

## de la Motte on Verne, trans. Walter and ed. Evans (2015)

Verne, Jules. *Five Weeks in a Balloon: A Journey of Discovery by Three Englishmen in Africa*. Translated with introduction and notes by Frederick Paul Walter, edited by Arthur B. Evans, Wesleyan UP, Wesleyan Early Classics of Science Fiction, 2015, pp. 357, ISBN 978-0-8195-7547-0

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As the translator of this attractive and eminently readable translation of Jules Verne's first great success, *Cinq semaines en ballon: Voyage de découvertes en Afrique* (1863) points out in his "Introduction" and "Note on the Translation," no critical edition of the novel exists, even in French. As he also reminds us, early translations of Verne into English were often poor, incomplete, and in some cases blatantly racist (for example, Verne used only "nègre" and "noir" for black Africans, which Frederick Paul Walter renders as "Negro" and "black" respectively, while early translations into English used highly offensive language in no way suggested by the author's original text). This volume is thus doubly valuable in that it provides both a lively and rigorously accurate translation for general readers, and a valuable scholarly resource for English-speaking scholars of Verne and others interested in his founding role in the development of what later became known as science fiction.

As Walter notes, this book is intended for a North American audience. Under the general editorship of Arthur B. Evans, it joins six other translations of Verne novels already published in the Wesleyan Early Classics of Science Fiction Series. In his "Introduction," the translator explains why the novel remains relevant and merits a new translation, its first complete rendering into English:

It's Verne's first novel, his breakthrough book; it was his second biggest seller, after *Around the World in Eighty Days*; it launched his famed series of *Voyages extraordinaires*; it's the classic ballooning novel; it's the first steampunk story; it's a triple-threat mix of adventure, comedy, and hard science fiction; it wrestles with ecological and economic issues that are still unresolved. ("Introduction" xxviii-xxix)

Walter's translation of the text itself is a delight, achieving its goal of capturing the adventure, suspense, and humor of the original in an American English vernacular that rings true today, but without permitting us to forget entirely that the main characters are two Englishmen (the scientist Samuel Fergusson and his manservant Joe Wilson) and a Scot (Fergusson's friend, the hunter-adventurer Dick Kennedy), by spicing his text with the occasional "Crikey!" and "Bloody Hell!" Detailed notes at the end of the novel give, by chapter, explanations of everything from textual variants to modern currency equivalents, while a "Gallery of Heroes" provides brief biographies of the dizzying number of explorers, soldiers, and scientists mentioned throughout the novel, particularly in the first few chapters. This edition also reproduces all of the novel's original illustrations.

For the scholar—whether a specialist in Verne and early science fiction or, like this reviewer, one interested in Verne's larger role as a *vulgarisateur* of scientific progress and its connection to other "master narratives" of the nineteenth century, including nationalism, capitalism, colonialism, modernity, and a nascent mass culture—the rest of the volume is as meticulously complete as the translation itself. An extensive "Introduction" situates the novel both in history and in Verne's own life and career, and provides a helpful overview of the book's narrative strategies, major ingredients, "Aftermath and Influences," and prior translations. The "Introduction" is followed by a helpful list of references, but more impressive still is the exhaustive annotated bibliography of the works of Verne, as well as a useful list of secondary sources, in both French and English, on his life and works. These follow the "Gallery of Heroes." A brief biography of the author, including a discussion of the role of his son Michel's problematic relationship to his later and posthumous works, concludes the volume.

This translation is both a delightful read and a significant addition to our understanding of the place of this seminal novel in the author's *oeuvre* and in nineteenth-century French literature in general. It belongs on the shelves of English-speaking Jules Verne fans and scholars alike, and should be of interest to those who appreciate the cultural significance of the writer UNESCO ranks as the most-translated French author, and second-most-translated author in the world.

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