

## *Introduction*

### *1. The Nature of the Project*

This book was planned as a companion project to a history of British “scientific fiction” entitled *New Atlantis: A Narrative History of British Scientific Romance*, which I had compiled three years earlier in order to compare and contrast the evolution of British speculative fiction based on scientific notions with American fiction of the same kinds. Previously all such fiction had been lumped together by historians under the label that eventually came to be applied to that kind of fiction: “science fiction,” but I had come to consider that aggregation misleading.

The term “science fiction” was invented in 1929, after a brief period in which the more cumbersome “scientifiction” had been employed as a label applied to Hugo Gernsback’s *Amazing Stories*, the first U.S. magazine specializing in fiction featuring hypothetical new inventions, scenarios set in hypothetical futures transformed by technological progress, scenarios in which the present world is disrupted by intrusions capable of rational rather than “supernatural” explanation, and “secret history” stories featuring past inventions and intrusions of the same sort. Those fundamental categories broadened over time to take in such marginal subgenres as “alternative history” stories and prehistoric fantasies based on scientific theories and discoveries.

All of those kinds of stories had existed prior to the invention of the label, so that generic label came with a “history” already built into it; indeed, in the introductory editorial to the first issue of *Amazing Stories* in 1926, Gernsback explained what the word “scientifiction” meant by referring back to previous works illustrative of the kind of fiction he wanted to gather together under the label, particularly works by Jules Verne and H. G. Wells. By so doing he defined “scientifiction,” and thus “science fiction,” as an essentially international enterprise, and in the first decade of their existence, Gernsback’s magazines not only reprinted works by Verne and Wells but published a number of translations of contemporary works from French and German. Although the translations disappeared from generically labeled magazines after the mid-1930s, the American science fiction magazines continued to use material from a handful of British writers, the magazines having a limited circulation in Britain.

Following the end of World War II in 1945, the label “science fiction” was imported into Britain and France, where the kinds of fiction contained in the American science fiction magazines had previously only had casually-applied descriptive labels that were not applied with any great consistency. The result of the importation was that a good deal of material began to be written in those two countries with the intention of publication under the label, and some material not written with that intention began to be gathered under it, if not by publishers, then by commentators and by readers who had a particular fondness for the genre. Those specialist readers, while not numerous, tended to be avid; there was something about the genre conducive to attracting a “cult following” of fans, who formed a kind of community—a phenomenon noticed and encouraged by Hugo Gernsback in the 1920s, which undoubtedly helped to maintain the viability of science fiction magazines as a commercial product in times of fierce economic competition.

That tendency of commentators and fans to lay claim to works that had not been written with the intention of bearing the generic label caused some dissent and dispute. The early American magazines bearing the label were “pulp magazines”: a term that referred to the cheap paper on which they were printed, but which also reflected a differentiation that had become very sharp in the U.S.A. during the 1920s when magazines supported by advertising revenue, which were printed on better quality paper and hence known as “slick” magazines, had increasingly focused on material calculated to appeal to better-off readers—particularly female readers, because market research had revealed that females had more

influence on purchasing decisions—while those supported primarily by the purchasing price were those considered “lowbrow” and mostly read by males. Although science fiction was actually rather demanding of its readers, in terms of the elaborate terminology it employed and the intellectual efforts it required to follow its imaginative extrapolations, it was particularly favored by young male readers: the category in which advertisers were least interested.

Economically condemned to pulp magazines by virtue of the nature of its readership, American science fiction had taken on other general attributes of pulp fiction—primarily, an emphasis on melodramatic action-adventure fiction—as well as evolving to reflect the particular interests of its cult following. By 1945, when the label was exported to Britain and France, the American science fiction magazines were dominated by futuristic fiction routinely featuring space travel and adventures on other worlds, much of it colorfully melodramatic in its content, and positively garish in its illustrative packaging. Although there were writers in both France and Britain ready and eager to write that kind of fiction for that kind of packaging, there was a marked dissonance between that particular produce and much of the fiction previously produced in those two nations dealing with the same fundamental themes. That dissonance caused some dissent between writers eager to be packaged as science fiction writers and writers who wanted to avoid the stigmatization of the label—a dispute that continues, sometimes fiercely, in the present day.

