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Chantal Foucrier

Unlike the great heroic myths of antiquity, which have been forgotten or are little known to the general public, the myth of Atlantis still calls out to us. Over the centuries this collective history of the conjectural past of the Earth and humanity has assumed a vocation to reflect the political, religious, moral and intellectual changes of Western societies. In vain does one search for the sunken island: each discovers it where he or she hopes to find it. As Thomas-Henri Martin stated in 1841: '[Atlantis] belongs to *another realm,* which is not in the domain of space but rather that of thought.'[1]

Few people dared, at that time, to put forward such certainties, thus denigrating the growing enthusiasm for the mystery and controversy that originate in Plato's *Timaeus* and *Critias*. The nineteenth century is, as such, an important observatory in terms of interpreting Atlantology, a polymorphic literature whose outlines were precisely and permanently drawn at that time. Reserved, until then, for erudite comment and philosophical-historical reconstructions of prehistory, literary production now invested two distinct territories. On the one hand, science, with its advances and methodologies, multiplied assumptions about the veracity of the myth. On the other, imaginative literature laid claim to the search for Atlantis in its own way by exploiting the incompleteness of the Greek myth, its symbols and dramatic storyline.

Nevertheless, the two approaches became intertwined in many ways and this is what I propose to study, taking into account the many changes that came about in the course of the century, including the growth of travel to distant lands, which introduced new cultural horizons to Western thought and other ways of approaching the world's origins. This no doubt generated all sorts of contradictory aspirations, for which Atlantean literature became something of a receptacle: within it, science combines with the irrational, belief in progress with the feeling of decline, and a sense of adventure with the temptation to look inward.

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[1] Our translation of T.H. Martin, 'Dissertation sur l'Atlantide', *Études sur le Timée de Platon* (orig. 1841; Paris 1981), 332: '[l'Atlantide] appartient à un *autre monde* qui n'est pas dans le domaine de l'espace mais dans celui de la pensée'.

The beginnings of a true scientific approach

In the nineteenth century, hypotheses on Atlantis continued unabated. Indeed they prospered and diversified and the lost continent was taken up by ever more disciplines, as theories and institutions developed in response to new knowledge. The century was, in all respects, an exciting period of transition, because what had been a strictly bookish approach to the matter can be seen, over its course, to have evolved into a concrete approach, conducted in the field, adopted by scholars fascinated by the mystery of the world's origins.

This process was of course progressive and Atlantis in any case long remained the preserve of scholars in the thrall of Greco-Roman classics and ancient history who continued to write theses in Latin, notably in Germany, on the validity of Solon's testimony as transmitted by Plato.[2] Did this testimony speak of the same Atlanteans as Strabo in his *Geography*, Pliny the Elder in the *Natural History* or Diodorus of Sicily in the *Historical Library*? What of Atlas, son of Poseidon and tutelary father of the Atlantean people in the *Critias*, though other mythological sources draw on different genealogies and Herodotus used his name for the mountain range of North Africa?[3] Research of this kind no doubt intended to dispel confusion and reveal the 'truth' of the myth. However, it only served to confuse things, such was the popularity of speculation about primitive times. Notably, in the seventeenth century, the Swede Olaus Rudbeck won renown by publishing his immense *Atlantica* (1675), a thesis on the Scandinavian Atlantis, the nationalist bias of which was refuted by the philosophers of the next century. After *Lettres sur l'Atlantide de Platon et sur l'ancienne histoire de l'Asie* (1779) by Jean-Sylvain Bailly[4] and *Histoire des Atlantes*, published at the same time by Jean-Baptiste Delisle de Sales, this 'genre', so conducive to

[2] For example Thomas-Henri Martin cites three successive works: Bach, *Solonis atheniensis carmina, quae supersunt* (Bonn 1825); Kleine, *Quaestiones quaedam de Solonis vita et fragmentis*, (Duisburg 1832); Stallbaum, *Prolegomena de Critias Platonis* (Gotha and Erfurt 1838). Martin, *Études sur le Timée*, 321-322.

[3] A.-J. Letronne, 'Essai sur les idées cosmographiques qui se rattachent au nom d'Atlas' in: M. de Férussac ed., *Bulletin universitaire des sciences*, section VII, tome 17, (1831) 103-116; W. Smith, *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Geography*, (Boston, MA 1857), see: 'Atlas' and 'Atlantis'.

[4] Translated into English under the title *Letters upon the Atlantis of Plato and the Ancient history of Asia* (1801).

literary variations, inspired Antoine Fabre d'Olivet, who used the fable in three books: *Lettres à Sophie sur l'histoire* (1801), *De l'état social de l'homme* (1822) and *Histoire philosophique du genre humain* (1824). Plato's account always appears as a brief episode in the great saga of humanity, whose theatre extends from the far North to the Orient and which implies that the fate of the Atlanteans could have met that of the Chaldeans, the Egyptians, the Scythians, the Israelites and the Chinese, et cetera. Fabre d'Olivet, who was a master of the occult, idealised the Atlanteans as heirs of an unknown civilisation no doubt embodying some lost wisdom: 'They [the Atlanteans] were seeking, just as we still are, the traces of a primitive people who, perhaps in turn, had sought those of its ancestors.' [5] Combining encyclopaedic knowledge, syncretism and cosmopolitanism, this work is more representation of the Enlightenment spirit than any scientific pretention to identify Atlantis. Pierre Vidal-Naquet remarks that it oscillates between universal history and: 'a form of story that is very much analogous to the modern science fiction novel'.[6]

