, but are surely an important subject for future research.

Another Vernian topos pervading 'Edom' at all levels is that of the principle of alternation. A first example is the successive civilizations which have risen and fallen. We know little about the initial setting of the twenty-third millennium, apart from the single tantalizing illustration showing a Chinese-style circular arch, possibly a pagoda, and three pillars crowned with capitals. We know little about the Atlanteans either, except for ruins of the identical 'chapiteaux' (224) and 'colonnes' (255). And we know virtually nothing about the civilization *before* the Atlanteans, hardly even its existence; just as the twenty-third millennium is barely aware of the third-millennium civilization (our own). In other words, of the four stages, each hardly knows the previous one, which is highly dissimilar, but each demonstrates clear affinities with the last-but-one civilization.

Island and ocean constitute a more developed alternation. Mountain-tops and sea-chasms, landslides and rising seas form inseparable couples. For third-millennium mankind to be wiped out by the cataclysm, all land must sink below the ocean; but, for instantaneous plant and animal evolution to come into play, the new lands must come from the ocean—and so on with each succeeding upheaval.<sup>16</sup> The rise and fall of both civilizations and continents are, in sum, as regular as Fogg's dining habits or Hans' pay-days en route for the Centre of the Earth.

More generally, careful permutations are established within 'Edom' between such varied themes as technology and humanism, desire for immortality and incidence of mortality, stasis and change, reductionism and transcendence; as well as structures like present- and past-tense narration and anonymous first-person narrator and third-person *Sofr* in the twenty-third millennium. After being established, however, any alteration is often duplicated or divided and then superimposed on itself, in a never-ending series of intersecting, self-reflecting forms. It is almost as if the simpler, two-way alternation of the earlier works were being parodied.

Given this eternal oscillation, the precise link between the two main protagonists is clearly important. The fact that *Sofr* learns about the first-person narrator and the immediately preceding civilization represents a unique bridge across the 20,000-year abyss, and so can be considered the nub of the tale. In contrast with the previous phases of history, the surviving civilization is thus warned of the fate its predecessors suffered—and may therefore be able to do something about it. The careful symmetry of man's ups and downs, his 'vains efforts accumulés dan l'infini des temps' (263), can perhaps be broken after all (as Fogg's and Hans' routines are). The tale may not be nearly as pessimistic as critics have claimed.

But how does the first-person account in fact reach *Sofr*? Clearly, the anonymous narrator would not have survived without the high technology of the 35-H. P. 'double phaéton' (231) and the lowish technology of the steam-and-sails *Virginia*.

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16. As a result, exceptions like the remaining islet above Rosario must be compensated for by land at the Canaries and Azores. This in turn necessitates a double upheaval: one to kill the present inhabitants off, and one to bring signs of the former inhabitants back up from the depths.

This alternation also explains third-millennium Captain Moris's intuition of seeking land by heading south-west from a submerged Europe: a distant memory of Atlantis, combined with the despairing thought that since land isn't where it should be

Again, had Sofr not wished to expand his *scientific* laboratories, the message would not have been unearthed. But the proximate cause of survival is the message's container, 'une sorte d'étui, fait d'un métal inconnu, de couleur grise, de texture granuleuse' (227)—aluminium we later learn (260). Because the paper was rolled up in it, we know that the container is cylindrical and relatively small; also, 'au tiers de sa longueur, une fente indiquait que l'étui était formé de deux parties s'emboîtant l'une dans l'autre' (228). In other words, it must be a cylindrical cigar-case! The case must somehow have been taken on to the motor-car, on to the *Virginia*, on to the new land, and then kept for several decades. In fact, nowhere is tobacco mentioned in the tale, except for the pre-cataclysmic 'au moment des cigares' (232). Such is the ingenuity of the description that this important realization of the means of transmission of the central message does not seem to have been made to date.<sup>17</sup> The irony throughout the tale as to the usefulness and durability of high technology may apply especially to the unconventional purpose the aluminium container is put to. Considerable pathos derives from the retention of the useless case through all the colony's vicissitudes—even after the death of virtually all its original members—and its reminder of fallen grandeur and the frivolity of smoking luxury cigars.

