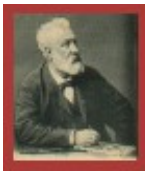
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Butcher's *Jules Verne*

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Butcher, William. *Jules Verne. The Biography.* Read by Simon Vance, Unabridged 10 CDs. Carol Stream, IL, Oasis Audio, 2020.

The outlines of Jules Verne's life are clear. He studied law but was more interested in writing for the stage. He married a widow with two daughters, and together they had a son who became a holy terror (and a writer and his father's literary executor). He wrote novels of geographic adventure that became wildly popular. He traveled extensively around the North Sea and the Mediterranean, being especially fond of Scotland. His nephew shot and crippled him. In his 60s, his health and his passion for writing deteriorated. A diabetic, he died at the age of 77.

In 2006, William Butcher filled out this picture with the first edition of his Verne biography. It contained a number of revelations, including many about the changes forced on Verne by his publisher, Pierre-Jules Hetzel. Since then, Butcher has continued to research Verne's life, and Oasis Audio has published a substantially revised version of the biography as an audiobook narrated by Simon Vance [1]. There are line by line changes throughout, with individual sentences recast, additional nuances teased out, and new paragraphs and a new chapter added to convey the wealth of new information. The tenacious research that characterized the first edition remains.

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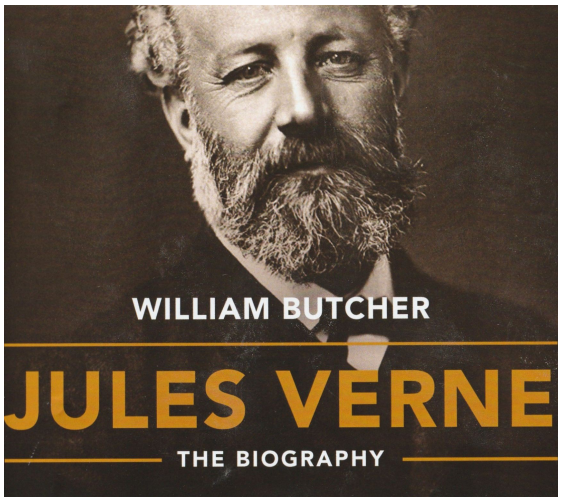
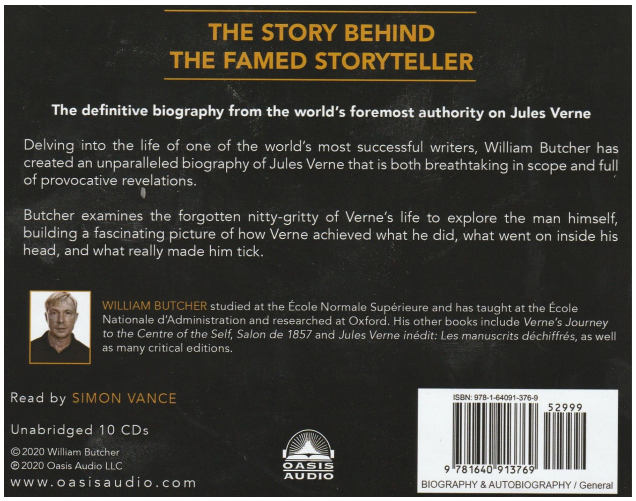
1 Audiobook: William Butcher, *Jules Verne: The Biography*. Narrated by Simon Vance. 20 chapters; 12 hours 14 minutes. Oasis Audio, 2020. ISBN 978-1-64091-376-9. Previous (printed) edition: William Butcher, *Jules Verne: the Definitive Biography*. 19 chapters, 299 pages + appendices and notes. Thunder's Mouth Press, 2006. ISBN 978-1-56025-854-4.





In this review I will concentrate on the new information, especially as it relates to Verne's relationship with his publisher. Hetzel's interventions in the published works turn out to be far more extensive than previously suspected even in 2006. Butcher lays out his thesis with crystal clarity.

