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Verne and the Theatre: Hoffmann and the “Shadowless Mann” in *Voyage au centre de la Terre*

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Abstract

The *Voyages extraordinaires* are scattered with a variety of errors in names of places and people. In a few cases these errors however can be explained. In *Voyage au centre de la Terre* the lighting effects in the underground cavern leaves the characters without shadows, like (says the narrator) “the fantastic character in Hoffmann who lost his shadow”. Commentators have noted that such a character occurs in a tale by Adelbert von Chamisso, not Hoffmann, who wrote of a character who lost his reflection. But in the theatrical adaptation *Les Contes d’Hoffmann* by Jules Barbier and Michel Carré (1851) Chamisso’s shadowless hero figures as a rival to the protagonist; this play (now better known in its operatic adaptation by Offenbach), a notable success at the time when Verne himself also collaborated on theatrical works with Carré, is thus the probable source of Verne’s error.

Résumé

Les *Voyages extraordinaires* contiennent de nombreuses erreurs de nom (noms de lieux, noms de personnages). Dans de rares cas il est possible d’identifier la source de l’erreur de Verne. Dans *Voyage au centre de la Terre* les effets de lumière dans la caverne souterraine font que (selon le narrateur) les personnages ressemblent à “ce fantastique personnage d’Hoffmann qui a perdu son ombre.” Comme l’indiquent les éditeurs du roman, un tel personnage se retrouve dans une nouvelle d’Adelbert von Chamisso; dans un conte fantastique d’Hoffmann par contre se trouve un personnage sans reflet. Mais dans l’adaptation théâtrale *Les Contes d’Hoffmann* de Jules Barbier et Michel Carré (1851) le héros sans ombre de Chamisso joue le rôle de rival du personnage principal; cette pièce (de nos jours mieux connue dans la version opératique d’Offenbach), un succès notable à l’époque où Verne collaborait lui-même avec Carré dans plusieurs ouvrages pour la scène parisienne, reste donc la source probable de l’erreur de Verne.

The *Voyages extraordinaires* are, notoriously, scattered with points that seem to modern editors in need of correction or annotation: the repeated confusion of east and west, misspellings of the proper names of people and places. There can be many sources of such “errors”. Some may arise from Verne accurately quoting from a source that was (unknown to him) in error; others may have arisen from Verne’s inability to read his own notes or his first drafts (written in pencil, then copied in ink before a legible fair copy); [1] others again from the printer: the published version of *Voyage au centre de la Terre* has “Guachara” Caves, whereas Verne’s MS correctly gives “Guacharo”. [2] Sometimes however prima facie errors or mistaken attributions can be explained – for instance why Verne took a parody of a line from Virgil’s *Bucolics* in Hugo’s *Notre-Dame de Paris* (“Immanis pecoris custos, immanior ipse”) as a genuine line from the *Georgics*. [3]

In Chapter 39 of *Voyage au centre de la Terre* (one of the sections added in 1867 to the first edition of the novel, published in 1864) the narrator Axel, Professor Lidenbrock's nephew, describes the (convenient) “ondes électriques” illuminating the underground cavern in which they find themselves:

Par un phénomène que je ne puis expliquer, et grâce à sa diffusion, complète alors, la lumière éclairait uniformément les diverses faces des objets. Son foyer n'existait plus en un point déterminé de l'espace et elle ne produisait aucun effet d'ombre. [...] Les rochers, les montagnes lointaines, quelques masses confuses de forêts éloignées, prenaient un étrange aspect sous l'égalité distribution du fluide lumineux. Nous ressemblions à ce fantastique personnage d'Hoffmann qui a perdu son ombre. (315-6)

Editors point out that the character who loses his shadow is the protagonist of Adelbert von Chamisso's *Peter Schlemihl's wundersame Geschichte* (1814), and that Schlemihl is referred to in E. T. A. Hoffman's *Die Abenteuer der Silvesternacht* (1815). [4] Arthur B. Evans, noting that Hoffmann's tale concerns a man who has his *reflection* stolen from him, abandons this promising parallel to suggest that Verne could have read Chamisso's tale in a French edition of 1860 published by A. G. Hoffmann and confused the publisher's name with that of the author (185 n. 47).