Although released at the same time and marked by the same nostalgic tendency to mythologise the earliest times, Jean Baptiste Bory de Saint-Vincent's *Essais sur les Isles Fortunées et l'antique Atlantide* (1803) seems to usher in a significant shift towards a more scientific approach to Atlantology. His book already has the merit of focusing attention on the Platonic subtext, even while the author exaggerates the longevity of the Atlantean civilization, the deeds and successive migrations of which he recounts, from Tartary to the famous continent that had sunk into the abyss off the Pillars of Hercules. According to him, its remains were to be sought in the Canary Islands, volcanic islands with archaeological and cultural remains as evidenced by the mysterious primitive Guanches people. They were supposed to have inherited high knowledge from those Atlanteans who survived the cataclysm, the majority having been forced to flee their devastated land to reach the Mediterranean and Greece, using force where necessary. In this retelling, the war mentioned in the *Timaeus* appears as an inevitable consequence of the natural disaster and not as its cause, which Plato had linked to the corruption of a warlike people.

[5] Our translation of A. Fabre d'Olivet, *Lettres à Sophie sur l'histoire* (Paris 1801) tome II, Lettre XXX, 7: 'Ils [les Atlantes] cherchaient, comme nous les cherchons encore, les traces d'un peuple primitif qui, peut-être à son tour, avait cherché celles de ses ancêtres.'

[6] Our translation of P. Vidal-Naquet, *L'Atlantide*, (Paris 2005) 104.

By making the Atlanteans victims of the vagaries of nature and stripping the original fable of its moralistic aspects, Bory de Saint Vincent turns the Atlantidian question into a general, 'anthropological' avant la lettre, reflection on the fragility of civilized and prosperous peoples and how they are affected by natural and political upheavals. In his eyes, the Guanches-Atlanteans incarnate decline much more than progress. Distancing himself from the visionaries of the previous century, he proposed, in fact, a much more modest, and thereby rational, interpretation of the Platonic myth. There was no need, in his view, to call on all the mythologies of Europe and Asia to shed light on a Greek text that, for his part, he was content simply to relate to Hesiod's *Theogony* and Diodorus of Sicily's account of the African Amazons. The objective being to write 'the philosophical history of one of the smallest of places on Earth', Bory de Saint-Vincent maintained that the reliability of his argument could be set against the excessive ambitions of his contemporaries. In order to uphold his thesis on the 'small' Canary Islands, he ironically refutes the traditional representation of the lost Atlantis as 'the birthplace of mankind […]' the homeland of the Patagonians, Peruvians, Kaffirs, Hottentots and Darkies of New Holland'[7] Faced with intellectual and somewhat fantastic constructs of his predecessors, the scholar used the critical eye of someone who drew not just on books and mythology but also and especially on travel and the observation of natural phenomena. His *Essais*, remember, are the work of an eminent naturalist who put his knowledge at the service of the Napoleonic armies, conducting reconnaissance missions and drawing maps of the many countries he visited.

Far from solving the riddle of Atlantis, this great traveller had moved it into the realm of conjecture claimed by the savants of the positivist era. These scholars took up Atlantis in various ways, not trying to rewrite the *Timaeus* but rather to illustrate their own research. While the Englishman Charles Lyell, considered the founding father of modern geology, gave credence to the Atlantidian hypothesis in his *Principles of Geology* (1830-1833), the German Alexander von Humboldt, another renowned naturalist, was more sceptical about the fact of the sinking, but very attentive to the impact

[7] Our translation of J.-B. Bory de Saint-Vincent, *Essais sur les Isles Fortunées et l'antique Atlantide, ou Précis de l'histoire générale de l'archipel des Canaries* (Paris 1803) 3: 'L'histoire philosophique du plus petit des lieux du globe', 465: 'Le berceau du genre humain', 466: 'La patrie des Patagons, des Péruviens, des Cafres, des Hottentots, des Cuivres (*sic*) de la Nouvelle Hollande'.

of geographical myths on the progress of navigation and the discovery of the New World. In his *Examen critique de l'histoire de la géographie du nouveau continent* published in 1836, he showed that imaginary lands – Atlantis, Meropis, Ogygia, Thule, Lyctonia, etc. – were not only 'ingenious fictions' because, he said, 'the opinions that have been formed about the world are reflected in them'.[8] Proof that the myth had been able to feed 'opinions' and possibly scientific theories on obscure parts of the past was found after Charles Darwin had revolutionised the natural sciences by publishing *On the Origins of Species* in 1859. The English scholar gave little credence to the sinking of Atlantis, his conception of evolution being based on slow metamorphosis in nature rather than brutal ruptures. *Natura non facit saltus* ('Nature does not make leaps'), according to the aphorism by the philosopher Leibniz (*New Essays on Human Understanding*, 1703-1704), which biologists then made an axiom. However, Darwinism did not signal the end of Atlantology, quite the contrary. Some proponents of evolution even resurrected Atlantis under other names, Gondwana or Lemuria, the remains of which they found in the islands between the tip of India and South Africa. The old theory of intercontinental bridges, so often put forward among commentators of Plato, was thus restored by the zoologist Ernst Heinrich Haeckel in *The Natural History of Creation* (*Natürliche Schöpfungsgeschichte*, 1868) and by paleontologist Melchior Neumayr in his *History of the Earth (Erdegeschichte*, 1886-1887).

