

MUSEE
JULES
VERNE

HÉROÏNES DE
LA MODERNITÉ



EXHIBITION

BOOKLET

Voyages extraordinaires
de femmes pas si ordinaires



HEROINES OF MODERNITY

Women in the works of Jules Verne

Jules Verne claimed in 1890 to “have no talent for female characters” yet he created a surprising and diverse gallery of feminine portraits.

Romantic young women in love, patriotic heroines, resourceful adventuresses, dominant wives, devoted mothers, cunning and ruthless spies, fantasy ghost-women – his heroines often succeed in escaping the confines of the rigid, hierarchical and hypocritical society described in nineteenth century novels.

Bold, determined, and possessed of a surprising thirst for knowledge, several dozen intelligent, intuitive and selfless women challenge the prevailing middle-class mentality. They embark on adventures and play an active role, displaying physical, romantic, social, ethical and political commitment, and countering reason and duty with the power of feelings. Without their rich and subtly differentiated personalities, the *Extraordinary Journeys* would

lack the emotional dimension which humanises the mechanical element and spirit of geographical and scientific conquest of male-centric journeys.

Women are invited to take pride of place at the Musée Jules Verne for this exhibition. The women who played a major role in the writer’s life – his mother Sophie, his sisters, and his wife Honorine – and the many women who inject modernity and great diversity into the *Extraordinary Journeys* all reveal another largely overlooked facet of Jules Verne through their adventures and the engravings which illustrate them.



THE WOMEN IN VERNE'S LIFE

“You are becoming regulars in the salons of the Prefecture. I am certain that this amuses Papa as much as his daughters, and that Mother would almost be prepared to dance there if someone were needed to make up a quadrille.”

Letter from Jules Verne to his mother, 21 June 1855.

Jules Verne was born on 8 February 1828 in Nantes. His mother, Sophie Allotte de la Fuÿe, was 27 years old. His father, Pierre-Gabriel Verne, had a solicitor’s practice. The couple set up home in the Île Feydeau district and Jules would watch the boats sail past from their country house in Chantenay. Pierre and Sophie had five children: Jules had a younger brother Paul and three younger sisters Anne, Mathilde and Marie. Marie, nicknamed le chou, was Jules’s goddaughter.

Their family life, in the company of many relatives and friends, was happy.



Sophie Verne, mère de Jules, âgée

Jules Verne is alleged to have had several romances in his youth, but he dedicated some thirty poems to the beauty Rose Herminie Arnault-Grossetière. He was not considered to be a good catch and was sidelined using the stratagems at which middle-class families excelled. This thwarted love affair cause him to leave Nantes. Jules was resentful of these intrigues and exploited them in his boulevard theatre plays, later returning to the theme in several *Extraordinary Journeys*.

Marriage, which is given a humorous treatment, becomes a recurring topic for discussion in his correspondence with his mother. In 1850, Jules Verne and a few friends set up a bachelor club in Paris dubbed “Eleven-men without women”. They would gather to laugh, drink and sing, but the bachelors got married one by one. His friend Auguste Lelarge invited him to Amiens to be a witness at his wedding. There, Jules met a young 26-year old widow with two small daughters called Honorine Deviane. He married her on 10 January 1857 in Paris.



THE SEA AND TRAVEL

“Yes! The Ocean is the infinite, the infinite we cannot see, but which we can feel [...] infinite like space which is reflected in its waters!”

 *The Green Ray*

In the collective imagination, Jules Verne is a writer seeking new horizons. His dreams of sailing became a reality when he bought a series of three boats named “Saint-Michel” in which he travelled to England, Scotland and Scandinavia. In 1867, he also boarded the liner SS *Great Eastern* to cross the Atlantic.