In Chamisso's story the protagonist-narrator impulsively surrenders his shadow to a mysterious man in grey in exchange for a wallet that produces money inexhaustibly; mocked or spurned by human society, he loses his fiancée. The grey man reappears to offer his shadow in exchange for his soul; Schlemihl rejects him, discards the wallet, but (having acquired seven-league boots) spends his life in solitary scientific exploration. (Slippers cover the boots when he needs to slow down.)

Hoffmann, struck by Chamisso's story, could not resist the temptation of writing – “fairly infelicitously” according to Julius Hitzig – his own variant, [5] introducing the figure of Schlemihl in acknowledgement. *Die Abenteuer der Silvesternacht* consists of four linked chapters, framed by brief paragraphs: one prefatory (by the “editor”), one concluding (by the narrator, the “Travelling Enthusiast”). In these New-Year's Eve “adventures” in Berlin, the Enthusiast meets his former love Julie at the Counsellor's reception. She offers a strangely gleaming goblet; he faints. When he recovers, Julie is looking at him amorously... and a repulsive man enters seeking his wife. The narrator flees, having ‘lost Julie for ever’ (I). Seeking refuge in a tavern, he meets two men: one identifiable (by footwear and botanical knowledge) as Schlemihl; the second, a little man, fears mirrors. The two quarrel (II). Going to an inn he knows (having left his housekey in his cloak at the Counsellor's), the narrator shares a room with the little man. He awakes to find a manuscript left by his room-mate which he deduces to be his “strange story” (“wundersame Geschichte” (268), echoing Chamisso's title) (III) and which he then relates (IV). Erasmus Spikher travels from Germany on a long-dreamed of journey to Italy. In Florence he is torn between the seductive charms of Giulietta, abetted by the sinister Dapertutto (“Everywhere”), and home and his “liebe fromme Hausfrau” (268) and child. His friend Friedrich repeatedly attempts to detach him from the snares of Giulietta. Invited to a fête by Giulietta, Spikher threatens, then (when he draws a knife) kills in a brawl a young Italian who is paying attentions to her. Forced to flee Florence, he leaves, in response to her pleas, his reflection with Giulietta. Spikher rejects subsequent temptations by Dapertutto to recover Giulietta by poisoning his wife and child, but without his reflection is rejected by society and family and has to travel the world. The tale ends by recalling his encounter with Schlemihl, the idea of their travelling together (Spikher providing a shadow and Schlemihl a reflection), but “nothing came of it” (“Es wurde aber nichts daraus” (282)).

The four episodes are interlinked (Giulietta's clothes and actions repeat Julie's), and Hoffmann's tale offers several echoes of Chamisso's. But Chamisso's suggestive fable (its autobiographical core – Chamisso's own sense of rootlessness – has wider moral and social resonance) becomes a conventional instance of a weak character and his passion for an unworthy woman, tempted to crime, then overcome by remorse (Ricci 371-2).

