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The "New" Jules Verne

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March 1995

The "New" Jules Verne

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Arthur B. Evans

The "New" Jules Verne

The publication in France of a "lost" Jules Verne novel called *Paris au XXe siècle*[1] (Paris in the 20th Century, untranslated as of this writing) has caused quite a stir in the media during the past few months. And rightly so. It is a rare and noteworthy event when a legendary author often cited as the "Father of Science Fiction" suddenly reappears among us, some 100 years later, and describes for us how he visualized our world of today. But there is also much more to this story than meets the eye. This futuristic tale, authenticated as one of Verne's earliest, could prove to be of revolutionary significance for literary scholars as well as for Verne's reputation among the traditional reading public. But more on this later. Let us first begin by taking a look at the novel itself.

The date is August 13, 1960. The place: Paris. The narrative opens *in medias res* as the national Corporation of Instructional Credit—a modern privatized version of the old Ministry of Education, created in 1937 during the reign of Napoléon V, with corporate shares now valued at over 10,000 francs each—is in the middle of its annual ceremony to distribute academic achievement awards to all of France's young graduates. Symptomatic of the times, 99.9% of the students have majored in the socially "useful" disciplines of mathematics, economics, engineering, and the natural sciences. One exception to this rule is Michel Jérôme Dufrénoy, a student of literature and an aspiring poet and dramatist (much like Verne himself prior to his fateful meeting with Hetzel). Despite his scholarly brilliance, Michel, as he walks to the podium to receive his diploma, is subjected to shouted insults, sarcasm, and overt ridicule by all those in attendance. It is obvious that Michel is deemed a social misfit in this "brave new world" of 1960. And the remainder of *Paris au XXe siècle* will portray his repeated—albeit doomed—efforts to integrate himself into a future French society much more interested in profit-margins and "progress" than in Pindar or the Parnassians.

This new Paris is the extrapolated culmination of social trends already very palpable during Verne's own time: e.g., industrial positivism, *laissez-faire* capitalism, and accelerated technological growth. As a result, Paris circa 1960 has evolved into a smooth-running, high-tech commercial megalopolis where gasoline-powered cars crowd the wide streets and urban commuters are whisked along in pneumatic tube-trains suspended from above. Computer-like adding machines and fax-like communication devices link the city's financial markets with the world's many multinational corporations (who hold the real political power). In this era, tactical military weapons have become so perfected that the very idea of war itself is no longer thinkable. And the Earth's skies and oceans have long ago been thoroughly explored, analyzed, and inventoried for their profit potential.

But this is no utopia. Most forms of art, literature, and music have either disappeared entirely, or have been redirected toward strictly utilitarian purposes. Education has been "purified," vocationalized, and standardized for all. Electricity not only illuminates the city and its ubiquitous commercial advertising but also serves as an efficient instrument for capital punishment. And the citizens of Paris themselves have become unfeeling cogs in a highly efficient but very repressive social wheel. Even the once-stylish and coquettish Parisian women are now cynical, hardened, career-minded, and distinctly masculine in their dress and manner.

Throughout the ensuing sixteen chapters and 200+ pages that follow in *Paris au XXe siècle*, Michel Dufrénoy attempts to find for himself a meaningful niche in this materialistic world. His businessman step-father manages to find him a job at a prestigious bank where he is charged with writing entries into "The Big Book," a twenty-foot-high ledger wherein the bank's accounts are ceremoniously inscribed each day. Months pass, and Michel meets a young woman named Lucy Richelot and falls in love. Lucy is the meek but lovely daughter of a professor of rhetoric at the university, and she returns Michel's love. But Professor Richelot is soon fired because too few students are interested in the humanities, and he and Lucy fall on hard times. Michel also is eventually fired from his job at the bank—for inadvertently spilling ink onto The Big Book. So he tries his hand at Paris' "Great Warehouse of Drama,"a huge theater-production company where tasteless soap-opera-style plays are mass-produced for a public that is hungry for entertainment. Horrified at what he sees as the prostitution of art for money, Michel soon quits in disgust and decides to devote himself entirely to writing poetry. But his situation rapidly worsens: in addition to being plagued by hunger and poverty, he experiences continual frustration at the unwillingness of publishers to publish his verse. Suddenly a crisis hits Paris: due to an unforeseen change of climate, France undergoes an unprecedented three-year cold snap. The temperature plummets to -23 degrees, snowdrifts begin to accumulate in the streets, and the entire city eventually grinds to a standstill. The poorest members of the population begin to die from the cold and, because of its devastating effects on the country's agriculture, there is widespread starvation. To make matters even worse, Lucy and her father have been evicted from their small apartment, and a frantic Michel cannot locate them among the many homeless Parisians now wandering the freezing streets.