In many cases, as we have seen for half a dozen novels, Hetzel restructured the plots and ideology and deleted the politics, violence, sex, and social commentary. The character development and the personal, literary, and philosophical vision are diluted, adulterated, or simply cut. In some cases, the missing parts hold as much interest as the published works. Occasionally, they represent the very peak of Verne's writing. Without exception, they are central to understanding the novels that have captivated successive generations [2].

The evidence is spread throughout the book. Any single example could represent the normal outcome of editorial intervention, but cumulatively they amount to a sustained assault on Verne's artistic goals. In addition to his discussion of individual titles, Butcher's new chapter, "Tarting Up and Dumbing Down," draws together the various threads into what amounts to a prosecutor's brief against the publisher.

Here are some of the most egregious examples. In the second volume of *The Adventures of Captain Hatteras*, Verne's manuscript includes a knife battle between the Englishman Hatteras and the American Altamont over ownership of the newly-discovered continent. Butcher noted this in 2006, but he has now quoted extensively from the manuscript to illustrate the quality of Verne's writing:

> From the moment the two fighters had set foot on the floe, an attentive observer would have noticed it gradually sinking under their weight. Because of the relative warmth of the sea, it was slowly disappearing. Hatteras and Altamont did not realize, but soon the sea-water was over their ankles.

2 To support the argument presented here, I have quoted extensively from the book. To ensure the accuracy of these quotations, which began as transcripts from the audiobook, they have, where possible, been checked against the 2006 edition. Where that has not been possible, direct quotes from the text have been verified using material supplied, at my request, by the author.

> Two minutes later it was up to their knees. Their battle continued although they could feel little under their feet. No less did they make furious assaults on each other. Neither man wanted to halt.

When they are finally rescued by their companions, Dr Clawbonny is horrified at their behavior:

> You too, my poor friends! To fight, to kill each other, for a miserable question of nationality! And what have Britain or America got to do with it? If the North Pole is reached, what does it matter who discovered it? Why call yourself American or British when you can call yourself a man?
>
> The doctor spoke thus for a long time with no effect whatsoever. Were these tough beings, savages so to speak, moved by the tears which they drew from that best of men? It could be doubted, given the hate-filled daggers the captains' eyes cast at each other.
>
> The night was spent keeping watch over them [3].

Under Hetzel's editorial hand, the entire passage was removed before publication.

As Butcher reported in 2006, Verne's manuscript has Hatteras throwing himself into the volcano at the North Pole—the only way he can literally reach that point on the globe. In the published novel, he is pulled back by his companions, but goes mad and ends his life in an asylum. In 2020, Butcher includes the original conclusion of the novel.

> The doctor always bestowed the glory on the man who deserved it above all others. In his account of the journey, entitled *The British at the North Pole* and published the following year by the Royal Geographical Society, he presented John Hatteras as the equal of John Franklin, for both were fearless victims of the quest for knowledge. And, of the memories of the Arctic expedition, the most indelible was that of a Mount Hatteras smoking on the horizon, the tomb of a British captain standing at the North Pole of the globe. [4]

Hatteras, like many of Verne's novels, was originally intended to end rapidly and tragically: having gotten his characters out on a limb, he seems to have preferred sawing off the limb rather than working out an ingenious method of getting them back.

In addition to these excised passages, Butcher finds a certain amount of evidence that another section existed, consisting of several thousand words, that has been lost even from the manuscript:

> The quality of the known sections makes us think that the section permanently lost must have represented a correspondingly high point of writing. One can only dream of the grandiose novels he could have dreamed up if his early steps had not been so cruelly cut down [5].

Butcher's discussion of *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* yields some new insight into Hetzel's censorship. Axel's girlfriend Graüben is described as a "flower-girl," a profession that (as documented in Verne's source) often moonlighted as prostitutes. Axel spends his

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3 Two quotes from the end of CD 5 of the audiobook (track 4): Chapter 10 - Golden Years (1863-66).