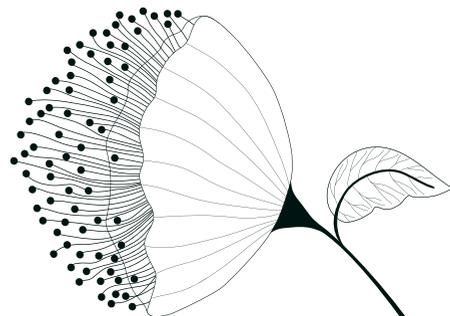
The *Extraordinary Journeys* feature a number of intrepid women sailors. **Marie** sets off to find her fiancé who is lost at sea (*A Winter Amid the Ice*), **Helena Glenarvan** is delighted to take over the helm of the *Duncan*, and **Mary Grant**, who works alongside her, has bona fide navigation skills (*In Search of the Castaways*). **Miss Herbey** experiences a fire on board, a shipwreck and countless days at sea on a makeshift raft (*The Survivors of the Chancellor*). **Dolly Branican**, for her part, sets out to sea in search of her husband and embodies a quality which fascinates Jules Verne: intuition (*Mistress Branican*).



Les Enfants du capitaine Grant

Other heroines undertake perilous journeys on terra firma. The motto of explorer **Paulina Barnett**, who accompanies an expedition to the frozen north of Canada, is “you have to see everything or at least try to see everything.” (*The Fur Country*).

Marfa Strogoff and **Nadia Fedor** face the freezing climate of Siberia with stoic indifference to suffering (*Michel Strogoff*). **Jeanne de Kermor** embarks on a journey to Venezuela and endures trials and tribulations in her single-minded quest to find her father (*The Mighty Orinoco*).

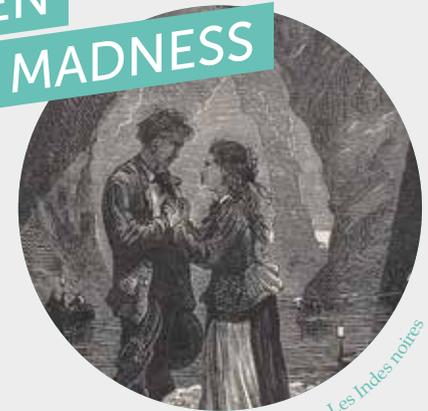



GHOST WOMEN FROM FANTASY TO MADNESS

“The young girl was fifteen or sixteen years old at most. Her distant, surprised expression, thin face drawn by suffering, pallid complexion untinged by sunlight, and her fragile, slender figure all gave her the appearance of a singular yet attractive being, [...] like a slightly supernatural-looking elf.”

 *The Child of the Cavern*

Five inaccessible dreamlike ghost-women, who have a seductive Hoffmanesque peculiarity, haunt the *Extraordinary Voyages*. They inspire overwhelming love and deep despair in men, and remind us that although Jules Verne was keen to provide an encyclopaedic vision of the world, he also embraced passion, poetry and imagination.



Nell – Les Indes noires

Ellen Hodges, a mysterious and fascinating “Black Lady” who walks the deck of the *Great Eastern* by night and sings in a spellbinding voice, lost her mind after entering into a forced marriage (*A Floating City*). **Laurence Munro** wanders across northern India for ten years, having gone mad after witnessing the Indian Mutiny in 1857 (*The Steam House*). **Nell**, a wild-eyed creature, “who only appears to be half-human”, protects the other characters at the pit like a benevolent spirit (*The Child of the Cavern*).

Using a hologram and voice recordings, Baron de Gortz can resurrect the famous opera singer **La Stilla**, who died onstage after deciding to put an end her career in order to escape him (*The Carpathian Castle*). **Myra Roderich**, by contrast, is made invisible by her spurned admirer, Wilhelm Storitz, but will remain “the soul of the house – invisible like a soul”, eternally beautiful and young in the idealised portrait painted by her husband (*The Secret of Wilhelm Storitz*).



MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

"A few problems, awkwardness and worries are not untoward before a marriage! When unions are forged too easily, there is a risk they will unravel in exactly the same way!"