The existence of that past and present dissonance inevitably creates problems for historians of the kinds of fiction that thrive under the science fiction label. Many simply take the view that the label can and should be extended to absorb anything susceptible of absorption—and, indeed, they often define “science fiction” operationally in a manner that makes that absorption compulsory. As interest developed in the compilation of some kind of definitive history of science fiction extending backwards as far as operational definition could take it, almost all such historians accepted the view adopted by Hugo Gernsback that it was an essentially international endeavor in which the relevant works of Jules Verne, H. G. Wells, and American pulp science fiction, were merely chapters in the same story.

That methodology has the side-effect of glossing over the fact that the British, French and American traditions of speculative fiction developed separately for more than a hundred years, with only slight overlaps of interest, prior to 1926, and continued to develop thereafter in accordance with quite different foci of interest and narrative methods, until the importation of the American label initiated a process of fusion that was still not complete even at the end of the twentieth century. My purpose in writing my two studies of British scientific romance—the preliminary *Scientific Romance in Britain 1890-1950* (1985) and the more definitive *New Atlantis: A Narrative History of Scientific Romance* (completed 2012 but not yet published at the time of writing)—was to identify and highlight those differences, and analyze the extent to which the evolution of speculative fiction, even within a common language, was not a common international endeavor but a process of parallel development of two separate traditions, with only a few bridges and entanglements.

While working on that project, I became acutely aware of the fact that if there was some historical insight to be gained by separating out the tradition of British scientific romance exemplified by H. G. Wells from the generalized “history of science fiction,” a similar insight could be gained by separating out the French tradition of *roman scientifique* exemplified by Jules Verne, which had been isolated to a much greater degree by a language barrier. Even the cases where that barrier appeared to have been breached—the translation of all of Verne’s relevant works into English being the key example—the crossover was far from perfect, because the original translations were, for the most part, corrupt and misleading.

To an even greater extent than British scientific romance, therefore, French *roman scientifique* seemed to me to warrant separate consideration as an independent tradition guided by its own particular interests and developing its own narrative strategies, rather than simply being subsumed, tacitly or explicitly, into a generalized “history of science fiction.” That is what motivated me to undertake the present project, and that is what it attempts to achieve, at least in terms of a preliminary sketch.

Although the first significant study of the material that forms the subject matter of the present project, *La Littérature française d'imagination scientifique* [The French Literature of the Scientific Imagination] (1950) by Jean-Jacques Bridenne did not adopt the “science fiction” label, most of those that came after it were content to do so, albeit with modifications and with a degree of separation. Most significantly, Pierre Versins’ *Encyclopédie de l’utopie, des voyages extraordinaires et de la science-fiction* [Encyclopedia of Utopia, Extraordinary Voyages and Science Fiction] (1972) recruited it, along with two other generic labels, to the specification its field of concern. Although the book’s format as an alphabetically-organized set of articles enables individual authors to be considered separately, the articles on the key themes of science fiction refer to French, English and American materials collectively.

Versins’ prodigious effort was followed by Jacques Sadoul’s *Histoire de la science fiction moderne* [The History of Modern Science Fiction] (1973; revised and augmented 1984 as *Histoire de la science-fiction moderne 1911-1984*), which separated its accounts of “le domaine anglo-saxon” and “le domaine français,” the latter account beginning in 1905 rather than 1911, thus facilitating comment on contrasts between the twentieth-century development of two traditions as well as their common features. Sadoul’s study does not have the same historical depth as Versins’ endeavor, but the different direction of his approach—as a writer and publisher of contemporary science fiction rather than a collector and historian—differentiated his outlook sharply, and thus made his text a useful complement to its predecessor.

