

Jules Verne

Birth: February 8, 1828, in Nantes, France

Death: March 24, 1905

Profession(s): Author, attorney

Publications: Over 60 novels, among which are: *Journey to the Center of the Earth* (1864), *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* (1870), *Around the World in 80 Days* (1872)

Remembered for: Founding father of science fiction, along with H.G. Wells



Image courtesy of Andrew Nash

A Closer Look:

As a boy, Jules Gabriel Verne ran off to be a cabin boy on a merchant ship, but was discovered and returned to his parents. His fascination with the sea and exploration stayed with him and influenced his later writing. At the age of 20, he was sent to college in Paris to follow in his father's footsteps. After finishing his law studies, Verne was drawn into the world of literature. Encouraged by his friend, Alexandre Dumas, author of *The Three Musketeers*, Verne dreamed of becoming a celebrated writer. He considered mixing fiction with fact by writing adventures with scientific principles. He incorporated the newest discoveries, explorations, and experiments of his age into his works. France was in a period of rapid industrialization, and scientists and engineers were becoming popular heroes.

Verne's novels became enormously popular throughout the world, among which the best known are *Around the World in Eighty Days*, Philèas Fogg's daring but realistic travel feat on a wager, based on a real journey by the US traveler George Francis Train (1829-1904), *A Journey to the Center of the Earth*, a story of an expedition that enters the Earth's hollow center, and *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, introducing Captain Nemo and his elaborate submarine, the Nautilus.

Many of Verne's books have been called prophetic. In his novel *Around the Moon*, Verne described the effects of weightlessness. He even pictured the spacecraft's fiery reentry and splashdown in the Pacific Ocean—at a site just three miles from where Apollo 11 landed on return from the moon in 1969.

Some of Verne's forecasts may have been what are called self-fulfilling prophecies. These occur when an idea is planted in someone's mind, and later becomes reality. We know that many of the scientists and engineers who pioneered spaceflight (such as Hermann Oberth and Konstantin Tsiolkovsky) read Verne's works. Modern astronautics might have had a slow start had Verne not written about the subject. With his close attention to scientific principles, Verne wrestled with the same technical problems that astronautical engineers faced in the 20th century. Therefore, Verne's carefully constructed answers to scientific questions were similar to modern solutions.

Until the end of his life, Verne composed two or three novels each year. But his later works never reached the fame of his earlier works. Verne fell ill a few weeks after his 78th birthday. He died quietly on March 24, 1905 with his family around him. He was buried near his home in Amiens where a memorial sculpture marks his grave. It depicts Verne rising from his tomb, one arm reaching toward the stars.

References

<http://avery.med.virginia.edu/~mtp0f/flips/jules.html> Biography of Jules Verne, a book chronology, book reviews, and a complete bibliography.

<http://www.math.technion.ac.il/~rl/JulesVerne/> Links to other sites about Verne, including chronologies, texts in electronic format, stamps, and a bibliography.

<http://www.sciam.com/0497issue/0497evans.html> Electronic reprint of the April 1997 Scientific American article, "Jules Verne: Misunderstood Visionary."