The advances of science dealing with the world's origins (archaeology, palaeontology, anthropology) favoured the idea that vanished, or presumed, legendary worlds might one day come back out of the shadows and into the realm of reality. The nineteenth century saw the ruins of prestigious cities emerge successively: Nineveh, Babylon and Assyria from 1842, then Troy and Mycenae unearthed by Heinrich Schliemann between 1870 and 1874. Would the megalopolis described in the *Critias* join these capitals of antiquity? The temptation was great, given the vastness of the sites, to see Atlantis in the sumptuous monuments erected by the pre-Columbian civilizations. Some attempted it, sometimes unwisely, by rereading the Greek dialogues in the light of the sacred writings of the Maya.[9]

[8] Our translation of A. de Humboldt, *Examen critique de l'histoire de la géographie du nouveau continent et des progrès de l'astronomie nautique aux quinzième et seizième siècles*, (Paris 1836) tome I, 113: 'Les opinions qu'on s'est formées sur le monde s'y reflètent'.

[9] L.S. de Camp, mentions two works that are first and foremost curiosities, perhaps even hoaxes: E.-C. Brasseur de Bourbourg, *Manuscrit Troano, études sur le système*

This era, dominated by colonial expansion, also enriched knowledge of vast hitherto unexplored areas. This was the case in France, where the hypothesis of an African Atlantis found a certain following in learned societies and among academics. In 1867, Dominique-Alexandre Godron, a professor at the Faculty of Nancy, published an essay entitled *L'Atlantide et le Sahara*, after which geographer Étienne-Félix Berlioux published a book in 1883 that claimed to demolish the most common theses: *Les Atlantes. Histoire de l'Atlantis et de l'Atlas primitif*. Later, in 1919, Pierre Benoit would draw on it for the scientific foundation of his successful novel, *Atlantida* (*L'Atlantide*), portraying the comical figure of a professor, prisoner of the Queen of the Hoggar and convinced that she was the last descendant of Atlantis. Interpreting the cataclysm of the *Timaeus* according to his own lights, Berlioux 'insularised' the Atlas mountains and an 'island' became a 'mountain', due to the earthquakes that raised the base and the drying up of lakes that had once lapped against its sides. The geological exposé was aligned with historical data on the first Libyans, Atlanteans whose rise and fall the author related to wars led against Egypt and Greece between the seventeenth and thirteenth centuries BC. Apart from refuting the great syntheses that were then fashionable and their aberrant chronologies, the author chose to read Plato in the light of the historians Herodotus and Diodorus of Sicily. Above all the aim was to emphasise the plausibility of the story and put forward a hypothesis that was both original and salutary because, in his words, 'it removes this territory from the world of Make Believe: the land of Atlantis is a place on which the most fantastic dreams have been built.'[10]

Other researchers agreed with this and Atlantis bibliographies include a good number of articles published between 1880 and 1900, sometimes emanating from academies of sciences and sometimes from anthropology and ethnography societies.[11] However, a myth is a myth, which is to say it is

graphique et la langue des Mayas (Paris 1869-1870); A. le Plongeon, *Queen Moo and the Egyptian Sphynx* (London 1896). See: *Lost Continents. The Atlantis Theme in History, Science and Literature* (New York 1970) 35-37.

[10] Our translation of E.F. Berlioux, 'Histoire de l'Atlantis et de l'Atlas primitif ou Introduction à l'histoire de l'Europe', *Annuaire de la Faculté des Lettres de Lyon*, I. Fascicule (1883) 151: 'Elle enlève ce domaine au pays des chimères : la terre des Atlantes est un des champs sur lesquels on a bâti le plus de rêves fantastiques.'

[11] See, for example, the bibliography of J. Imbelloni and A. Vivante, *Libro de las Atlantidas* (Buenos Aires 1939).

a discourse stimulating imaginative rewrites as much as it does readings attempting to rationalise it. *Logos* and *Mythos* constantly confront one another on such a terrain. The late nineteenth century is thus a turbulent time when scientific theories served as counterpoints to the 'fantastic dreams' associated with the legendary *Hybris* of Atlantis.

Resistance and variations of the fantasy of the mother civilization

This dual approach is actually at the heart of Plato's thought. He was unable to transmit his theoretical reflections on cosmological revolutions without lending them the striking illustration of the story of a magnificent fallen empire. Intrinsic to the original work, then, the *Mythos/Logos* complex left its mark on an entire literature that was on the whole dominated by fantasies of disaster, attraction to the irrational, the dual fascination for catastrophe and for utopia. As every era seeks its Golden Age, the general theme of lost greatness has generated all kinds of nostalgic projections that have withstood time and that the most authoritative scientific demonstrations have never really been able to check. It would even seem that positivist research on the origin of the Earth and its peoples curiously reinvigorated, at the end of the century, the great historical-mythological theories apparently forgotten since the days of Fabre d'Olivet. Alongside them there was a resurgence of old ideological and narrative patterns: the conversion of a barbarian Atlantis into a civilising Atlantis ferrying knowledge, traditions and arts and the obsessive fantasy of a primitive Atlantis as the genealogical and cultural centre of humanity. The philosophers of previous centuries had placed the city in emblematic places on hilltops (Bailly, Delisle de Sales), not far from the North Pole (Rudbeck), or in a kind of ideal centre, making the Atlantis of the origins myth an intercontinental bridge linking the Old and New World, before sinking into the ocean.