Those two books preceded most of the “histories of science fiction” written in English, although they drew on the preliminary work done by Sam Moskowitz in compiling the essay collections *Explorers of the Infinite: Shapers of Science Fiction* (1963) and *Seekers of Tomorrow: Masters of Modern Science Fiction* (1965). A significant model for generalized “histories of science fiction” was provided by Brian W. Aldiss’ *Billion Year Spree: The True History of Science Fiction* (1973), which stirred up some controversy by its insistence on locating the “origin” of the retrospectively-constructed genre in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1815). Other historians and bibliographers hastened to identify other supposed points of origin, stimulating much debate about the essential nature of the genre and the manner in which it ought to be viewed, highlighting the fact that there is not just one “history of science fiction” but several, arranged in parallel like the alternative histories that genre had partially absorbed.

The most comprehensive account of retrospectively defined “science fiction” is Everett F. Bleiler’s annotated bibliography of *Science Fiction, The Early Years* (1990), which lists and describes all the works published in English prior to 1926 that could, in Bleiler’s syncretic view, be considered retrospectively to belong to the genre. His survey includes all the relevant works translated from French but none that had not been translated. That volume has become the definitive bibliographical guide to the “history of science fiction” prior to the invention of the label, although it is restricted to its manifestations in the English language. Investigation of the French tradition was, however, pursued by a number of critics and commentators in the last quarter of the twentieth century, most extensively by Jacques van Herp in his *Panorama de la science-fiction: les thèmes, les genres, les écoles, les problèmes* [A Panorama of Science Fiction: The Themes, Genres, Schools and Problems] (1975).

The most notable volume focusing on the entire history of French material that has been published since Versins’ *Encyclopédie* is Jean-Marc Lofficier and Randy Lofficier’s *French Science Fiction, Fantasy, Horror and Pulp Fiction: A Guide to Cinema, Television, Radio, Animation, Comic Books and Literature from the Middle Ages to the Present* (2000), which contains a useful synoptic history of various genres of French imaginative fiction and an extensive bibliography of relevant works. Another extensive study dedicated entirely to French material, although more limited in its scope, is Jean-Marc Gouanvic’s *La Science-fiction française au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle (1900-1968)* [French Science Fiction of the Twentieth Century, 1900-1968] (1994), while other critics and historians who have significant contributions to the study of roman scientifique in the twentieth century include Jean-Pierre Fontana, Gérard Klein and Jean-Pierre Andrevon.

Although it is not exclusively devoted to French works, Daniel Fondanèche’s *La Littérature d’imagination scientifique* [The Literature of the Scientific Imagination] (2012), which focuses mainly on the period from 1750 to 1910, places French materials in the foreground, and thus forms a useful

complement to Sadoul's work, as do Irène Langlet's *La Science-Fiction: lecture et poésie d'un genre littéraire* (2006) and Simon Bréan's *La Science-Fiction en France* (2012). Natacha Vas-Deyres' account of *Ces Français qui ont écrit demain, utopie, anticipation et science-fiction au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle* [The French Authors who have written Tomorrow: Utopia, Anticipation and Science Fiction in the Twentieth Century] (2013) extends the account given by Sadoul to the end of the century, offering in-depth analyses of selected works; her bibliography refers to several recent academic theses on the subject that have not yet achieved book publication, reflecting an increasing interest in the subject.

The present project attempts to build on those endeavors and carry them a little further forward, within its own temporal range, from seventeenth-century foundation-stones to the 1930s.

The Versins *Encyclopédie* was the model for *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* edited by Peter Nicholls and John Clute, published in 1979 in England and America, which attempted to fix and clarify the notion of "science fiction's" range and history in the same fashion. The editors made an effort to include coverage of science fiction in other languages, and were careful to include entries on several notable French writers, although only a small minority of those covered by Versins. In order to help them cope with problems of definition, the editors commissioned an entry on "proto-science fiction," coining that term to describe works published before the genre label was invented, but which could be retrospectively gathered under its banner.

