

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: SEA CHANGES: ABSENCE OF THE FEMININE PRESENCE
AND ITS REPLACEMENT IN VERNE'S *VINGT MILLE*
LIEUES SOUS LES MERS

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The following work will examine masculine representations, the absence of feminine presence, and the elements that replace it in Jules Verne's 1870 novel *Vingt mille lieues sous les mers*. Maternity is of particular interest in this novel. Representations of family, when they can be found, are usually seen through inanimate objects, sterile eggs, or the corpses of mothers, potentially reflecting 19th century fears of the collapsing traditional family. To understand the implication this feminine absence and replacement, relationships between the primary male characters will be considered based on the type of masculinity each represents and how their roles affect the narrative. This will lead into a discussion of reproduction and sterility, which will dovetail into an analysis of representations of femininity and maternity with an eye toward what this says about Verne's entire body of work and future potential research in this area.

SEA CHANGES: ABSENCE OF THE FEMININE PRESENCE AND ITS
REPLACEMENT IN VERNE'S *VINGT MILLE LIEUES SOUS LES MERS*

by

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CHAPTER 1:

Introduction

In the novel *Vingt mille lieues sous les mers*, his 1870 installment in the *Voyages extraordinaires* series, Jules Verne plunges the reader into a world of men and men alone. The family, when it can be found, is dead, and representations of reproduction often take the form of inanimate objects, sterile eggs, or the corpses of mothers and children: nothing that can still give birth. It is a world of masculinity, full of hunting, of battle, and of exploration and subsequently conquest, but it is also a world out of balance where the absent femininity and maternity attaches itself to inanimate objects and sometimes male characters to fill the void. In this world where human women are excluded and where what is masculine seems to be the ideal, femininity flows through the cracks like ocean water into a sunken vessel.

It is as though the state of life aboard the Nautilus, where Nemo passionately wanted to escape the injustice of the terrestrial world, were a warning to those who dreaded the collapse of the traditional family and societal order of the age. In the near future of the world in *Vingt mille lieues*, Nemo's family is dead. Woman does not exist. She has also died out. Eggs are always sterile, and their current, crumbling society has no future. This is an absence that merits analysis. Likewise, the reactions and representations of masculinity in this narrative are significant

Though women and human maternity have no part in Nemo's underwater world, this is not to say that femininity and maternity are completely absent. Much of the literary discourse on these topics takes place in lengthy pedagogical passages in which Nemo

describes the marvels of science and the sea, sometimes addressing his companions, but oftentimes as though reading a textbook aloud to no one in particular, or at least no character present within the narrative. In an article in which Timothy Unwin examines the allegedly innovative author's tendency to rely on "already written" texts to flesh out his descriptions of "unknown" places and "unseen" creatures, Unwin defends such passages and Verne's intentions for them. According to Unwin, Verne was as experimental in his text and textuality as Flaubert and, despite his reputation as a futurist, was very much a writer of his own era (Unwin, 257). Rather than a dispensable defect in Verne's writing, Unwin sees these pedagogical passages as "such a hallmark feature of Verne's style that they seem to point to something essential," and Unwin lifts them up as a challenge to conventional discourse that parallels Verne's protagonists' own explorations (Unwin, 262). While difficult for the reader who wants nothing more than an adventure story, these passages are Aronnax's direct communication with the reader and they set the frame for the discourse on masculinity and maternity analyzed here among others. They serve as important historical documents both within the narrative and without. In carefully worded prose, Aronnax's long-winded lessons on fish classification and tragic shipwrecks often tie in with the Nautilus's current location and invoke historic references ranging from antiquity to Verne's own age. The imagery in these passages also plays to the same societal fears that must have inspired feminine representation in Verne's earlier works, infamous for their inherent misogyny, not to mention women's general treatment in the popular novels of the Verne's time, which focused to the point of obsession on prostitution, family scandal, and threats to the accepted structure of the family in general .

That certain references to femininity and maternity or the lack thereof are meant to evoke such fears can be supported by certain facts surrounding *Vingt mille lieues*' publication in addition to the contents of the text itself. William Butcher, who, in his 2006 Verne biography, declares himself the sole scholar to have read and published (in English) on Verne's original manuscripts as they were before edited by Hetzel, tells us that early manuscripts of *Vingt mille lieues* acknowledge a debt to Alexandre Dumas *fils* with whom Verne collaborated and befriended during his youth in Bohemian Paris (Butcher, 75-76 and 192). Moreover, Verne's early works featured the same sorts of women that populated contemporary theater and novels. Though *Vingt mille lieues* was published some time after Verne had left Paris for provincial married life, one can still find Romantic sentimentality throughout the text.

Butcher and many other sources tell us that, at Hetzel's request, references to Nemo's nationality were removed and details on Nemo's family and how they were lost were left ambiguous if not omitted altogether for political reasons. However, when Verne published *L'Île mystérieuse* in 1874, Nemo reappears with a detailed confession outlining his revolutionary days and revealing the death of his wife, children, and family as a result of those actions. National allegiances are changed. Butcher tells us that Hetzel refused Verne's original idea of presenting Nemo as a Pole driven to the Nautilus by Russian aggressors that brutally slaughtered his family for commercial reasons and fear of offending the Russian government (Butcher, 189-190). Instead, Verne gives only the most vague indications of Nemo's past in *Vingt mille lieues* and holds the revised story of his life as the Indian Prince Dakkar until publishing *L'Île mystérieuse* four years later. While this analysis does not take the whole of *L'Île mystérieuse* into consideration, those

parts describing Nemo's background as an Indian revolutionary fighter against the British and his family's death are important given Verne's original intent for *Vingt mille lieues*. These details enrich certain points and commentary in *Vingt mille lieues* and make the discourse more clear overall.

To understand the implication of feminine representations in the text, it is first necessary to understand the role of its masculine counterparts. Therefore, relationships between the primary male characters, specifically Nemo, Ned Land, and Professor Pierre Aronnax, will be considered based on the type of masculinity each represents and how their roles fit into and affect the narrative. Based on discoveries from this analysis, the general principles of masculinity that enter into play will be identified, as will the effects of the conflict between them. This will lead into a discussion of reproduction and sterility, which will dovetail into an analysis of the seemingly absent feminine presence, representations of femininity and maternity, and the role of the family. Finally, we will see that Nemo has a compulsion to repeat the cycle illustrated by his tale in *L'Île mystérieuse*, which nearly always ends in a display of impotence and Nemo's incapacity to prevent the loss of what he fought to protect.

CHAPTER 2:

Masculine Roles and Relations Between the Principal Male Characters

The three most strongly defined and developed male characters in the narrative each represent a different type of masculinity, though there is often an inner struggle in each of them between these types if not between masculinity and femininity altogether. It is a struggle within the *homme* between the *bête* and the *savant* where the lines distinguishing the two begin to blur. The struggle plays out not only between the individuals but amongst their possessions, their trappings, and their very environment. Moreover, in a world without women, the men must struggle to build a new society, which necessitates that some must take up the tasks left untended by the missing gender. We will see that some take up the role of the missing women themselves with gender roles as mutable as the gender organs of some of the hermaphroditic aquatic creatures with which they share the seas.

2.1 Nemo: Lire sur sa physionomie à livre ouvert

Given that the 19th century was the golden age for physiognomy and phrenology in Europe and that physiognomic character observations were a staple of the 19th century novel, it is unsurprising that Aronnax would use it as an “objective” way to introduce the man who was the object of his attempt at a scientific and pedagogical memoir. It is notable, however, because it reveals almost as much about Aronnax’s perception of Nemo as about Nemo himself. Aronnax himself refers to chirognomy and to anatomist Louis Pierre Gratiolet and philosopher Johann Jakob Engel, both of whom discussed

some form of physiognomy in their works. Moreover, these references come from a man who has devoted his own work to the classification and study of animal species and who considers Nemo to be as easily read as a “livre ouvert” via a physiognomic study (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 91).

At first sight and based simply on his physiognomy, Aronnax sees in Nemo a dominant and noble character. Aronnax judges everything about Nemo’s appearance as proof of his power and rigidity:

Je reconnus sans hésiter ses qualités dominantes - la confiance en lui, car sa tête se dégageait noblement sur l'arc formé par la ligne de ses épaules, et ses yeux noirs regardaient avec une froide assurance : - le calme, car sa peau, pâle plutôt que colorée, annonçait la tranquillité du sang ; - l'énergie, que démontrait la rapide contraction de ses muscles sourciliers ; le courage enfin, car sa vaste respiration dénotait une grande expansion vitale (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 91).

Each aspect of his personality is qualified by a connection to a physical trait. Such qualities will also be the characteristics that represent masculinity and dominance in Nemo’s world, specifically Nemo’s dominance over all others, Ned Land included. The emotion and inclusiveness that Aronnax will eventually witness are entirely absent here. Everything Aronnax first notices about Nemo indicates a warlike nature. Above all, Nemo’s dark eyes and penetrating gaze, to which Aronnax makes reference constantly throughout his narrative, are the most effective weapons in Nemo’s arsenal. As though brandishing a sword, Nemo uses his gaze to intimidate, to control, and to wound. It also establishes his dominance over the newest and most significant challenge to his dominance:

Ses yeux, un peu écartés l'un de l'autre, pouvaient embrasser simultanément près d'un quart de l'horizon. Cette faculté je l'ai vérifié plus tard se doublait d'une puissance de vision encore supérieure à celle de Ned Land (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 91).

Nemo's gaze reached farther than just Ned Land's unseen horizon, however. According to Aronnax, Nemo's power extended not only over the physical, visible world, but it penetrated the depths of the unseen and the unconscious:

Quel regard ! comme il grossissait les objets rapetissés par l'éloignement ! comme il vous pénétrait jusqu'à l'âme ! comme il perçait ces nappes liquides, si opaques à nos yeux, et comme il lisait au plus profond des mers !... (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 91).

However, Nemo's gaze also marks him as a savant: « son regard ferme et calme semblait refléter de hautes pensées » (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 91). Like the contradictory halves of Nemo's soul, the concept of the savant seems poised at odds with that of the warrior throughout this text. Nemo's gaze can speak for him and serves as much as a tool to guide and calm his men as it does a weapon to wound his enemies. “Puis du regard il parut m'interroger directement” (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 92).

Another weapon in Nemo's arsenal was his voice, just as everything about Nemo seemed made for battle. By his voice alone, Nemo disarmed Ned Land at their first encounter when Ned was attempting to strangle Nemo's right-hand man: « A ces mots, Ned Land se releva subitement » (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 106). Moreover, Aronnax describes his voice as “une voix calme et pénétrante” (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 108), another emphasis on Nemo's penetrating presence which certainly functions as a weapon, a tool which, in

Aronnax's own words, left Aronnax *cloué à sa place* (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 106), and which has its own phallic quality.

Aronnax's contradictory vision of Nemo as savant and as warrior establishes his dominance in both realms. As a savant, he is superior to Aronnax himself, and as a warrior, he is superior to Ned Land. Everything about Nemo serves as a weapon, reflecting the revolutionary fighter we learn he once was during his confession in *L'Île mystérieuse*. Nemo, however, is conflicted between what Aronnax called "l'instinct destructif de l'homme" to make war and to conquer and his desire to live a peaceful life nurturing his crew and exploring his new kingdom (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 320).

In contrast to Nemo, Aronnax presents Ned Land as a classic, rustic ideal of masculinity. Ned's example was held up time and time again in contrast to that of Captain Nemo, whom Aronnax presents as superior in every way despite obvious, potentially fatal character flaws. Ned is the strongest human challenge to Nemo's dominance on board the Nautilus. However, Ned's presence not only challenges Nemo's authority but Nemo's ability to uphold his idealized version of masculinity in which he carefully balances nobler, academic pursuits with a self-righteous crusade against all forces of the unjust, be they the actions of other humans or some force of nature or the animal world. Moreover, their struggle is one for dominance over posterity. Ned Land, still attached to the surface world (Land) and desiring of marriage, represents a tangible, physical reproduction, but he also represents the destructive instinct of man that threatens to permanently damage the natural world required for living offspring to survive. Nemo, however, having lost his original kingdom, longs to protect that world by channeling his own destructive urges against those who would do harm to his adopted realm. His

posterity takes the form of maps, journals, and collections documenting his explorations and findings. Still, it is a sterile posterity. At the start of his relationship with Aronnax, Nemo intends to one day take all his research with him to a watery grave. He does not want his knowledge propagated in the surface world with which he has cut ties. In addition, there is little hope of a physical lineage. Between *Vingt mille lieues* and *L'Île mystérieuse*, we learn that his wife and children were killed because of his revolutionary actions on the surface world.

In this and many other domains, Ned Land represents a more traditional, completely heterosexual masculinity. Almost animal-like in his skill at and hunger for the hunt, he is constantly associated with fighting, hunting, and weapons, specifically his faithful whale-killing harpoon. Seemingly indiscriminate in what he kills, he poses the greatest threat to the balance Nemo has worked so hard to achieve between a warlike and a nurturing masculinity. Of the three companions, he is the least able to handle his confinement in Nemo's underwater kingdom, and he is the only one throughout the story who seems to notice the lack of a feminine presence, specifically and explicitly the lack of women. He is less concerned with posterity than Aronnax, but this is not to say that he is unconcerned with matters of reproduction. Superstitious and earthy in contrast to Aronnax's high-minded *savant*, Ned Land will leave behind no academic memory of himself, but he has been engaged and wants to be married. Land is the most likely to leave behind a physical lineage, which is yet another tie between Land and the base and physical. The most obvious of these is his name, "Land," which, being the English word for the world of indiscriminate killers and oppressors that Nemo has left behind, sets him at immediate opposition with Nemo.

Aronnax does not give us as detailed a physiognomic analysis of Ned's appearance as of Nemo's, but several early remarks on Ned's appearance are notable. Both men are tall and strongly built, both given to the physical feats required of combat and conquest. In contrast to Nemo's calm superiority and communicative gaze, however, Aronnax sees "l'air grave, peu communicatif, violent parfois, et très rageur quand on le contrariait" (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 48). Nemo's ability to communicate without words through his gaze and his physiology rendered his speech even more powerful when he did use it. Ned does not have the same power over other men and has only his physical force to rely on. Aronnax does, however, note Ned's gaze, and his description of it bears comparison to that of Nemo:

Sa personne provoquait l'attention, et **surtout la puissance de son regard qui accentuait singulièrement sa physionomie.**

Je crois que le commandant Farragut avait sagement fait d'engager cet homme à son bord. **Il valait tout l'équipage, à lui seul, pour l'œil et le bras. Je ne saurais le mieux comparer qu'à un télescope puissant qui serait en même temps un canon toujours prêt à partir** [emphasis added] (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 48).

