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JOURNEY TO THE MOON

JULES VERNE was born in Nantes in 1828, the eldest of five children in a prosperous family of French, Breton, and Scottish extraction. His early years were happy apart from the accidental drowning of his cousins and unrequited passions for his cousin Caroline and Herminie Grossetière. Literature always attracted him and while taking a law degree in Paris he wrote poetry and a large number of plays. His books *Journey to England and Scotland* and *Paris in the Twentieth Century* were not published in his lifetime. However, he published *The Salon of 1857* in 1857, and in 1862 the publisher Hetzel accepted *Five Weeks in a Balloon*, to be followed by sixty other novels covering the whole world and beyond; at the same time he insisted on radical changes to the structures and contents of the books. Verne travelled over three continents, before selling his yacht in 1886, following an attempt on his life by his favourite nephew, Gaston. Eight of the books appeared after his death in 1905—although in fact partly written by his son Michel.

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OXFORD WORLD'S CLASSICS

JULES VERNE

Journey to the Moon

*Part One: From the Earth to the Moon:
A direct journey in 97 hours*

Part Two: Around the Moon

Translated and edited by

DAVID COWARD AND WILLIAM BUTCHER

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INTRODUCTION

From the Earth to the Moon (1865), written early on in the career of Jules Verne (1828–1905), ranks among a handful of his most successful and popular works. Its sequel, *Around the Moon* (1869), also belongs to the crucially creative first decade with Paris publisher Jules Hetzel, which catapulted him from obscurity to international fame. With renewed interest in our only satellite expected in the 2030s and 2040s, the relevance of the pioneering and realistic two-volume *Journey to the Moon* can only increase.

Yet, despite its popularity and historical and literary importance, no critical edition has ever been published: the three surviving manuscripts remain largely unknown, and the necessary ‘establishment of the text’, including the identification of the best French edition issued by Hetzel, followed by the publication of an updated text, has not been carried out. This deficiency is in fact only part of a general problem: the best-known French writer has seldom benefited from a canonical edition of even his best-known works,¹ let alone his Collected Works, properly established on the basis of the last corrected texts. As a result, studies of Verne’s work have often examined the novels in a defective edition. This essential groundwork on the texts was carried out long ago, however, for Flaubert, Stendhal, Balzac, and Proust.

The present volume will therefore explore aspects of the *Journey to the Moon* diptych including the references and allusions and the suppressed or modified handwritten text—in short, all the evidence, generally unpublished to date, that will enable us to better understand and appreciate this unparalleled marvel, this jewel of world literature.

In this Introduction in particular, after a brief examination of Verne’s reputation, which still remains challenging to define, I will look at its characters, especially the intriguing Michel Ardan (double of the photographer and aeronaut Nadar). Verne’s science, finally, will be examined, in particular the work’s sources and its ‘predictions’ and ‘errors’. The Explanatory Notes at the end of the volume will seek to clarify and reference obscurities and allusions; the profusion

¹ W.B. has made a few attempts for Gallimard Folio Classique and Oxford World’s Classics.

of authorities cited by Verne is covered in Appendix 2: 'Proper Names Cited by Verne'. In the general absence of information about the lunar manuscripts, these three essential documents will be studied in the context of the work's elaboration, to highlight not only where the publisher changed the text but also the instances in which the contents differ significantly from the known version (Appendix 1: 'Inception and Development of the Novel'). Care will be taken to situate the work in Verne's life ('A Chronology of Jules Verne') and in terms of the exchanges with the publisher ('A Chronology of the Writing of *Journey to the Moon*').

Voyage à la Lune fits into the mould of the first books under Hetzel's direction: an audacious journey into an unknown domain of prestige and mythical resonance, far from the too-familiar European lands and deliciously empty of a human presence; with as much time spent on the preparations as the journey itself; characters who are stereotyped but striking; a thick underlay and solid veneer of science and technology, done with so much accurate or credible information as to become convincing, despite an essential implausibility. The first volume of the diptych is lively, humorous, confident, and ambitious, written in Verne's relief and joy of having finally found a publisher and a national reputation. It exists on many levels, thanks to its psychological interplay, its scientific and technological expositions, its plot twists; and to its wealth of metaphors, proverbial expressions, images and reflections of contemporary social and political debate.

