

Editorial

Marie-Hélène Huet

In 1969, Michel Foucault delivered a lecture in which he underlined the difference between writer and author, exploring the socio-cultural factors that created what he called the “author function”. Foucault’s text throws light on the prodigious success of Jules Verne as a creator, as a name, and as Hetzel’s most successful product. It also leads us to reflect on the specific nature of his creative work.

Vernian studies have repeatedly explored this question, though from vastly different perspectives. Biographical and textual studies led to multiple discoveries, further enriched by the publication of Jules Verne’s correspondence with his publishers, online access to the manuscripts and the possibility of consulting the rich archives deposited in the Nantes and Amiens libraries. Vernian journals have recently provided new information on Verne’s surroundings, on his family and friends, giving us a better idea of the general atmosphere in which he grew up and developed as a writer. On the other hand, renewed attention has been paid to the work itself in an attempt to better understand Jules Verne’s writing process. But, when retracing the creation of a novel, how best to capture the initial idea or the development of a narrative? Manuscripts are a definite starting point for genetic studies and for William Butcher, who has meticulously examined the various stages of several important manuscripts, bringing to light Hetzel’s interventions. It is safe to predict that the debates regarding the relationship between Verne and his publisher are far from over. William Butcher’s recent contribution to Vernian studies, *Jules Verne, les manuscrits déchiffrés*, is reviewed in this issue by Jean-Michel Margot.

But does a work always start with a manuscript? What takes place before the first word is

written on a blank page, before the plot takes shape in a writer's mind? We will never seize the fleeting moment when an image, a discussion, a passing impression combine and lead to the first idea of the work, but a search for the multiples sources of Verne's novels yields unexpected and rewarding results, as Alex Kirstukas shows in his thorough inquiry into Robur's models. The analysis of these sources elucidates as well some of the author's personal beliefs; it certainly adds to the understanding of Verne's notoriously complicated hero.

For all the readers who discovered Jules Verne in Hetzel's illustrated volumes or in their reproductions, the books themselves have come to represent more than just a compelling story. The dream of owning a complete collection of Hetzel's original bindings—or just a few of them!—is unfortunately beyond most Vernians's means, but, fortunately, many reeditions of Verne's novels have managed to recreate the magic of text and images. Books have their own history, and so do the illustrations that have become inseparable from Verne's most improbable heroes: chief among them, no doubt, the engraving showing on a newspaper front page Impey Barbicane and J.-T. Maston as they travel to the North Pole, comfortably playing chess inside the belly of a whale. Terry Harpold unveils here the story of *Sans dessus dessous's* memorable drawing. And it reads like a great detective story. I also take the article as an invitation to explore further the place and role of illustrations in Verne's novels.

Verne's legacy often reminds me of a remark I once heard about popular literature: that works remain alive not just when they are read, but when they are routinely used, transformed, and "betrayed" in a way an author would not and could not have anticipated; conversely, works whose meanings have been set and sealed, works that no longer yield the form of re-creation purists may perhaps deplore, such works are *dead*. This issue of *Verniana* gives us two perfect demonstrations of Verne's living legacy and his enduring capacity to cross over genres and artistic expressions. When a French electric company and a Japanese technical giant borrow from Verne's novels or from their illustrations in their publicity campaign, they produce a hybrid image, one that captures the *Extraordinary Voyages'* adventurous spirit, but also adds to the mythical quality of the writer's works. As Jean-Claude Bollinger shows, a brilliant act of piracy can also be homage.

We know that for an entire generation of young enthusiasts, the most memorable event of *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea* involved a giant squid skillfully produced by Disney studios. In his groundbreaking study, *Hollywood presents Jules Verne*, Brian Taves gives us the most complete account and analysis of the more than 300 film or television series inspired by Jules Verne's stories. He shows that the complexity of these adaptations reveals a cinematic universe with its own set of references quite as rich and surprising as the *Extraordinary Voyages* themselves. The book is reviewed in this issue by Jean-Michel Margot.

In the wide world of vernian studies, this issue of *Verniana* illustrates not just the multiples ways to approach Jules Verne's work, but also the pure pleasure of plunging into an adventure that allows us to travel back and forth in search of the elusive quality that lies at the heart of a living legacy. To be sure, some vexing questions remain, many of them raised in previous editorials: the online proliferation of poor, if not absurd, translations, the difficulty of maintaining up-to-date bibliographical records. It is true, as many scholars have noted, that the growing field of vernian studies is bound to include repetitions, particularly as new publications appear in multiple countries and translations are not always available. Certainly,

Verniana has not exhausted the multiple media innovations now at its disposal. But the continued appeal of the *Extraordinary Voyages* is worth celebrating, and *Verniana* remains an invaluable meeting place where readers, scholars, enthusiasts, Vernians of all creeds, exchange ideas and further elucidate the secrets of the most creative writer of his time.