Nor do the possible consequences end there. The names of characters in the *Voyages* are often highly revealing. Those of the postprandial three wise men, Bathurst, Mendoza, and Moreno (231), all seem to refer to precise nineteenth-century events.<sup>18</sup> Also, the surname of the women who will give birth to three-quarters of the colony is the rare Raleigh (231). It is surely associated with Sir Walter and his famous introduction of tobacco. Raleigh was also responsible for the first British attempt to colonize America: 121 settlers were left on an island in Virginia, but three years later they had disappeared without trace, apart from the word 'Croatoan' found carved on a tree.<sup>19</sup> A lost colony leaving only a single, obscure name behind it: the parallel with 'Edom' is striking. The case of the missing cigar, without even considering what Freud might have made of it, leads us to striking historical resonances.

Other details also become significant when assembled. Thus Sofr-Aï-Sr has a monosyllabic tripartite name with the surname first (cf. 'Mogar-si' (217): 'cigare-mo(u)', as Porcq has pointed out) and lives in the capital on the east coast of the Empire (214). Sons are identified by numbers not names. His is a cultured classical civilization which invented printing and has an uninterrupted history of thousands of

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17. I.O. Evans, for instance, translates 'étui' as 'container', Arthur Evans (*Jules Verne Rediscovered*, p. 99) as 'canister'.

18. Bathurst, in New South Wales, where a 'mine d'argent' (230) was discovered in 1830; Mendoza, a city in Argentina almost totally destroyed by an earthquake in 1861; Moreno, Gabriel García (1821–75), president of Ecuador 1861–5 and 1869–75.

19. Interest in the 'Lost Colony' was renewed towards the end of the nineteenth century, when a group of mixed-blood Indians claimed to be descended from the colonists and the Croatoan tribe.

The name Moris (242) may refer to Robert Morris (1731–1806), a prominent leader in the War of Independence and the sole American tobacco purchasing agent for the French Farmers-General.

years; it seems advanced in some respects but closed and backward in others. It is dominated by a 'race ... prolifique' (216), the so-called 'Hommes-à-Face-de-Bronze' (note the article-less syntax). These features concord with the only other 'Empire' mentioned in the tale, of 'quatre cents millions d'âmes' (245). Sofr's homeland is central in both geographical position and importance, a middle kingdom as it were. The opening sentence describes it as surrounded by 'Quatre-Mers', situated north, south, east, and west. But 'Four Seas' is a stock expression in Chinese: the Northern, Southern, Eastern, and Western, corresponding to the English 'Seven Seas', but also collectively signifying 'the world united in brotherhood'. The 'Fixed Star' is referred to rather than the 'North Star'. In other words, every detail quoted in this paragraph refers to China and the Chinese.<sup>20</sup> The evidence is overwhelming.

'Someone', then, has ingeniously strewn clues throughout 'Edom', including the names Raleigh and *Virginia*, the cigar-less cigar-case, and a systematic reference to the Chinese. The survival of themes and sources from the past seems to depend on gratuitous and frivolous details. But to date, no one seems to have deciphered them. The past has remained dead and buried for ninety years.

The tale's title is also highly symbolic. In *Vingt mille lieues*, Nemo explains that the 'Red' of 'Red Sea' is a translation of the Hebrew 'Edom' (meaning both 'rouge' and 'roux').<sup>21</sup> Genesis says of Jacob's twin brother that 'Esau is Edom' (36:8), that he is 'red' and 'hairy all over' (25:25), and that his name also comes from the 'red' colour of the mess of pottage he sells his birthright for (25:30, 27:21–4). The name, which occurs eighty-eight times in the Old Testament, then applies to Esau/Edom's second-millennium-BC descendants in the Wilderness of Edom, south-east of Israel. As cousins to the Jews, the Edomites were subject to great hatred. The Book of Obadiah is particularly indignant about their collaboration with the Babylonian conquerors, with the prophet Obadiah calling down a Day of Judgment on them.<sup>22</sup> The particular connotations of the name of Edom for the turn of the twentieth century may be that of a civilization without written traces, described in an unverifiable oral tradition but with archaeological evidence beginning to be dug up.

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20. The mention of the 400 million souls is possibly part of a belief in a 'yellow peril' (*Oxford English Dictionary* (1900)), the turn-of-the-century fear that the West could be overwhelmed by numerically superior Orientals. 'Au XXIX<sup>e</sup> siècle' describes the fear more directly: 'la prolifération [*sic*] chinoise est un danger pour le monde' (201). Further evidence of Michel's interest in China is his final 'Zigzag', entitled 'Intelligence et douleur: Un Anesthésique anglo-chinois', an article which anticipates such ideas in 'Edom' as the correlation between brain size and intelligence and the invention of printing, etc., by the Chinese while the West was still primitive. On the other hand, Jules Verne was approached for a 'prophecy' on the 'yellow peril' in 1895 by Félix Fénéon, author of an article 'Blancs, jaunes, noirs' in *La Revue blanche* (1889); Verne, however, replied that 'les temps des prophètes sont passés' (Fénéon, *Œuvres plus que compètes*, (Geneva, Droz, 1970), vol. 2, p. 548). Even the name Mendoza could be that of a seventeenth-century Chinese missionary.