4 Quote from CD 5 of the audiobook (track 4): Chapter 10 - Golden Years (1863-66). This quote was first published in note 313 of Butcher's translation of Verne's *Hatteras*: Jules Verne, *The Adventures of Captain Hatteras. The British at the North Pole — The Desert of Ice*. Translated with an Introduction and Notes by William Butcher. Oxford World's Classics, 2005, 401 p.

5 Last two sentences of CD 5 of the audiobook (track 4): Chapter 10 - Golden Years (1863-66).

evenings in Graüben's bedroom and emerges "the happiest of lovers." Hetzel would have none of this. Hetzel also toned down the behavior of Professor Lidenbrock, who in the manuscript could be physically as well as verbally abusive, and who, it is subtly hinted, had more than a business relationship with his maid. (In fairness, Butcher credits Hetzel with significant involvement in the two chapters added to the expanded 1867 edition—the battle of the sea monsters and the giant mastodon herdsman—which are often considered among the best episodes in the book.)

Hetzel repeatedly censored any suggestion of adult relationships in Verne's writing, keeping his focus narrowly on the juvenile market. It wasn't as if the Hetzel "brand" was limited to that market; he had published, and would publish, works by Stendhal, Hugo, George Sand, Zola, and others. But Verne, who at times yearned to venture into that territory, was bound by his contract, and apparently chose the security of a regular and predictable income over his more literary ambitions.

Butcher notes the frequent occurrence of intertextual references in Verne's work: for example, *The Mysterious Island* is presented as part of a trilogy that includes *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Seas* and *Captain Grant's Children*. All three novels were modified at Hetzel's insistence, and sometimes with disastrous results. Butcher says of *Captain Grant's Children*:

> To our modern eyes, Verne's manuscript text sans the Hetzelian incrustations is often clearer, tidier, more adult, in a word more readable. The additions contain religiosity, clichés, and sentiment galore, but less logic, style, or intelligence. When one allows ghost-writing, one should not be surprised if things go bump in the night [6].

In Verne's manuscript, Captain Grant "sails to the South Seas to make his fortune." Post-Hetzel, his mission is to "found a Scottish colony." Hetzel wrote his own ending for the novel, resulting in explanations that were "fifteen times as long" as before. Verne also delegated much responsibility for the romantic scenes to Hetzel.

Things continued to go bump with the other two novels. Verne's conception of *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Seas*, still apparent in manuscript, was quite different from what finally ended up in print. (Much of the following is taken from the first edition of the biography, but is included here because it supports the coherence of the argument.) Verne's Nemo was a sympathetic figure, a courageous partisan, even though he could be capable of ruthless action when under attack. When Pacific Islanders try to board his ship, he simply electrocutes them. When an unknown vessel—unknown at least to the narrator Aronnax—fires on him, Nemo sinks it without hesitation, killing everyone on board. He shows little remorse for these actions, and Verne's narrative *in manuscript* does not imply that he should. This Nemo is even less bound by the "laws of civilization" than his printed doppelgänger: from the beginning he makes it clear that Aronnax and his friends are prisoners.

Hetzel disapproved of this guilt-free Nemo. He judged him on the basis of his actions without taking his motivations into account. In his correspondence, Verne fought desperately to maintain the integrity of his character.

> Nemo doesn't run after ships and sink them every five minutes, he responds to attacks. Nowhere, whatever your letter says, have I made him a man who kills for killing's sake. He has a generous

6 Quote from CD 6 of the audiobook (track 2): Chapter 11 - Whole New World: 1865-67.

> nature and his feelings are sometimes brought into play in the environment he inhabits. His hatred of humanity is sufficiently explained by what both he and his family have suffered... imagine again—this was the original idea for the book—a Polish nobleman whose daughters have been raped, wife killed with an axe, father killed with a scourge, a Pole whose friends all die in Siberia and whose nationality will soon disappear from Europe under the Russian tyranny. [7]

With an eye to sales in Russia, Hetzel vetoed the idea of Nemo as a Polish freedom fighter. Verne's response was to render Nemo's background a blank and his enemy a ship without a flag. But Butcher has noticed an intriguing detail. The warship Nemo attacks is described as "a great warship with a ram: an armour-plated double-decker", and in the manuscript it is identified more specifically as being "of the Solférino class"—*a type built only by France*. In other words, at this stage of composition Nemo had in effect become a *French* patriot opposed to Napoleon III!

