

Jules Verne

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Jules Verne



Jules Verne. Photo by Félix Nadar.

Born: February 8, 1828
Nantes, France

Died: March 24, 1905
Amiens, France

Occupation: Novelist

Nationality:  French

Genres: Science Fiction

Jules Gabriel Verne (February 8, 1828–March 24, 1905) was a French author who pioneered the science-fiction genre. He is best known for novels such as *Journey To The Center Of The Earth* (1864), *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under The Sea* (1870), and *Around the World in Eighty Days* (1873). Verne wrote about space, air, and underwater travel before air travel and practical submarines were invented, and before practical means of space travel had been devised. He is the third most translated author in the world, according to Index Translationum. Some of his books have been made into films. Verne, along with Hugo Gernsback and H. G. Wells, is often popularly referred to as the "Father of Science Fiction".^[1]

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Biography

Early years

Jules G. Verne was born in Nantes, France, to Pierre Verne, an attorney, and his wife, Sophie. The eldest of five children, Jules spent his early years at home with his parents in the bustling harbor city of Nantes. The family spent summers in a country house just outside the city, on the banks of the Loire River. Here Jules and his brother Paul would often rent a boat for a franc a day. The sight of the many ships navigating the river sparked Jules's imagination, as he describes in the autobiographical short story *Souvenirs d'Enfance et de Jeunesse*. At the age of nine, Jules and Paul, of whom he was very fond, were sent to boarding school at the Saint Donatien College (Petit séminaire de Saint-Donatien). As a child, he developed a great interest in travel and exploration,

a passion he showed as a writer of adventure stories and science fiction. His interest in writing often cost him progress in other subjects.

At the boarding school, Verne studied Latin, which he used in his short story *Le Mariage de Monsieur Anselme des Tilleuls* in the mid 1850s. One of his teachers may have been the French inventor Brutus de Villeroi, professor of drawing and mathematics at the college in 1842, and who later became famous for creating the US Navy's first submarine, the USS *Alligator*. De Villeroi may have inspired Verne's conceptual design for the Nautilus in *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, although no direct exchanges between the two men have been recorded.

Verne's second French biographer, Marguerite Allotte de la Fuye, formulated the rumor that Verne was so fascinated with adventure at an early age that he stowed away on a ship bound for the West Indies, but that Jules's voyage was cut short when he found his father waiting for him at the next port.

Literary debut

After completing his studies at the *lycée*, Verne

went to Paris to study for the bar. About 1848, in conjunction with Michel Carré, he began writing librettos for operettas. For some years his attentions were divided between the theatre and work, but some travellers' stories which he wrote for the *Musée des Familles* revealed to him his true talent: the telling of delightfully extravagant voyages and adventures to which cleverly prepared scientific and geographical details lent an air of verisimilitude.

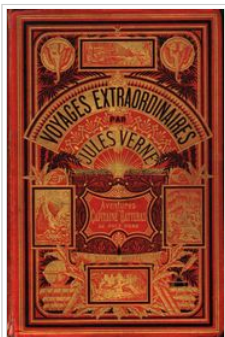
When Verne's father discovered that his son was writing rather than studying law, he promptly withdrew his financial support. Verne was forced to support himself as a stockbroker, which he hated despite being somewhat successful at it. During this period, he met Alexandre Dumas, père and Victor Hugo, who offered him writing advice.

Verne also met Honorine de Viane Morel, a widow with two daughters. They were married on January 10, 1857. With her encouragement, he continued to write and actively looked for a publisher. On August 3, 1861, their son, Michel Jules Verne, was born. A classic *enfant terrible*, Michel would marry an actress over Verne's objections, had two children by his 16 year old mistress, and buried himself in debts. The relationship between father

and son did improve as Michel grew older.

Verne's situation improved when he met Pierre-Jules Hetzel, one of the most important French publishers of the 19th century, who also published Victor Hugo, Georges Sand, and Erckmann-Chatrian, among others. They formed an excellent writer-publisher team until Hetzel's death. Hetzel helped improve Verne's writings, which until then

had been repeatedly rejected by other publishers. Hetzel read a draft of Verne's story about the balloon exploration of Africa, which had been rejected by other publishers for being "too



A typical Hetzel front cover for a Jules Verne book. The edition is *Les Aventures du Capitaine Hatteras au Pôle Nord*, type "Aux deux éléphants".

scientific". With Hetzel's help, Verne rewrote the story, which was published in 1863 in book form as *Cinq semaines en ballon* (*Five Weeks in a Balloon*). Acting on Hetzel's advice, Verne added comical accents to his novels, changed sad endings into happy ones, and toned down various political messages.