Coincidentally, that article in the 1979 *Encyclopedia* was assigned to me, and I patched it together without giving any serious thought to the propriety of the term. Indeed, I continued to use the phrase routinely for thirty years thereafter without giving it much thought. The article in question still exists, modified for the 1993 edition of the *Encyclopedia* and again for the current on-line version, which is enjoying a curious "pre-existence" by virtue of the fact that it is a work in progress that will never actually be finished, but can nevertheless be accessed in its incomplete and imperfect state. Nowadays, however, because of the insights developed during the research for the present project, I make a point of never using the term; I have recently preferred to subtitle the various anthologies of such material that I have compiled as translations of "French scientific romances." As well as asserting that the present project should not be considered as a "history of science fiction," I particularly want to emphasize the assertion that it should not be considered as a "history of proto-science fiction."

In wanting to do that, I am not attempting to deny the "science fiction" label because of any kind of imagined taint; my reason is that thinking of works produced before the genre label existed as "proto-science fiction" tacitly implies that they were somehow "leading to it," as if it were a kind of objective to attained. Science fiction fans in search of reading material inevitably look for works that resemble the objects of their affection most closely, and evaluate them according to the extent to which they do, but that kind of assessment ought not to be used to construct a historical narrative.

For example, futuristic fiction and interplanetary fiction are rightly regarded as the two most important elements of modern science fiction; indeed, if one looks at the narrow history of the American science fiction that evolved in the pulp magazines in the 1930s and 1940s, it is evident that those two subgenres became conflated into a whole that became the core, if not the essence of science fiction. Within that context, interplanetary fiction was almost exclusively futuristic, and although there was no logical necessity for the reverse to be the case, the futuristic fiction featured in the magazine almost invariably imagined space travel as a key aspect of future historical development. Although it is an admitted oversimplification, it is possible to characterize, if not actually to define, American science fiction as a genre based on that quasi-chemical combination of futuristic and interplanetary fiction, as one of the most influential editors in the genre, Donald A. Wollheim, did explicitly in his own survey of it, *The Universe Makers* (1971).

If one looks back at the history of those two kinds of fiction outside the narrow context of the American specialist magazines, however, there is little overlap between them; the majority of futuristic fictions make no mention of space travel, and those that do often regard it as a peripheral issue of no great significance, while the majority of interplanetary fantasies are set in the present or the past. Although both subgenres were, therefore "ancestral" to modern science fiction in some sense, it would be a mistake to

look at them as if they were aspects of the *same* kind of fiction, and evaluate previous works in terms of the extent to which the two themes are combined therein.

Necessarily, the history outlined in these pages includes the evolution and development of French interplanetary fantasy and the evolution and development of French futuristic fantasy, and while doing that, I have had to bear in mind the eventual entanglement of the two kinds of fiction. What I have tried to set aside, however, is the notion that there was anything predestined about that eventual entanglement, and that authors working in those separate fields were somehow groping toward the connection.

It is, alas, tempting to look at interplanetary fantasy as if it were always somehow aiming toward the real space program of the 1960s and the actual moon landing that occurred in 1969—when science fiction writers were present at the launch of the spacecraft, exultant as having been “proved right”—and thus devaluing interplanetary fantasies that employed “*génies*” [genii, meaning spirits] or balloons as a literary device of imaginary spatial displacement as essentially lacking or inept. However, the writers who used those devices were not trying and failing to invent or anticipate *Apollo 11*; their aims and concerns were entirely different, and need to be weighed in their own terms if their contribution to literary history is to be accurately assessed.

That is one specific instance of a general problem. All history is to some extent distorted because, seen from the viewpoint of the present, the past inevitably seems to have been the process that produced that present, and what happened in the past thus tends to be seen in terms of the contribution the events in question made to the present state of affairs. In consequence, all history has a tendency to become not so much a mere record of past events as a narrative of the way in which those events combined to produce the present.