As they are described by Aronnax, both Nemo's and Ned's gazes are comparable to weaponry. While Nemo's gaze gives the impression of a precise, controlled instrument, however, Aronnax compares Ned's gaze to a canon, hardly a precision instrument and one that is only barely under the control of its wielder. Ned's gaze is also linked to his arm or, in other words, his strength, where Nemo's is not only detached from his physical force but, in some cases, from his person altogether. According to Aronnax, Nemo's gaze

can penetrate the depths of the sea or of a man's soul. Ned's gaze, however, is limited to the horizon. Thus we see from the start, Ned's own physiognomy labels him as Nemo's foil. Ned's form of masculinity will be shown time and time again as inferior to Nemo's throughout the story.

2.2 Sauvage or civilisé? Bête or savant?

In matters of intellect, Ned Land is doubly inferior to his captor, and his entire reason for living seems to come from the animal-like thrill of hunting and destruction. While Nemo is content to nourish himself with what the sea provides, Ned constantly hungers for land-based meat. This desire seems unusual even to Aronnax and Conseil. When the trio is released for a short time to hunt in the wilds far from Western civilization, Aronnax remarks of Ned Land, "C'était un prisonnier échappé de sa prison" despite the fact that they were very much still captives. Instead of celebrating his freedom, however, Ned has only one concern: "De la viande! répétait-il, nous allons donc manger de la viande, et quelle viande!" (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 230). That his carnivorous obsession strikes even his fellow meat-eating companions as unusual can be seen in Conseil's teasing concerns that Ned will resort to cannibalism: "Il faut absolument abattre quelque gibier pour satisfaire ce cannibale, ou bien, l'un de ces matins, monsieur ne trouvera plus que des morceaux de domestique pour le servir" (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 233-234). Ultimately, however, the greatest contrast against Ned's lust for meat is Nemo himself, of whom Aronnax tells us: "Il me questionna avec intérêt sur nos excursions à terre, sur nos chasses, et n'eut pas l'air de comprendre ce besoin de viande qui passionnait

le Canadien” (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 258). This is yet another distinction in Nemo’s world between the *bête* and the *savant*.

Nemo, however, does hunt, and does nourish himself with the flesh of animals that make up part of his adopted kingdom. Even if he does not eat the animals killed, he still makes use of their carcasses. Ned, on the other hand, is driven to hunt regardless of his need for food or supplies. Beyond mere hunting, Ned’s drive to hunt is a reflection of his natural instinct to make war against an enemy. This instinct is evidenced by his physical reaction to the challenge posed by the sharks that attempt to attack him through the glass of the Nautilus’s window: “Souvent, ces puissants animaux se précipitaient contre la vitre du salon avec une violence peu rassurante. **Ned Land ne se possédait plus alors.** Il voulait remonter à la surface des flots et harponner ces monstres” [emphasis added] (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 299). Indeed, Ned speaks of his “enemies” with the same familiarity that Nemo reserves for the ship flying the colors of his former revolutionary foes at the end of *Vingt mille lieues*: “Les baleines et moi, nous sommes de vieilles connaissances, et je ne me tromperais pas à leur allure” (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 348).

Ned is also subject to fear and superstition that was absent from the domain of the *savant* and was marked, according to Aronnax, as the domain of women. On Commander Farragut’s belief that the Nautilus was a living animal rather than a vessel, Aronnax initially says, “Il y croyait comme certaines bonnes femmes croient au Léviathan par foi, non par raison” (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 46). While Ned was one of the few aboard the steamship *Abraham Lincoln* not to believe that the Nautilus was a living creature, he was certainly not a man of reason. He based this assessment on physical reality and his own personal experience:

Que le vulgaire croie à des comètes extraordinaires qui traversent l'espace, ou à l'existence de monstres antédiluviens qui peuplent l'intérieur du globe, passe encore, mais ni l'astronome, ni le géologue n'admettent de telles chimères. De même, le baleinier. J'ai poursuivi beaucoup de cétacés, j'en ai harponné un grand nombre, j'en ai tué plusieurs, mais si puissants et si bien armés qu'ils fussent, ni leurs queues, ni leurs défenses n'auraient pu entamer les plaques de tôle d'un steamer » (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 50-51).

In short, Ned's reasoning only goes so far as to say that if he hasn't seen it, it can't possibly exist. He is by no means immune to superstitious fancies, however, especially when presented with the seeming proof before his eyes. When thwarted by walls of ice in their push for the South Pole, Ned sees the wall as a clear mandate from nature itself that man must not cross: "Personne ne peut franchir la banquise. Il est puissant, votre capitaine; mais, mille diables! il n'est pas plus puissant que la nature, et là où elle a mis des bornes, il faut que l'on s'arrête bon gré mal gré" (Verne 469-470). Additionally, Ned sees the barrier as a limit to his gaze: "Je pense que nous voyons ici des choses que Dieu a voulu interdire aux regards de l'homme" (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 503). Nemo, however, recognizes no such barrier. This weakened desire for conquest marks Ned as inferior to Nemo in yet another realm of masculinity on this novel's terms.

2.3 Weapons as metaphor: Prostheses of masculinity, self-identification, and self-reproduction

Both Nemo and Ned Land are represented by fetishized objects that serve as though a prosthetic or an extension of each one's individual masculine identity. The most

visible of these are the harpoon for Ned Land and the Nautilus itself for Captain Nemo. The harpoon and the Nautilus double as weapons, and this will open a discussion of how weapons function generally in this novel and individually for the characters associated with them. From time to time in the narrative, it is difficult to tell where the weapon ends and the person begins. The weapon is often described as part of the character's appearance, and especially in the case of the Nautilus, it is described as though either having a life of its own or sharing its wielder's life force.

In the case of *le roi des harponneurs*, the lines between Ned Land and his chosen weapon are more clearly drawn than those between Nemo, his Nautilus, and the Nautilus's fierce spur. However, Aronnax describes Ned himself as the *Abraham Lincoln*'s most formidable weapon, and this description blurs this delineation: "Donc, l'*Abraham-Lincoln* ne manquait d'aucun moyen de destruction. Mais il avait mieux encore. Il avait Ned Land, le roi des harponneurs" (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 47). According to this description, Ned Land and his harpoon are the physical embodiment of the spur for the *Abraham Lincoln*. Where Nemo controlled the Nautilus and its weaponry, Ned Land was the *Abraham Lincoln*'s weapon and was a weapon to be controlled by others. When in quarters too close for his harpoon to be of use, Ned chooses a bowie knife that he describes as follows: "Heureusement, mon bowie-knife ne m'a pas quitté, et j'y vois toujours assez clair pour m'en servir" (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 87). In personifying the knife as a thing that could choose to leave him, he credits the weapon with a life of its own. Additionally, its specific description as a "bowie knife" reinforces Ned's identity as an American, albeit a Francophone one. The bowie knife is traditionally associated with the conquest of the American continent, especially the Old West, and with Jim Bowie, the

iconic American figure who died in battle at the Alamo. It is also associated with a colonial power that subjugated a native population and thus symbolically entrenches Ned Land with the surface world powers against which Nemo has set himself. Given these associations, the harpoon and the knife form part of Ned Land's identity and are a near-constant part of his physical presence. They are also reminders to the reader of the sort of masculinity embodied by Ned Land.

2.4 The Nautilus as self-reproduction: "la chair de ma chair"

« - Oui, capitaine Nemo, répondis-je, et le Nautilus s'est merveilleusement prêté à toute cette étude. Ah! c'est un intelligent bateau!

- Oui, monsieur, intelligent, audacieux et invulnérable! » (Verne, Vingt mille, 339).

Rather than serve as an aid in self-identification, however, the Nautilus is the result of Nemo's efforts at self-reproduction. As his avatar and constructed offspring, the Nautilus plays an ambiguous double role as a representation of Nemo and as the result of a reproduction without women.

In his analysis of the image of the machine in the French novel, critic Jacques Noiray notices a similar ambiguity of role when considering the Nautilus. He even remarks its prosthetic quality in the following assessment: "La machine apparaît encore comme une sorte de monstrueuse prothèse corporelle, que l'esprit de son maître vient animer" (Noiray, 2: 218). However, Noiray concludes that the Nautilus's role is primarily a feminine role and that the Nautilus itself equals the feminine presence otherwise absent from Verne's technological fiction:

L'amour que Nemo porte au *Nautilus* n'est pas seulement paternel, il est aussi conjugal et filial. Ce que représente la machine, pour cet homme qui a vu « tout périr » autour de lui, c'est un substitut idéal de la femme, enfant, mère, épouse à la fois, un équivalent mécanique de ce sexe féminin si curieusement absent de tous les romans de fiction technique de Jules Verne, et partant de toutes les machines (Noiray, 2: 217-218).

In the same analysis, Noiray considers the relationship between Nemo and his creation one that is at the same time conjugal and filial. This does seem true, and the *Nautilus*'s shifting role is ambiguous. It is interesting, however, to remark how the *Nautilus*'s filial and prosthetic connection to Nemo seems more emphasized in Verne's text than a conjugal or maternal role. It seems that that role is more strongly attributed more to the sea, the liquid entity that constantly surrounds the *Nautilus* as though comprised of the fluid within the womb and from which the *Nautilus* and its crew derive all their sustenance. Moreover, the *Nautilus* can be considered both as a external representation of Nemo's internal state of mind and as his created offspring, thus positioning it as the result of a self of self-reproduction as will be analyzed further in this section.

Nemo later reveals in *L'Île mystérieuse* that a failed war against colonial powers in India caused him to lose everything, not the least of which was a significant measure of dominance and power as prince. Through displacement from the surface world to Nemo's underwater realm, his *Nautilus* allows him to regain this dominance by giving him unequalled power over the sea. Those vessels that sail on it and certain heinous predators within it now serve as Nemo's new enemies. That same sea also fills the role of a wife and mother in Nemo's eyes, as we will later discuss, and once again, the *Nautilus*

plays a complicated double role in which it is both Nemo's constructed offspring, as he describes it himself, and a machine of which Nemo is physically and spiritually a part according to Aronnax's observations.

Nemo and Aronnax are not alone in giving the Nautilus the same status as a living entity. From its first introduction to the world at large, it had a mythological status. Immediately, the public labeled it a monster and not a machine. The dispute over its size and length was a mania among both sailors and scientists

« Les faits relatifs à cette apparition, consignés aux divers livres de bord, s'accordaient assez exactement sur la structure de l'objet ou de l'être en question, la vitesse inouïe de ses mouvements, la puissance surprenante de sa locomotion, **la vie particulière dont il semblait doué** [emphasis added] » (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 22).

These superstitious souls had rightly guessed the most important question regarding the Nautilus's without knowing its true nature as a vessel: Was it an inanimate object or a living being? This question went further than simply wondering whether or not it was a whale? It reached matters more spiritual: Did it have a soul? Yes, a soul and a will under the name of Captain Nemo. Aronnax comes to this conclusion himself late in the text when, rather than looking directly to Nemo to deduce his state of mind, he looks to the Nautilus for a more accurate explanation: "Mais qu'il devait être triste, désespéré, irrésolu, si j'en jugeais par ce navire dont il était l'âme et qui recevait toutes ses impressions!" (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 551).

If one considers the brain to be the center of a human body's soul or, at least, the center of its control, Nemo certainly played this role for the Nautilus. He was linked to all

the vessel's members and digits across electric wires just as the brain is linked to the diverse parts of the body by the network of the nervous system:

« Des fils électriques reliaient la cage du timonier avec la chambre des machines, et de là, le capitaine pouvait communiquer simultanément à son Nautilus la direction et le mouvement. Il pressa un bouton de métal, et aussitôt la vitesse de l'hélice fut très diminuée » (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 358).

This system of wires and mechanical organs under Nemo's remote control resembles the nervous system or, possibly, the circulatory system of a living organism. The Nautilus, portrayed primarily as a masculine entity, has this in common with the sea, portrayed as a feminine entity in this narrative. Both function on a system that is either directly compared or comparable to the systems that make up the human body. A key exception, however, is that Nemo has no control over the sea.

Additionally, descriptors such as “fusiforme” and the frightful presence of the *dent* or *l'éperon*, the Nautilus's most devastating weapon, reinforce the effect of the Nautilus as a phallic signifier. More than simply a seafaring vessel or a scientific instrument, the Nautilus is a weapon and an instrument of conquest. Descriptors of the Nautilus nearly always make reference to the vessel's enormous size, its power, and its speed as though it were a supernatural force. It passes beyond mere masculinity in this world's collective imagination. The Nautilus is a sublime being just as Nemo is presented as the apogee of all that is masculine. In addition to the Nautilus's phallic appearance, the backwash produced by its propeller and noted by Aronnax upon his first encounter with the machine reflects its captain's anger over the *Abraham Lincoln*'s insulting attack and his excitement over his chance to retaliate: “Un long corps noirâtre émergeait d'un mètre

au-dessus des flots. Sa queue, violemment agitée, produisait un remous considérable. Jamais appareil caudal ne battit la mer avec une telle puissance” (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 69). These signs again signify the mood of the vessel’s captain and the state of its human soul.

The Nautilus is also armed with a weapon equivalent to its master’s penetrating gaze: its spur or *éperon* that, while its only weapon, is nevertheless effective. The *éperon* is initially thought to be the horn or tooth of a narwhal that functioned also as a sword:

En effet, le Narval est armé d'une sorte d'épée d'ivoire, d'une hallebarde, suivant l'expression de certains naturalistes. C'est une dent principale qui a la dureté de l'acier. On a trouvé quelques-unes de ces dents implantées dans le corps des baleines que le Narval attaque toujours avec succès. D'autres ont été arrachées, non sans peine, de carènes de vaisseaux qu'elles avaient percées d'outre en outre, comme un foret perce un tonneau (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 33).

Like that tooth, the Nautilus’s spur always attacks successfully. That invincible weapon, compared to the sword which is the common, age-old, phallic symbol of masculinity, also marks Nemo’s dominance and that of his vessel which functions here as a prosthetic limb, helping replace those parts of Nemo’s masculinity and dominance torn from him during his revolutionary losses. Here the weapon serves as the symbol of a dominant masculinity, and its size marks it as a compensation. It establishes Nemo’s predominance over all others, especially Ned Land, who can only kill one whale with his harpoon before it is either lost or must be retrieved. In contrast, the Nautilus’s spur kills a sea of sperm whales with very little effort in addition to its effortless victory over enemy vessels and its ability to force its way through walls of ice.