And this grim, dystopian portrait of life in 20th-century France concludes with no happy ending in a final chapter entitled "Et in Pulverem Reverteris" ("and into dust you shall be returned"). Alone in the night and surrounded by falling snow, the young hero stands dejectedly in the famed Paris cemetery of Père-Lachaise, weeping over the tomb of one of his literary heroes, Alfred de Musset. He weeps not for himself, nor for his lost love, but for the death of human idealism. He curses Paris and its cold-hearted inhabitants, and he asks the heavens to send a deluge of fire to sweep it into oblivion. Then, with his beloved's name on his lips, he falls unconscious to the cold ground. The novel abruptly ends.

According to the preface of *Paris au XXe siècle* written by Vernian scholar Piero Gondolo della Riva, Verne's publisher Pierre-Jules Hetzel refused this manuscript in 1863, shortly after the publication and immediate success of Verne's first novel, *Five Weeks in a Balloon*. Hetzel's explained his reasons for turning down this work in a letter to Verne:

> My dear Verne,
>
> I would give almost anything not to have to write you today. You have undertaken an impossible task and, like your predecessors in such matters, you have not been able to pull it off well. It is much below the level of your *Five Weeks in a Balloon*. If you were to reread it one year from now, you would surely agree with me. It is tabloidish, and the topic is ill-chosen.
>
> I was not expecting perfection—to repeat, I knew that you were attempting the impossible—but I was hoping for something better. In this piece, there is not a single issue concerning the real future that is properly resolved, no critique that hasn't already been made and remade before. I am surprised at you … [it is] lackluster and lifeless.
>
> I am truly sorry to have to tell you this, but I believe that publishing this would be a disaster for your reputation. …
>
> You are not yet ready to write a book like this. Wait twenty years, and then try it again. … [2]

Hetzel also jotted down many editorial comments in the margins of Verne's manuscript as he was reviewing it—critical observations like "avoid using neologisms in the opening scene" (Riva 14), "these grandiose dialogues are not what you believe them to be; they seem phony, and the circumstances don't warrant them; this procedure is good in the hands of a Dumas, in a book full of adventures; but here, they are tiresome" (14), "all these things are not very pleasant" (14), and "I really do not find these hypotheses interesting at all" (15). At one point, Hetzel offers what is perhaps his most stinging (albeit, in historical retrospect, highly ironic) criticism against Verne's futuristic tale, saying "My dear Verne, even if you were a prophet, no one today would believe this prophecy…they simply would not be interested in it" (15).

But, today's reading public *does* view Jules Verne as a famous prophet of the future, and it has *always* considered him as eminently believable. So, logically, one might expect that *Paris au XXe siècle* would be very favorably received in 1995 by all Verne aficionados. But such will probably *not* be the case. Why? Because, quite simply, this novel's basic story-line contradicts the general public's popular image of what a work by the legendary Jules Verne should be: i.e., an exciting Industrial-Age epic which glorifies scientific exploration and technological innovation. In contrast, despite its frequent (very Vernian) detailed descriptions of high-tech gadgetry and its occasional flashes of wit and humor, this dark and troubling tale paints a future world that is oppressive, unjust, and spiritually hollow. Instead of epic adventure, the reader encouters pathos and social satire. Instead of intrepid heros going "where no one has gone before," the reader shares the life of a lonely and angst-ridden poet. Instead of an action-packed yarn about Man's conquest of Nature, the reader witnesses Nature's conquest of a man. Such reversals are sure to create some bewilderment and consternation. This narrative seems so

