



Editorial

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Jules Verne was one of the first authors, and certainly one of the most famous, to take full advantage of the enormous increase in the availability of information that characterised the nineteenth century. As he told Robert Sherard in an 1894 interview, he “... had a good fortune to enter the world at a time when there were dictionaries on every possible subject.” [1] Dictionaries, journals, popular-scientific reviews such as *La Nature* and *Le Tour du Monde*: those were Verne’s tools in crafting his world-spanning series of novels. These resources were relatively easy to obtain and carried a wealth of detail on whatever topic Verne wanted to address. If his reading did not suffice, he would sometimes consult an expert to assist him with the technicalities.

Yet, books and periodicals had to be looked up in libraries. Recent, accurate maps of specific regions were not always at hand. In Verne’s correspondence with his publisher Hetzel, there are countless references to books, photographs, maps and other information that had to be requested from libraries, publishers or individuals, if it was at all known where the information could be found. Thus, the physical nature of Verne’s sources of information caused delays and missed opportunities. Similarly, collaboration with others required either arranging a meeting, and possibly having to travel, or writing letters and waiting for the replies.

This state of affairs remained unchanged throughout most of the twentieth century. Certainly, the telephone allowed for more direct contact, but this was still contact between two parties. Radio and television emerged as new mass media, but broadcasts were time-based and publisher-driven and could not be searched, browsed or perused. The advent of the

Internet brought about a radical change in the way information was distributed and processed. Communication between individuals and among groups became easy, cheap and almost instantaneous by means of Usenet or e-mail. The World Wide Web, which started as a platform for scientists to share collections of interlinked documents, quickly spread outside of academia. Today, we have the world at our fingertips. Any source we wish to consult is instantly delivered to our computer screens, often at no cost at all.

This development has obviously had its impact on Verne Studies as well. More and more resources are becoming available online. Many of Verne's texts have been published as electronic texts on the web, [2] allowing them to be searched for words, names or expressions. A significant part of Verne's manuscripts can be consulted at the site of the municipal library of Nantes. [3] Old newspapers and magazines are constantly being digitised by local and national libraries and other organisations throughout the world, commercial as well as non-profit. The National Library of France's Gallica project, [4] which offers millions of documents to the interested reader, is of particular use to Verne scholars. Communication among Vernians has improved as well. If, on a local scale, it can be hard to find like-minded people willing to engage in discussion or cooperation on a project, a global community is much more readily formed online. Better access to resources, new methods of processing them, and faster dissemination of results are undoubtedly advantages for the modern Verne scholar.

There is, however, a flip side to these wonderful developments. The wealth of information becomes overwhelming. Not only is it problematic for novices to find their way to the essentials and to separate the wheat from the chaff, it is also becoming more and more challenging for seasoned Verne experts to keep up with new publications in so many places and in so many languages. An exhaustive, searchable online bibliography in the vein of the volume compiled by Jean-Michel Margot a quarter of a century ago, [5] or Volker Dehs' more recent effort, [6] would be an invaluable tool. But is it even possible to collect all resources related to Verne? And would not low-quality, repetitive and superficial publications vastly outnumber the original, relevant ones? Should entries therefore be assessed, or even selected, according to some quality criterion? This would obviously raise ethical issues, to say nothing of the amount of manpower needed for such a project. It might be more practical to rely on search engines such as Google to yield the best results for any query, albeit at the cost of focus. These problems are not unique to Verne Studies, of course; they trouble the scientific community at large.

Meanwhile, *Verniana*, in its current form, does not yet take full advantage of the potential offered by the medium it is published in. As an open access online journal, *Verniana* is freely accessible to readers worldwide. There are no restrictions on the length of contributions. Articles can be richly illustrated, in high resolution and full colour, without any extra cost. Readers who are insufficiently familiar with a publication's language can at least understand the main idea by having the text machine-translated at the push of a button. These are definite benefits in comparison to printed journals. But much more could be done with embedded multimedia, audio, film, layered maps, interactive elements... the possibilities are endless. At present, all articles published in *Verniana* are in essence static, digitised versions of the familiar ink-on-paper texts that we have been used to for so many years. Are authors so attached (perhaps subconsciously) to the old paradigm? Or have there simply been no topics addressed so far for which these extras would have been a valuable addition rather than a

pointless gimmick? While a linear flow of text may be the most convenient method for getting an argument across, I am convinced of the effectiveness, in certain cases, of enriching a text with more sophisticated illustrative elements than mere static images. Let us be as creative in our usage of new media as the man who gave us edible newspapers, long-distance piano concerts and electrically projected advertisements!

NOTES

1. Sherard, R.H. — “Jules Verne at Home.” *McClure’s Magazine*. January 1894. Web: <http://jv.gilead.org.il/sherard.html>.
2. <http://jv.gilead.org.il/works.html>.
3. <https://bm.nantes.fr/home/espaces-dedies/patrimoine/patrimoine-numerise.html>.
4. <http://gallica.bnf.fr/>.
5. Margot, J.-M. — *Bibliographie documentaire sur Jules Verne*. Amiens: Centre de documentation Jules Verne, 1989.
6. Dehs, Volker — *Bibliographischer Führer durch die Jules-Verne-Forschung. Guide bibliographique à travers la critique vernienne 1872-2001*. Wetzlar, Phantastische Bibliothek, 2002.

