

Editorial — The Future of Vernian Criticism

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In the first editorial of *Verniana* in 2008, Daniel Compère wrote:

My wish is that *Verniana* may become the counter-measure to these tendencies by offering studies of Verne that will allow us to return to serious efforts based on a sound methodology and critical awareness [1].

The “tendencies” referred to by Daniel Compère are described and clarified earlier in his editorial. They include concerns about *diversity* (giving the impression to a new reader that Verne belongs also to technology, to medicine, to psychiatry, etc.), *confusion* (between the author and his work, and between the innumerable variants of his writings), and, lastly, *ignorance* (of earlier research).

Compère surveyed the past of Vernian research, and now that *Verniana* is entering its tenth year, a brief look at the current state of Vernian studies should reveal whether his wish has been fulfilled.

Leafing through these nine years of *Verniana* (figuratively speaking, since *Verniana* is a periodical available only online at verniana.org), I find that the articles published in the journal have all contained useful and “serious” research. As such, the hope expressed by the first editorialist of *Verniana* seems to have been realized.

Is it the same for the whole field of Vernian scholarship?

Browsing back through my memories of the beginning of the 21st century, I come to the—entirely subjective—observation that the succession of the next generation of Vernian scholars and researchers is not guaranteed (at least to the degree it appeared to be at the end of the 20th century). This conclusion leads me to ask myself the following questions: have we reached a turning point in Vernian research? Are there new ways to pursue research in this field that was opened in 1949 by Michel Butor [2]?

I would tend to answer “yes” to the first question and “*perhaps*” to the second. Indeed, the life and work of Verne are now known. Excellent biographies are available, the corpus of his works is generally accepted, and the bibliography of critical studies devoted to Verne is now both extensive and well established. The biggest discoveries [3] are behind us. What will be the future paths that Vernian research will take in the years to come? Will we see a new generation of working methods, the use of computer techniques related to artificial intelligence, a more in-depth study of the language and the production of text and images that make up the Vernian corpus?

Until now, Verne was still a part of our time, and a personal passion for us. Now, he is on the way to becoming one of those venerable authors of the French literary tradition, to be studied like Racine or Zola by high school students who will not touch them ever again for the rest of their lives unless they become a literature specialist in one of the many academic institutions scattered across the planet. Verne's recent inclusion in the *La Pléiade* collection [4] seems to be a demonstration of this.

On the other hand, Verne will no doubt always remain a fundamentally popular author, generating not only new editions of his novels more or less popular, more or less reliable (that is, at least, corresponding to a version that is recognized as part of the Vernian corpus), but also many new adaptations in cinema, television, graphic novels, music, painting, sculpture and the decorative arts. And on this global level, Verne will continue to be a familiar icon, synonymous with adventure, risk, exploration, and futurism. In other words, the fissure existing between the “archetype Jules Verne”, that dwells in the public's mind, and the “author Jules Verne”, the subject of serious research, is likely to continue [5].

But his reputation is also likely to become more multi-dimensional as a host of new readers, viewers, and listeners “consume” Verne. Some, pushed by their curiosity, will want to know more about the author and his less famous writings. By reading *Hector Servadac*, they will discover that Verne appears to have been an anti-Semite. Passing south of Cape Horn and reaching Africa thanks to *A Captain at Fifteen*, they might see in Verne a racist. Then, gradually interested in Vernian criticism, they might cross the paths of Marc Soriano [6] and other researchers, and discover that Verne may have suffered from sexual repression, or possibly inspired by extraterrestrials or strongly influenced by secret initiatory societies [7].

The Jules Verne Forum (to which *Verniana* is connected [8]) has often resonated with such “discoveries” over the years—some credible, some less so. But one thing is certain: given the worldwide spread of communication technologies and different forms of media transmission (paper, magnetized, optical or even virtual)—cultural developments that the authors of “The Day of an American Journalist in 2889/2890” and *The Castle in the Carpathians* could not have imagined—Verne studies in the future will become more globalized and more accessible to more people than ever before.

There remains much to discover in Verne's large and complex œuvre. His work is far from being exhausted. For example, there are letters still to be discovered, each new one could reveal a considerable surprise. Working over the manuscripts could still keep the specialists busy, and generate and raise controversies. Finally, Verne's papers and notebooks, although already known and cataloged, are still far from being analyzed and fully made use of. The generation of which I am part had the incredible luck of being among the first explorers of Verne who opened the way—or, perhaps, provided different directions of research—for tomorrow's Verne scholars.

NOTES

1. Daniel Compère. « Editorial ». *Verniana*, vol. 1, 2008-2009, p. v-vi.
2. Butor's famous article of 1949 is usually considered as the starting point of modern literary scholarship on Jules Verne: Butor, Michel. « Le point suprême et l'âge d'or à travers quelques oeuvres de Jules Verne ». *Arts et Lettres*, vol. 4, no 2, 1949, p. 3-31.
3. Among many other discoveries, the following come to mind: Michel Verne's revisions of his father's posthumous manuscripts, the correction of the falsehoods in the biography by Marguerite Allotte de la Fuÿe, the exhumation of texts considered as lost (*Monsieur de Chimpanzé*, *Voyage à travers l'impossible* and *Paris au XXe siècle*), the identification of the author of *Prodigieuse découverte et ses incalculables conséquences sur les destinées du monde* published by Hetzel under the pseudonym X. Nagrien, and the sometimes astoundingly bad English translations of Verne's most famous works.
4. *La Pléiade* is the most prestigious collection of literary texts in the Francophone world. It was created in 1931 and has published hundreds of authors in the same high-quality standard volume size, format, paper thinness and binding. An author published in *La Pléiade* series is recognized as being a valued part of the world's literary heritage:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biblioth%C3%A8que_de_la_Pl%C3%A9iade.
5. Volker Dehs. "Editorial". *Verniana*, vol. 2, 2009-2010, p. iii-iv.
 Terry Harpold. "Editorial - The Historical Rupture in Verne Studies". *Verniana*, vol. 3, 2010-2011, p. v-viii.
6. Marc Soriano. *Jules Verne (le cas Verne)*. Paris, Juillard, 412 p. 1978.
7. In the 1960s, Alfred Renoux and Robert Chotard published four esoteric books about Jules Verne. More recently, in 1984 and 1994, Michel Lamy published two books on the same subject (Payot, Paris). Finally, in 1999, Alexandre Schreyer, in two volumes, connected Jules Verne and the *Aiguille creuse* of Arsène Lupin (the hero of Maurice Leblanc) with the treasure of the kings of France.
8. The first page of the website verniana.org has a link to the *Jules Verne Forum* (<http://jv.gilead.org.il/forum/>).

