

SONS AND THE CITY: A STUDY OF TWO NOVELS BY JULES VERNE

By

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To Estelle

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Abstract of Thesis Presented to the Graduate School  
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This thesis analyses the connections between descriptions of cities and the protagonists' relationships with their respective father figures in the novels *Paris au XX<sup>e</sup> Siècle* and *Les Cinq Cents Millions de la Béguine* by Jules Verne. Research has highlighted the thematic similarity of these two novels, but has not addressed the ways in which depictions of the urban environment mirror, and are altered by, the evolving thoughts and actions of the orphaned protagonists in relation to other male characters.

I argue that Michel Dufrénoy's initial awe, subsequent disillusionment and final hallucinatory horror at the future Paris parallels a personal psychological crisis which centers on his inability to find a father figure worthy of filial devotion. In contrast to the artistic and culturally anachronistic Dufrénoy, Marcel Bruckmann's adventures in the cities of Stahlstadt and France-Ville mark him out as the embodiment of his age: bold, scientifically-minded and patriotic. Because of these qualities, Bruckmann is able to transcend the limitations of his two father figures, the pacifistic Dr. Sarassin of France-Ville and the belligerent Herr Schultze of Stahlstadt, to gain mastery over the urban environment and acceptance as a worthy son. Unlike Dufrénoy, who dies unloved in the snow, Bruckmann's reward for his success is to be adopted into the Sarassin family as

his daughter Jeanne's fiancé. This thesis contributes to Vernian criticism by emphasizing the importance of the father and son theme in relation to the depictions and critique of the modern city in the work of Jules Verne.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Jules Verne is primarily known to the English-speaking world as one of the forefathers of modern science fiction and a visionary author of remarkable predictions about the future. Such epithets often constitute only half-truths. In the two novels studied here – *Paris au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle* and *Les Cinq Cents Millions de la Bégum* – Verne shows himself to be more concerned with the circumstances of his own time. Indeed, Verne often "seems more preoccupied with the past than he is with the future" (Unwin 7). In spite of the futuristic setting for *Paris au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, the novel is as much an exploration of the place of art in society prior to the Second Empire as it is a prediction of the capital's future configuration. In any case, the focus of this study is not technology or Verne's supposedly uncanny predictive capacity – enjoyable as that may be to debate – it is, rather, two central themes of these novels: the city and father-son relations.

I chose to study these two novels for several reasons. First, the theme of the city has always intrigued me, particularly in the context of industrialization and the profound social changes which such a transition to modernity induces. In these two novels, the protagonists are forced to confront their respective cities in an attempt to gain mastery over their environment. In addition, the fact that both these protagonists were orphans fascinated me. Although the stories have quite different plots, it seemed to me that the city and the search for a father-figure were inextricably linked in both novels.

Previous studies have focused rather heavily on the impact of contemporary urbanism and industrialization on Verne's descriptions of the city. Nadia Minerva (2001) paints a vivid portrait of the cities in *Bégum*, demonstrating how they are at once

opposed and complementary. In juxtaposing this analysis with an examination of the Paris of the future, Minerva places an emphasis on the overwhelming force of modern, urban society. According to her, Verne's Paris is a brutal, mercantilist dog-eat-dog world in which uniformity and monotony are the watchwords. Despite Verne's reputation as a visionary writer, Timothy Unwin (2005) emphasizes the parallels between the representation of twentieth-century Paris and Verne's own Paris, a place of financial boom and bust, of furious inventiveness and of grand schemes of urban regeneration. My study adds to current scholarship by highlighting the link between (fictional) cities and the role of father-son relations in these two novels. To my knowledge, no such study has been carried out before. I argue that the city is a locus of transcendence, in which a rite of passage can take place both to adulthood and to fatherly acceptance within the context of a threatening modernity. The mastery of space and place is crucial to the protagonists' quest, yet only Marcel Bruckmann is able to overcome the hostile urban environment to attain harmonious relations with his father-figure; Marcel Dufrénoy's unsuccessful attempts to master the city echo his failure to connect fully with a father-figure. In this sense, I argue that the city should be understood as the structure in which the orphaned protagonists are forced to confront the challenges of modernity and attempt thereby to attain a connection with the father figure. The experience of the city and the ways in which the protagonists view and confront it are therefore intimately connected to their success or failure felicitously to resolve their orphaned status.

That these two novels were written twenty years apart is evident from the development of Verne's narrative technique, which is that of a more assured and established writer in the later novel. What is also suggested by the two stories is a

slightly different take on father-son relations. One has the sense that in the early novel, Verne, as a struggling young writer, injects some of his own concerns and fears into the creation of the protagonist, Marcel Dufrénoy. In the later novel, Verne's concerns about his own son find their outlet in the descriptions of Dr. Sarassin's son, Octave. Of interest, too, is the impact of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 on Verne. Writing before the war, Verne was able to envision a Paris in which weapons had become obsolete; but the profound shock at the brutality of mechanized warfare made Verne pessimistic about the prospects for peace. In *Bégum*, the threat of annihilation lies at the heart of the city of Stahlstadt, and therefore at the heart of a dystopian modernity. The similarity of some of the main themes, coupled with the fact that these novels show startling continuities over what was a considerable period of Verne's working life, make for an interesting study. I have arranged the thesis into several chapters.

In the second chapter, *Synopses*, I provide a brief synopsis of each novel in order to set the scene. Readers should be aware, however, that this study assumes a familiarity with the texts that goes beyond these sketches. The synopses are intended to serve as an *aide-mémoire* for readers who have already read these novels.

In the third chapter, *The City*, the city as an entity comes under the spotlight. I argue that geographical and architectural aspects of these mainly imaginary cities inform much of the narrative. Cityscapes in these novels shape the lives of their inhabitants, constraining or facilitating communication between them; curtailing or enabling movement between sections of the city; dividing communities along class and functional lines or suggesting the homogeneity of the citizenry. They also indicate ideological underpinnings of the city. In this study, the cities of Paris, France-Ville and

Stahlstadt are the loci of these various configurations. I explore the similarities and differences between them and show how, in both novels, Verne's narrative is predicated on a critique of contemporary politics.

In the fourth chapter, *Sons*, I explore the relationship between the protagonists of these two novels, Michel Dufrénoy in *Paris* and Marcel Bruckmann in *Bégum*, and the father figures in each of their lives. "Father figures" rather than "fathers", of course, since both protagonists are orphans. Indeed, I would suggest that, on one level, both novels are a study in these characters' attempts to negotiate a path towards a father figure and thereby to become fully incorporated members of a patriarchal society. I show how Verne's own relationship with his son is echoed in the characters of Bruckmann and his friend Octave Sarassin. In addition, I stress the ways in which Dufrénoy's wanderings, both physical and metaphysical, are partly due to the clash of Dufrénoy's idealism, on the one hand, and the pragmatism of his father figures on the other - an irreconcilable difference, as it turns out.

## CHAPTER 2 SYNOPSES

### ***Paris Au XX<sup>e</sup> Siècle***

*Paris au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, one of Verne's first novels, dates from early 1860s but was discovered only in the mid-1990s. There is some controversy about the actual date of completion of the novel, although it is thought that the novel was, in point of fact, not his first. According to Olivier Dumas, Verne began writing the novel in 1861-2, just as the honeymoon effect of his marriage was wearing off. He argues that, owing to the insertion of events based on Verne's own circumstances, the novel must have been completed in 1865 (Dumas 5). Although Verne has come to be known as a children's author, Piero Gondolo Della Riva reminds us, in his preface to Hachette's French publication of the novel, that Verne's jejune novel addresses itself to an adult audience (Verne, "Paris" 16). It is a novel in which the young protagonist's experiences of the city serve as a means for Verne to critique the politics and social norms of his own time.

The novel centers on the protagonist Michel Dufrénoy, an orphaned provincial who migrates to Paris. Once in the capital, he attends a grand awards ceremony at which he receives a Latin prize for composition. The spirit of the times, however, is wholly against humanistic learning, and Dufrénoy is booed off stage. Upon arrival at his uncle Boutardin's house, he is greeted with cold disdain. Boutardin is the quintessential product of his age, a man whose actions are calculated on the basis of profit, who thinks only in facts and figures. He insists that Dufrénoy knuckle down and become a pragmatic member of society rather than embrace the lofty realm of literature. Boutardin puts Michel to work in his bank, where he is supervised by his cousin. Before he begins his work, to which he is not looking forward in the slightest, he pays a visit to the local

bookstore, where he is horrified to find not a single canonical work of the nineteenth century.

His quest for literature takes him to the library, where he encounters an uncle from his mother's side by the name of Huguenin. Unlike Boutardin, this septuagenarian attended Dufrénoy's award ceremony and is delighted to see his artistically-minded nephew. The two form a close bond that lasts throughout the novel. Huguenin is a voice of reason and pragmatism in the face of Dufrénoy's romantic idealism. He encourages his nephew to work towards financial independence, but is also keen to share his encyclopedic knowledge of literature with him.

When Dufrénoy begins work at Boutardin's bank, he encounters Quinsonnas, whose responsibility it is to enter transactions in a giant ledger, the *Grand Livre*. The ledger symbolizes the dominant capitalist ideology of the future Paris. Quinsonnas is also artistic by temperament, but is also a pragmatist. He recognizes the need to keep up with the spirit of the times and has composed a piece of modern music, marked by the dissonance and cacophony so favored by twentieth-century Parisians. Just as Huguenin has an encyclopedic knowledge of French literature, so Quinsonnas has a deep familiarity with the classical repertoire. Quinsonnas and Huguenin serve to portray contemporary artistic thought and practice, affording Verne the chance to critique the artistic practices of his own time while demonstrating his own knowledge of the arts.

Dufrénoy dines with his uncle Huguenin, his former Latin professor, and the professor's daughter, Lucy. He quickly falls in love with Lucy and vows to win her heart. But his position is not secure, particularly after he and Quinsonnas are fired from the bank when Quinsonnas carelessly spills ink over the *Grand Livre*. This crime against the

capitalist system signals the start of Dufrénoy's decline. Quinsonnas, ever the pragmatist, suggests Dufrénoy work for the *Grand Entrepôt Dramatique*. Dufrénoy follows his friend's advice, moves from department to department within this state-run organization, but finally quits in disgust at the banality of the entertainments he is asked to produce.

Adamant that love and literature will find a way, Dufrénoy retreats into an ever more solitary existence, eschewing the company of others to write verses in his unheated apartment. Reduced to a state of abject penury, during which time he is forced to eat an insipid and unwholesome form of bread made from coal, he finally leaves the apartment one winter's night to seek Lucy. Having purchased a single, wilted flower with the last of his funds, he proceeds to Lucy's apartment, only to find it uninhabited. In his desperation, he spends the nocturnal hours roaming the streets of Paris, haunted by the omnipresent electricity which powers the modern capital. His peregrinations bring him to Père-Lachaise cemetery where, after paying homage to great figures of the past who are buried there, he dies in the snow.

### ***Les Cinq Cents Millions De La Béguim***

*Les Cinq Cents Millions de la Béguim* is a product of Verne's middle period. By the time of its publication in 1879, he was an established and successful writer following the publication of a string of highly popular books. If those novels are on the whole characterized by an optimistic belief in the progress of science, *Les Cinq Cents Millions de la Béguim* paints a disquieting picture of the evil uses to which science can be directed, and thus marks a turning point in Verne's writing (Chesneaux 228).

The story revolves around the development of two rival cities, which are founded in the American West by Dr. Sarassin, a Frenchman, and Herr Schultze, a German.

Both men have shared a vast inheritance from a distant Indian relative, the *Bégum Gokool* (hence the title of the novel) which they invest in their respective cities.

Sarassin's city, France-Ville, is the city of good; Schultze's Stahlstadt (the Steel-City) is the city of evil. France-Ville is an egalitarian city whose inhabitants strive for hygienic perfection. There is a house for each family, as well as communal buildings such as schools, museums and churches erected for the edification of the inhabitants. In contrast, Stahlstadt is an industrial city whose chief product is steel. Eighteen coal-mining villages surround a central citadel in which the dictatorial Herr Schultze lives. Life on the periphery of the city is precarious. Apart from the relentless smoke and noise from industrial activity, the risk of death in the mines is ever present.