The Chase of the Golden Meteor.

Marriage is a recurring theme in the work of Jules Verne. His own marriage was not always happy and he was appalled by marriages in which love was not present and reciprocal. He believed that arranged marriages were doomed to failure, as is demonstrated in his youthful plays such as *Mr Chimp*.

Verne's married women are often modern and dynamic. **Mrs Melvil** assists her husband in his business dealings (*The Humbug*), **Mrs Joliffe** runs the household and helps her spouse in every respect

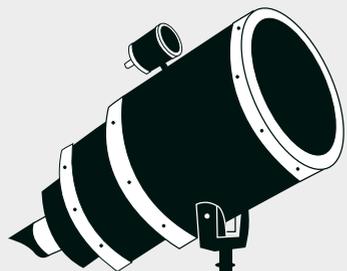


La Chasse au météore

(*The Fur Country*), while **Yaquita Garral** supports her husband through trials and tribulations after he is unjustly arrested (*Eight Hundred Leagues on the Amazon*).

In *Kéraban the Inflexible*, Jules Verne explores the difficulties of married life in a humorous vein. Van Mitten bemoans the fact that "life had become unbearable between **Madame Van Mitten** and me. Endless discussions about everything, on what time to get up, what time to go to bed, when to eat, what to eat...". By contrast, *The Chase of the Meteor* offers a portrait of a model wife in the shape of **Flora Hudelson**.

Jules Verne also depicts whirlwind marriages such as that of **Cornélia Vadarasse**, who gets married during the interval to a circus performer whom she has only met that evening (*César Cascabel*). However, when **Horatia Bluett** weds Fulk Ephrinell on the Trans-Asian train, the marriage ends in divorce as soon as they get to Peking (*Claudius Bombarnac*). **Arcadia Walker** marries Seth Stanford without even dismounting from her horse and divorces him two months later (*The Chase of the Meteor*).



LOVE FROM A FEMALE PERSPECTIVE

"I pity you [...] Mr Fogg, for solitude is a sad state of affairs. What! Have you not one heart into which to pour your troubles? They say that with two people, misery itself is bearable! [...] Do you wish for both a relative and a friend? Will you have me as your wife?"

Around the World in Eighty Days

In 1866, Jules Verne wrote to his publisher Pierre-Jules Hetzel that he felt "very clumsy about expressing feelings of love". However, his work is dotted with women in love who have no qualms about articulating their feelings and fighting to make their dreams a reality in the face of danger and trials. These brave and determined women often manage to avoid arranged marriages and earn their freedom.



Alice Watkins - l'Étoile du Sud

The first such woman, **Sarah**, runs away with the young Indian man she loves, but dies in the waterfalls on a river and this tragic end highlights the impossibility of a perfect love which crosses the boundaries of culture and social status (*Martin Paz*). Subsequent Verne heroines are more fortunate.

Modern, free-spirited **Aouda** proposes to Phileas when he believes that he is ruined (*Around the World in Eighty Days*). Romantic **Helena Campbell** sets off in search of the "Green Ray" in order to escape a marriage arranged by her uncles (*The Green Ray*). **Alice Watkins**, who is fascinated by science and culture, fights to marry Cyprien against the will of her diamond-obsessed father (*The Vanished Diamond*). **Sava Sandorf** endures captivity and bullying and is prepared to lose her life rather than marry anyone other than her beloved (*Mathias Sandorf*). **Louise Elissane** braves her middle-class mother to avoid marrying apathetic Agathocle, and even shoots a lion with a revolver (*Clovis Dardentor*).