After the attack on the warship, Verne's manuscript includes a lyrical passage describing the *Nautilus's* scenic progress along the coast of Normandy, sailing past Verne's birthplace and residence, and finally fetching up at sunrise off the coast of Belgium:

> On the sea small regular ripples created criss-crossing diamond shapes. The sun picked them out in sparkling points. The water, like liquid emerald, heaved in broad waves that the *Nautilus* did not even feel. In the quivering haze, a few far-off fishing boats and two or three coastal luggers with flaccid sails faded indistinctly away. The smoke from a steamer traced a motionless cloud on the backdrop of the sky [8].

Unfortunately this fell foul of one of Hetzel's more bizarre restrictions—that nowhere in the *Extraordinary Voyages* would anyone set foot in France (or have any opinions on French politics or culture). And so in the printed text, the passage has been neutered to the point where the reader may not even realize the *Nautilus* is in the English Channel.

Hetzel was never able to wrap his mind around what Verne had accomplished or was trying to accomplish with this book. At one point he blithely suggested adding a third volume to the narrative, as if the book could be expanded like an accordion. One Hetzel notion involved rescuing some Chinese boys and keeping one of them on board for comic relief. But Hetzel's hand appears—literally—at various points in the manuscript, "usually making the text less vivid, less outspoken." Innocuous references to France are removed: the name of a French inventor, "the acknowledgement of a debt to Dumas *fils*", a comparison of the pilot house to the dome of the Paris Observatory. Modern industry is praised in an un-Verne-like passage. Double entendres are removed, and a lament about the evils of alcohol is added. A reference to Mecca is deleted. The flat tombstone placed on the grave of the dead crew member is replaced by a cross of coral. Nemo is made to cry "God Almighty! Enough!" as Aronnax and his friends are escaping. The cumulative effect of these changes, in Butcher's opinion, is "catastrophic," rendering the plot largely "incoherent."

Verne was under contract from 1865 onward to submit three volumes a year to Hetzel, but Hetzel had no clear obligation to accept them. One of the books he seems to have rejected was *Uncle Robinson*, about a shipwrecked family forced to build a semblance of civilization

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7 Quote from CD 6 of the audiobook (track 4): Chapter 12 - By Land and Sea: 1867-69. The source is Verne's letter to Hetzel dated May 17,1869.

8 Quote from CD 7 of the audiobook (track 1): Chapter 12 - By Land and Sea: 1867-69.

from scratch. At the very end a pellet indicates the presence of someone else on the island. After the rejection, Verne reworked the idea into *The Mysterious Island*, adding many other inexplicable events; and during this process, someone decided to graft Nemo onto it. (It may be telling that Nemo's name first appears in a marginal note in Hetzel's handwriting.) Nemo turns out to be a bad fit: as Butcher points out, his presence as a *deus ex machina* completely undermines the "robinsonade" premise of the novel; and his benevolent role in the novel completely undermines his role in *Twenty Thousand Leagues*. Verne gave him a backstory that—besides its patent absurdity—makes a complete hash of the internal dating of events in the novel *and* destroys the coherence of dates in the other trilogy novels, *Twenty Thousand Leagues* and *The Children of Captain Grant*. Did Verne simply stop caring, or was he being deliberately subversive?

Verne left some other badly joined seams in plain view. The lead pellet remains from the original draft, and Pencroff bites down on it. The "colonists" draw the logical conclusion that the person who fired the gun is their mysterious benefactor, and the book never contradicts that conclusion. But this makes no sense: Nemo doesn't use gunpowder or guns and doesn't hunt land animals anyway—in fact he never sets foot on land *on principle*.