The novel addresses the theme of Franco-Prussian relations as shown in the rivalry between France-Ville and Stahlstadt, whose struggle serves as an allegory of contemporary politics. The novel was written in the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War at a time when tensions between the two countries were particularly fraught. The reader follows the adventures of the hero of the novel, Marcel Bruckmann, a young man from Alsace. He is the friend of Sarassin's son, Octave, an indolent young man. In contrast to Octave, Bruckmann is strong both mentally and physically, academically accomplished and brave. He vows to avenge his forefathers whose Alsatian territory was captured by the Prussians during the war. He heads to Stahlstadt where he intends to discover the secret machinations of Herr Schultze. Bruckmann's employment in Stahlstadt under the pseudonym Johann Schwartz provides an insight into the workings of the city.

He befriends his landlady's son, Carl Bauer, and helps him with his mathematics homework. But young Carl dies soon thereafter in a mining accident. Bruckmann's efforts to find him, in which he employs his knowledge of aeration systems to great effect, result in his promotion and admission to the citadel. Once inside, he may not leave. Bruckmann's tenacity and unparalleled understanding of the technical applications of science allow him to work his way up through the hierarchy. Eventually, he is able to gain access to Herr Schultze's inner sanctum. Once there, he earns the trust and confidence of Schultze and tries to prise from the industrialist the secret plans he is concocting against France-Ville. Schultze reveals the gigantic cannon with which he expects to annihilate the city's inhabitants. He intends to employ poison gas to asphyxiate the unwitting populace.

Schultze determines that Bruckmann must die as he now knows too much, and confines him to chambers in the interior of the city. But the young adventurer is able to escape and travels to back France-Ville where he alerts Dr. Sarassin and the city's council of the impending threat. France-Ville has been caught off guard. Panic ensues and the population begins to evacuate, as the city has been rendered defenseless by the lack of foresight on the part of the city's authorities. But the expected attack never occurs.

Bruckmann, together with Octave Sarassin, vow to return to Stahlstadt to fight the implacable Schultze. There they fight Schultze's henchmen in the overgrown, decadent garden which Schultze has constructed for himself at the heart of the citadel. Eventually, they are able to locate Schultze's secret lair, a laboratory in which he has been working on his biological weapons project. They find the mad scientist dead,

asphyxiated by his own fatal poison. Upon their return to Stahlstadt, they are hailed as heroes. Bruckmann's reward for his persistent patriotism and bravery is the hand in marriage of Dr. Sarassin's admiring daughter, Jeanne.

## CHAPTER 3 THE CITY

### **The City In Verne's Œuvre**

It is not accidental that the exploration of the city forms the basis of several of Verne's novels. Burgeoning modern urban spaces, with their endless possibilities for the display of human ingenuity, form an ideal backdrop for scientific and technological impulses of the modern age, a veritable "épicerie de la spéculation utopique" (Minerva 75). As we shall see later, the Paris of Verne's time was a fast-developing metropolis at the heart of a growing economy. The pace of change in the geographical configuration of the city, and the concomitant effect of such restructuring on social relations of its citizenry, influenced artists and writers alike. From Baudelaire to Zola, novelists and poets were fascinated by the dynamics of the transformation of Paris into a modern, industrial city. Haussmann's schemes of urban regeneration are the source of satirical comment from the young Verne, who, along with his protagonist, seems to struggle with the challenges thrown up by these important urban changes.

Verne's fascination with the city is allied to his wonder at scientific and technological possibilities. In *Une ville flottante* (1871), the "city" in question is, in fact, a huge ship - the *Great Eastern* - whose voyage from Liverpool to New York forms the narrative backdrop for this study of a society on the ocean wave. In *L'île à hélice* (1895), four French chamber musicians, having lost their way, end up on a huge island on which is situated a large city. The island-city navigates the Pacific Ocean by means of large propellers. While *L'île à hélice* shows Verne's penchant for utopian settings such as those found in *Les Cinq Cents Millions de la Béguin*, another of Verne's books, *Une ville idéale* (1875), contains a series of speeches which explore the configuration of the

ideal city. Having been elected director of *l'Académie des sciences, belles-lettres et arts* of Amiens in 1875, Verne used his inaugural speech to describe his vision of Amiens in the year 2000, this city of the future having become a model urban community in Verne's imagination. In taking a real-life city and projecting forward into the future, just as he did with *Paris au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Verne is able to achieve a measure of distance from his subject, which allows for the inclusion of utopian themes.

It should be clear by now that the city is important across Verne's œuvre. Although the city is not always presented in the same light, it is nonetheless often shown to be a threatening place. In *L'île à hélice*, for example, the rich magnificence of the city as described in the first half of the novel gives way to a fractious and divided dystopia in the second. The city literally breaks apart in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, a vestige of its former grandeur. Such a presentation of the city is akin to that which we see in *Paris au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle* and *Les Cinq Cents Millions de la Bégum*. In those novels, the putative glories of all three cities are extolled – the grand, clean lines of the Paris of the future; the efficient productive capacity of the steel-making factories of Stahlstadt; the hygienic and healthy nature of France-Ville – before their singular flaws are revealed. In all cases, Verne proves to be neither blindly in favor of technological progress, nor stubbornly opposed to its extension. What matters to Verne is not the means, but the ends to which the means are put: the value of a city is predicated on the human wisdom, or folly, of those who determine its direction. In other words, none of the three cities in this present study is perfect; but nor is any one of them completely without merit.

This chapter stresses the importance of city landscapes to each of these novels in terms of their narrative development and the ideas that they convey. In support of the significance of the city in Verne's œuvre, and in particular in these novels, one can cite correspondence between Verne's editor, Pierre-Jules Hetzel and the author: "Je regrette que nous n'ayons pas pensé pour *Les 500 Millions de la Bégum* à ce titre: *Les deux cités*. Qu'en penseriez-vous ?" Verne, it should be said, was not receptive to the idea, but only because the title suggested by Hetzel seemed a little "outdated" (Dumas, Gondolo della Riva, Dehs 27-8).

This chapter examines the ways in which Verne uses the city setting to frame his narrative in each of the novels under discussion. I show how geographical configurations of the cities reflect and shape perceptions of the cities' underlying ideologies. Elements of government, particularly of control structures, are reflected in the cities' architectural design and organization. I also show how the individual's responses to the city's spatial construction – predominantly through the experiences of the two protagonists, Dufrénoy and Bruckmann – contribute to the depiction of the city as a social and political domain. The study adds to the understanding of how character and city are related in Verne's novels, particularly with respect to the idea of an individual's quest – in this case, the quest for a father-figure. Each city is dealt with in turn, but similarities and differences between the cities are highlighted where important.

### **France-Ville**

In this section, I argue that France-Ville, far from being a utopian foil to the dystopian blackness of Stahlstadt, is an imperfect city. The supposed benefits of its hygienic ordinances are besmirched by the imperialism on which France-Ville seems to

be based. Moreover, it is the cleanliness and introspectiveness of its inhabitants that render the city prone to Herr Schultze's evil designs.

The reader is made aware of the chief attributes of France-Ville via the reproduction of an article from the putative German journal *Unsere Centurie*, a narrative device which has the peculiar effect of lessening any effect of verisimilitude. Indeed, the utopian elements of France-Ville pale in comparison to the rich, imaginative description of Stahlstadt (Chesneaux 229). The journal describes how the chosen site for Sarrasin's model City of Health enjoys ideal environmental conditions: ". . . on fait valoir spécialement sa latitude tempérée dans l'hémisphère Nord, qui a toujours été à la tête de la civilisation terrestre . . ." (Verne, "Bégum" 98). In this description is the suggestion of an imperialist dimension to the development of France-Ville. The connectedness between Old Europe and the utopian sandbox of the New World is underscored by the rapid transit of two of the project's commissioners to the site: "[Ils] sont arrivés en onze jours à New York, et sept jours plus tard à San Francisco, où ils ont mobilisé un steamer, qui les déposait en dix heures au site désigné" (Verne, "Bégum" 99). Furthermore, the mobilization of twenty-thousand "coolies chinois" to construct France-Ville is presented as both a blessing and as a menace inherent in such colonial undertakings. Paid a dollar a day, their wages are held back until the completion of the work, whereupon they are not permitted to return to France-Ville for fear that they will modify the city in a pernicious manner: "Précaution indispensable pour se débarrasser d'une population jaune, qui n'aurait pas manqué de modifier d'une manière assez fâcheuse le type et le génie de la Cité nouvelle" (Verne, "Bégum" 99).

In spite of its railroad links to the rest of the American continent, France-Ville remains curiously isolated. It seems to be an attempt to create a racially and hygienically "pure", insular European society, an imperial dream *par excellence*. The refusal to allow the Chinese construction workers to settle in France-Ville echoes the uneasiness over the sailors in the Paris of 1960, who remain in a single neighborhood, cut off from the rest of the city: "Tout autour s'élevait une ville entière de cabarets, où les marins débarqués tranchaient du nabab et couraient d'opulentes bordées . . . Ils formaient . . . une population à part, point mêlée à celle des autres faubourgs, et assez peu sociable" (Verne, "Paris" 113).

The concern with preserving European middle-class values is manifested in the types of buildings chosen for construction, as well as the regulations for sanitary living in France-Ville. Public works are a key component of France-Ville's design: "Les édifices publics sont déjà en grand nombre. Les plus importants sont la cathédrale, un certain nombre de chapelles, les musées, les bibliothèques, les écoles et les gymnases . . ." (Verne, "Bégum" 103). Is this not a description of the ideal Victorian town as seen through the eyes of the bourgeoisie? It is nothing other than a picture-postcard vision of the city, with its museums and libraries for public education, its chapels and cathedral for wholesome Sunday services. Public gardens, another hallmark of nineteenth-century urbanism, have their part to play in this utopian vision: "À tous les carrefours, un jardin public est réservé et orné de belles copies des chefs-d'œuvre de la sculpture, en attendant que les artistes de France-Ville aient produit des morceaux originaux dignes de les remplacer" (Verne, "Bégum" 103).

With its reproduction sculptures, France-Ville is a banal attempt to transpose European middle-class values overseas. What is more, the French metropolis is held up as the paragon of good taste, underscoring once again the imperialist subagency of the city's conception. These middle-class values form a kind of social straight-jacket in which free enterprise is supposed to flourish, free from the contamination of the working classes whose labor has made the city possible.

Indeed, France-Ville is a city in which the freedom of the citizenry sits awkwardly beside a certain obsessive orderliness, which mirrors the concern over undesirable immigrants' mores. Hygiene in both public and private realms is the city authorities' chief concern: "Nettoyer, nettoyer sans cesse, détruire et annuler aussitôt qu'ils sont formés les miasmes qui émanent constamment d'une agglomération humaine, telle est l'œuvre principale du gouvernement central" (Verne, "Bégum" 103). Due to careful controls on immigration to the city, issues of health are able to predominate over any threat of internal dissent that might be fostered in a polity mixed along racial or class lines. Efficiency, uniformity and regimentation of the social domain are paramount here; the human body substitutes for the body politic as the primary concern of the state.

In France-Ville, attacks upon the sanctity of the body are vilified. For example, those who sell spoiled foodstuffs commit a heinous act, their crimes detected by the "*police sanitaire*" who are well-educated specialists in the domain. Furthermore, the necessity for bodily cleanliness and physical exercise is drilled into youngsters from the age of four years such that they are ashamed of a simple stain on their clothing when one appears. Such instruction - one might say indoctrination - by the state is not restricted to children, however: "Chaque citoyen reçoit à son arrivée une petite

brochure, où les principes les plus importants d'une vie réglée selon la science sont exposés dans un langage simple et clair" (Verne, "Bégum" 105). Such state intervention in people's lives is reminiscent of the omniscient *Étatisme* in the Paris of 1960, in which education has been centralized under a single, state-controlled company, but also reveals the presence of a literate populace receptive to ideas of self-improvement. Like the Paris of the twentieth century, yet unlike Stahlstadt, France-Ville appears to embrace a system of universal education.