China already had a population of 430 million in the census of 1850, so the 'quatre cents millions' is puzzling. Is it a sign of part of the tale being written in the 1860s--or of an attempt to make it look so?

21. Part 2, ch. 4. However, in reality the Bible's Hebrew for 'Red Sea' is 'Yam Suf' ('sea of reeds'), which in any case is not now considered to be the modern Red Sea.

22. Obadiah is the name of the judge in *Le Tour du monde*.



In 'Edom' the surviving tribe is described as 'couvert de poils rudes, err[ant] dans ce morne désert' (259). In addition to this almost direct biblical quotation, the name may have generated such elements as the various archaeological excavations in the tale, the theme of disinheritance, and the repeated cataclysms. Further resonance is added with Sofr's final realization of the truth of the linguistic legend transmitted down from man's origins, that 'Edom' is a deformation of 'Adam': 'Edom, Edèm, Adam [replaced in the published version by the illogical 'Hedom, Edem, Adam'], c'est le perpétuel symbole du premier homme' (261). The theme of repeated alternation is again apparent here, for 'Edom' has two distinct identities: the name in the Bible; and as a twenty-third-millennium derivative, and replacement, of 'Adam'. The derivation is invented ('Adam' in fact means 'man' in Hebrew, itself possibly derived from 'earth'); but since 'Adam n'était peut-être que la déformation de quelque autre mot plus ancien' (261), the implication may be that *Eden* and even 'Iten' (213) are also variants of the same word. 'Rien que sur cette petite difficulté philologique, une infinité de savants avaient pâli, sans trouver de réponse satisfaisante' (227). The word 'Edom' is thus at the heart of interrogations about the past and even the origin of man—or lack of origin. The tale is producing radical ideas about the Bible, allowing itself to comment on religious ideas and on man's prehistory more freely than the previous *Voyages* did.

But another surprising deduction follows on concerning another long-hidden clue. What language does the lost colony speak? The answer is not evident, but a passing remark concerning Bathurst's pronunciation of the word 'Adam' reads: '(naturellement, en sa qualité d'Anglo-Saxon, il prononçait Edèm)' (232). The forms 'Edom' and 'Hiva' (226) that are transmitted down to Sofr's civilization are therefore (corrupt) English ones, making English the spoken language of the colony's descendants. However, although logical as far as it goes, this idea will ultimately be turned upside-down, for the two degraded forms are apparently the *only* words to survive. The written English and Spanish languages, as presumably recorded by Bathurst and Moreno, are in any case lost. And the discovered manuscript, deliberately written in French (230), changes everything: it accurately transmits a complete idiom, effectively resurrecting a lost language. 'Edom' seems to be arguing that, once again, seemingly ineluctable tendencies can be reversed. The turn-of-the-century fear of linguistic decline and fall is turned inside out: French survives at the expense of English.

The tale's concern about linguistic evolution proceeds in parallel with an anxiety about biological evolution, and about progress in general. In a nutshell, the *Voyages* manifest a distrust of the idea of Darwinian evolution, and produce repeated rearguard arguments against it. In 'Edom' the terms 'darwiniste' (232), 'loi de l'évolution' (220), and 'sélection naturelle' (232) put in an appearance, and the truth of short-term evolution is apparently accepted. The concept is even exaggerated in the extraordinary acquired-characteristics accelerated-evolution scene of the marine animals 'en train de devenir terrestres' and the flying fish turning into birds (256). Even man seems to be able to lose any of his characteristics, such as speech or intelligence. But this is just a narrative feint: the characteristics he loses or acquires mask, but do not substantially remove, his uniqueness. Man has always survived each successive disaster and retains in particular a mysterious mechanism allowing him repeatedly to climb out of the morass (218). The conclusion, or rather

initial axiom, is that animals can and do evolve, but man cannot. While undoubtedly putting a strong case for late-nineteenth-century *social* Darwinism, 'Edom' ultimately seeks out the precise conditions which allow the evolutionary appletart to be overturned. In the face of the realization that the earth's history is infinitely longer than conventional biblical views would allow, the tale maintains that man always will remain, and always has remained, the same as he is now. Darwinism is partly bunk.

