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Culminating a Decade of Scholarship on Jules Verne

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REVIEW-ESSAYS

Arthur B. Evans

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 *Jules Verne inédit: les manuscrits déchiffrés* [The Unpublished Jules Verne: The Manuscripts Deciphered].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 Cotardièrre 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).

- Travel Scholarships*. Trans. Teri J. Hernández. Ed. Volker Dehs and Arthur B. Evans (EARLY CLASSICS OF SCIENCE FICTION, Wesleyan UP, 2013).
2. NEW AND IMPROVED ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF VERNE NOVELS:
Off on a Comet. Trans. Ellen E. Frewer and Adam Roberts (Solaris, 2007).
Journey to the Centre of the Earth. Trans. Frank Wynne. Ed. Peter Cogman (Penguin, 2009).
The Green Ray. Trans. Karen Loukes. Ed. Ian Thompson (Luath, 2009).
The Castle in Transylvania. Trans. Charlotte Mandel (Melville House, 2010).
Amazing Journeys: Five Visionary Classics. Trans. and ed. Frederick Paul Walter (SUNY, 2010), containing new translations of *Journey to the Center of the Earth*, *From the Earth to the Moon* and *Circling the Moon*, *20,000 Leagues under the Seas*, and *Around the World in 80 Days*.
The Blockade Runners. Trans. Karen Loukes. Ed. Ian Thompson (Luath, 2011).
The Sphinx of the Ice Realm. Trans. and ed. Frederick Paul Walter (SUNY, 2012).
The Earth Turned Upside Down. Trans. Sophie Lewis (Hesperus, 2012).
Five Weeks in a Balloon. Trans. Frederick Paul Walter. Ed. Arthur B. Evans (EARLY CLASSICS OF SCIENCE FICTION, Wesleyan UP, 2015).
3. FIRST ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF MANUSCRIPTS OF POSTHUMOUS WORKS:
The Meteor Hunt. Trans. and ed. Frederick Paul Walter and Walter James Miller (BISON FRONTIERS OF IMAGINATION, U of Nebraska P, 2006).
Lighthouse at the End of the World. Trans. and ed. William Butcher (BISON FRONTIERS OF IMAGINATION, U of Nebraska P, 2007).
The Golden Volcano. Trans. and ed. Edward Baxter (BISON FRONTIERS OF IMAGINATION, U of Nebraska P, 2008).
The Secret of Wilhelm Storitz. Trans. and ed. Peter Schulman (BISON FRONTIERS OF IMAGINATION, U of Nebraska P, 2011).
Golden Danube. Trans. Kieran M. O'Driscoll. Ed. Brian Taves (PALIK SERIES, BearManor, 2014).
4. FIRST ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF EARLY WORKS AND THEATER PIECES:
The Marriage of a Marquis. Trans. Edward Baxter. Ed. Brian Taves and Jean-Michel Margot (PALIK SERIES, BearManor, 2011).
 "Jédédias Jamet, or The Tale of an Inheritance" in *The Marriage of a Marquis*. Trans. and ed. Kieran M. O'Driscoll (PALIK SERIES, BearManor, 2011).
Shipwrecked Family: Marooned with Uncle Robinson. Trans. Sidney Kravitz. Ed. Brian Taves (PALIK SERIES, BearManor, 2011).
Mr. Chimp and Other Plays. Trans. Frank Morlock. Ed. Brian Taves and Jean-Michel Margot (PALIK SERIES, BearManor, 2011).

The Count of Chanteleine. Trans. Edward Baxter. Ed. Garnt de Vries-Uiterweerd, Volker Dehs, and Brian Taves (PALIK SERIES, BearManor, 2011).

Vice, Redemption and the Distant Colony: Stories by Jules Verne and Michel Verne. Trans. Kieran M. O'Driscoll. Ed. Brian Taves (PALIK SERIES, BearManor, 2012), containing the short stories "Pierre-Jean" and "The Somber Fate of Jean Morénas," as well as "Fact-Finding Mission" (original partial manuscript of *The Barsac Mission*).

Around the World in 80 Days, the 1874 Play. Ed. Philippe Burgaud, Jean-Louis Trudel, Jean-Michel Margot, and Brian Taves (PALIK SERIES, BearManor, 2012).

Bandits and Rebels. Trans. Edward Baxter. Ed. Daniel Compère and Brian Taves (PALIK SERIES, BearManor, 2013), containing the short stories "San Carlos," "The Siege of Rome," and "Martin Paz, or The Pearl of Lima," as well as the essay "Future of the Submarine."

Of special note in this list are the translations of previously untranslated works by Verne that are sponsored by the North American Jules Verne Society in its PALIK SERIES (from a bequest of the late Edward D. Palik).