Frequently advanced and discussed by scholars, this last theory was derived from remarks attributed to the Egyptian priest in the *Timaeus* stating that the giant island sank, 'in front of the strait which, I've heard you say, your people call the Pillars of Heracles'.[12] The theory of the intercontinental bridge naturally allowed universal history to accommodate various ideological perspectives. While the Spanish chroniclers of the sixteenth

[12] Plato, *Timaeus* and *Critias*, R. Waterfield trans. (Oxford 2008) 13.

century used it for apologetic purposes, to show that America had been populated and Christianised by Europeans before the sinking, the Italian Giuseppe Carli took advantage, in the eighteenth century, of this same territorial bridge to make his homeland the privileged heir of the New World 'enlightenment'.[13] Among these different versions, almost always related to a quest for identity and the manufacture of a founding story extolling the prestigious origins of their author, the most famous is the one conceived by a Republican senator from Minnesota, Ignatius Donnelly, who, in 1882 published a new demonstration of the existence of Atlantis: *Atlantis, the Antediluvian World.* When the European contention of the intercontinental bridge crossed the Atlantic Ocean, it was obviously welcome because it provided Americans with the opportunity to establish, even if they had to invent them, affiliations between their own ancestors and ancient Greek tradition.

Donnelly put his vast knowledge at the service of this goal, while modernising the historicising approach of his predecessors. He relieved the utopian figure of Atlantis from the philosophical concerns that had forged it and he propped up his argument with ample scientific or pseudoscientific evidence, with the sole purpose of emptying the myth of its fabulous or sacred substance. To him, indeed:

> There are in Plato's narrative no marvels, no myths, no tales of gods, gorgons, hobgoblins, or giants. It is a plain and reasonable history of a people who built temples, ships, and canals; who lived by agriculture and commerce; who, in pursuit of trade, reached out to all the countries around them.[14]

To convince the reader, the author endowed his work with a scientific background, using the theories discussed in his time. On the one hand catastrophism (Atlantis was thought to have sunk in a violent convulsion of nature), on the other, diffusionism (as an antediluvian world, it was a cultural matrix). The island-continent being the zero point of history and the beginning of everything, the most remote parts of the world were, in his view, just so many colonies, or 'daughters' of the mother civilization. From

[13] See: P.S. de Gamboa, *Secunda Parte de la Historia général llamada Indica* [The Second Part of the General History called Indica] (orig. Cuzco0 1572; Cambridge 1907); G. Carli, *Lettere americane* (Firenze) 1770-1781.

[14] I. Donnelly, *Atlantis: the Antediluvian World* (London 1882) 22.

Egypt to Mexico, Ireland to Java and the sites of Mayan ruins to Greco-Roman cities, the book counts off the similarities in customs (calendars, funeral rites), objects (weapons, statuary, monuments), ethnic types, fossils, plants, etc.

The reader is left perplexed by this system which consists in stating all these wonderful correspondences, placing all the legends of the flood on the same plane and putting etymological roots to hazardous use; enough to prove Etiemble's maxim that 'Comparison is not reason'.[15] Ignatius Donnelly had not so much proved the existence of an Atlantic Atlantis, but rather had remodelled a beautiful imaginary object, a utopia that had come out of the depths of time. The book was a resounding success. What's more, in it Donnelly gave America a rewarding version of its own history. He offered seekers of Atlantis a positivist explanation of the myth. The book is, in fact, convincing in appearance by its construction, its rich iconography and frequent mention of some of the big names of academic science: Charles Lyell, Charles Darwin, Alexander von Humboldt, all mentioned above, as well as the anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor, known for his research on archaic forms of thought and language thanks to a book published in 1870: *Primitive Culture*.

Attractive to fans of progress and lovers of sensational revelations, the views of the talented polygraph were unable to win everyone over in 1882. The end of the century was indeed marked by various movements of thought expressing the doubts and criticisms of the time toward the materialistic doctrines that resulted from science and industrialisation. On both sides of the Atlantic, there was a revival of the tradition propagated by the occult sciences in several initiatory schools or sects, whose apostles preached a diffuse idealism postulating a resurgence of religion, belief in the hereafter and the existence of a supernatural world. Atlantis, an invisible space and loaded with mystery, could easily accommodate these disciples of irrational currents, obsessed by the cyclical return of wisdom and knowledge that had, according to them, blossomed into a civilization unknown to ethnologists. Thus the *Antediluvian World*, which had contemplated prehistory in a realistic light, provided two authors with the opportunity to come back at Donnelly with an esoteric response: Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, a Russian who had lived in the US, where she founded the Theosophical Society in 1875, first made use of Atlantis in her *Secret*

[15] See the title of his book: R. Etiemble, *Comparaison n'est pas raison: La crise de la littérature compare* (Paris 1963).

Doctrine (1888), after which Walter Scott Elliott was inspired to write a *Story of Atlantis* that appeared in 1896. These surveys, both rather verbose and indigestible, pushed the popular belief in the excesses attached to lost worlds a very long way, at the same time as readopting the method and spirit of the vast studies that had come before. Like Delisle de Sales and Fabre d'Olivet, the two Theosophists postulated that Plato's Atlanteans had illustrious predecessors and also descendants, whose origin was lost in an ancient past of several hundred thousand years, in the 'Imperishable Sacred Land'. While they borrowed the cosmographic fantasy of the intercontinental bridge from Donnelly, it was merely in order to double its scale, since they added an oriental Atlantis to the huge space that had emerged in joining the Old and New World, serving as an intermediary land between Hyperborea in the north and Lemuria in the south. Mythological syncretism reached a high in both authors who believed that esoteric philosophy brought together all cultures and all religions. Madame Blavatsky thus easily located traces of the Platonic myth in the Puranas of India, in the Pentateuch and in the sacred texts of the Chinese, Chaldeans, Mohammedans etc.