We see the man reflected in his weapon, but to truly know the man, one must know his soul. Likewise, an analysis of the interior of the Nautilus of which Nemo is the soul will be necessary. The Nautilus's interior is as dangerous and difficult to reach as the psyche of its captain. Electrically charged ramps limit entry to the vessel only to those Nemo chooses to allow inside. In the same way, Nemo's thoughts and emotions are hidden from all except those he chooses to take into confidence. When natives attempt to enter the Nautilus, they are greeted with this surprise:

Ce n'était plus une rampe, mais un câble de métal, tout chargé de l'électricité du bord, qui aboutissait à la plate-forme. Quiconque la touchait ressentait une formidable secousse, et cette secousse eût été mortelle, si le capitaine Nemo eût lancé dans ce conducteur tout le courant de ses appareils! (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 261).

Correspondingly, Nemo is himself both an attraction and a deadly danger to those who would enter his world and know his mind. His use of the Nautilus's interior as a refuge for like-minded souls, however, adds ambiguity to the vessel's purpose: "Le Nautilus n'est pas seulement un navire. Ce doit être un lieu de refuge pour ceux qui, comme son commandant, ont rompu toute relation avec la terre" (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 449). While the Nautilus's exterior reflects an aggressive, warlike masculinity, the interior reflects a protective masculinity bordering on feminine nurturing and motherhood.

The innermost, most sacred and forbidden part of the Nautilus would be Nemo's own quarters, which express the aspects of his character that his coldness and silence do not reveal. If the Nautilus were a temple, Nemo's quarters would be its Holy of Holies. Indeed, Aronnax remarks, "J'entrai dans la chambre du capitaine. Elle avait un aspect

sévère, presque cénobitique” (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 129), thus giving the impression that Nemo lives as a monk in hermitage. Additionally, the word *sévère* appears several times as Aronnax describes what he sees despite the otherwise lavish décor of the ship and its stunning collections of oceanic treasure. It is a severity born of penitence, however, and of grief for the dead and a desire for vengeance.

The contents of Nemo’s bedroom and salon, however, are as conflicted as the contents of his spirit. Aronnax, as does the reader, searches Nemo’s effects for clues to the contents of the man’s soul that analysis of his physical presence could not provide. Alongside the severe décor, Aronnax discovers masterworks of art and literature, some of which stand out from the rest. The most impressionable is the series of portraits of great liberators and revolutionary men including Abraham Lincoln and John Brown which inspires Aronnax to question Nemo’s own origins:

Quel lien existait-il entre ces âmes héroïques et l’âme du capitaine Nemo?
Pouvais-je enfin, de cette réunion de portraits, dégager le mystère de son existence? Était-il le champion des peuples opprimés, le libérateur des races esclaves? Avait-il figuré dans les dernières commotions politiques ou sociales de ce siècle. Avait-il été l’un des héros de la terrible guerre américaine, guerre lamentable et à jamais glorieuse?... (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 395).

Of course, taking Nemo’s confession in *L’Île mystérieuse* into account, we know that he was involved in a similar revolution. While these portraits are certainly indicative of a warlike masculinity, it is also a nurturing and protective masculinity that takes up arms only for others who cannot defend themselves. In this way, it is an enlightened

masculinity contrary to that of Ned Land, although the same violent instinct can be found at its root.

Moving from portraiture to literature, one item in Nemo's library gives pause:

Parmi ces ouvrages, je remarquai les chefs-d'œuvre des maîtres anciens et modernes, c'est-à-dire tout ce que l'humanité a produit de plus beau dans l'histoire, la poésie, le roman et la science, depuis Homère jusqu'à Victor Hugo, depuis Xénophon jusqu'à Michelet, depuis Rabelais jusqu'à Mme Sand (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 121).

Of the works listed on Nemo's shelf from antiquity to the modern day, Aronnax chooses George Sand as a remarkable name to mention. That he identifies her as "Mme Sand" is significant given that she is a female author who writes under a masculine name. It would have been easy enough to list her as "George Sand" or only "Sand," but her gender here is important enough that Aronnax distinguishes her from the other writers. She does not write on making war or on the rise and fall of empires. Rather, Sand wrote a great deal of emotion, a domain that, outside of anger and a lust for vengeance, seemed forbidden to the most masculine of men. That Nemo chooses her works to include in his private inner sanctum and that Aronnax chooses to mention her in this brief sampler of his library further reflects the ambiguous nature of the Nautilus as weapon and as refuge and the conflict in Nemo's soul between an aggressive and a nurturing masculinity.

Some of Nemo's most problematic effects, however, can be found in the salon where he keeps his collection of zoological treasures. Of all that Nemo has collected in his time underwater, Aronnax chooses to mention primarily specimens of pearls and various mollusk shells. These have a symbolic connection to reproduction, specifically

feminine reproduction, and their presence here requires nuanced analysis. Clamshells have often been linked to birth and femininity, perhaps most famously in Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* where Venus herself, a quintessential embodiment of the feminine, seems to be born from one. In the center of Nemo's salon, which can be seen as reflecting the core of Nemo's soul, Aronnax notes the following:

Au milieu du salon, un jet d'eau, électriquement éclairé, retombait dans une vasque faite d'un seul tridacne. Cette coquille, fournie par le plus grand des mollusques acéphales, mesurait sur ses bords, délicatement festonnés, une circonférence de six mètres environ (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 125).

In addition to the mollusk's connection to birth and reproduction, it also reinforces the notion of sterility, which we will see time and time again in this novel when any references to progeny and reproduction are made. Because this clam is only a shell and no longer a living clam, any hope of future reproduction is extinguished. It is nothing more than a beautiful reminder of its once great and now lost potential. Pearls, being the oyster's equally sterile product, will be addressed at a later point.

Given that Nemo's kingdom is one without women and without physical reproduction, the reader may wonder, as does Aronnax, for what purpose Nemo undertakes the construction and perfection of the Nautilus and the exploration of the seas. Where lies Nemo's posterity? His wife and progeny are as lifeless as the bone-dry shells and pearls in his collection, but he is not without a fathering role. In fact, although the Nautilus has already been explored as a reflection of Nemo himself, Nemo considers it as his offspring: "Je l'aime comme la chair de ma chair!" (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 146). Aronnax's remarks verify this: "Le feu de son regard, la passion de son geste, le

transfiguraient. Oui! il aimait son navire comme un père aime son enfant!” (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 146). The care he would have given his family is displaced onto the Nautilus, and the leadership he would have given his people is displaced onto his crew, which must follow him as unquestioningly as a soldier would follow the orders of his prince. It is a curious sort of fatherhood, however, since he has constructed a child that so closely resembles him in so many ways and has designed it without any partner. There is little doubt that Nemo is the spirit of the machine, but what remains problematic and significant is that its construction still seems a sort of asexual self-reproduction.

2.5 Devenir un parfait colimaçon: Aronnax as parent and partner

Though the primary character of the story, the bearer of the viewpoint through which we see it, and a pivotal male character around whom most of the story revolves, Professor Aronnax does not fit into either Ned’s masculinity, which is aggressive and animal-like, or Nemo’s, which is conflicted and somewhat nurturing. Aronnax lives a seemingly asexual life devoted to research and biological classification. Though he works with Conseil, who also specializes in classification, their relationship is based on servitude. He does not truly have a partner in his work until he is forced into Nemo’s captivity.

The contrast between masculine roles aboard the Nautilus is similar to that indicated by film critic Susan Jeffords in her analysis of shifting masculine roles in Hollywood films between the 1980s and 1990s. Between the two decades, Jeffords saw a transition from the 1980s leading man of “violence, rationality, single-mindedness and goal orientation” to the 1990s leading man who forsakes “bombs and bombast” for “love

and protection” in order to preserve a future for his children (Jeffords, 253-255). This analysis is especially pertinent since it focuses heavily on science fiction films, particularly the popular *Terminator* series, in which Jeffords also notes a stunning pattern of self-reproduction via technological mediums not unlike Nemo’s self-reproductive efforts with the Nautilus. However, Verne’s spectrum of masculinity pushes beyond this nurturing, protective masculinity and attributes to Aronnax an almost fully feminized role. If the masculine roles that Jeffords compared and contrasted in her analysis could be seen on a scale with maternal femininity at one pole and aggressive masculinity with its hunger for war and the hunt at the other, Nemo struggles to situate himself more closely to the center, aiming for a role similar to that of the “sacrificing fathers who want to preserve a human future for their sons against the inhuman systems [...] that are bent on carrying out a plan that will destroy all human life” (Jeffords, 254). Aronnax, on the other hand, floats between the center and the far feminine pole, specifically in regards to his relationship with Nemo.

As such, Aronnax plays a complex role in this scenario. He is both prisoner and confidant to Nemo, and unlike Ned and Conseil, Aronnax admires his captor as much as if not more than he fears him. It is an affection bordering on Stockholm Syndrome. Aronnax begins to dread his companions’ plans for escape more than his captivity, and he subscribes to Nemo’s plans until Nemo reaches the point of damaging other ships that threaten the Nautilus or that pique Nemo’s former revolutionary allegiances. Ultimately, however, Aronnax refuses to cross the line into that realm of uber-masculinity that is the root of Nemo’s inner conflict and an exaggeration of the very qualities that Aronnax admires in Ned Land.

Nemo, on the other hand, seems to see an equal in Aronnax or, at the very least, a partner worthy of sharing his new life's work. Rather than the destruction for which he was responsible as a prince, Nemo works with Aronnax to construct a body of knowledge building upon what each already has. Nemo's proposition to Aronnax is less a proposal and more an order given that Aronnax has little choice but to follow, but it still *connotes* an offer of intimacy that is extremely rare with Nemo:

Vous serez mon compagnon d'études. A partir de ce jour, vous entrez dans un nouvel élément, vous verrez ce que n'a vu encore aucun homme car moi et les miens nous ne comptons plus - et notre planète, grâce à moi, va vous livrer ses derniers secrets (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 113).

Moreover, unlike anyone else on board including Nemo's most trusted crewmen, Aronnax is lodged in extremely close quarters with Nemo: "Votre chambre est contiguë à la mienne, me dit-il, en ouvrant une porte, et la mienne donne sur le salon que nous venons de quitter" (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 129). Nemo takes Aronnax as a confidant to the point where he installs Aronnax in his private chambers and shares the secrets of his Nautilus, his avatar and his constructed offspring. As he instructs Aronnax in the Nautilus's workings and in its creation, it is as though Nemo is inviting Aronnax to take the part of a parent, the only other being alive with whom Nemo has shared the workings of what he calls "la chair de ma chair":

Nous étions assis sur un divan du salon, le cigare aux lèvres. Le capitaine mit sous mes yeux une épure qui donnait les plan, coupe et élévation du Nautilus. Puis il commença sa description en ces termes:

"Voici, monsieur Aronnax, les diverses dimensions du bateau qui vous

porte. C'est un cylindre très allongé, à bouts coniques. Il affecte sensiblement la forme d'un cigare" (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 139).

Whether self-reproduction or not, this is certainly a reproduction without women. As if to emphasize the privileging of all that is masculine to the point of exclusion of all that is feminine, Nemo reveals his secrets in a scene filled with signifiers of male dominance and power. In addition to its obvious phallic properties, the cigar gives an air of luxury and leisure. Likewise, given the general construction of most naval vessels, it is doubtful that the crew's chambers are fitted with the same opulent décor as Nemo's salon or, for that matter, that any other crewmen have regular access to a divan or a salon. Nemo's description of the Nautilus links it again to the cigar, which here serves as a signifier of the leisure that can only be achieved through a masculinity that dominates others, and the Nautilus is certainly an instrument of domination. Though Nemo claims a desire to liberate subjugated peoples, his underwater utopia is hardly a realm of equality. In his native culture he was nobility, and his superior status remains evident both in his lavish quarters and in the hierarchy aboard his vessel. This is yet another indicator of Nemo's inner conflict between the will to dominate and the desire to nurture. Though a prisoner, Aronnax is instantly taken in and boosted to a status almost equivalent to Nemo's and well above the Nautilus's faithful crewmen. Nemo has selected Aronnax as a partner against his will almost as his prior incarnation as Prince Dakkar might have selected a spouse: by his right as a dominant male. Nemo does recognize the intimacy of this relationship as evidenced by the following dialogue on the Arabian Tunnel much later in the narrative:

- Est-il indiscret de vous demander comment vous avez découvert ce tunnel?

- Monsieur, me répondit le capitaine, il n'y peut y avoir rien de secret entre gens qui ne doivent plus se quitter (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 345).

While Aronnax is still somewhat reserved about their relationship, not being the dominant party, it is Nemo who feigns openness. The reader and certainly Aronnax are aware that there very well are secrets between the two men. There are still many questions about Nemo and his vessel to which Aronnax craves the answers. At surface value, however, Nemo's statement implies that the exchange goes both ways. As Nemo claims to hold nothing secret from Aronnax, neither should Aronnax feel compelled to withhold secrets from Nemo. The relationship is, in Nemo's eyes, a partnership and falls in line with the nurturing masculinity he is trying to cultivate. It is in reality, however, a manipulation since Aronnax remains a prisoner and certainly cannot share all his secrets with his captor or even take the liberties of an equal in their discourse. Thus this supposed intimacy turns out to be, in fact, another instrument by which Nemo maintains his dominance over Aronnax.

As for Aronnax's viewpoint on all of this, he buys into Nemo's apparent affection for him and begins to see the Nautilus as a paradise. While he retains the understanding that his friends are still prisoners, he sees his own life on Nemo's Nautilus as a utopia, the ideal setting for his life's work, and he misses nothing from his previous life. In fact, women or the possibility of his ever having a family outside the Nautilus are never mentioned. Nemo's lifestyle seems natural to Aronnax while the life left behind on the surface now seems foreign:

Ainsi nous marchions, incessamment charmés par quelque merveille nouvelle....Véritables colimaçons, nous étions faits à notre coquille, et j'affirme qu'il est facile de devenir un parfait colimaçon.

Donc, cette existence nous paraissait facile, naturelle, et nous n'imaginions plus qu'il existât une vie différente à la surface du globe terrestre (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 268-269).

