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Journey to the Centre of the Earth. By JULES VERNE. Trans., with an introduction and notes, by WILLIAM BUTCHER. (World's Classics) Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press. 1992. xxxviii + 234 pp. £4.99.

Among the world's misunderstood books, Verne's *Voyage au centre de la terre*, misrepresented by comic-book and film, has a special place. Fundamentally reread in France since the 1950s, Verne is still regarded by non-specialists as a children's adventure-writer and dated scientific vulgarizer; this edition of what symbolically and psychoanalytically must be his richest text will, however, do much to encourage a more just appreciation.

William Butcher's new translation is effective and enjoyable, unlike previous approximations: respecting Verne's characteristic mix, it is lyrical, melodramatic, and mischievously ironic by turns. The end-notes are extremely useful in explaining a wealth of mainly scientific allusions (though the gloss on 'Lidenbrock' misses the reference to the Leyden jar, essence of the highly-charged professor). After a life-sketch situating the *Journey* in Verne's vast project, Butcher's introduction takes the reader into the subterranean world of implicit meanings, often in tension with the manifest surface. Valuable avenues of analysis are suggested with brisk confidence, not only on the initiatory structures (though alchemy is neglected) but also on the primacy of the practice of writing over the pretext of science, supported by useful pointers to intertextuality and authorial self-consciousness of a remarkably ludic and 'modern' kind. Only the claim that characterization is 'quite sophisticated' fails to convince: Verne's reputation is hardly to be redeemed in *those* traditional terms!

UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL

DAVID MEAKIN