An insistence on hygiene and the necessity of order manifests itself in the spatial and architectural aspects of France-Ville's design. The rules governing the construction of houses are myriad, and, while leaving a certain degree of discretion to the architects, they effectively control to a considerable extent the societal composition and life-styles of their inhabitants. The first "*règle fixe*" which the committee promulgates is instructive of such coercion: "1° Chaque maison sera isolée dans un lot de terrain planté d'arbres, de gazon et de fleurs. Elle sera affectée à une seule famille" (Verne, "Bégum" 100). The city government thereby effectively imposes a nuclear family model, the paradigm of the emergent middle class of the period.

As Sharon Marcus observes in her book on the architecture of Paris and London in the nineteenth-century, the single-family household was something of an English ideal rather than a French one; the architects of Paris of this period preferred the apartment complex as typified in *Paris au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*. Indeed, the single-family house as an ideal model had captured the English cultural imagination to such an extent that "it persisted even in the face of several discourses that protested the actual deviation from that course" (83). Such deviation is best explained by the chief restrictions on

architectural development in the nineteenth-century European city, namely, lack of space and imperfect transportation networks: "No nineteenth-century city could consist solely of single-family houses occupying their own plots of land" (85). Of course, this restriction did not need to apply to Verne's utopian city, in which the limitless expanse of the New World, coupled with the aforementioned restrictions on citizenship in France-Ville, allowed the freedom to realize this English ideal.

The presentation of this architectural ideal in *Les Cinq Cents Millions de la Bégum* owes much to the writings of the English social thinker Benjamin Ward Richardson, from whose 1876 work, *Hygeia, a city of Health*, ten prescriptions on house architecture in France-Ville are taken (Dupuy 5). This may in part explain the English architectural character of the city, although its final inclusion may also reflect Verne's own admiration of the English-speaking world, of which he would say late in life: "J'ai toujours admiré les Anglo-Saxons . . . Les gens des pays de langue anglaise font de bons héros, dans les récits d'invention ou d'exploration scientifiques . . ." (Compère, Malbrancq, Margot 224).

Whatever the case may be, it is undeniable that the focus on the single-family home is allied to the emphasis on physical and moral hygiene. As Marcus explains, "[i]n addition to condemning the apartment house as a deviation from national standards, writers on urban housing warned of the dire moral effects apartments had on their inhabitants . . . they were seen as morally corrupting influences or monstrous, unspeakable structures" (87). Verne's appropriated ideal of single-family housing can be seen as a conservative reaction against the promiscuity supposedly provoked by the

anomie of city life and is redolent of a deeper concern in both novels about the lack of space for urban living.

Rational, linear orderliness is further promoted through the use of a grid-pattern road system, the roads being numbered and equally spaced. The regulation of space extends to attempts to control the movements of the sick. In terms of health care, a dense concentration of patients in large hospitals - a magnetic lure of mortality which nearly captures Dufrenoy in *Paris au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle* - is seen as inimical to the promotion of hygienic conditions. Hospitals are few and far between in France-Ville and are reserved for exceptional cases, the preferred treatment regime being isolation of the patient within discrete annexes of private houses. Once again, this emphasis on the nuclear household as the center of civilian activity exemplifies the bourgeois, egalitarian ideology underpinning the organization of the city.

The city of France-Ville stands as an exemplary spatial realization of the belief in equality. The assertion of equality, however, induces a balancing act between individual freedoms and social conformity. In contradistinction to the cultural philistinism of Paris in *Paris au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, the artist is a welcome member of the community of France-Ville, but all inhabitants of the city are obliged to work: "Pour obtenir le droit de résidence à France-Ville, il suffit, mais il est nécessaire de donner de bonnes références, d'être apte à exercer une profession utile ou liberale, dans l'industrie, les sciences ou les arts, de s'engager à observer les lois de la ville. Les existences oisives n'y seraient pas tolérées" (Verne, "Bégum" 103). In point of fact, the idle are not tolerated in any of the cities under discussion. Indeed, one common thread uniting the politics of Paris, France-Ville and Stahlstadt is the emphasis on the importance of hard work.

For all its putative freedoms and modern emphasis on hygiene and open spaces, France-Ville is a peculiarly restrictive environment. Its rectilinear layout, numerous construction codes, and references to the French homeland as an arbiter of good taste all point to a city with rigid, conservative tendencies. Indeed, the city's orderliness serves as a metaphor for the apathy with which the citizens view the threat from Stahlstadt. Too wrapped up in practices of their own bodily hygiene, they fail to see the threat from beyond the city limits.

### Paris

The Paris of 1960 presents interesting parallels and contrasts with France-Ville. In terms of similarities, the crucial role of advanced technology lies at the heart of daily life in both cities. Fast urban railroad lines connect different parts of the city, those of France-Ville being arranged, predictably, in an entirely regular pattern. Communications networks with the outside world are well established. Freedom of movement is assured *de jure* in each city. Haussmannian urban construction projects were clearly a factor in the genesis of the urban criticism in *Paris au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*. But Verne's critique, as we shall see, goes beyond the merely architectural to encompass a broader spectrum of concerns: financial and state power; the role of powerful individuals in centralized planning, and; the reconfiguration and control of urban space.

If the presence of fax machines and high-speed rail links seem like remarkable predictions, it is perhaps wise to emphasize the fact that it is in Verne's Paris of the future that the premises of the nineteenth-century are most fully realized (Minerva 85). Indeed, to take but one example among many in the novel, Verne himself makes clear that the propulsion technology used in the metropolitan railroad system is based on nineteenth-century engineering ("Paris" 41). Timothy Unwin sees in the elaboration of

the technological achievements of the future a Vernian technique used extensively elsewhere in his œuvre, whereby Verne appropriates recent ideas about which has read in newspapers and journals such that the amazing predictions of the future are, in fact, "nothing more than the fruit of Verne's copious and compulsive note-taking from popular contemporary sources" (36). The novel is at once an exploration of future technological possibilities and a critique of the municipal politics and economics of 1860s Paris. Indeed, it is the social focus of the novel that is arguably more significant. With its "anchoring references to mid-nineteenth century values and issues" *Paris au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle* "very explicitly addresses a mid-nineteenth century readership" (Unwin 35). I explore below these social issues.

The Paris of 1960 is a city in which dystopian and utopian elements are united (Minerva 77). While Verne enthuses to some extent about the standard of living made accessible through the development of new technologies, he laments the lack of individual freedom and the sense of alienation to which the city gives rise. He also highlights the inequalities produced by decades of unrestrained capitalism. So while electric lights illuminate the nocturnal entertainment of the city's well-off, Dufrénoy is forced to survive the bitterly cold winter by eating *pain de houille*, a bread made from a coal-like substance, at two centimes per pound. This singular circumstance throws into relief the young Verne's ironic attitude towards science: "On l'avouera, il fallait être bien dégoûté pour mourir de faim ; la science ne le permettait pas" ("Paris" 156). Science is able to keep people alive, but cannot spare them, it would seem, from abject penury; while ostensibly a force for good, it merely perpetuates and amplifies existing

inequalities of an uncaring society. Such marginalization of the down-at-heel individual occurs perhaps most forcefully in Dufrénoy's dispiriting experience of the city streets.

After the awards ceremony at which he wins the Latin composition prize, the provincial Dufrénoy is overcome by a sense of drowning in the crowd: "La foule entraînaît pourtant l'infortuné lauréat ; il se sentait pris par le courant comme un homme en train de se noyer" (Verne, "Paris" 38). Dufrénoy's isolation in the crowd is amplified by the juxtaposition of a detailed description of the gigantism of Paris, the growth of which has only been checked by natural features: "Les hauteurs de Meudon, de Sèvres, de Saint-Cloud avaient arrêté ses envahissements dans l'ouest" (Verne, "Paris" 39). But the sense of vastness - twenty-seven leagues in circumference, which equates to a diameter of approximately twenty-three miles - of the city next to the ant-like figure of Dufrénoy collapses in the context of the rapidity with which one can traverse it: "On pouvait circuler d'une extrémité de Paris à l'autre avec la plus grande rapidité" (Verne, "Paris" 39). The city is no longer defined solely in terms of the spatial relations of objects within it; rather, while that static aspect of spatial conception remains, an understanding of space shaped by the potential of swift, modern transport contorts this three-dimensionality.

As a fourth dimension, time serves to shape the reader's understanding of the possibilities and restrictions of this Vernian city. For example, while Dufrénoy is made dizzy by the rapidity of municipal transport, he is also restricted by the controlling force of time which his oppressive working conditions impose upon him. No sooner has he entered his uncle Boutardin's house than he is made aware of the burdensome demands that the world of work will make upon him, thus reducing the time he has to

spare for exploring the city and, by extension, his sense of self within that environment. His uncle says to him matter-of-factly: "Vos vacances . . . commencent ce matin et finissent ce soir" (Verne, "Paris" 50). Similarly, working conditions impose constraints on Marcel Bruckmann when he enters Stahlstadt as a spy. His only means of penetrating deeper into the heart of the city is through hard work and tenacity - and a stroke of luck! Patience is a necessary virtue for the protagonists of both novels.

It has been noted that, unlike the uniform and highly regulated spatial layout of France-Ville, Paris has grown organically to abut its geographical constraints. It is important to realize that *Paris au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle* was written in the context of a seminal period of French urbanism. Mid-nineteenth-century Paris saw a remarkable burst of urban growth, its population rising from under 900,000 inhabitants in 1831 to nearly 1,700,000 thirty years later (Harvey 91). If Dufrénoy feels overwhelmed by the swarming masses beside him, by the vast distances traversed in just a few minutes, it is fair to surmise that this is a reflection of Verne's own concern at the relentless pace of change, not just of the city, but also of modern life in general.

To be sure, Verne was not the only author to be fascinated by the urban developments of the Second Empire. In his famous collection, *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1857/61), the poet Charles Baudelaire remarks upon the changing cityscape with a tinge of sadness. In *Le Cygne*, the changes to the urban landscape are aptly detailed:

. . . A fécondé soudain ma mémoire fertile,  
Comme je traversais le nouveau Carrousel.  
Le vieux Paris n'est plus (la forme d'une ville  
Change plus vite, hélas! que le cœur d'un mortel);

Je ne vois qu'en esprit tout ce camp de baraques,  
Ces tas de chapiteaux ébauchés et de fûts,  
Les herbes, les gros blocs verdis par l'eau des flaques,  
Et, brillant aux carreaux, le bric-à-brac confus . . .

(Baudelaire, Adam 95)

The mortal heart is unable to keep time with the city's frenetic pulse; nostalgia is here the corollary of modernity. The city is a confusion of fleeting forms, a well-worn palimpsest ripe for architectural novelty. The poet wanders this fascinating but alien landscape, just as the provincial Dufrénoy lurches nauseatingly around the capital in the final chapters of *Paris au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*.

It is helpful at this juncture to consider the role of *flânerie* in *Paris au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*. Flânerie is understood here as "the activity of strolling and looking which is carried out by the *flâneur*"; it appears as a "recurring motif in the literature, sociology and art of urban . . . existence" (Tester 1). Dufrénoy's wanderings around the city, including his excursion to the *port de Grenelle*, can be seen as examples of *flânerie*.

Dufrénoy displays the hallmarks of the typical *flâneur*: he is, indeed, "something of a deviant in emerging bourgeois society," (Tester 25) rejecting comforts that conformism would afford him. The *flâneur* is a lonely figure who must embrace art as a means to channel this disquiet: "Anomie and alienation have become the condition of modernity, and the condition, as well, of the modern writer. For Proust, the *flâneur's* disengagement from society defines the dilemma of the artist and points to the solution that is art" (Tester, 38-9). With his pretensions to artistic achievement, Dufrénoy is the archetype of the lost soul in the city.

