



Prof. Walter James Miller (January 16, 1918 - June 20, 2010) and the literary recognition of Jules Verne in the Anglo-Saxon world - A tribute

In June 2010, the editorial board of *Verniana* lost one of its most respected and influential members. Walter James Miller was a pioneer of modern Verne studies who, in the 1960s, was the first to point out the poor quality of most English translations of Verne and the damage that this had done to Verne's literary reputation. For half a century, Miller led what he called the "rescue team" — scholars who worked with him and under his influence to rehabilitate Verne's status among contemporary scholars and enthusiasts in the English-speaking world.



Walter James Miller, June 2007, at the annual meeting of the North American Jules Verne Society in Albuquerque, New Mexico

Numerous publications (including Miller's essay in Volume 1 of *Verniana* [1]), interviews, and lectures [2] detail the history of this important crusade. Among the many excellent works by Miller that have spearheaded this effort are:

- the first faithful English translations of *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Seas* (by Miller alone in 1965 and later in a 1993 collaboration with Frederick Paul Walter that was published by the United States Naval Institute) [3].
- the first annotated editions of Verne novels in any language, in *The Annotated Jules Verne: Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* (1976) and in *The Annotated Jules Verne: From the Earth to the Moon* (1978) [4].
- the introduction and notes for the first English translation of *The Mighty Orinoco*, (2002). Miller's critical introduction remains one of the best studies of this novel [5].

Born in McKee, New Jersey, Miller attended Brooklyn College and Columbia University. From 1943 to 1946 he was a liaison officer in the U.S. Army. Before becoming a professor at the New York University in 1958, Miller taught at Hofstra University, the Polytechnic University (Brooklyn, NY), and at Colorado State University (Fort Collins).

An expert in American literature, Miller forged an international reputation as a literary scholar, poet, and playwright, and authored, co-authored or contributed to 67 books on a wide variety of subjects and writers such as Samuel Beckett, Upton Sinclair, Joseph Heller, E.L. Doctorow, Ray Bradbury, Edward Bellamy, and his lifelong friend, Kurt Vonnegut. During the 1960s and 1970s, Miller hosted the WNYC television and radio shows "Book World" and "Reader's Almanac," for which he conducted interviews with many up-and-coming-but-not-yet-famous writers such as Nadine Gordimer and Allen Ginsberg. The "Great Books" course he created at NYU and taught for many years was celebrated in 1996 by *New York Magazine*, in an article titled "Cool Classes, Great Teachers."

A true modern humanist, Miller was curious about everything and passionate about literature, especially poetry. He shared this love with his students for over 40 years. His "Great Books" class at New York University was so popular that it was highlighted in an article called "Cool Classes, Great Teachers" in the *New York Magazine* in August 1996. We dedicate Volume 3 of *Verniana* to one of the founding fathers of modern criticism, Walter James Miller. We remember Walter as a friend, full of humor and kindness, always ready to help.

THE EDITORS

NOTES

1. Walter James Miller, «As Verne Smiles», *Verniana*, vol. 1, 2008-2009, p. 1-8.
2. *Two Great Writers*. The North American Jules Verne Society presents the *WNYC Book World* and *Reader's Almanac* radio interviews by Walter James Miller. 2009. 2 CDs. (See Volker Dehs's review in *Verniana* 2)
3. *Jules Verne's Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea: The Definitive Unabridged Edition Based on the Original French Texts*. Translated and edited by Walter James Miller and Frederick Paul Walter. Annapolis: US Naval Institute, 1993.
4. *The Annotated Jules Verne: Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*. New York, Crowell, 1976. *The Annotated Jules Verne: From the Earth to the Moon*. New York, Crowell, 1978.
5. *The Mighty Orinoco*. Translated by Stanford L. Luce, edited by Arthur B. Evans, and with an introduction and notes by Walter James Miller. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2002.