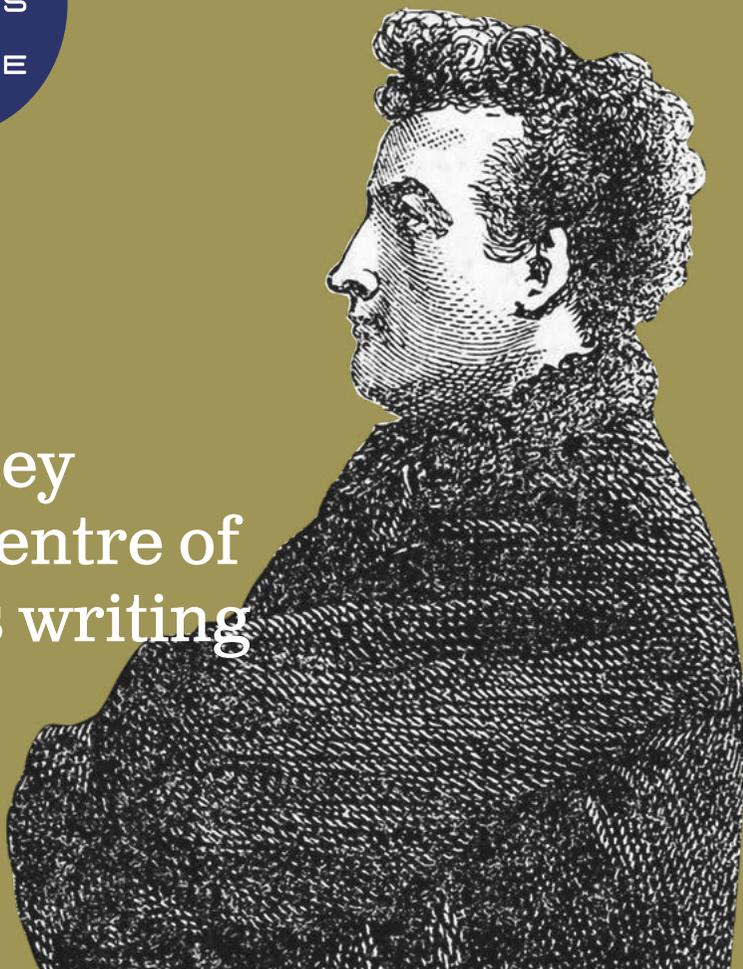


MUSEE  
JULES  
VERNE



# A journey to the centre of Verne's writing

*Guide*



VISITORS' BOOKLET ESSENTIAL TO THE DISCOVERY OF THE MUSEUM  
PRESENTATION OF EACH STAGE OF THE ITINERARY



## WELCOME



Although Jules Verne never lived in this house, he *“often had to come and contemplate the river from this height, where it becomes the gateway to the open sea and the path of adventure”* (Julien Gracq, *La Forme d'une ville*).

Opened in 1978, the Jules Verne Museum invites you, in the crucible of his inspiration, to discover the man, the writer and his imagination, a skilful blend of intuition and fantasy, through original objects and documents as well as more contemporary creations, testifying to the extraordinary influence of Jules Verne's work over time.

## JULES VERNE, A NATIVE OF NANTES



Jules Verne was born in Nantes on 8 February 1828, on Île Feydeau, an island surrounded by the river Loire at the time.

From the quayside, he could watch the steady stream of merchant ships sail past and see goods from all over the world being unloaded.

This major port and modern city open to innovation embraced the Industrial Revolution with enthusiasm. At the shipyards on the banks of the Loire, sailing boats were fitted out with engines and left the slipways for distant shores, equipped with all the latest machinery. This time spent by Verne in the port contained the germ of his *“extraordinary voyages”*.

A tight family circle, affectionate parents, and a close rapport with his brother Paul and his sisters, also helped to foster Jules Verne's creativity.

The arts and literature played a key role. He devoured the books in the family library: classics, travel and adventure stories such as *The Swiss Family Robinson* by Johann Wyss, historical tragedies, and his favourite author, Victor Hugo.

His early attempts at writing literature, poetry and novels reflect this romantic influence. Nantes, and the ancient Saint-Nicolas church in particular, inspired his first dark fantasy novel, *A Priest in 1839*, at the age of eighteen.

## THE TRAVELLER



Jules Verne loved the geography he studied at school, discovered in the atlases he pored over, and which unfolded before his eyes. In the nineteenth century, an unprecedented number of expeditions were setting off all over the globe by land and sea.

His meetings with explorers such as Jacques Arago were critical; they strengthened his resolve to *“paint the whole earth, the whole world, in novel form, by imagining adventures peculiar to each country, and by creating characters who are peculiar to their environment”*, as he wrote in his *Memories of Childhood and Youth*.

He was himself a traveller: to England and Scotland in 1859, and to Scandinavia in 1861. In 1867, he crossed the Atlantic from Liverpool to New York with his brother Paul on the liner *Great Eastern*. The impressions he recorded in his notebooks of the places he visited and the people he met provided source material for his stories.

The sea was his main source of inspiration. From 1866, he combined writing and maritime travel. His trips aboard his own vessels, the three *Saint-Michels*, truly stimulated his imagination. *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea* was partly written in the small cabin of *Saint-Michel I*.



*Saint-Michel III* in the Bay of Naples, gouache

Jules Verne



Portrait of Jules Verne, oil on canvas

## THE MAN AND THE WRITER



In 1848, at the age of 20, Jules Verne moved from Nantes to Paris, where his family sent him to study law so that he could take over his father's solicitor's practice. However, he had his own agenda.

