CHAPTER 2

AROUND THE WORLD IN EIGHTY (ONE) DAYS

As spatial barriers diminish so we become much more sensitized to what the world’s spaces contain.¹

—David Harvey

The title of Jules Verne’s famous novel Le Tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours (Around the World in Eighty Days) promises a journey in eighty days. Yet, the culminating moments of this adventure reveal that Phileas Fogg takes not eighty but eighty-one days to reach his destination. As Fogg goes around the world in a precisely calculated, or rather an almost precisely calculated journey, the route he takes and the tools he uses – graphs, charts, numbers and maps – are the very devices of abstracting spaces that lead to his victory at the end of the adventure.² I say almost precisely calculated because the climactic moments actually defy the careful calculations that form the basis for the adventure, as well as the subsequent victory, which surprises both Phileas Fogg and the reader.

During the entire journey across the world, Inspector Fix follows Fogg. Fix has confused the former with a robber responsible for robbing the Bank of England of 55,000 pounds. Lacking a proper warrant, Fix is able to arrest Fogg only once back in Great Britain, at Liverpool. The novel craftily persuades the reader that due to his mistaken imprisonment Fogg had lost the bet by a delay of five minutes. Finally, when the misunderstanding is sorted out and Fogg is released the narrative states: “Il avait perdu” ['he had lost'] (284; 191). There is no intervening explanation for the confusion that follows when, a couple of chapters later, in what Timothy Unwin calls a “whipcrack ending,”³ on the twenty-first of
December Phileas Fogg runs into the Reform Club at eight forty-five p.m. with the clock striking the fifty-seventh second and exclaims: “Me voici, messieurs” [‘Here I am, gentlemen’] (295; 199). It is to be understood that he won the bet.

The last chapter reveals the literary ruse. One finds out that Fogg’s victory is a result of a collusion – as would befit such a novel – between the units of time and global geography. In traveling eastwards around the globe, Fogg and his companions had gained a day without realizing it. On disembarking at Liverpool, they had arrived not on the final day of the bet, as they had thought, but instead a day before. It was Edgar Allan Poe’s famous story “Three Sundays in a Week” that furnished the mechanism of introducing this surplus day, or, the “phantom day” (Unwin Le tour; 4), in the novel. To be fair to Verne’s literary talents, this was a carefully planned “sleight of hand of an accomplished storyteller” (47). Unwin shows how via a “series of devilish ticks,” (46), Verne leaves plentiful clues, sometimes in plain sight, to prepare the reader for this surprising conclusion, such that this “phantom day” becomes a “perfectly obvious consequence of the information which has been provided earlier” (42-3).

The intervening day also allows Fogg and Aouda to reveal their affection toward each other. It is while making necessary arrangements for Fogg and Aouda’s wedding that Passepartout, Fogg’s servant, realizes that they can still win the bet. It is interesting that the earnestness of this declaration of love toward Aouda, perhaps Fogg’s only display of human emotions, takes place at a moment when the novel reveals his mathematical error. As much as this episode gives us grounds to claim a relationship of conflict between the emotional and the calculative, even more revelatory is the role of this new spatiotemporal paradigm that trumps the clock-like mathematical Fogg. Here is the novel’s explanation of the calculation of the twenty-four hours that the mathematically accurate Fogg did not account for:

Or, on compte trois cent soixante degrés sur la circonférence terrestre, et ces trois cent soixante degrés, multipliés par quatre minutes, donnent précisément vingt-quatre heures, – c’est-à-dire ce jour inconsciemment gagné. (299)

[Now there are 360 degrees on the Earth’s circumference, and this 360, multiplied by 4 minutes makes exactly 24 hours – in other words the day gained unconsciously. (201)]

Fittingly, the “phantom day” that accounts for his victory is the product of the crossing of the spatial understanding of Earth’s surface in terms of its meridians
with a temporal consciousness measured in hours and minutes. The resultant territorial circumference ("circonférence terrestre" ['Earth’s circumference']) is not just literally the topographical span but is rather a collectivity of three hundred and sixty homogenized degrees, all of which have been rendered uniform by the equal time gained of four minutes in crossing them. Placed against the backdrop of a remapped Earth that responds to the temporal demands of a nascent capitalistic thinking, this calculation is the final blow to all ideas of alterity. In moving from the other calculation that initiated the journey of eighty days at the beginning of the novel, it represents the ultimate abstraction of global spatiality. Earlier calculation acknowledged the existence of a spatial multiplicity (London, Bombay, Yokohama, New York, etc.) that had to exist for the voyage around the world to take place. In contrast, the new world that emerges at the end of the novel is literally flattened out into a universal familiarity of numbers, both temporal as well as spatial. This newly created reality of the globe is a space that institutes a numerically defined understanding of the world and encompasses within itself a redefinition of human subjectivities.

The eventual marriage between Fogg from civilized London and Aouda from a savage unregulated part of India is a biological union that connects two disparate units of the British Empire, perpetuating a new order that is the direct result of this new spatiotemporal paradigm. Indeed, as Ross Chambers points out, a white man bringing back to London a “thoroughly assimilated Aouda” (a Europeanized woman) could only be yet another example of “reduction of alterity to sameness.” Instead of leading the narrative action, as they have until this point, the couple find themselves submitting to the possibility of financial failure. Just as they prepare to fight the resulting indigence by combining forces, the spatiotemporal collusion reveals itself, declaring Fogg to be the winner of the bet. Appearing concomitantly as they do, the numerical explanation and the marriage reinforce each other. The very enabling actors demonstrate by example their subservience to the new order. The reality of the all-powerful forces of this colonial-capitalist globe is no longer in question for them; as its components, their acceptance of defeat validates the power of the paradigm that had propelled their journey across the globe.

In analyzing Fogg’s near mythical journey, this chapter assesses the relevance of similar spatiotemporal matrices that relate to time taken to traverse global space. Susan Hanson attests that since the 1950s experts have started theorizing that the “commodification of space means that a unit of travel time has a money value” (471). Fogg, through his strictly timed journey with its monetary implications, traversing over the globally interconnected colonial infrastructure,
was already displaying that speed can be increased “via networks and technology” (Hanson 471). Writing about the space-time compression characteristic of modernity in *The Condition of Postmodernity*, David Harvey analyzes French writers and painters like Baudelaire, Flaubert and Manet. Harvey discovers “signals” of a break “of cultural sentiment that reflected a profound questioning of the meaning of space and place, of present, past and future, in a world of insecurity and rapidly expanding spatial horizons” (263). Had he studied Verne, instead of hunting for “signals” indicating how the literary world was symbolizing the changing dynamics, Harvey would have discovered a much more obvious and at the same time more nuanced enunciation of a “world where both time and space are being absorbed under the homogenizing powers of money and commodity exchange” (263). This chapter makes visible the process that rearticulates the globe as an imperial commodity.

As stated in the introductory chapter, analyses in this chapter shall serve as a backdrop for later chapters, in which I discuss postcolonial works that resist this spatial imperialism. This is not to state that the newer spatialities that emerge in the process respond directly to Verne. Instead, it is to present Verne as exemplifying the dominant spatial logic of nineteenth-century colonialism and capitalism, whose effects later works contest. The discussion below presumes similarities in the numerous expressions of French and European modernity, resulting from various cultural, historical and political contexts. While in-depth study of these expressions and the colonial effects they had across the globe is essential to highlight the differences between them, it is also beyond argument that their shared colonial commonalities produced a totalizing vision of the world. What follows is a “periodizing hypothesis,” to borrow Jameson’s term (3), in which I present the dominant traits of a colonizing spatial narrative that the postcolonial imagination challenges. Verne’s iteration of the world evokes not only the prevailing power equations in colonial terms but also modernity’s rationalization of spaces of belonging and Otherness as spaces of production and consumption. Emerging forms of geographical knowledge embed into Verne’s aesthetic production, an ideology of ordering and managing territorial occupations from the center.

A clear tension is present in Verne’s work between the principles of geography that dominate the nineteenth century and the “alternative geographic epistemology” (Brosseau, “In” 10) that emerges when we analyze the workings of the colonial-imperial structures of his writings. The geography that Verne purposefully intends to incorporate into his fiction is distinct from the literary geography in his work that responds to the colonial reorganization of the world.
In order to display the workings of Verne’s literary geography, I have divided this chapter into two major sections. The first prepares the grounds for understanding how Verne’s final textual result is complicit in a spatial paradigm wherein capitalism and the Western concept of national borders sought to empty the global landscape of its local meaning to reinscribe it within an industrialized mechanics. In addition to displaying how, exactly, Verne participates in the nascent nineteenth-century discipline of geography, whose objective at that time was to describe landscapes and national territories, this section also contextualizes Verne by looking at studies that have analyzed his geography. The objective is double: firstly, to account for the widely held critical beliefs about Verne, in particular related to his use of geography; secondly, to show how these studies have laid the important groundwork for the discovery of far more complex workings of geography. In the last part of this section I demonstrate, through a brief reading of the Indian landscape, how *Le Tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours* reinscribes the planet in a newer spatial paradigm.

This reading will serve as a backdrop for understanding the workings of the opium economy in the second section, which records how Verne’s literature both displays the clandestine workings of an opium economy and becomes a site of its concealed principles. Opium first proliferated in China because of imperial smuggling. Later, when faced with an increasingly determined China committed to keeping opium away from its boundaries, the British imperial war machine smoothened the territorial creases to ensure opium’s free movement across colonial space. This early capitalism would one day become a part of the kind of “financescapes” (34-5)\(^4\) that spread all across the world to overwhelm nation-states. In the next chapter on Ananda Devi’s work, I shall take up this relationship between the nation-state and global economy.

**Section 1. Understanding Verne: Laying the Groundwork**

*Le Tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours* belonged to a series of novels, *Voyages Extraordinaires* (*Extraordinary Voyages*), whose fictional journeys, enabled by technological possibilities and knowledge emerging toward the end of the nineteenth century, presented the world and its physical expanse to the readers. Verne’s characters cut through the air in a balloon (*Cinq semaines en balloon*; 1863), delved deep into the ocean (*Vingt mille lieues sous les mers*; 1869),
burrowed their way to the centre of the earth (\textit{Voyage au centre de la Terre}; 1864), and even flew through the infinite extraterrestrial space (\textit{De la terre à la lune}; 1865). In addition to displaying modernity’s thirst for newer mechanical innovations and the desire to discover new locales of Otherness,\textsuperscript{15} these adventures across various geographies displayed how Verne “systematically and patiently” marked out “the globe into its different regions”\textsuperscript{16} (28). The four elements—earth, air, fire and water—whose presence Julian Gracq analyzes in Verne’s work serve to give mythical proportions to his writings.\textsuperscript{17} Much like the varied spatial exploits of his characters, Verne’s literary profusion also effortlessly transcended genres, charting new literary territories. The enviable critical attention that his oeuvre, boasting of scores of novels, short stories, plays and poems, has attracted is a testament to his exceptional artistic acumen.

From a writer with “defective” inspiration to a “man who foretold the future,”\textsuperscript{18} Verne’s critical reception has varied considerably over the last century and a half. Even though he attracted worldwide attention, he spent his life yearning for respect as an accomplished littérateur. One observer has called Verne a “prophet” for having predicted several scientific discoveries.\textsuperscript{19} Verne’s work might have even challenged the Bible in popularity\textsuperscript{20} and triggered a slew of ongoing worldwide academic interest,\textsuperscript{21} but he lamented the lack of recognition as a literary equal by his peers. Lucian Boia commences his book on Jules Verne with an often-quoted note of regret by the legendary author: ‘The biggest disappointment of my life is that I have never been considered a part of French literature.’\textsuperscript{22} The disappointment accentuates the irony of Verne’s literary career. One of the most read French authors and “the most translated of all French writers,”\textsuperscript{23} he only found praise from a few of his peers. French literary canon largely ignored the value of his literary contributions during his lifetime.

It is only recently that critics like Unwin have convincingly argued for a more sustained interest in “the self-conscious literary skills and compositional practices which went into” (Journeys 1) Verne’s writing. The “complexity and the sophistication of Verne’s approach to the writing of novels” (2) completely belie Zola’s gross underestimation of Verne’s literary talents. Zola had infamously characterized \textit{Extraordinary Voyages} as “without any importance in the contemporary literary movement.”\textsuperscript{24} If anything, Verne was breaking new literary ground with his writing, while at the same time questioning what it meant to write in the nineteenth century. Indeed, Verne “expanded the very concept of what literature is or might be” (5).\textsuperscript{25}

Unwin sees Verne’s writings as analogous to the adventurous journeys that are their subject matter. One of the crucial questions that Unwin’s monograph
Jules Verne: Journeys in Writing sets out to answer is about “the metaphorical relation between his [Verne’s] own fictional and experimental journey – the ‘journey of writing’ [...] and the actual physical ‘journeys’ that are so often the subject of his novels” (3). One need only look at the “processes of writing and the literary techniques” to discern profound underlying debates in Verne’s writing about “what the novel is, or might be, or could become.” The discovery of unknown spaces, experimentation and scientific progress, then, are not just subject matters of Verne’s fiction: in certain ways they are “re-enacted in the writing itself” (216).

In order to counter Roland Barthes’ derisive opinion of Verne as being an armchair traveler, Unwin asserts that Barthes fails to understand that for Verne’s writing, “travel is text, that text is travel” (217). The synonymity between writing and travel that Unwin signals functions metaphorically as well as at a more literal level in Verne’s writing. The “textual negotiation” during travels not only involves using texts, as Vernian travelers do in the form of written documents as navigation tools, but also involves reading and rereading the world as a text, to give it meaning (217).

The literary readings in my study, then, set out to find the meaning that Verne produces of a world that he defines uniquely in geographical terms. These readings follow Unwin’s claim that for Verne nature has to be “verbalised and articulated if it is to have any ‘meaning’ at all” (217). If we are indeed to believe that Verne’s writing proclaims that “it is through text that we are able to understand and make sense of the world” (217), then surely it is incumbent upon us as readers of literature to just do that: make sense of the “meaning” of this world that Verne textually negotiates in topographical and national terms. As one sets out to understand how Verne’s writings register the pervading spread of newer technologies across the world, one discovers that they also record the accompanying coordinates that define the changing meaning of the worldscape.

As the colonial enterprise and the nascent capitalist market, aided by technological and scientific novelties, spread all across the word, they also began to reconfigure the very idea of the world as already defined by social relations produced by a colonial-capitalist dynamics. The “meaning” of the world that Verne creates is mediated through these dynamics, which, as they were offering access to the yet unknown geographies, were also already rendering them into homogenized commodities. More importantly, Verne’s text reduces the colonial subjects to the demands of these new geographical arrangements, defined in terms used to prop up the process of distribution and consumption in the capitalist economy and its emerging global contours.
Within the context of this book, this chapter serves to establish the kind of extreme rationalization of geography that creative works of the twentieth and twenty-first century respond to. The reason these postcolonial works insist on foregrounding colonial bodies; on analyzing language’s interaction with space; on focusing our analytical attention on the ever-evolving relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, is that they seek to present an alternative to the naturalization of the colonized subject as a passive entity interchangeable with the conquered geographical landscape.

While this study responds to the lack of textual analyses of Verne’s work in English, it also complements the kind of readings that Unwin presents in Journeys in Writing about Verne’s literary place in nineteenth-century French literature. For Unwin, in order to show how Verne is opening a novel literary space, it is important to “return to the literary and cultural context in which the Voyages extraordinaires were composed” (2), and to analyze how Verne assembles his texts within the nineteenth-century literary and cultural conventions. In order to appreciate “the complexity and the sophistication” of these texts and to see how Verne “achieves his own uniqueness and originality as a novelist” (3), Unwin focuses on “Verne’s approach to the writing of novels.” Unwin’s nuanced macroanalyses of Verne’s writing process prepare the grounds for my analyses focusing on the textual result of that process. For Unwin, understanding this “approach” involves analyzing the intertextual environment that Verne worked in and the kind of textual sources he used; it also involves understanding how Verne’s apprenticeship in theatre contributed to the “sheer theatrical quality” (96) of his writing and ensured “that the textual world he creates is an artificial and unreal one” (108).