very different from what we have come to expect from the creator of Phileas Fogg, Impey Barbicane, and Captain Nemo. Since the initial publication last fall of *Paris au XXe siècle*, the French and American media have all ballyhooed the accuracy of Verne's technical prognostications. But just as striking to most readers will be the bleak and sinister portrait of daily life in the 20th century that Verne has depicted in this book. Written in 1863 but recalling in some ways several of his much later and more pessimistic *Voyages Extraordinaires*, this novel is far less a panegyric to progress than a troubling commentary on its costly price.

For Verne experts, the sudden and unexpected (re)appearance of *Paris au XXe siècle* will also cause some problems. Indeed, its very existence has already forced some to redefine their understanding of Jules Verne, the man and the writer. And they have begun to call for a complete reappraisal of Verne's life and works. This reaction is somewhat ironic since, for decades, they have fought long and hard *against* the popular notion of Verne as "The Father of Science Fiction" and the prophet-novelist of things to come. For example, for many years modern Vernian scholars have (quite correctly) insisted that bad English translations, Hollywood cinema, and certain Disney theme-park rides have tended to one-dimensionalize the true identity of this author and the 60-odd novels of his *Voyages Extraordinaires*. And they have (quite correctly) complained that Jules Verne's popular image has persistently portrayed him as a champion of positivism and scientific progress—despite the fact that about half of his works are either strongly *anti*-science or deeply sceptical as to the benefits that technological progress can bring to an imperfect world. However, these scholars have also said that this change in Verne's attitudes began only in the mid-1880s after a series of tragedies in his personal life and long after his most celebrated novels had been written. Now, confronted with this new publication—written by Verne *at the very beginning* of his literary career—they must totally rethink their interpretations. Among other reconsiderations, they must give greater attention to the crucial role played by Verne's publisher Hetzel and especially the latter's dominating influence on Verne's earlier novels. So it is no exaggeration to say that these critics and biographers will be working for years to try to iron out this new wrinkle in the history of Verne's literary career.

More important, Verne scholars have also argued long and hard that Jules Verne should *not* be labelled a futurist at all. They have maintained that, contrary to prevailing popular beliefs, the plots of almost all of Verne's scientific fictions were *not* set in the future; they were set in the author's present or recent past. For example, it is in 1863 that Professor Lidenbrock and Axel begin their *Journey to the Center of the Earth* (1864); the opening page of *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea* (1870) indicates the year as being 1866; the story of Barbicane's space-bullet in *From the Earth to the Moon* (1865) takes place right after the American Civil War; and the robinsonade of *Mysterious Island* (1874) is also set near the end of the Civil War. And the great majority of Verne's other novels follow this same chronological pattern. All this nonwithstanding, there is one particular story

in Verne's massive opus that stands in glaring contradiction to these claims. And, because of this, it has been a constant source of irritation to these Vernian scholars through the years. It is the short story called "In the Year 2889" (1889)[3]. This very well-known Vernian piece is exceedingly futuristic, not only in its technology but also in its setting. Further, since its original publication, it has been one of the most often reprinted of Verne's short stories. It shows up quite frequently in English-language textbooks, literary readers, and a wide variety of science-fiction anthologies. It seems that, whenever a "typical" Jules Verne sf story is needed, his "In the Year 2889" is invariably selected to fill the bill. It was reprinted most recently, for example, in David Hartwell and Kathryn Cramer's 1994 anthology *The Ascent of Wonder: The Evolution of Hard SF* (reviewed in SFS 21:406-12, #64, Nov 1994). Accordingly, in part because of its publishing history, "In the Year 2889" has for over a century helped to create and sustain Jules Verne's popular reputation as a futurist, a technological seer, and a social prophet.

