

such as transcendental meditation, should be neither supported nor regulated by government. Whatever policies emerge, says Dworkin,

should be crafted “with a degree of sympathy toward those who have found something of value in alternative medicine.”

ARTS & LETTERS

The Prophet of Scientific Morality

“Editor’s Column” by Walter A. McDougall, in *Orbis* (Summer 2001), Foreign Policy Research Inst., 1528 Walnut St., Ste. 610, Philadelphia, Pa. 19102-3684.

Mention Jules Verne (1828–1905), and most people think of the visionary novelist who, among other things, foretold the space age, inspiring such rocket scientists as Robert Goddard and Wernher von Braun, and penned books, such as *Around the World in Eighty Days* (1873) and *20,000 Leagues under the Sea* (1870), that spawned Hollywood hits. But the man himself, says McDougall, a historian at the University of Pennsylvania and the editor of *Orbis*, is a jumble of contradictions. Where one would expect to find “a rationalist and promoter of science,” one discovers a romantic. Instead of a bohemian like his contemporaries Victor Hugo and Émile Zola, “one finds a paragon of respectability.” And though Verne inhabits the public consciousness as “an apostle of progress,” McDougall reminds us that he “ended his life issuing jeremiads about the dangers of another Dark Age.”

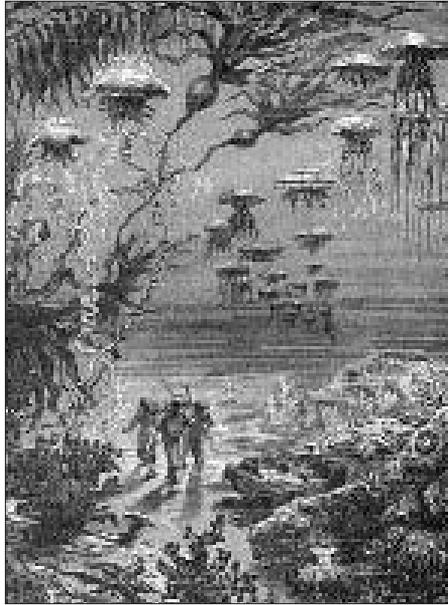
Born in Nantes, the son of a lawyer who expected Jules to follow him into the legal profession, Verne at an early age acted upon the passions that were to rule his life: “freedom, music, and the sea.” At the age of 11, he stowed away on a ship bound for the West Indies; discovered and sent home, he promised his mother that “from now on, I will travel only in my dreams.” Verne obtained his law license in 1848 in Paris, but that same year Parisian mobs

overthrew the monarchy, and Verne embraced the liberal revolution. He walked away from law, and announced his intention in 1852 to become a writer. It took him a while to realize his ambition. He first married and became a stockbroker, but devoured books on science as he struggled to make his way.

Then, in 1862, a revelation: “It struck me one day that perhaps I might utilize my scientific education to blend together science and romance into a work . . . that might appeal to the public taste.” The result was *Five Weeks in a Balloon*, which launched his writing career. Soon to come were *Journey to the Center of the Earth* (1864) and the visionary *From the Earth to the Moon* (1865). Verne would publish 64 novels

and 21 short stories, becoming the fourth-most-translated author in history (behind Joseph Stalin, V. I. Lenin, and the detective writer Georges Simenon).

To McDougall, the message of such novels as *20,000 Leagues under the Sea* and *The Mysterious Island* (1875) is “a virtual catechism. Science permits human beings to locate themselves in the cosmos, survive perils, unlock Nature’s secrets, serve their fellow man, and finally become ‘more than a man.’” Verne’s scientist-heroes, such as Captain Nemo, are “godlike” creatures. It all seems to suggest a “positivistic stance: science as a sec-



An illustration from one of Jules Verne’s best known works, *20,000 Leagues under the Sea*

ular religion.” But McDougall says that Verne “frankly *romanticized* science and technology as fairy lands liberating his middle-class readers (and himself) from the tedium of modern urban life.”

What accounts for the tone of pessimism that crept into Verne’s work in his later years? Partly, thinks McDougall, it was due to personal misfortune: His wife became an invalid, and his only son, Michel, became a rake. By 1890, Verne was suffering from facial neuralgia, and cataracts destroyed his eyesight in 1900. But experiences also affected his ideas. His

early enchantment with America, which suffuses *Around the World in Eighty Days*, gradually gave way to concern about the technological colossus, and he witnessed firsthand the evils science can bring when Krupp-made cannon smashed Paris in 1870 during the Franco-Prussian War. Scientists, once the heroes of his fictions, were now portrayed as evil geniuses. McDougall believes that Verne “saw the dangers of planned science, whether in the hands of governments or corporations,” but he did not fault science; rather, “what he lost was his faith in mankind.”

Naughty but Nice

“Pornographic Art” by Matthew Kieran, in *Philosophy and Literature* (Apr. 2001), The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, Journals Division, 2715 N. Charles St., Baltimore, Md. 21218-4363.

There can be no such thing as pornographic art. That’s the received view, as reported, but not shared, by Kieran, a lecturer in the School of Philosophy at the University of Leeds, who finds none of the supporting arguments convincing.

The first argument is definitional: As a matter of principle, pornography cannot have artistic value. Pornography’s sole aim is sexual arousal. Other kinds of erotic representations, by contrast, have additional aims, including artistic ones.

But why, Kieran asks, should we grant this narrow characterization of pornography? Most representational forms—pictures, novels, films—have little artistic merit, but we do not take this lack as evidence that the respective forms are *incapable* of having artistic merit. Might it not be that the stigma attached to pornography has kept genuine artists from attempting to create it? Besides, it’s far from obvious to Kieran “that there are no artistically valuable pornographic representations.” The onus, he believes, is on others to prove that such things as Nicholson Baker’s novel *Vox*, Georges Bataille’s *Story of the Eye*, Egon Schiele’s portraits, and some of Picasso’s late work are without artistic merit.

A second line of argument against the possibility of pornographic art holds that the very purpose of pornography—sexual arousal—causes pornographic representations to be “artistically indifferent”: “the greater the explicit concentration on the physiological, biological,

and more generally animalistic aspects of sexual behavior,” the more limited the possibilities of representation “in any complex and interesting way.”

Kieran replies that many choices can be made about how the explicitness is to be “treated and conveyed.” Nor is the “inherently formulaic” nature of pornography an automatic argument against artistic expressiveness. “Even where a pornographic representation is formulaic,” he insists, it may realize aspects of originality, as do, for example, many of Rodin’s pornographic nude drawings: “The specifically artistically innovative developments in Rodin’s line drawing enabled him to characterize the lines of action, sexual embraces, and actions in a more athletic, impulsive, vigorous manner which enhances the evocation of sexual arousal.”

Yet another line of argument holds that the aesthetic aspect of a work cannot be appreciated so long as our interest in the work is pornographic. “A pornographic interest,” says Kieran, “is held to be one which involves the objectification of a person’s body, in the service of arousal, by denying or precluding their first-person perspective.”

Kieran counters that many artistic works solicit an interest that precludes the first-person perspective of the represented subject. Among the examples he proposes are Ovid’s *Ars Amatoria* and the literature of courtly love, in which the object of desire is idealized as an object to be possessed, and visual art by