Two final themes exhibit a similar structure. 'La véritable supériorité de l'homme ... c'est, pour le penseur, de ... faire tenir l'univers immense dans le microcosme de son cerveau' (236). This sententious, unVernian, definition, produced at the height of the central cataclysm, highlights the unlimited capacity of consciousness: it has, on the one hand, the power to produce a one-to-one mapping between itself and the whole of the universe. But contrariwise, the one-to-one mapping may map the mind back on to itself: the mind can *always* imagine a remedy to events, or at least an antidote: 'La véritable supériorité de l'homme ... c'est, pour l'homme d'action, de garder une âme sereine devant la révolte de la matière, c'est de lui dire: "Me détruire, soit! m'émouvoir, jamais!"' (236). Consciousness—the word occurs four times in the tale—is thus a direct link between an individual's finite mind and his 'theory-of-everything'.

A similar function which focuses, by turn, on 'everything' and on itself is the instance of narration. The French first-person narrator occupies the centre of all sorts of symbolic representations. Thus he—ironically—outlasts the two doctors, and even his own son, becoming the living memory of the whole colony; he controls the destinies of the writings of the other two, and so is a quasi-divine three-in-one; in the event, he accords special treatment to his own word; he has no name, as if symbolizing his own 'immanen[ce]' (233); he is even depicted as God in the final illustration (259). His self-generating, all-englobing written production could be defined as 'I am that I am'. The mystery of ends and origins is reproduced in—and generated by—the mystery of written creation.

The varied themes studied here are, I would claim, closely linked. The religious arguments, linguistic anxiety, evolutionary debate, and many of the other concerns show common morphological characteristics. All draw attention to the origin—whether of mankind or of language—and all point to an all-englobing metaphysical theory: briefly, that there is nothing new under the sun.

We can conclude that 'Edom' asks questions about man and life and everything, but provides highly ambiguous answers. But the very asking is revealing; and so 'Edom' serves to summarize a tendency visible throughout the *Voyages*. In this tendency, a positivistic, limited-context argument typically forms the thrust of the main narrative, easily gaining the assent of public opinion. But in each case this theory has two Achilles' heels: the 'inductive fallacy', where observing even a very large number of instances of a phenomenon does not allow one to determine the next instance; and the essential subjectivity of any theory proceeding from an individual. Current discoveries can always be reversed by future discoveries. Anything lost can always be found—and vice versa. Invariably, therefore, the argument ends up being hung from its own petard and undergoing a sort of 'eversion'. Because of the Achilles' heel in the first-level argument, a subjective element in its own objectivity, the argument can be re-applied to its own basis, and

hence produce diametrically opposed conclusions. This process exists at many levels throughout the *Voyages extraordinaires*—even the conventional wisdom embodied in stock expressions and metaphors is typically undermined and ‘demetaphorized’. The self-eversion of arguments explains the difficulty of finding consistent ‘messages’ in Verne’s works: even the doubting process may be subject to doubt. Clearly also, the process is trying to jump out of the fiction into the real world.

Verne’s grossly inappropriate public reputation has, from the beginning, been the symptom, and even the cause, of a limited first-level analysis: a deeper reading leads to the appreciation of a number of receding levels. The works produce complexity as if to spite the simplistic interpretation placed on them. The contribution of ‘Edom’ may thus be to make the regressive argument all-inclusive and hence systematize the process of re-evaluation. Adam is the vital missing link to ‘une infinité d’autres humanités’ (234), a universal peg to hang indefinitely recurrent arguments on.

There are then only three means of escape from the indefinite recurrence: all, as we have seen, find objects which *incorporate* the self-doubting into the process: the process of writing as a way of understanding the writer, the medium as message about the medium; consciousness, aware of its own consciousness, and therefore of its own powers and limits; and man, looking at his own past existence so as to better understand his present.

Two ideas marked the beginning of the twentieth century. Einstein’s essential innovation in the Special Theory of Relativity (1905) was to assume space and time were not unalterable givens, but to take them *into* the equations, as variables subject to transformation and to higher-level analyses. In 1910 Bertrand Russell destroyed the coherence of the foundations of mathematics by considering the set of all sets that contain themselves: a third-level object which analyses an impossible second-level object. The essence of modernity, captured in various forms in the period 1905–10, may therefore be in the failure of any totalizing symbol—a failure produced by applying the would-be totalizing symbols to themselves. In these terms, ‘Edom’, itself torn between 1905 and 1910, is hauntingly modern.