The plot of "In the Year 2889" is undeniably prophetic in both subject and tone. It portrays a day in the busy life of the managing editor of the world's largest newspaper in New York City (now called Centropolis). This narrative framework serves quite well as a stepping-stone for a detailed description of this entire future world, its technological advancements, its international relations, and its (ironically, still quite 19th-century) social mores. Among the many technological, political, and social predictions featured in "In the Year 2889" are air-cars, air-buses, and air-trains, energy accumulators that provide unlimited power, the "telephote" (videophone), the annexation of Great Britain and Canada by the United States, global climate control, food piped into homes, mechanized dressing-rooms that wash, shave, and clothe their pampered occupants, interplanetary communication (and the discovery of one planet, referred to as "Olympus," said to be beyond the orbit of Neptune), computers (called "totalizers"), commercial advertisements projected onto the clouds, the perfection of color photography ("invented at the end of the twentieth century by the Japanese"), cryogenics, trans-Atlantic submarine tubes by which "one travels from Paris (to Centropolis) in two hundred and ninety-five minutes," and a host of other highly imaginative innovations.

This "problematic" Verne story was most likely inspired from popular (but very un-Vernian) sf works of the period like Albert Robida's illustrated novel *Le Vingtième Siècle* (The Twentieth Century, 1883). And, in order to come to grips with it and make it congruent with Verne's oeuvre as a whole, some European scholars have recently begun to attribute it to the author's *son*, Michel Jules Verne. But other, more traditional Vernophiles (on both sides of the Atlantic) have tended to react to this suggestion with both indignity and scepticism. Witness, for example, what one contemporary American biographer of Verne has to say about this question:

> Perhaps the greatest leap forward in Verne's scientific imagination is the "Journée d'un journaliste américain en 2889" ("The Day of an American Journalist in the Year 2889"). There is some debate over the authenticity of this work which was first published in 1910 in the collection of shorter works

> entitled *Hier et demain(Yesterday and Tomorrow)*. Some Verne specialists feel that it is the work of Michel Verne; however, there are two important reasons to attribute it to his father. First, in 1885 Gordon Bennett, the editor of the *New York Herald*, asked Verne to write a story about life in America in the coming centuries; Verne would have had ample time to write it and was unlikely to refuse the request of a person whose newspaper figured so often in his works. Second, Jules Verne completed at least the general framework of the story, because one version was published in the "Mémoires de l'Académie d'Amiens" in 1890.[4]

But what this particular scholar fails to take into account is that there were several versions of "In the Year 2889" and, more important, that the first one was originally published *in English* in February 1889 (not in 1910) in a New York periodical called *The Forum*. The next year, it was then translated into French, substantially modified, had its title changed to "La Journée d'un journaliste américain en 28*90*"(my emphasis), and published by Verne in the *Mémoires de l'Académie d'Amiens*.[5] The year after, this French version was then reprinted (with the same title) in the *Supplément illustré* section of the *Petit Journal*.[6] And after Verne's death in 1905, it was reprinted yet again in Verne's posthumous short-story collection *Hier et demain* (*Yesterday and Tomorrow*, 1910),[7] but now with the title "Au XXIXe siècle. La journée d'un journaliste américain en 28*89*" (my emphasis). Moreover, this latter 1910 version appeared with a footnote on the title page which states:

> "Cette fantaisie a paru pour la première fois en langue anglaise, en février 1889, dans la revue américaine *The Forum*, puis elle a été reproduite, avec quelques modifications, en langue française. Dans la version actuelle, on s'est parfois référé au texte primitif anglais. M.J.V." (p. 187)
> ["This fantasy appeared for the first time in English, in February 1889, in the American journal *The Forum*, then it was reprinted, with some modifications, in French. In the present version, the original English text was sometimes referred to. M.J.V."].