Dufrénoy's artistic essays, however, are themselves alienating and highly restrictive; he finds no outlet for his frustrations. For example, he reluctantly goes to work for the *Grand Entrepôt Dramatique*, where the state-controlled entertainment machine turns out modernizations of older plays and crude vaudeville performances for the distraction of the people. The emphasis is on sensationalism as well as the

propagation of government sanctioned public information. Significantly, this vast enterprise is run along strictly capitalist lines, comprising five main departments. Just as Dufrénoy has failed in the world of business, so too does he fail in the world of artistic (re)creation for profit. But such failure is understandable given the lack of artistic freedom at the *Entrepôt*. His idealism once again confronts the practical and commercial spirit of the age. Upon being asked to script a particularly crude and populist scene, Dufrénoy balks with typical intractability: "Oh ! se dit-il ! je ne resterai pas un instant de plus dans cette caverne ! plutôt mourir de faim !" (Verne, "Paris" 147).

Dufrénoy's disgust at the unchecked commercialism of his age is marked throughout the novel. This too is to be understood partly in the light of Verne's contemporary experience of Paris. Dufrénoy's unhappy experiences at his uncle's banking firm have their parallel in Verne's own employment at the Paris stock exchange, where, at the time, he was forced to work to provide for his family. Moreover, Jean Chesneaux suggests that money, and specifically the need to be solvent, has such a prominent place in the novel because of the material demands of Verne's wife and step-daughters. (43).

Verne moves beyond his immediate, private concerns to satirize the state-backed capitalist forces bringing about change in contemporary Paris. The methods of Baron Haussmann, who was responsible for planning much of the architectural modernization of central Paris, are parodied in the novel. Haussmann had an unshakable "faith in the empire and its infinitely expandable wealth" (Jordan 239). During the Haussmann years, "[m]unicipal finance had become a never-never land of fantastic liens on future revenue" (Jordan 237-8). This period of speculation led to the creation of vast credit enterprises,

such as *Crédit Lyonnais*, *Crédit Industriel et Commercial* and *Société Générale*, which continue to operate to this day (Jordan 233). Verne takes aim at the opportunism, and the cozy relationship of state and private finance, at the heart of in Haussmann's developments. In the novel, Baron de Vercampin is responsible for the creation of the vast *Société Générale de Crédit instructionnel*, clearly a parodic concatenation of the aforementioned real-life credit institutions. The mission of the *Société* is nothing less than the control of all secondary education in France. Finance dominates all aspects of the decisions of the *Société*, and leads to the effective indoctrination of schoolchildren in the industrialist mantra that the *Société* wishes to propagate. The consequence of this promotion of science, technology, and profit above all other concerns is the concomitant decline of humanistic studies.

We saw above that the *Grand Entrepôt Dramatique* is divided into sections as per the division of labor in a capitalist system of production. Similarly, the city of Paris is itself divided into zones along functional lines. (Stahlstadt, as we shall see, is similarly split up into functional entities, which is hardly surprising given the totalizing effect of Schultze's military-industrial complex.) The narrator enthuses about the unceasing busyness of the *port de Grenelle*, a spectacle in and of itself:

Un magnifique spectacle, à coup sûr, c'était celui de ces steamers de toutes grandeurs et de toutes nationalités dont les pavillons déployaient leur milles couleurs dans les airs; de vastes warfs, des entrepôts immenses abritaient les marchandises dont le déchargement se faisait au moyen des plus ingénieuses machines . . . il regnait dans l'air cette odeur sui generis que l'on peut appeler le parfum du commerce (Verne, "Paris" 114).

Dufrénoy, Huguenin, Richelot and Lucy wander through this bustling nexus of modern commerce amongst a large crowd who have come to visit the port. The sailors who reside there are part of the spectacle, their habits and customs alien to the

inhabitants of the capital: "Ils formaient d'ailleurs une population à part, point mêlée à celle des autres faubourgs, et assez peu sociable. On eût dit Le Havre séparé de Paris par la seule largeur de la Seine" (Verne, "Paris" 113). Once again, modernity has crushed traditional concepts of space: the dichotomy between center and periphery has been undermined by the development of the vast inland port, although old distinctions of identity remain stubbornly constant, which only serves to underscore the unsettling social effects of such developments. As Verne mentions earlier in the novel, "l'Océan lui-même baign[ait] de ses flots les rivages de Grenelle" ("Paris" 33). The periphery has come to the center, but has guarded its own character. The port zone is at once part of the city and separated from it.

Elsewhere, in a thinly-veiled critique of Haussmannian reforms, the narrator laments the demolition of city-center housing to accommodate legal establishments:

Certains quartiers même n'offraient pas un seul logement aux habitants de la Capitale, entre autres, la Cité où s'élevaient seulement le Tribunal de Commerce, le Palais de Justice, la Préfecture de Police, la cathédrale, la morgue, c'est-à-dire, de quoi être déclaré failli, condamné, emprisonné, enterré et même repêché. Les édifices avaient chassés les maisons (Verne, "Paris" 75).

Housing plays second fiddle to the priorities of the state in terms of law and order. In the Haussmannian excess of grand boulevards and sweeping avenues, houses are forced towards the city's periphery. The narrator cannot resist the following jibe: ". . . à force d'élargir les places, de percer des avenues et de multiplier les boulevards, le terrain menaçait de manquer aux habitations particulières. Ce qui justifiait ce mot du temps : à Paris, il n'y a plus de maisons, il n'y a que des rues !" (Verne, "Paris" 75). The location of housing stock on the city's periphery anticipates the marginalization of workers in Stahlstadt.

The effect of the unprecedented expansion of the city center's thoroughfares at the expense of dwelling space is the atomization of individuals within the society; the city no longer functions as a community, but more as a collection of discrete units on both a geographical and a social level. For example, Dufrénoy is compelled to travel miles to visit Quinsonnas or his uncle Huguenin. Because he is impoverished – and in that sense, also an outsider to the dominant social and technical regime of the city – he must make this voyage on foot.

Another discrete entity is the state-backed *Société Générale de Crédit instructionnel*, which owns its own giant complex of buildings on the site of the former *Champ de Mars*. Thus, just as the commercial district of the *port de Grenelle* is a self-contained community within the wider, amorphous geography of the capital, so too is this educational establishment: "C'était une cité complète, une véritable ville, avec ses quartiers, ses places, ses rues, ses palais, ses églises, ses casernes, quelque chose comme Nantes ou Bordeaux, pouvant contenir cent quatre-vingt mille âmes . . ." (Verne, "Paris" 31). One has the sense of Paris as a series of connected agglomerations, each one having very different *raison d'être*.

Dufrénoy's final journey through the streets of Paris further highlights the zonal layout of the modern city. He wanders through a variety of urban settings, each with its own function. He walks by the hospitals, crowded into a single zone as if to isolate the ailing in a manner so unlike that found in France-Ville. Religion has its place in Notre-Dame. He passes the theaters and is sickened by the ostentation of the departing audience. Finally, he arrives at the cemetery.

Throughout this breathless journey, he is pursued by *le démon de l'électricité*, to quote the title of the penultimate chapter. Electricity is clearly a motif of (malign) modernity in this novel. To Dufrénoy, electricity is both modern and demonic, a symbol of all that is wrong in the world. We saw above that the Paris of the future has come to be dominated by state-backed capitalist interests, and the final scene of the novel shows how this predominance is symbolized by the omnipresence of electrical light. Entertainment, religion and even death are illuminated by its rays, and the citizen has no choice but to accept the presence of electricity, and therefore of the modern. To Dufrénoy, electricity, as a symbolic representation of the modern, also symbolizes the death of the literary heritage that he holds so dear. As an illustration of this parallel, Dufrénoy tries to escape the "spectacle sinistre" of the preparations for an execution, but is stopped in his tracks by the infrastructure for electricity: "Michel voulut s'échapper à cette vue ; mais il se heurta contra la caisse ouverte. En se révélant, il y a vit une batterie électrique" (Verne, "Paris" 164). Electricity - and thus the modern - is the unavoidable obstacle to Dufrénoy's progress.

Through his portrayal of Dufrénoy as the unfortunate and obstinate Romantic hero, and the scorn with which he treats the Haussmannian transformations of his time, the young Verne can be seen as politically conservative and a pessimist in terms of science and technology. To be sure, this early novel describes a society in which war has become obsolete due to the *ad absurdum* development of weapons technology. In other words, technology has saved humankind from its worst, internecine tendencies - in that sense, *Paris au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle* is more optimistic than the later *Cinq Cents Millions de la Bégum*, in which the threat of Armageddon looms large. But the way of life that results

from this advent of peace is one of capitalist competitiveness fueled by the technological exploitation of nineteenth-century scientific discoveries: a form of warfare by other means. Art and historical memory are marginalized in favor of spontaneous and frivolous entertainment that fulfills the state's goals. Work and mindless graft take priority over creativity. And the protections that science ultimately affords the individual are tragically insufficient.

Such marginalization is exemplified through descriptions of space and objects. Symbolic of the decline of art and literature amid relentless capitalist speculation and urban growth, is the way in which the buildings surrounding Huguenin's apartment prevent the illumination of his bookcases:

. . . une seule fois par an, au solstice, le 21 juin, s'il faisait beau, le plus élevé des rayons de l'astre radieux effleurant le toit voisin, se glissait rapidement par la fenêtre, se posait comme un oiseau à l'angle d'un rayon ou sur le dos d'un livre, y tremblait un instant, colorait dans sa projection lumineuse les petits atomes de poussière ; puis, au bout d'une minute, il reprenait son vol, et disparaissait jusqu'à l'année prochaine (Verne, "Paris" 94).

In this cinematographic passage, a sense of the fleeting and rarely felt significance of literature to modern life is conveyed through the image of the restless bird. The dust connotes the cultural desuetude of 1960s Paris; literature is here reduced to a ritualized, annual event that Huguenin awaits breathlessly. The penumbra of the neighboring buildings betokens the oppressive influence of capitalist growth, as exemplified by the city's architectural expansion.

To give another example, the library in which Dufrénoy first encounters his aged uncle Huguenin is eerily deserted, its only attraction being a table at which a scholarly Arab died in the 1870s: "Quelques étrangers . . . visitaient [la bibliothèque] encore, comme on voit le Sahara, et on leur montrait la place où mourut un arabe, en 1875, à la

table même qu'il occupa pendant toute sa vie" (Verne, "Paris" 54). The library has become a spectacle for tourists who are historically aware only to the extent that interesting vignettes are proffered them; they have no interest in the cultural and intellectual archive that surrounds them.

The description of the library's faded glory contrasts with the fantastic gigantism of the ledger in which Dufrénoy and his colleague Quinsonnas record the bank's financial transactions. The very name of this object - the *Grand Livre* - makes reference to its size and ironizes its cultural import in relation to canonical, literary works of the past. While volumes by Hugo, Nerval and Voltaire gather dust in the unvisited confines of the library, the *Grand Livre* enjoys pride of place at the center of the banking house. Twenty feet tall, its three-meter-long pages replete, like medieval manuscripts, with handwritten, multicolored entries, are breathtaking: "Michel fut stupéfait à la vue de ce monument" (Verne, "Paris" 68). The *Grand Livre* is indeed monumental, a symbol of the predominance of capitalism in this city of the future; but, as we have seen, it is also a reflection of Verne's view of the Paris of the 1860s as a burgeoning capital in thrall to a vulgar acquisition and display of material wealth.

The ledger's size and cultural significance is outmatched only by the gigantic lighthouse at the *port de Grenelle*, a beacon of material progress signaling the triumph of capitalism with its inescapable rays. The omnipresence of its electric beam stands in contrast to the weak and ephemeral glimmer of natural light that penetrates Huguenin's apartment to illuminate his book collection once a year. How appropriate then that this light of modernity should be among the final things that Dufrénoy sees before falling in the snow! The lighthouse, "jetant sa pointe aiguë à cinq cents pieds dans les airs"

(Verne, "Paris" 167), is like a new secular church of Mammon. Below the lighthouse stand thousands of houses and factories bathed in its all-encompassing glow: "Aussous Paris, et ses cent mille maisons entassées, entre lesquelles surgissaient les cheminées empanachées de dix mille usines" (Verne, "Paris" 168). In the end, Dufrénoy is overwhelmed by the totalizing, unavoidable effect of this industrial leviathan.