The problems involved in that kind of reasoning are unfortunately redoubled in a project that sets out to deal—not exclusively but to a considerable extent—with the history of images of the future. *Roman scientifique* is not a genre that consists entirely of futuristic fiction—one of the factors distinguishing it from modern science fiction is the reduced quantity of futuristic fiction it contains—but it does contain a good deal of it, and it would be difficult to rule many examples of futuristic fiction irrelevant to its development. It is, however, necessary to beware of considering those futuristic fictions purely and simply in relation to the actual future that developed in the interim between their writing and the time of their consideration.

It is perfectly natural for readers contemplating works of futuristic fiction produced in the past to measure the accuracy of their “predictions,” tacitly awarding them credit for every detail of their images of the future and technological possibility that have actually been replicated in the interim between the writer’s present and the reader’s, and reckoning as a failure every detail that failed to achieve realization in that interim, but it would be a serious mistake for a historian to employ the same measuring-stick, as if all that past writers of futuristic fiction were attempting to do was anticipate the actual form that the future would take—a quest that is logically impossible.

In fact, writers of futuristic fiction frequently argue that they are not trying to predict the future, and are, in fact, far more interested in trying to *prevent* the hypothetical events they describe from actually coming to pass, but that does not prevent the readers of the present from picking through yesterday’s images of the future with the interim in mind as a dimension of comparison. It should, however, serve as a dire warning to historians to be more sensitive in their evaluations, and to attempt to see the future-orientated fictions of the past as products of their own past rather than hit-or-miss contributions to the present from which they are being viewed, although it is also necessary to avoid going to the opposite extreme, and refusing to see anything in such works but reflections of their own present.

Alarmist writers attempting to prevent their futuristic visions coming true rather than to enhance their possibility are still attempting to be participants in the active process by which the future is made. It is necessary always to bear in mind that none of them had any idea what the actual shape of the future would be, and that their notions of what had previously counted and would subsequently count as “progress” were not the same as the notions that actually developed thereafter, but it is necessary to remember too that they would not have been writing futuristic fiction at all if they did not have a passionate interest in the nature and direction of progress. Such interests are, however, often much

narrower than the future of the human race seen as a whole, and even when they are as broad as that, they are inevitably influenced by the standpoint of the observer. For that reason, British notions of progress have always tended to be different from American ones, and French ones have been even more different. In consequence, the history of *roman scientifique* is not something that can or ought to be simply gathered into a general “history of science fiction.”

An argument can be made, and sometimes is, that it is a mistake and a distortion to gather texts together into genres at all, and to build narratives connecting them. In the present instance, that argument would assert that trying to establish a body of *roman scientifique* extending across two and a half centuries, and trying to make any kind of narrative out of the “evolution” of that work, is just as misleading and distortive as trying to assimilate that assembly of texts to a generalized “history of science fiction.” Again, however, it would be silly to go to the opposite extreme and take the view that the generic similarities that the present text will attempt to identify and link together are purely accidental, entirely in the eye of the modern beholder.

Many of the texts that will be described and discussed in this volume are explicitly linked together by their own internal references, and many more by tacit connections resulting from their reaction to the same issues. Indeed, that is far truer in France than in Britain, let alone America, because of the concentration of French publishing, and the presence of a highly-developed French literary community, in the city of Paris. French writers, by and large, had more opportunity and inclination to read previously-written books relevant to their own projects, and to read one another’s books, than writers in the English language. The *salon* culture that developed in seventeenth-century France, initially in association with Louis XIV’s court, which spread and diversified throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, ensured that French writers, at least in Paris, were far more likely to get together and discuss what they were doing than writers anywhere else in the world.

That kind of opportunity is particularly relevant to imaginative and speculative fiction, which deals with ideas and possibilities rather than with the mimetic reproduction or elaboration of the familiar. As previously mentioned, one of the key features of the development of the labeled science fiction genre in America has been the evolution in association with the fiction of a community of writers and readers who went to considerable efforts to arrange regular meetings and discussions, partly for mutual support and encouragement, but also to “bounce ideas” back and forth. In France, it was not necessary to invent a labeled genre and make special provision for that kind of interaction to happen among speculative fiction’s practitioners and enthusiasts; the social infrastructure was already in place.