And, finally, this posthumous collection *Hier et demain* was itself translated into English by I.O Evans in 1965, and the short story in question was given the title "In the Twenty-ninth Century. The Day of an American Journalist in 2889."[8]

According to the pioneering research of Piero Gondolo della Riva—the critic who first traced the somewhat labyrinthine editorial history of this Vernian short story[9] and to whom I shall return in a moment—there are a number of important differences between the text as originally published in *The Forum* and the later variants published in French.

To be sure, some of the textual discrepancies pointed out by Gondolo della Riva are rather inconsequential. For example, the day is September 25 in the orginal English version and July 25 in the later French versions, the name of the fictional newspaper starts out as "Earth Chronicle" and later becomes "Earth Herald," and the editor originally named "Fritz Napoleon Smith" is changed to "Gordon Benett" [sic], ostensibly in honor of James Gordon Bennett of *New York Herald* fame.

But some of these changes are infinitely more noteworthy—especially to the extent that they expand upon and improve the original narrative. The techno-logical extrapolations portrayed in the later versions are pushed even further, certain neologisms and anecdotes are added, the descriptions are rendered more lively and colorful, the personalities of the characters are given more depth, and an entire atmosphere of tongue-in-cheek humor is injected into the story. Consider, for instance, the following exerpts: the first are from the original English version, and the second—italicized—are my translations of the same passages from the final French version.

> …our modern towns, with populations amounting sometimes to 10,000,000 souls; their streets 300 feet wide, their houses 1000 feet in height; with a temperature the same in all seasons; with their lines of aerial locomotion crossing the sky in every direction! (662)
> *… our modern cities, with streets a hundred meters wide and buildings three hundred high, and which are always maintained at the same temperature, and with the sky furrowed by thousands of aero-cars and aero-buses!* (188)

> Think of the railroads of the olden time, and you will be able to appreciate the pneumatic tubes through which to-day one travels at the rate of 1000 miles an hour. Would not our contemporaries prize the telephone and the telephote more highly if they had not forgotten the telegraph? (662)
> *If they could only remember the defectiveness of steamers and railroads, and their frequent collisions and slow speeds, how much more would today's travellers appreciate the aero-trains and especially these pneumatic tubes which now stretch across the oceans and which transport them at a speed of fifteen hundred kilometers an hour! Finally, wouldn't they enjoy the telephone and telephote even more if they recalled that our forefathers were had only this antidiluvian apparatus which they called the telegraph?* (188)

> This morning Mr. Fritz Napoleon Smith awoke in very bad humor. His wife having left for France eight days ago, he was feeling disconsolate. Incredible though it seems, in all the ten years since their marriage, this is the first time that Mrs. Edith Smith, the professional beauty, has been so long absent from home; two or three days usually suffice for her frequent trips to Europe. (665)
> *That morning Francis Benett awoke in a rather gloomy mood. It was eight days that his wife had been in France and he was feeling a bit lonely. Can you believe it? In the ten years that they had been married, it was the first time that Mrs. Edith Benett, that professional beauty, had been away for so long. Two or three days usually sufficed for her frequent trips to Europe, and most particularly to Paris, where she often went to buy hats.* (193)

> Two minutes later the machine deposited him all dressed at the threshold of his office." (666)
> *Two minutes later, without needing the help of a valet, the machine deposited him washed, coiffed, shoed, dressed, and buttoned from top to bottom, at the threshold of his office.* (194)

> Mr. Smith passed into the next hall, an enormous gallery upward of 3200 feet in length, devoted to atmospheric advertising. Everyone has noticed these enormous advertisements reflected from the clouds, so large that they may be seen by the populations of whole cities or even of entire countries. This too is one of Mr. Fritz Napoleon Smith's ideas, and in the *Earth Chronicle* building

a thousand projectors are constantly engaged in displaying upon the clouds these mammoth advertisements. (669)

The adjacent room, a vast gallery a half-kilometer long, was devoted to advertising, and one can easily imagine what advertising must be to a newspaper like the Earth Herald. *It brings in an average of three million dollars per day. Moreover, thanks to an ingenious system, part of this advertising is done in an absolutely new manner, due to a patent purchased for three dollars from a poor devil who has since died of hunger: immense signs reflected on the clouds whose dimensions are such that one can see them throughout the entire country. From this gallery, a thousand projectors were constantly at work sending these mammoth advertisements to the clouds where they are reproduced in full color.* (199)

