

REVIEW-ESSAYS

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Culminating a Decade of Scholarship on Jules Verne

Jules Verne. *The Self-Propelled Island*. Trans. Marie-Thérèse Noiset. Intro. Volker Dehs. BISON FRONTIERS OF IMAGINATION. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 2015. xxi + 328 pp. \$29.95 hc.

Brian Taves. *Hollywood Presents Jules Verne: The Father of Science Fiction on Screen*. Lexington: U of Kentucky P, 2015. iv + 360 pp. \$40 hc.

William Butcher. *Jules Verne inédit: les manuscrits déchiffrés* [The Unpublished Jules Verne: The Manuscripts Deciphered]. Lyon: ENS Éditions, 2015. 491 pp. €29 pbk.

The year 2005 marked the centenary of Jules Verne's death. Predictably, a flood of new books about Verne's life and works (as well as modern reprints and updated translations of his famous *Voyages extraordinaires*) suddenly appeared in French and English bookstores. The following year, in a book review titled "Centennial Scholarship on Jules Verne," I attempted to provide an overview of the more noteworthy titles among these dozens of publications by and about Verne. I focused specifically on three biographies by William Butcher, Joëlle Dusseau, and Jean-Michel Margot, on the first of several volumes of Verne's personal correspondence (edited by Olivier Dumas, Volker Dehs, and Piero Gondolo della Riva), on four excellent monographs by Lucian Boia, Lauric Guillaud, Jean-Pierre Picot, and especially Timothy Unwin, on a few of the more interesting coffee-table books by François Angelier, Philippe de la Cotardière and Jean-Paul Dekiss, Philippe Mellot and Jean-Marie Embs, and Eric Weissenberg, on several scholarly journals that devoted special issues to Verne (including *SFS* 32.1 [Mar. 2005]), and finally on the new English translations and critical editions of Verne novels published by Wesleyan University Press, the University of Nebraska Press, Oxford University Press, and others.

During the ten years that have passed since this centennial celebration, Verne scholarship has continued to be surprisingly vigorous. For example, there has been a steady stream of new English-language translations of Verne showing up in the marketplace. And, judged not only by their quantity but also by their quality, they bear out my observation in 2009 that we seem to be "witnessing a veritable renaissance of interest in all things Vernian" ("Jules Verne in English" 9). These translations can be grouped into four basic categories:

1. FIRST ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF VERNE NOVELS:

The Kip Brothers. Trans. Stanford L. Luce. Ed. Jean-Michel Margot and Arthur B. Evans (EARLY CLASSICS OF SCIENCE FICTION, Wesleyan UP, 2007).

in France, Stanislav Govorukhin in Bulgaria, Paweł Trzaska in Czechoslovakia, Hans-Dieter Schwarze in Germany, and Masayuki Akehi in Japan—one must look elsewhere.¹ For the most authoritative history of Verne filmography in English, however, this book is definitely the one to buy.

William Butcher's *Jules Verne inédit* is the first comprehensive and in-depth examination of Verne's original manuscripts, the great majority of which are housed at the Bibliothèque municipale of Nantes, France. As Butcher explains:

Ces documents précieux dévoilent les romans d'avant la lecture de l'éditeur, Jules Hetzel, qui coupe, ou fait couper, tout ce qui lui semble inapte à être lu par les enfants bourgeois, que ce soit pour des raisons de politique, de violence ou d'érotisme.... La quasi-totalité des études à ce jour, même les éditions savantes de ces romans, négligent cet aspect: elles interprètent, non les oeuvres que le romanier écrit, mais celles, parfois maladroites, de temps à autre incompréhensibles, qui résultent des remaniements éditoriaux. La visée de ce volume sera en somme d'appréhender l'élaboration des oeuvres les plus importantes, de chercher Verne "à l'état nature." [These precious documents reveal the novels as they were before the publisher Jules Hetzel read them and before he cut, or had cut, everything that he deemed inappropriate for bourgeois children to read, whether it be for reasons of politics, violence, or eroticism.... The near totality of studies to this day, even the scholarly editions of Verne's novels, neglect this aspect: they interpret not the works the novelist wrote, but those sometimes clumsy and even incomprehensible ones that were the result of editorial rewrites. The goal of this book is therefore to understand how the author's most important works developed and to search for Verne "in his natural state."] (14)

Here, in the opening pages of this hefty (nearly 500-page) volume, one finds an explicit explanation of the book's principal focus and most important polemical goal: to demonstrate the extent to which Pierre-Jules Hetzel, Verne's editor/publisher, repeatedly altered the author's stories, from his earliest rough-draft manuscripts to the final published versions of his *Voyages extraordinaires*. Tailoring his selection of texts to this specific purpose, Butcher has chosen twenty of Verne's earliest and most famous titles (out of more than sixty)—i.e., those works written between 1859 to 1879, the years when Verne was working most closely with Hetzel (who died in 1886), adopting him as his literary mentor and "spiritual father," as he once called him.