By virtue of that circumstance, many of the authors whose works are discussed in the present text not only read many of the other works discussed, and responded and reacted to them, but were personally acquainted with at least some of their contemporaries, able to respond and react to them face-to-face. Not everyone, of course, could do that, but even those writers excluded from the meetings for one reason or another were aware of the culture of which they were a part; they sometimes made up the deficit with correspondence, or made what compensation they could by shadowy emulation or simple envy.

The result of that infrastructural support is that, even though no one before the 1870s could actually think in terms of “writing *roman scientifique*” and many people who can now be considered in retrospect as having done that actually thought of what they were doing in other terms, there was nevertheless always an awareness of some degree of common cause among writers interested in works of that kind, and an ongoing dialogue. The narrative of the evolution of French “scientific fiction” is blurred and complicated by all kinds of factors, but there is, nevertheless, a real narrative within it, and a real process of evolution. If it is to be understood properly, that evolution needs to be conceived as an evolution away from its actual past rather than an evolution toward what turned out to be its future, but it is a real and comprehensible process. (The same is, of course, true of biological evolution, although very few writers of speculative biological fantasies have understood that, and almost all of them tacitly or explicitly adopted the opposite point of view: that the progressive “purpose” of biological evolution had been, and still was, to “perfect” human being.)

In sum, therefore, the nature of this project is an attempt to produce a reasoned account of the evolution of scientifically-influenced fiction in France, paying heed to the differences between that evolution and the parallel processes going on in Britain and America. That cannot be responsibly done by looking primarily at the similarities between antique fiction of that sort and more modern fiction, as if the former were merely a prelude to the latter. It is, on the contrary, necessary to make the attempt, however difficult it might be, to look forward in the fashion that the authors of the past were looking forward, not toward our present but toward circumstances that never came about—and which, we now understand, never could have come about—but whose hypothetical construction can nevertheless be reckoned as a serious imaginative endeavor.

Tracking the evolution of a genre in order to cultivate the kind of understanding described above is a difficult process. The genre of *roman scientifique*, as I shall attempt to depict and characterize it, is a massive entity, with which it is no means easy for a single person to acquaint himself, even superficially. The bibliographical endeavor of accumulating a register of the relevant texts is Herculean in itself, and I could never have envisaged making the attempt without the enormously valuable groundwork laid by the bibliographers who have gradually put together the maps that I have employed in my attempted navigation.

The foundations of that endeavor were laid by Pierre Versins in his 1972 *Encyclopédie*. Although its coverage is limited to the number of texts that one person was capable of assembling and reading over a period of a few decades, it exhibits a remarkable breath and assiduity. Subsequent collectors have contrived to identify and locate numerous texts that Versins never happened across, so the body of work that can be identified as relevant to the present project has swelled steadily since 1972, thanks to the endeavors of such enthusiastic collectors and bibliographers as Joseph Altairac, Marc Madouraud, Guy Costes and Jean-Luc Boutel, assisting the bibliography contained in the Lofficiers' account of *French Science Fiction, Fantasy, Horror and Pulp Fiction* (2000) to extend the basic list of relevant titles considerably and usefully.

Although Pierre Versins bequeathed his collection to provide the basis of the library contained in the Maison d'Ailleurs at Yverdon, severe difficulties remained for subsequent scholars in obtaining access to the range of texts identified by him and subsequent bibliographers. Inevitably, those difficulties resulted in the vast majority of historical studies of generic materials produced before 2001 employing the standard academic strategy of simply ignoring the bulk of the material and focusing attention on a limited range of easily-available texts, tacitly suggesting that an understanding of the whole phenomenon can be gleaned from a handful of exemplary texts, without any need to consider the rest.