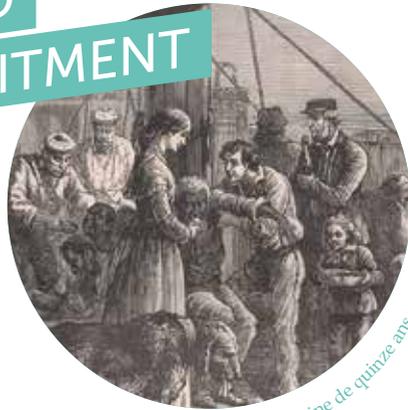
MORAL AND POLITICAL COMMITMENT

“It was to the very heart of Barbary, to these pirate-infested ports [...] that the courageous young woman [...] came, without hesitation, to fulfil her mission. Thus, she risked life and liberty, and braved every danger to which her beauty and youth exposed her. Nothing stopped her. She just set off.”

 *The Archipelago on Fire*

Demonstrating a keen sense of duty, several heroines of the *Extraordinary Journeys* willingly risk their lives to defend ideals they believe to be right. They are committed to two major political causes in particular: the fight against slavery, and the patriotic struggle to free their homeland from tyranny.

A passionate opponent of slavery, **Jenny Halliburt** roundly criticises the captain of a vessel carrying arms to Confederate forces at the height of the American Civil War (*The Blockade Runners*). For her part, **Alice Stannard** deems that fighting in this war is a duty because ‘it is to fight for the liberation of a human race and,



Un Capitaine de quinze ans

in short, for freedom’ (*North Against South*). **Mrs Weldon** and her African-American servant **Nan** are, for their part, confronted with the horror of the triangular slave trade in Africa (*Dick Sand, A Captain at Fifteen*).

In *The Archipelago on Fire*, **Andronika Starkos** throws herself into the Greek struggle for independence from the Turks in order to atone for the crimes of her son – a traitor to his country – and **Hadjine Elizundo**, a true symbol of female liberation, uses her father’s ill-gotten wealth to buy back thousands of Greek prisoners sold into slavery. Finally, in *Family Without a Name*, **Bridget Morgaz** devotes her life and the lives of her sons to the struggle for independence in French-speaking Canada, and the militant **Clary de Vaudreuil**, who corresponds with the country’s Reform committees, enthusiastically participates in the uprising.



THE SKIES AND SPACE

“Out of the whole Gallican colony, it was little Nina who was best able to resist. [...] She spoke to all and sundry, and her sweet voice charmed the gloomy depths like birdsong. [...] There was such a superabundance of life in this small creature that everyone was affected by it, as it were”

 *Off on a Comet*

Jules Verne’s novels devoted to the skies and space display a predominantly male cast of characters, particularly in the case of the diptychs *From the Earth to the Moon / Around the Moon* and *Robur the Conqueror / Master of the World*.

Nevertheless, the writer created the ethereal and radiant character of a young girl in the fantastic tale *Off on a Comet*. Orphan **Nina** is herding goats in Sardinia when a section of the Earth is torn from the planet following a collision with a comet. Picked up by Count Timascheff and Captain Servadac, Nina is ‘as pretty as those charming creatures whom



Nina - Hector Servadac

Murillo transformed into angels in his Assumptions’. Exuberant and carefree Nina endears herself to her companions and over two years of adventures, becomes the mascot of this new planet named Gallia.

In sharp contrast to this radiant girl, but still appealing in her own way, is the character **Evangelina Scorbitt** in the satirical novel *The Purchase of the North Pole*. Out of love for the mathematician J. T. Maston, Evangelina, a wealthy and generous widow, funds his project to adjust the Earth’s axis in order to exploit the mineral wealth of the Arctic territories. Even when the whole world takes fright at this project, which threatens to submerge entire countries, the enthusiastic and resourceful Evangelina remains Maston’s steadfast admirer. After springing him from prison before he is lynched by a mob, she ultimately convinces this confirmed bachelor to marry her!