### **Stahlstadt**

Stahlstadt (German for *steel city*) is the last of the three cities analyzed in this chapter. It is the counterpart to France-Ville in a story which, according to one author, "revolves around the dualistic antagonism of Christian eschatology, between Good and Evil cities" (Platten 83). It is clear that in a moral sense this conception of the novel is apposite. Stahlstadt is the evil city whose dictatorial founder, Professor Schultze, is intent upon the destruction of the neighboring and peaceable France-Ville. But we have also seen that France-Ville is ethically suspect in its extreme regularization of the lives of its inhabitants, and its refusal to admit Chinese immigrants into its society, so this dualistic interpretation of the city in this novel is open to some doubt.

It is important to note that this novel was written in the context of the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. The war caused the collapse of the French Second Empire through the defeat of the French forces at the hands of a "distinctly superior Prussian army" (Brosman 108). Beyond the immediate material damage and human suffering brought about by this seminal episode in the history of mechanized warfare, the conflict "created a national inferiority complex" in the French collective psyche (Brosman 109). One of the longest-lasting open sores was the loss of the territory of Alsace and Lorraine to the victorious Prussian forces.

It is hardly surprising therefore that the literature of the post-war period reflected the collective feeling of inferiority and indignation at the Prussian victory. Indeed, "[t]he motif of lost provinces and its corollary, *revanchisme*, weighed heavily upon the French imagination, as reflected in literature and the political arena" (Brosman 109). One scholar has (improbably) concluded that *Les Cinq Cents Millions de la Bégum* is nothing more than a light-hearted farce, based on the fact that Verne must have known that the trajectory of Schultze's doomsday cannon was wholly unrealistic (Hammerton 108-9). But this is to miss the import of the war as context for the novel's production.

Indeed, Verne himself seems to have placed not a little emphasis on the underlying military and political concerns raised by the novel's undeniably hyperbolic take on weapons of mass destruction. In one of his last interviews, Verne was equivocal about the idea of progress, saying that scientific progress could be used in support of good as well as evil ends. He muses on the question of Japanese military expansion: "Quand je regarde le progrès des Japonais en matière militaire, je pense à mon roman *Les cinq cents millions de la Bégum*" (Compère, Malbrancq, Margot 224). The novel is clearly meant as a serious effort to highlight the morally equivocal uses to which science can be directed. So, fantastic and allegorical as the science and technology behind the novel may be, the narrative nonetheless reveals a real and serious concern with one of the key geopolitical questions of the day.

The reader's understanding of the underlying tenets of the society of Stahlstadt, as well as an appreciation of the form of the city, emerge from a narrative which follows the espionage adventures of the intrepid Marcel Bruckmann. This narrative technique is also employed in *Paris au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, where the peregrinations of Michel Dufrénoy

reveal to the reader the plan and character of future Paris. While a surface reading of Stahlstadt may suggest wide disparities between it and the other cities under discussion, I wish to point to the deeper levels on which a degree of convergence is evident.

To be sure, Stahlstadt is an aberration on the landscape. The atmosphere is heavy with the smoke and noise of industrial activity, and nature suffocates in this putrid environment: "L'air est chargé de fumée et pèse comme un manteau sombre sur la terre. Pas un oiseau ne le traverse, les insectes mêmes semblent le fuir, et de mémoire d'homme on n'y a vu un papillon" (Verne, "Bégum" 40). In contrast, France-Ville, as noted above, is the very model – perhaps an extreme model – of the hygienic city; and the Paris of 1960 emphasizes urban cleanliness and order with its sweeping boulevards, accessible trains and uncluttered sidewalks, in a caricature of the regularized modern city promised by partisans of Haussmann. Moreover, the location of Stahlstadt on a rocky and barren plain is markedly different from the fertile lands chosen by Dr. Sarassin as the site of France-Ville. And the dictatorial rule of Professor Schultze would appear starkly different from the politics of France-Ville or Paris, although we have seen that those cities are also restrictive, albeit in different ways, of individual freedoms.

Stahlstadt is essentially a factory-city comprising eighteen coal-mining villages encircling a central, towering complex in which Schultze resides and works. As noted above, the population of Paris has been pushed from the center of the city; so too we find that the workers of Stahlstadt are compelled to live on the outskirts of the agglomeration, which symbolizes their marginalization (Verne, "Bégum" 41).

Access to the city is closely guarded, and the immediate impression one has is that of a prison: "En arrivant sous les murailles mêmes de Stahlstadt, n'essayez pas de franchir une des portes massives qui coupent de distance en distance la ligne des fossés et des fortifications. La consigne la plus impitoyable vous repousserait. Il faut descendre dans l'un des faubourgs" (Verne, "Bégum" 42). Indeed, once inside the complex, the only way for Bruckmann to escape is to get closer to Schultze and the center of the city; the rumor is that no-one comes out of the complex once they have entered.

Bruckmann initially finds lodging with one Frau Bauer on the city's outskirts. Her name is significant as it means "farmer" in German, the suggestion being that her sorry lot is like that of many rural-urban migrants to fast-growing industrial cities. We learn that her husband died four years previously in an horrific mining accident, just as her son, Carl, will do later in the novel.

Carl is obliged to work down the mine to support his mother. He takes care of six horses as a way of supplementing his income, but the chief reason he does so is because the mine is too far from his house to allow him to return home each evening. Just as we saw how workplace restrictions limited Dufrenoy's movements, allowing him only a very modest number of days off, so Carl's childhood is curtailed by the exigencies of paid employment and the geographical constraints of the mine.

Verne also points to the isolating nature of the work environment. Quite apart from the dark, dangerous conditions which prevail in the depths of the mine, Carl's experiences can only be shared with his mother through his recounting of his subterranean existence. Since women are not allowed down the mine. Verne shows

how the divorce of work and home life, so recent in the contemporary memory, has deleterious effects on the family: "Que n'aurait-elle pas donné pour . . . visiter l'emplacement sinistre où le cadavre du pauvre Bauer, noir comme de l'encre, carbonisé par le feu grisou, avait été retrouvé après l'explosion ?" ("Bégum" 54). Her grief is not allowed full expression because of the restrictions on movement; she is left to wonder at the full horror of her husband's fate. Verne's novel stands in a long line of critiques of the rapid and pernicious growth of industrial capitalism. The social effects of coal-mining, for example, would be explored in more visceral detail later in the century in Zola's *Germinal*.

Bruckmann finds also that the society of Stahlstadt is highly restrictive such that one's spatial agency is defined almost exclusively by profession. In other words, Stahlstadt appears to be a meritocratic society, but only a limited range of attributes are recognized and rewarded. When Bruckmann is finally permitted to enter the central block, it is not because of his heroic (if failed) effort to save the young Carl; he is granted access due to his unrivaled knowledge of aeration systems that will profit Schultze's vast enterprise. Similarly, his later efforts are rewarded because they conform to the requirements of the city's industrial aims.

In this industrial city, every worker is a servant of Schultze. Bruckmann is informed that he must remain within the compound and obey military instructions. His superior informs him: "Vous êtes soumis au régime militaire, et vous devez obéissance absolue, sous les peines militaires, à vos supérieures" (Verne, "Bégum" 66). Bruckmann likens his position to that of incarceration. Indeed, he is treated as a potential criminal, and his employers place no trust in his integrity: "[Bruckmann] fut alors rassaisi par les acolytes

gris, et, avec le même cérémonial, c'est-à-dire les yeux bandés, conduit au bureau du directeur général" (Verne, "Bégum" 65).

Jean-Paul Dekiss contends that "[c]e ne sont pas les Allemands que [Verne] attaque, c'est l'empire Krupp et ses marchands de canons" (232), but it is clear to me that both are the target of Verne's satire. We have seen how Verne criticizes industrialists for displaying a *pocourante* attitude towards their employees' lives and livelihoods. But it is in the descriptions of the militaristic rigidity and rule-bound proclivities of the gate-keepers and managers of the city of Stahlstadt that the narrative satirizes the profoundly hierarchical Prussian socio-military order.

If Verne is saved from the charge of outright anti-German nationalism, it is because the city of France-Ville can be said to be monolithic and hidebound in its own way. In other words, he takes aim at both sides in this conflict of utopias. I argued earlier that France-Ville was a banal attempt to distill bourgeois values in an imperialist urban context. However, Verne's implicit critique of this insipid society runs deeper and needs to be understood, once again, in the context of the Franco-Prussian war. Specifically, his critique centers on the lack of preparedness of France-Ville's authorities when faced with the threat of annihilation from Schultze's weapons of mass destruction. In spite of an awareness of such a threat, the citizens are *blasé* about the possibility: "On savait que [Schultze] était venu élever cité contre cité. Mais de là à se ruer sur une ville paisible, à la détruire par un coup de force, on devait croire qu'il y avait loin" (Verne, "Bégum" 112). France-Ville's military commander, Colonel Hendon, informs Dr. Sarassin that countering the might of Schultze's weaponry will not be possible in the time available. And once Bruckmann arrives back from Stahlstadt with news of

Schultze's weaponry, some citizens "descend[ent] dans les caves, résignés à subir les horreurs d'un bombardement" (Verne, "Bégum" 119). The apathy and docility of France-Ville's citizenry are a reference to the unready state of France's military prior to the Franco-Prussian War, as well to the post-war fear of an ongoing lack of preparedness for a future conflict with Germany. France-Ville's uniformity and isolationist commitment to its internal programs and aims, symbolic of its lack of dynamism, has been its downfall.

On this reading of the novel, neither city shines as a beacon of hope. Andrew Martin provides a useful approach to our understanding of this ambiguity: "An explicitly binary novel, it presents a pair of diametrically opposite cities, the one tyrannically scientific, the other tolerantly imaginative, whose roles prove reversible, revealing the imaginative within the scientific, and the tyrannical within the tolerant" (75). Stahlstadt is certainly no wonderland, but even Bruckmann comes away with a sense of awe at the audacity of Schultze's plans. In contrast, the putative benefits of France-Ville are shown to have unsteady foundations when faced with a more imaginative foe.

The final important physical feature of Stahlstadt that I wish to discuss is the idyllic garden at its center. It is here that Herr Schultze has his laboratory. Chesneaux sees the garden that surrounds him as an example of the perversion of science, which it no doubt is (231). The paradisaical garden is completely incongruous in a city in which nature has been suffocated to make way for industrial technologies. Herr Schultze, due to his preeminent position as dictator of Stahlstadt, is able to utilize technology to rectify, in a perverse sense, the deleterious effects of that self-same technology. But he alone is able to enjoy this hermetic paradise; the poor are excluded from its wonders. The

idyllic garden, then, is yet another symbol of the divide between rich and poor in industrialized society, where the poor suffer the effects of a hostile, polluted environment in order to feed the opulent lifestyle of the rich.

### **Conclusion**

I have mentioned the wider importance of the city in Verne's work. Indeed, it is a trope of modernity to which he returns time and again throughout his career, making it a useful window into the preoccupations of an author who grappled to make sense of the impact of urban environment and technology on people. All three of these cities are unwieldy, unstable places, threatened either from within or without by the pressure of a growing urban population. None of these cities is perfect. The egalitarianism and hygiene of France-Ville masks a fatal apathy and inertia. The industrial efficiency of Stahlstadt is the by-product of ruthless capitalism in which men's lives are deemed expendable in the interests of profit-making. The high-speed train links and international commerce of Paris have produced a fractured society of haves and have-nots, a city of gigantic spaces in which the individual is crushed by the overwhelming weight of societal conventions.