Although Schlemihl does play a role in Hoffmann's tale, Verne's confusion is likely to have arisen not directly from Chamisso or Hoffmann, but from *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*, "drame fantastique en cinq actes" by Jules Barbier (1825-1901) and Michel Carré (1822-1872), first performed at the Odéon on 21 March 1851. [6] The play reworks freely several tales by Hoffmann, exploiting the French stereotype of Hoffmann (meerschaum pipe and *Bierkeller*) and giving them an autobiographical twist. The framing acts, set in Luther's tavern, depict Hoffmann's love for the singer Stella (I: "Prologue") who is won by his rival Counsellor Lindorf (V: he has bribed her servant). Hoffmann, drunk, is carried home by his companion in each act, the student Friédrick and in the final scene the Muse appears to turn him towards art. [7] In Act I Hoffmann's evocation of the grotesque figure of Klein-Zach (taken from *Klein Zaches gennant Zinnober*) was interrupted by his own reverie about a woman. In the central acts he tells how he loves and loses three women. Olympia (II, based on the Spalanzani/Coppola section of *Der Sandmann*; Hoffmann assuming the role of Nathanael) is revealed to be an automaton. Antonia (III, based on *Rat Krespel*), sings and dies (having inherited her mother's fatal chest complaint); Hoffmann has the role of the narrator, amalgamated with Antonia's fiancé. In Florence the courtesan Giulietta steals his reflection (IV, based on Chapter IV of "Die Abenteurer"; Hoffmann has the role of Spikher). In each act Hoffmann is faced by a rival, successive avatars of his evil genius Lindorf and played by the same actor: [8] Coppelius the provider of eyes and optical instruments (II), docteur Miracle who urges Antonia to sing (III), [9] and Dapertutto (IV). Each also contains another male figure – the eccentric inventor Spalanzani, Olympia's "father" (II), Antonia's father Crespel (III), and Peter Schlemil [*sic*] (IV) – and a comic servant (all played by one actor, Tétard): Stella's monosyllabic Andrès (I), Spalanzani's Cochenille (II), the deaf Frantz (III), Giulietta's *bouffon* Pitichinaccio (IV). [10] In Act V Hoffmann realises that the three women (all played by Marie Laurent) represent different aspects or phases of one love, declaring "c'est justement là mon cauchemar... mon cauchemar en trois rêves": "Stella / Sous les trois aspects de sa vie! / Artiste, jeune fille et courtisane!" (79-80).

In Act IV Barbier and Carré develop Hoffmann's nod to Chamisso, naming Spikher's unnamed Italian rival "Schlemil", and making Dapertutto Lindorf's final avatar. When the act, still set in Florence, opens, Schlemil is the current lover of Giulietta. Hoffmann, after his loves for Olympia and Antonia, imagines himself now disillusioned with women, "ces faibles et décevantes créatures". Giulietta is just a beautiful woman who will "distraindre" him in Florence (sc. ii, 61), boasting to Friédrick that even the devil could not make him love her. Dapertutto, appearing, predicts that Hoffmann will replace Schlemil (sc. iii). Alone, Dapertutto addresses the diamond that will captivate Giulietta ("Il n'y a pas de femme qui résiste à cela!" (sc. iv, 64)). [11] Their conversation reveals that she owes her palace, clothes and admirers to him; in exchange she steals from her lovers tokens – the latest being Schlemihl's shadow – which are "de petits à-comptes en attendant le grand jour de l'échéance", their souls. But "il faut varier ses plaisirs" (sc. v, 65), so Dapertutto asks for Hoffmann's reflection rather than his shadow: "Schlemil et lui feront la paire" (sc. v, 65). Giulietta, initially reluctant because she admires Hoffmann's "riche et puissante nature" (sc. v, 66), agrees, not for the diamond, on hearing of his boast that he could defy her charms. Alone with Hoffmann, she feigns disillusionment with her life of pleasure and wins

him over. Schlemil (who has the key to her apartment) warns Hoffmann about “cette syrène” (sc. vii, 70) and challenges him to a duel (mimed in silence by moonlight). Hoffmann kills Schlemil and takes the key. But Friédrick (who leaves to prepare horses) and Giulietta (professing horror at Hoffmann’s act) urge Hoffmann to leave Florence. Her pleas for “un gage, un souvenir” obtain for her his reflection (sc. x, 73-4); seeing it vanish, Hoffmann faints. Giulietta, rejoicing in her triumph, abandons him to Dapertutto. When Hoffmann comes to, Dapertutto gives him a draught to make Friédrick “sleep”, giving him one night in Florence with Giulietta. While Hoffmann hesitates at the side of the stage, he sees Giulietta enter with Pitichinaccio, mock Hoffmann, and drink the draught. As she dies in Hoffmann’s arms, [12] Dapertutto reappears, exclaims at Giulietta’s “clumsiness”. The curtain falls to Pitichinaccio’s laughter.