While Unwin analyzes the process of the creation of the Vernian text, I am more interested in the implications of the final product. Journeys in Writing covers an amazing breadth of Verne’s work, in order to comment upon the literary characteristics of the entirety of Extraordinary Voyages. My study dives deep into select moments of Le Tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours to discover how this foremost of French authors was rearticulating the world as a geographical extension of the colonial empire’s expansionist project. If Vernian writing is about writing and rewriting this world, about giving it “meaning,” then for my study it is important to see how the end result of this writing process, the actual text, produces “meaning.” I am interested in finding out how the syntactical structures, the vocabulary used and the historical references create Verne’s fictional world; I also ask what insights do Verne’s textual predilections offer about the
conceptions of global spatiality in the late nineteenth century, and the implications they have for the “meaning” of the world?

Verne and the World

It is well established that Verne was among those nineteenth-century authors writing in the presence of the “split personal subject” inhabiting the end of the century (8). The need to travel and the need to write about discoveries of newer lands and cultures across the globe were central to nineteenth-century literature’s attempts at “discovering, exploring, and connecting such divides” (Youngs 2014: 8). This desire for an elsewhere was the result of “a subliminal unease with changes” in the metropolitan center that nineteenth-century writers “thought they knew so well.”

In Exotic Memories: Literature, Colonialism, and the Fin de Siècle, Chris Bongie reads time and space in Verne’s work as a confluence that sets up exoticism (7). Central to this view is a superior past, whose lost values one has to revive elsewhere in the future. Confronted with the discovery of the masses in the aftermath of the French Revolution, the subject of modernity finds its individuality subjugated to a gathering of indistinguishable individuals. Exoticism seeks to rediscover this lost individual, whose existence has become possible, ironically, with the discovery of its loss. This “post-revolutionary individual is in his very essence an afterimage, always alienated from experience and tradition” (Bongie 13). Unlike an imagined past in which an original subjectivity had the possibility of an authentic experience of fellow beings, for the nineteenth-century European subject, advancing modernity, with its mechanization and its social institutions, appeared to be eliminating all prospects of going back to the past. Far-away locales offered an escape route from this annihilating modernity. In its flight the subject sought to relive the original experience in locales far removed from continental Europe, untouched by the spreading peril of mechanical capitalism, where individuality had not been eroded and one could still revive the imagined glorious times of an invented history with the hope of reliving them in the future. Exoticism prospects across global space for a temporal confluence of the past and the future. It is a circular move of temporality that one realizes in spaces of Otherness.

This presentation of the world presumes it to be divided along the lines of technology, with human subjectivity a function of the spreading industrialization. Such a world is made to order for realizing the dreams of its onlooker where the Other’s existence is justified in its utility for the self. Human subjectivity is
presumed to be the same all over the world, such that traversing space makes it possible for one to assume a predetermined essence. History in this equation is a fiction responding to the desires of its reader and serves only to contort further the unipolar presentation of the world. It is a selectively chosen image of the past highlighting those reference points that validate the vantage point of the present. The search for an original individuality is one such strategy of an insecure subject that responds to the obliterating pressures of modernity. Desirous of re-discovering itself, it looks toward the past to seek a more stable subjectivity.\textsuperscript{32}

Written in 1872, at the height of colonial expansion, \textit{Le Tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours} abounds in discursive practices that rearrange political and social boundaries. Jules Verne’s writings represent the dominant bourgeois worldview of his time, in which time and space were to provide a sense of order. Ironically, while it might seem that these fictional journeys were an escape from the advancing rationalization, the world that they describe is refracted through the prism of its mathematical modernity. The fact should be evident from the title of the novel itself, which tells us of the world understood as a quantifiable entity, measured in the units of time (eighty days) taken to traverse it. The very same well-measured mathematically exact movements with which Fogg negotiates the private space of his home and traverses London, the heart of the largest colonial empire,\textsuperscript{33} are then deployed to present the geography of the entire world as already conquered in its consumable finite geographical limits.

History and geographical space fell into the same paradigms of methods of production and consumption, which were rationalizing the time and spaces of infrastructure. Related to these mechanisms of organizing spaces of citizenship and belonging, of demarcating limits of civilization, was a rise in newer institutions like disciplinary geography, and tools for investigating and measuring the world, such as cartography. Verne’s work responds to the need to organize and access the world, to manage and control the unwieldiness of alterity within the bounds of the written word. Narratives such as Verne’s are invested in, and powered by, the growing need to conquer space, be it in terms of colonial territories or newer markets. When such narratives as Phileas Fogg’s mathematically link domestic spaces, the topography of London and the entire colonial empire, they participate in the material conditions of the latter and reiterate its political ambitions. For us, they also necessitate a deeper examination of such links.

At the same time, it is interesting to note that Verne insisted on his work not being political. If politics means avoiding everything that would attract controversy at the end of the nineteenth century, then yes, one could argue that Verne’s work does not overtly lead into acrimonious debates. Pierre-Jules Hetzel, Verne’s
editor, proactively edited out any portions that could have been potentially controversial. He even went to the extent of consulting with the “Russian embassy in Paris to make sure it [the novel *Michel Strogoff*] would not cause offence to tsarist readers” (59). In light of Hetzel’s editorial efforts to ensure that Verne’s work remained generally palatable and marketable, one understands why Verne would want to claim while referring to *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* that “politics has no place in the book.” In accepting this argument today, one runs the risk of eternalizing Verne’s understanding of himself and foreclosing the very possibility of alternative readings.

As an author who was crossing boundaries – both geographical as well as literary – Verne’s popularity and the pedagogical objective of his work were also influenced by and at the same time shaping and influencing the ideological framework of the society within which he lived. Boia presents Verne’s literature as one about spatial exploits and devoid of any political overtones:

> Jules Verne had two passions in his life: theater [...] Second passion: geography [...] traveling [...] traveling on the map, traveling via books, traveling by writing. [...] All of Jules Verne can be found there. Everything for him was a pretext for geography and for a plot bringing together individual destinies, and much less or not at all social or national problems.

As I shall show in the sections that follow, the academic attention devoted to spatial organization in Verne’s work validates Boia’s recognition of the importance of geography in the author’s work. However, to share Boia’s assessment about the absence of the social and national realm risks missing out on the full nuances of Verne’s literature. When Boia notes that the ‘study of the society is not one of Verne’s strong points,’ and bases this argument on a correspondence between Verne and Hetzel, where Verne is defending his literature, the critic succumbs to Verne’s intentions and his definition of himself and thus universalizes the author’s understanding of his own work.

While Boia presents layered and complex representations of Verne’s place in nineteenth-century literature, his usage of geography, in being limited to a grammar of cartography (“la carte” [‘the map’]) that facilitates travel, concurs with Verne’s spatial appropriation of a world divided along topographical and national lines. In contrast, I contend that instead of being nonexistent, these social realms actively claim relevance in the Vernian universe. In fact, a more just representation of Verne’s fiction would communicate the social and political
ennmeshed within geography and subsumed by it in such a way that the spatial, while retaining prominence, acts as a marker of social relations.

I am interested in showing how Vernian space is a register of social equations and, even more importantly, how it participates in perpetuating the political ambitions of the colonial project. It is important to understand the circumstances under which the Vernian space was created, the way it was communicated, and how his literature – born under the frenetic glare of industrialization and determined by the industrial outlook of modernity – perceived and used global space as a tool of colonialism.

Verne’s writing contributed to stabilizing the identity of the modern subject within the dominant spatial givens and perpetuated the identitarian limits imposed upon a world defined along national, and by extension, imperial lines. Analyses that bring together literature and geography have grown exponentially over the last few decades. They attempt to understand the myriad ways in which humans and their surroundings, both built as well as natural, interact with each other. Such analyses now provide the vocabulary to exploit unexplored nuances of Verne’s work, which is self-consciously geographical in nature.

Verne’s Geography

Scholars have documented how Verne privileged geographical knowledge in his writing. In a special volume published in 2005 to commemorate Verne’s death centenary, Jean Bastié, the president of the Société de Géographie (Society for Geography), notes with pride that the author had vigorously participated in the society’s meeting, and that starting from 1865, he even belonged to it for more than three decades. To highlight Verne’s enthusiastic involvement in the nascent, yet fast growing discipline of geography, it has often been pointed out that, although limited in number, Verne did publish articles on geography. Ian B. Thompson concludes that it “would be an exaggeration to state that Verne made a significant contribution to geography as a discipline.” Verne’s *Géographie de la France* (*Geography of France*) followed the “standard descriptive form of the day” and one could describe his attitude toward geography as that of an eager, engaged, and a well-informed learner. Commenting on the geographical dimensions of Verne’s work, Dao Humeau finds that the author does evoke “a geography with social connotations;” at the same time, in his view Verne “can’t be considered as a geographer, because he doesn’t think as such.” To summarize Humeau’s argument in Thompson’s more succinct formulation: “It is more appropriate to think of ‘Verne and geography’ rather than ‘Verne the Geographer.’"
Verne was writing at a time when the disciplinary boundaries related to geography were still being established. While at present, increasing stress is being laid on understanding spaces as a social product, and in particular on seeing aesthetic art forms as sites where everyday spatial negotiations are most visible, Verne was working within a spatial environment where describing landscapes and countries was seen as geography’s primary function. More importantly, despite lively debates within the Society for Geography, the “narrowly conceived scientific conceptions that presided over the university institutionalization [...] [ensured that] geography was quite effectively separated from literature for a long time” (Berdoulay 47). The academic definition of geography was structured to exclude even those like Verne who actively participated in the Society for Geography, and were, in their own way, also producing a conception of the discipline. To what extent this academic positioning of the university discipline, which led to literature’s exclusion, might have both impoverished geography and influenced Verne’s engagement with it, is difficult to state. Nonetheless, the discussion above does speak to Verne’s desire to mirror the preoccupations of geographers contemporary to him and to participate in, and follow, the normative understanding of geography: the “standard descriptive form of the day” (Berdoulay 47). The “obsession for plenitude” and the extreme realism that are described as the defining characteristics of Verne’s writing were determined by the dominant geographical thinking of the time, at least as far as the author’s engagement with spatial manifestations (local descriptions, urban centers, or the entire world) was concerned.

As a member of the Society for Geography, Verne would interact with “some of the great geographers of the day, such as Kropotkin, and Elisée Reclus” (Thompson), and even source inspiration for his literary works from fast growing geographical research and findings. In order to highlight Reclus’ influence on Verne, Lionel Dupuy entitles the book *Jules Verne, l’homme et la terre: la mystérieuse géographie des Voyages extraordinaires* after Reclus’ posthoomous work titled *L’Homme et la Terre*. Dupuy also goes to some length to detail the similarities between Verne and Reclus. Both men, according to Dupuy, shared the common ambition of ‘representing Earth in its entirety’; furthermore, both display ‘a form of human ecology much before its time’. However, what Dupuy details are coincidences related to their lives and careers, and not methodological similarities in their attitude toward the discipline of geography.

It is the differences between Verne and Reclus, more specifically political differences between the two, that one needs to consider in order to understand their individual attitudes toward geography. During the Paris Commune,
they stood on opposite sides of the political divide. While Verne supported the status quo, Reclus’ active participation in the Commune led to his exile to Switzerland. His “constant preoccupation was the problem of the state and its relation to the individual” (Ross, “Rimbaud” 60). Beyond a facile landscapism, it was the human element that Reclus laid stress on in his engagement with geography. He was among the first to have used the term “social geography” (Ross, “Rimbaud” 61); to have understood space as a social product and as an entity that is produced as a result of its interaction with human beings. While Verne did consult Reclus’ work, and both Verne and Reclus expressed the desire to understand the world in its totality, the kind of geography that the author of fiction deployed ran counter to geography as a social product that Reclus was exploring. Reclus’ work was “anticipating many of the more modern theories of unequal development” (Ross, “Rimbaud” 61). Had Verne actually followed the methodological approach of this “anarchist geographer” (Ross, “Rimbaud” 60), he would have undoubtedly engaged with how changing spatial definitions under the influence of imperialism were affecting human beings and their place in the world. Instead, in presenting the world as available for discovery, as an entity that can be grasped, enumerated and textually narrated, Verne followed a version of geography that was closer to Vidal de la Blache’s conception of the discipline.

For Vidal de la Blache, the human sense of sight was the privileged tool and the role of a geographer was “to detail a region’s physiognomy and show how its traits result from a harmonious and permanent interaction between natural conditions and old historical heritages” (Ross, “Rimbaud” 56). In other words, the aim of geography was to describe and enumerate with as many details as possible the regions and physical features of the planet. One cannot forget that Verne was writing immediately after France’s defeat at the hands of Germans in the Franco-Prussian War. As a way of reclaiming lost national pride France was expanding its colonies across the globe, and acquiring elsewhere, territory lost to the Prussian army. Vidal de la Blache was a historian by training, and it is pointed out that his “conversion to geography was tied in with France’s recent defeat at the hands of Germany” (147). Vidalian geography, much like Verne’s own understanding of geography, was greatly invested in France’s nationalist mission. In particular, “the teaching of French geography appeared to be essential as a means of strengthening people’s attachment to their national territory” (Mercier 148).

Geographical societies, themselves interested in expanding the reach of their discipline, served as pressure groups advocating colonial expansion (Berdoulay 51). These societies furnished the tools of charts, maps and geographical data
needed for colonial expansions, and at the same time, because of these expansions, they gained in terms of easier access to newer territories. The nascent discipline of geography that Verne followed so closely was deeply invested in the cause of French nationalism. As a result, it embedded territorial expansion and colonialism as the guiding principles of Vernian literature.

Verne was not in favor of all aspects of colonialism. However, overall, he remained a supporter of the practice. Jean Chesneaux rightly notes that Verne’s “description of colonial expansion and the national movements opposed to it is very contradictory” (116). This contradiction no doubt reflects how, on the one hand in Verne’s *Extraordinary Voyages* there are “idealist views about the superiority of ‘a state of nature’; [and] on the other hand, […] racist and ethnocentric prejudices […] [that serve as] convenient justification for colonial expansion” (112). Despite his “secret sympathy” for the cause of the colonized Verne nonetheless recognizes colonialism as an “unavoidable and accomplished fact” (122). Colonization was less about some peoples exercising authority over others. It was, rather, “one of the methods by which man can achieve mastery over the globe” (123).

At a textual level, this desire of mastery over the world took on Faustian proportions. Indeed, beyond just expansion, it was the desire to possess within the bounds of his text, to describe in absolute detail the nooks and crannies of the Earth and its beyond, that marks Verne’s writing through the end of his writing career. This “yearning for totality – total knowledge, total coverage, total possession” (Unwin 29) – especially when talking of the expanse of the Earth – is what Unwin calls part of a larger “metaphysical, Faustian ambition to possess the infinite” (Unwin, *Journeys* 29). Roland Barthes calls this “an obsession for plenitude” (Barthes 65). This is a world of “numerable and contiguous objects” (Barthes 65), and betrays a presumption that the world can be exhaustively catalogued. One has recognized this presentation of the world as an example of the nineteenth century’s realist desire to capture in words a world that one understands to be finite. This landscape-based definition of geography aimed at discovering new territories was an inherent part of the principle of expansion, which was the “defining principle of his [Verne’s] approach” (Unwin “Negotiating” 13).

Unwin concludes that it was no doubt because Verne’s novel *Paris au XXe siècle* (*Paris in the Twentieth Century*) lacked this expansion of literary and physical boundaries that Hetzel rejected the manuscript in 1863. The novel, after all, recounts the story of a “garret-dwelling hero” named Michel Dufrénoy, inhabiting a world of “art and poetry for their own sake.” How could such spatial stasis
and the unquestioning acceptance of literary boundaries be condoned? Such a “view of art and of the modern world was radically opposed to the whole thrust of Voyages Extraordinaires” (Unwin “Negotiating” 13).

One cannot help seeing a faint reflection of Dufrenoy, a man in search of literature, in Verne the author himself. While not quite a garret-dweller, Verne’s explorations of the world, for a nineteenth-century author writing about travel, were limited. Verne was writing at a time when travel literature was undergoing foundational transformations. Irrespective of whether they were actually travel writers or not, “a remarkable number of novelists and poets were travelling writers” (73). Ironically, Verne, for whom geographical presentation of the world was extremely important, and who through his detailed research created at times a geographical hyperrealism, was not himself very well traveled across the world.