In expressing his contentment in his male-only environment, it is significant that Aronnax compares his way of life to that of a *colimaçon*. Given Aronnax's status as a biologist and the excruciating detail in which he and, subsequently, Verne describe all manner of sea life throughout pedagogical passages covering every region of the globe visited by the Nautilus during its voyage, both narrator and author must have been aware that snails are hermaphroditic creatures that can play either gender role during reproduction. In fact, the snail is one of the few aquatic creatures that is not analyzed, classified, and described from every angle. This fascinating detail is omitted and its reference here remains ambiguous. However, as Aronnax believes his new existence to feel as natural as any life on the surface world, he also omits the fact that he lives in an environment where women are blatantly absent. Aronnax does not suffer for their absence and believes himself to be *fait à son coquille* in this distorted reality. In declaring the ease of becoming *un parfait colimaçon*, it is Aronnax here who will shift gender roles, who will serve as a feminine partner in Nemo's sterile form of procreation, and who will take on a mothering role in this unconventional form of parenting. Aronnax's transformation has the air of a hermaphroditic metamorphosis worthy of Ovid. This gives more weight to the specimen

Aronnax chooses to bring back from the trip to the South Pole as part of Nemo's collection:

Je ne récoltai aucun objet curieux, si ce n'est un œuf de pingouin, remarquable par sa grosseur, et qu'un amateur eût payé plus de mille francs. Sa couleur isabelle, les raies et les caractères qui l'ornaient comme autant d'hiéroglyphes, en faisaient un bibelot rare. Je le remis entre les mains de Conseil, et le prudent garçon, au pied sûr, le tenant comme une précieuse porcelaine de Chine, le rapporta intact au Nautilus. Là je déposai cet œuf rare sous une des vitrines du musée (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 491-492).

This is especially significant given that male penguin parent plays as large a role as the female in hatching the egg, spending weeks sitting on the egg while its partner searches for food. Aronnax brings back to Nemo a real egg, legitimate feminine genetic material, but nevertheless an egg that is very unlikely to hatch. Moreover, the egg is very much described as a relic of the past. Not only is it destined to make up part of a private museum, but it is ornamented with *hieroglyphs*, thus marking it as a thing of a bygone age. The egg is quite probably already dead before it reaches the Nautilus, thus possibly foretelling the fate of the fruit of Nemo and Aronnax's work together.

Additionally, with Aronnax aboard, Nemo turns an eye toward posterity. The topic of future generations is not breached initially. At first, it is enough to explore together without much thought for the future, but Aronnax eventually begins to concern himself with the future of their work together:

Souvent, je me demandai dans quel but il faisait ces observations. Était-ce au profit de ces semblables? Ce n'était pas probable, car, un jour ou l'autre, ses

travaux devaient périr avec lui dans quelque mer ignorée! A moins qu'il ne me destinât le résultat de ses expériences. Mais c'était admettre que mon étrange voyage aurait un terme, et ce terme, je ne l'apercevais pas encore (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 265).

His concern has a like effect on Nemo who, in their final moments together, grudgingly agrees to give their offspring a future beyond them:

Voici, monsieur Aronnax, un manuscrit écrit en plusieurs langues. Il contient le résumé de mes études sur la mer, et, s'il plaît à Dieu, il ne périra pas avec moi. Ce manuscrit, signé de mon nom, complété par l'histoire de ma vie, sera renfermé dans un petit appareil insubmersible. Le dernier survivant de nous tous à bord du Nautilus jettera cet appareil à la mer, et il ira où les flots le porteront (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 557).

The *petit appareil insubmersible* takes on the form and function of an egg in this circumstance, containing their work and ready to hatch and to be put to use in the world once found. In another instance of Aronnax fulfilling a mothering role, he offers to carry this would-be egg to the surface world where he could see to its hatching himself:

Capitaine, répondez-moi, je ne puis qu'approuver la pensée qui vous fait agir. **Il ne faut pas que le fruit de vos études soit perdu.** Mais le moyen que vous employez me paraît primitif. Qui sait où les vents pousseront cet appareil, en quelles mains il tombera? Ne sauriez-vous trouver mieux? Vous, ou l'un des vôtres ne peut-il...?

- Jamais, monsieur, dit vivement le capitaine en m'interrompant.

- Mais moi, mes compagnons, **nous sommes prêts à garder ce manuscrit en réserve**, et si vous nous rendez la liberté[...]

- Monsieur Aronnax, dit le capitaine Nemo, je vous répondrai aujourd'hui ce que je vous ai répondu il y a sept mois: **Qui entre dans le Nautilus ne doit plus le quitter** [emphasis added] (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 557).

In another reference to reproduction, Aronnax refers to the container's contents as *fruit*, and he worries over the precariousness of Nemo's plan for his posterity. Aronnax also calls Nemo's methods *primitif*, thus challenging the dominance of the *savant* over the *bête* in Nemo's soul. It also cements for both parties the realization that Aronnax is a prisoner, something much less than a partner in Nemo's endeavors.

2.6 Partenaire ou prisonnier? Aronnax's struggle to return to normalcy

Aronnax's status as prisoner and his state of denial regarding it must be analyzed in order to understand his role on the Nautilus. The intricacies of the power exerted on Aronnax by Nemo and of Aronnax's reaction to it are a study in the conflicting types of masculinity at play and illustrate some of the points made in previous sections. Aronnax's struggle is very similar to what is known as Stockholm Syndrome in which a captive begins to feel sympathetic toward the captor. Aronnax certainly exhibits this and admits that he feels this conflict between the well-being of his friends and wanting approval for fulfilling Nemo's wishes.

Nemo's dominance over Aronnax is evident from the start, even in their first encounter before any words are spoken: "Je me sentis 'involontairement' rassuré en sa présence, et j'augurai bien de notre entrevue" (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 91). When Aronnax

should have been fearful for his life, he is subjugated by Nemo's penetrating gaze and reassured against his own will. He even ambiguously sets off his own choice of the word *involontairement* with quotation marks as though to mark the fact that he found pleasure in his imprisonment that his companions did not share and that he was willing to be dominated by the stranger.

Despite his own conflicted feelings regarding Nemo, however, Aronnax does recognize his status as prisoner, and this is made clear many times throughout the narrative. When the companions are given the liberty to hunt on land far away from their home civilization, it is as though Nemo's power over Aronnax is momentarily broken the instant he sets foot on land:

Je fus assez vivement impressionné en touchant terre. Ned Land essayait le sol du pied, comme pour en prendre possession. Il n'y avait pourtant que deux mois que nous étions, suivant l'expression du capitaine Nemo, les " passagers du Nautilus ". c'est-à-dire. en réalité, les prisonniers de son commandant (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 231).

The land, however, remains associated with the savage, warmongering masculinity that Nemo has set out to avoid. Aronnax, being as foreign to this form of masculinity as man can be, recognizes this and is content to return to the Nautilus at the end of his stay. Ned, however, feels the call to that very nature within him and is tempted to run. Aronnax rationalizes his desire to remain in captivity with:

Mais une fuite à travers les terres de la Nouvelle-Guinée eût été très périlleuse, et je n'aurais pas conseillé à Ned Land de la tenter. Mieux valait être prisonnier à

bord du Nautilus, que de tomber entre les mains des naturels de la Papouasie (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 229).

In the constant struggle of the *bête* versus the *savant* or the *sauvage* versus the *civilisé* on board the Nautilus, Aronnax sees his imprisonment as the height of civility. For Aronnax, structured imprisonment in the confines of the ship is more desirable than freedom under the threat of attack by uncultured savages, which may touch slightly on the political thought of the day and which certainly identifies the sort of masculinity that Aronnax subscribes to in contrast with that of Ned Land.

Aronnax confesses this recognition to his companions. When Ned pushes Aronnax to realize how long they had been imprisoned, Aronnax responds with, “Non, Ned, je ne le sais pas, je ne veux pas le savoir, et je ne compte ni les jours, ni les heures” (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 331). He shares an even deeper realization with the reader shortly thereafter: “Par ce court dialogue, on verra que, fanatique du Nautilus, j’étais incarné dans la peau de son commandant” (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 331-332). This is an ambiguous and problematic statement. *Incarné dans la peau* implies that Aronnax is becoming more than just a partner to Nemo but is in some way actually becoming him. There is a joining here that goes beyond a mere partnership and borders on the spiritual as would a marriage. It seems that Aronnax is unsettled by this realization, but he is still content and has not been forced to act on it.

Aronnax’s sympathies continue to align themselves more with Nemo than with his original companions, and as he embarks on a relationship with his captor that Nemo has not offered to his other captives, he struggles with guilt every time his fellow captives consider escape:

Nous ne sommes que des captifs, que des prisonniers déguisés sous le nom d'hôtes par un semblant de courtoisie. Toutefois, Ned Land n'a pas renoncé à l'espoir de recouvrer sa liberté. Il est certain qu'il profitera de la première occasion que le hasard lui offrira. **Je ferai comme lui sans doute. Et cependant, ce ne sera pas sans une sorte de regret que j'emporterai ce que la générosité du capitaine nous aura laissé pénétrer des mystères du Nautilus!** Car enfin, **faut-il haïr cet homme ou l'admirer?** [emphasis added] (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 288-289).

Considering that he is a captive and that Nemo has imposed his will upon him, common sense would direct Aronnax to hate Nemo, but there are more complex factors at play. Aronnax is clearly able to fill some need through his imprisonment that his life on the aforementioned uncivilized surface world could not:

Il serait cruel de sacrifier mes compagnons à ma passion pour l'inconnu. Il faudra les suivre, peut-être même les guider. Mais cette occasion se présentera-t-elle jamais? **L'homme privé par la force de son libre arbitre la désire, cette occasion, mais le savant, le curieux, la redoute** [emphasis added] (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 288-289).

Aronnax again remarks on the conflict between the *homme* with his base desires and the *savant* led by curiosity. Unlike Nemo, there is little conflict in Aronnax's soul as to which side of this dichotomy he falls. Aronnax dreads Ned Land's salvation because it would return him to a lonely life on the surface world where he would almost certainly return to his asexual life of scholarship and would have to abandon the work begun with

Nemo. This would be as traumatic to Aronnax as would be the act of abandoning a child to a mother. Aronnax himself romanticizes the loss in further contemplation:

Je voulais éviter le capitaine pour cacher à ses yeux l'émotion qui me dominait. Triste journée que je passai ainsi, entre le désir de rentrer en possession de mon libre arbitre et le regret d'abandonner ce merveilleux Nautilus, laissant inachevées mes études sous-marines! **Mon roman me tombait des mains dès le premier volume, mon rêve s'interrompait au plus beau moment!** Quelles heures mauvaises s'écoulèrent ainsi, tantôt me voyant en sûreté, à terre, avec mes compagnons, **tantôt souhaitant, en dépit de ma raison, que quelque circonstance imprévue empêchât la réalisation des projets de Ned Land »** (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 392).

In Aronnax's comparison between his captivity and a *roman*, it is not hard to draw a connection between his predicament and the popular French novel in his day that villanized desire and bemoaned the collapse of the traditional family unit, a concern which can also be seen in this novel although carefully disguised and which will be elaborated upon in a later section. Additionally, Aronnax refers again to the penetrating power of Nemo's gaze, which he was certain would root out the guilt-inducing emotions that wracked Aronnax's spirit. Rather than dominating his own emotions as would be required of a more masculine character, however, Aronnax is dominated by them. Aronnax's forced voyage also carries with it an erotic bliss for it can never be finished and complete knowledge of the unknown depths can never be fully attained. In the thrall of his captor, Aronnax wishes that his companions escape plans could be thwarted, but he is still capable of resisting his captor's will and stops just short of thwarting them himself.

Rather than taking decisive action for or against his companions' plans, Aronnax wishes for external, potentially supernatural forces to grant his desires, thus again subjecting himself to that faith in superstition labeled earlier as a feminine trait. He knows that his place is on the surface world and that taking pleasure in his own circumstances would cause his companions to suffer, so he denies himself what he most desires.

We see in this incident, however, the stunning dimensions of the power of Nemo's gaze. Amidst his inner turmoil, Aronnax goes to Nemo's bedroom as though guilty and wanting to be caught in his act of desertion. Finding Nemo absent, Aronnax enters:

Tout à coup l'horloge sonna huit heures. Le battement du premier coup de marteau sur le timbre m'arracha à mes rêves. **Je tressaillis comme si un oeil invisible eût pu plonger au plus secret de mes pensées, et je me précipitai hors de la chambre** [emphasis added] (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 395).

Still considering the Nautilus to be an avatar of Nemo, it can be interpreted that Aronnax not only goes to Nemo at the moment of his escape but that he enters the most private, secret part of the ship as a last ditch, indirect effort to ruin his companions' attempts to escape. Though Aronnax isn't caught, Ned's plans are thwarted nonetheless: the Nautilus remained deep under the ocean's surface at the planned time of escape. It would seem that the providence for which Aronnax wished earlier had responded, but a troublesome turn of events shortly afterward puts the boundaries of Nemo's gaze into question. We learn that, just as Nemo's disembodied gaze penetrated the thoughts of the trespassing Aronnax, Nemo's real eyes were searching for him as well: "Ah! Monsieur le professeur, dit-il d'un ton aimable, je vous cherchais" (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 396). This gives the

unsettling impression that Nemo's gaze was so overpowering as to penetrate their minds, see into their plans and into Aronnax's conflicted spirit, and to thwart them in the least offensive way imaginable.

After this incident, we see some of Aronnax's first real signs of resistance toward Nemo. As if a loyal pet, Aronnax settles down next to Nemo in the salon: "Le capitaine s'étendit sur un divan, et, machinalement, je pris place auprès de lui, dans la pénombre" (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 396). Though it is easy to imagine Aronnax here as a dog habitually curled up at its master's feet, there is some indication of resistance. Aronnax seats himself *dans la pénombre* as if in an attempt to hide in the shadow and shield himself from the penetrating gaze that some part of him recognizes as a threat despite his attraction to it.

Aronnax poses a more subversive challenge to Nemo's composure and dominance than the outright brutal challenge posed by Ned Land. As a result, Nemo himself becomes confused between his roles as captor and a sort of mentor to Aronnax to whom he hopes to reveal the whole of the ocean. In response to the Nautilus having impacted a reef and Aronnax's assertion that Nemo might have to go back to land, Nemo responds, "D'ailleurs, monsieur Aronnax, le Nautilus n'est pas en perdition. Il vous transportera encore au milieu des merveilles de l'Océan. Notre voyage ne fait que commencer, et je ne désire pas me priver si vite de l'honneur de votre compagnie" (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 227). Moreover, little by little, Nemo gives in to emotion, which has a deteriorating effect on his rigidity and dominance. Torn between his roles as warrior and nurturing protector – ultimate masculine and ultimate feminine characteristics – and finding himself unable to protect that which he loves, a crewmember, Nemo cries. Aronnax reinforces what a shock

he finds this classically feminine act with, “Quelques larmes glissèrent de ses yeux, que je ne croyais pas faits pour pleurer” (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 279). Thus Nemo’s invincible gaze shows some sign of compassion and of weakness.