The mood of *Around the Moon* is less exuberant. Verne wrote the volume after Hetzel had transformed, almost to destruction, *The Adventures of Captain Hatteras* (begun in 1864) and *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Seas* (1868), including their heroic captains and their ideologies and 'messages'.² These two masterpieces, together with other works, lost some of their finest chapters in a paroxysm of destructive editing that attacked their very cores, without any possibility of appeal. Be that as it may, although entertaining and enlightening, the second lunar volume, written after the worst editing traumas, serves as a prelude to Verne's relative novelistic waning, from 1870 to 1905, where society is criticized more and literary form is experimented

² See William Butcher, *Jules Verne inédit: Les manuscrits déchiffrés* (Lyon: ENS éditions and Institut d'histoire du livre, 2015), for chapter and verse of the changes the publisher forced onto Verne's works.

with, but where less exhilarating themes are explored with reduced word-play and humour.

It is not easy to understand the enduring attraction exercised by *Journey to the Moon*, continuing since publication and operating across every continent. Part of the explanation may be in the very manner in which Verne tells the story, carrying it along with infectious excitement. Part may be in the revival of an age-old dream, although we now know that the journey has been accomplished in reality: humans have been to the Moon and lived to tell the tale. Travelling to the Moon represents the fulfilment of a reverie available to everyone, but one which is still hard to believe when contemplating the Moon's face in the constellation of the night sky.

Verne's books are invariably as developed when he is writing about the preparations for a journey as actually carrying it out, not only because he can work in the results of all his research, meaning that external constraints exist to structure the writing, but also because presenting the journey itself requires a great deal of imagination and inventiveness to keep the reader informed and entertained. Verne is in his element in synthesizing complex but familiar questions in precise but accessible language, in working towards a solution to concrete preparatory problems drawn from everyday experience.

In *From the Earth to the Moon* especially, the novelist can indulge himself to the utmost in selecting the launch site, choosing the propulsion method, and finally building the cannon, all in semi-technical language leavened with much good humour. Undoubtedly the quality of the writing, in the sense of clarity, coherence, and continuity, including details like rhythm, assonance, and vocabulary, all of which are highly polished, contributes greatly to the enjoyment of the volume.

The main themes of the first chapters, in particular, are the American character and the satirical showing up of the belligerence inherited from the Civil War. But much of their interest also comes from the interaction of the characters, each with his own foibles and weaknesses.

Genesis: dates of composition

Although we do not have many genetic documents for the years 1862 to 1867, it is clear that Hetzel often intervened, both in the choice of a plot for the novels and in the work of composing and revising. At the

time his contribution was appreciated by Verne, who built up a fund of gratitude that would last his whole life, even after later works suffered significantly from the publisher's less constructive interventions; the Moon volumes straddle the turning point of 1867.

Around October 1864, Verne wrote to Hetzel to say that 'of course' he would use aluminium for the projectile and first experiment with animals: 'the dog will eat the squirrel'. Both volumes were serialized first in the daily newspaper the *Journal des débats politiques et littéraires* (henceforth *Débats*).³ This was perhaps the reason they managed to mostly escape Hetzel's pedagogical and commercial straitjacket of being made suitable for a fragile young readership—a restriction that was to define Verne's writings for half a century—allowing him here to tackle more advanced 'adult' subjects with boldness and irreverence, as for example in his acid evocation of the 'bloody memories' of the Civil War: 'the cotton plants flourished in well-fertilized fields, [and] the mourning clothes were finally worn out together with the mourning' (p. 000); a peace that results in considerable exasperation among retired gunners:

'It's so depressing,' said good Tom Hunter one evening as his wooden legs slowly charred in the fire of the smoking room. ' . . . Nothing to look forward to! . . . Whatever happened to the time when you were woken each morning by the noise of cannon-fire that gladdened the heart?' (p. 000)

Nevertheless, these robust remarks are already present in the manuscripts, when the author did not know how the novel would be published.

After Verne's writing of the fair-copy manuscript of the first volume in 1864, Hetzel read it closely as usual, giving the author the chance to review his corrections and comments; then repeated the process several times on the successive proofs in 1865 (for details see Appendix 1). In September and October 1866 *From the Earth to the Moon* appeared in serial form in the newspaper *Journal des débats politiques et littéraires*.