Hetzel made or strongly recommended changes large and small. The last word of Verne's Nemo is "Independence!"; the last words of Hetzel's Nemo, *in his own hand in the manuscript*, are "My God and my country!" To Verne's list of life-saving items found in the mysterious sea-chest, Hetzel added a New Testament—an unusual choice for a gift from Captain Nemo—along with a scene of reverential prayer that followed its discovery. (Verne sometimes made references to Providence; the publisher usually changed them to explicitly Christian sentiments.) Other changes Hetzel wanted were for the colonists to build a railroad and to seek help by flinging a message-in-a-bottle into the ocean. Verne resisted the first, but the second found its way in, even though Verne detested it as a worn-out cliché: the colonists find a message in a bottle that leads them to Tabor Island, where they rescue Ayrton, marooned in *Captain Grant*.

Verne's tragic ending for *The Mysterious Island* was not allowed to stand. In his manuscript, the inhabitants of Lincoln Island are stranded on a desolate rock: their utopian experiment is a failure. In Hetzel's ending, the inhabitants of Lincoln Island are rescued at the last minute because of a note left, not in a bottle this time, but on Tabor Island. Captain Nemo somehow knew that Captain Grant or his representatives would come in search of Ayrton, so he "borrowed" the colonists' sailboat, sailed it single-handedly to Tabor Island (despite his advanced age), and once again violated his never-set-foot-on-land vow to leave a note there directing the rescue party to Lincoln Island. So, rescued by Hetzel through the agency of Captain Grant's son Robert, the colonists return to the US and replicate their colonizing success in Iowa.

There are many fine descriptive and emotional passages in Verne's novels, but it seems that for every such passage that made it into print, there was another one—often a better one—that didn't.

Two grimly effective passages in *The Mysterious Island* were deleted before publication. In one, the rescued Ayrton has taken a pipe and is smoking furiously. He struggles to form words. The "colonists" of the island gather around him, and Captain Smith gazes at him with an intensity that borders on hypnosis. "He held both hands of the savage. He squeezed them

tightly. It seemed as though he was transfusing his soul into him, his intelligence, for the being was now looking at him, was now listening to him, wanted to understand him." Ayrton finally bursts out with the single word, "Tabor!" and runs out of the cavern down to the beach, where he paces back and forth staring at the ocean. "His companions came round him without a word. He seemed to see them for the first time. For the first time, his eyes perceived human beings." It's a moving account of a person's struggle to place himself in time and space and to reconnect with other human beings. But apparently it was too moving for Hetzel.

Another passage may have been too graphic—or too unsuitable for putting into adolescents' hands, for fear of imitation. Herbert has been injured, and his arm is swelling, almost to the point of bursting. Captain Smith applies compresses, but none of them really knows what to do: none of them has any medical training. Pencroff offers his own arm for practice and begs the Captain to do something, anything. Amputation is a possibility. Finally in desperation, the reporter Gideon Spilett takes his knife and, after getting Herbert's permission to proceed, cuts an incision shaped like a cross in the hideously swollen arm—and a bullet falls out. Herbert's wound begins healing, but they all realize what a close call it had been: what will do they if the next crisis doesn't yield to a combination of common sense and good luck? It was apparently an issue Hetzel didn't want the reader to reflect on.

Around the World in Eighty Days fell under the same kind of censorship that affected *Journey to the Centre of the Earth*. Phileas Fogg, who has rescued Princess Aouda after admiring "the undulations of her body", has brought her to Hong Kong. They are detained by the police, who try to contact Aouda's family. Fogg's wager is at stake, but Aouda's status as an under-age single woman makes it impossible for them to proceed. After spending hours in Aouda's room at night, unsupervised, Fogg decides to overcome the difficulty by marrying her. Passepartout and Inspector Fixserve as witnesses, and Fogg and Aouda complete the rest of the journey as man and wife. This was too cold-blooded for Hetzel. In the printed book, the marriage is delayed until the day after they return to England, when Fogg thinks he is financially ruined; his proposal to Aouda is coupled with Hetzel-authored romantic embellishments. Verne had a more transactional view of marriage than his publisher.