Brought into each other’s company, at home in their *coquille*, the Nautilus, these two men have the most devastating effect on one another of any characters in the narrative. As though two snails, the gender roles of each one evolve somewhat to suit the other. Given the overwhelming dominant and aggressive masculinity that is as native to Nemo as it is to Ned Land, however, Aronnax comes to a line he will not cross: He will not take part in Nemo’s attacks on the human-laden ships that Nemo feels the need to retaliate against, and he does not understand Nemo’s thirst for justice. This is the point where Aronnax’s enchantment with Nemo’s imaginary kingdom begins to crumble. He already recognizes his status as a prisoner, but now begins to see through the illusion that Nemo has eschewed the *bête* completely in favor of the *savant*:

« Non! le capitaine Nemo ne se contentait pas de fuir les hommes! Son formidable appareil servait non seulement ses instincts de liberté, mais peut-être aussi les intérêts de je ne sais quelles terribles représailles » (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 288).

Aronnax cannot move with Nemo into this space that he, as an ambiguous character occupying this classically feminine role, was not constructed to fill. We may infer from Nemo’s confession in *L’Île mystérieuse*, however, that his wife, whose heart “*saignait comme le sien aux malheurs de sa patrie*,” was able to do so (Verne, *L’Île*, 746). When Nemo’s wife moved into this space, presumably by either taking up arms or supporting those who did, as we are briefly told in *L’Île mystérieuse*, she no longer functioned in the

traditional role of wife and mother. She died, and as a problematic character, she was removed from the narrative. Aronnax does not cross this line. He does not take up arms and thus take on the masculine role, he does not support those who do, and his unwillingness to break from his role prevents him from a continued existence on board Nemo's Nautilus.

However, in a sort of confession of his own near the end of *Vingt mille lieues*, Aronnax implies that he might have complied fully with Nemo's wishes had Nemo held up his end of the bargain.

Pour moi l'étude est un secours, une diversion puissante, un entraînement, une passion qui peut me faire tout oublier. Comme vous, je suis homme à vivre ignoré, obscur, dans le fragile espoir de léguer un jour à l'avenir le résultat de mes travaux, au moyen d'un appareil hypothétique confié au hasard des flots et des vents. En un mot, je puis vous admirer, vous suivre sans déplaisir dans un rôle que je comprends sur certains points: mais il est encore d'autres aspects de votre vie qui me la font entrevoir entourée de complications et de mystères auxquels seuls ici, mes compagnons et moi, nous n'avons aucune part (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 558).

This is Aronnax's most direct admission that he understands his role on board the Nautilus and that he was happy to fill it. He also reveals that posterity and the future of their work together was important to him. However, it is also the clearest expression of his disappointment that Nemo has not kept his promise to remain open and to keep their relationship free of secrets. Nemo's need to remain dominant and retain the upper hand, albeit through the fear of losing his new companion, has ultimately undone the bond:

Et même, quand notre cœur a pu battre pour vous... nous avons dû refouler en nous jusqu'au plus petit témoignage de cette sympathie que fait naître la vue de ce qui est beau et bon, que cela vienne de l'ami ou de l'ennemi. Eh bien, c'est ce sentiment que nous sommes étrangers à tout ce qui vous touche, qui fait de notre position quelque chose d'inacceptable, d'impossible (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 558).

Throughout the story, Nemo has kept too many secrets and has too often fallen prey to the lust for violence that he claimed to leave behind on the surface world. His desire to inspire fear in his enemies ultimately did so as well in these involuntary companions and revealed the ultimate, fatal flaws in the masculine utopia he sought to build under the waters. Regardless of his attempts to incorporate them into his machinations, Aronnax realized he would always be foreign to Nemo's kingdom and that, as with the snail that could repeatedly switch its role from father to mother and back again, Aronnax would never truly know who Nemo was.

CHAPTER 3:

Representations of Masculinity and the Threat of Sterility

Outside of the characters' struggle to understand their role in Nemo's underwater society and to reach whatever each individual terms as ideal, the Nautilus's aquatic environment reflects a similar struggle. Much discourse is made on the *instinct destructif de l'homme*, but the visuals described by Aronnax are even more effective in displaying its effects on the ocean environment, on femininity, and on humanity's posterity as a species. Imagery here depicting man's destructive impact on maternity and his own inability to self-replicate foretells a diseased world where human society will be entirely unable to sustain itself. While this is hardly a unique scenario in speculative fiction, it is particularly significant here given 19th century representations of women, reproduction, and the family, which often also foretell the doom of society and genetic posterity without the speculative element.

3.1 Le règne de la verticalité: Nemo's Garden, or the Forests of the Island of Crespo

In fiction of the 18th and 19th centuries, it is quite common for a female character to have a garden that both reflects the inner workings of her mind and communicates for her things that the author will not or cannot allow her to say. It can be a place of meeting, both legitimate and illicit, and of solitary contemplation. It is almost always a place of nurturing where flora and fauna reflect the woman's potential motherhood and thrive by the grace of her care.

Such a place exists for Nemo in this novel, although its purpose is slightly different. It is an underwater forest used by Nemo and those he selects as a hunting ground. His method of tending to his “garden” could more accurately be considered culling the herd. This is hardly the same sort of nurturing stewardship seen in the novels of such authors as Jean Jacques Rousseau and George Sand. It is, rather, an inversion of the same purpose, replacing a symbolic motherhood with an idealized masculinity.

As can be said of many fictional women’s gardens, the underwater forests of the Island of Crespo exhibit many characteristics that reflect their protagonist. Nemo describes his forest as follows:

- Monsieur le professeur, me répondit le capitaine, **les forêts que je possède ne demandent au soleil ni sa lumière ni sa chaleur.** Ni les lions, ni les tigres, ni les panthères, ni aucun quadrupède ne les fréquentent. **Elles ne sont connues que de moi seul. Elles ne poussent que pour moi seul.** Ce ne sont point des forêts terrestres, mais bien des forêts sous-marines [emphasis added] (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 171).

Nemo’s forest is a place apart from the surface world, which is self-sufficient and needs neither light nor warmth. Likewise, a masculine ideal would need no external support to survive, and Nemo, who is presented as masculinity perfected, claims to not only survive but also thrive without depending on anything from the surface world that he has forsaken. It is an intimate place, pure and unspoiled by other human hands, but in Nemo’s eyes, it is nonetheless his and his alone. This reference to possession underlines his dominance here as in the rest of his underwater realm, and the fact that they grow *for* him implies a sort of servitude and subjugation. Ultimately, this introductory description

touches on the desire for conquest natural to *l'instinct destructif de l'homme* by which Nemo claims to be repulsed. Aronnax notices this underlying sentiment in the following observation:

Il la considérait comme étant sienne, et s'attribuait sur elle les mêmes droits qu'avaient les premiers hommes aux premiers jours du monde. D'ailleurs, qui lui eût disputé la possession de cette propriété sous-marine? Quel autre pionnier plus hardi serait venu, la hache à la main, en défricher les sombres taillis? » (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 186).

The primary idea here is conquest, and the word *pionnier* evokes memories of the individuals who were still beating their way across the American continent at the time of this publication. Like the American Old West or the yet-to-be-seen reaches of outer space, Nemo's mastery of this seascape touches on a theme extremely common throughout Verne's works: man's conquest and mastery of uncharted places.

The forest itself is a panorama of masculine imagery ranging from the phallic to the unusually self-reliant. Aronnax is stunned by the rigidity and inflexibility of the plants as he describes them in the following narrative on the Kingdom of Verticality:

Cette forêt se composait de grandes plantes arborescentes, et, dès que nous eûmes pénétré sous ses vastes arceaux, mes regards furent tout d'abord frappés d'une singulière disposition de leurs ramures - disposition que je n'avais pas encore observée jusqu'alors.

Aucune des herbes qui tapissaient le sol, aucune des branches qui hérissaient les arbrisseaux, ne rampait, ni ne se courbait, ni ne s'étendait dans un plan horizontal. Toutes montaient vers la surface de l'Océan. Pas de filaments, pas

de rubans, si minces qu'ils fussent, qui ne se tinssent droit comme des tiges de fer. Les fucus et les lianes se développaient suivant une ligne rigide et perpendiculaire, commandée par la densité de l'élément qui les avait produits. Immobiles, d'ailleurs, lorsque je les écartais de la main, ces plantes reprenaient aussitôt leur position première. C'était ici le règne de la verticalité (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 186).

Again, Aronnax's description begins with penetration, or the spoiling of uncharted territory by human exploration. In addition, the rigid and relentlessly vertical foliage serves a double function. Its verticality is clearly a phallic signifier, but it also exhibits the same liberty and self-reliance that Nemo strives to reach. No roots or vines support the plants in their position. They hold their position by the strength of their own fiber and not by any external support. They follow their desired path directly and without deviation, and when an external hand tries to bend them, they snap back to their initial track. Likewise, Nemo believes absolutely in the righteousness and justness of his course. He does bend when encouraged by Aronnax, but he ultimately cannot change himself from the aggressive prince he once was hungering for battle and the need to make amends through the use of weapons and warfare. The reign of verticality, in this case, is the reign of masculinity.

Another observation on the foliage's self-reliance touches on the plants' and, subsequently, Nemo's relationship with the surrounding sea:

J'observai que toutes ces productions du règne végétal ne tenaient au sol que par un empâtement superficiel. Dépourvues de racines, indifférentes au corps solide, sable, coquillage, test ou galet, qui les supporte, elles ne lui demandent qu'un

point d'appui, non la vitalité. Ces plantes ne procèdent que d'elles-mêmes, et le principe de leur existence est dans cette eau qui les soutient, qui les nourrit (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 187).

As does Nemo, these plants take nothing from the earth but a point of purchase. Their entire nourishment and sustenance comes from the ocean water around them. The ocean water, in fact, seems to be the only part of this environment with any feminine quality. Its purpose is to nourish as does a mother, but this description is as explicit as was the first in explaining that the plants *ne procèdent que d'elles-mêmes* or, rather, that they physically support themselves entirely by their own strength and their own construction. It is almost another battle for dominance. The sea around the plants would seek to support or bend them, while the plants constantly resist it and push through it to continue on their chosen course.

To reinforce, however, that neither Nemo nor his kingdom has any reliance on the surface world, Aronnax is careful to draw their borders explicitly:

Un mur de rochers superbes et d'une masse imposante se dressa devant nous....**C'étaient les accores de l'île Crespo. C'était la terre.**

Le capitaine Nemo s'arrêta soudain. Un geste de lui nous fit faire halte, et si désireux que je fusse de franchir cette muraille, je dus m'arrêter. **Ici finissaient les domaines du capitaine Nemo.** Il ne voulait pas les dépasser. Au-delà, c'était cette portion du globe qu'il ne devait plus fouler du pied [emphasis added] (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 191).

Most interesting here is Aronnax's reaction to this most inflexible verticality in the entire forest. Enrapt by his captor's hunt and push for conquest, Aronnax does not recognize the

hunt's or his captor's boundaries, and he is tempted to cross them. Nemo's brand of masculinity is still foreign to him, and he does not yet understand its limits or its reach. Nemo recognizes them well, however, and here we come to the line that Nemo will not cross. Aronnax has not yet found his, but Nemo will in time bring him to that point.

3.2 The threat of sterility, a fruitless posterity

As parental figures, Nemo and Aronnax cannot leave behind a lineage. Their only progeny is a sterile body of research made even more sterile by the fact that, according to Nemo's plans, other eyes may never see it after the two of them are dead. Likewise, the environment that they explore throughout the novel shares a similar sterility. Nemo's underwater kingdom is a world of wonder and mystery, but Nemo also reveals to Aronnax a world of encroaching extinction, pollution, and dying organisms. While women may be absent from *Vingt mille lieues*, motherhood is often seen, especially in the animal realm, and it suffers due to the harm caused by man. Young, if they are born, often die early or their mothers are killed, which not only leaves broken family units in the short term but also threatens entire species' existence for generations to come. This parallels 19th century fears of the collapse of the family due to changes in class and society. Such crumbling familial structures can be seen represented throughout French literature of the same era though the idea is not commonly associated with scientific romance or Verne's *Voyages Extraordinaires*.

In another reflection of man's relentless desire to hunt and destroy without provocation or need, Nemo shows Aronnax several ocean populations in which mothers

and young are killed indiscriminately, threatening both their current environment and their future progeny:

Le capitaine m'apprit qu'autrefois de nombreuses tribus de phoques habitaient ces terres; mais les baleiniers anglais et américains, dans leur rage de destruction, massacrant les adultes et les femelles pleines, là où existait l'animation de la vie, avaient laissé après eux le silence de la mort (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 465-466).

In this case, the hunters did not kill only animals. By slaughtering pregnant mothers, they destroyed the population's future. Moreover, this is a direct attack by a masculine entity, the indiscriminate hunter, on the most quintessential of feminine roles, motherhood. We will see this attack again several times in this narrative, including the following, very similar passage:

Aussi les morses sont-ils en butte à une chasse inconsidérée qui les détruira bientôt jusqu'au dernier, puisque les chasseurs, massacrant indistinctement les femelles pleines et les jeunes, en détruisent chaque année plus de quatre mille (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 490).

Moreover the damage done is not limited to any one species, to the aquatic world, or even to the animal kingdom. Left unfettered, this destructive masculine instinct upsets the balance so direly that it endangers the human population as well. Regarding entire families of peaceful manatees who were being slaughtered, Aronnax observes the following:

“Là vivaient en famille plusieurs groupes de lamantins....Ce sont eux, en effet, qui, comme les phoques, doivent paître les prairies sous-marines et détruire

ainsi les agglomérations d'herbes qui obstruent l'embouchure des fleuves tropicaux.

“Et savez-vous, ajoutai-je, ce qui s'est produit, depuis que les hommes ont presque entièrement anéanti, ces races utiles? C'est que les herbes putréfiées ont empoisonné l'air, et l'air empoisonné, c'est la fièvre jaune qui désole ces admirables contrées....