"Why, Doctor, as you well know, everything is done by machinery here. It is not for me to go to the bath; the bath will come to me. Just look!" and he pressed a button. After a few seconds a faint rumbling was heard, which grew louder and louder. Suddenly the door opened, and the tub appeared. (677)

"There is no need, Doctor. There is always a bath prepared in my hotel here, and I don't even need to bother leaving my room. Look, by simply pressing this button, the bathtub will start moving, and you will see it come along all by itself with the water at a temperature of thirty-seven degrees! [Celsius]*"*

Francis Benett had just pressed the button. A rumbling sound began, grew, and got louder…Then, one of the doors opened, and the bathtub appeared, sliding in on its rails..

Heavens! While Dr. Sam covered his face, little screams of frightened modesty arose from the bathtub…

Having arrived at the hotel a half-hour before by the trans-Atlantic tube, Mrs. Benett was still in it! (211-12)

These are a few of the textual variants between the original "In the Year 2889" published in 1889 and its later French reprints appearing in 1890, 1891, and 1910. These glaring discrepancies prompted Gondolo della Riva to search through the Verne/Hetzel archives at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris for some sort of correspondence by Verne which might explain them. And there he discovered a previously-unknown letter, dated 1889, which provides a convincing solution to this entire riddle. In this letter, Jules Verne writes to his publisher Hetzel *fils*, saying:

"The article that I spoke to you about during your visit to Amiens appeared in *The Forum* of New York; after arrangements between Michel and myself, it was (just between us) entirely written by him, and it seems to have made him very happy. And so … of the 1000 [francs] I have given 500 to Michel…"[10]

The proof now seems irrefutable: it *was* in fact Jules Verne's son Michel who originally wrote "In the Year 2889." The year after its initial publication in *The Forum*, Jules Verne apparently took his son's text, improved upon it, and then "recycled" it in some local journals in France—although he never allowed it to be published (at least during his lifetime) as part of his own *Voyages Extraordinaires*. Finally, after his father's death in 1905, Michel chose to "officially" publish it in Verne's posthumous collection of short stories called *Hier et demain*, and he added the aforementioned footnote to its title page—a

footnote which, when reread in the light of this recent discovery, now seems quite revealing indeed.

But this entire saga, inevitably, raises further questions.

First, as I have demonstrated elsewhere,[11] neither Jules Verne nor his son Michel could read or write English very well. So who was responsible for the original English text of "In the Year 2889" published for the first time in New York?

Second, can we continue to assume that "In the Year 2889" a.k.a. "The Day of an American Journalist in 2889" is still part of the oeuvre of Jules Verne? Yes, of course we can, and we should. The French versions (and the modern English translation based on those versions) were as much Jules's work as they were Michel's. And such informal collaboration with another (uncredited) writer was not unprecedented in Verne's literary career. To cite just a few examples, Verne's earlier *Les Cinq cents millions de la Bégum* (1879; *The 500 Millions of the Begum*, 1879), *L'Etoile du sud* (1884; *The Vanished Diamond*, 1885), and *L'Epave du "Cynthia"* (1885, *The Wreck of the "Cynthia,"* 1886) all owed much to the ideas and contributions of André Laurie—an arrangement made by the publisher Hetzel *père* himself.