From that point to years after Verne's death, Hetzel published two or more volumes a year. The most successful of these include: *Voyage au centre de la terre* (*Journey to the Center of the Earth*, 1864); *De la terre à la lune* (*From the Earth to the Moon*, 1865); *Vingt mille lieues sous les mers* (*Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, 1869); and *Le tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours* (*Around the World in Eighty Days*), which first appeared in *Le Temps* in 1872. The series is collectively known as "Les voyages extraordinaires" ("extraordinary voyages"). Verne could now live on his writings. But most of his wealth came from the stage adaptations of *Le tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours* (1874) and *Michel Strogoff* (1876), which he wrote with Adolphe d'Ennery. In 1867 Verne bought a small ship, the *Saint-Michel*, which he successively replaced with the *Saint-Michel II* and the *Saint-Michel III* as his financial situation improved. On board the *Saint-Michel III*, he sailed

around Europe. In 1870, he was appointed as "Chevalier" (Knight) of the Légion d'honneur. After his first novel, most of his stories were first serialised in the *Magazine d'Éducation et de Récréation*, a Hetzel biweekly publication, before being published in the form of books. His brother Paul contributed to *40th French climbing of the Mont-Blanc* and a collection of short stories - *Doctor Ox* - in 1874. Verne became wealthy and famous. According to the Unesco Index Translationum, Jules Verne regularly places among the top five most translated authors in the world.

The last years

On March 9, 1886, as Verne was coming home, his twenty-five-year-old nephew, Gaston, shot him with a gun. One bullet missed, but the second entered Verne's left leg, giving him a limp that would not be cured. Gaston spent the rest of his life in an asylum.

After the deaths of Hetzel and his beloved mother in 1887, Jules began writing darker works. This may partly be due to changes in his personality, but an important factor is the fact that Hetzel's son, who took over his father's business, was not as

rigorous in his corrections as Hetzel Sr. had been. In 1888, Jules Verne entered politics and was elected town councillor of Amiens, where he championed several improvements and served for fifteen years. In 1905, while ill with diabetes, Verne died at his home, 44 Boulevard Longueville (now Boulevard Jules-Verne). Michel oversaw publication of his last novels *Invasion of the Sea* and *The Lighthouse at the End of the World*. The "Voyages extraordinaires" series continued for several years afterwards in the same rhythm of two volumes a year. It has later been discovered that Michel Verne had made extensive changes in these stories, and the original versions were published at the end of the 20th century.

In 1863, Jules Verne wrote a novel called *Paris in the 20th Century* about a young man who lives in a world of glass skyscrapers, high-speed trains, gas-powered automobiles, calculators, and a worldwide communications network, yet cannot find happiness and comes to a tragic end. Hetzel thought the novel's pessimism would damage Verne's then booming career, and suggested he wait 20 years to publish it. Verne put the manuscript in a safe, where it was discovered by his great-grandson in 1989. It was published in 1994.

Reputation in English-speaking countries

While Verne is considered in many countries such as France as an author of quality books for young people, with a good command of his subjects, including technology and politics, his reputation in English-speaking countries suffered for a long time from poor translation.

Characteristic of much of late 19th-century writing, Verne's books often took a chauvinistic point of view. The British Empire in particular was frequently portrayed in a bad light, and so the first English translator, Reverend Lewis Page Mercier working under a pseudonym, removed many such passages, such as those describing the political actions of Captain Nemo in his incarnation as an Indian nobleman. Such negative depictions were not, however, invariable in Verne's works; for example, *Facing the Flag* features Lieutenant Devon, a heroic, self-sacrificing Royal Navy officer worthy of any written by British authors. Captain Nemo, an Indian, was balanced by Ned Land, a Canadian. Some of Verne's most famous heroes were British (e.g. Phileas Fogg in *Around*

the World in Eighty Days).

Mercier and subsequent British translators also had trouble with the metric system that Verne used, sometimes dropping significant figures, at other times keeping the nominal value and only changing the unit to an Imperial measure. Thus Verne's calculations, which in general were remarkably exact, were converted into mathematical gibberish. Also, artistic passages and whole chapters were cut because of the need to fit the work in a constrained space for publication. (The London author, Cranstoun Metcalfe (1866–1938), translated two of Verne's later works into English during the first years of the 20th century.)

For those reasons, Verne's work initially acquired a reputation in English-speaking countries for not being fit for adult readers. This in turn prevented him from being taken seriously enough to merit new translations, leading to those of Mercier and others being reprinted decade after decade. Only from 1965 on were some of his novels re-translated more accurately, but even today Verne's work has still not been fully rehabilitated in the English-speaking world.