Verne relied heavily on resources collated and analyzed by scientific societies and expert geographers to render his adventurers’ destination. He also “did not hesitate to exploit guide books to add local colour and detail” (Thompson). Gracq names Verne a “discoverer of routes and revealer of worlds.”58 To adapt liberally this comment to the current argument about Verne’s borrowed geographical knowledge, it would be more pertinent to call Verne a re-discoverer of routes and re-revealer of worlds. Verne was unquestioningly transporting geography’s methodological presumptions into his work, accepting this conception of geography as a given. Similarly, critical analyses too, have followed Verne’s treatment by uncritically accepting Verne’s geography as a passive backdrop against which the narrative unfolds.

Geography on Verne

Rare would be the study on Verne that addresses the author’s literary exploits relating travels across the world without evoking his penchant for geography. One has strong reasons to classify all critical readings of Extraordinary Voyages as geographical analyses. After all, Verne was writing about journeys across the world, and any criticism would, by default, be a commentary on Verne’s engagement with geography. Yet, despite the passage of more than a century after his death, barring a few exceptions, sustained geographical readings that juxtapose Verne’s works to emerging understandings of space are difficult to find. There have been numerous studies about stereotypes associated with nationalities and ethnicities; differences between continents; characteristics of flora and fauna; descriptions of landscape, topography and national territories, among other
aspects of Verne’s work. All such arguments furnish coincidental spatial analyses about the organization and perception of space in his oeuvre.

Let us take, for instance, studies that examine Verne’s association with Scotland. In rich and nuanced analyses, Ian Thompson notes “Verne professed an affection for Scotland to an almost obsessive degree.” On a similar note William Butcher and Sarah Crozier show that “Verne’s understanding of Scotland and Scottish society went far deeper than has been appreciated to date.”59 In an article about nineteenth-century Scotland, Thompson points out that *Voyage à reculons en Angleterre et en Écosse* (*Backwards Journey to England and Scotland*) “reflects the writings of the Romantic period in France and the search for the exotic.” Butcher and Crozier insist, while commenting on *Les Indes noires* (*The Black Indies*), that nowhere “else in his 200 works does he demonstrate such detailed and accurate knowledge of his mother’s homeland [Scotland].” One infers through terms designating geographical belonging, like Scotland and France, that the arguments are operating in a critical environment that presumes a world divided along political boundaries as Verne himself imagined.

There have been similar in-depth studies that examine the extent to which Verne was invested in different political and territorial divisions of the world.60 This scholarship tries to understand, for instance, how Verne was “enamored with America and all things American”61 (35); how the geography of colonial India was marked by the presence of ‘savage unbridled nature’62; and how “Verne subtly aligns the geography of Central Africa with outer space in order to prepare his audience for their imminent, and allegorical, ‘departure’ into the realm of the outlandish” (109).63 If there is a geographical argument to be made about how Verne fictionalizes continents and countries, there is also another to be made about how literary cultures across the world64 perceive Verne differently. In Victorian Britain, one primarily read Verne as a “writer of juvenile literature”65 (Costello 16), which has contributed to keeping Verne from being regarded as a “literary” author across the English-speaking world.

The intention here is not to hold these studies up for criticism because they do not furnish the definition of space that this study furnishes. For my study, literature serves as a historical record of the evolving spatial preoccupations of its time, whose dynamics one can excavate through an analysis of its syntax, vocabulary and literary structures. In contrast, for these studies, it is important to analyze how Verne understands geography, and they are conducted in the awareness that for Verne geography meant describing countries and topographies. Butcher and Sarah Crozier, as well as Thompson, examine the effects of Verne’s travels to his “mother’s homeland” (Butcher and Sarah), to explain the image of Scotland
that emerges in the author’s work. When Verne traveled to his “mother’s homeland” and subsequently deployed that personal experience into his literature, he was engaging with the politically defined spatial entity of Scotland.

Thompson rightly points out the irony in Verne’s stand. On the one hand, “Verne regarded Scotland as being downtrodden by the English, linking the history of Scotland to his anti-British imperialist views,” and yet on the other hand he “sympathised with the view of Scotland founding its own colonies overseas and in Les Enfants du Capitaine Grant.” For us, this irony also displays that Verne’s political stand, his personal affinities, and his views toward colonialism and empire were all operating within a nineteenth-century political economy. Such theorizations of Verne’s literary journeys recognize Verne’s geographical engagement in terms of national identities and physical features. Further, they also account for ways in which late nineteenth-century geographers were tracing political and natural divisions. The latter quarter of the nineteenth century saw an explosion of scientific observations, experimentations and travels transmuting the world from a collection of faraway lands to knowable entities that one could access through books, journals and magazines, and discuss in schools and bourgeois living rooms as verifiable facts.

Just as writers like Baudelaire were fetishizing the streets of Paris, recording their experiences of negotiating the constructed urban landscape, there were those like Verne whose writings represented the split subject of nineteenth-century going in search of locations not yet touched by mechanisms of modernity.

It is thus easy to see why Verne would write about the polar region. Such a geographical presentation of a faraway land also fulfilled Verne’s pedagogical objective of introducing the young readers to a geographical region they would not have access to otherwise. It would then also be natural for critics to discover, as Edmond-P. Gehu does, in a three-part series about Verne’s writings on polar regions, that Verne had ‘the soul of all the pioneers of the white desert.’ Verne ‘contemplated within himself, the gloomy hyperborean solitude; heard the voice of ice floes; pondered over the polar night […] He had the soul of all the pioneers of the white desert […] He put this soul into his writing.’

In presenting Verne’s ‘soul,’ it is almost as if Gehu illustrates how the end-of-the-century author seeks solitude, whether it be within the ‘soul’ or in the faraway, unknown, undiscovered lands, and then invests writing with this solitude. These faraway lands had to be inaccessible, the irreducible unknown geographical Other, to function as the site of expression for the collective fin de siècle literary melancholy.
That ‘ruins,’ locations of decrepitude and decay, would have a special place as a literary metaphor in Verne’s writing dominated by solitude is not surprising. It is interesting to note, firstly, that in this search for places of Otherness, ruins function as ‘the expression of a veritable poetics of space that reveals a geographical imagination where man, confronted with time, experiences the vulnerability of his life and work.’ Secondly, as if Verne’s work was not already highly geographical in nature, it is interesting that even the metaphors used to describe natural features are those associated with physical dilapidation that result from human beings’ interaction with space.

Moreover, this interplay between the text and geographical space does not just stop at one particular metaphor of ruins. As Unwin’s thorough analysis has shown, there is also a parallel relationship between the entirety of Extraordinary Voyages, that is, Verne’s “fictional and experimental journey – the ‘journey of writing’ […] and the actual physical ‘journeys’ that are so often the subject of his novels” (Journeys 3). Verne’s coverage of the entire world is a metaphor for understanding his writing. In a different context, Butcher has also discovered an interplay between geographical linearity and narrative linearity. This “linéomanie,” as Butcher calls it, refers to the simultaneous spatial as well as chronological linearity in Verne’s writings. Verne as the author need only follow the linearity of the river and the narrative linearity takes care of itself. The river, a character in its own right, provides plenty in terms of geographical information, and in terms of obstacles and opportunities of adventure, to fulfill the needs of the fictional content of the narrative. The straight line, in all its manifestations, represents the desire to ‘occupy the immense expanse of the physical or conceptual space.’

Thus far, in the attempt to show the different definitions of geography that emerge from critical works on Verne, apart from exemplifying the presentation of political and topographical divisions, I have also shown how Verne’s writings mirror the geography they represent. There is also reason to invert the relationship between Verne’s literary discoveries and the territorial expansion they depict. Verne plagiarized copiously and it is easy to see how “there is often a surprising boldness and openness about his re-use and reworking of other texts” (Unwin, Journeys 178). One can also see how in “proclaiming its derivative qualities” Verne’s writing style “challenges and subverts notions of originality” (Unwin, Journeys 178). Would not this copious plagiarism, practiced routinely in nineteenth-century literature, allow us to see how it is Verne’s textual colonization that gets reflected in his manner of depicting territorial expansion? Might one not say, that when Verne boldly presents as his own other people’s writing, he is laying out, at a textual level, the principle that guides his occupation of
geographies of Otherness; that it is through the template of appropriation practiced at the textual level that Verne refracts his understanding of geography?

To continue with the example of a river furnishing the linearity needed for the narrative: Verne had used the works of Jean Chaffanjon and Élisée Reclus to create the backdrop for his Venezuelan adventure, *Le Superbe Orénoque (The Mighty Orinoco)*, a novel that takes place along the river Orinoco. While relying on Chaffanjon and Reclus, Verne did cite his sources at times by name and did use appropriate quotation marks to ensure that the text of the source author stands out, but he also very liberally plagiarized entire chunks of text. At other times, Verne extrapolated, orienting geographical data from Chaffanjon’s writings toward the needs of his fictional narrative: increasing the number of inhabitants, or making a village seem more somber than what Chaffanjon’s text furnished (Dupuy “Superbe Orénoque de Jules Verne”). In other words, Verne’s appropriation of texts, his manner of adapting textual information to suit the disposition of his narrative, could also be seen here as the dominant template that determines how he appropriates geography. The world he presents can only appear as colonized because it results from textual colonization. Of course, in hypothesizing about textual colonization as the dominant principle, I am only making a rhetorical point to display how existing studies have opened up numerous possibilities of research about Verne’s association with geography.

How physical structures are fictionalized, and how the narrative and the geography mirror each other’s structures are certainly important questions to be dealt with. The question of Verne’s geographical sources in particular is inextricably linked to the historical context that was providing access to newer places. While fast-growing research was making it possible for Verne to set up his adventures in newer territories, the literary conventions of his times allowed him to own the geographical information without citing those like Louis Figuier, Jean Chaffanjon and Élisée Reclus as the sources for his writings. An engaged discussion of these questions shows how geography is inextricably linked to all forms of research about Verne. Given Verne’s popularity, one can be sure there is a lot more to come.

The definition of space and spatiality that serves as the backdrop for these analyses accepts as given the broad continuities in Verne’s understanding of geography and modernity’s spatial rationalization. The crucial difference is that Verne very consciously foregrounded geography, whereas for his critical reception, with a few exceptions, the excessive geographical details have slipped into the backdrop, belying their status as Verne’s principal preoccupation, a part of his writing style and a literary innovation. They have become stabilized within
definitions that Verne himself was borrowing from the nationalist colonial outlook of the discipline. It is the literary result of these broad methodological continuities between these secondary sources of geographical knowledge on the one hand, and Verne’s work on the other, that needs a deeper examination. Verne’s articulation of geography superimposes imperial notions of identity and nation building onto colonies and glosses over alternative geographical conceptions.

A few notable studies have read Verne within emerging paradigms of geography. Dupuy’s engagement with Verne’s geography extends over two monographs and several scholarly articles, many of which have already figured in discussions above. How to understand better Verne’s deliberate usage of geography is the question that undergirds Dupuy’s extensive examinations. For instance, in the monograph *En relisant Jules Verne* (*Rereading Jules Verne*), Dupuy assumes the ‘point of view of a geographer,’ and analyzes different notions of space and time (18) in Verne’s work. *Voyage au centre de la Terre* (*Journey to the Center of the Earth*), is not only a journey into the entrails of the planet but also a way of understanding Earth’s history and evolution over time as recounted by the various geological layers. Time in this equation refers to both the time taken for the journey as well as a historical reference that evokes the various stages of Earth’s evolution.

While not claiming that Verne was a geographer, Dupuy nonetheless identifies geographical and ecological preoccupations in Verne’s work to argue that the nineteenth-century author was much ahead of his times. A century before our current pressing concerns about the relationship between human beings and their surroundings, Verne, according to Dupuy, was already displaying a deep awareness about such questions (*En relisant* 102). For instance, Dupuy reads *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* as a ‘magnificent ecological metaphor’ and places analyses of the novel within the transdisciplinary stance of human ecology. Nemo’s surroundings offer him shelter while he protects them from exploitation and abuse. This coexistence serves as an ecological metaphor for a thought process much ahead of its times (*En relisant* 126). It shows us how Verne’s work was making a case for reasonable use of resources that respects nature.

Dao Humau also discovers a ‘new social geography’ in the context of Nemo’s society and highlights the presence of a ‘coherent geographical space in osmosis with nature.’ Through this social geography, Humeau articulates geography as distinct from nature and raises questions that help understand the relationship between spatial arrangement and human beings. However, given its limited scope, this short study does not go beyond making a brief presentation of ‘some of the geographical dimensions in Verne’s work.’ One of the questions
that Dao Humeau poses is about how Verne’s work ‘underlines the subtle differences between’ determinism and possibilism. While analyzing Verne’s *La Maison à vapeur* (*The Steam House*), Frédéric Landy debates a similar question. Landy comments on the colonial dimension of Verne’s work to discover a possibilist geographical outlook underlying which is the belief of human beings’ power and their ‘progressive mastery over natural forces.’ This outlook corresponds to Verne’s larger belief that ‘human societies are capable of dominating the most extreme of natural surroundings.’

These readings have quite rightly made Verne’s engagement with geography their subject matter. In addition to showing how Verne reflects the preoccupation of modern geography, they have made a strong case for a deeper investigation of the relationship between human beings and their surroundings. I shall show how analyzing representations of this geography further opens up a complicity between Verne’s outlook – invested in spatial rationalization – and the colonial project, which was also intent on flattening the globe out for easier imperial and capitalist expansion. Unlike some of the readings above, what follows takes a less sympathetic view of Verne’s perception of the world. The cartography of Verne’s globe, even as it privileged swift movement – propelled by the growing availability of an imperial infrastructure – also created new social relationships and political hierarchies. This geography is definitely more than a simplistic description of natural locales.

**Reading Verne’s Geographies**

*Cinq semaines en ballon* (*Five Weeks in a Balloon*), the very first of the *Extraordinary Voyages*, was also where Verne tested for the very first time detailed descriptions as the defining narrative tool that would dominate the rest of his writing. This novel, which recounts the westward journey across Africa of three Englishmen, was based on real-life expeditions along the Zambezi river, the Kalahari and Sahara deserts. Verne read about these expeditions in research journals and reviews such as *L’Année Géographique* (*Geographical Year*) to source material for his novel. Such was the importance and the influence of geography as a discipline in Verne’s writing that figures of scientific authority exhibit traits proper to a geographer. As Dr. Samuel Fergusson travels across Africa in *Cinq semaines en ballon*, he records the features of the places he is crossing, just as a geographer would.

That Fergusson, in his ethical attitude toward nature and planet, and through his criticism of the plundering ways of Kennedy, his traveling companion, might
be acting as Verne’s alter ego, is not lost on the informed reader. More importantly, Fergusson embodies exactly the kind of geographical expert whose writings become the source of Verne’s literature. Verne’s character records the kind of geographical information that the author will use as source information for this character to record. Verne is the mediating conduit who participates in a self-fulfilling textual loop that displays the process of writing wherein the world is contained in the text that contains the world.

To imagine Fergusson as Verne’s reflection one has to look for literary clues. But Verne is also very consciously inserting his presence within the literary spatial rationalization via one of his favored tools: maps, which “emphasize their complex relations to his texts in support of the spatial imaginaries of his heroes’ adventures” (Harpold 19). In *Voyages et aventures du capitaine Hatteras* (*Voyages and Adventures of Captain Hatteras*), the reader discovers a map drafted by someone named Jules Verne. Is this Jules Verne a part of the fictive world, or does it refer to Jules Verne the author of the *Extraordinary Voyages*? There is a “calculated interleaving of fictional and nonfictional realms – ‘Jules Verne,’ the expedition’s cartographer, doubles ‘Jules Verne,’ the author” (Harpold 21). For the purposes of my study this interleaving raises important questions about the world’s presentation within the textual realm. While Harpold presents this “interleaving” as homologous with the way this fictional map incorporates real-world spaces along with fictive imagined spaces, for me this also presents a world whose contours are already prefigured within a closed and predictable geometry. Verne the author imagines Verne the map-drafter who charts out spaces that Verne the author incorporates in his narrative. If by “stepping outside of the diegetic process [...] Verne deliberately draws attention to the literary framework,” then this play with the image of the hidden geographer is certainly to be read as drawing attention to the process of imagining geography. The geography of *Extraordinary Voyages* is a self-fulfilling prophecy whose fictional coordinates are prefigured in the mathematical principles that lay at the basis of Jules Verne’s (both as author and the mapmaker) map-based rationalizing knowledge. None of these two Jules Verne figure as active characters in the narrative. Yet, it is their geographical eye that furnishes the backdrop for the fictional narrative where modernity’s abstraction of the world renders it coherent, homogenous, and a textually representable physical terrain. This abstraction glosses over the differences and the accompanying global inequality inherent to this spatial abstraction.

