



**Jules Verne**

# **Joyous Miseries of Three Travellers in Scandinavia**



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**Joyous Miseries of Three  
Travellers in Scandinavia**

**Translated with an introduction, notes and  
appendices by William Butcher**

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## Introduction

The aim of the present publication, which coincides with the 150th anniversary of Jules Verne's journey to Norway (1861), is to make available a first English translation of *Joyous Miseries of Three Travellers in Scandinavia*. At the same time it attempts to address the critical shortfall, where very few studies of the work have appeared in any language to date.<sup>1</sup>



1 Verne at about 30

The humorous and high-spirited *Joyeuses Misères de trois voyageurs en Scandinavie* was published in 2003, in the form of the sole surviving chapter. This work was manifestly designed to recount Verne's visit, with friends Aristide Hignard and Émile Lorois, to Sweden, Norway and Denmark.<sup>2</sup> The writer spent five weeks away from Paris, missing the birth of his only son Michel. Certainly the absence constituted a poor start to biological fatherhood and a sign of selfishness as a husband, but may perhaps be justified in terms of its ultimate effect on the French literary landscape.

The finished book would undoubtedly have derived much from the untitled, unpublished notebook that Verne wrote on his Scandinavian journey.

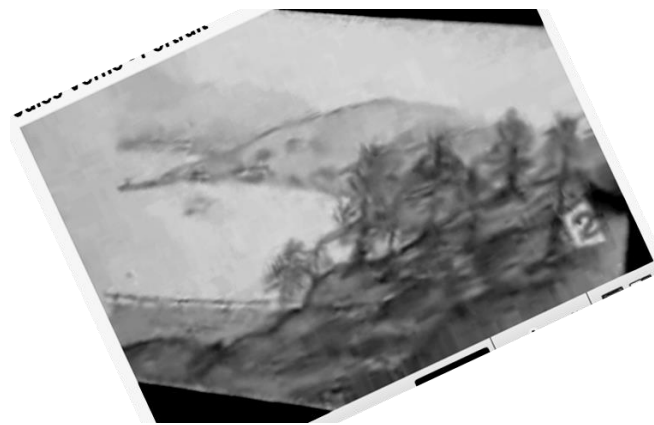
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<sup>1</sup> Since the main focus of the present publication is *Joyous Miseries*, regrettably the Scandinavian journey itself cannot be examined in detail.

<sup>2</sup> The Norwegian section of the actual journey is masterfully presented by Per Johan Moe ([www.julesverne.no/english](http://www.julesverne.no/english) and associated pages).

Two entries in this diary indeed give birth to crucial passages of *Joyous Miseries*. One emphasises the sickness that staying in France causes him and the resultant need to depart: “Ill if I stay/resite [*sic*]. To leave is a must”. This heartfelt note will be expanded to become: “[all these] adventures, discoveries . . . explorations . . . made me quite ill. A nostalgia for foreign countries overwhelmed me. To get out of France . . . where I no longer lived, no longer slept, hardly breathed, was an absolute must.”

The second entry concerns the search for new lands: “Such people do not go to Norway”. This will produce: “Who does not to a certain extent visit Italy, Germany, Switzerland or Algeria! Who amongst my readers has not more or less crossed the Alps or the Pyrenees?” In other words, the author views the Nordic countries as remote and untravelled, as fulfilling a long-suppressed thirst for escape, as compensation for a missing exoticism: “the savages of Oceania, the Eskimos of Greenland, Switzerland on a grand scale.” The two ideas together — travel outside France, to places unsullied by tourists — thus encapsulate the conceptual core of *Joyous Miseries*, and may even constitute a terse manifesto for the whole 40-year series of Extraordinary Journeys.



2 Verne’s sketch of Norway (Scandinavian diary)

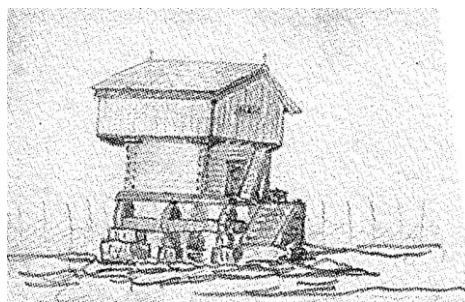
Equally interesting in the light of Verne’s soon-to-take-off career is the mention of “ten years of constant reading”, the best summary we have of his long intellectual development in the capital. According to his account, he scanned the 66 volumes of the *Univers pittoresque* magazine and took out a subscription to the new *Tour du monde*. “Those illustrations,” especially, “raised my imagination to its highest point, drawn as they were by the Dorés, the Durant-Bragers, the Rious, the Hadamars, the Girardets, the Flandins, the Lancelots of this world, all artists of sufficient talent to reproduce what they had never seen”. Verne thus reveals the visual nature of his imagination — an aspect that surprisingly few commentators have highlighted.