Verne's works also reflect the bitterness France felt

in the wake of defeat in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 to 1871, and the loss of Alsace and Lorraine. *The Begum's Millions* (*Les Cinq cents millions de la Begum*) of 1879 gives a highly stereotypical depiction of Germans as monstrous cruel militarists. By contrast, almost all the protagonists in his pre-1871 works, such as the sympathetic first-person narrator in *Journey to the Centre of the Earth*, are German.

Hetzel's influence

Hetzel substantially influenced the writings of Verne, who was so happy to finally find a willing publisher that he agreed on almost all changes that Hetzel suggested. Hetzel rejected at least one novel (*Paris in the 20th Century*), and asked Verne to significantly change his other drafts. One of the most important changes Hetzel enforced on Verne was the adoption of optimism in his novels. Verne was in fact not an enthusiast of technological and human progress, as can be seen in his works created before he met Hetzel and after his death. Hetzel's demand of the optimistic text proved correct. For example, *The Mysterious Island* originally ended with the survivors returning to mainland forever nostalgic about the island. Hetzel

decided that the heroes should live happily, so in the revised draft, they use their fortunes to build a replica of the island. Many translations are like this. Also, in order not to offend France's then-ally, Russia, the origin and past of the famous Captain Nemo were changed from those of a Polish refugee avenging the partitions of Poland and the death of his family in the January Uprising repressions to those of an Indian prince fighting the British Empire after the Sikh War.

Predictions

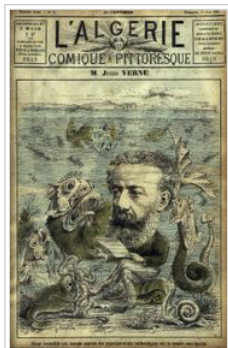
Jules Verne's novels have been noted for being startlingly accurate descriptions of modern times. "Paris in the 20th Century" is an often cited example of this as it describes air conditioning, automobiles, the internet, television, and other modern conveniences very similar to their real world counterparts. Another good example is "From the Earth to the Moon", which is uncannily similar to the real Apollo Program, as three astronauts are launched from the Florida peninsula and recovered through a splash landing.

Bibliography

Verne wrote numerous works, most famous of which are the 54 novels part of the *Voyages Extraordinaires*. He also wrote short stories, essays, plays, and poems.

Some of his better known works include:

- *Five Weeks in a Balloon* (*Cinq Semaines en ballon*, 1863)
- *Paris in the 20th Century* (*Paris au XXe Siècle*, 1863, not published until 1994)
- *Journey to the Center of the Earth* (*Voyage au centre de la Terre*, 1864)
- *From the Earth to the Moon* (*De la terre à la lune*, 1865)
- *Journeys and Adventures of Captain*



Jules Verne and some of the creatures from his novels

Hatteras (Voyages et aventures du capitaine Hatteras, 1866)

- *In Search of the Castaways or Captain Grant's Children (Les Enfants du capitaine Grant, 1867-1868)*
- *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea (Vingt mille lieues sous les mers, 1870)*
- *Around The Moon (Autour de la lune, a sequel to From the Earth to the Moon, 1870)*
- *A Floating City (Une ville flottante, 1871)*
- *Dr. Ox's Experiment (Une Fantaisie du Docteur Ox, 1872)*
- *The Adventures of Three Englishmen and Three Russians in South Africa (Aventures de trois Russes et de trois Anglais, 1872)*
- *The Fur Country (Le Pays des fourrures, 1873)*
- *Around the World in Eighty Days (Le Tour du Monde en quatre-vingts jours, 1873)*
- *The Survivors of the Chancellor (Le Chancellor, 1875)*
- *The Mysterious Island (L'Île mystérieuse, 1875)*
- *The Blockade Runners, (1876)*
- *Michael Strogoff (Michel Strogoff, 1876)*
- *Off On A Comet (Hector Servadac, 1877)*
- *The Child of the Cavern, also known as Black Diamonds or The Black Indies (Les Indes noires, 1877)*

- *Dick Sand, A Captain at Fifteen* (*Un Capitaine de quinze ans*, 1878)
- *The Begum's Millions* (*Les Cinq cents millions de la Bégum*, 1879)
- *The Steam House* (*La Maison à vapeur*, 1879)
- *Tribulations of a Chinaman in China* (*Les tribulations d'un chinois en Chine*), 1879
- *Eight Hundred Leagues on the Amazon* (*La Jangada*, 1881)
- *The Green Ray* (*Le Rayon vert*, 1882)
- *The Headstrong Turk* (1883)
- *Frritt-Flacc* (1884)
- *The Vanished Diamond* (*L'Étoile du sud*, 1884)
- *The Archipelago on Fire* (*L'Archipel en feu*, 1884)
- *Mathias Sandorf* (1885)
- *Robur the Conqueror* or *The Clipper of the Clouds* (*Robur-le-Conquérant*, 1886)
- *Ticket No. "9672"* (*Un Billet de loterie*, 1886)
- *North Against South* (*Nord contre Sud*, 1887)
- *The Flight to France* (*Le Chemin de France*, 1887)
- *Family Without a Name* (*Famille-sans-nom*, 1888)
- *Two Years' Vacation* (*Deux Ans de*

vacances, 1888)