If writing about the elsewhere was somehow linked to finding subliminal answers about the split nineteenth-century subject, then, what does one make of Verne, fusing himself with his fictional characters in a text representing an elsewhere?
These are characters who, with information supplied by Verne, communicate this elsewhere within the text, such that Verne is both within and outside the diegetic process. Answer to this rhetorical question is outside the purview of this current study. However, the readings that follow will help better situate Verne’s literature within the context of an imperial system that imposed uniformity of local, national and global political divisions. These analyses, that show modernity taking aesthetic forms in Verne’s literary rendition of spatiality, will also, hopefully, ensure that all debates that reckon with the relationship between the elsewhere and the author inhabiting the end of the nineteenth century, have to engage necessarily with spatial abstraction and the urban form it takes. In addition, the discussions that follow will reinforce arguments by scholars interested in analyzing the nineteenth-century author’s need for writing about an elsewhere, and the textual representations that this elsewhere assumes. I am also hoping that these close textual analyses will bolster the work of scholars like Richard Phillips and Indra Mukhopadhyay who give primacy to the reader and discover in Verne’s work an anti-imperialist stance. They read Verne’s work as a “site of resistance” (Phillips 137) and identify in it a “literary alternative to colonial historiography” (Mukhopadhyay 118).

Rounding up the World

The discussion that follows not only reinforces the important role that Verne’s titles play but is also a testament to the perception of space under modernity. This reading serves as a specific example of how the textual structures and vocabulary betray Verne’s rationalization of geography. To look closely, the title of the novel under discussion is *Le Tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours* (translated as *Around the World in Eighty Days*). It is a title centered literally on the *world*. The word *monde* – French for *world* – falls at the center of the three-part, seven-word French title. The other two parts, *Le tour du* and *en quatre-vingts jours*, encapsulate *monde* and summarize within themselves how the novel envisages the world. The world, it is to be noted, is *le monde*. The connotations of this definite article go beyond its grammatical function of presenting the unique physical reality of *le monde*. It tells us that the novel visualizes the world solely from the point of view of its geographical space, and secondly, it introduces us to a conception of the world as being one that does not allow for plurality and forecloses the existence of multiplicity. This “world,” as the novel proves, is not a world of cultures, of languages. It is one where all markers of plurality get incorporated within, defined by, and subjugated to, the expanse of physical space.
The French word *tour* encapsulates within it the idea of both a measurement of a circular body and a movement around a circular body. When the title talks about a “tour” of the world, it presents not only a world that one circles around in a matter of eighty days but also a world that is measurable in eighty days. *Tour* is a unit of measurement quantifying and capturing the world. The number eighty stands in clear contrast and opposition to the unitary aspect endowed to the space of this world. This number miniaturizes further the contours of the world by assigning a finite figure to the project. Since it is in traversing only the physical expanse of the world that one completes the journey in eighty days, *quatre-vingts* reinforces the presentation of the world solely as a physical reality defined by its geographical spread.

It is also important to point out that the idea of going “around” the world tells, first, of an agglomeration of technological and scientific advances that allowed the world to be measured and mapped; and, second, of a synchronization of scientific accomplishments that made possible a feat demanding dominance over land and water. Presenting a world of technological advances, the novel’s title ties in closely with the explosion of technological inventions at the end of nineteenth century and instantly necessitates a look at the influence of these advances. Contrasting the spatially defined unitary world against the carefully arrived at sum of eighty days speaks of space quantifiable in measures of time.

It is such a quantifiable world that a mathematical Fogg, himself known for his exactitude and precision, sets out to traverse. Suvin points out that Fogg is the very embodiment of the novel. “Fogg of Anglo-Saxon coolness and chronometric precision in traversing time and space” reminds us that “Verne’s protagonists are passionate incarnations of the story’s theme” (61). Only an eccentric such as Fogg could have traversed the planet in the given time and only someone named Passepartout, whose very name suggests *passeport* (the French word for passport), connoting international mobility, could have accompanied Fog in his quest to cross borders. Need one be reminded that in French, *passepartout* literally means a master key that opens every lock?

The combination of these near polar opposites, where Fogg’s sometimes purposeful indifference is contrasted with Passepartout’s near intrusive interest in the local, brings together “the two halves of man.” This combination of two halves is also conjoined in their other identity as colonizers, such that both the Englishman and his French servant go around the world reinscribing its definitions in parameters of colonization.
This becomes clearer in Passepartout’s conversation with Fix in the following exchange. In his attempts to ascertain the exact location of India, Passepartout divulges the computing matrix used to reckon with spatial alterity:

– Assez loin, répondit l’agent. Il vous faut encore une dizaine de jours de mer.
– Et où prenez-vous Bombay ?
– Dans l’Inde.
– En Asie ?
– Naturellement.
– Diable !

[...]
– Mon bec de gaz que j’ai oublié d’éteindre et qui brûle à mon compte. Or, j’ai calculé que j’en avais pour deux shillings par vingt-quatre heures, juste six pence de plus que je ne gagne, et vous comprenez que pour peu que le voyage se prolonge … (51-2)

[‘Is Bombay very far?’ asked Passepartout.
‘Quite far. About ten days away by sea.’
‘And where do you find Bombay?’
‘In India.’
‘Which is in Asia?’
‘Of course
Good Lord!’

[...]
‘My gas burner. I forgot to turn it off, and so have to pay the bill myself. I’ve worked out that it’s costing me 2s. every 24 hours, or 6d. more than I earn. So it’s easy to calculate that if the journey goes on for any length of time …’ (36-7)]

Interrogation regarding the distance to Bombay, the question about Bombay’s location, and finally the doubt about India, are queries that, while supposedly displaying Passepartout’s ignorance, reiterate many times over the instability of their destination – the colony of India. This dialogue literally raises questions about India’s existence. Passepartout’s ultimate concern for a few shillings over the colony’s existence gives away the colony’s triviality. This calculation revolving around a gas burner, combined with the reduction of India to the urban center
of Bombay, suggests the importance of the role of money and urban centers in this vision. What defines and sustains the vision of these distant, undefined locales of Otherness is the calculative concerns. This operation of rationalizing alterity, minimizing it to known coordinates, becomes clearer through the descriptions of how the travelers move through the British colony of India.

**Capital Repetitions: Monghir**

In what follows, I shall show how the novel grapples with the unknown landscape of the Indian subcontinent, giving us the beginnings of the formation of the colonial landscape. In discovering how industry invades the local landscape and practice, I will prepare the scaffolding for a discussion about its role in reinforcing the presentation of the local as savage. As the travelers’ train cuts across the Gangetic plane from Benaras to Calcutta, the description of Bihar from within a train compartment privileges a technologically advanced perspective. Apart from the ready cliché of technology working the raw, indigenous land, corresponding to the rapid movement of the train, the description accumulates other numerous details typifying the quintessential fetish objects associated with the presentation of the subcontinent, especially the particular attention paid to Hindu spirituality. With the holy city of Banaras and the “eaux consacrées” [‘sacred water’] of the river Ganga as the backdrop, the peppering of names of Hindu divinities completes the perfect ensemble for the pious to live in. This landscape is synonymous with the religion of its inhabitants.

The two quotations that follow, both part of the same description, register the change in the paradigm that defines space. Of the binary opposition in the description – the train against untamed nature – the former is gaining in force. Conscious of the power of technology and its dominating relationship with the metamorphosing landscape, the description exploits all these elements by bringing them together in a hypothetical question that reiterates the power equation:

Mais de quel œil Brahma, Shiva et Whishnou devaient-ils considérer cette Inde, maintenant ‘britannisée’, lorsque quelque steam-boat passait en hennissant et troublait les eaux consacrées du Gange, effarouchant les mouettes qui volaient à sa surface, les tortues qui pullulaient sur ses bords, et les dévots étendus au long de ses rives! (107)

[But what must Brahma, Shiva, and Vishnu have thought of this India, now ‘Britannicized’, when some steamboat passed on the Ganges: neighing, churning up the sacred waters, and frightening the seagulls]
skimming over the surface, the tortoises swarming over its banks, and the devout stretched out along its shores. (74)]

Establishing the historical change, “cette Inde” [‘this India’] as it stands in its present state brings to light another India, by default an earlier India not “britannisée” [‘Britannicized’], a change of state marked by the presence of the steamboat. As the passing train records a moment of transition, the Hindu trinity (Brahma, Shiva, and Vishnu) associated with the earlier India is reduced to helplessness, and the steamboat becomes a historical milestone that records the passage to the mechanical age. The extent to which its movement over water can disturb the seagulls, the tortoises and the devotees all at the same time communicates the spread of the steamboat’s power and the power the state of being Britannicized stands for.

With this, for the very first time in the description, a challenge to the native landscape is alluded to and this scene of gentle disturbance of the quaint scenario that remains literally over the surface – it troubles the waters (“troublait les eaux” [‘churning up the sacred waters’]) – changes to a more aggressive and an overt challenge to the local scenery. The following quotation reveals the ease with which the train overpowers the geography of the colony of India:

Tout ce panorama défila comme un éclair, et souvent un nuage de vapeur blanche en cachait les détails. À peine les voyageurs purent-ils entrevoir le fort de Chunar, à vingt milles au sud-est de Bénarès, ancienne forteresse des rajahs du Béhar, Ghazipur et ses importantes fabriques d’eau de rose, le tombeau de Lord Cornwallis qui s’élève sur la rive gauche du Gange, la ville fortifiée de Buxar, Patna, grande cité industrielle et commerçante, où se tient le principal marché d’opium de l’Inde, Monghir, ville plus qu’européenne, anglaise comme Manchester ou Birmingham, renommée pour ses fonderies de fer, ses fabriques de tailanderie et d’armes blanches et dont les hautes cheminées encrassaient d’une fumée noire le ciel de Brahma, – un véritable coup de poing dans le pays du rêve! (107)

[This whole panorama flew past like a flash, although often a cloud of white steam masked the details. The travelers hardly saw the fort of Chunar, twenty miles south-east of Benares; nor the ancient fortress of the rajahs of Bihar; Ghazipur with its important rosewater factories;]
Lord Cornwallis’s Tomb, which stands on the left bank of the Ganges; the fortified town of Buxar; and the large industrial and business city of Patna, where the principal opium market in India is held. They could hardly glimpse Monghyr, a town which is more than European, being as British as Manchester or Birmingham, renowned for its iron foundries and its factories for edge tools and knives, and whose tall chimneys choked the sky of Brahma with their black smoke – a veritable punch delivered to the land of dreams! (74)"

The two extremes of the passage allow for discussion on the nature and importance of the visual in the strengthening of industry. As the steam power provides locomotion to the train, it is muddying up the view (“un nuage de vapeur blanche en cachait les détails” ['cloud of white steam masked the details']). Toward the end, this view has been completely taken over by the violence of the factory smoke: “les hautes cheminées encrassaient d’une fumée noire le ciel de Brahma – un véritable coup de poing dans le pays du rêve!” ['tall chimneys choked the sky of Brahma with their black smoke – a veritable punch delivered to the land of dreams!'].

As the scene fluctuates between the locales and industry, one becomes conscious of the priority given to sight. Be it the movement of the water, a description of the tortoises (“les tortues qui pullulaient” ['the tortoises swarming']) or the people (“devots étendus” ['the devout stretched out']), the presentation, detailed from behind a train window, prepares for the eventual challenge industry holds out to the traditional organization of the landscape in the novel. Initially presented visually, it is a landscape described solely from the point of view of the religious everyday practices of the inhabitants. They are living in a contourless space, undefined by any capital-based markers or political boundaries. Moving from a clear view of the inhabitants to a view hampered by the vapor of the train, the advancing description, as if to demonstrate the power of industry it presents, progressively cedes that place to industry.

A sky already covered by the overreaching chimneys is completely dominated by the smoke emanating from them. While speaking volumes about the importance of the privileged human faculty of sight in the advancement of industry, it demonstrates how the industry obscures sight itself, such that it only makes allowance for a view conducive to its own growth.

One can better perceive this aggression in the interplay between the Hindu divinity, Brahma, and the factories. It is a moment of spatial transition in which
the latter muscle their way in, destroying the earlier serenity and introducing violence into the landscape. Although identified as “le maître suprême des prêtres et des législateurs” ['the supreme master of the priests and legislators'] (107; 73), Brahma is better known as the creator of the universe in Hindu mythology. In receiving “un coup de poing” ['a punch'], Brahma’s sky is forever transformed by the chimney smoke, and with it the text signals an alternate conceptualization of the universe, aligned to the matrix of these factories. The world of the creator is forever changed.

As a precursor to the impending cartographic move of reconfiguration, this unveils a new space, scaled by and for the proliferation of capital. Lefebvre states: “A further important aspect of spaces of this kind is their increasingly pronounced visual character. They are made with the visible in mind: the visibility of people and things, of spaces and of whatever is contained in them” (Production 75). With the eye as the primary tool of delineation, this space – currently devoid of any territorial signs – is to be mapped for the growth of industry. From Passepartout’s worries of a few shillings to an aggressive industry, these are all strategies of abstraction that empty space of its qualitative characteristics, reducing it to universally quantifiable coordinates. Hampered visibility is a symptom underscoring the increasing transparency of this evolving space, which in turn ignores the varied human experience inhabiting it. “Sight and seeing,” in Lefebvre’s words, “have turned into a trap: the means whereby, in social space, diversity may be simulated and a travesty of enlightenment and intelligibility ensconced under the sign of transparency” (75-6).

As the party traverses the colony of India, the description is associated with the reach of the railway line, and the regions served are directly implicated within the colonial economy. With factories as its points of reference, the movement of the train evokes the movement of the colonial industry, recording the milestones of its economic prosperity as it also tries to grapple with spatial alterity. In this movement of the adventurers, one perceives a distinct opposition between the aggressive industry and a quaint local landscape. As a precursor to the impending cartographic reconfiguration, Monghir is only an example of this new space, scaled by and for proliferating capital. This aggressive industry is only one of the many strategies of abstraction that empty out space of its qualitative characteristics reducing it to universally quantifiable coordinates.

For the moment, I turn to another strategy of annihilation of social spaces: repetitious spaces. Monghir, with foundries and factories as its sole coordinates, also assumes the identity of a British city – a self-multiplying
space in the novel, which in its many appearances demonstrates the transparency of world space. Apart from the unfolding of the city as a comparison of Manchester and Birmingham, since what makes this city of Monghir in the Indian subcontinent English (“anglaise”) is its industrial nature, one also infers the relationship of synonymity that exists between being English and being industrial, which forces us to consider the interdependence between colonialism and capitalism. To understand this connection, a further exploration of Monghir’s identification as a colonial city (“ville”) and that which makes it a city is necessary.

At a time when “the geographical description of any country consists of presenting and describing the regions that make it up,” of describing the “natural ‘givens’” (Ross “Rimbaud” 51-52), Monghir exists solely as a colonial space. In homogenizing the colonial world and making it one with the colonizer’s world through technological coordinates, the alterity has most definitely been negated. Monghir cannot even exist as a natural “given,” which would allow it a unique existence in India. It now exists as a replication of the colonizer. Wiped clean is the old world where borders designated difference and prevented incursions.