Dominated by spiritual preoccupations, the two books attacked the scientific question of Atlantis from the direction of sanctimonious proselytising: here the riddles of the universe are not explained by natural sources, but rather supernatural ones. In this context, prehistory is represented as a series of disasters meant to punish peoples wallowing in the cult of materialism. To this end, Scott-Elliot tells how the fourth epoch of the Earth saw the brilliant Atlantean civilization flourish and then die, since its capital, the 'City with the Golden Gates' became a place of lucrative trade and political ambitions. It was then, he says, that the 'White Emperor' was driven out by the 'Black Emperor'. In this Manichean mystical version of history, the 'Manu', invisible spirits of Indian tradition, are the emanation of supposed 'Great Ancestors': they regulate the succession of races on Earth, their hierarchy, their subdivision into 'root races' and 'sub-races'. These outlandish views were the bearer of dangerous ideological excesses, as borne out later in Germany where Nazi theorists invoked the scholarship of the theosophists to affirm that the Nordic Atlantis was the cradle of the pure Aryan race, the ancestor of the Germanic people, a superior race which Helena Blavatsky and her followers saw as heir to the Atlanteans, now established in Europe.[16]

[16] See: A. Rosenberg, *Der Mythus des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Munich 1932).

Nevertheless, even before being taken up by the ideologues, the occult met with huge success both in the US and Europe, where the feeling of decline, the loss of values and anxiety regarding the future secreted regressive aspirations: a rejection of progress, nostalgia for the golden age, a taste for mythical representations of the world. This return to *Mythos* is reflected both in decadent literature and the philosophical work of Nietzsche. In what was another factor altogether, the memory of Atlantis benefited all the more easily from such a context in that the diversification and democratisation of the novel gave a voice to those who promoted the fable.

The emergence of romantic rewritings

It was, indeed, the novel of the nineteenth century that popularised the Atlantidian tradition and, with the help of pseudo-scholars, lent staying power to a fascination that was to be particularly fruitful in the following century. The impact of Donnellysme and occultism was such in the English-speaking world that the decade 1890-1900 alone saw a dozen novels appear focusing on the fantastic survival of the Atlanteans. The well-documented book by Lauric Guillaud, *L'Éternel déluge* (2000), gives an idea of this fiction of uneven quality, throwing all mythologies into the same pot and confusing the lost continents of antiquity with those which had been found or invented by scholars: Mu, Gondwana, Lemuria. Some titles managed to escape this repetitive and hybrid vein. I will come back to them later, referring mostly to three stories to highlight the contrast between the romantic production of the end of the century and that, of poetic essence, of its beginning, which I would like to draw attention to first.

Well before the novel became the prerogative of a large number of readers, the Greek myth had generated works that were more difficult to access and that mainly tapped into the philosophical and symbolic content of the theme of the sunken island. Besides two writers representative of German Romanticism, Novalis, author of *Henry von Ofterdingen* (*Heinrich von Ofterdingen*) (1802) and Hoffmann, whose *The Golden Pot* (*Der goldene Topf*) appeared in 1814, we find the name of a French academician, Népomucène-Louis Lemercier, with liberal ideas who published *L'Atlantiade ou la Théogonie newtonienne* in 1812. This forgotten work differs from the other two, not only by comparison with their fame but also by the adopted form. *L'Atlantiade* is

an epic poem, where Novalis conceived a novel that was left unfinished, which inspired Hoffmann to write a fairy tale, a *Märchen*, in the terminology of the time. Differing in their aesthetics and ideologies, the three texts nevertheless share the same narrative material and didactic use of the myth.

Dedicated to Newton, Lemercier's epic casts the *Timaeus* conflict in the light of an invasion of Atlantis (named Eugée by Lemercier) by barbarians who have fled their own country in the wake of a cosmic revolution. In this symbolic war, the false knowledge of the invader (obscurantism and superstition) is opposed by respect for the harmony of nature to which the Symphytes of the Island Eugée (the 'good Earth') submit. The poet invents a scenario to this effect involving the contrasting relationship of attraction and repulsion between fictional deities with suggestive names: Lampélie (Light), Electrone (Electricity) Pyrotonne (Lightning), Pyrophyse (Heat) Sulphydre (Sulphur), etc. These are the gods of modernity, whose loves, rivalries and ruptures are metaphors for the phenomena described by physical laws. In a poetical evocation of the tides, we see Océan fall in love with Ménie (Moon) and provoke the jealousy of Hélion (Sun). Borrowing from Hesiod and Lucretius for the antique embellishment, as well as Chancellor Bacon for his natural sciences pedagogy, Lemercier concludes his drama with a geological disaster, which a couple, who are very comparable to Adam and Eve, survive.