Lastly, if all this is so, then to what extent did Michel Verne have a hand in writing his father's *other* works from this period? The answer is shocking: modern French researchers have determined that several of Jules Verne's short stories and almost *all* of his posthumous works were, in fact, composed—either partially or, in a couple of cases, totally—by his son Michel. Such works include the following: *Le Volcan d'or* (1906; *The Golden Volcano*, 1962), *L'Agence Thompson and Co.* (1907; *The Thompson Travel Agency,* 1965), *La Chasse au météore* (1908; *The Chase of the Golden Meteor*, 1909), *Le Pilote du Danube* (1908; *The Danube Pilot,* 1967), *Les Naufragés du "Jonathan"* (1909; *The Survivors of the "Jonathan,"* 1962), *Le Secret de Wilhelm Storitz* (1910; *The Secret of Wilhelm Storitz,* 1963), most of the short stories appearing in *Hier et demain* (1910; *Yesterday and Tomorrow,* 1965), and Verne's final novel *L'Etonnante aventure de la mission Barsac* (1919; *The Barsac Mission*, 1960).

However scandalous as this might appear—and there does seem to be some evidence of collusion between Michel and Hetzel *fils* to make the most financially of Verne's remaining incomplete manuscripts and scattered notes—the situation is not quite as condemningly clear-cut as it might seem.

In truth, Jules Verne actively encouraged Michel to publish his own fiction under his father's illustrious name. After many years of coping with a wide variety of problems caused by his rebellious son—e.g., repeated bankruptcies, costly amourous escapades, divorce from this first wife, legal difficulties, etc.—Verne came to recognize that Michel enjoyed writing and that he seemed to have a knack for it. It also probably occurred to Verne that, by cultivating Michel's budding writing career in this way, he could help him to become financially responsible and finally stabilize his life. Further, such a fraud could be accomplished with a minimum of complications: Michel simply signed his

manuscripts with "M. Jules Verne"—where the "M." could be (and sometimes was) interpreted by publishers as "*Monsieur* Jules Verne."

Moreover, during the final decade of Jules Verne's life from 1895 to 1905, his eyesight and ability to write were rapidly failing. And it was Michel who actively "collaborated" with his father (as secretary-scribe-typist) to help bring several of Verne's later novels to publication. So it is not surprising that, after his father's death, Michel decided to complete—and, in some cases, greatly expand upon—many of Verne's unfinished manuscripts.

To date, despite the ongoing efforts of French scholars,[12] definitive answers are still lacking about the exact role played by Michel Verne in the composition of the *Voyages Extraordinaires* from 1885 to 1919. And it seems that, until such a time as researchers have meticulously examined all of Jules Verne's later manuscripts, publications, and correspondence, the question of authenticity in these works will continue to be one of the more "extraordinary" mysteries of Verne's literary legacy.

But how does all this relate to Verne's newly-published "lost" manuscript called *Paris au XXe siècle*? Why did I say at the outset that this (re)discovered novel could prove to be of revolutionary importance to Verne scholarship as well as to Verne's traditional readership?

The answer is deliciously ironic. Now armed with the knowledge that "In the Year 2889" was originally written by *Michel* Verne, modern critics once again have begun to assert—and this time with demonstrable *proof*—that Jules Verne should *not* be viewed as a writer of futuristic sf, that he was extremely conservative in his extrapolations, and that none of his works ever came close to prophesizing the future of a society as a whole.

But, quite obviously, the unexpected 1994 publication of Verne's *Paris au XXe siècle*—authenticated by none other than Piero Gondolo della Riva himself—flies in the face of such a claim. And, in an ironic twist of fate, Vernian scholars must now acknowledge the painful truth: the public's longtime and much-maligned perception of Jules Verne as visionary technological prophet and "Seer of Tomorrow" was actually more accurate than we, the so-called "experts," ever suspected.

NOTES

1. Jules Verne. *Paris au XXe siècle*. Paris: Hachette, 1994. The rights to the English translation of this novel have, reportedly, been sold to Random House. The translation is currently scheduled to appear on the US market sometime later this year.

2. Hetzel's letter is quoted in Piero Gondolo della Riva, "Préface" in Jules Verne *Paris au XXe siècle* (Paris: Hachette, 1994), 15-16.