But where does this leave the question of authorship? The first and third sections of the tale do display a more abstract and theoretical vocabulary, with the use of regular subordinate clauses making for a more formal style. Furthermore, the average word, sentence, and paragraph lengths are significantly greater in the first and third sections.<sup>23</sup> They seem more philosophical and modern than the rest of

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23. An average of 5.0 letters per word in section II, 5.4 letters in sections I and III. Similarly, the average sentence lengths are respectively approximately 15 and 21 words, and the average paragraph lengths, approximately 46 and 64 words. Finally, the longest sentences have, respectively, 68 and 105 words. If we compare the average word-length in Jules Verne’s *Les Aventures de la famille Raton* (1891) with that in ‘Au XXIX<sup>e</sup> siècle’ (1889), mostly by Michel Verne, we get: 4.8 and 5.2 letters per word; 14 and 17 words per sentence; 28 and 29.2 words per paragraph; and longest sentences of 106 and 138 words. In other words, all the evidence is consistent with Michel’s contribution being in every case stylistically distinct and with his being mainly responsible for the first and third sections of ‘Edom’.

the corpus, more linked to Michel's known writing. But what remains is the tale's striking coherence—around the dual focus—and its allusion to the problems both of the previous corpus and of concluding the previous corpus. The crux, then, of the problem of internal analysis is that no other *Voyage* written after, say, 1873 seems to show the same quality; but many elements of the work seem to post-date, for example, 1890, and some seem characteristic of the vital 1905–10 period. Any internal ascription to Jules would in any case be hazardous, since what one writer can do, another can always imitate. On the other hand, it is impossible to prove a negative, that Jules did *not* contribute.

In sum, hardly any progress has been made at this stage on how such a singular masterpiece came to be written. Just like Edom, 'Edom' seems to have no recorded history, no clear author, but simply roots trailing back indefinitely. If we argue by analogy with 'Au XXIX<sup>e</sup> siècle', perhaps the closest work, we may suspect alternating accretions from the two authors. 'Edom' seems simultaneously imitative, parodic, and innovative—as if its overriding aim were to obscure the authorship question. Both theme and structure seem to add to the mystery, taunting the exegete with an infinite regress of hypotheses-within-hypotheses. The questions of rebellion and conformity, filiality and paternity, inherited wisdom and creative originality seem to circle endlessly round one another. Because the previous seventy works do not reach a synthetic conclusion, 'Edom' goes out of its way to try to conclude. But things seem to have been arranged by the author(s) in such a way that any conclusion contains in germ its own contradiction. The answer, if any, would be obtained by seeking the first cause. But any seeming origin refers back to the totality. The truth lies within. The only clear conclusion is that of a mysteriously self-aware masterpiece.

Or, as Roudaut puts it: 'l'issue du labyrinthe est une nouvelle entrée dans le labyrinthe, ce qui sera plus tard est ce qui fut jadis' (207).

### **Appendix**

Such was the state of play when I sent the proofs of this article to Piero Gondolo della Riva. His reply produced another bombshell, which brings vital understanding to the posthumous question, and is therefore worth quoting textually:

Depuis quelques mois j'ai retrouvé chez un membre de la famille Verne ... ce fameux manuscrit qui est *absolument* de la main de Michel. [C'est le] texte complet (51 pages recto-verso) ... C'est un *véritable manuscrit* avec un nombre extraordinaire de ratures ... Je dispose d'ailleurs de documents inédits qui me font croire que cette nouvelle (ainsi que *L'Agence Thompson*) a été écrite par Michel du vivant de Jules et que ce dernier l'a lue et, peut-être, corrigée.

This scholar, whose previous claims have proved justified, further adds that the modified manuscript corresponds to the unedited proofs; and that Simone Vierre and the Verne family are now convinced that the handwriting is indeed Michel's.

One conclusion thus immediately stands out: that 'Edom' was, after all, at least partly composed by Michel, but also, in all probability, partly by his father. The correct authorship ascription seems to lie somewhere between 'Michel and Jules Verne' and 'Michel with Jules Verne'. The debate is thus likely to continue, trying to remove the onion layers of each author's contribution.