By combining the Schlemihl who quarrels with Spikher in the tavern with Spikher’s unnamed Italian victim, Barbier and Carré create a rival to Hoffmann and parallel victim of Giulietta and Dapertutto. That Verne would have known “ce fantastique personnage ... qui a perdu son ombre” from *Les Contes d’Hoffmann* rather than the tales of E. T. A. Hoffmann is highly probable. The play was performed in 1851. Théophile Gautier’s review singled out for praise the staging of the duel and the lighting effects, the innovative combination of prose and verse (“cette heureuse innovation”), and the acting of Laurent and Tisserant in their multiple roles, predicting success for the play: “*Les Contes d’Hoffmann* forceront le public à passer le pont, et renouvelleront de l’autre côté de l’eau la vogue du *Champ*”. [13] Although the play did not obtain the runaway success of Sand’s *François le Champi* (first performed at the Odéon on 23 November 1849, it marked its hundredth performance in March 1850 (Sand 7, 402)), the 57 performances on its first run and its revival for 11 in 1852, noted by Volker Dehs (“Verne et Hoffmann” 20), constitue an honourable run for the early 1850s (Lough 341). This was the time when Verne was trying to establish himself in the theatre, writing numerous plays, four in collaboration with Carré between 1851 and 1859, including *Monsieur de Chimpanzé*, a one-act *opéra-comique* (music by Verne’s friend Aristide Hignard) staged at the Théâtre des Bouffes-Parisiens (directed by Offenbach) in 1858. [14] A version of Barbier and Carré’s play (score by Hector Salomon) was nearly staged at the Porte-Saint-Martin in 1866 (the year before Verne added the reference to Hoffmann in *Voyage au centre de la Terre*), but shelved because a soprano could not be found for the main role. [15]

The play was adapted by Barbier to form the libretto of Offenbach’s opera, left unfinished at his death in 1880, in which form it is familiar today. [16] Verne himself was to collaborate with Offenbach in the *opéra-bouffe* *Le Docteur Ox* (1877), [17] based on his comic novella *Une Fantaisie du docteur Ox* (1872). As Volker Dehs notes, the multiple adaptations of Hoffmann in France make specific attributions of sources problematic (“Verne et Hoffmann” 14). Jean-Michel Margot has argued that docteur Ox, “véritable excentrique échappé d’un volume d’Hoffmann” (Verne, *Contes* 90), seems to have been inspired more by the docteur Miracle of Barbier and Carré’s play than directly by the tales (*Journey through the Impossible* 9-17). Verne’s probable confusion in 1867 of Hoffmann and Chamisso’s figures via Barbier and Carré’s play provides another instance (if one were needed) of the continuing presence in the *Voyages extraordinaires* of his apprenticeship in the world of the Parisian stage. [18]