Crossing borders functions as the mainstay of this novel about free movement across the world, where the existence of international frontiers furnishes the very basis of the adventure. Despite the protestations of the card players with whom he has struck the wager, and who assure Fogg of believing his word of a gentleman, Fogg promises to come back with visas stamped on his passport (30; 24). Stamped passports that verify travel across borders testify to their importance in this adventure. Given the ease with which the travelers can go around the world also paradoxically prepares the ground for theorizing the ineffectiveness of these borders. What emerges when Monghir exists as one of many similar entities is the obvious corollary it produces of borders in crisis. While they do maintain the illusion of separation, the similarity between locations across the world constitutes these borders as impossible entities. Even before the journey from London began, one could already predict what Monghir – existing elsewhere – held. If the technology-based paradigm was to display Monghir as a reflection of Birmingham and Manchester, the British consul at Suez, right before Fogg was to enter India, was already putting a question mark on the validity of borders and their mechanisms. In this meeting, the consul affirms to Fogg that passports and visas are unnecessary (46; 33). Whereas this insistently reminds readers of the spread of imperialist hegemony, figuring Egypt as another outpost of British colonialism, it also
preemptively presents the colonized world as indistinct from that of the colonizers. No visas and passports are needed in a world where technologically triggered replication holds sway and locations are indistinguishable from each other. As the adventurers will soon discover, Monghir has been absorbed into the body of the colonial project. It has become a part of what the title of the novel had from its very outset predicted – the singular *le monde*. Since the world has been rendered the same all over – a replication of British counties – the borders serve no purpose.

In today’s fast-globalizing world, we are trying to understand how the global economic structure “invites compliance from states, corporations, and other organizations.” One can see that “state actions and the global economy are causing one another”; that is, they are complicit in each other’s existence. The mathematical calculations in *Le Tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours* breaking down the distinctions between Birmingham and Monghir, Europe and Asia, empire and colony in favor of the colonial economy were already making these borders obsolete. They are not frontiers to alterity but serve as facile conduits to sameness.

Or, are these borders obsolete? Instead of defining the inhabitants of India and other colonies, they now facilitate unhindered movement for the colonizers. Their existence lies in furthering the colonizing mission. They do not limit boundaries but are now themselves limited to the colonial design. With technology as the locus, this is both a moment of change in spatial use as well as a moment of reinscription of the role of boundaries. Their submission has now given them a unidirectional aspect and their purpose lies in allowing Fogg to pass through India in order to validate his travels as well as to lock the native in for the discovery and the perusal of the colonizer. However, this paradigm where ineffective borders serve as exotic containers cannot function without simultaneous consequences for the larger definition of space. Monghir remains only a symptom of the construct that has taken over this interconnected world, whose regions are progressively becoming alike as the world is shrinking.

This novel that literally takes the readers through the vast British Empire provides numerous examples of the work of this power on colonial spatiality, by showing how boundaries are created and how colonial essences are first constructed, then assigned and then emptied out and replaced by the means of capitalistic structures. Be it Singapore, Bombay, Calcutta, Yokohama or Hong Kong – cities in the novel are deployed as colonial recreations. Presented solely using structures of commerce and a colonial temporality, they all adequately
model the prevalent pattern of representing alternate spatial identity during this voyage. In Harvey’s words, this post-1850 world is one where the “world’s spaces were deterritorialized, stripped of their preceding significations, and then reterritorialized according to the convenience of colonial and imperial administration” (“Condition” 264).

Until this point, I have touched upon the interweaving influences of temporal and spatial components onto colonial territories that rearrange these alterities into an infrastructure necessary for the accumulation of capital. Moving through unknown territories, at times even in violation of local conventions, Fogg’s forays are never transgressions, for they always anticipate, and indeed actively participate in, the creation of a spatial “sameness” through the operations of a capital-induced colonialism. To explore this space means accepting a model of production that not only allows uniquely self-profiting transactions but also completely ignores all ideas of alternate subjectivity. In this paradigm, spatial entities like international borders function more as spatial tools in colonial service, resulting, as I have been trying to argue, in a complete effacement of the Other. To experience this space means constantly living at the cost of the Other, to find validation by inserting the self into emptied-out definitions of the Other.

In what follows I look at the presentation of Hong Kong as an illustration of how colonial cities are formed with capitalism as the operating force. This will allow appreciating how the seemingly innocuous reference to the opium market makes Monghir part of a larger constellation of geographically dispersed cities, all implicated in an opium economy, interconnected as parts of a machinery. It helps establish colonial cities under nascent capitalism as abstracted spaces, globally homogenized and presented with industrial markers that render them universally similar. They are set in place with the sole objective of increasing colonial capital. The reading records the novel rearticulating the indigenous landscape into a colonially familiar spatiality.
Section 2. Opium Silence and Nineteenth-Century French Literature

L’opium agrandit ce qui n’a pas de bornes,
Allonge l’illimité,
Approfondit le temps, creuse la volupté,
Et de plaisirs noirs et mornes
Remplit l’âme au-delà de sa capacité.

—“Le Poison,” Baudelaire96

[Opium extends that which has no bounds
Stretches the limitless
Deepens time, hollows out delight
And pours dark and mournful pleasures
To fill up the soul beyond its measure

—“Poison,” Baudelaire97]

Baudelaire’s writings present numerous instances of his experiences with opium. His fascination for the drug is more than evident in his much-quoted three-hundred-page volume, Les Paradis artificiels: Opium et haschisch (Artificial Paradises: Opium and Hashish, 1860). The extent of his addiction was such that opium and alcohol would cause his eventual financial ruin later in life. Much earlier though, in 1841, when he was around twenty years old, his family decided to send him on a voyage to the city of Calcutta in India, hoping to cure him of his wayward lifestyle.98 Baudelaire did start the journey, but right before reaching India, he took a boat back to France from the Indian-Ocean island of Mauritius. Had Baudelaire continued, he would have discovered that Calcutta was where the English colonizers had set up the nerve center of their opium trade. Baudelaire’s family was, ironically, sending him to the very colonial roots of his addiction and subsequent ruin. Baudelaire’s journey, in having opium as one of its instigators and failing to reach its colonial destination, is symptomatic of most nineteenth-century French literature. Despite the fact that opium trade “had become the largest commerce of its kind in a single commodity in the world,”99 this literature records opium’s presence without recognizing the capitalist colonization it imposed on India and China for the drug’s production and transportation.
The epigraph above is from Baudelaire's four-stanza poem titled “Poison,” where love is presented as a poison more potent than opium. It is neither the thematic of love, nor the vocabulary of death and despair (“creuse” ['hollows’]; “noirs” ['dark’]; and “morne” ['mournful’]) that interests me. Rather, I am interested in the discourse on an opium space that this poem displays. This stanza is a perfect example of the absence in nineteenth-century French literature of opium’s pivotal colonizing role.

Based on Baudelaire’s treatment of opium with no references to a colonized Hong Kong or Calcutta, one would have no reason to probe its link with these cities. In fact, much like Calcutta, Hong Kong too was central to transporting opium. In 1842, just a year after Baudelaire’s failed journey to India, Great Britain won what is famously known as the First Opium War against China. Opium, as the center of the three-word term – “The Opium War” – designates the cause of the conflict as well as its centrality to the interconnected global economy that the drug created. After their victory, not only had the British won the right to sell opium in China, but with China’s concession of the island of Hong Kong the British Empire had also attained the logistical maritime means of making the drug a commercial success. The East India Company cultivated in India the drug destined for China, which led to opium becoming the central link between disparate geographies. Beyond China, Hong Kong, France and Great Britain, the effects of opium were felt across the globe as it turned around the economy of the colony of India and became the capitalist fuel for imperial colonial expansion.

Even as opium acquired new politicoeconomic significations, no longer remaining just a signifier for the hallucinatory drug, Verne’s novel, *Around the World in Eighty Days* effaced any overt mention of opium’s centrality to global interconnections. Indeed, by disguising its presence Verne’s writing sanitized opium’s effects to make it more palatable, or, as Baudelaire would have us believe – less of a poison.

Yet, as hard as it might try to occlude colonialism, Baudelaire’s poetry nonetheless betrays the changing face of spatial discourse. When the poem urges us to investigate spatialities and temporalities of interconnectedness that have opium as their center, it is calling for an analysis of this ever-expanding new space. Of course, one cannot take literally the powers of opium to stretch spatial and temporal boundaries (“agrandit” ['extends’]; “allonge” ['stretches’]; “bornes” ['bounds’]; “illimité” ['limitless’]). Nonetheless, the poem is a site of articulation, associated with opium, that contains within it definitions of temporal and spatial boundaries as well as challenges to the limits of these definitions.
This poem prepares the ground for an entire discourse that demands a closer scrutiny of opium’s presence and investment in history and the formation of global spatiality. The poem stretches space and history, evoking opium’s presence in a network of influences to help us understand the dynamics that generate colonial space. It helps understand how opium is both a product of as well as an instigator of significant changes in colonial space and the history of India and China, and how Baudelaire as a consumer of opium creates the demand for the drug in the colonial metropolis. The poem, when read alongside Baudelaire’s fascination for the drug, contextualizes opium’s historical presence in France and traces the invisible route that led it from Calcutta to Hong Kong to Europe. Most importantly, it helps understand the transformation that opium, as a colonial-capitalist element, brought about in our spatial grammar.

Baudelaire presents opium without its supporting colonial infrastructure. On the other hand, the phlegmatic hero Phileas Fogg, in his forays from London to Bombay to Calcutta to Singapore to Shanghai, relies on a colonial infrastructure established by and for the opium economy, but never takes stock of opium as the driving force behind this infrastructure. By the term “opium silence,” I intend to show how, through its absence, opium operates surreptitiously at an intersection of financial and colonial forces. Jules Verne’s literature is implicated in the opium-driven nascent capitalist economy that reconfigured indigenous landscape into universally homogenized urban spaces such that they had to imperatively resemble colonial entities. Imperatively, so that English opium might pass unnoticed through this colonial economy. Much like the opium that was initially smuggled into China, an opium apparatus forms the clandestine backdrop of such nineteenth-century French literature. A juxtaposition of opium’s historical economic strength with its paradoxical absence in literature allows us to understand the reasons for this silence and its larger implications for colonial subjectivity.

Verne’s spaces and the spatial arrangements are all part of the changing spatial grammar that Verne was actively transporting into his literary works. It is not just about showing how the details and descriptions that the author so meticulously collected about countries and landscape find a place in his work. It is also about showing how spatial rationalization and homogenization, the mainstay of the changing discipline of geography, became the very guiding principles of Verne’s spatial engagements. A French author writing the story of an
Englishman who traverses global colonial-economic space speaks to the kind of cross-national interconnections in which the local and the global are intertwined and constitute each other.

Colonizing Hong Kong

The following is a detailed reading of Hong Kong’s description. The centrality of Hong Kong’s role in the novel’s colonial opium economy shall become self-evident in this analysis. It is important to minutely parse Hong Kong’s presentation to establish how capital-induced colonial coordinates and the associated vocabulary have completely taken over the presentation of urban landscape. Reproducing itself, this space becomes the main motor of colonialism.

The quotation below enunciates Hong Kong’s “meaning” within a colonial geography that can only locate spatial coordinates associated with territorial expansion. Given the kind of geographical apparatus Verne was working with, it is not surprising to discover that all spatial details are invested in enhancing the city’s colonial character. Spatial details abound, but only those that connect this city to the colonial-capitalist power structure. Additionally, the only historical moment available in the description is the year 1842, the year when Hong Kong became a colonial possession. The spatial and temporal structures that mark the island’s geography are in themselves fictional creations, set into place by a colonizing vision that privileges only those temporal and spatial milestones that are consistent with its project of expansion. This blinkered vision exemplifies the matrix the novel deploys to render the world into a geography of abstraction.

Understanding Hong Kong’s portrayal in the novel as a colonial geography would facilitate the task of showing the island’s relevance to a colonially organized global narcotic economy. One never overtly mentions opium’s role in Hong Kong’s establishment. However, when, after the 1842 Opium War, it was responsible for Hong Kong’s creation, opium stood as an example of the larger financial apparatus in *Le Tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours*. The novel displays colonial capital abundantly without any elaboration of its acquisition. Exactly in the same manner as the island of Hong Kong is described using selective coordinates, so is the description of the world that Hong Kong participates in limited to the economic operation of the colonial empire. What are the implications for the definition of the colonized, and how the novel allows only a particular kind of colonized subject to be at the center of this geography? This is what I examine next.
While the first paragraph below is an example of what Michel Foucault calls a “voix sans corps” [‘body-less voice’] (discussed below), an absent narrative voice, the second is from Passepartout’s point of view. Together, they describe Passepartout’s impressions about Hong Kong as he disembarks on the island and perceives it as a rearticulation of other English cities:

Hong-Kong n’est qu’un îlot, dont le traité de Nanking, après la guerre de 1842, assura la possession à l’Angleterre. En quelques années, le génie colonisateur de la Grande-Bretagne y avait fondé une ville importante et crée un port, le port Victoria. Cette île est située à l’embouchure de la rivière de Canton, et soixante milles seulement la séparent de la cité portugaise de Macao, bâtie sur l’autre rive. Hong-Kong devait nécessairement vaincre Macao dans une lutte commerciale, et maintenant la plus grande partie du transit chinois s’opère par la ville anglaise. Des docks, des hôpitaux, des wharves, des entrepôts, une cathédrale gothique, un ‘government-house’, des rues macadamisées, tout ferait croire qu’une des cités commercantes des comtés de Kent ou de Surrey, traversant le sphéroïde terrestre, est venue ressortir en ce point de la Chine, presque à ses antipodes.

Passepartout, les mains dans les poches, se rendit donc vers le port Victoria, regardant les palanquins, les brouettes à voile, encore en faveur dans le Céleste Empire, et toute cette foule de Chinois, de Japonais et d’Européens, qui se pressait dans les rues. À peu de choses près, c’était encore Bombay, Calcutta ou Singapore, que le digne garçon retrouvait sur son parcours. Il y a ainsi comme une traînée de villes anglaises tout autour du monde. (139-40)

[Hong Kong is but a small island, which the Treaty of Nanking transferred to England after the war of 1842. Within a few years Great Britain’s genius for colonization had founded an important city there, and created a port, Victoria Harbour. The island is situated at the mouth of the Canton River, only 60 miles from the Portuguese city of Macao on the opposite shore. Hong Kong was bound to overtake Macao in a commercial battle, and now the majority of Chinese imports and exports pass through the English city. Docks, hospitals, wharves, godowns, a Gothic cathedral, a Government House, and surfaced roads – everything made you think that one of the many market]
towns in Kent or Surrey had passed right through the terrestrial sphere and popped out at this point in China, almost at the antipodes. Passepartout, hands in pockets, headed for Victoria Harbour, examining the palanquins, the wind-driven wheelbarrows still in use in the Celestial Empire, and the large crowds of Chinese, Japanese, and Europeans filling the streets. With a few exceptions, it was Bombay, Calcutta, or Singapore all over again, that the worthy fellow was finding on his route. There is a trail of English cities right round the world.\footnote{100}

The end of the quotation – “autour du monde” [‘round the world’] – distinctly reminds of the desire projected by the title of the novel, and talks about the space of the ‘world’ the cities conquer. As “villes anglaises” [‘English cities’] tell us – it is the cities that go around the world transporting the “trainée” [‘trail’] of Englishness.

Presented as a product of Great Britain’s “génie colonisateur” [‘genius for colonization’], the description depicts Hong Kong as a locus of an enumeration of constructions that remind of Great Britain and its commercial prowess in the counties of Kent or Surrey. Hong Kong’s definition above reaffirms its presence as another in the chain of colonial cities, and by acknowledging its position of mercantile superiority in the region, it also evokes a city’s necessary association with business for it to be a successful British city. This association is further reinforced by the commercial nature of the numerous spatial constructions (“port Victoria” [‘Victoria Harbour’]; “docks, des hôpitaux, des wharfs, des entrepôts” [‘docks, hospitals, wharves, godowns’]; “government-house” [‘Government House’]; “rues macadamisées” [‘surfaced roads’]). Additionally, references to a “lutte commerciale” [‘commercial battle’] and “transit chinois” [‘Chinese imports and exports’] only enrich this business-related semantic field.