Et s'il faut en croire Toussenel, ce fléau n'est rien encore auprès de celui qui frappera nos descendants, lorsque les mers seront dépeuplées de baleines et de phoques. Alors, encombrées de poulpes, de méduses, de calmars, **elles deviendront de vastes foyers d'infection**” [emphasis added] (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 531).

The death of these families led not only to extinction and the end of genetic lineage but specifically to disease of the human population on land. The sea, which nourishes all within and around it and which fulfils the ultimate feminine, mothering role in Nemo's kingdom, is on its way to becoming nothing more than a vast repository for infection due to man's destructive urges. This is not unlike the way in which women, specifically prostitutes, are depicted in French novels of the era. Here Verne has taken the entirety of the sea, prostituted it to serve man's lust for destruction, and according to Aronnax's theories, he has turned it into the eventual instrument of man's demise. Thus, even through this early plea for environmental consciousness, we see shades of the misogyny that colors much of Verne's work. We see here the death of several types of mothers including the sea as the creatures that make up her internal organs are being destroyed. Her body is being infected as would be that of the tuberculosis-ridden prostitute, and she

is in turn passing that infection on to man now in the form of the yellow fever already raging in certain surface countries. Eventually her disease will spread and overtake all.

The crew of the Nautilus is not exempt from causing its share of damage here, however: “Cependant, sans dédaigner ces théories, l'équipage du Nautilus s'empara d'une demi-douzaine de manates. Il s'agissait, en effet, d'approvisionner les cambuses d'une chair excellente, supérieure à celle du bœuf et du veau » (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 531).

Admittedly, the manatees are hunted for practical reasons, and their remains will be used to feed the crew for some time to come, but Aronnax specifically refers to the quality of the meat as the reason behind this particular hunt. The Nautilus's crew could have stocked their cupboards with any type of sea-based meats. However, they chose the manatee not because there was no other option but because they desired the pleasure of tasting its meat. Thus their reason for killing it was not altogether different from their land-based counterparts. Ultimately, the crew killed for pleasure and not necessity, and for this reason they did their part to damage their world and its future.

The threat of impending sterility can be seen not only in the organisms that populate the sea but in its geological features as well. Volcanoes are specifically noted for their life-giving properties and their role in the earth's evolution from the beginning of time onward. At one point Nemo explains to Aronnax how their lava is responsible for creating new islands:

Depuis 1866, huit petits îlots de lave ont surgi en face du port Saint-Nicolas de Paléa-Kamenni....Si, au milieu du Pacifique, ce sont les infusoires qui forment les continents, ici, ce sont les phénomènes éruptifs. Voyez, monsieur, voyez le travail qui s'accomplit sous ces flots (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 373).

Thus, as presented here, volcanoes provide the earth's ability to father new landmasses and serve as a sort of masculine counterpart to the sea from which they are born.

However, Aronnax tells Conseil that this ability is dying away with the extinguishing of the heat at the earth's core:

Les volcans, si nombreux aux premiers jours du monde, s'éteignent peu à peu, la chaleur interne s'affaiblit, la température des couches inférieures du globe baisse d'une quantité appréciable par siècle, et au détriment de notre globe, car cette chaleur, c'est sa vie.

- Cependant, le soleil...
- Le soleil est insuffisant, Conseil. Peut-il rendre la chaleur à un cadavre?
- Non, que je sache.
- Eh bien, mon ami, la terre sera un jour ce cadavre refroidi. Elle deviendra inhabitable et sera inhabitée comme la lune, qui depuis longtemps a perdu sa chaleur vitale » (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 381-382).

Beyond the overwhelming environmental concern of this passage, we can link it to the earlier passage on the birth of islands and its imagery of fatherhood. As such, Aronnax is explaining to Conseil the eventual demise of fatherhood and an end to one sort of reproduction. Like motherhood for the feminine gender identity, fatherhood is an intrinsic part of the masculine gender identity, and its fading from prominence here speaks of similar fears in the human realm. This fundamental property of masculinity is weakening and disappearing in its primitive forms, and its disappearance in civilized human society cannot be far behind.

CHAPTER 4:

Femininity, Maternity, and the Collapse of the Family

Soon after beginning his voyage under the sea, as we have seen earlier, Aronnax comments that all aboard seems natural and that he can no longer imagine a different life on land. There is, however, a conspicuous lack: there are neither women nor children nor the hope of a family or far-off future in Nemo's underwater kingdom. This is especially evident in regards to Ned Land, the everyman of his day, an uneducated sailor and possibly peasant, who is the masculine antithesis of Nemo, the *maître homme*, who oscillates between the *savant* and the man of war. Nemo seems to be beyond any need for the feminine until the end when he collapses in tears over the memory of his lost family. For the greater part of the narrative, however, Nemo seems to replace any such need with his love of the sea and love for his machine. Ned, however, seems incapable of replacing love of women with a love of the sea despite his seafaring career. At one point, Conseil warns Aronnax of Ned's deteriorating psychological state with: "Ce pauvre Ned pense à tout ce qu'il ne peut pas avoir. Tout lui revient de sa vie passée. Tout lui semble regrettable de ce qui nous est interdit" (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 450). From this, the reader can infer that women were part of that *vie passée* and that they must be among the things forbidden in Nemo's kingdom.

However, despite the physical absence of living women, certain things in this world adopt a feminine presence and function as though ghosts of women, mothers, and absent children. Feminine representations and symbols throughout the narrative continue to reinforce ideas of sterility, of reproduction, of the crumbling family unit, and of

motherhood seen earlier in the story. Connections can also be drawn between Nemo's current state and his compulsion to repeat past events that caused him to lose his own wife, children, and hopes of physical lineage.

4.1 Oeufs stériles and the cultivation of false eggs

Though Verne's pedagogical passages in *Vingt mille lieues* have been heavily criticized, one in particular serves to reinforce the fears of sterility and notions of feminine displacement referred to elsewhere. In one of his many biological lectures to Ned and Conseil, Aronnax introduces the pearl as something that is cultivated, but his description uses terminology that *connote* it as inert genetic material. Aronnax's description of the pearl as something that "*s'incruste dans les plis de l'animal*" gives the impression that he is describing an egg attached to the lining of a uterus. This is later supplemented by explanation on how a pearl begins to form:

Mais elle a toujours pour noyau un petit corps dur, soit un ovule stérile, soit un grain de sable, autour duquel la matière nacrée se dépose en plusieurs années, successivement et par couches minces et concentriques [emphasis added] (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 308).

Thus the pearl often forms around a real egg, albeit a sterile one, placed in the clamshell's interior and attached to its lining. The egg is placed inside a sort of uterus, but it is dead from the start. When the clam is later opened, it will only give birth to a pearl, essentially a dead egg, that will be an object of admiration but which will never bear life.

The extraction process that Aronnax describes is rather violent and often results in the death of the mollusk that produced the extracted pearl. The fishermen let the mother

mollusks dry out “à l’air libre” until they reach the point of “un état satisfaisant de putrefaction” before extracting the pearls and the mother of pearl. Additionally, Aronnax makes reference to the traditional names given to mother of pearl: “*bâtarde blanche*” and “*bâtarde noire*,” putting even more emphasis on the absence of paternity and the lack of filial relation between the mollusk and its produce.

If one reads the relation between the mollusk and its produce as that between the members of a family, it is the fishermen who fill the role of the father. The fishermen impregnate the mollusk through a sort of artificial insemination by inserting a small piece of something hard (sometimes the afore-mentioned sterile egg) into the mollusk around which mother of pearl accumulates to form a proper pearl. After killing the mothers, they gather their false progeny that, according to Aronnax, are nothing but *ovules stériles*. This can be read as the family destroyed by man’s brutality, the very thing against which Nemo struggles at the same time as he flees from it to the depths of the sea. This reading also once again appeals to 19th century fears of the collapse of the family.

Commerce in pearls, especially those that Aronnax calls *les perles vierges* (pearls chosen for their beauty, their pure whiteness, and their perfection) according to their traditional name, alludes to the sale of women’s purity, be it as wife or as prostitute, and pearls of such value “*se vendent à la pièce*” (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 309). Additionally, smaller pearls are traditionally known as *semences* and they “*se vendent à la mesure*” (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 309). In addition to being seeds that will never germinate, they were often used in ornamental church decoration, not unlike orphans abandoned to the care of the clergy and to nuns. In sum, the western land-based society of the time was commonly feared to be evolving into a society of orphans, of bastard children, and of women who

sold themselves like jewelry: a world where the nightmare of the upper classes was coming to life.

Moreover, the topic of pearls leads the companions toward a discussion of women, one of the rare times in the text where women are mentioned and the only time when marriage is mentioned. However, the companions do not talk about any woman as ideal and chaste as the pure *perle vierge* but, rather, Cleopatra whom they say drank pearls in her vinegar (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 310), and the conversation results in some significant revelations about Ned Land's past with women:

- Je regrette de ne pas avoir épousé cette dame, dit le Canadien en manœuvrant son bras d'un air peu rassurant.

- Ned Land l'époux de Cléopâtre! s'écria Conseil.

- Mais j'ai dû me marier, Conseil, répondit sérieusement le Canadien, et ce n'est pas ma faute si l'affaire n'a pas réussi. J'avais même acheté un collier de perles à Kat Tender, ma fiancée, qui, d'ailleurs, en a épousé un autre. Eh bien, ce collier ne m'avait pas coûté plus d'un dollar et demi, et cependant - monsieur le professeur voudra bien me croire les perles qui le composaient n'auraient pas passé par le tamis de vingt trous.

- Mon brave Ned, répondis-je en riant, c'étaient des perles artificielles, de simples globules de verre enduits à l'intérieur d'essence d'Orient.

- Si peu que rien! Ce n'est autre chose que la substance argentée de l'écaille de l'ablette, recueillie dans l'eau et conservée dans l'ammoniaque. Elle n'a aucune valeur.

- C'est peut-être pour cela que Kat Tender en a épousé un autre, répondit philosophiquement maître Land (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 310-311).

According to this story, Cleopatra and Kat Tender are presented in a stark materialist light. Likewise, regarding the prostitutes, courtesans, and *femmes entretenues* of that age, it was woman's greed that threatened to destroy long-standing notions of paternity, family structure, and, consequently, the structure of society itself. Kat Tender serves nicely as a symbol of that fear, but the introduction of Cleopatra reveals somewhat the eternal notion of that characteristic among women. This adds a misogynist tone to what is otherwise a mildly comic scene and reinforces the following ideas: all women are greedy, they have always been, and they cannot be trusted to assure the future of the family as mothers. On the other hand, man himself has nothing to offer but *ovules stériles* and faux pearls.

Even if Ned Land, harpooner and Canadian, was far from being noble, however, he was the "*roi des harponneurs*." Still, his title, his sentiments toward women, and his faux jewelry couldn't win the heart of these women who *se vendaient à la pièce* at a very high price. His fortune was as false as those of the 19th century French nobility who possessed a title without the *terroir* and the heritage associated with either the title or the name.

Nemo's own association with pearls is even more loaded with reproductive connotation, specifically because he is cultivating some pearls of his own. Regarding the collection of treasures from the sea in Nemo's salon, we see further symbolism of sterility and fears for future posterity in this earlier noteworthy mention of pearls in the narrative:

À part, et dans des compartiments spéciaux, se déroulaient des chapelets de perles de la plus grande beauté...curieux produits des divers mollusques de tous les océans et de certaines moules des cours d'eau du Nord, enfin plusieurs échantillons d'un prix inappréciable qui avaient été distillés par les pintadines les plus rares. Quelques-unes de ces perles surpassaient en grosseur un œuf de pigeon (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 127).

In this reference, pearls are only indirectly linked to reproduction in that Aronnax compares some to the size of eggs. While unremarkable in this passage, it is the first of several references to eggs in passages on pearls and begins a trend that can't be ignored. Moreover, Aronnax also associates pearls to their monetary value or, rather, in the case of these pearls, the impossibility of associating them with such a value. Given that he will never share his collection with the world, the reasons why Nemo might keep such a collection to begin with make for a curious question. Aronnax's narrative on Nemo's pearl cultivation, however, may offer some light.

In one of Nemo's more odd and unexplained explorations of the ocean floor, he takes Aronnax into an underwater cavern containing a giant clam that Aronnax describes as follows: "C'était une huître de dimension extraordinaire, une tridacne gigantesque, un bénitier qui eût contenu un lac d'eau sainte, une vasque dont la largeur dépassait deux mètres" (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 321). Given that it is treated as a fountain of holy water, we are immediately reminded of the fountain in Nemo's salon and its earlier analyzed implications. This is feminine space and, in a reading such as this, must be carefully considered.

When visiting his submarine forests near the Isle of Crespo, Nemo remarks, “Elles ne sont connues que de moi seul” (Verne 171). Moving from that extremely masculine hunting space where Nemo was utterly dominant into our current scene, it is interesting that Aronnax chooses the exact same phrasing to express Nemo’s possession of the place: “Le capitaine qui semblait se diriger par des sentiers connus de lui seul” (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 320-321). Unlike the forests, however, this is a feminine space because it contains the giant clamshell that is incubating Nemo’s giant pearl. Aronnax describes the setting as follows:

Je distinguai les retombées si capricieusement contournées de la voûte que supportaient des piliers naturels, largement assis sur leur base granitique, comme les lourdes colonnes de l'architecture toscane. Pourquoi notre incompréhensible guide nous entraînait-il au fond de cette crypte sous-marine? (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 321).

There are two types of imagery at work here. On the one hand, we have a shrine, which serves a double purpose. This “*crypte sous-marine*” is a sacred place, set aside for reverence as though consecrated to some ancient deity. It is, however, still a crypt, often associated with burial and revered as a monument to death. If one reads this seen as an insemination and the pearl’s development as a symbolic pregnancy and sterile birth, then it follows that this tomb should be seen as a monument to lineage and reproduction and again plays on fears of sterility, impotence, and societal collapse.