While the epic subject matter allowed the dramatic framing of the original myth to be preserved (a war and cataclysm), we can see that Atlantis is primarily a symbolic horizon, a place of death and rebirth indicating the advent of a new age. Later, even as the epic figure had become a stale genre, the Catalan writer Jacinto Verdaguer resorted to it in his poem *La Atlántida,* published in 1877. Told to a Genoese who is none other than Christopher Columbus, the story no doubt met the aspirations of the ideologues who thought that a new Spanish golden age might emerge under the leadership of the Catalans.[17] Closely combining cosmology (the opening of the Strait of Gibraltar) and history with mythology, this rewrite links the sinking of Atlantis-Hesperia to Hercules' gesture guided by the hand of the God of the Christians. The disaster here has a punitive function because it punishes the unclean Atlanteans, the Titans, Geryon, Antaeus and other forces of evil, but it is also a salvation and a bearer of regeneration. The hero is, first and

[17] See C. le Bigot's interesting analysis: C. le Bigot, *Atlantides imaginaires*, collected by C. Foucrier and L. Guillaud (Paris 2004): 'Le mythe atlantidien chez Jacinto Verdaguer, Rafael Alberti et Rafael Lema: ambivalence, utopie et réflexe identitaire'.

foremost, a dispenser of justice and the founding father who wrests Queen Hesperis from the fallen kingdom to be mother to his children who will inhabit the Iberian Peninsula, a 'New Hesperia' promised a glorious future: the discovery of new worlds, of which Hercules would be the Prophet.

This dialectic of death and rebirth governs both Novalis' and Hoffmann's prose narratives, which tell, each in their own way, the story of the initiation of a young man to poetry by the dual mediations of love and learning on the mysteries of nature. The lessons come from masters who appear as sacred personages who are guardians of the secrets of the universe. In Novalis, the trials consist of a journey that leads Henry into the depths of a gold mine, connoting both primeval chaos and the silence of tombs. The hero dies in the world. As for Hoffmann's Anselme, we see him cloistered in the office of a mad archivist and forced to copy incomprehensible manuscripts. The formation of the world and its great conflagrations are told through a fable whose main actors are Phosphorus, Fleur de Lis, Green Snake etc. In both cases, contact with the antediluvian ages produces a metamorphosis of the character, the revelation of his poetic vocation. According to the ideal of the German Romantics, this implied a detachment from reality, asceticism, a dive into the archaic and finally the belief in the superiority of invisible worlds. Attached to these, is the memory of Atlantis. The dreamlike aesthetic of the *Märchen* makes woman the messenger of this other world: in *Henry von Ofterdingen* she attracts the poet in the form of a blue flower gifted with speech and movement, while in *The Golden Pot*, she has the features of a small bronze snake with dark eyes which Anselm immediately falls in love with.

Both storytellers thus manifested their isolation and suffering in an age in which prosaic values were disapproved of. Against the present, they opposed Atlantis, the lost continent, metaphor of art and dreams, the surreal woven from cosmogenic legends, one Nordic (Novalis), the other Eastern (Hoffmann). Reproduced in poetic form, the myth deploys the versatility of the strong images emanating from the founding disaster, which lends itself to allegorical readings. Whether making reference to the fallen state (Plato), science (Lemercier), patriotism (Verdaguer) or poetic creation (Novalis and Hoffmann), allegory, whatever its nature, always looks to offer a general truth, or an abstract idea.

It is in this that the Atlantis' of the beginning of the century constitute a nice exception, both in thematic and generic terms, not to mention their literary richness within a corpus of work largely attached to

questioning the validity of the Platonic narrative. This questioning, as we have seen, proliferated in particular in the late nineteenth century, when romantic idealism had given way to concrete and profitable concerns: industrial and commercial development, colonial expeditions and scientific discoveries. Such a configuration was not without impact on the dissemination of knowledge or on the approach to reality through literature, and therefore on the emergence of a new readership. This range of factors brought back to the fore a genre as old as Western literature itself: the adventure novel, on which form the nineteenth century conferred its legitimacy, assuring it of 'the autonomy of a separate genre' and its 'survival', according to the critic Jean-Yves Tadié.[18] It is not surprising that Atlantis found its place in this vein based, roughly speaking, on the credibility of an incredible adventure. On the one hand, fiction, if not plausible, at least aims to maintain in the reader the illusion of a real story. On the other, this same fiction must provide an original means of escape and fulfil the fantastical hope of reaching some hidden treasure. In the words of Tadié, in such fiction, 'what is possible is hard to distinguish from what is impossible'.[19]

In the case before me, this blurring feeds an account by putting a man of our world into contact with an unknown world - *Terra incognita* or *Novus Orbis* - from where he returns, enriched by a sensational discovery. A hero of an incredible adventure, he is also sometimes the narrator, in this inheriting the role attributed to the Greek Solon in the *Timaeus*. This is the first virtue of the novel: the weight of experience and force of testimony win over the reader more easily than any scholarly commentary. And even if this phenomenon of belief had for centuries permeated the Western imagination, novels, as is their vocation, approached Atlantis from a very seductive slant, guaranteeing a strong following. France was a pioneer in the field, with the work of Jules Verne who, although devoting just one (posthumous) story specifically to the myth of Atlantis ('L'Eternel Adam', 1910), accorded it fairly constant interest, citing it in seven novels in the *Voyages Extraordinaires*. [20] *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Seas* (1870), a novel in which the reference exceeds mere mention, and whose English

[18] Our translation of J.-Y. Tadié, *Le Roman d'aventures* (Paris 1982) 22: 'Lautonomie d'un genre à part'[et sa] 'survie'.

[19] Our translation of Tadié, *Roman d'aventures*, 206: 'Le possible s'y distingue mal de l'impossible'.