Verne penned the first manuscript of the second volume from November 1868 to February 1869, then the final manuscript between March and June of the same year. It seems that Hetzel sent it back to him twice in July, the first time annotated in blue pencil, the second

³ Publication of the first volume in the *Débats* was only considered after the very first impression in spring 1865; it seems to have happened as a matter of course for the second volume, another indication of the inseparability of the two parts.

in black ink: each time the writer incorporated most of the suggested changes, while assuring the publisher that he had accepted them all. In the end Verne declared himself satisfied with both its content and form,⁴ although he rarely mentions the title itself of *Around the Moon*.

Rather than submit the text directly to the *Débats* for serialization, Verne again preferred to have the proofs prepared by Hetzel (letter of 25 July 1869); he reread them from September onwards and *Autour de la Lune* appeared in the *Débats* that November and December.

In the manuscript of *De la Terre à la Lune* the title is followed, in a second line and in an identical hand, by that of *Autour de la Lune*, which seems to imply that the basic idea for the second part dates from 1864 or 1865. In some other manuscripts, however, Verne wrote in the title long after the end of composition. In any case, the addition of the programmatic and spoiler second title does not seem to fit with the internal indications, which, even in the opening chapters of the second part, appear to foresee an actual arrival on the lunar surface.

The first volume seems deeper and richer because it can incorporate information from the Earth;⁵ whereas the second volume has to generate its own narrative resources. One gets the impression that Verne embarked on writing *Journey to the Moon* as an amusement, a gamble, a way to fulfil his contracts. It appears unlikely that when he began, he was actually proposing to land on the Moon, if only because common sense implies that the projectile would crash into the surface. Even if one was to assume the use of retrorockets to achieve a soft landing, an idea absent from the first chapters of the diptych, there would still be all kinds of implausibility, such as the lack of food, water, and air. Another thorny problem, even for instinctive, improvisational writers like Verne, was to find a way of getting his travellers back—for if they failed to return how could he narrate the story of what had happened to them?

In short, he seems to have made a commitment without considering the ways and means of honouring it or the possibility that Hetzel would not allow him to launch his heroes into space without guaranteeing

⁴ 'I have great hopes that the public, despite the strangeness and audacity of certain things, will accept and swallow the adventures of our three adventurers' [Sept. 1869]; 'My manuscripts are very much revised now, when I give them to the printer' [Sept. 1869].

⁵ As just one small example, Verne semi-humorously converts the river system of North America into a single unbranching water course, and its 'orographic system' into two mountain chains.

their safe return. It may be that the publisher maintained the ambiguity about the ending for a few years, but eventually hardened his position. In the end Verne had to begin planning a trajectory which would bring the projectile back to Earth, and thus avoid a potentially infinite flight or a real Moon landing that would describe the surface in detail and so go far beyond contemporary knowledge. Faced with the danger of scientific inaccuracy, he seems to have eventually given up the objective of leaving the projectile, and thus of being able to do something new, to have genuine adventures, in a word for him to have enough interesting material to fill a second volume.

In the event, he came out it rather well: by dint of witty dialogues, debates on the trajectory, and informative exposés on the cosmology based as much on literary and historical culture as on science, an enjoyable ‘novel about nothing’ emerged, perhaps anticipating the spirit of the New Novelists of the mid-twentieth century, although not managing to come close to the number of words that the publisher required.

In sum, although there are indications that Verne did not do any serious work on *Around the Moon* before autumn 1867, very little is known about the date of his plan, if he wrote one at all. Nor do we know where the initial stimulus for the tale came from, whether the final plot was determined from the outset, or how Verne managed to finish writing the two volumes so quickly.

Precursors and sources

Back in December 1847, Verne had either composed or copied out a sonnet called ‘The Moon’, in which he attributed people’s changeability, ‘the ebb and flow of their moods’, to lunar influence.