Colonial essence condenses in structures related to capital and commerce, and multiplies itself through the spatial reproduction of cities. As reproduced spaces, cities also operate as active tools in the further propagation of this capital-infused spatiality through self-replication. They are empowered agents that transmit the commercial essence that made them. While Hong Kong itself is portrayed as under the command of, and as a carrier of, colonial identity, it is the generic city that emerges victorious. Hong Kong as the stake between two empires highlights its importance as a space of desire and extends its dimensions of a city much beyond its administrative boundaries. Being of a collectivity that circulates around the world stretches Hong Kong’s scope to the entire world:
a world already inscribed using the coordinates of urban space. The following sentence exemplifies the relative power of these commercial entities through the example of the counties of Kent and Surrey:

une des cités commerçantes des comtés de Kent ou de Surrey, traversant le sphéroïde terrestre, est venue ressortir en ce point de la Chine, presque à ses antipodes.

[one of the many market towns in Kent or Surrey had passed right through the terrestrial sphere and popped out at this point in China, almost at the antipodes.]

The combined usage of “traversant” [‘pass right through’] and “ressortir” [‘popped out’] accentuates the action of cutting through the globe to emerge at the “antipodes” [‘antipodes’] of the Earth, which incidentally is designated only using the physical expanse – “sphéroïde terrestre” [‘terrestrial sphere’] of the planet. Antipode articulates the ability of urban spaces to establish themselves at the two geographical extremes, showing their vast reach and power, and the extent of their growing spatial domination over the planet. The image of cities that can cut through to pop out on the other side of the planet communicates a veritable notion of geographies in movement propelled by capitalism in a controllable physical world. Their respective sentence positions also address the power equation: the cities are in an active subject position with the world as their object. Combined with the adventurers’ movement across the surface of land and water, the cities’ momentum establishes complete authority over Earth. There is a distinct parallel between the two movements, which goes beyond the obvious use of “autour du monde” [‘round the world’] for both the cities and the adventurers. It is the study of this other parallel movement that holds the key to understanding the adventurers’ voyage around the world. When this spatial “world tour” of urban spaces is described as already accomplished during Passepartout’s visit, it points to the fact that the spatial movement has preceded the adventurers: commercially propelled and long time in motion, these spaces have outrun the competitors in going around the world. In addition to enumerating constructions (docks, etc.) that represent colonial and business power in Verne’s work, this section also tries to establish the interrelationship between spatial entities. Verne’s world is a geography of colonial-capitalist spaces in movement that are carving out newer spatial hierarchies in the world according to changed coordinates.
As much as the above discussion highlights the power of urban spaces, it also shows how Passepartout and his fellow travelers follow a route set up by the very same commercial infrastructure used to maintain a stronghold over colonies. This infrastructure also ensures that cities from different parts of the world resemble each other: be it Hong Kong or Kent or Surrey, or even Bombay, Calcutta, or Singapore.

It is a world that is shrinking as the commercial infrastructure is gaining in expanse. At least, this is the contention that triggers the voyage at the center of the novel. Fogg, during a card game with his fellow club members, counters a claim about Earth being vast: “Elle l’était autrefois” [‘It used to be’] (22; 18), he contends – that Earth was vast in another time. As important as it is to take into consideration the two temporal references of a present and a juxtaposed past, even more significant is the question raised about the size of Earth. As Andrew Stuart rightly queries: “Comment, autrefois! Est-ce que la terre a diminué par hasard ?” [‘What d’you mean, ‘used to be’? Has the Earth suddenly got smaller by some chance?’, (23; 18).

Stuart’s skeptical interrogation about Earth’s size receives a reply in the positive and the reason for this shrinkage is attributed to the speed of travel that allows one to cover distances much faster. The geographical expanse is inversely proportional to the increasing velocity of travel. This speed of means of transport becomes the historical marker differentiating the “autrefois” [‘used to be’] of a larger Earth from the present. This temporal distinction with technology at its root is a recurrent trope in the novel and its prevalence becomes evident when Gauthier Ralph, another card player, joins his voice with Fogg’s:

La terre a diminué, puisqu’on la parcourt maintenant dix fois plus vite qu’il y a cent ans. (23)

[The Earth has shrunk because it can be covered ten times as quickly now as a hundred years ago. (18)]

The proportional logic – between the decreasing size and the increasing speed – crystallizes in the interrelation expressed between the increasing speed and the reduction of Earth’s dimensions. In this case, with the increasing speed “dix fois plus vite” [‘ten times as quickly’] as the only separation between the present and the past, the rate of velocity is literally a designator of history. What Ralph refers to is the significance of the new faster means of travel to a world contemporary to them, the infrastructure for which is being set up by the self-replicating
urban space. In fact, it is the establishment of the railway-network in the English colony of India that triggers Fogg’s journey. Following the publication in the *Morning Chronicle* of a hypothetical calculation claiming possible a trip around the world in eighty days, Fogg challenges the skepticism of his fellow card-playing club members and wagers half of his wealth to the project:

– En quatre-vingts jours seulement, dit Phileas Fogg.
– En effet, messieurs, ajouta John Sullivan, quatre-vingts jours, depuis que la section entre Rothal et Allahabad a été ouverte sur le ‘Great-Indian peninsular railway’, et voici le calcul établi par le *Morning Chronicle*. (23)

[‘Eighty days,’ interjected Fogg. ‘Yes indeed, good sirs,’ confirmed Sullivan. ‘Eighty days, now they’ve opened the section of the Great Indian Peninsular Railway from Rothal to Allahabad. This is the calculation done by the *Morning Chronicle*. (19)]

The simultaneity between the setting up of the infrastructure and the world’s shrinkage is clear. As a necessary precedent to the bet, the railroad is an example of colonial infrastructure as an essential precursor to the changing discourse of the planet. This is a moment of incorporating the world within a terminology of technology. The completion of the railways is the final piece of a global “meshwork” of dominated spaces.

The simultaneous conclusion of the railways and the beginning of the adventure around the world is not a coincidence. It is rather a predictable corollary for a journey that could potentially change the “meaning” of global space, imposing on it instead an essence that can be calculated. What the *Morning Chronicle* then presents through its calculations of the global distance is an example of dominated space. These calculations reduce the globe to an achievable number. In the novel, the colonial encounter with the Other is determined by the increasing role of the infrastructural “meshwork.” Hong Kong illustrates the dynamics of such a mapping process and a study of the articulation of its means of transportation uncovers a matrix deployed toward dominating not only the colonized but also other competing colonizers.

Already valorized many times over, the supremacy of the British Empire in the region takes on a mercantile character when Hong Kong is presumed victorious over Macao in a hypothetical commercial battle: “Hong-Kong devait nécessairement vaincre Macao dans une lutte commerciale” [‘Hong Kong was bound
to overtake Macao in a commercial battle’]. Having arrived first, the Portuguese were the ones to set up Macao – the oldest European port in China – in 1557. Eventually when the British did get to China, despite being the later entrants, they surpassed the other colonizers (Portuguese and the Dutch), “becoming the dominant European country trading with China” (Grasso 28).

Situating Hong Kong vis-à-vis Macao’s inadequacy and putting the two in a commercial conflict brings to the fore an entire colonial history, wherein Hong Kong is a reminder of Great Britain’s simultaneous victory over China and rival Portugal in a battle of territories. The distance of sixty miles offered by the Canton River between the two cities is more than just a physical separation. The waterway evokes the maritime prowess of Great Britain that navigated it into a position of advantage in the region.

For, during the Opium War the Chinese “military was no match for the steam powered ships and superior firepower of the British” (Grasso 38). Given that the very same waterway also propelled Britain to the position of commercial leader, it is little wonder that the infrastructure of Hong Kong is also replete with constructions that support this maritime movement: “des docks” ['docks']; “des wharfs” ['wharves']; “des entrepôts” ['godowns']. As a result, one sees the novel remarking that a majority of Chinese commerce transits through Hong Kong.

Serving as the foundation stone for the British colonial expedition, the river as separation aggrandizes the colonizer’s position. While the constructions serve to anchor Hong Kong into an image of the colonizer, this image is fixed into a state of perpetual greatness by the means of a “constructed” distance, which, as it becomes the basis of Hong Kong’s continued mercantile success, also serves to isolate Macao on the other bank of the river. This “other” side ['l’autre rive’] should also be understood as the other side of the prosperity the river signifies, and also, the humbled side of this commercial battle, not endowed with tools of maritime commerce.

While it might seem separated by a physical distance, Macao is inseparable from Hong Kong and its colonial greatness. Macao’s presence in inferiority is a necessary corollary for anchoring Hong Kong’s glorification in constructed structures. What Hong Kong and Macao in their hierarchy establish is the subservience of the local geography that has been carved to the demands of a commercially defined colonial essence.

The means of transport described in Hong Kong serve to draw a binary opposition. The association of nonmechanical palanquins and wind-driven wheelbarrows with an ancient name for China (“céleste empire” ['Celestial Empire']) that evokes divinity is clearly in contrast to modern infrastructure in Hong Kong, conducive to the movement of mechanized transport. This association
of temporal opposition of the means of transport simultaneously exoticaizes and
relegates to the past all that is nonmechanical and celebrates all that reinforces
Hong Kong in the hypothetical commercial battle. This preference for mecha-
nization stands as proof for Ralph’s (Fogg’s fellow card player’s) earlier stated
contention about the interrelation between Earth’s size and the changing face
of transportation. Additionally, it also displays how means of transportation are
the shaping mechanism of a new Earth. Not only means of displacement over
space that reduce travel time, they are also temporal milestones that document
the passage to a new Earth of reduced dimensions.

“[E]ncore en faveur” ['still in use'] crystallizes the temporal separation be-
tween the two kinds of transports. Where Hong Kong’s current commercial
prosperity is ascribed to British-type transport, “encore” ['still'] establishes a
chronology of superiority where manual labor predates and eventually cedes
place to the mechanical force – associated with the “génie colonisateur” ['genius
for colonization']. This is an ameliorative history, where the two oppositional
transports are designators of a past and a colonial present. As their host, Hong
Kong finds itself suspended in a state of anachronism; its landscape witnesses
the coexistence of two distinct moments of history on the same temporal plane
such that its presence becomes an excuse for the colonizers’ aggrandizement.
Alternatively, this is a dehistoricized Hong Kong, disengaged from its own his-
torical trajectory and in motion toward the colonizer’s temporal plane.

The amplification of nouns illustrates the colony’s dependence on the pro-
gress carried out by the colonizing genius. It is “Angleterre” ['England'] that
takes possession of Hong Kong designated by the diminutive “îlot” ['small is-
land']. But it is the subject of the second sentence, “Grande Bretagne” ['Great
Britain'] and its “colonial genius” that transform the “îlot” ['small island'] of
Hong Kong into an “île” ['island'] by establishing and creating an important city.

If Macao was indispensable to prove Hong Kong’s superiority, then Hong
Kong now serves to explain the power of Great Britain. From a small island,
Hong Kong is transformed into an island at the same time as England becomes
Great Britain. With the increase of the influence of colonial power, the physical
dimensions used to refer to the colonizer also increase, only dwarfing further the
contours of the “îlot” ['small island']. In the new interconnected colonial world,
Hong Kong’s transformation by Great Britain is a sign of latter’s global influ-
ence. While this draws out the growing colonial interconnections between two
disparate geographies, it also aptly demonstrates the indispensability of Hong
Kong’s existence as a diminutive that in its juxtaposition augments further Great
Britain’s contours of a larger island.
This hierarchy of size is only one part of the equation of colonial spatiality; the other part draws out the necessity of viewing the colonized territory as conquerable and secondary to the colonizer. Colonial landmarks, enumerated as plural forms (“Des docks” ['docks']; “des hôpitaux” ['hospitals'] etc.), attest to the enormity of the growing colonial influence and to the reproducibility of such spaces. The plurality of these common nouns takes over the uniqueness of Hong Kong. These lexical items are easily replicable from the location of one proper noun – Kent or Surrey – to another – Hong Kong. Thus, the colonized space resembles Kent or Surrey – rendering the island a site of recreation of British nationhood. Instead of digressing further into how this also typifies the way most colonizing literature sees colonies as either units for the spread of religion (“cathédrale gothique” ['Gothic cathedral']) or governance (“government-house” ['Government House']), let us get back to the very first moment of contact between Hong Kong and its colonizer.

Illegal Opium and Colonial Wealth

Before I continue to discussing how this equation typifies much of the novel’s desire in projecting the colonized territory, a quick word about the narrator-like voice in the background that creates through the literary structure its own sense of temporality and temporal understanding. Foucault assesses Verne’s text as made complete by different speakers recounting the narrative in the background. The elaborate unfolding above of details regarding Hong Kong – both spatial and temporal – reminds us of one of these “voix sans corps” ['body-less voices']. It links the novel to the world of the reader as it enumerates details and events from the reader’s world. The “body-less voice” presents Hong Kong via coordinates that recall Great Britain. From historical signposts of 1842 and the “treaty of Nanking” to the spatial reminders of a colonial city, all locate a universe familiar to the reader.

This alternative chronology that serves as a background to the narrative puts the author in a tacit understanding with the reader regarding a mutually accepted sense of historical occurrences that Foucault calls a “chronologie objective” ['objective chronology']. In acknowledging one of the author’s historical moments of 1842, the reader is in direct conversation with Verne; both agree about a time frame exterior to the fictional narrative.

This piggybacking by the fictional of the historically verifiable scaffolds Benedict Anderson’s notion of “empty time,” one of the principal ideas of nationalism. A perceived temporal simultaneity forms the backdrop of the nationalistic
feeling shared by individuals identifying themselves with, and living in, the same political boundaries of a nation.107 Anderson explicates empty time through the example of fictional literary texts that present historical details verifiable by the reader. This, he says, creates “empty time,” a common chronology where both the fiction and the reader coexist alongside a fictional backdrop. By analogy, according to Anderson, the very same idea is manifest in a nation where the nationalistic feeling claims the right to a common temporal unfolding for all its citizens. In the present case, “empty time” demonstrates a nineteenth-century sense of nationalism as it clearly postulates the island of Hong Kong as an extension of British history and political boundaries.

The very first sentence of the long quotation I have been discussing has two place names at its extremities, where the first – Hong Kong – is subordinated to the latter – “Angleterre” ['England’]. All that the novel tells us about Hong Kong’s origins is:

Hong-Kong n’est qu’un îlot, dont le traité de Nanking, après la guerre de 1842, assura la possession à l’Angleterre.

[Hong Kong is but a small island, which the Treaty of Nanking transferred to England after the war of 1842]

Apart from the net of spatial markers that ties Hong Kong to its colonizer, it is the “war of 1842” in between the two ends of this sentence that clarifies Hong Kong’s status as a possession. As it mediates in this sentence between the two colonial entities, this war (and its ensuing consequences) is at work in much of this novel’s knowledge of Hong Kong. In fact, it is the understanding of not one but two conflicts that allows us a better comprehension of the island. It is the second, a hypothetical commercial battle where Macao would have lost, that sustains the results of the first war by maintaining Great Britain’s supremacy and Hong Kong’s existence as a port of commerce. It is the first – the bloody battle of 1842 culminating in the Treaty of Nanking – that is of interest to us because it forced China to cede Hong Kong to the British, who turned it into a commercial port. Beyond just exhibiting the superior British force, this conflict laid the groundwork for the eventual shape the region would take.

More than in the exact dynamics of the colonial victory, my interest lies in opium, the trigger of this war. In the way the novel unproblematically relays the Hong Kong-Great Britain connection by omitting the role that opium played in the war that led to the island’s transfer from China to Great Britain,
one would have no reason to probe the link. When Aouda’s passage from India to Europe too is marked by and even facilitated by an itinerary prepared by an opium economy, the importance of analyzing the role the drug plays in this voyage around the world becomes self-evident. While it apparently criticizes opium as a colonial vice, the novel itself is thoroughly implicated in its propagation: a proliferation that is never overtly accounted for and that always operates in the surreptitiousness of “opium silence.” I hope to illustrate, firstly, that the silence of opium is the founding principle in operation in the novel’s description of Hong Kong. Secondly, that this silence is nothing but a parallel of the opium-related historical reality at play in the region. What I wish to demonstrate is that opium could only have been present in the novel through its conspicuous absence. This paradoxical manifestation of opium, the reasons for its silence and its implications for colonial subjectivity is what I chart out in the discussion that follows about Hong Kong’s origins.