One can detect, however, an evolution in Verne's thinking about cities. Paris sprawls outwards uncontrollably from a restyled center, whereas the later Stahlstadt and France-Ville are very much more planned and limited in scope. This no doubt in part reflects the difference between Paris as a capital city and France-Ville and Stahlstadt as more allegorical representations. But the idea of a contained city is found elsewhere in Verne's oeuvre, not least in his ocean-going "cities" which are, naturally, constrained by the sea. We should perhaps not be surprised, therefore, that Dufrénoy finds it impossible to negotiate the monumental, tentacular Paris of the future, whereas

Bruckmann, in his more contained environment, is able to gain mastery over space and place. The protagonists' different experiences suggest, perhaps, Verne's growing acceptance of the city.

## CHAPTER 4 SONS

### Michel Dufrénoy

We have seen how Michel Dufrénoy's journeys around Paris are the narrative means by which the reader gains insight into the spatial configuration of the city. What is of equal significance to the novel's flow are the numerous relationships that he forges with older, male characters in this unfamiliar metropolis. The orphaned Dufrénoy uses these characters as guides to the behavior and norms of the future city. Through them he receives advice and guidance, but, ultimately, he never finds a father figure who is fully receptive to his own artistic and idealistic sensibilities. In this section, I explore Dufrénoy's relationship to three characters, namely: (1) his uncle Boutardin; (2) his uncle Huguenin, and; (3) his colleague Quinsonnas.

Stanislas Boutardin is Dufrénoy's guardian, and is, in many ways, the antithesis of his nephew. He plays the role of the oppressive father figure in whom the functions of employer and *pater familias* are merged. In so far as Dufrénoy is a counter-culture figure in this imagined future, Boutardin is the archetype of the age, which, as I have argued, is marked by examples of nineteenth-century values. We learn that he is "le produit naturel de ce siècle d'industrie" (Verne, "Paris" 46), a coarse philistine whose social Darwinist mentality brooks no compromise with the world of art. In language which disturbingly prefigures later fascistic characterizations of other races, Boutardin informs Dufrénoy during their initial meeting that he has discovered in the young man germs ("*des germes*") which it is important to destroy, and says that "l'artiste n'est pas loin du grimacier auquel je jette cent sols de ma stalle pour qu'il m'amuse mes digestions." (Verne, "Paris" 49-50). As a father figure, Boutardin resembles Schultze in

the sense that his motivations in fatherhood, as in all aspects of his life, are driven by wholly commercial and selfish considerations.

Dufrénoy is naturally disgusted by his adopted family. His contempt is indicated to the reader through the narrator, who appears to speak for Dufrénoy, but one wonders to what extent these sentiments reflect Verne's misgivings about the predominant ideology of Second Empire France. Boutardin's character is the embodiment of the age. When Dufrénoy retires to his bedroom for the first time *chez* Boutardin he looks up at the ceiling whereupon "le plafond hexagone rappelait à son esprit une foule de théorèmes géométriques" (Verne, "Paris" 46). While Dufrénoy is clearly nauseated by the cold, mathematical nature of his surroundings, the hexagonal ceiling also suggests that Boutardin's household epitomizes the dominant class in France, a country familiarly referred to as *l'Hexagone*. Indeed, Boutardin is heavily implicated in public works as a capitalist banker and director of the *Société des Catacombes de Paris et de la force motrice à domicile*. In this state-controlled plutocracy, Boutardin's capitalist interests mark him out as a model citizen.

The narrator uses the adjective *utile* repeatedly to describe Boutardin's character, a man, like Schultze in *Les Cinq Cents Millions de la Bégum*, overcome with a sense of the rightness of his own beliefs and an inflated sense of self-importance. The common denominator of all his actions is monetary gain. Guided by considerations of utility and practicality, his acquisitiveness leads to a blanching of life's pleasures. As Dufrénoy sits down to eat with the family, the scene is uninspiring: "Dans cette triste salle, ridiculement dorée, on mangeait vite et sans conviction. L'important, en effet, n'est pas de se nourrir, mais bien de gagner de quoi se nourrir" (Verne, "Paris" 46).

Boutardin's achievements as an industrialist, moreover, throw into sharp relief his lack of cultural sensibility and philistinism, symbolized by the *Grand Livre*. The ornate script that Quinsonnas writes upon its enormous pages in multicolored inks is reminiscent of the artistic productions of the Middle Ages, but his writing has no real aesthetic value; it is, rather, a grotesque parody of calligraphic art, of such art reduced to the organization of the financial ledger. Boutardin, then, cuts a ridiculous figure, his personality an embodiment of all the worst tendencies of an age of material prosperity. Just as Dufrénoy is at his mercy, so too is he at the mercy of the overwhelming forces of capitalist enterprise of which Boutardin is the chief exemplar. Through Boutardin, we quickly learn everything that his nephew is *not*. What these two characters share in common is an obstinate trait of assuming that their world-view is the right one; in this sense, both are close-minded and all-the-more impoverished as individuals as a result.

As they are otherwise diametrical opposites, the unabating success of Boutardin can only portend the abject failure of Dufrénoy. The narrator emphasizes the anachronism of Dufrénoy's world-view through his love of classical literature, which is derided from the very beginning of the novel as a subject of study unfit for the modern age. The last of the classics professors fade towards obsolescence in abandoned classrooms (Verne, "Paris" 30). When Dufrénoy ascends the podium to collect his prize for Latin verse, he is greeted by peals of laughter and derisive remarks, only to be awarded "*le Manuel du bon usinier*" (Verne, "Paris" 34, italics in the original). This prize reflects at once the priorities of the age, namely industrialism, and the low status of the classicist who is now expected to be fit for nothing other than common factory work.

Dufrénoy's love of literature and art is out of step with his time; it appears, moreover, to be a trait that he has inherited from his late father, who is described in the following terms: "Ce pauvre artiste, musicien de grand talent, né pour un siècle meilleur, succomba jeune à la peine, ne léguant à son fils que ses tendances de poète, ses aptitudes et ses aspirations" (Verne, "Paris" 49) Thus Verne avers to his reader from the start of the novel that young Dufrénoy is the issue of a sensitive and refined father who was himself ill-suited to his age. The suggestion is that Dufrénoy *fils* will likewise be stymied by the same societal forces that sent his father to an early grave if he chooses to exercise his talents in a similar direction.

Dufrénoy's relations with his uncle Huguenin and his colleague Quinsonnas are less clear-cut than those with Boutardin. While both uncle and colleague take Dufrénoy under their wing, often employing the term "mon fils" to refer to the young man, they are ambiguous characters.

Huguenin's attitude towards his nephew is one of encouragement and affectionate empathy for his artistic endeavors, as well as admonition and negative prophecy when it comes to the young man's future as an artist. These dual sentiments - of excitement and enthusiasm for the young man's efforts, mixed with pessimism concerning his future - allow the narrator to use this relationship to paint a detailed picture of the moribund nature of art in twentieth-century Paris while harkening back to the glory days of literature before the advent of that demon, electricity.

Huguenin is the last vestige of a bygone age in which literature enjoyed great cultural importance. He first meets Dufrénoy in the dilapidated public library in which he works in as an assistant librarian. After congratulating his nephew on winning the Latin

prize, he then proceeds to warn the young man of his, Dufrénoy's, unsuitability for the world of banking. But artistic endeavor will get him nowhere either: ". . .ah ! mon enfant, avec tes idées, avec tes aptitudes, tu es né bien tard" says his uncle (Verne, "Paris" 56). The death of literature, and of interest in literature, is evoked repeatedly by Huguenin. Towards the end of their initial meeting, Huguenin sounds a note of profound pessimism: "La littérature est morte, mon enfant, répondit l'oncle ; vois ces salles désertes, et ces livres ensevelis dans leur poussière ; on ne lit plus ; je suis ici gardien de ce cimetière, et l'exhumation est interdite" (Verne, "Paris" 58).

Instead of calling for an heroic opposition to the stifling spirit of the age, Huguenin counsels a pragmatic, conciliatory attitude which would submit to the spiritual impoverishment inherent in Boutardin's world of banking. To his nephew he says:

Non ! tu n'es pas libre ; Monsieur Boutardin est malheureusement plus que ton oncle ; il est ton tuteur ; je ne veux pas, je ne dois pas t'encourager à suivre une voie funeste ; non, tu es jeune ; travaille à gagner l'indépendance et alors, si tes goûts n'ont pas changé, si je suis encore de ce monde, viens me trouver (Verne, "Paris" 56).

Huguenin is caught between the desire to see his nephew flourish so that he might realize his humanistic potential and the realization that, practically speaking, the pursuit of artistic endeavor is a fool's paradise: ". . .le vieux savant voulait étouffer chez le jeune homme ces belles tendances qu'il admirait, et sa parole venait à chaque instant trahir sa volonté ; il savait ce que la situation d'un artiste aurait de faux, de déclassé, d'impossible" (Verne, "Paris" 57).

The fact is that Boutardin and Huguenin, though they appear to be philosophically divergent characters, actually come to the same conclusion concerning Dufrénoy's future: that it is far better for the young man to pursue a practical path than to remain fixated on a literary past that is no longer relevant. For Huguenin, as we saw above,

work is a means of gaining independence; for Boutardin, on the other hand, work is an end in itself. He says to Dufrénoy: "j'ai décidé que vous entreriez dans la maison de banque Casmodage et Cie, sous la haute direction de votre cousin ; prenez exemple sur lui ; travaillez à devenir un homme pratique" (Verne, "Paris", 50). Both these father figures, then, are propelled towards the same conclusion by exigencies of the all-powerful capitalist system, although the underlying philosophies by which they reach that conclusion differ.

Quinsonnas is Dufrénoy's colleague at the bank, and it is he who enters the transactions into the *Grand Livre* with a florid hand. He holds similar, but not identical, views to those of Huguenin. Where Huguenin is an aficionado of French literature, Quinsonnas is an expert pianist with an encyclopedic knowledge of the repertoire. Just as Huguenin resents the decline of literature, so Quinsonnas laments the passing of traditional harmony in music: "Voilà tout bonnement un accord de nos jours ! et, chose épouvantable, les savants se chargent de l'expliquer scientifiquement !" (Verne, "Paris" 83). But whereas Huguenin is supremely pessimistic about a resurrection of literature, Quinsonnas is more of an opportunist, and is willing to embrace modern art when it suits him. He reveals to Dufrénoy that he has composed a piece in the modern style called *La Thilorienne, grande fantaisie sur la Liquéfaction de l'Acide carbonique*, and proceeds to play it. Dufrénoy cannot believe that Quinsonnas is serious, but the latter reveals the opportunism of his project:

- Et tu comptes sur ce morceau-là, dit Michel.
- Si, j'y compte ! répondit Quinsonnas ! c'est de mon temps ! tout le monde est chimiste. Je serai compris. Seulement l'idée ne suffit pas, il faut encore l'exécution (Verne, "Paris" 87).

Quinsonnas is in tune to the spirit of the times, aware of the commercial aspects of the art world. He is brazen about the dependence of art on finance when he says "la finance a cela de bon qu'elle peut au moins payer les chefs-d'œuvre, et il faut bien manger, même quand on a du génie !" (Verne, "Paris" 86). This practical aspect to artistic living is something Dufrénoy will never get to grips with – later in the novel it will lead to his holing up in his apartment, eating cheap coal-bread, rather than compromising on his deeply-felt outrage against modern times. Quinsonnas is also more aware than Michel of the exigencies of his artistic patrons, in that his intended route to fame revolves around creating a shocking spectacle. In admonishing Dufrénoy for his traditional views, Quinsonnas says to him that "si tu ne racontes pas quelque chose d'étonnant, qui t'écouterà ? L'art n'est plus possible que s'il arrive au tour de force !" (Verne, "Paris" 78). In this, Quinsonnas shows a propensity to ape the purveyors of sensational productions at the *Grand Entrepôt Dramatique*. His is a cynical artistry.