3. Jules Verne, "In the Year 2889," *The Forum* 6:662-77, Sept 1888-Feb 1889.

4. Lawrence Lynch. *Jules Verne* (NY: Twayne, 1992), 77.

5. Jules Verne, "La Journée d'un journaliste américain en 2890," *Mémoires de l'Académie d'Amiens* 37:348-70, 1890.

6. Jules Verne, "La Journée d'un journaliste américain en 2890," *Petit Journal* 40:2-4, Aug 29, 1891.

7. Jules Verne, "Au XXIXeme siècle. La journée d'un journaliste américain en 2889," *Hier et demain* (Paris: Hetzel, 1910). Rpt. in *Hier et demain* (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1967), 187-212.

8. Jules Verne, "In the Twenty-ninth Century. The Day of an American Journalist in 2889," *Yesterday and Tomorrow* (London: Arco, 1965), 107-24.

9. Piero Gondolo della Riva, "A propos d'une nouvelle," *Cahiers de l'Herne: Jules Verne* 25:284-88, 1974.

10. This letter is located at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, in the Manuscript Room, Verne-Hetzel Correspondance, vol. II, folios 97-98. The letter itself is dated January 29, 1889.

11. Arthur B. Evans, "Le 'Franglais' vernien (père et fils)" in *Modernités de Jules Verne*, ed. Jean Bessière (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1988), 87-105.

12. See, for example, Olivier Dumas, "La Carrière littéraire de Michel Verne," *Bulletin de la Société Jules Verne* 103:3-7, 1992.

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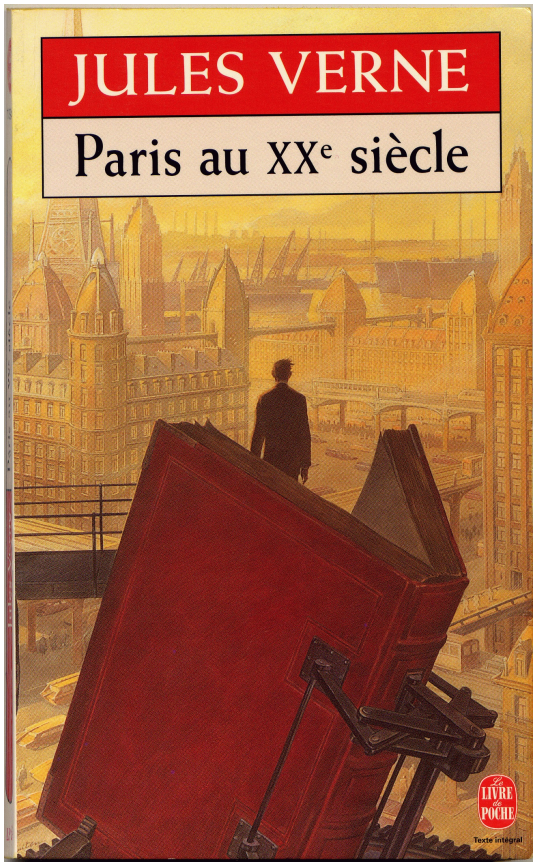
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ABSTRACT
The recent publication in France of a "lost" novel by Jules Verne called *Paris au XXe siècle* (Paris in the 20th Century) is of watershed importance in two rather ironic ways. On the one hand, it refutes the false but enduringly popular notion that Verne was always an apostle of scientific progress; on the other, it confounds certain literary scholars who have sought to redefine Verne's relationship to sf. For the former, this chillingly dystopian portrait of Parisian life in 1960-63 is totally inconsistent with what the general public has come to expect from the legendary "Father of Science Fiction," at least from his most famous works. For the latter, the publication of *Paris au XXe siècle* comes as an unexpected bombshell. After having clearly demonstrated that Verne's similar tale called "In the Year 2889" (among many other works attributed to him) was actually written by Verne's son Michel, respected literary critics had begun to assert that—despite his reputation in America—Verne never wrote a truly futuristic novel and therefore should not be viewed as a writer of "real" sf at all. The existence of *Paris au XXe siècle* is proof to the contrary.


JULES VERNE
Paris au XXe siècle
Le LIVRE de POCHE
Texte intégral