In the given quotation, Hong Kong is indistinguishable from any of the other urban centers in the counties of Kent or Surrey. With a list of over dozen place names and an even more copious enumeration of spatial markers, the quotation successfully establishes Hong Kong’s credentials as a British space. However, how the island came to be colonized and the exact beginnings of this association have been relegated to a single historical event: the war of 1842, a date that stands out in its sketchiness.

If there were any doubts about the power equation between the two entities of the colonizer and the colonized, then this date puts them to rest as its interests in Hong Kong go only so far as the island’s association with the British Empire. For the purposes of this novel, Hong Kong’s origins lie in the moment when it came in contact with the colonizer. Interestingly, the war that resulted in the treaty of Nanking actually started in 1840 and it is its culmination date of 1842 that figures in the quotation. Curiously enough, while this date privileges only the year of contact between the two entities, it also raises the question of why apart from the result of the British emerging as victors, no further details regarding the reasons for the commencement of hostilities or its continuation are forthcoming.

Of the many consequences of this war, the only one brought to light is the concession of Hong Kong to the British Empire. In this construction-heavy reference to Hong Kong, the sole temporal reminder of the island’s history too has been presented as a reference to a spatial takeover. While it speaks volumes about the spatial obsession of the colonial project, Hong Kong’s presentation is a case in particular of temporal subversion to suit the demands of a spatial venture. The war of 1842 as a point in history is important only in so much so as it allows
for an explanation of spatial supremacy over the island. This way Hong Kong’s spatiality and history both exist as replications of the colonial identity.

The war of 1842 is in fact better known as the first of a set of two opium wars that changed the shape of the colonial map in the region. As the name suggests, opium was at the root of this war and thus was instrumental in the formation of the island. Yet, in a quotation about Hong Kong’s foundation, in a move symptomatic of this novel, not only has its role been overlooked, the word “opium” itself has been omitted from a name – the Opium War – in which it has earned a permanent place. Opium was the one product that was clearly fiscally more important to the British government (and the colonial project, one might add) than even the health of its subjects.

Before England definitively regulated opium’s use in the early twentieth century, profits accrued from it overshadowed any considerations of restricting the drug’s usage in the British society. So much so that during “the nineteenth century opiates were probably more extensively employed in England than in any other European country.” While China’s first edict banning the usage of opium “appears to have been issued in 1729,” Britain continued ignoring the drug’s harmful effects despite the fact that “opium and its preparations were responsible for more premature deaths than any other chemical agents” (Lomax 168).

Looking at the praise the medical journals were heaping on opium, one might think that the medical community was unaware of its ill effects. On the contrary, these journals also carried “almost as many references to the toxic nature of opium” (Lomax 168). It was not the lack of resistance against opium that allowed its proliferation; it was rather the business interests of the pharmaceutical community that prevailed. Despite the loss of human lives, nobody wanted to restrict a drug whose exceeding popularity was the cause of an increasing pharmaceutical business: “Even the government was not disinterested, since it supported the lucrative opium trade between India and China, without regard to the health of people of either country” (Lomax 176).

The government was slow to recognize the fallout of an unregulated drug that, as was to be expected, caused many deaths, with a particularly devastating effect on the infant population. Elizabeth Lomax explains how ignorant and poor working mothers from manufacturing districts liberally employed opium as an infant sedative. If the 1839 coroners’ returns from England and Wales are anything to go by, of the 182 people who died of opium poisoning in 1836 and 1837, 72 were children. The legislature did present a bill in 1857, and passed a much watered-down version in 1868, but the final legislative reprieve was to come later in the form of the Pharmacy Act of 1908.
Nineteenth-century Britain used economics as the sole guide while dealing with opium domestically and adopted the same approach overseas in relation to its colonies.\textsuperscript{112} The British government had assumed “a monopoly over the sale of opium in their dominions” and the production of opium in India, “in Bengal directly under the aegis of a Governmental administrative monopoly” (Greenberg 105). It also forced the Chinese to buy the drug. Almost to the very moment the above statistics on opium-related infant deaths were being collected, Great Britain was preparing the groundwork for the beginning of the First Opium War in 1840. When one sees that William Jardine (in the same year, 1840) defended his character “as the leading opium merchant” by citing how declarations in both Houses of Parliament were repeatedly asserting that “it was financially inexpedient to abolish the trade,”\textsuperscript{113} one can well imagine the devastating effect opium might have had on British colonies.

Opium’s significance should be obvious from the fact that the map-altering First Opium War was a direct result of the illegal opium trade by British traders in China.\textsuperscript{114} June Grasso et al. point out how initially they were restricted to the port city and forced to trade with the Chinese on their terms. The lopsided trade dynamics worked against the British: “while there was a large British demand for Chinese goods – especially tea – there was little Chinese interest in British goods.” But as their position strengthened, the foreign traders, taking advantage of the weak political situation in China, compensated for their loss by trading in illegal opium. The “opium trade probably had become the largest commerce of its kind in a single commodity in the world” (Grasso 29).

Throughout the course of these business dealings the battle lines were drawn, not so much on territorial boundaries but along the right to sell opium. In the run up to the 1840 war, tired of increasing restrictions by China on the opium traders, Jardine repeatedly exhorted the British government to act militarily in order to secure favorable commercial conditions. Implicit was the demand for an imposition of the traders’ interest on Chinese sovereignty. The government, however, would have none of it. In a letter sent out as reply in 1835 to one of Jardine’s entreaties, it was made clear, not surprisingly, that the government was “not prepared to take such a step so long as the revenues which derived from the China trade continued to be provided” (Greenberg 197). However, once it became clear that opium trade was at a risk of coming to a standstill and in turn paralyzing the entire trade with China, the government had to step in and assert for dealings on its own terms. Over time, the “[i]llicit opium traffic” combined with the “British insistence on regulating trading relations on the basis of Western law, became an internal political issue” (Grasso 36-37), which
would later result in a military conflict that the British forces won. One iden-
tifies the treaty of Nanking (the treaty the above quotation refers to) that fol-
lowed the war as one of the “unequal treaties’ that opened China to imperialist
exploitation.” Some of the clauses “were particularly injurious to China and were
accepted only because the mandarins were at the wrong end of the gun.” More
importantly, for the purposes of my argument, it is noteworthy that “[f]ive ports
were opened for trade, gunboats and foreign residence [...] [and] Hong Kong
was ceded to the British and was made a free and open port” (Grasso 39).

This treaty is a perfect example of colonial capitalist machinations conquer-
ing the space of the world. The very existence of Hong Kong as a part of the
British Empire took place using force, and with an eye on the balance sheet.
After its acquisition, the island played a pivotal role in opium trade. The British
made sure that “Hong Kong remained the first port of call for vessels from India
and the center from which the drug was relayed to the mainland.” What fol-
lowed as Hong Kong’s success story the novel has already relayed to us. Of all the
consequences of a colonial Hong Kong, the most significant was the opium-gen-
erated economic turnaround of British India. By the time the crown assumed
control of India in 1858, “the opium revenue, next to that from land and salt,
was the largest single increment to the Indian treasury, aggregating something
over one-seventh of its total income” (Owen 282-3).

In the entire discussion, what is of interest is that the representation of Hong
Kong, dedicated to the colonizing genius, glorifies abundantly its great advances
and conspicuously ignores opium’s role in describing both Hong Kong’s origins
and its economic transformation. That Hong Kong played the clinching role
in assuring the colony of India a substantial portion of its income would have
furthered glorified the British colonial genius; yet, all mention of opium in this
topographical rearrangement has been omitted. Or, has it?

Opium Cities

The above description could be uncritically read as a positive presentation of the
British Empire: by presenting the effortless triumph over Hong Kong it ignores
all opposition and advances the image of an unopposed colonizer. That it is no
doubt the case, but there is more to it.

Similar to the secretive yet rampant opium contraband that led to the col-
onization of the region, this novel too creates an invisible spatial net held in
place by the silent colonial opium. Apart from the obvious reference to the opi-
um-triggered 1842 war, what entrenches the above description, and the novel,
further into a drug related economy are the colonial cities it references – all of them (Hong Kong, Calcutta, Bombay and Singapore) directly enmeshed in proliferating the British trade of opium in China.

As mentioned, after the “emperor’s edict of 1729, the East India Company decided not to jeopardize its lucrative role in the tea trade by continuing to carry opium to China.” And although opium “could be grown in India only with the Honorable Company’s permission” (Janin 37), it was “private ‘country’ traders (often Parsees or Scots) based in India or Western firms based in China itself [that] bought the drug at government auctions in Calcutta and arranged for its onward shipment to China” (Janin 57). While Hong Kong, occupied by the British, was extremely significant to the trade, it remained second to the Indian city of Calcutta (Le Failler, 44).116

Calcutta is the city that Baudelaire was headed toward, but that he never reached. As a spatial benchmark this demonstrates its importance – the city boasted the advantage of a seaport facilitating the shipping from India – a distinction it shared with Bombay. Of the two major varieties, the “opium produced in Bengal [...] was sent to Calcutta to be auctioned off” and the Malwa opium from the “native states of central and western India,” after “it had reached Bombay [...] was transshipped to China” (Janin 38-9). While it drained China of its resources and caused an outcry on grounds of morality,117 for British India, opium brought a much-needed economic boom. In other words, ‘China went in to deficit for India’s profit’118 Even Karl Marx pointed out how opium-generated money resulted in a richer colonial population capable of buying the increasing British exports.119 Singapore, the fourth and the final English city, with its location on the opium route between Calcutta and China, was only a logical stop for clippers of the drug trade: ‘The fleet of clippers doing the Calcutta-Singapore-China doubled between 1842 and 1858 [...] interval between the Opium Wars was the golden age for big traders.’120

While Singapore’s contribution, as is obvious, was significant to the trade, opium’s benefits to the island were not insignificant either: ‘It won’t be an exaggeration to consider the opium traffic as the founding business of the colony.’121 This all-around economic success was the product of a mandatory passage of opium through these cities. The unmentioned, the unspoken, even as it turned around the British Empire’s economic health (Le Failler 33-4), opium trade was always carried out surreptitiously.

Establishing Hong Kong as a result of the 1842 war allows to understand how the spatial indicators enumerated above are all implicated in opium’s production and transportation. Juxtaposing multiple locales and reading them in
relation to their contribution to the clandestine opium trade brings forth their mutual interaction. Dispersed over an empire, when assembled together, the interplay between these cities illustrates the making of space articulated as a process, where one contributes to the other, much like each link making up the totality of a chain. So, when Hong Kong is described as yet another element in a series – “encore Bombay, Calcutta ou Singapore” [‘Bombay, Calcutta, or Singapore all over again’] – the idea is also to understand these cities as implicated in Hong Kong’s creation as much as the latter is another link of the chain they comprise. This network of cities, as it describes the spread of a colonial capitalism, presents also the attendant spatial abstraction. This is a globe that can be measured and scaled. These cities are appropriated into a matrix of hierarchy that reorganizes them in terms of their relevance to the opium trade and the fiscal demands of the colonizing power. Hong Kong reminds of the point of origination of this trade – Kent and Surrey – and not the other way round.

This is a classic example of a moment at which the production of a space – Hong Kong – dominoes into the creation of a new subjectivity. The description continues unceasingly to reconstitute alterity when it recognizes the existence of different identities (Chinese, Japanese, European), but also empties them of all meaning by presenting Hong Kong as resembling very closely (“à peu de chose près” [‘with a few exceptions’]) a string of indistinguishable spaces. If, despite their existence, it is the island’s dissimilarity that is accentuated, then it goes to say that the sum of their individual differences remains subservient to the unproblematic similarity at the global scale imposed by this “traînée de villes anglaises” [‘trail of English towns’], of which Hong Kong is an indistinguishable part. This paradoxical identity creation exemplifies the dislocation carried out by abstract spaces on human subjectivities. While Chinese, Japanese and Europeans might exist on the island of Hong Kong, what matters is their contribution to the enhancement of overarching British capitalism. Similarly, as it attests to the existence of Hong Kong’s uniqueness in the two means of transport palanquins and wind-driven wheelbarrows not found elsewhere, the description almost instantaneously finds a means of dislodging this alterity by articulating identity in terms of structures of Britishness.

Apart from demonstrating the economic transformation of the region, this depriv(a)vation of identity through structures underscores the relevance of spatial markers to subjectivity formation while revealing the beginnings of abstraction of space, where spaces, and in turn subjectivities, are homogenized into an exchangeable similarity. One can be replaced by another and understanding one entails the understanding of all. This apparent contradiction of a simultaneous
homogenization and hierarchy of locales provides an eloquent instance of the paradox of abstract spaces. For in resembling closely with “a few exceptions” and not exactly, this displays how abstract space “is not homogeneous; it simply has homogeneity as its goal, its orientation, its ‘lens’” (Lefebvre, Production; 287). Hong Kong illustrates the coming into being of an alternate matrix, which, as I have shown, aims at endowing the world with “the flatness of a mirror, of an image,” ordered “under the absolute cold gaze” (287) of Passepartout. Passepartout walks in a manner that it is his “lens” (both vision and perspective) that orders Hong Kong into an accumulation of constructions.

With the neutralizing of each annexed spatial component such an operation sets into motion the intrinsic repetitiveness of spaces of capitalism. As a new entrant into a world organized around urbanity, Hong Kong displays all the characteristics of a modern city. Belonging to a growing imperial capitalism that centers on opium, through their similarity, the constructions on the island, and the island itself, reproduce the inherent repetition associated with such spaces of abstraction. It was much later in the first half of the twentieth century that Walter Benjamin would discuss the loss of aura in works of art that were reproduced mechanically. For sure, Jules Verne’s serial fiction is a classic example of a mechanically enabled, mass produced literature, that “paralleling nineteenth-century capitalism” was institutionalizing “delayed gratification.” More importantly, just like his literature that both speaks of and is a product of mechanization, these cities too, are produced by and situated through mechanical markers. These cities are already in the process of losing their aura, not in the sense of losing an authentic essence that would reduce these locales to an identifiable anchor, but in the sense of being incorporated into a spatial grammar of replication; existing as enablers of the process of mass production, they are themselves mechanically produced realities. Or, at least, that is how I would understand Hong Kong, and these cities, being produced discursively by a grammar of docks, wharfs and roads.

To recapitulate, the silence on opium’s relevance in the articulation of these cities redeploy its conspicuous presence in every aspect of the region: without opium there would be no basis for colonial cities; they would not exist, let alone existing in interrelation with each other. If opium were any other product, its omission would hardly be a cause of concern, but the silence in this matter, as I have been insisting, remachinates the dynamics of opium’s absence. Always the motor that propels business in the region, it is never recognized, and even as it causes the war, opium retains its silence.
Opium Race

To end the First Opium War in order to avoid further loss and to “end hostilities, the Chinese were forced to sign the unequal Treaty of Nanking,” which, as the above discussion reminds, was responsible for the formation of a colonial Hong Kong. One knows that “the treaty never mentioned opium, however, the war effectively protected drug interests” (Marez 24). It would be safe to read Verne’s novel as a literal enunciation of the politico-geographical language of silence that defined opium historically in relation to Hong Kong. The literary, in obfuscating opium’s presence, is in fact performatively playing out opium’s correspondence to real life. Verne’s novel, through its silence, reminds us that while opium and the Opium War would perpetuate what Immanuel C. Y. Hsu calls China’s “semiccolonial status” (192), opium itself always moved unacknowledged through Hong Kong.

To be fair, it is not as if the novel is completely oblivious of the nefarious effects of opium. Describing a smoking den in Hong Kong, Le Tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours exclaims how the colonial business was selling hundreds of millions of francs worth of opium. The novel also holds the drug squarely responsible for the health of “millions” – all of whom were affected by “un des plus funestes vices de la nature humaine” [‘one of the deadliest vices of human nature’] (143; 98). Although an apparently genuine criticism of opium, this does not in any way contradict its workings in the formation of Hong Kong.

