



## Editorial

### Volker Dehs

One year after the appearance of its first volume, *Verniana* launches its second, strengthening its scholarly mission first begun in 2008. True to its goal of providing readers with original and previously unpublished criticism about Jules Verne, *Verniana 2* presents a broad assortment of different articles. We are especially pleased to include a number of papers delivered at the Eaton Conference, Riverside (California) in 2009. The theme of this conference, focusing on the works of Verne, was the first of its kind in the United States, and thus deserves special mention. Other papers from this conference will be published in *Verniana 3*.

The many authors featured in *Verniana 2*, from the newcomers to Vernian research to some of its earliest pioneers, represent a wide variety of topics and approaches, proving that there is still much to say about Jules Verne and his oeuvre. Bio-bibliographical studies join textual analysis of individual novels along with discussions of other specialized aspects of Verne's works. Occasionally, surprising new perspectives are offered — such as those that seek to explicate the many identities of the unfathomable Captain Nemo. While remaining an exemplary and essential component of the *Extraordinary Voyages*, the master of the *Nautilus* has long since detached himself from his original context to take on a host of new identities outside of literature, including psychotherapy for children! [1] It would be, in my view, erroneous to see this multitude of approaches as a manifestation of the arbitrary. As times change, ways of perceiving and interpreting literary texts will also change, in the same way as a kaleidoscope reconstructs its same elements in continually new and surprising ways.

A publication like *Verniana* also clearly demonstrates that this diversity of approaches not only has a temporal dimension, but also a spatial one. It is not surprising that Verne's oeuvre, preeminently international as it is, might be perceived differently within cultural and social traditions that are not the same in France, Romania, Tunisia, the United States or India. To produce new insights, it is sometimes enough that views from different corners of the world be brought to bear on the same topic. *Verniana* is still in the early stages of realizing Zvi Har'El's dream of becoming a truly international scholarly journal, but its prospects are promising and the publication is still in its infancy ...

Here, then, is the second volume wrapped up, and since it's already time to be thinking about the third, I wish to offer two suggestions to our readers and potential authors. An ancillary but interesting approach in recent years has been to compare the works of Jules Verne to those of his predecessors, contemporaries and successors, including many authors whose literary legacy was at risk of slipping into a not always justified oblivion. I will explicitly

name a few, such as Albert Robida, Alphonse Brown, André Laurie, Paul d'Ivoi and Louis Boussenard, in French literature alone. [2] The study of these authors would certainly be beneficial to giving a new meaning to the literary "reassessment," so often demanded for Jules Verne.

This reassessment should not consist of merely placing the author of *Extraordinary Voyages* on the narrow pedestal already occupied by the likes of his famous literary colleagues and countrymen Hugo, Flaubert, Proust, et al., at the expense of many others; doing so would only perpetuate a practice that has become obsolete. This truly innovative approach, instead, would be to reinsert his name into the context of that vast literature traditionally looked down upon as being "popular" — 90% of whose works have been ignored by the literary critics. Indeed, doing so would better define the ways in which Jules Verne stood out from his colleagues who tried to exploit the same genre(s). Creating hierarchies in the arts, music, and literature, and especially when the hierarchy claims to be immutable, has always seemed to be nonsensical to me; it has deprived and continues to deprive us of many interesting discoveries.

The second suggestion goes rather in the opposite direction. The centennial year of 2005 brought us such an avalanche of publications on Jules Verne — not only in French! — that even experts have had difficulty in separating the wheat from the chaff. This avalanche had a fleeting existence in the publishing industry, and it has unfortunately taken with it many publications that still deserve a critical appraisal. Our "book review" section is still fairly modest, but it is now open and ready to remedy this problem, especially since this gap is not being filled by the other — national — journals dedicated to Jules Verne.

« Forüt ! said quietly the guide.

– Forward! » answered my uncle.» (*Journey to the Centre of the Earth*, ch. XVI)

Göttingen, January 2010

(Translated by Arthur B. Evans)

## NOTES

1. Indeed, the German therapist Ulrike Petermann has, for more than twenty years, incorporated Captain Nemo into her work, as evidenced in her book *Die Kapitän-Nemo-Geschichten. Geschichten gegen Angst und Stress* (Freiburg: Herder 2001, 2005).
2. See two special issues of the journal *Le Rocambole. Bulletin des amis du roman populaire* n° 30, printemps 2005 («Dans le sillage de Jules Verne») and n° 32, automne 2005 («Les cousins de Jules Verne») as well as many articles in *Science Fiction Studies* and the collection *Les Contemporains de Jules Verne. Aux frontières de la légitimation littéraire* (edited by Daniel Compère and Arnaud Huftier) in the series *Lez Valencienne* n° 40, Presses Universitaires Valenciennes, 2007.