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### Centennial Scholarship on Jules Verne. [Review of over two dozen recent books by/about Jules Verne, published in honor of his centenary]

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# Science Fiction Studies

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## BOOKS IN REVIEW

**Centennial Scholarship on Jules Verne.** I have been remiss in not writing reviews on the many excellent books on/by Jules Verne published during his centenary in 2005. There has, in fact, been a veritable flood of them—more than *fifty* titles in all—first appearing on the market in late 2004 and continuing into 2006. For a comprehensive listing, see Norbert Spehner's "Verne: publications autour d'un centenaire" (*Solaris* 156 [automne 2005]: 95-102) and his periodic bibliographical bulletin *Marginalia* 46 (septembre 2005), 47 (décembre 2005), and 48 (mars 2006). To receive a free digital copy of the latter, one need only write to him at <nspehner@globetrotter.net> and ask to be added to his mailing list. In this review, I shall identify and briefly comment on several of these Verne-related works that I consider to be important additions to the existing scholarship in the field. A more detailed review of certain titles may be forthcoming in a future issue of *SFS*.

### 1. Biographies and biography-related:

**Butcher, William.** *Jules Verne: The Definitive Biography*. Intro. by Arthur C. Clarke. New York: Thunder's Mouth, 2006. xxxii + 369 pp. \$28.00 hc.

**Dumas, Olivier, Volker Dehs, and Piero Gondolo della Riva,** eds. *Correspondance inédite de Jules et Michel Verne avec l'éditeur Louis-Jules Hetzel (1886-1914)*. Tome I (1886-1896). Geneva: Slatkine, 2004. €44 hc.

**Dusseau, Joëlle.** *Jules Verne*. Paris: Perrin, 2005. 562 pp. €24 pbk.

**Margot, Jean-Michel, ed.** *Jules Verne en son temps*. Amiens: Encrage, 2004. 254 pages. €28 pbk.

Although, to my mind, no biography can ever be truly "definitive," the two new biographies on Verne by Butcher (in English) and Dusseau (in French) far surpass previous efforts—such as those by Jean Jules-Verne (1973) or Herbert Lottman (1996)—by their accuracy, balance, and familiarity with the latest discoveries about the personal life of this sometimes secretive author. Both are highly recommended. Many such secrets pertaining to Verne's complex relationship with his publisher and "spiritual father" Pierre-Jules Hetzel have been brought to light during the past few years by the publication (in three volumes) of their voluminous correspondence by Dumas, Dehs, and Gondolo della Riva (see my review in *SFS* 28.1 [March 2001]: 97-106). The above-listed book by the same trio of Vernian researchers is the first of two more volumes in this richly revelatory series that will now reprint all Verne's correspondence with Hetzel's son after the latter took over the business following his father's death in 1886. The final volume of the series should be especially fascinating: the letters exchanged between Verne's son Michel and Hetzel *filsthroughout* the period when Jules's posthumous works were being published—works that have triggered great controversy when found to be as much by Michel's hand as by his father's. Finally, Margot's book is a wonderful anthology of book and theater reviews, newspaper stories, magazine articles, entries from literary journals, short book chapters, and obituaries that were published on Verne in France from 1863—the date of publication of his first novel—to his death in 1905. These many nineteenth-century *témoignages* [eyewitness testimonies/evidence] clearly show to what extent, during his lifetime and among his own countrymen, Verne was a well-loved celebrity but recognized mostly (and erroneously) as a writer for children and a prophet of science and technology.

## 2. Critical studies and monographs:

**Boia, Lucian.** *Jules Verne: les paradoxes d'un mythe.* Paris: Belles Lettres, 2005. 304 pp. €19 pbk.

**Guillaud, Lauric.** *Jules Verne face au rêve américain.* Paris: Houdiard, 2005. 90 pp. €13 pbk.

**Picot, Jean-Pierre, and Christian Robin, eds.** *Jules Verne: cent ans après*. Actes du Colloque de Cerisy. Rennes: Terre de Brume, 2005. 494 pp. €25 pbk.

**Unwin, Timothy.** *Jules Verne: Journeys in Writing*. Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2005. xi + 242 pp. 50.00 hardcover, 20 paper.