In a novel where the overall portrayal of colonial superiority presents a predictable corollary of Verne’s beliefs that colonization “is one of the aspects of progress,” this seeming criticism of opium reflects the true nature of the paradigm that Verne utilizes to deal with ideas of colonial Otherness. Despite all its ills – opium most likely included – colonialism for Verne presents the opportunity of taking “possession of nature, to exploit new territories in the interests of economic and technical progress” (Chesneau 26). Hong Kong in this equation becomes an unavoidable and imminent product of this opium-generated colonialism.

The above reasoning is still insufficient for one crucial reason: the two mutually disparate presentations – the ills of opium and the formation of Hong Kong – are laid out in the novel with nothing mediating between them. That they are complementary products operating as part of the same mechanism that created Hong Kong is unproblematically relayed, with no attempts at making the connections. In a restricted presentation, Verne’s novel completely discounts the colonial process by only partially acknowledging opium’s presence. This way,
Hong Kong remains a colonial accomplishment having no apparent relation to the opium trade. Opium in the novel must necessarily be portrayed as an unrelated detail. What, might one ask, provokes such a presentation?

It should not be a matter of surprise that Verne’s novel, published in serialized form, documents colonial victory without mentioning the opium wars. Not only Verne but even his literary colleagues experimenting with serialized literature in England were representing the triumphant march of civilization in Asia without any reference to those historical events. Marez points out how, instead of reckoning with the historical reality, opium den narratives in the English mass culture circumvent the associated violence by almost never mentioning the Opium Wars. Two worldviews come to meet in the opium den narratives, where facts become acceptable through their transformation into fiction. This striking omission then falls into a pattern defining the enabling condition of literary works contemporary to Verne. Much like the opium den literature, Verne’s novel “exists side by side with” the knowledge of British conquest, “but it denies the history of conquest by splitting from it” (Marez 69). It fits into the larger picture of literature devoted to the colonial project. The Opium War of 1842 as a key moment that fashions the colonial map that is responsible for Hong Kong’s colonial character is not only conspicuous by its absence; it is through its absence that it displays the exact dynamics of the colonial undertaking in the region.

In these dynamics, Inspector Fix enacts the colonial control over opium as he intoxicates Passepartout, hoping thus to delay his departure from Hong. As a victim, Passepartout plays a fixed script. He cannot counter the monopoly of the inspector over the usage of opium in Hong Kong. After all, Fix was a representative of imperial authority. Situated in colonized Hong Kong, this opium den reanimates opium’s history and its silent literary representations. As if to remind us that opium always acts in silence, Fix too – clandestinely – “en glissa une dans la main de Passepartout” [‘slips a pipe into Passepartout’s hand’]130 (149) – thus effectively separating the servant from his master, at least for a part of the journey. The power dynamics of the region demand that the empire’s power, working through this officer who manipulates opium surreptitiously, be on display and in effect on the island of Hong Kong. This apparent linkage between opium and Hong Kong could have been passed off as a literary coincidence, had it not been for Aouda’s liberation – not only from the superstitious fury of the indigenous people but also from the grasp of opium. The political power structure both assures Fix a command over opium and also imposes a racial hierarchy. In what follows I discuss how Aouda rises further along a racial ladder by purging herself of opium. Hong Kong plays the decisive role in launching her toward Europe.
Marez provides the beginnings of a racial equation associated with opium that explains Aouda’s evolution from the exotic. What is at stake is a clear racial division imposed by opium. As if affirming Marez’s conclusion, there is Inspector Fix who, just like the other colonial observers in these narratives, keeps his distance from opium consumption and symbolically recoils “from direct participation in the imperial system the opium den represents” (Marez 64). Yet, colonial authority benefits from imposing opium on unwilling victims: the British gain fiscally at the cost of the Chinese, and Fix benefits by delaying Passepartout.

Continuing with the same logic, Aouda is rescued not only from death but also from opium. As the adventurers are moving across the colony of India, they come to know of a woman of noble background, who, after the death of her husband, is to be consigned to fire along with her husband’s body on the funeral pyre. Summoned to his gentleman’s duty, Fogg decides to rescue Aouda, and after futile attempts to locate her family, he brings her back to London. As in several other literary works written during colonization, Aouda’s rescue too could be read as an excuse to put on display the white man’s inherent moral superiority: Fogg saves from the clutches of native barbarians a native woman, who otherwise would have been dead. But Aouda isn’t after all a typical native woman. She is a “charmante femme dans toute l’acception européenne du mot” [‘an attractive woman in the full European meaning of the word’] (103; 71). So much so that one would have taken her for European (“l’eût crue Européenne” [‘thought her a European’] [91; 63]).

On her initial introduction, Aouda displays the racial characteristics associated with white women exposed to opium. In the opium den narratives, white women “seem especially prone to Asian capture.” Falling for opium is a sure way for white women to be denigrated into fulfilling the vices of Chinese men. It would seem that their association with the drug is inversely proportional to the loss of their racial status: “cohabitation with opium-smoking Asian men caused certain women to shed their whiteness and assume a degraded new ‘Oriental’ visage” (Marez 65). In Aouda’s case, however, this journey is carried out in the opposite direction, such that in moving away from opium’s effects she finds her companion in a white man.

As a sati, before being consigned to the flames of her husband’s funeral pyre, she was subjected to the fumes of opium and hashish. Aouda can barely support herself and makes her appearance as an intoxicated woman in the clutches of the Brahmins. To set her free would mean not only liberating her but also bridling the power of opium. This happens when the opium-induced intoxication of the Indians allows the adventurers to make possible Aouda’s rescue:
Her introduction in the novel happens at a moment when she, as well as her relatives, are under the influence of opium. These white men take advantage of Aouda’s relatives’ opium-induced intoxication to rescue her. This display of opium in the cause of whiteness does not of course surprise, for that has been the underlying theme of what I have already said. This backward movement away from opium and toward civilization shows how the indigenous are easily categorizable human beings who exist in hierarchies. They are a blundering savage people who celebrate the idea of human sacrifice and then display their complete ineptitude in carrying it out. There is no doubt that these practices, and many others of such order, did plague the Bundelkhand region during the period described in the novel. Regardless of their veracity, what interests us is the interrelation drawn between the absence of English control and the presence of these practices. Below is an exchange between Fogg and Sir Francis Cromarty about the practice of sati in India:

– Comment! [...] ces barbares coutumes subsistent encore dans l’Inde, et les Anglais n’ont pu les détruire?
– Dans la plus grande partie de l’Inde, répondit Sir Francis Cromarty, ces sacrifices ne s’accomplissent plus, mais nous n’avons aucune influence sur ces contrées sauvages, et principalement sur ce territoire du Bundelkund. (88)

[‘Can it be?’ [...] ‘These barbaric customs survive in India, and the British still haven’t been able to put an end to them?’
‘Sacrifices don’t happen any more in most of India, [Sir Francis Cromarty replied,] but we have no influence over these wild kingdoms, especially in the State of Bundelkhand.’ (61)]

In turning to a country where the scale of civilization (in this case, savagery) is a function of the British control, Verne’s novel posits a worldview whose operation
is already manifest in the presentation of other locales. Much like Hong Kong’s success is a product of English control, Bundelkhand’s savagery results from the absence of such control. This, no doubt, is emblematic of much of exoticizing colonial literature, which while perceiving the uncontrollable and the inexplicable as a threat also appreciates all that is suitably white – as happens with Aouda’s whiteness.

Throughout the course of her rescue and her eventual marriage proposal to Fogg, it is by distancing from opium that she achieves affinity with Europe. Needless to say, her fundamentally European physical characteristics and upbringing tipped the scales in her favor. She was after all, as has already been stated, “une charmante femme dans toute l’acception européenne du mot” [‘an attractive woman in the full European meaning of the word’] (103; 71).

A product of and changing toward Europe, Aouda is the embodiment of transformation in process, who, in responding to the pushes and pulls of colonial opium, follows its geographic trajectory toward her ultimate Europeanization in London. She comes to be part of a power paradigm that disallows contact with subjectivities beyond its realm, and accounts only for a Fogg-Aouda-like self-reinforcing union. Instead of losing whiteness because of the drug, she gains Europe as she is liberated from opium, and thus verifies the correlation between racial identity and opium.

Her parentage reinforces her apparent superiority. She is related to the well-known Parsi, Sir James Jejeebhoy, who was accorded his title by the colonial government. In fact, she accompanies Fogg to Hong Kong, hoping to seek help from a cousin of Jejeebhoy. This small island of Hong Kong occupies a disproportionately large space in the novel’s topography. In Hong Kong, where she hopes to find support from her relative, she learns of him having shifted base to Europe – Holland. It is thus in Hong Kong that Aouda’s decision to continue to England is taken for her, doubly underscoring the city’s relevance to the opium map.

The possibility of this adventure presupposes a centrifugal world, moving away from the center; its every move verifying the center’s existence. In this case, Aouda’s itinerary passes through Hong Kong to London. As the island displays signs of its determining matrix, Hong Kong also justifies its own role within the grid. If Hong Kong had been an isolated creation, Aouda’s passage would have generated little thought, but Hong Kong as an agent of the British Empire, as shown in our discussion, is an exercise in infectious mutation and thus has to garner reinforcing elements. This would explain why Aouda’s decision in favor her onward journey to Europe is made for her in Hong Kong. As events prove, instead of being a temporary stop, London, where the besotted Fogg stays, becomes her future home.
Identified already as superior among the indigenous people, Aouda, instead of just remaining “like” European, now justifiably owns her European identity. Hong Kong, presented this far as a mediated identity – a construct – becomes a mediator between a dangerous India and London, where a stable subjectivity emanates. In between the two ends are located not only the sojourns of this journey but also a definition of the process that triggers their creation. The journey animates a center that, while redefining these spaces, also pushes them to a state of abstraction, institutionalizing its own relevance. So, in moving up (or perhaps being pulled up) the spatial ladder toward London, Aouda retraces and reinforces the flow of the power of the center.

In this entire equation, as much as Hong Kong holds a justifiably substantial position, it models the prevalent pattern of representing alternate spatial identity during this voyage. In other instances, too, the novel furnishes yet other spatial Others who exist as extensions of the colonizer. Y okohama, for example:

> une cité absolument européenne, couvrait de ses rues, de ses places, de ses docks, de ses entrepôts, tout l’espace compris depuis le promontoire du Traité jusqu’à la rivière. Là, comme à Hong-Kong, comme à Calcutta… (174)

[an absolutely European city: houses with low fronts adorned with verandas on top of elegant colonnades. Its streets, squares, docks, and warehouses covered the whole area between the Treaty Promontory and the river. As in Hong Kong and Calcutta… (119)]

With “européenne” as its key trait, this presentation situates the Japanese city with a nearly identical enumeration and establishes it via other colonial cities, reproducing the Hong Kong paradigm. Monghir too, more than European, as seen earlier in India, recalls the importance of colonial industry, and is articulated – once again – as a replication of the English cities:

> Monghir, ville plus qu’européenne, anglaise comme Manchester ou Birmingham, renommée pour ses fonderies de fer, ses fabriques de taillanderie et d’armes blanches. (107)

[Monghir, a town which is more than European, being as British as Manchester or Birmingham, renowned for its iron foundries and its factories for edge tools and knives. (74)]
At the risk of overstating the obvious, Monghir’s presentation, with its factories, displays all of Hong Kong’s symptoms. Not to mention that the reason for the city’s importance is its opium market, which assures it also a place in the silent opium economy.

Verne’s novel demonstrates through this spatial wealth the predominant genius for colonization, and puts on display the changing geographical “meaning” of the world. What emerges from the above discussion is the consistent pattern of a mathematical European identity – defined commercially – that provides the template for apprehending the “meaning” of spatial alterity. The homogenized features of this template serve to configure these locales according to a global matrix of spaces rendered interchangeable for the smooth passage of opium. It is thus that Hong Kong, having achieved technical as well as financial progress as defined by the coordinates of this matrix, becomes an obvious example of the colonizer’s power.

In order for this perceived mimicry to glorify the colonial power, these spaces need to be almost, and not completely, like the spatial self (“À peu de choses près” ['With a few exceptions']). This expectation of colonial mimicry from the Other is “the desire for a reformed, recognizable ‘Other’, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (Bhabha 235). Not quite because this “desire” postulates the colonized subject as a “partial” presence within the colonizer’s construct, which confronted with unfamiliar coordinates can only reckon with the known, treating the slippage as an undesired sedimentation. This spatial Other, which in this equation is “not quite” the same, becomes a site of lack. This spatial Other exists in a process of colonization that leads to a reformed state resembling the image that one has of the self. While such a move celebrates the familiar in Hong Kong as proof of colonial accomplishment, all that escapes comprehension is relegated to an “autrefois,” another time associated with an antiquated China. Identity is redistributed along an axis that, while desiring a familiar, forever disarms the spatial Other of its difference.

Arjun Appadurai speaks about how, in the contemporary world, globalization exists as a “definite marker of a new crisis for the sovereignty of nation-states” (4). Literary geography in Verne’s work attests to the formative moments of this global network when nation-states and the accompanying nationalisms, working in consonance with capitalism, were laying the groundwork for a system whose hegemonic nature would assume the overwhelming proportions of contemporary twenty-first century fiscal globalization. This chapter, through its readings of the literary geographies associated with the colonial opium economy in *Le Tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours*, lays out the warning signs of the crisis Appadurai talks about. What one witnesses are the operations of a nascent network, invested
in the market forces of opium’s demand and supply that would eventually impose homogenization and rationalization on the entire planet. It is such imposed geographies that literary works discussed in later chapters of this book respond to.

Although Fogg himself might claim no apparent capital accumulation, in returning back to London – the point of departure – having gained nothing financially, he displays through his journey not only the path taken for the accrual of imperial capital and the acquisition of colonies but also represents a literary colonization of geographies. Just as the choice of locales in which Verne placed his narratives was determined by what was available in texts on geography, so do the manner of configuring these locales, their mutual interaction, their raison d’être and their association with human beings also get filtered through a geography of colonization. Written at the height of colonization, with a worldview that colonially apportions the globe, the novel displays how the entire planet has become a commodity. As dispersed nodes of trade routes, the relevance of these colonies is a function of their contribution to the interconnected financial network that transports production as well as ploughs capital back to London, further buttressing the colonizer.

Verne wrote at a time when traveling to discover, or writing about traveling to discover, the unknown elsewhere and its inscrutable mysteries was a means of escaping the advancing modernity. Yet clearly, Fogg embodies a paradigm of predefined quantifiable literary geography that already knows what it is looking for and how it will define its encounter with the spatial Other. Nowhere is this clearer than in the confidence with which Fogg accepts the wager. Fogg knows, without ever having done this before, that the world is measurable. Instead of presenting the new, Fogg’s journey exemplifies the inscription of the world within known coordinates. This mathematical and mechanical man is both the witness and the agent responsible for measuring out the entire world in the same manner as he has been doing in his daily life by taking exactly 575 steps with his right foot and 576 with his left, to reach his club.136

Even the adjective “eccentric,” perhaps the most used to describe Fogg, serves as the very proof of the workings of this new entity.137 In a discussion about spatial and temporal connotations of Fogg’s eccentricity, following one definition of “eccentric,” P. Schulman argues that the hero undertakes two voyages:

one that is purely mathematical (80 days) [...] and the real voyage, that is the one filled with discoveries of exotic countries far from the centre, London, characterized by the act of enlarging his own sense of geographical space.138
Schulman offers a connection of some significance when London as the center is opposed to the larger geographical space, the exact locales within which are important only to the extent that they contribute to enriching Fogg’s knowledge base. For, this is exactly what the journey is proof of: a world reconfigured in relation to, and according to the desires of the metropolitan center. Eccentric also means moving ‘away from the point considered as the center.’

For this chapter, Fogg is eccentric because he is the bearer of this decentered literary geography: he deflects his eccentricity onto these locales by defining them in relation to the metropolitan center and thereby decenters them, dislodging these locales from their axes.

In reading a novel written at the height of the colonial quest for spatial domination, this chapter has tried to assess the influence of spatial homogenization in the narration of encounters with hitherto unknown spatial alterity. If colonial space needs to be rationalized, so would colonial subjectivity need to be refashioned to suit its expansionist desires. That is why in this novel, where the local and the global are created in the image of the empire, Fogg can only exist as a mathematical entity, and Aouda as thoroughly Europeanized.