NOTES

1. See Butcher, “Long Lost Manuscript” 963.
2. Verne, *Voyage au centre de la Terre* 237; see Butcher, “Long Lost Manuscript” 968 n. 17. For similar examples in another MS, see Verne *Une Ville flottante* 26-7.
3. See Touchefeu.
4. William Butcher in his translation (229-30); Peter Cogman in notes to Frank Wynne’s translation (251).
5. “ziemlich unglücklich zu variieren”: see the prefatory letter added in the 1827 edition from Chamisso’s friend Julius Hitzig to F. de la Motte Fouqué (Chamisso 20). Volker Dehs notes that Verne owned a translation of Hoffmann’s story by the pseudonymous P. Christian (“Verne et Hoffmann” 14). For other discussions of the multiple and complex links between Verne and Hoffman, see notably Compère’s exploration of themes from Hoffmann in *Le Château des Carpathes*, Volker Dehs’ edition of *Voyage au centre de la Terre* and Dehs, “Inspirations”, on thematic links especially with *Les Indes noires*, *Le Château des Carpathes* and *Le Secret de Wilhelm Storitz*; Dehs, arguing that Verne could have known Hoffman not just directly but through Barbier and Carré’s play *Les Contes d’Hoffmann* and Dumas’s *La Femme au collier de velours*, notes an allusion similar to that in *Voyage au centre de la Terre* in *Autour de la Lune*, Chapter VIII (“Le fantastique a créé des hommes privés de leurs reflets, d’autres privés de leur ombre! Mais ici la réalité, par la neutralité des forces attractives, faisait des hommes en qui rien ne pesait plus, et qui ne pesaient pas eux-mêmes!”), seeing the origins of both allusions in *Die Abenteurer* (183).
6. Music by Joseph Ancassy: see Yon 103. Jean-Michel Margot has shown the probable debt of Verne and d’Ennery’s *Voyage à travers l’impossible* (1882) to this play, both structurally (prologue and episode framing three episodes with the same protagonist in different settings and a recurrent figure who assumes different identities) and theme (choice between love and an alternative, respectively scientific knowledge or art) (*Journey through the Impossible*, 11-19).
7. “Cesse d’être homme, Hoffmann! je t’aime! sois poète!” (V, vii, 88). She opens the Prologue, then metamorphoses into “un jeune étudiant” (I, i, 4); although Muse and Friédrick are played by different actors (Mme Bilhaut, Harville), we assume them to be one.
8. The famous Hippolyte Tisserant (1809-1877).
9. In Hoffmann the two doctors help Antonia. But Spikher’s servant calls Dapertutto “der Wunderdokter” (the quack) in “Die Abenteurer” (272); Heather Hadlock, discussing Miracle’s role, notes the term’s translation as ‘docteur miracle’ in Henri Egmont’s 1836 version of the tale (44-6).
10. The name is taken from the eunuch dwarf in Hoffmann’s *Signor Formica*. See Hadlock 119.
11. In Offenbach’s opera based on the play, Dapertutto fascinates Giulietta with a jewel: in the 1904 reworking of the opera’s Venetian act by Raoul Gunsbourg, using a libretto by Pierre Barbier (son of Jules), Dapertutto sings the aria “Scintille, diamant” (see Hadlock 46-50 and 123), taken from Offenbach’s *opéra-féerie Voyage dans la lune* (1875, revised 1876), ultimately inspired (via a revue of 1871) by Verne’s *De la Terre à la Lune* (1865), while drawing at the same time on the theatrical adaptation (with Adolphe Dennery) of *Le Tour du Monde en quatre-vingts jours* (1874) and (or so Verne thought)

- the dénouement of *Voyage au centre de la Terre* (the travellers return after a volcanic eruption). See Yon 527-530.
12. Repeating the pattern of Acts II and III: Hoffmann is left with the 'lifeless' Olympia/Antonia, and Coppélius/Miracle laugh (Hadlock 120-121).
 13. Gautier 2. The version of this review reproduced in *Histoire de l'art dramatique en France depuis vingt-cinq ans*, 6^{ème} série, Paris: Hetzel, 1859, 230-233, is truncated. See also the entries on the actors in Pierre Larousse's *Grand Dictionnaire universel* (1866-77), X, 254 and XV, 234-5.
 14. Yon, 768; Butcher, *Jules Verne* 181, 320-321.
 15. Yon 478.
 16. The orchestration was completed by Ernest Guiraud. Act IV, transferred to Venice (enabling Offenbach to use as the famous barcarolle music taken from the overture to his unsuccessful opera *Die Rheinnixen* (1864)), was cut in the first performance in 1881 and remains problematic: see Hadlock's discussion of the complex history of its subsequent reworkings (113-133). The 1881 libretto shows significant divergences from the play: Giulietta takes the shadow of Hoffmann (leaving Venice because of gambling losses) *before* the duel; the act ends with Hoffmann accidentally stabbing Pitichinaccio and Giulietta's grief.
 17. Libretto by A. Mortier and Ph. Gille, but Verne also contributed (Yon, 555-556 and 768).
 18. See e.g. Unwin Chapter IV, "Theatre and Theatricality", and Jean-Michel Margot's editions of *Voyage à travers l'impossible*.

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