



THE 2009 EATON SCIENCE FICTION CONFERENCE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, RIVERSIDE, MAY 1-3, 2009



R. Leys

EXTRAORDINARY VOYAGES: JULES VERNE AND BEYOND

The 2009 Eaton Sequence

Arthur B. Evans – Terry Harpold – Rob Latham – George Slusser

Housed in the Tomás Rivera Library of the University of California, Riverside, the J. Lloyd Eaton Collection of Science Fiction, Fantasy, Horror and Utopian Literature (<http://eaton-collection.ucr.edu/>) is the largest cataloged collection of its kind in the world and the premier academic research center for science fiction scholarship in North America. Founded in 1969 with the donation of the private collection of J. Lloyd Eaton, an Oakland, California physician and book collector, the Collection has grown from an initial 7500 books to some 125,000 volumes and many thousands of films, comic books, manga, and pulp magazines in more than a dozen languages. The Eaton's outstanding collection of science fiction fanzines numbers more than 90,000 issues, making it one of the most complete and authoritative archives of this important, ephemeral literatures.

Since 1979, the Eaton Collection has developed in a symbiotic relationship with the Eaton [Science Fiction] Conferences (<http://eaton-collection.ucr.edu/TheEatonConference.htm>), which have included participation by many of the foremost authors, artists, and scholars of science fiction and fantasy. Usually focused on a specific theme, collegial but also pathbreaking, many of the Conferences have represented breakthrough moments in the emergence of science fiction studies as a respected and influential academic field. They have generated thirty edited collections of science fiction scholarship, as well as special issues of *Science Fiction Studies* and *Extrapolation*. In 2009, McFarland Press has published two Eaton-related books: *The Science of Fiction and the Fiction of Science*, the collected Eaton essays of Frank McConnell, and Gary Westfahl and George Slusser's *Science Fiction and the Two Cultures*, essays from the 1999 Eaton Conference, issued on the 50th anniversary of C.P. Snow's famous lecture. A volume from the 2008 Eaton Conference, *Chronicling Mars*, is in preparation; it features essays and comments by Ray Bradbury, Kim Stanley Robinson, Fredrik Pohl, Greg Bear, Joe Miller, Eric Rabkin, Geoff Landis, and other Martian visionaries.

The theme of the 2009 Eaton Conference, held at Riverside in early May, was "Extraordinary Voyages: Jules Verne and Beyond." The Conference was cosponsored by the North American Jules Verne Society (<http://www.najvs.org>), and funded by UC Riverside's College of Humanities and Social Sciences and the Rivera Library. The Conference featured three plenary lectures by John Rieder, Walter James Miller, and Marie-Hélène Huet; five panel discussions (on *The Emergence of Modern Science Fiction*; *The Two Jules Vernes*; *Extraordinary Revision, Repetition, and Pastiche*; *Collecting Verne*; and *Steampunk and Extraordinary Voyages*); and 22 papers by North American and European scholars, archivists, and science fiction authors. The topics of the papers and presentations ranged widely within the traditions of the extraordinary voyage; not surprisingly, Verne's signal role in and lasting influence on those traditions, and on much of modern speculative fiction and art, was central to the discussions.

All the events were well attended, with the audience peaking during Saturday afternoon's awards ceremony, which included the bestowal of the R.D. Mullen Research Fellowships to graduate students doing work in the Eaton archive, the student short story awards, and the second annual Eaton Lifetime Achievement Award (given to Frederik Pohl). An illness prevented Pohl from attending, but he recorded a warm and funny acceptance speech that was screened for the assembly. Authors who did participate in the weekend's events included Greg Bear, Gregory Benford, Kathleen Ann Goonan, Howard Hendrix, Tim Powers, and Rudy Rucker. By general consent, the level of discussion sustained over the three days was remarkably high, and the audience came away with a deeper appreciation for Verne's literary skill, his political acumen, his sophisticated humor, his engagement with scientific discourses, and his importance for subsequent science fiction.