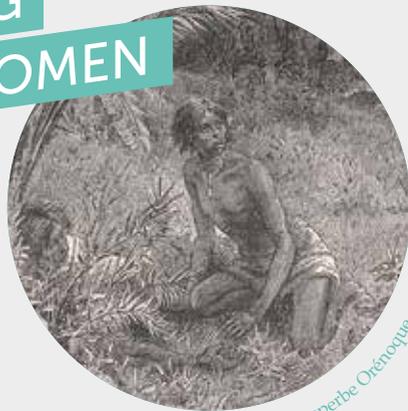


OUTSTANDING INDIGENOUS WOMEN

“Kalumah went ahead of the small group. Like a chamois amid alpine rocks, the sprightly little woman was sure-footed on the ice. It was wondrous to see her run in this way, without hesitation or error, as she picked the best path through the maze of icebergs – instinctively, as it were.”

 *The Fur Country*

As anthropology in the nineteenth century evolved to reflect the physical and cultural diversity of humanity, and artefacts from non-western cultures moved from cabinets of curiosities into museums, Jules Verne became fascinated by human diversity. His early writings feature numerous clichés (*Martin Paz, Five Weeks in a Balloon*), but his work swiftly became more nuanced, in the wake of ethnological and anthropological discoveries and thinking.



Le Superbe Orienotique

The inhabitants of Patagonia (*In Search of the Castaways*), the Aboriginal people of Australia (*Mistress Branican*), Pacific Islanders (*Propeller Island*), Native American and Inuit communities (*The Fur Country, César Cascabel, Family Without a Name, The Mighty Orinoco*), inhabitants of Africa (*The Adventures of Three Englishmen and Three Russians in South Africa; Dick Sand, A Captain at Fifteen; The Village in the Treetops, The Vanished Diamond*) and many other peoples were extensively described and became main characters in the *Extraordinary Journeys*.

Among these ‘indigenous’ figures, Jules Verne gives pride of place to several remarkable women. Although they are not immune from some of the clichés and prejudices of the day, their exceptional qualities demonstrate the writer’s surprising open-mindedness. These portraits offer the key to understanding these women’s communities and environments, thereby building a bridge between them and the European protagonists of the *Extraordinary Journeys*.



CHILD-LIKE GRACE

“With her precocious intelligence, already rendered keener by misfortune since the horrific scenes on the plantation, Dy understood that she had been wrenched from her mother’s hearth, that she had fallen into the hands of a wicked man, and that if no one came to her rescue, she would never see Camdless Bay again.”

 *North Against South*

Joining little **Nina** from *Off on a Comet*, a dozen girls light up the pages of the *Extraordinary Journeys* with their exuberance. Little **Betty Clères** sings in a children’s church choir with her friend Joseph, their two voices separated by an interval of only an eighth of a tone (*Mr. Re Sharp and Miss Mi Flat*). **Napoléonne Cascabel** joins the epic journey which takes her family from California to Normandy, via the frozen Bering Straits, and fearlessly faces herds of seals, attacks from packs of wolves, and hurricanes (*César Cascabel*). **Dy Burbank** bravely endures her imprisonment in the



P’tit Bonhomme

swamps of Florida, taking illness, cruel treatment, and a crocodile-infested river in her stride (*North Against South*).

In *Foundling Mick*, penned in tribute to Dickens, **Sissy** has ‘skinny limbs, a hollow chest, and ribs protruding from beneath her rags like someone who has been flayed alive’. Placed in the care of a loathsome shrew and then in the workhouse, she toils in a Belfast textile mill before rising out of poverty. **Jenny Mac Carthy** finds herself on the street with her family and spends five wretched years in Australia before being rescued by her godfather, Little Fellow.

Doll Wolston (*The Castaways of the Flag*) and **Loo Hudelson** (*The Chase of the Golden Meteor*) are two mischievous and spirited fourteen-year-old girls. Doll has adventures in South Africa and the Pacific Ocean, while Loo must try to convince her father, an amateur astronomer, to forget the meteor made of pure gold which he has spotted in the heavens.



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