If, in *Joyous Miseries*, Doré’s sketches play a vital role for Verne’s dreams and thoughts, his paintings, in contrast, are strongly criticised in his *Salon of*

1857: “there are no details, no episodes at all . . . the intelligent public are free to say that this painting is neither worthy nor serious, and they *are* saying it” (“Cinquième article”). And yet a central detail of the painting in question does strike him: “a pretty ray of sunlight, like those that cut out a plane of light in a room through half-open venetian blinds; Mr Doré has lovingly embraced this beam . . . one might believe that it is a ray fraudulently introduced [into the exhibition hall]”. This same ray, or something rather like it, will, in *Paris in the Twentieth Century*, light up the hero’s living room for precisely one minute each year. In the margin of the manuscript, Verne writes “perhaps implement” (54). And indeed, a year or two later it will reappear, to show Lindenbrock the path to the centre of the earth.

As regards Verne’s favourite writers, more are explorers here than novelists. He likes Jules-Sébastien-César Dumont d’Urville and Alexandre Dumas père, as well as James Cook, James Ross and John Richardson, of Scottish descent. He loves Louis Énault’s *Norway* (1857), by the author who had already guided him around North Britain. And he adores Ossian, the legendary third-century warrior, whose Gaelic poetry, modernised and perhaps largely invented by James Macpherson, helped make Scotland a major focus of the Romantic Movement.

The chapter, written in 1861–2, predates by mere months the encounter with the lifelong publisher, Jules Hetzel, in about the summer of 1862. Previously Verne had tried out various genres: gothic novel (“A Priest in 1839”), poetry, art criticism (*Salon of 1857*) and theatre (about 40 works). *Joyous Miseries*, however, together with *Journey to England and Scotland* (1859–60) and *Paris* (1860, 1863), opens up the route to the famous novels. All three, like the following books, are in prose, about a youngish hero, at least slightly romanced and set in a precise geographical area.



3 Verne’s sketch of a rustic house (Scandinavian diary)

The two northern trips, together with the writing of them, in fact transformed Verne. By blending the Norwegian spray with the Scotch mist he had bottled in his innermost recesses, he finally found his voice: a potent mix of solid geographico-historical research, visual invention and humorously self-mocking exaggeration, shaken together but not stirred. *Joyous Miseries* indeed



proposes a second, equally snappy, manifesto that echoes the artistic talent Verne so much admires: “to see while travelling those charming things that do not exist.”

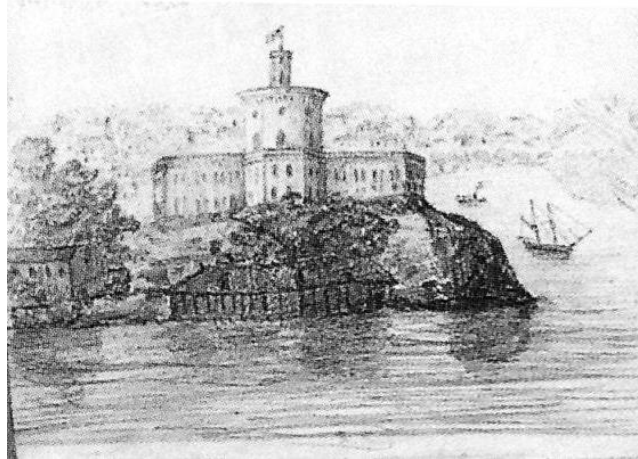
Henceforth an irresistible urge will draw him:

to the hyperboreal regions, like the magnetic needle to the North . . . I am temperamentally drawn to cold countries . . . [According to Énault]: “As you head north, you constantly get higher; but so uniformly and imperceptibly that you only realise the height you have got to by looking at the rise in the barometer and the drop in the thermometer.”

Verne equates altitude with both latitude and the deliciously frigid temperature, joint scales measuring out his Nordic obsession. Hatteras and Lindenbrock will result, for Énault’s three-way metaphor lies at the heart of Verne’s prose universe. The young man who embarked on the Scottish voyage of discovery and saw things through his mind’s eye was not the same one as the writer who returned from the Norwegian epic.

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**4 Verne's sketch of Kastellet château, Kastelholmen, Stockholm (Scandinavian diary — identification by Per Johan Moe)**