As for Verne criticism during the past decade, the most significant venue has been the website *Verniana* founded in 2008 at <www.verniana.org>. In its own words, *Verniana* is "an international multilingual and peer-reviewed online journal that will consider any original contribution that advances knowledge about Jules Verne and his works." A sampling of the many interesting articles published to date in *Verniana* might include the following:

Walter James Miller. "As Verne Smiles." 1 (2008-2009): 1-8.

Terry Harpold. "Verne's Errant Readers: Nemo, Clawbonny, Michel Dufrenoy." 1 (2008-2009): 31-42.

Garnt de Vries-Uiterweerd. "Spherical Geometry in *Mirifiques aventures de maître Antifer*" [The Marvelous Adventures of Captain Antifer]. 2 (2009-2010): 1-10.

Timothy Unwin. "Brunel's *Great Eastern* and the Vernian Imagination: The Writing of *Une Ville flottante*" [The Floating City]. 2 (2009-2010): 23-46.

Danièle Chatelain and George Slusser. "The Creation of Scientific Wonder: Jules Verne's Dialogue with Claude Bernard." 2 (2009-2010): 89-124.

Marie-Hélène Huet. "Winter Lights: Disaster, Interpretation, and Jules Verne's Polar Novels." 2 (2009-2010): 149-78.

Mike Perschon. "Finding Nemo: Verne's Antihero as Original Steampunk." 2 (2009-2010): 179-94.

Jacques Crovisier. "Le Storm glass, un instrument de météorologie oublié présent dans les *Voyages extraordinaires*" [The Storm glass, a forgotten meteorological instrument present in the *Extraordinary Voyages*]. 3 (2010-2011): 1-10.

- Volker Dehs. "La Bibliothèque de Jules et Michel Verne" [The Library of Jules and Michel Verne]. 3 (2010-2011): 51-118.
- Brian Taves. "'Verne's Best Friend and his Worst Enemy': I.O. Evans and the Fitzroy Edition of Jules Verne." 4 (2011-2012): 25-54.
- William B. Jones, Jr. "From *Michael Strogoff* to *Tigers and Traitors*: The *Extraordinary Voyages* in *Classic Illustrated*." 4 (2011-2012): 67-92.
- Jean-Michel Margot. "Où donc situer le Great-Eyry?" [Where then to situate the Great Eyry?]. 5 (2012-2013): 1-14.
- Philippe Burgaud and Jean-Michel Margot. "Jules Verne chez Hachette de 1914 à 1950" [Jules Verne's Hachette Editions from 1914 to 1950]. 6 (2013-2014): 1-42.
- Stéphanie Clément. "La Double profondeur dans *Ville mille lieues sous les mers* ou le sens des limites" [The Double depths in *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Seas* or the sense of limits]. 6 (2013-2014): 55-66.
- Bridget Behrmann. "Éclat: Duality and the Absolute in *Voyages et aventures du capitaine Hatteras*." 7 (2014-2015): 1-16.
- Peter Schulman. "Melancholic Mirages: Jules Verne's Vision of a Saharan Sea." 7 (2014-2015): 75-86.

Considered within the context of these ongoing Verne studies published since 2005, the three books currently under review are exemplary and constitute not only a continuation but also a culmination of the Verne scholarship produced throughout this period. They represent three very different—but equally important—vectors of Vernian erudition: a new and much improved translation of a key Verne novel, the first authoritative study of Hollywood's cinematic adaptations of Verne's works, and a watershed piece of research shedding light on Verne's original manuscripts.

The significance of Marie-Thérèse Noiset's new translation of Verne's *The Self-Propelled Island* (in French *L'Île à hélice*, previously translated as *The Floating Island* and *Propeller Island*)—the story of four musicians aboard a luxurious artificial island cruising the South Pacific—can perhaps best be understood if we compare it to a Routledge reprint of the 1896 public-domain translation of this novel that I reviewed in 1992:

This translation is severely abridged, and almost all the passages excised from Verne's original French text happen to be in some way or another critical of England and/or the English people....

Given this massive tampering with Verne's original novel, it seems highly ironic that the publisher of this book—in an obvious attempt to hype this modern repackaging of a very old, very bad translation—tries to advertise Jules Verne as "a social satirist whose work has been compared to that of Montesquieu, Swift and Voltaire"....

To summarize, a revised and more accurate English translation of Verne's *L'Île à hélice* would have been genuinely welcome and would have done honor to any publisher. In contrast, this book brings shame: it represents a commercialized resurrection of a translator's travesty, and it aptly demonstrates how an industry's profit motive can sometimes overpower its sense of literary integrity. ("New and Recycled" 262)

Before Noiset's translation, the only available English-language version of this novel was the horridly bowdlerized one described above and an even more chopped-down version (the "Fitzroy" edition) published in 1961.

