

A Classic Verne Biography Reissued as an Audiobook. William Butcher, *Jules Verne, The Biography*, Oasis Audio, narrated by Simon Vance, 12 hours and 15 minutes. 2020. \$28.95.

In 2006, William Butcher's *Jules Verne, The Definitive Biography* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press), received high praise from Vernian readers as well as enthusiastic comments from sf authors such as Arthur C. Clarke and Ray Bradbury (see Evans, "Centennial Scholarship on Jules Verne," *SFS* 33.3 [2006]: 557-61). This new audio edition of Butcher's biography is noteworthy because it offers a revised and updated version of the original text, enriched with fascinating information on Verne's manuscripts. It thus offers non-French readers an exclusive opportunity to discover some of the detailed analyses published in France by Butcher in his 2015 book *Jules Verne inédit: les manuscrits déchiffrés* [Jules Verne Unpublished: The Manuscripts Deciphered] (see Evans, "Culminating a Decade of Scholarship on Jules Verne," *SFS* 42.3 [2015]: 557-65). This latter work meticulously traces the modifications that Verne's publisher, Pierre-Jules Hetzel, imposed on the new writer he had recruited, hoping to train him so that he would fit Hetzel's pro-science educational project. In his initial biography, Butcher had a double goal: to rehabilitate Verne as a serious writer, showing that his considerable talents had long been disfigured and betrayed by dreadful translations (some of which are still circulating on the internet today), and to unveil "what sort of man Jules was, how he achieved what he did, what went on inside his head, what really made him tick" (xxvi). This enterprise—one could say this mission—made for a lively and spirited text documenting minute details of Verne's life and freely imagining how he might have felt or reasoned, given what we know from his letters and novels. Butcher's readers were thus invited to discover Jules Verne's rich career and to share his intimate thoughts throughout a long and productive life.

With this expanded audiobook version of Verne's biography, Butcher fulfills another goal: to show what the Vernian literary oeuvre might have been without Hetzel's interference, without the radical changes he made to Verne's novels, and without the publisher's many "deleterious effects on the author's creative imagination" (224). An entire new section of the revised biography is dedicated to the questions raised by the manuscripts (which are now available online on the site of the Nantes médiathèque) and suggests that in several cases the final published version of Verne's novels was not the best nor the most authentic one and that, for some works such as *The Adventures of Captain Hatteras* or *Around the World in Eighty Days*, future publishers should opt for an earlier manuscript version, not the one "censored" by Hetzel. One may or may not agree with some of Butcher's judgments, interpretations, or hypotheses, but his compelling passion for Jules Verne cannot leave the reader or listener indifferent. His knowledge, his style, and his enthusiasm invite us to share his captivating exploration of one of the most famous—if often misunderstood—French authors. And I must also add that this audiobook is particularly well-served by Simon Vance's perfect baritone reading performance.—**Marie-Hélène Huet, Princeton University**