- *Topsy Turvy*, (1890)
- *Mistress Branican*, (1891)
- *The Castle of the Carpathians* (*Le Château des Carpathes*, 1892)
- *Propeller Island* (*L'Île à hélice*, 1895)
- *The Purchase of the North Pole* (*Sans dessus dessous*, the second sequel to *From the Earth to the Moon*, 1895)
- *Facing the Flag* (*Face au drapeau*, 1896)
- *Clovis Dardentor* (1896)
- *The Sphinx of the Ice Fields* or *An Antarctic Mystery* (*Le Sphinx des glaces*, a sequel to Edgar Allan Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, 1897)
- *The Mighty Orinoco* (*Le Superbe Orénoque*, 1898)
- *Second Fatherland* (*Seconde Patrie*, sequel to Johann Wyss's *The Swiss Family Robinson*, 1900; also published in two volumes as *Their Island Home* and *Castaways of the Flag*)
- *The Village in the Treetops* (*Le Village aérien*, 1901)
- *The Master of the World* (*Maître du monde*, sequel to *Robur the Conqueror*, 1904)
- *Invasion of the Sea* (*L'Invasion de la mer*, 1904)
- *A drama in Livonia* (*Un Drame en Livonie*,

1904)

- *The Lighthouse at the End of the World* (*Le Phare du bout du monde*, 1905)
- *The Chase of the Golden Meteor* (*La Chasse au météore*, 1908)
- *The Danube Pilot* (*Le Pilote du Danube*, 1908)
- *The Survivors of the 'Jonathan'* (*Le Naufrages du Jonathan*, 1909)
- *The Eternal Adam* (*L'Eternel Adam*, 1910)

See also

- Paschal Grousset
- Karl May
- Zane Grey
- B. Traven
- Emilio Salgari
- Edgar Rice Burroughs
- Osip Senkovsky
- Oshikawa Shunro
- Steampunk, a style that took inspiration from Verne.
- *Before Armageddon: An Anthology of Victorian and Edwardian Imaginative Fiction Published Before 1914* (1976)

Notes

1. ^ Adam Charles Roberts (2000), "The History of Science Fiction": Page 48 in *Science Fiction*, Routledge, ISBN 0-415-19204-8. Others who are popularly called the "Father of Science Fiction" include Hugo Gernsback and H. G. Wells.

Further reading

- William Butcher, Arthur C. Clarke (Introduction) (2006). *Jules Verne: The Definitive Biography*. ISBN 1-56025-854-3
- Herbert R. Lottman (1997). *Jules Verne: An Exploratory Biography*. ISBN 0-312-14636-1
- Philippe Melot et Jean-Marie Embs (2005). *Le Guide Jules Verne*. Les Editions de l'Amateur, Paris. ISBN 2-85917-417-6

External links

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- Les Voyages Extraordinaires -list of Verne works Compiled by Dennis Kytasaari.
- Jules Verne at the Internet Speculative Fiction Database

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- Jules Verne's works: text, concordances and frequency list
- A Jules Verne Centennial 1905-2005: A selection of early Jules Verne books and illustrations at the Smithsonian Institution Libraries edited by Norman M. Wolcott.
- Zvi Har'El's Jules Verne Collection, including the Jules Verne Virtual Library, online sources of 51 of Jules Verne's novels translated into eight languages.
- The Jules Verne Collecting Resource Page, complete online sources, posters, cards, autographs, first edition covers, etc..

Biography

- Biography of Jules Verne
- Jules Verne: A Reappraisal, by William Butcher

Reviews

- "Jules Verne: Father of Science Fiction?", John Derbyshire, *The New Atlantis*, Number 12, Spring 2006, pp. 81-90. A review of four

new Jules Verne translations from the "Early Classics of Science Fiction" series by Wesleyan University Press.

- *Jules Verne: An Exploratory Biography*, by Herbert R. Lottman - a review.

Misc

- Vision Cruceros Vision Cruise --> Thematic Cruise about Jules Verne.
- ***A Jules Verne Centennial: 1905-2005***
(2005) Norman Wolcott From Smithsonian Institution Libraries
- The maps from the Voyages Extraordinaires, scans of all the maps that were included in the original editions of Jules Verne's novels.
- Nantes Tourist Office official website (English)

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