There is much to like in this new Verne translation by Noiset. The fine art of translating—blending textual faithfulness with discursive fluidity—is clearly evident in her prose. And the book's introduction by reputed Verne scholar Volker Dehs is both accurate and insightful. The only drawback to this otherwise commendable book is its regrettable lack of illustrations; the original French octavo edition featured some eighty marvelous illustrations by Léon Benett (1839-1917), an artist whose work graced the pages of more than two dozen of Verne's *Extraordinary Voyages*.

Brian Taves's excellent and long-awaited monograph *Hollywood Presents Jules Verne* is quite simply the gold standard in Verne cinema scholarship. No other study comes close (see, for comparison, my review called "An Exercise in Creative Genealogy" of Thomas Renzi's *Jules Verne on Film*, published in 1998). As a film historian and archivist at the Library of Congress, a prolific Verne scholar and co-author of the *Jules Verne Encyclopedia* (1996), and president of the North American Jules Verne Society, Taves ideally combines the requisite areas of expertise on Verne and the history of cinema. And both are on full display in *Hollywood Presents Jules Verne*.

The book is organized chronologically, both to take into account the impact of evolving technology on cinema production and to better witness "the intertwined industries of filmmaking and publishing" where "numerous exchanges have been made between the visual media and the appearances of Verne books, comic books, biographies, and children's editions" (11). This approach also permits Taves to identify certain "'cycles' of Verne filmmaking in both live action and animation" (11) that form the thematic backbone of the book's thirteen chapters (all nicely supplemented with extensive Notes in the appendix):

1. The Silents
2. Searching for a Popular Approach, 1925-1945
3. Creating a Style, 1946-1955
4. Establishing a Mythos as the Verne Cycle Begins, 1956-1959
5. The Height of the Verne Cycle, 1960-1962
6. The Cycle Changes, 1963-1971
7. Toward a New Aesthetic, 1972-1979
8. The Wandering Trail, 1981-1993
9. The Revival, 1993-1996
10. Telefilms and Miniseries Reign, 1997-1999
11. Biography or Pastiche, 2000-2003
12. Dismal Reiterations, 2004-2008
13. A New Formulation, 2008-present

From the early silent films of *Michael Strogoff* (1914) and *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea* (1916) to the most recent hits of *Journey to the Center of the Earth 3D* (2008) and *Journey 2: The Mysterious Island* (2012), Taves

guides the reader through nearly a hundred years of Verne cinema. The most famous and successful big-screen adaptations—such as Disney’s 1954 blockbuster *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea*, Michael Todd’s 1956 *Around the World in 80 Days*, and 20th Century-Fox’s 1959 *Journey to the Center of the Earth*—are treated in great detail but so are many of the biggest (and most expensive) flops of Vernian filmography, such as Warner Brothers’ version of *From the Earth to the Moon* (1958), Irwin Allen’s *Five Weeks in a Balloon* (1962), and Jackie Chan’s *Around the World in 80 Days* (2004).

True to his promise in the book’s introduction, Taves discusses not only the big-budget live-action Hollywood movies based—however loosely—on Verne but also those made-for-television films (including miniseries) as well as a broad range of animated versions (for children and adults). More than offering generic plot descriptions and simple knee-jerk judgments of how faithful or unfaithful to its source a particular film might be, Taves analyzes the thematic richness of its vision, the sophistication of its script, the quality of the acting, the technological innovations used in its production, and the behind-closed-doors story of its financing, directorial priorities, and “inside Hollywood” deals that led to its creation. Taves also focuses on what he calls the role of “intertextuality” in Verne cinema—the “degree to which a film of one story often impacted not only a remake but also a film of another story” (11)—as well as other cultural influences such as comic books, theme park rides, and video games. Finally, he gives clear examples of the questions he asks when reviewing these cinematic adaptations:

Do they retain Verne’s original characters with the same traits? How does the enactment impact characterization, and is the dialogue commensurate with the setting or a more modern vernacular? Are the themes the same ones Verne addressed, or are they expanded, or are others substituted in their place? Is the ending to the story the one provided in the source, or is it modified or altered completely? What myths about the author does this alteration create? Is the period the one intended by Verne, or is it shifted to another time or updated in other ways (such as atomic power)? How do such technical aspects as color, wide-screen, special effects, and three-dimensional filming contribute to visualizing Verne’s imagination? How has the mimetic tradition of Verne filmmaking been enriched by the constant contrast and exchange with that which is more representational and experimental, especially the animated offerings? (11-12)

According to Taves, to date more than three hundred Verne-based movies for cinema or television have been filmed around the world. In this book, he discusses “only Verne films either made or co-produced in the English language” (9) and clarifies that he is using the term “Hollywood” in “the widest possible context, not simply for those productions filmed or shot within the city’s geographical locality, but to indicate the industry’s commercial influence in the Anglo-American world” (9). In other words, the reader must understand that *Hollywood Presents Jules Verne* tells only part of the story. For detailed information about those Verne screen adaptations produced in non-Anglophone countries—for example, by directors such as Georges Méliès

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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