[20] Translated into English: J. Verne, 'The Eternal Adam', *Yesterday and tomorrow*, I.O. Evans trans. (London 1965).

translation appeared in 1872, stands out and exerted a significant influence on Anglo-American production.

A single chapter of this book, some twenty pages, was enough to translate the *Mythos* into the field of reality, recounting events that occurred during an exploration of the ocean conducted by Professor Aronnax under the leadership of Captain Nemo. The sequence is short, dense and spectacular. The narrator creates a passage full of suspense: the hero does not know the purpose of the journey, which is moreover strewn with obstacles and threats in these rugged depths populated by gigantic crustaceans. Hence his questions ('Where was I? Where?'[21]) to which a textual response is given in the form of Nemo's inscription of the place name ATLANTIS on a basalt rock. However, it is essentially the description of the site that serves as a response. The remains of an ancient city, with its dislocated temples illuminated by incandescent projections of an underwater volcano, rise up suddenly, like an apparition. The fragility of the finest civilizations is thus signified in a tableau that combines the signs of high culture and those of the power of nature. With the torrents of fire it vomited forth, the volcano is compared to 'an enormous torch' that illuminates not only the scene but also, symbolically, the spirit of the character and ultimately the Platonic myth.[22] The inner monologue translates the emotions of Aronnax, a cultivated naturalist who mobilises all his memories in an instant, recalling the outline of the *Timaeus* but also the names of the scholars who have studied it, not distinguishing the Ancients (Theopompus, Porphyry, Tertullian, Jamblichus etc.) and Moderns (Buffon, Humboldt, D'Avezac, Malte-Brun, etc.).

With this light synonymous with rebirth, Jules Verne resurrected Atlantis in a completely new day, nevertheless offering the contours of the composite mythology of his time. In this he brought together a saturated textual tradition of references, a geographical area that was recognised as plausible (the area of the Azores and the Canary Islands), and finally a fascinating picture reflecting the desire to solve the mystery of the world's origins. This is why the city, with its Greco-Roman appearance, falls within what Donnelly called shortly afterwards 'the antediluvian world'. This can be seen in Aronnax's anachronistic reverie, rendered as follows: 'my hands were touching ruins hundreds of thousands of years old, contemporary with

[21] J. Verne, *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under The Seas* (New York, NY 1998) 260.
[22] Verne, *Twenty Thousand Leagues*, 259-260.

the early geological periods! I was walking on the same spot where the coevals of the first man had walked!'[23]

The revival of the vanished world is here drawn by the magic of words and a true staging of Atlantis and Atlantology. Subsequent adventure novels actually did revive the Atlanteans and peopled this portrayal, as shown by two fictions from the end of the century: *Atlantis* by André Laurie, a Jules Verne imitator who published his novel in 1895, and *The Lost Continent* by the Englishman, Charles John Cutcliffe Hyne, whose novel was published in 1899. Although very different, both these stories picked up on, adding seasoning to the adventures of, the Verne recipe of a dangerous march into the unknown on which one discovers Atlantis, either by chance (Hyne) or during a shipwreck at sea (Laurie). In terms of featuring the legendary island, the two novels had, moreover, the merit of providing two opposing options for posterity: archaism or modernity. When Atlantis was definitively erased from the globe, it was still possible to make the dead speak and retrace the past. This was the decision taken by Hyne, who imagined a historical novel that opens with a typical adventure story introductory episode: the discovery of a manuscript unearthed by archaeologists on which one can read, in this case, the history of Deucalion, a survivor of the cataclysm. Ignatius Donnelly's influence is evident here: the precious relic is found in the Canary Islands, while the testimony recorded concerns the Yucatan, a distant Atlantean colony. The other option, chosen by Laurie, reveals a contemporary Atlantis, an 'outside world' that subsisted for thousands of years in the abyss, and necessarily unknown to sailors. To get there, one must sink into it, which is what happens to the hero, René Caoudal. The remains of the sunken continent have here the form of a purely artificial microcosm, a translucent dome equipped with everything necessary for life: electricity, oxygen, agriculture, industries etc. Built by the ancient Atlanteans to escape the notorious catastrophe, the city is only inhabited by the last two remaining descendants, the old Charicles and his daughter Atlantis.

This giant machine, a product of modern technology, features characters who, through their voluntary seclusion and their ancestral culture, paradoxically point back to a stubborn cult of antiquity. Atlantidian fiction willingly practices this mixing of temporalities which, in particular, allows the reprise of the science-fiction cliché of the superior knowledge of ancient peoples. In Hyne's epic, this knowledge is attributed to the caste of learned

[23] Verne, *Twenty Thousand Leagues*, 261.

priests who intend to expel the tyrannical queen of Atlantis. Guardians of a certain 'Ark of Mysteries', they possess the secret of life and death, as well as the weapon that will eventually destroy the corrupt kingdom. Whether archaic or futuristic, the Atlantis of novelists is, in any case, always shaken by serious political and moral crises. Ever since Plato, the indissoluble war-cataclysm link had been a ferment of intrigue that philosophers and pseudo-scholars accommodated to their personal aims. Following their example, novelists traced the thread of a recurring scenario, linking the fall of Atlantis to internal divisions rather than a conflict with a foreign country, as was the case in the *Timaeus*. It is a civil war that, in *The Lost Continent*, sets the defenders of religion and freedom up against those who are blinded by the desire for power and wealth, *libido dominandi*. This summary determines the action interspersed with conspiracies, after which Zaemon, head of the religious party, triumphs over Phorenice, the novel's debauched queen.