(Speaking of Fogg, Butcher quotes one of Verne's first notes about his character, from jottings at the beginning of the first draft: "Face not only organ expressive of character." It's not hard to imagine what other organ Verne may have had in mind, and Butcher considers what the implications may be for Fogg's "imperturbable" character.)

Verne was trapped into making many of these changes because of the nature of his contractual relationship with Hetzel. It's worth reviewing some of the information about those contracts. (Most of this information appears in 2006, although the new edition clarifies the wording in several places.) It's hard to disagree with Butcher's conclusion that the contracts are iniquitous. Compared to what his son Michel was able to negotiate after his father's death, Verne ended up with about a fifth of the royalties he might have gotten from a more conscientious publisher.

Between 1862 and 1875, Verne signed six contracts with Hetzel, each one of them turning him into more of an employee—or worse, a pieceworker—than an independent author. He received a fixed amount per year in return for a fixed number of volumes ("only" two volumes per year from 1871). What Verne did *not* get were any royalties on the serializations of his books in Hetzel's *Magasin* or on the lavishly illustrated editions that Hetzel sold at great profit

when the serialization was complete. To make matters worse, Hetzel negotiated complete ownership of the first four novels for FF 5500. Butcher estimates that these four books sold a million copies before the copyright expired—meaning that Verne made about half a centime per copy.

A set of account entries from late 1870 tells the story. For the period covered by the account, the publisher made a profit of FF 182,788; the author earned FF 25,666. Verne, of course, was never allowed to see these accounts. He made enough to support a mostly comfortable (but sometimes squeezed) middle-class lifestyle; Hetzel became "a millionaire five times over".

Butcher's contribution to our understanding of Verne's life extends far beyond his relationship with Hetzel. One of the major discoveries in the first edition of the biography was Verne's contribution to art criticism. He wrote seven substantial essays about the 1857 Universal Exposition of Fine Arts, collected and edited for the first time by Butcher as *Salon de 1857* [9]. The revised edition provides additional detail and extracts from letters: for example, there is evidence that Verne performed some editorial duties for the *Revue des beaux-arts* in addition to the essays he wrote. Butcher finds a correspondence between Verne's approach to art and the way he assembles research for his novels.

> Verne's method in this early breakthrough is reminiscent of the impressive amounts of research he will insert into his early fiction, assembled from a myriad tropes, titbits, asides. While the French lycées, then and now, emphasize almost to the exclusion of other approaches a rhetoric of analysis and reconstruction—thesis-antithesis-synthesis—Verne distrusts all theoretical superstructures. Making it up as he goes along to a large extent, his method is in contrast empirical and eclectic—both dirty words in French. [10]

Butcher also discovered a short essay from 1857 about the composer Victor Massé, and in the revised biography he quotes from it:

> Victor Massé is a Breton from Morbihan, which he hardly remembers. Very few of his friends suspect his Armorican origin. Besides, he draws no pride from it, and he is quite right. It is up to Morbihan to remember him [11].

All these amount to only a sampling of the work that has gone into this revision. There are differences on every page. A random comparison of paragraphs will yield something like the following. In 2006:

> So that autumn Jules studied at home, getting practical experience with his father's back-office clerks. His friends at this stage remained Ernest Genevois, Émile Couëtoux du Tertre, Charles Maisonneuve, and Édouard Bonamy [12].

In 2020:

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9 Jules Verne, *Salon de 1857.* Acadien, 2008, edited by William Butcher.