Several important critical studies of Verne were published last year, the most impressive of which was by Unwin, whose scholarly monograph treating Verne as a writer "who renews and revitalises the genre" (6) offers a refreshingly new, text-based approach to understanding Verne's oeuvre and literary legacy. Consistently intelligent and insightful, Unwin's book is a worthy successor to (and rival of) Daniel Compère's magisterial *Jules Verne, écrivain* (1991), the acknowledged gold standard for this type of analysis of Verne's style. Picot and Robin's hefty volume contains over two dozen scholarly papers that were presented at the prestigious ten-day conference on Verne at the chateau of Cerisy-la-Salle on August 2-12, 2004. As with most conference volumes of this sort, the quality of the contributions is somewhat uneven. Yet collecting together as it does a broad selection of essays by some of the field's top scholars such as Jean Chesneaux, Butcher, Compère, Dumas, Gondolo della Riva, and Picot and Robin themselves, this book must be considered as one of the more noteworthy publications of 2005. Boia's breezily deconstructionist study investigates the many paradoxes of Verne's "mythical" life and works—his conflicted personality (both clown and pedagogue, optimist and pessimist), ambiguous sexuality (woman-chaser and closet homosexual), contradictory political views (extreme right and extreme left, idealist and racist), and even the problematic question of his authorship (Hetzl's input, Grousset's manuscripts, son Michel's rewrites). Guillaud's short and concise book also seeks to explore an apparent paradox: Verne's simultaneously pro-American and anti-American attitudes as expressed in his public persona and/versus his *Voyages extraordinaires* (a particularly relevant topic today as strained political relations between France and the USA continue to be fraught with misunderstanding and knee-jerk ethnocentrism).

3. General reference and large-format, coffee-table books:

**Angelier, François.** *Dictionnaire Jules Verne*, Paris: Pygmalion, 2005. 1000 pp. €29.90 hc.

**De la Cotardière, Philippe, and Jean-Paul Dekiss, eds.** *Jules Verne: de la science à l'imaginaire*. Preface Michel Serres. Paris: Larousse, 2004. 192 pp. €35 hc.

**Mellot, Philippe, and Jean-Marie Embs.** *Le Guide Jules Verne*. Paris: Ed. de l'Amateur, 2005. 320 pp. €38 pbk.

**Weissenberg, Eric.** *Jules Verne: un univers fabuleux*. Lausanne: Favre, 2004. 320 pp. €39 hc.

Centennial celebrations tend to generate "guide" books on the commemorated subject as well as a host of handsome "souvenir" coffee-table books. The Verne fête of 2005 was no exception to this rule. The very best of the former include Angelier's *Dictionnaire* and Mellot/Embs's *Guide*; the very best of the latter—published in oversized (9" x 11") format and magnificently illustrated—are the Weissenberg and Cotardière/Dekiss. All four closely resemble encyclopedias of Verniana with their overviews of biographical and bibliographical information, detailed inventories of Verne's fictional characters and plot locales, descriptive discussions of the dominant themes in his works (travel, food, cannibalism, race, volcanoes, colonialism, electricity, etc.), listings of the film and TV adaptations of his novels, reproductions of Hetzel's advertising posters and the famous red/gold covers of the octavo luxury editions, etc. Of the four, the Weissenberg stands out as the most authoritative and has the additional advantage of offering the most in-depth coverage of Verne's love life (pre-marital, marital, and extra-marital) that I have read anywhere.

#### 4. Special issues of scholarly journals:

**Europe** #909-910 (janvier-février 2005). "Jules Verne." 384 pp. €20.

**IRIS** 28 (2005). "Jules Verne entre Science et Mythe." 260 pp. €15.

*Revue Jules Verne* #19-20 (septembre 2005). "Mondial Jules Verne." 240 pp. €8

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**SFS** 32.1 #95 (March 2005). "A Jules Verne Centenary." 224 pp. \$5.00.