Even Quinsonnas's apartment is a place where practicality flourishes. Its small size prohibits much furniture, so a piano serves as a musical instrument, a bed and a dinner table. The multipurpose piano is a metaphor for art in the Paris of 1960, marginalized by the practical considerations of life such that it is no longer permitted to occupy its own separate realm. In other words, the Romantic view of art for art's sake is no longer valid – art must serve, at least, a function outside of it. That Quinsonnas owns such a piece of furniture provides further evidence of his willingness to adapt to society, something Dufrénoy is loath to do. The suggestion is that Quinsonnas is the character whom Dufrénoy should emulate if he wants to succeed: practical yet artistic, worldly-wise yet displaying an unusual sensibility, he can negotiate a course that satisfies both

his needs and his desires. He has the ability to compromise, whereas Dufrénoy is terminally in thrall to a romantic idealism.

In sum, much as Sarassin and Schultze place emphasis on the importance of work on an individual's development in society, so the father figures of Boutardin, Huguenin and Quinsonnas recognize the necessity of having a practical outlook which privileges the world of work over artistic concerns. Dufrénoy's failure to adapt to his environment, which ultimately leads to his downfall, can be explained by his unwillingness to condescend to the expectations of a materialistic society. He is condemned by his failure to heed his fathers' warnings. In contrast, Bruckmann's ready adoption of the patriotic and paternalistic philosophies of Sarassin and Schultze ensures the success of his mission.

### **Marcel Bruckmann: A Son For Sarassin . . . And Verne?**

In this section, I show how Bruckmann's actions are a mimetic realization of Dr. Sarassin's own paternal standards, and how paternity and patriotism combine to bring about his happy adoption as future son-in-law of the good doctor. I emphasize Bruckmann's relationships with Sarassin's son, Octave; Frau Bauer's son, Carl; and Herr Schultze. I suggest how the differences between Octave and Bruckmann may relate to Verne's fraught relationship with his own son, Michel, at the time of composition. I argue that it is through an appreciation of the subtleties of paternal relations - the knowledge of how to be both authoritative father figure and tolerant son - that Bruckmann himself receives the blessings of family.

If Michel Dufrénoy exhibits all the signs of a young provincial man's *anomie* and disenchantment faced with the specter of industrialism, in the person of Marcel Bruckmann Verne offers his readers the example of a model citizen who tackles head-

on the challenges of the age of iron. There are parallels between Dufrénoy and Bruckmann. Both are orphans who are taken under the wing of older individuals. Both are provincial young men - Bruckmann hails from Alsace - who move to the city. And both characters have to confront challenges of modernity as exemplified through life in a hostile and unforgiving urban landscape. But that is essentially where the similarities end: whereas Dufrénoy retreats into an ever more trenchant rejection of what he sees as the vulgarities of modern society, Bruckmann embraces possibilities afforded by his scientific understanding and technical acumen in order to defend his *patrie*.

Verne describes Bruckmann's character alongside that of Dr. Sarassin's son, Octave. Bruckmann and Octave first come to the reader's attention in the second chapter, entitled *Deux Copains*. Octave Sarassin has traits that foreshadow the peculiar averageness of that most bourgeois of cities, France-Ville: "Il n'était ni sot ni d'une intelligence supérieure, ni beau ni laid, ni grand ni petit, ni brun ni blond. Il était châtain, et, en tout, membre-né de la classe moyenne" (Verne, "Bégum" 10).

In contrast, Marcel Bruckmann does not belong to the *classe aisée* in which Octave fritters away his time. He finances his own studies with a small inheritance, left by his late father, "qui suffisait tout juste à payer son collège" (Verne, "Bégum" 10). It is this spirit of stoic independence which defines Bruckmann's character throughout the novel. His is a forceful personality, "une nature énergique dont l'influence un peu tyrannique mais bienfaisante s'était de vive force imposée à [Octave Sarassin]" (Verne, "Bégum" 10). Compared to his mediocre friend, Bruckmann is a tower of strength, physically, intellectually and morally. His is a figure fit for the industrial age, "une machine organique au maximum de tension et de rendement" (Verne, "Bégum" 11).

Verne's emphasis on Bruckmann's physical attributes connotes the protagonist's role as a man of action. Whereas Michel Dufrénoy lives for the power of words and is suspicious of, and cowed by, the teeming activity of the city, Marcel Bruckmann's attitude is the opposite; he prefers to demonstrate his gratitude towards the Sarassins "par des faits, non par des paroles" (Verne, "Bégum" 10). And it is through his actions that Bruckmann guides Octave towards a more productive manhood.

The opportunity for wartime volunteering, which presents itself shortly after the two students have finished their school exams, underlines Marcel's combative and active nature. At the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War, by the mention of which Verne demonstrates the Bruckmann's patriotic zeal, he and Octave eagerly join an infantry regiment in order to defend France against the Germanic threat. Bruckmann's character is indelibly shaped by these experiences. Indeed, as we have seen, the Franco-Prussian War casts a shadow over the whole novel. His very manliness is conditioned by his wartime experiences and reflections: "Les malheurs de la France, la séparation de l'Alsace et de la Lorraine, avaient imprimé au caractère de Marcel une maturité toute virile" (Verne, "Bégum" 12). Bruckmann's conviction is that there is an explicit link between patriotism and paternal relations: "C'est affaire à la jeunesse française, disait-il, de réparer les fautes de ses pères, et c'est par le travail seul qu'elle peut y arriver" (Verne, "Bégum" 12).

It is clear early in the novel that themes of familial loyalty and self-improvement and the defence of *la patrie* are intimately connected in Bruckmann's mind. His intention is to make Octave into "un fils digne de son père" (Verne, "Bégum" 11) while at the same cultivating a judicious and decisive self-awareness in Sarassin's daughter,

Jeanne. This intended service to the father, Dr. Sarassin, is mirrored in Bruckmann's desire to avenge the German incursion into Alsace. Bruckmann therefore acts as spiritual bridge between filial obedience, fraternal loyalty, and the extension of these patriarchally motivated sentiments into the public domain, as exemplified by his unwavering patriotism. Unlike Michel Dufrénoy's experience of a nauseating existential duality, of the irreconcilable demands of private and public life, Bruckmann finds a *via media* through his assumption of the dominant, patriarchal values of his age.

Apart from his wartime adventures, Bruckmann's patriotism finds a practical outlet in the study and application of scientific principles, which serve as a motif of modernity in both novels. Verne seems to be saying that the security of the modern state rests on an understanding and application of scientific principles. Indeed, it is partly through an advanced understanding of science and its technological applications that Bruckmann is able to penetrate the secrets hidden behind Stahlstadt's forbidding walls. Science provides him with a deep knowledge of the processes underpinning modern, industrial societies, allowing him to engage critically with the challenges facing both his adopted family and the wider society of France-Ville. For Dr. Sarassin, of course, science is at the very heart of his conception of France-Ville. But scientific understanding by itself is insufficient; Bruckmann's academic achievements must combine with a paternal sensibility to ensure that he prevails.

Just before the arrival of the news of Sarassin's almost unimaginably large inheritance, Bruckmann has his head buried in his work. The problem that he is tackling is one of applied, descriptive geometry. In contrast, Octave, who wishes to avoid "la terrible nécessité d'aligner des équations" (Verne, "Bégum" 12), is procrastinating by

making himself coffee, drop by drop. Here is more than a simple comedic sketch on Octave's indolence: Bruckmann is already shown to be uncovering the secrets of *how* things work, whereas Octave is merely *using* the technology that emerges from that understanding, while willfully neglecting his own scientific studies. Once he learns of his father's vast inheritance, Octave is overwhelmed by wonder at what he might now acquire with these riches. Compelled to leave the apartment, where Bruckmann continues doggedly to pursue his studies, Octave becomes a typical *flâneur* of the Parisian boulevard:

Octave suivait . . . les arcades de la rue Rivoli. Il arriva aux Champs-Elysées, tourna le coin de la rue Royale, déboucha sur le boulevard. Jadis, il n'en regardait les splendides étalages qu'avec une indifférence, comme choses futiles et sans place dans sa vie. Maintenant, il s'y arrêta avec un vif mouvement de joie que tous ces trésors lui appartiendrait quand il le voudrait" (Verne, "Bégum" 17)

This reverie of material plenty and the trappings of wealth corresponds, of course, to Verne's acerbic description of Octave as "un membre-né de la classe moyenne" (Verne, "Bégum" 10). Octave's access to a higher social status is not predicated on political ideals or scientific understanding. He is now an *arriviste* who will be able to buy his way into higher social circles.

This consumerist attitude expands insidiously to imperialist proportions as Octave realizes the power that money can provide above and beyond the offerings of the metropolis: "Paris est à moi !... Tout est à moi !... Ne voyagerais-je pas ? N'irai-je point visiter ma baronnie de l'Inde ?... Je pourrai bien quelque jour me payer une pagode, avec les bonzes et les idoles d'ivoire par-dessus le marché !... J'aurai des éléphants !... Je chasserai le tigre ! . . . Il y a l'école... Oh ! oh ! l'école ! on peut s'en passer !" (Verne, "Bégum" 17). Octave's limited imagination is only capable of dreaming up the most

clichéd activities of the would-be imperialist adventurer. His flights of fancy, contrasting with the equanimity of Bruckmann's reaction, emerge in stark contrast to his dismissal of his educational responsibilities. Through Octave's naïveté, Verne is able to criticize such ambitions of empire and of consumption for consumption's sake.

Throughout this episode, Bruckmann tries to act as a quasi-paternal check on Octave's incautious exuberance. We learn before this of Bruckmann's tendency to act as a controlling influence on his wayward friend: "Debout à cinq heures, il obligeait Octave à l'imiter. . ." (Verne, "Bégum" 12). Bruckmann's appreciation of paternal relations is, however, sufficiently well attuned to recognize Octave's need to let off steam after the discovery of his inheritance, for he says: "Tu ferais mieux d'aller prendre de l'air ! Il est évident que tu n'es bon à rien ce soir" (Verne, "Bégum" 16).

My analysis so far has suggested that the portrayal of Octave's behavior is a means for Verne to criticize the frivolity of the times. It is perhaps also the case that the author's preoccupation with Octave's pleasure-seeking has its roots rather closer to home. In fact, the relevance of Octave's character becomes more intelligible to us if we take into account Verne's troubled relationship with his own son, Michel, around the time of the novel's composition. Verne, in fact, came to the conclusion that he had failed as a parent and had Michel "imprisoned for eight months in the detention center of Mettray, near Tours, under the supervision of famous psychiatrist Dr. Blanchard." (Butcher 251). This attempt to control his son's increasingly erratic behavior failed. Despite the family's moving house in an attempt to make a fresh start, "Michel fell into bad company and got into debt. In desperation, Verne had him brought before a judge and again imprisoned." (Butcher 252). It is not, in my view, a leap of the imagination to

propose that the portrayal of Bruckmann and Octave Sarassin presented Verne with a way, through fiction, of dealing with his feelings concerning the reform of a problem child whose behavior was increasingly uncontrollable. Could it not be that Bruckmann represents the obedient, dogged son Verne wishes he had had, who, moreover, is the collaborator in the father's efforts to reform his recalcitrant son?

Bruckmann has much more in common with Dr. Sarassin than does Octave - suggesting, perhaps, that he is indeed the type of son Verne wished for. Upon learning of the inheritance, Bruckmann's remarkable *sangfroid* is punctuated only by a cry of patriotic fervor at the uses to which the inheritance could be put: "Un demi-milliard de francs ! s'écria Marcel, secoué par le mot plus qu'il ne l'avait été par la chose. Sais-tu ce que vous pourriez en faire de mieux ? Ce serait de le donner à la France pour payer sa rançon !" (Verne, "Bégum" 15). Bruckmann's community-centered, patriotic attitude stands in stark contrast to his friend's individualistic perspective. Similar to Bruckmann, Dr. Sarassin shows a surprising degree of detachment from the personal significance of the inheritance. Having previously been faced with the snooty condescension of his peers at the Congrès d'Hygiène, Sarassin enters the hall the day after learning about his inheritance only to be confronted by the obsequious congratulations of those self-same peers. Just as Bruckmann is, on a personal level, impervious to the seductions of money, Dr. Sarassin is perplexed by the claim from the now fawning Lord Glandover that he is worth twenty-one million pounds: "Le docteur Sarassin, qui ne croyait pas, en conscience, «valoir» un sou de plus qu'aux séances précédentes . . ." (Verne, "Bégum" 21). Verne thereby emphasizes the moral hazards that the possession of money brings, a sentiment which is borne out by Marcel's warning to Octave: "Quelque chose me dit,

mon pauvre Octave, qu'il eût mieux valu pour toi, sinon pour ton père, qui est un esprit droit et sensé, que ce gros héritage fût réduit à des proportions plus modestes" (Verne, "Bégum" 15-16). The qualification of his young friend as "mon pauvre Octave" underscores, in its irony, Bruckmann's faith in the moral value of character over that of fortune. His anxiety about the consequences of the rapid acquisition of riches is echoed in Dr. Sarassin's sudden terror and skepticism upon learning of his inheritance: "Le docteur Sarassin était pétrifié. Il resta un instant sans trouver un mot à dire. Puis, mordu par un remords d'esprit critique . . ." (Verne, "Bégum" 5).