Most striking, however, is the description of how Nemo examines the pearl. The process is described in such intricate detail that both inspires new connotations and plays off of those previously established, resulting in a scene reminiscent of an artificial

insemination. In this odd excursion, Nemo has armed himself with a dagger. Usually when hunting, Nemo prefers his underwater gun, and as a general weapon, he most commonly makes use of his eyes or the overcompensating power of the Nautilus and its fearsome spur. However, for this trip, Nemo has chosen a small and often phallic weapon of a type more often associated in this narrative with Ned Land's base, animalistic masculinity: "Les deux valves du mollusque étaient entr'ouvertes. Le capitaine s'approcha et introduisit son poignard entre les coquilles pour les empêcher de se rabattre" (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 323). Nemo shares the moment with Aronnax, whom he briefly shows the pearl within the shell before removing his dagger: "Sa forme globuleuse, sa limpidité parfaite, son orient admirable en faisaient un bijou d'un inestimable prix" (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 323). Again Aronnax refers to the price of a pearl, and for the second time, he refers to a pearl in Nemo's care as having inestimable value. The pearl's value is connected here again to its purity. This untarnished, uncommercialized pearl, being the pure although sterile offspring of Nemo's efforts, has a value beyond that of the mere money spent on and earned by lesser pearls (and thus offspring) which result from a more commercial and possibly also bourgeois lineage. We must also remember that Nemo was once Prince Dakkar and remains nobility, so any reproduction involving him would be associated with older ways now in the process of disappearing as nobility was bought and sold to the highest bidder with little connection to family lineage. Nemo's own royal line is as unlikely to continue physically as his *ovule stérile* is unlikely to ever hatch.

Aronnax further explains his suspicions regarding Nemo's pearls and makes more weighted references to reproduction in the following description:

Je compris alors quel était le dessein du capitaine Nemo. En laissant cette perle enfouie sous le manteau de la tridacne, il lui permettait de s'accroître insensiblement. Avec chaque année la sécrétion du mollusque y ajoutait de nouvelles couches concentriques. Seul, le capitaine connaissait la grotte où “mûrissait” cet admirable fruit de la nature; seul il l'élevait, pour ainsi dire, afin de la transporter un jour dans son précieux musée. Peut-être même, suivant l'exemple des Chinois et des Indiens, avait-il déterminé la production de cette perle en introduisant sous les plis du mollusque quelque morceau de verre et de métal, qui s'était peu à peu recouvert de la matière nacrée.... // Superbe curiosité naturelle et non bijou de luxe, car je ne sais quelles oreilles féminines auraient pu la supporter (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 323-324).

This is clearly a very intentional cultivation, and Aronnax speculates that it was Nemo who inserted the material into the mollusk that would start the pearl's development. Considering the clam's secluded location, it seems foolish to think otherwise. Aronnax speaks of it both as a fruit, which lends itself to the idea of cultivating a seed, and as something that Nemo *élevait*, a poetic interpretation of the verb *élever* definitely corresponds to raising a child. Finally, Nemo has chosen this clam, an agent of the sea, to bear this burden, which Aronnax is clear to distinguish from a vile *bijou de luxe*. However, while the grotto is a feminine space and the mollusk serves as the uterus that houses the developing pearl, motherhood is absent here. It is Nemo who watches over the developing pearl and who will decide when it is time to remove it. Though the remark is most likely made in regards to the pearl's size, it is significant in this context that Aronnax says, “*je ne sais quelles oreilles féminines auraient pu la supporter.*” A more

nuanced reading could see this as a misogynist statement: there is no woman fit or worthy to bear such a pearl as the one Nemo is cultivating on his own.

4.2 La mer as ultimate feminine presence

The fact that there are no living women in Nemo's world, however, does not mean that it is completely devoid of any feminine presence or even of motherhood. While we will later see significant representations of motherhood in the animal kingdom, the most significant feminine presence seems to be the sea itself. Given the previous deduction that no woman is fit or worthy to bear pearls of such value as the one Nemo was cultivating, it is the sea that flows in to fill the void:

Tout me vient maintenant de la mer comme tout lui retournera un jour!

- Vous aimez la mer, capitaine.

- Oui! je l'aime! La mer est tout! Elle couvre les sept dixièmes du globe terrestre. Son souffle est pur et sain. C'est l'immense désert où l'homme n'est jamais seul, car il sent frémir la vie à ses côtés. La mer n'est que le véhicule d'une surnaturelle et prodigieuse existence; elle n'est que mouvement et amour; c'est l'infini vivant (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 117).

Aside of the Nautilus, the sea is the only thing in the narrative that Nemo claims to love. Here its purity and health are emphasized, which contrasts with the fear mentioned elsewhere that man's lust for destruction will turn it into a reservoir for infection. Even in this early mention, reflections of gestation, birth, and motherhood begin to appear. It is important to remember that the sea is a place of refuge where Nemo and his crew have fled to escape the surface world. Nemo is immensely proud of the fact that supplies and

nourishment for his entire crew come only from the sea and what it provides (“*la mer a fournit tous mes besoins*” (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 116)). It is thus a place of protection, potentially mimicking the security of the mother’s breast or, possibly, the womb. Nemo’s impression of feeling *frémir la vie à ses côtés* is not unlike the sensation of an infant in the womb, surrounded by fluid, and aware of the exterior world only by the tremors it sends across the liquid. Again, reinforcing the sea’s image as a provider of nourishment and of life, Nemo says, “*je dois tout à l’Océan; il produit l’électricité, et l’électricité donne au Nautilus la chaleur, la lumière, le mouvement, la vie en un mot*” (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 133). Also, despite the rather general nature of the term *sein*, it seems a significant choice of words for Nemo in the following appeal to Aronnax given his previous sentiments: “*Ah! monsieur, vivez, vivez au sein des mers! Là seulement est l’indépendance!*” (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 118).

Like the Nautilus, which Nemo calls *la chair de ma chair*, there is some dispute over whether or not the sea is itself a living organism. As he did for the Nautilus, Nemo defends its viability as a living entity. He outlines what he considers requirements for a living being to be classified as such and lists how the sea meets his qualifications:

Regardez, reprit-il, il s’éveille sous les caresses du soleil! Il va revivre de son existence diurne! C’est une intéressante étude que de suivre le jeu de son organisme. Il possède un poulx, des artères, il a ses spasmes, et je donne raison à ce savant Maury, qui a découvert en lui une circulation aussi réelle que la circulation sanguine chez les animaux (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 198-199).

The same sentiment that allowed Nemo to personify the Nautilus as his progeny allows him here to personify the sea as a feminine entity. Beside the anatomical references that

give the sea all the necessary functions of a living body, Nemo adds a sense of touch: the sea responds to the caresses of the sun. This seems a vaguely feminine response or at least one inspiring the image of love or romance since *caresse* carries more weight than to simply express a sense of touch. Additionally, emotion, specifically unchecked emotion, is presented as a more feminine trait, and it contrasts with Nemo's cold and dispassionate masculinity. Thus, the following description further cements the sea's status as a specifically feminine presence: "*Voyez cet océan, monsieur le professeur, n'est-il pas doué d'une vie réelle? N'a-t-il pas ses colères et ses tendresses?*" (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 198). *Colères* and *tendresses* are polar opposites of the emotional spectrum and seem to correspond with the binary states of the extreme masculine and the extreme feminine. Nemo, who is lifted up as the representative of a dominant masculinity, is praised at first for his stoicism, his coldness, and his dispassionate appearance and responses. That stands in stark contrast against the erratic and fluid changes between *colère* and *tendresse*, erratic emotion which *connotes* frivolity and which is also stereotypically associated with a feminine state.

Beyond the sea's quality as a feminine entity, however, it is treated not only as a maternal entity but the ultimate mother of all life on earth. In addition to its symbiotic, potentially filial relationship with the creatures that populate it, Aronnax links the sea to the origins of life itself:

Durant les époques géologiques, à la période du feu succéda la période de l'eau.
L'Océan fut d'abord universel. Puis, peu à peu, dans les temps siluriens, des sommets de montagnes apparurent, des îles émergèrent, disparurent sous des déluges partiels, se montrèrent à nouveau, se soudèrent, formèrent des continents

et enfin les terres se fixèrent géographiquement telles que nous les voyons (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 149).

Aronnax's tale of the origins of life on Earth dovetails with earlier descriptions of volcanoes and the birth of islands. If volcanoes are the masculine parents of islands and continents, then, given this description of the sea as the medium from which they emerge, the sea must serve as the feminine parent. Indeed, the mountains emerge first as does the head of an infant from the womb followed by the rest of the island, already developed under the waves and ready to be born.

Likewise, Nemo hopes that the sea will birth new civilizations of men, presumably with his assistance in place of the volcanoes required to father the foundations of the land he has forsaken:

Aussi, ajouta-t-il, là est la vraie existence! Et je concevrais la fondation de villes nautiques, d'agglomérations de maisons sous-marines, qui, comme le Nautilus reviendraient respirer chaque matin à la surface des mers, villes libres, s'il en fut, cités indépendantes! Et encore, qui sait si quelque despote... (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 200).

In fact, the word *concevrais* implies some measure of fatherhood in and of itself. In the knowledge that Nemo was once prince of a kingdom and father of a family, both of which were lost, his fears of a despot in his underwater kingdom are all the more poignant. They indicate a fear of the repetition of these past traumas that we will see play out in several ways throughout the narrative.

4.3 The threat of maternity in the animal kingdom

In addition to the sea's portrayal as mother of all life, there are several representations of actual, physical motherhood scattered throughout the book. Most of these instances portray maternity in the animal kingdom with two very significant human exceptions, which serves to associate it with a tendency as base and vile as the *instinct destructif de l'homme*, which causes Ned Land's insatiable lust for hunting and killing. Rather than a gentle, romanticized representation, maternity in the animal kingdom is often violent and sometimes results in death.

For instance, Conseil's first observations of seals and their young would seem to fit into the image of motherhood as peaceful and serene. Aronnax, however, warns Conseil of the violence and danger inherent in the mother's role:

Ce ne sont pas des animaux dangereux? me demanda Conseil.

- Non, répondis-je, à moins qu'on ne les attaque. Lorsqu'un phoque défend son petit, sa fureur est terrible, et il n'est pas rare qu'il mette en pièces l'embarcation des pêcheurs.

- Il est dans son droit, répliqua Conseil.

- Je ne dis pas non (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 489).

This is hardly the image of docile femininity, but it is, nevertheless, quintessentially feminine. At the very core of her nature, the female is as violent as the male when she is threatened. Also, this animalistic representation of maternity is similar to that of man's destructive instinct. The fierceness and violence that the mother exhibits to protect her young is not unlike man's lust for the hunt, which at least has the potential to serve a self-sustaining purpose even if it is often undertaken only for pleasure. This could potentially

be further extrapolated to see motherhood as a threat to the male: the destructive masculine instinct leads man to destroy sea life to the point of extinction, and the protective, maternal instinct leads the female to attack and destroy the hunter, that which is quintessentially masculine. In the female's own struggle between the *sauvage* and the *civilisé*, the *bête* versus the *savant*, motherhood here is portrayed both literally and figureatively as the *bête*

This scenario plays out rather vividly in the following incident, which is very similar to Aronnax's later description of the manatee slaughter that he ultimately blames for the putrefaction of the sea despite the crew of the Nautilus taking part in it in order to stock their cupboards with delicious meat for culinary pleasure. The Nautilus encounters the dugong, a seemingly peaceful animal that shares a biological classification with the afore-mentioned manatees:

- Bon, reprit le Canadien, le voilà sur le dos, et il dresse ses mamelles en l'air!

- C'est une sirène, s'écria Conseil, une véritable sirène, n'en déplaise à monsieur."

Ce nom de sirène me mit sur la voie, et je compris que cet animal appartenait à cet ordre d'êtres marins, dont la fable a fait les sirènes, moitié femmes et moitié poissons.

" Non, dis-je à Conseil, ce n'est point une sirène, mais un être curieux dont il reste à peine quelques échantillons dans la mer Rouge. C'est un dugong.

- Ordre des siréniens, groupe des pisciformes, sous-classe des monodelphiens, classe des mammifères, embranchement des vertébrés," répondit Conseil.

Et lorsque Conseil avait ainsi parlé, il n'y avait plus rien à dire (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 350).

As if the living allegory of femininity's animalistic potential, this is an animal that was once considered to be half woman and half fish. The dugong is identified as female immediately by its visible teats, which not only draws a connection to maternity but also identifies the creature as a sirenian, a biological classification. This subsequently identifies the peaceful dugong with the sirens of ancient lore whose deceptively beautiful song lured men to their deaths. Likewise, the dugong may seem serene, but it is a vicious and powerful fighter as Nemo warns Ned and Aronnax:

- Est-ce que ce dugong est dangereux à attaquer? demandai-je malgré le haussement d'épaule du Canadien.

- Oui, quelquefois, répondit le capitaine. Cet animal revient sur ses assaillants et chavire leur embarcation (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 351).

Also, though it may not be for reasons of classical beauty, the dugong has every bit the allure of the ancient sirens for the animalistic hunter in Ned Land:

Cependant Ned Land regardait toujours. Ses yeux brillaient de convoitise à la vue de cet animal. Sa main semblait prête à le harponner. On eût dit qu'il attendait le moment de se jeter à la mer pour l'attaquer dans son élément.

" Oh! monsieur, me dit-il d'une voix tremblante d'émotion, je n'ai jamais tué de "cela". " Tout le harponneur était dans ce mot (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 350).

The lust for the hunt is clearly in full effect here, and Ned's harpoon is possibly at its most phallic in this scene as any in the narrative. This is a meeting of the most animalistic parts of the male and the female, which ultimately ends in the battle that Nemo predicted.

Though Ned loses his harpoon at first, he does successfully strike the dugong, and yet another representative of maternity falls prey to man's destructive instinct.

4.4 The lost family and the compulsion to repeat its demise

As mentioned earlier, there are two representatives of human maternity in this narrative, and both women are dead, thus reminding us of specific 19th century fears that the future of human reproduction is in peril. The first dead mother appears as a corpse, still clinging to the corpse of her infant, shortly after the shipwreck that killed them both:

Triste spectacle que celui de cette carcasse perdue sous les flots, mais **plus triste encore la vue de son pont où quelques cadavres, amarrés par des cordes, gisaient encore!** J'en comptai quatre - quatre hommes, dont l'un se tenait debout, au gouvernail - **puis une femme, à demi-sortie par la claire-voie de la dunette, et tenant un enfant dans ses bras.** Cette femme était jeune. Je pus reconnaître, vivement éclairés par les feux du Nautilus, **ses traits que l'eau n'avait pas encore décomposés.** Dans un suprême effort, **elle avait élevé au-dessus de sa tête son enfant, pauvre petit être dont les bras enlaçaient le cou de sa mère!** L'attitude des quatre marins me parut effrayante, tordus qu'ils étaient dans des mouvements convulsifs, et faisant un dernier effort pour s'arracher des cordes qui les liaient au navire [emphasis added] (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 205-207).