In the periodical scholarship sector, 2005 witnessed a number of special issues devoted to Jules Verne. In addition to the one published in March by *SFS*, the eminent French literary/arts journal *Europe* (which had earlier produced special issues on Verne in 1955 and 1978, celebrating the 50th anniversary of the author's death and the 150th anniversary of his birth, respectively) contributed yet another containing nearly two dozen analytical essays by the most respected French scholars in Verne studies—Robin, Picot, Chesneaux, Butcher, Marc Soriano, Roger Bozzetto, Robert Pourvoyeur, Dumas, Gondolo della Riva, Volker Dehs, Weissenberg, Guillaud, et al. The *Revue Jules Verne* (funded by the Centre International Jules Verne in Amiens and the Bibliothèque municipale and Centre d'études verniennes in Nantes) published a special double-issue covering the "Mondial Jules Verne," an international conference and celebration held in Amiens on March 20-24, 2005. It includes papers presented there by several members the North American Jules Verne Society such as Jean-Michel Margot, Andrew Nash, Terry Harpold, Peter Schulman, Norman Wolcott, Brian Taves, and others. Finally, the academic journal *IRIS* (sponsored by the University of Grenoble) published a special issue that features essays on Verne by veteran French experts such as Picot, Margot, and Simone Vierne and also a variety of other international scholars such as Harpold (USA), Ian Thompson (Scotland), Boia (Romania), Dimitri Roboly (Greece), and Gianni Crippa (Italy).

#### 5. New Verne translations and critical editions:

(published in 2005)

**Jules Verne.** *The Adventures of Captain Hatteras*. Trans. and ed. William Butcher. New York: Oxford UP, 2005. xliii + 402 pp. \$15.95 pbk.

**Jules Verne.** *The Begum's Millions.* Trans. Stanford L. Luce. Ed. Arthur B. Evans. Introduction and notes Peter Schulman. Wesleyan Early Classics of Science Fiction. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 2005. xxxix + 262 pp. \$29.95 hc.

**Jules Verne.** *The Mighty Orinoco.* Trans. Stanford L. Luce. Ed. Arthur B. Evans Introduction and notes Walter James Miller. Wesleyan Early Classics of Science Fiction. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 2005. xvii + 426 pp. \$19.95 pbk.

**Jules Verne.** *Underground City.* Trans. Sarah Crozier. Foreword by Ian Thompson. Edinburgh: Luath P, 2005. xvii + 220 pp. 13.95 pbk.

(published in 2006 or after)

**Jules Verne.** *The Kip Brothers.* Trans. Stanford L. Luce. Ed. Arthur B. Evans. Introduction and notes Jean-Michel Margot. Wesleyan Early Classics of Science Fiction. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP (forthcoming 2007).

**Jules Verne.** *The Lighthouse at the End of the World.* Bison Frontiers of Imagination. Trans. and ed. William Butcher. Lincoln, NE: U Nebraska P (forthcoming 2007).

**Jules Verne.** *Mathias Sandorf.* Trans. Edward Brumgnach. Ed. Arthur B. Evans. Introduction and notes Timothy Unwin. Wesleyan Early Classics of Science Fiction. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP (forthcoming 2008 or 2009).

**Jules Verne.** *The Meteor Hunt.* Bison Frontiers of Imagination. Trans. and ed. Frederick Paul Walter and Walter James Miller. Lincoln, NE: U Nebraska P, 2006.

**Jules Verne.** *The Secret of Wilhelm Storitz.* Bison Frontiers of Imagination. Trans. and ed. Peter Schulman. Lincoln, NE: U Nebraska P (forthcoming 2008).

**Jules Verne. *Travel Scholarships*.** Trans. and notes Terisita Hernández. Ed. and introduction Arthur B. Evans. Wesleyan Early Classics of Science Fiction. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP (forthcoming 2008).

Lastly, brief mention should be made of the growing number of new English translations and critical editions of Verne's works that were published during 2005 or are scheduled to be published over the next few years. Much credit should be given to Oxford UP, Wesleyan UP, and the U Nebraska P for their pioneering efforts to provide accurate modern translations of Verne's texts in affordable, scholarly editions. These new editions are helping to restore Verne's reputation in the Anglophone world and constitute an important milestone in the recent "Verne renaissance" in contemporary literary studies.—ABE