In 1854 the novelist Alexandre Dumas *père*, a friend of Verne’s since 1848, published ‘Voyage à la Lune’ (Journey to the Moon), about an eagle-powered flight, a story that was reprinted in *L’Univers illustré* of 18 February 1865; that same year, an Alexandre Cathelineau anonymously published an ingenious way of getting the story back to Earth, in another ‘Voyage à la Lune: D’après un manuscrit authentique projeté d’un volcan lunaire’ (Journey to the Moon: based on an authentic manuscript expelled from a lunar volcano). From 26 January to 19 February 1864, a Charles Habeneck (1836–79) serialized a story about an interplanetary voyage called *La Légende du soleil* (The

Legend of the Sun) in the newspaper *Le Peuple*. In *Le Petit Journal* of 20 November 1865, this journalist pointed out similarities between his and Verne's stories: the use of a huge cannon to send a ball into space, the descriptions of the cannon, the effect produced by the launch detonation, and the presence of a 'scientific commission' inside the projectile. However, he charitably declared that he did not believe 'that M. Verne was inspired by my legend'.

Over the centuries, many other writers, too many to name, had imagined a fictional journey to the Moon, using a wide variety of distinctly unscientific methods. Although Verne himself mentions a few (p. 000), he apparently did not take them seriously and their influence on his own tale seems slight. He includes Edgar Allan Poe, although in his 1864 article, 'Edgar Poe et ses œuvres', he strongly criticizes the credibility of the American's story. In any case, Verne was the first novelist to present travel to the Moon in a relatively realistic way, describing in detail the methods used to launch the travellers, the craft, the ballistics, celestial mechanics, and the means of survival.

For the equations and calculations, Verne called on his first cousin, mathematician Henri Garbet, with the two men perhaps chatting in a café near the Lycée Henri IV in the Latin Quarter. He also seems to have had the first volume reviewed by mathematician Joseph Bertrand, who nevertheless found the story a little thin. It is not impossible that he sought further assistance from the astronomer Jules Janssen and the geologist Charles Sainte-Claire Deville, as claimed by his pioneering but unreliable biographer Marguerite Allotte de la Fuÿe.

As in all his first drafts, in order to aid later checking of details, Verne inserted page references in the margin of the first manuscript of the second volume, thus recording his documentary sources, nearly all of them astronomical works of quality.⁶

A honeymoon novel

It is not fashionable in academic circles to resort to biography; in any case, the novelist's life before 1870 remains largely unknown, with the links between the works and the biography in particular forming a neglected area. Nevertheless, as we shall see, Verne's semi-exotic

⁶ The precision of the annotations makes it possible to identify the edition of the works consulted by Verne, some of which can be found in his library.

voyage of 1861 and the account of it constituted one important connection between his personal life and the writing of many of his stories.

In the late 1860s much of France's population was complaining about the arbitrary measures of the dictatorial and belligerent Napoleon III. In 1869 the nation was heading for disaster, continually provoking Germany into war: French people were optimistic about the final outcome but with little reason. When the Franco-Prussian War finally came in July 1870, Germany quickly overran and occupied much of the country, deposing the Emperor. The Paris Commune followed, fomenting violence and disrupting everyday life, including food supplies; Verne's cousin Henri Garcet died as a result of the privations.

Verne's new home in Amiens was commandeered and he served as a National Guard member (the type of French rifle that he was issued for the war is prominently mentioned in *Twenty Thousand Leagues*). But he suffered little except financially, for Hetzel's publishing house closed for the duration, and the second octavo volume of the marine novel only came out two years after the first one. However, the pugnacity of many French people at the time, including Verne's father, is surely reflected in the artillerymen's belligerence in *Journey to the Moon*.

It may be that Verne himself was not fully aware of the origin of the torrent of brilliant novels that poured out in the two years from 1864 to 1866: subsequently he would not be able to draw on so much inspiration, having to rely more on perspiration. Is the reason for the change to be found in the misfortunes of France, his personal life, or a subtle change in the world's atmosphere? After the initial honeymoon years, when Hetzel played a constructive role as co-creator and first reader, when the editor went on holiday in the south of France, Italy, and Germany with his protégé, even perhaps passing on his mistress, it is possible, as we have seen, that Hetzel's overbearing rewriting of Verne's output made him lose his balance, his confidence as a novelist. No longer daring to venture into the rarefied air of absurd inventions, crazy discoveries, and transgressive madness, Verne would stick henceforth to fixed trajectories on beaten tracks.