Jules Verne inédit contains twenty chapters, plus appendices (notes and select bibliography). The first two chapters introduce the reader to the book's modus operandi, to the structure and history of Verne's manuscripts, and to the different author-editor phases through which the texts passed before (and sometimes after) their publication. Chapter three focuses on the manuscripts of two early unpublished essays—*Voyage à reculons en Angleterre et en Écosse* [Backwards to Britain] and *Joyeuses misères de trois voyageurs en Scandinavie* [Joyous Miseries of Three Travellers in Scandinavia]—and of the two first novels submitted to Hetzel: Verne's highly successful *Cinq semaines*

en ballon [Five Weeks in a Balloon] and his rejected novel *Paris au XXe siècle* [Paris in the 20th Century]. The next sixteen chapters are devoted to an analysis of one novel manuscript per chapter, as follows:

4. *Aventures du capitaine Hatteras* [The Adventures of Captain Hatteras]
5. *Voyage au centre de la terre* [Journey to the Center of the Earth]
6. *De la terre à la lune* [From the Earth to the Moon]
7. *Les Enfants du capitaine Grant* [The Children of Captain Grant]
8. *Vingt mille lieues sous les mers* [20,000 Leagues Under the Seas]
9. *Autour de la lune* [Around the Moon]
10. *Une ville flottante* [A Floating City]
11. *L'Oncle Robinson* [Uncle Robinson]
12. *Le Chancellor* [The Chancellor]
13. *Le Tour du monde en 80 jours* [Around the World in 80 Days]
14. *L'Île mystérieuse* [The Mysterious Island]
15. *Michel Strogoff* [Michael Strogoff]
16. *Hector Servadac* [Hector Servadac]
17. *Les Indes noirs* [The Black Indies]
18. *Les 500 millions de la Bégum* [The Begum's Millions]
19. *Les Tribulations d'un Chinois en Chine* [The Tribulations of a Chinese Man in China]

Each chapter begins with a useful overview of the publishing chronology of the work in question: dates of the first rough-draft manuscript and subsequent proofs and galleys, of its pre-publication (when applicable) in Hetzel's periodical the *Magasin d'éducation et de récréation* [Magazine of Education and Recreation], and of its appearance in different Hetzel book editions. Included as well are excerpts from the correspondence between Verne and Hetzel during the editing process. Each chapter also features sample illustrations of the specific manuscript being discussed. Given their (often lengthy) scribbles in the margins, their multiple strikeouts, and their (often barely legible) overwrites, one soon comes to understand why Butcher chose to subtitle his book "The Manuscripts Deciphered."

I will not spoil the reader's surprise by revealing the details of Hetzel's many alterations to Verne's manuscripts that are uncovered and analyzed by Butcher in *Jules Verne inédit*. But they are both substantial and wide-ranging, affecting the very identity of Verne's *Voyages extraordinaires* as we know them today. Vernians like myself have always been aware of some instances of Hetzel's censorship and rigid demands for rewrites that changed the fate of Verne's Hatteras, the identity and last words of his Nemo, and the conclusion of his *Hector Servadac*, for example. But even the most seasoned Verne scholar will be shocked at the extent to which Verne's most famous works were transformed by the hand of Hetzel. It seems fitting that the final chapter of *Jules Verne inédit*, which also serves as its conclusion, is titled "Déhetzeliser Verne?" [To "De-Hetzel" Verne?], where Butcher asks—not entirely rhetorically—why Verne's *original and genuine* manuscript-based

works should not be published alongside their Hetzel-edited counterparts. Perhaps, in the best of all possible worlds....

Noiset's *The Self-Propelled Island*, Taves's *Hollywood Presents Jules Verne*, and Butcher's *Jules Verne inédit* offer an impressive, finish-on-a-high-note finale to a decade of superb Verne scholarship since 2005. These books belong in every university library and on the bookshelves of every Verne aficionado.

NOTES

1. To be fair, several non-Anglophone directors are mentioned in passing in *Hollywood Presents Jules Verne*—Segundo de Chomon, Juan Piquer Simón, and Karel Zeman, for example. And one of the best studies of the French-language novels and films of Jules Verne's son Michel Verne is also by Taves (see below).

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