Maternity imagery is vivid in this scene. In addition to the obvious association with the mother's corpse and her dead infant, several corpses float, attached by ropes, as if fetuses in the womb, still attached by umbilical cords. The only fruit of this maternity, however, is death. As for the drowned woman, she is young, the shipwreck is fresh, and several

remarks here raise the fact that this disaster is a recent event. It is not, however, preventable any longer. The reader enters the scene with the crew of the Nautilus just after all hope is lost. It is a rather pessimistic warning about the sorry state of human maternity. It would seem that the damage foretold has already come to pass and is irreversible. One remaining problematic aspect, however, is Aronnax's revelation in the final lines of this passage that blame the afore-mentioned cords at least in part for the sailors' deaths. Their pained expression as they try to escape the cords is a frightening image. Its meaning here is somewhat ambiguous, but it reinforces the misogynistic undercurrent observed elsewhere that sees maternity as something threatening toward men and something to be feared.

The second representation extends beyond maternity to encompass the whole concept of family, specifically of family, paternity, and posterity lost. It is the portrait of Nemo's lost wife and children, which is revealed in the narrative of *Vingt mille lieues* just after Nemo has sunk the presumably British vessel and crossed a boundary into a destructive masculinity beyond which Aronnax will not follow:

Quand tout fut fini, le capitaine Nemo, se dirigeant vers la porte de sa chambre, l'ouvrit et entra. Je le suivis des yeux.

Sur le panneau du fond, au-dessous des portraits de ses héros, je vis le portrait d'une femme jeune encore et de deux petits enfants. Le capitaine Nemo les regarda pendant quelques instants, leur tendit les bras, et, s'agenouillant, il fondit en sanglots (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 588).

Though it is not explicitly stated that the family in this portrait is Nemo's own, it is generally assumed to be Nemo's family based on his confession in *L'Île mystérieuse* and

his declarations in the following passage during the sea battle at the end of *Vingt mille lieues*:

“Je suis le droit, je suis la justice! me dit-il. Je suis l'opprimé, et voilà l'opprimeur! C'est par lui que tout ce que J'ai aime, chéri, vénéré, patrie, femme, enfants, mon père, ma mère, j'ai vu tout périr! Tout ce que je hais est là! Taisez-vous!” (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 581).

In this loss, outlined in more detail in *L'Île mystérieuse*, we see the conclusive defeat of Nemo's dominant masculinity. He lost not only the family of his flesh in both generational directions but also a symbolic family in the country that, as prince, he was born to protect:

Le nom du prince Dakkar fut illustre alors. Le héros qui le portait ne se cacha pas et lutta ouvertement. **Sa tête fut mise à prix, et, s'il ne se rencontra pas un traître pour la livrer, son père, sa mère, sa femme, ses enfants payèrent pour lui avant même qu'il pût connaître les dangers qu'à cause de lui ils couraient...**

Le droit, cette fois encore, était tombé devant la force. Mais la civilisation ne recule jamais, et il semble qu'elle emprunte tous les droits à la nécessité. **Les cipayes furent vaincus, et le pays des anciens rajahs retomba sous la domination plus étroite de l'Angleterre** [emphasis added] (Verne, *Vingt mille, L'Île*, 747).

In this ultimate failure of Nemo's warlike masculinity, he retreats to the sea, a vastly feminine space, with a small number of his supporters. His underwater kingdom will become his new country and the crew his new family. However, the old battles are

simply displaced into a new environment with new players. It is here where he will struggle between the two conflicting halves of his nature: should he protect and defend or should he proactively attack? As Nemo has taken on a new family and a new realm, he will take on new, possibly imagined enemies, and this compulsion to repeat his past failures will play out several times throughout Aronnax's voyage with him and always with the same result. Nemo will attack or attempt to avenge, and his family will suffer for it. The ambiguous ending in which the companions escape the Nautilus just as Nemo is allowing it to sail toward the maelstrom could equally be seen as the loss of his kingdom and progeny despite the ship's curious return later in *L'Île mystérieuse*.

To understand how this compulsion plays out across the narrative in *Vingt mille lieues*, an analysis of the original events will be necessary. In giving a third-person account of his own history in *L'Île mystérieuse*, Nemo says of his marriage to his wife: « *Il se maria avec une noble indienne dont le cœur saignait comme le sien aux malheurs de sa patrie* » (Verne, *Vingt mille, L'Île*, 746). This is an unusual sentiment for a woman of the time and an even more unusual role. Since we are given so little information on her in a series of books where even the shape and size of a fish's fin is described in intimate detail, we must infer as much on her as the text allows. If she was not only sympathetic to Nemo's cause but, indeed, her heart bled for it, we can assume she played some role in his rebellion. This is not to say that she fought outright or ever picked up arms. Her support could have been as little as a general complicity in Nemo's plans and as a source of moral support, and it would still have been more political involvement than the tradition figure of the fictional Western woman at the time. In this regard, she plays an ambiguous, vaguely androgynous role in that she plays some part in Nemo's very

masculine battle efforts. He worked with this woman in his previous incarnation as Prince Dakkar to produce two children and a nation free of imperialist invaders, but Nemo's odd narrative tells us he went too far. He fought alongside common men without hiding his royal identity, and despite causing notorious amounts of damage to English forces, his rebellion was defeated. His infamy and recklessness only served to put his family in mortal danger. He succeeded only in a campaign of carnage at the end of which he lost wife, children, and the country for which he fought.

A symbolic and nearly allegorical repetition of these events can be seen when, in response to Ned's simple request to hunt whales, Nemo instead turns the whole fearsome force of the Nautilus on their natural enemies, the *cachalot*, better known in English as the sperm whale. Nemo takes the *cachalots* as his enemies and fights them as he fought the British in India in an attempt to avenge if not protect the whales that he considers peaceful. Although Nemo destroys as many as he can, he then discovers that he was unable to save one of the mother whales and her young that he undertook the battle to defend in the first place just as he was unable to keep his wife and children from being killed by his colonial enemies despite his efforts in battle:

Le malheureux cétacé, couché sur le flanc, le ventre troué de morsures, était mort.

Au bout de sa nageoire mutilée pendait encore un petit baleineau qu'il n'avait pu sauver du massacre. Sa bouche ouverte laissait couler l'eau qui murmurait comme un ressac à travers ses fanons.

Le capitaine Nemo conduisit le Nautilus près du cadavre de l'animal.

Deux de ses hommes montèrent sur le flanc de la baleine, et je vis, non sans

étonnement, qu'ils retiraient de ses mamelles tout le lait qu'elles contenaient,
c'est-à-dire la valeur de deux à trois tonneaux. (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 463).

Nemo's efforts have once again failed to protect the family and its posterity, and the implications of this scene on maternity's future are overwhelming. Just as they stocked their storehouses with meat from the endangered manatees, the Nautilus's crew takes the last milk from this mother and stores it away. On one hand, this action could be seen as a compensation for a lack of maternity on the ship, but on the other, the fact that these barrels of milk are a supply that will be depleted reinforces what has already been portrayed several times as maternity's inevitable end. Additionally, Nemo's own reaction to the threat posed by the *cachalots* can be seen as overcompensation and yet another instance of his reacting to a shot across the bow with all-out war. Nemo's instinctually masculine response to destroy all of what he considers to be the enemy turns the peaceful, womb-like waters into an ocean of blood and allows for an unrestricted attack on the whale family without Nemo being near enough to stop it.

A more significant repetition, however, is Nemo's near loss of Aronnax at the South Pole. In Aronnax, we have already seen that Nemo senses a partner more than a prisoner, and Aronnax was more than happy to accept the role despite the apprehensions of his companions. Even given so little information on Nemo's wife, and not given that until years later in the text of *L'Ile mystérieuse*, we can see similarities between this partnership with Aronnax and Nemo's relationship with his dead wife. Aronnax shares Nemo's passion for knowledge and exploration, and the two of them work toward a common goal. Now, as Nemo attempts a more civilized life under ocean waters where only his guns have the capacity to fire and where his reasoning mind gives him power

over any natural creature that might assail him as an enemy, he repeats the essence of this relationship with Aronnax, giving Aronnax a privileged position in his kingdom but also putting Aronnax at great risk in the interest of Nemo's own pursuits. Nemo works with Aronnax to produce a body of knowledge. The well-being and growth of this "offspring" requires exploration and conquest of new territories. Nemo pushes the boundaries of what is right and natural in pressing on to the South Pole, which not only is a land that no man's foot has heretofore dared reach but is also, despite being virgin territory, still the land that Nemo has vowed never to set foot on again. In this momentous act of conquest, Nemo returns momentarily to a previous state of being in repeating his role as a conqueror and ruler of the land he vowed to forsake. Nemo invites Aronnax to share the moment with him, thus putting Aronnax at risk by his reckless press onward in the same way that the press of his revolution put his Indian family at risk:

Il me vint alors à l'idée de demander au capitaine Nemo s'il avait déjà découvert **ce pôle que n'avait jamais foulé le pied d'une créature humaine.**

" Non, monsieur, me répondit-il, et **nous le découvrirons ensemble.** Là où d'autres ont échoué, je n'échouerais pas. **Jamais je n'ai promené mon Nautilus aussi loin sur les mers australes; mais, je vous le répète, il ira plus loin encore** [emphasis added] (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 472-473).

The Nautilus becomes trapped in the ice for several days as a direct result of Nemo's efforts to press beyond his capabilities, itself a form of overcompensation. Before the men are able to free the vessel, oxygen levels are swiftly depleted. Aronnax seems the hardest hit by the lack of oxygen while his hale and hearty male companions do not suffer as visibly. Even when the Nautilus breaks free, Aronnax is already in the process of

suffocating and nearly dies before the vessel reaches the surface. It is a demise not terribly far removed from that suffered by many 19th century female literary personages. While it is not the tuberculosis suffered practically as punishment for living with loose morals, it is certainly the direct result of Aronnax having aligned himself with Nemo's plans. Likewise, Nemo's overly masculine drive for conquest caused Aronnax's miserable state and near death in much the same way that Aronnax's contemporary compromised literary heroines suffered their disease as a result of city-bound man's lusts.

This particular repetition has the most visible effect on Nemo. Having been rendered impotent by being unable to prevent a repetition of his previous failures, Nemo drifts erratically, no longer the master of his own emotions and embodying the stereotype of one of the greatest feminine weaknesses. Nemo drives the Nautilus into the Gulf Stream where it floats out of control just as Nemo's own mind and body take a similar tack: "*Le Nautilus continuait d'errer à l'aventure. Toute surveillance semblait bannie du bord*" (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 554). It is as though Nemo has completely given himself over to the impulses of the *bête* and has lost the self-mastery of a *savant* or even of an *homme*. As we have done throughout this reading, Aronnax attempts to gauge Nemo's mental state via the maneuvers of the Nautilus:

Mais qu'il devait être triste, désespéré, irrésolu, si j'en jugeais par ce navire dont il était l'âme et qui recevait toutes ses impressions! Le Nautilus ne gardait plus de direction déterminée. Il allait, venait, flottait comme un cadavre au gré des lames (Verne, *Vingt mille*, 551).

Aronnax's comparison of the Nautilus to a floating cadaver here is extremely significant given that, for Nemo, it is *la chair de sa chair*. If it is true that Nemo's hopes for what

little future he had in his underwater kingdom are dead, then this is yet another repetition of the loss of Nemo's family, specifically his children, and he has not come to terms with it. His relations with Aronnax become strained after this point. The sense of collaboration is gone, and Aronnax begins to fear Nemo as a captor, as a monster, rather than respect him as a fellow *savant*. Beyond this incident, Aronnax is for Nemo a reminder of his repeated failures as a man and a leader.

Further overcompensating for these failures, Nemo gives himself over completely to the *bête*. In addition to putting himself at the mercy of nature, steering the Nautilus into the Gulf Stream also puts it in the highly populated waters between New York and Boston, frequently traveled by every sort of vessel that Nemo has tried to avoid throughout his years away from the surface world. This serves also as a convenient way to regain his masculinity using Ned Land's more base methods. Nemo is clearly spoiling for a fight with an enemy he knows he can defeat.

CHAPTER 5:

Conclusions and Future Research

Despite this rather lengthy analysis and the wealth of possibilities that it opens up for more feminist readings of Verne's vision, it is but one reading of one area of one of Verne's many texts. Research seems to show that the whole of Verne's bibliography lacks the scholarly attention it deserves despite Verne's continued fame and recognition as an innovator nearly two centuries after his birth. He tends to be seen primarily as an early futurist writer of speculative fiction with a small amount of attention given to the socio-political aspects of his work, but very little attention seems given to his own innovations in textuality and what his prose was able to do apart from its subject matter given the era in which it was written.

Verne was a prolific author, and Unwin's article bemoans that the size of his corpus has kept all but specialized Verne scholars from reading the entire run of *Voyages extraordinaires* (Unwin, 257). Unwin is not alone in complaining that a great deal of common knowledge about Verne, especially that which can be found in scholarship in the English language, is based on hearsay, myth, and inaccurate, abridged translations. He is particularly misunderstood in the United States, where abridged versions of his best works have been passed off as children's novels despite the pathos and sometimes violence found within the original editions. Hetzel's editorial mandates have also damaged the reader's understanding of Verne's intentions. A better understanding of Verne's own stated aims and beliefs would enrich scholarship of his works as would better accessibility of his original manuscripts where they are available. Verne's

bohemian roots and early works are worth plumbing for the influences of that ideology on so-called speculative writing and, indeed, the whole of the scientific romance movement.

From these beginnings, profitable paths of research could be found in deeper analysis of Verne's letters and manuscripts, particularly the French originals if they can be accessed. Also, fresh analysis of Verne's early works, particularly those unavailable in English and unstudied by Anglophone scholars, would ease the process of outlining misogynistic trends in Verne's works and of understanding how they function in the same corpus as Verne's later, more sympathetic (albeit more commercial) heroines such as *Le Rayon vert*'s Helena Campbell, a rare female protagonist in the Vernian pantheon. Some discourse has also been published on homoerotic subtext in Verne's works, but as there is a shortage of scholars who have read his complete corpus, this is still an area where further research and analysis could be fruitful.

In essence, however, Verne's voyage under the seas is very much a product of its time, and despite its far-reaching imagination, it must be read as such in order to achieve its full impact. Given that many of the societal and environmental threats lurking in the shadowy recesses of the ocean still threaten and cause fear today, however, it is important to remember that Verne's work has had lasting impact and, as such, merits increased scrutiny.

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