The first Vernian works, published from 1863 to 1869, are usually set in relation to a transcendent point, placing at the centre of their search an unexplored but highly symbolic point, an *ultima Thule*, a site located at the maximum distance from France, a distance that

allows the heroes to encounter an increasing number of obstacles on the way to their goal, but which makes it problematic to close the novel without having the heroes either die or humiliatingly retrace their steps.

All these stories reflected the young author's life. Indeed, his own first trips abroad took him, first to the grandiose heart of the Scottish Highlands, haunted by the spirit of Walter Scott, and then to the dramatic natural spectacles of the Norwegian wilderness. Most of his early tales similarly transport us to poor, little-known, exotic lands with a rich history and culture, where the natives speak a language that goes back to the dawn of time, are isolated from the cultural mainstream, and are fierce but welcoming, independent-minded and rebellious. The geography of these two regions—not yet nations—is turbulent, chaotically diverse, made up of proud peaks reaching for the sky and enchanting, enticing valleys, inextricable networks of land and water, as if designed for getting lost and making unheard-of discoveries, ideal breeding grounds for rich fiction.

In a precursor work, the fascinating autobiographical fragment 'Joyeuses misères de trois voyageurs en Scandinavie' (Joyous miseries of three travellers in Scandinavia, 1861 or 1862), Verne explains his motivation, revealing his dreams and desires in the pre-Hetzell period and even his entire career plan: above all to maximize the geographical, linguistic, and cultural distance from Paris, now deemed too 'stifling'. This essential fragment foreshadows his destiny as a novelist when it expresses a laconic wish 'to see things that do not exist while on a journey'. Henceforth an irresistible urge will draw him 'to the hyperborean regions, like the magnetic needle to the North . . . I am temperamentally drawn to cold countries.'

The two northern trips, together with the writing of them, including that of 'Joyous miseries', 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. The two expeditions would thus generate several stories, to a certain extent autobiographical by contagion and therefore 'true', but at the same time bursting with imagination, madcap creativity, and boundless fiction: the early novels spawned by the two northern journeys emerge from their identical mould. The three heroes, a magical and practical

number, as 'Joyeuses misères' explains, more or less Anglo-Saxon, are heroic and often Nordic, defined by a search for an absolute that is a stubborn physical fight against 'Impossible Odds' (as in the title of *Around the Moon*, chapter 19), wallowing in extreme conditions, verging on the miserabilist or the masochistic, as they strive to reach a *nec plus ultra*, a supreme inaccessible point, a culmination that is as topographical and metaphysical as it is allegorical, symbolic, and paroxysmal: the heart of Africa, the North Pole, the centre of the Earth, the dark side of the Moon, later the bottom of the ocean, or, accidentally, the edge of the Solar System. All of these pilgrimages, governed by a quest for the extraordinary, create an ideal novelistic structure, with a gradual approach to the holy place, followed by a climax and, sometimes, insurmountable difficulties in retracing their steps across a now deflowered land, re-entering society, and returning derisorily to everyday reality.

After these two or three short years and this deluge of a quarter of a million enchanted words, Verne would never again find a comparable combination of novelty, excitement, invention, and perfection of expression, of a happy sojourn in an age-old land, of union with the Earth, of extravagant escape without thought of tomorrow, of transcendence—he would have no more virgin domains to conquer.

As if to complement his two northern journeys, Verne turns to the New World from the middle of the 1860s. His vision of the United States is in fact less positive than perceived by most commentators—and by the comments of the author himself, when courteously receiving American journalists towards the end of his life.

The Floating City, the account of his experience on a whirlwind tour of the country in April 1867, contains less spontaneity and joy than his unrestricted leisure-time adventures in Scotland and Norway. This third foreign journey was made in the company of his brother Paul, who was probably less open-minded and creative than his previous companion, the composer Aristide Hignard; it seems to derive less from the desire to discover a country and find himself than the need to earn a living and find a subject for a story. While Scotland in particular was home to bilingual relatives and friends of friends, France's American tragedies must have been present in the minds of the two monolingual brothers—that of a continent which had become predominantly French and francophone, but now housed a seemingly less sophisticated, less refined nation.