Moreover, Bruckmann's sense of a community-centered imperative has its parallel in the imagination of Dr. Sarassin, who, having had a chance to reflect upon his good fortune, decides to invest his wealth in a purely humanitarian endeavor: "Ce n'est pas à moi que ce capital appartient de droit, c'est à l'Humanité, c'est au Progrès" (Verne, "Bégum" 23). These clichés of the age will develop into France-Ville's stereotypical museums, cathedrals and monuments that, as has been mentioned above, were the mainstay of nineteenth-century bourgeois philanthropy.

In sum, Marcel Bruckmann and Dr. Sarassin share beliefs with regard to the dangerous allure of money, the relevance of scientific knowledge, the value of philanthropy over individualistic covetousness and conspicuous consumption, and the recognition of the dangers that the possession of such a large sum portends.

Bruckmann assumes, in a sense, the role of father figure to Octave, replacing Dr. Sarassin. Over the course of the novel, Bruckmann's actions, in tune with the philosophy and spirit of the doctor, inspire Octave to relinquish his hedonistic tendencies and to adopt the manly posture of his remarkable friend. Bruckmann's

dramatic return from his espionage mission to Stahlstadt, for example, incites Octave to emulate the young Alsatian. No longer the indifferent bystander that he was earlier, Octave is ready to assist Bruckmann fully in his efforts to protect France-Ville: "En tout ceci, Marcel fut bien secondé par Octave, qu'il trouva moralement changé et bien à son avantage" (Verne, "Bégum" 124). Bruckmann's actions have indeed spoken louder than words. Through the adopted son, the father's philosophy has prevailed.

Bruckmann's actions also speak for themselves elsewhere in the novel. His role as tutor and sometime guardian of young Carl Bauer is the means by which he accedes to Stahlstadt's central complex, where ultimately he is able to discover Schultze's terrible secret. Once again, Bruckmann is discharging a paternal role. As though he were the boy's father, he demands that he be allowed to descend the mineshaft to go in search of the missing child: "Mais enfin, reprit Marcel, il faut que je sache ce qu'est devenu cet enfant !" (Verne, "Bégum" 58).

Finally, in his relations with Professor Schultze, the role Bruckmann has been playing thus far is inverted as he comes to adopt the role of son to the mad scientist. Such a reading of the text fits in with Andrew Martin's assertion that "France-Ville is twinned with Stahlstadt while Sarassin becomes an alter ego of Schultze" (75). Indeed, Bruckmann, whose name means "bridge man" in German, serves as a link between these two seemingly contrastive personalities. While he must combine an understanding of the twin cities of France-Ville and Stahlstadt from a social and technological point of view, he has also to understand the twin father figures of Schultze and Sarassin in order to save France-Ville and win Jeanne Sarassin's hand in marriage.

In other words, Bruckmann combines the strong patriotism and scientific inventiveness of Herr Schultze with the peace-loving, paternal philosophy of Dr. Sarassin.

## CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

This study has looked at the ways in which the urban setting affects the narrative in each of these novels. We have seen that contemporary political and social concerns shaped these novels as much as, or perhaps more than, any supposedly visionary aspect of Verne's writing. While urban settings are crucial to many of Verne's stories, they are only ever the backdrop against which human protagonists act. This study has investigated the interplay between this backdrop – the urban environment – and the protagonists' quest for a father-figure. I have argued that mastery of the city is the means by which Marcel Bruckmann is able finally to accede to harmonious relations with a father-figure through marriage to his daughter. I have shown equally how Michel Dufrénoy's failure to escape his orphaned state is a consequence of his being overwhelmed by the city.

The importance of father-son relationships is brought out in a number of other ways. Just as Boutardin controls his own family with an iron will – his propensities mirrored in his wife and son – so too the state is controlled by an oligarchy of male capitalists. The state therefore mirrors the family in its composition, relying heavily on an all-powerful capitalist ideology to support it and to impose its will.

The breakdown of the father-son relationship is best exemplified in the relationship of Herr Schultze to his people. Having no family himself, he is unable to empathize with his workers. Reduced to a purely transactional relationship with them, Schultze displays no compunction at putting to death those workers by whom he feels betrayed or let down. The inflexibility and ruthlessness of Schultze's dysfunctional paternity is mirrored in the architectural traits of his Citadel. Heavily delineated spaces through which one

passes blindfolded mark one caste of workers off from another. Huge portals control entry and exit. Finally, beside the central lair, a vast, overgrown garden evidences Herr Schultze's excesses in the face of other inhabitants' misery. In contrast, the caring Dr. Sarassin presides over a people who, although apathetic and unaware of the dangers from the bellicose German, are nonetheless peaceable individuals for whom Sarassin's vision is to maximize health and prosperity for all.

In *Paris au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, the effects of Haussmann's reforms are echoed in the satire with which the narrator treats the marriage of grand state-backed projects and the world of high finance. Paris in 1960 has become a huge, sprawling monster of a city split into functional zones, much as the society's capitalist economy rests upon a productive division of labor. Science is viewed both positively and negatively in the novel. Scientific knowledge contributes to the development of high-speed rail links and modern communications technology; but science is also behind the demonic electricity, that symbol of modernity which plagues Michel Dufrénoy. With its anemic and omnipresent glow, electric light suffuses the city in a glow of garish modernity in which the relentless pursuit of industrialism overwhelms art and historical consciousness. Nowhere is the triumph of industrialism more evident than in the monumental electric lighthouse at the *port de Grenelle*, which, with its spire of light, towers over the city like some kind of cathedral to capitalism.

The theme of industrialism and the atomization of individuals within the city are also found in Verne's later work *Les Cinq Cents Millions de la Bégum*. While messages of both novels are pessimistic in nature, this later novel dispenses with the utopian suggestion that industrialism will make war obsolete. Indeed, since it was written in the

aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War, the novel treats seriously the theme of conflict. In Stahlstadt, industrialism is triumphant. Like 1960 Paris, the city can be viewed as a series of zones. On the periphery, beyond the walls of the citadel, coal-mining communities struggle in oppressive conditions, with family members forcibly cut off from one another by the exigencies of industry. Within the citadel a militaristic and authoritarian hierarchy obtains. The social hierarchy is reflected in the various guarded portals and discrete zones which cut groups off from one another. At the heart of the citadel, a paradisaical garden harbors Herr Schultze's secret laboratory, in which he develops poison gas. This garden shows the wonders that modern technology can bring while also suggesting that perversions of science, whose application can give rise to the unnatural and the uncanny, exacerbate existing social inequalities.

It is tempting to see France-Ville as the antithesis of Stahlstadt. Its rectilinear, orderly layout contrasts with the concentricity of Stahlstadt. Much as the concentric layout of Stahlstadt echoes its hierarchical social structure, so the grid-pattern layout of France-Ville denotes the democratic and egalitarian spirit that ostensibly prevails there. This is further emphasized in the uniformity of the housing stock, which is restricted to single family homes. The regulation of housing, coupled with the city's development of museums, places of worship and schools, emphasize middle-class pretensions of the city's founders. In contrast to the other cities, France-Ville is not zonal; social life is instead centered on the single-family home. Yet, despite – and in several respects, because of – its embrace of rational, hygienic, modern living conditions, France-Ville, in its overbearing structural uniformity, remains curiously lifeless. Its inhabitants are apathetic about the threat from neighboring Stahlstadt.

Significantly, the three cities share the mantra of the importance and centrality of work. In Paris, Dufrénoy is told to pursue a pragmatic course of action by rejecting (or setting aside) his artistic aspirations and embracing the world of work. In France-Ville, one of the few requirements for residency is that one be willing to work; idleness will not be tolerated. And in Stahlstadt, slavish work has a totalizing effect on the population and the development of its social structures.

This study has also proposed that relations between protagonists and their respective father figures are important to understanding the messages of these stories. Much as the revealing of imaginary cities is central to the narrative development in these novels, so too is the theme of the orphaned young man trying to find his way in the city.

In *Paris au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Michel Dufrénoy's relationship with his uncle Boutardin serves to set up a dichotomy between the world of art and its antithesis of high finance and industrialism. Boutardin's cold reserve and pragmatism contrast with Dufrénoy's sensitivity and idealism. The young man's uncle Huguenin represents the old, neglected world of literature. On the one hand he induces Dufrénoy to ignore literature and focus instead on the pragmatic world of work. On the other, he piques Dufrénoy's interest in literature with an extensive discussion of the great works of the past. Huguenin's self-contradictions mirror Dufrénoy's groundlessness as his mind grapples with competing ideologies. For Dufrénoy, of course, it is a case of all or nothing. Unlike his colleague, Quinsonnas, who represents a sort of third way - an uneasy marriage of the traditional and the modern through a pronounced cynicism - Dufrénoy is unable to compromise on his idealistic position in order to accommodate the spirit of the age.

By way of contrast, in *Les Cinq Cents Millions de la Bégum* Marcel Bruckmann is the very embodiment of values that his age admires. He is bold, patriotic and pragmatic. Placing great emphasis on learning, scientific literacy and social justice, Bruckmann's philosophy echoes that of France-Ville's founder, Dr. Sarassin. Indeed, Bruckmann becomes a kind of surrogate father for the recalcitrant and indolent Octave Sarassin in a mirror of the paternal bond. This subplot may reflect Verne's own feelings about his wayward son, Michel; Bruckmann may be the son Verne wishes he had had.

Bruckmann also adopts a paternal role with Carl Bauer, the young German miner, whom he helps with his studies. Finally, he bridges the gap between Stahlstadt and France-Ville by gaining the respect of Herr Schultze. Playing the role of obedient son, he is able to prise from the mad scientist the secret at the center of Stahlstadt. In Schultze we recognize Bruckmann's patriotic zeal; at Schultze's inventiveness, Bruckmann expresses his admiration. Having satisfied the twin roles of both father and son, in the process revealing the connection between Stahlstadt and France-Ville and Schultze and Sarassin, Bruckmann makes a triumphant return to France-Ville to ask for Jeanne Sarassin's hand in marriage. The father-son connection is finally consummated: the orphan has found his family.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

William Sheard was born in Congleton, England. He attended the University of Edinburgh where he took full advantage of the possibilities afforded by a year at the Institut d'Études Politiques in Grenoble, France, before returning to the cold north to earn a Master of Arts in politics. Postgraduate study followed in a unique transnational dual degree at the University of Kent and the Université du Littoral, Côte d'Opale. William enrolled in the French literature master's degree program at the University of Florida in 2008. He is currently pursuing a doctorate in linguistics.

Jules Verne, widely regarded as one of the fathers of science fiction, wrote some of literature's most famous adventure novels, including seminal works like *Journey to the Center of the Earth*, *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, and *Around the World in 80 Days*.<sup>1</sup> Verne spent his childhood watching ships sail down the Loire and imagining what it would be like to climb aboard them [PDF].<sup>2</sup> A study of Mexican dog owners versus non-dog owners found that the dog owners felt that they were healthier: "Compared to non-dog owners, the dog owners' scores were significantly lower for psychosomatic symptoms and stress and were higher for general health, vitality, emotional role, absence of bodily pain, social functioning, and mental health."