

Why the Random House Translation of Paris in the Twentieth Century is Inadequate

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The reason why we are publishing this completely new translation of the first two chapters of Jules Verne's *Paris in the Twentieth Century* is our indignation at the translation published by Random House in 1996. We believe that the authorised version, by Richard Howard, is insufficiently faithful to Verne's intentions. While Howard's text is generally fluent and readable, it sometimes unaccountably takes upon itself to alter phrases from their original meaning. We suspect that many of the inaccuracies are due to over-intrusive editing or the translator's haste, although a few demonstrate that the French has simply not been understood. But in any case it would be a simple operation to remove most of the problems.

Paris in the Twentieth Century is cleverly written, for it leads the reader into admiration of the marvels of the future, but then shows that this scientific progress has been achieved at the expense of human values. Verne's subtlety lies in the narrator's ambivalent attitude to the innovations. A translator of Verne has to be aware of the novelist's lesser-known writing, often anti-scientific in nature, rather than relying on his popular reputation in the United States, based on a misapprehension. However, Howard often reverses the value-judgements and inverts the metaphors, and sometimes lacks common sense and knowledge of nineteenth-century Paris. The effect of these repeated slips is to create an often incoherent and confusing text.

In our own version of chapters 1 and 2, translated from scratch and published here for the first time, we attempt to be faithful to the French, while producing an English text that stands in its own right. We display the English and French texts in parallel, so that the correspondence of each phrase and sentence may be checked. To show the unreliability of the Random House translation, we have inserted into the English text phrases from Howard's translation, **marked thus**. In chapter 2, we have indicated the clear factual mistakes, but in chapter 1 the inaccuracies in style and register as well. We would like to emphasise that each and every page of the 1996 edition of *Paris in the Twentieth Century* contains a comparable number of problems to those we identify here. The first two pages of Howard's Chapter 3, for example, translate "windows" as "plate-glass windows", "run far away" as "run away", "the door" as "the doors", "closed automatically" as "closed", "chamber" as "narrow chamber", "shafts" as "chutes", and so on.

Verne has been travestied in the English-speaking world for too long. It is vital that a faithful translation of the whole of *Paris in the Twentieth Century* be finally made available in English.