As well as extricating himself from doomed love affairs, he cherished dreams of becoming a writer. In a letter to his father he wrote: *“Literature above all, since that is the only thing at which I can be successful.”* He therefore became a frequent visitor to bookshops, theatres, cafés, and literary salons in Paris in the hope of achieving fame, but it proved elusive.

*“Literature above all, since that is the only thing at which I can be successful.”*

In 1857, when he was looking for secure employment, he married Honorine de Viane and got a job as a stockbroker. He very swiftly neglected his wife and son Michel, born in 1861, and devoted himself once again to writing - *“the one true source of happiness”*. Although the writer's family life was a painful failure, he achieved international fame.

In 1871, the Verne family settled in Amiens, Honorine's home town. Now that they were comfortably off and had established themselves in society, they moved into an elegant, tastefully furnished residence where they entertained the middle-class citizens of Amiens, and journalists from all over the world.

## THE NOVELIST AND HIS PUBLISHER

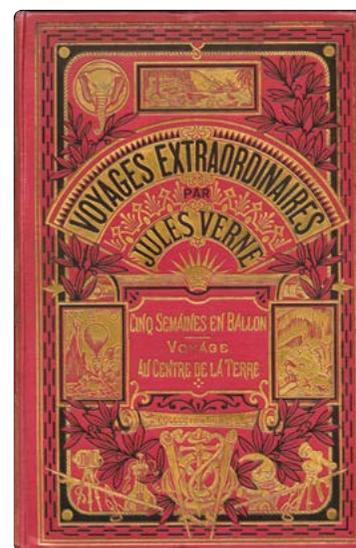


*“I plan out the chapters then start writing my first draft in pencil, leaving a margin of half a page for corrections; then I re-read it all and go over it in ink,”* explained Jules Verne in 1894.

As a tireless worker and perfectionist, he paid very close attention to plotting and style, while carrying out extensive research. He read specialist journals, kept up to date with the latest scientific developments, studied geography textbooks and travelogues, and arranged meetings with scientists and explorers.

These skills formed the basis of his collaboration with the publisher Pierre-Jules Hetzel which began with the publication of *Five Weeks in a Balloon* in 1863 and marked the start of a very close but challenging relationship.

Hetzel, who had an educational vision and sought to champion his republican values via his children's publication *Le Magasin d'éducation et de récréation*, supervised Jules Verne's work very closely. The illustrations, multicoloured covers and advertising posters for the books showcased his editorial skill and marketing flair, and made a significant contribution to the magical appeal of the *Extraordinary Journeys*.



*Five Weeks in a Balloon / Journey to the Centre of the Earth*, published by Hetzel

Jules Verne

Jules Verne



Jame's Prunier, original illustration for *Around the Moon* (éditions Gallimard)

## THE VERNIVERSE

Jules Verne lived in an era teeming with new discoveries. His *Extraordinary Journeys* have their roots in the momentum of modernity, the triumph of science, the wealth of technological innovations, and the rise of the machine, which characterised the nineteenth century.

Looking beyond the countries and oceans of the globe, he exploited the transport revolution to push back the boundaries of the unknown – the centre of the Earth, the depths of the sea, and space – and created worlds in which inventiveness takes precedence over realism and verisimilitude.

Although this depiction of scientific progress fills readers

with wonder, it also raises questions and give pause for thought. Shadowy outsiders Nemo and Robur are mesmerising yet disturbing, and Jules Verne does not hide this ambiguity.

He was fascinated by technical innovation, but troubled by its uses and applications in modern society. He was wary of science when it was pushed to extremes, insufficiently controlled, or fell into the hands of corrupt or malicious individuals. The fate of Humanity, the Earth and Nature preoccupied him.

The power of his work explains its creative influence on film adaptations and the graphic arts. The world created by Jules Verne remains strikingly modern even today.

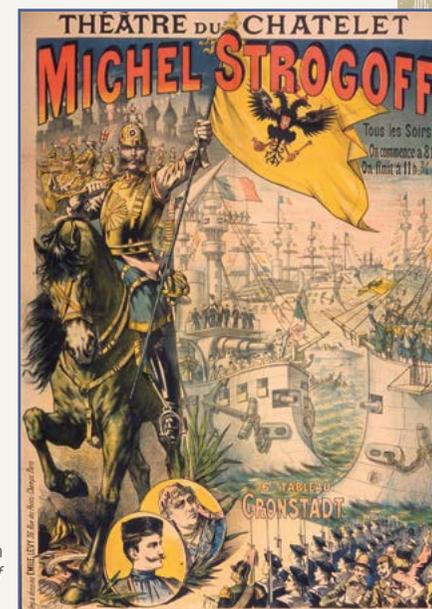
## AT THE THEATRE

As a young writer, Jules Verne initially dreamed of being a playwright.

During his bohemian years in Paris, he visited theatres to watch performances of the classics and popular plays by Victor Hugo. He also worked as a secretary at the Théâtre lyrique.

In 1850, with support from his friend Alexandre Dumas fils, he put on a play at the Théâtre historique which he had written a year earlier entitled *Broken Straws* - a light-hearted love story. The play was later reprised at the Théâtre Graslin in Nantes. It was warmly received, but only moderately successful.

Jules Verne wrote over thirty plays in total, yet this aspect of his writing is not well known. In fact, he found theatrical success by adapting his novels *Around the World in Eighty Days*, *Michel Strogoff*, and *In Search of the Castaways* for the stage. These spectacular productions, with their dazzling sets and staging, paved the way for film adaptations in the following century.



Poster for the stage adaptation of *Michel Strogoff*



Jules Verne

Cover: illustration by Édouard Riou depicting Professor Aronnax in *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea*, after the photograph of a young Jules Verne reproduced on the back cover.

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