10 Quote from CD 5 of the audiobook (track 1): Chapter 8 - Married, with Portfolio: 1857-59.

11 Quote from CD 5 of the audiobook (track 1): Chapter 8 - Married, with Portfolio: 1857-59.

12 Quote from book: William Butcher, *Jules Verne: the Definitive Biography*. 19 chapters, 299 pages + appendices and notes. Thunder's Mouth Press, 2006. ISBN 978-1-56025-854-4. The quote is on page 58, Chapter 4 - What Use Are Girls?: 1846-48.

> So Jules studied at home, getting practical experience with his father's back-office clerks. Little record of this period has survived, except for a sonnet he wrote in 1847 about a court case, where the judge's colleagues snore, the prosecutor is cantankerous, the defense barrister is bound to lose, the jurors laugh and shout, and the spectators emit a strong smell. His friends at this stage [13].

The description of Verne's trip to Scandinavia in 1861 is expanded with extracts from his journal and from his account of the trip, "Joyous Miseries of Three Travelers in Scandinavia":

> I am unaware whether my readers have ever been overcome by an irresistible passion. I do hope they have. Then they will understand, and realize my state of mind after ten years of constant reading had built up an overflow of impatience, of temptations, of all-devouring desires. I had reached the point of totally identifying with the great travelers whose works I absorbed. I discovered the lands they discovered. I took possession in France's name of the islands where they planted their flags [14].

Verne rarely put his wanderlust into words so baldly.

There are also a number of corrections. The club Eleven Without Women, described in 2006 in the chapter covering 1851-54, has been moved to the chapter covering 1867-69. In 2006, Butcher says that Verne probably joined the Circle of the Scientific Press in 1861 and through them met Nadar. However, in 2020 he mentions evidence that Verne may have met Nadar in the 1850s, and that his earliest documented link to the Circle is from 1865. So progresses scholarship.

Butcher's occasionally jocular tone may not sit well with those who like their scholarship delivered in a no-nonsense manner. And he does take liberties at times. The book opens with a prologue that imagines what was going through Verne's mind as he was being shot. Another chapter includes a long passage that puts Verne on his yacht in 1868, sailing into the English Channel and reflecting on the course of his life up to that point. These are interesting and credible passages, and they demonstrate the author's considerable sympathy with his subject; but neither is anchored to any actual journal entries or correspondence.

Butcher suggests that someone should publish Verne's best novels in versions based on the manuscripts, without Hetzel's interventions. Not everyone will be willing to join him in this. But as drastic as the suggestion sounds, the publication of manuscripts is not an uncommon practice. A few examples: when the full manuscript of *Huckleberry Finn* came to light in 1991, at least one publisher issued an edition that restored a number of passages that Twain himself had deleted. The first draft of Tolstoy's *War and Peace* was found among his papers: it was significantly shorter and ended differently. It was published as an alternative *War and Peace* in 2007. The manuscript for Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* has survived, and it has been published in a critical edition (*The Original Frankenstein*) that separates her handwritten text from the numerous changes applied by her husband Percy Shelley. Several of Verne's own posthumous novels have been published in editions based on the original manuscripts, eliminating changes made by his son Michel. Verne's abandoned novel, *Uncle Robinson*, was published as part of the Palik Series in 2011. It may be time to bring other Verne manuscripts to a wider audience in their original form. If Verne is to be evaluated as a writer, it would seem useful to have a clear handle on what he actually wrote.

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13 Quote from CD 2 of the audiobook (track 4): Chapter 4 - What Use Are Girls?: 1846-48.

14 Quote from CD 5 of the audiobook (track 2): Chapter 9 - Destiny Draws up her Skirts: 1860-63.

Jules Verne: the Biography is a cornucopia of information about one of the most exciting and popular writers of the 19th century, made all the more indispensable with the additional detail, refinements, and corrections. Although the primary focus here has been on the content, I would also like to note that Simon Vance, the narrator, is one of the masters of the form, with a reputation for meticulous preparation and well-paced delivery. He is able to keep the occasionally dense detail of the book moving forward. Listening to the audiobook will repay the effort for anyone interested in Verne and his writing.

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