The paradigm of the dual Atlantis would be declined thereafter in multiple ways. The sages fight the barbarians, just as the 'old' confronts the 'new', 'old manner' and 'newer method', as one of the narrative's characters recounts.[24] This debate is at the heart of André Laurie's *Atlantis*. Laurie, a writer and journalist and former Communard, produced books for young people that spread the ideal of a 'Republic of Sciences and Letters', exalting moral and social progress by public education. In his fiction, the fall of Atlantis is the crucial moment when the Atlanteans, fleeing their homeland under threat of sinking to found a colony elsewhere, were separated from the cultured elite of engineers and teachers who built their submarine refuge and opted for complete isolationism. Informed by his visitor on the progress accomplished on the earth's surface, Charicles admits his mistake: 'What good is science if it is not be disclosed?'[25] Faced with deadly seclusion, the stranger embodies movement, faith in progress, the life force. The twist here is that René Caoudal is not simply the dazzled spectator imagined by Jules Verne but a significant contributor, and, better still, the saviour of Atlantis. Like Deucalion's, his voyage includes initiatory tests as well as a love affair that throws the hero into the arms of a virtuous young woman, unhappy and threatened with death. Various incidents lead to her removal and the couple's escape to unknown horizons, a New Atlantis in some way.

[24] C.J. Cutcliffe Hyne, *The Lost Continent* (orig. 1899; New York, NY 1972) 22.
[25] Our translation of A. Laurie, 'Atlantis', *Magasin d'éducation et de récréation*, (Paris 1895) tome I, 318: 'À quoi bon une science qui ne sera pas divulguée?'

The introduction into the myth of the saving theme of love recalls the poetic retellings of the beginning of the century and was a constant that would prove productive in many other novels. The encounter between the hero and Atlantis may well be what gave new force to the narrative continuations of the Greek account. The formation of this couple is expressive first and foremost of a general trend in the Western imagination that has converted a whole mythology of the fall into a mythology of rebirth, the sinking into a resurgence. As for the escape of the two characters, it is emblematic of the enterprise of refictionalisation that is particular to the nineteenth century, since it refers back to the idea of the transmission of very ancient history and its reappropriation by the Moderns, in short, to the freedom to continue the unfinished *Critias*. In this sense the loving traveller is somewhat the avatar of the writer, while the heroine saved from the waters, representative, in the manner of a synecdoche, of the island of Atlantis itself: history, remains, customs, political system, etc. In this interplay of mirrors, the woman reflects the values and in turn, according to the portrait dressed of her, the 'good' or 'bad' Atlantis. In Cutcliffe Hyne, Naïs, noble and rebellious, is the counterpoint to Phorenice, the femme fatale evoked by Messalina and Cleopatra, at the same time as foreshadowing the most famous of all barbarian queens, Pierre Benoit's Antinea.[26]

Conclusion

Even briefly presented, this fictional scenario allows us to measure the progress made by the eclectic literature of the nineteenth century, which progressively left the reading rooms reserved for the intelligentsia to achieve its arrival, via science and the adventure novel, into the public domain and mass culture. The gap is apparently quite wide between the relatively abstract Atlantis of the historians and poets of the early years and the one that the contemporaries and successors of Jules Verne reconfigured, exploiting it in various ways and borrowing from several different genres (historical, realistic, fantastic, esoteric) to produce the illusion of the current existence of Atlantis.

[26] The book that I have published presents a detailed study of fictions on Atlantis: C. Foucrier, *Le Mythe littéraire de l'Atlantide (1800-1939). L'origine et la fin* (Grenoble, 2004).

As I have shown, this belief in the possible resurgence of the mythical island can be ascribed to several factors. Besides the evolution of literary forms and readership, new expectations arose from journeys of exploration, colonial policy and progress in knowledge on primeval ages and lost civilizations. However, strangely, the influence of science on the interpretations of the myth in the nineteenth century actually nourished an imaginary Atlantis, by producing polemic, bold hypothesis and fantastic reconstructions such as that of the mother civilization, which pseudo-scientists (Donnelly) and theosophers (Blavatsky) propagated in Europe and America. Erudite comment and fictional narratives thus have several similarities, such as nostalgia for the Golden Age and for the more or less idealised representation of an eminent ancient people – the Atlanteans – which Plato had, on the contrary, characterised through its *Hybris* and barbarism.

This positive image of Atlantis doubtless bears out modern fascination for earliest Antiquity, for its mysteries and myths and its presumed models of knowledge and wisdom. I have therefore been able to observe a genuine continuity between the first and the last rewritings of the century, particularly through the theme of the voyage towards Atlantis. From Novalis to adventure novels, the multiple variants of the story always emphasise the involvement of the narrator in the narrated adventures and, consequently, that of the reader who is somehow carried forth on this imaginary journey, and pulled in contrasting directions, lent both feelings of enchantment and condemnation. Is it not that this reader is somehow affected by the old Atlantis, both him and the modern world? If this is so, it is no doubt because myths defy time: to question the early ages is often to question the present. By establishing this new relationship with the quest for the lost continent, the fiction of the nineteenth century actually re-established the link with the process of production of the Platonic myth, an exemplary narrative suggesting that the corrupt city of *Critias* is a *trompe l'oeil*: the disguised replica of contemporary Athens, the foreshadowing of a catastrophic future and the image of civilizations blind to their own frailties.[27]

[27] Article translated by J. Sims.