As significant, the conference served to facilitate a much-needed rapprochement between two important but estranged domains of literary scholarship – Verne studies and Anglo-American science fiction studies. During the past several decades, as both fields have become more sophisticated and specialized, they seem to have often lost sight of each other. As courses on science fiction began to multiply in British and North American universities, sf scholars often brought new critical perspectives to the field: women writers (feminism), “dime novels” and the American pulp genres (cultural studies), the ideological foundations of social identity (Marxism), the role of the popular science fiction film (media studies), or the evolving understanding of the real in Western technoculture (postmodernism). Verne’s role in the emergence of modern imaginative fiction was often minimized or ignored altogether. Many sf scholars avoided Verne for one of two reasons: 1) he was considered to be simply a writer of children’s stories and not “serious” enough to warrant inclusion in literary sf; or 2) his novels – and, until recently, most of the worthwhile criticism on them – were available only in French: many “Anglo-Saxon” sf scholars can read only English, and know only the grotesque Victorian mis-translations of Verne they read as children. Even as complete, accurate, and graceful English translations of Verne’s novels have become available, it is still unusual for Verne to be taught with any depth in British and North American universities.

For their part, Verne scholars have resisted associating Verne with the genre of science fiction. They have focused instead on enhancing his status as a recognized author of world literature, on publishing improved translations of his works, and on working to shed his stereotypical reputation as “the man who invented the future” or “the father of sci-fi.” Verne scholars have argued long and loudly that Verne *is not and never has been* a writer of “sci-fi” because his texts include no aliens, A.I.s, or warp drives. The Anglo-American treatment of Verne as an icon of futurism undercuts and trivializes his importance as a mainstream 19th-century author.

The 2009 Eaton Conference marked a watershed moment in the exchanges between these factions. The growing momentum of new and excellent English-language Verne scholarship can no longer be ignored in the sf community, which is coming to recognize the achievement of a forebear. Vernians are coming to appreciate that Verne can be *both* one of the founders of modern sf *and* a major voice in 19th-century French and world literatures. These are the conditions of a genuine and productive dialogue, and a new way forward for Verne and sf studies alike.

This Eaton Special Sequence of Verniana collects many of the best papers from the 2009 Conference in which the work and influence of Verne was a principal focus. Taken as a whole, this body of scholarship represents a major contribution to modern Verne Studies, and demonstrates the new diversity, depth, and vitality of Verne scholarship in North America, which is in several respects distinctive from – but no less rigorous or original than – Verne scholarship in other national traditions. The success of the 2009 Eaton Conference reaffirms the evidence of other national and international congresses of recent years: in the 21st century, Verne’s status as a world author is assured.

Guest Editors of the Eaton 2009 Special Sequence

- Arthur Evans, Professor of French, DePauw University
- Terry Harpold, Associate Professor of English, Film & Media Studies, University of Florida
- Rob Latham, Associate Professor of English, University of California, Riverside
- George Slusser, Curator Emeritus, Eaton Collection of Science Fiction, Fantasy, Horror, & Utopian Literature; Professor Emeritus of Comparative Literature, University of California, Riverside

A Note re the papers collected in the Special Sequence

Verniana publishes texts accepted by its Editorial Board when editing and production of each text is complete. Thus, the papers in the Special Sequence will be published in the journal irregularly, over the next several months, as they readied. These papers have been selected by the Guest Editors for inclusion in the Sequence:

Terry Harpold (University of Florida) “Professor Lidenbrock and the Mole Men”

William B. Jones, Jr., “From *Michael Strogoff* to *Tigers and Traitors*: The Extraordinary Voyages of Jules Verne in *Classics Illustrated*”

Kieran O’Driscoll (Dublin City University), “Taking the Child Reader on an Extraordinary Journey to the Center of the World of Verne”

Peter Schulman (Old Dominion University), “*The Secret of Wilhelm Storitz*: Fathers and Sons at Work”

Matthew Snyder (University of California, Riverside), “Oceans of Noise: Archetypal Readings of Jules Verne in *The Abyss*”

Ekaterina Yudina (University of California, Riverside), “Comrade Jules Verne vs. The Sharks of Imperialism in Mikhail Bulgakov’s *The Crimson Island*”