That situation has, however, changed drastically in the twenty-first century by virtue of the advent and extension of the world wide web. Consultation on line has made access to the bibliographical information much simpler; there are now several bibliographies of relevant material available on the web, the largest and most useful being those detailed at [noösphere.org](http://noösphere.org) and the website of the BDFI (Base de Données Francophone de l'Imaginaire); the latter includes bibliographies of relevant works by some ten thousand authors, a useful forum in which authors can discuss possible candidates for the elaboration of the bibliography, and links to numerous other sites providing supplementary information.

Some of those other sites, most notably Jean-Luc Boutel's *Sur l'Autre Face du Monde*, and some more narrowly specialized sites such as [destination-armageddon.fr](http://destination-armageddon.fr) and the section on [trussel.com](http://trussel.com) dedicated to prehistoric fiction, provide much more elaborate commentaries on relevant texts, and are increasingly providing direct access to previously-rare texts. The Bibliothèque Nationale's website *gallica* is gradually making the library's entire stock of out-of-copyright texts available for reading on line, and has already made a large quantity of texts that would otherwise be almost impossible to obtain available for downloading. It has therefore become feasible, as the twenty-first century has progressed, for anyone with sufficient determination not only to identify a wide range of texts relevant to the genre in which the present endeavor is interested, but to also read many of them; that is what I have tried to do, to the extent of which I was capable.

I cannot pretend that what I have contrived to produce in the present volume is anything more than a preliminary sketch, and it is arguable that its cut-off date for the considerations of texts, 1939, is at least a decade too early. Given another ten years of reading, during which time *gallica* would undoubtedly have made many more texts available, I could probably have done something a little more comprehensive, and should I live that long, I might well attempt a second edition of the present text, but it seemed worthwhile to produce something in the interim that was within my range of practicality, because I believe that there is some merit in trying to grasp the broad picture of the genre's early evolution, even while the jigsaw I am presently able to compile is necessarily missing many of its pieces.

In trying to identify and delineate the genre that I have chosen to call *roman scientifique* I thought it necessary not only to specify a starting-point—the beginning of the eighteenth century—but also to sketch a “prehistory” explaining how the seeds of the genre were able to begin germination in that century and proliferate greatly in the next. I have tracked the development of the genre through the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth as comprehensively as I could, but my coverage becomes increasingly patchy as the twentieth century progresses, partly because the volume of relevant material increases to unmanageable levels, and partly because I have focused my attention primarily on works in the public domain, because those were available for translation, and translating works automatically grants a more intimate insight into their narrative workings than merely reading them. It also creates a sense of investment invaluable to determined and protracted research.

The latter decision makes the text somewhat arbitrarily selective, especially with regard to its consideration of developments after the Great War of 1914-18, but one has to draw a line limiting such projects somehow, because it is not humanly possible to read and comment on everything. I hope that those I have been able to include offer a broader and more accurate representation than could ever have been achieved by the method of focusing on a mere handful of texts and trying to pretend that they are more representative than they are. I have tried to offer an image of the true extent and complexity of the genre, and if it lacks detail in places—as it surely does—I hope that disadvantage is somewhat compensated by its relative breadth.

In order to support the research for the book, and the book itself, I have translated more than a hundred and fifty volumes of material not previously available in English, the great majority of which have been published by Black Coat Press. The majority of the detailed references I shall have occasion to make are, therefore, to texts that interested readers will be able to find if they wish in English translation, most of them available in electronic formats as well as print-on-demand versions.

The volumes of translation provide a significant support function, in that the introductions and afterwords to the various volumes and sets of volumes generally provide more detailed information about particular authors and more detailed analyses of individual texts than can be accommodated in the present general survey. The thematic manner in which the present text is organized requires coverage of the work of such important and versatile authors as Maurice Renard, J.-H. Rosny and André Couvreur to be distributed over several different subsections of the chapters relating to the periods of their activity, whereas the detailed introductions to the sets of translations of their works offer detailed biographies and overviews of their entire production. There is a sense, therefore, in which the present volume is simply the central element in a larger project, and is perhaps best regarded itself as a mere introduction. The set of translations will continue to grow, for as long as I am capable of producing them and Black Coat Press is able to publish them.