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Around the World in Eighty Days

Jules Verne

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Around the World in Eighty Days (French: Le tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours) is a classic adventure novel by the French writer Jules Verne, published in 1873. In the story, Phileas Fogg of London and his newly employed French valet Passepartout attempt to circumnavigate the world in 80 days on a £20,000 wager (roughly £1,511,978 today) set by his friends at the Reform Club. It is one of Verne's most acclaimed works. Around the World in Eighty Days was written during difficult times, both for France and for Verne. It was during the Franco-Prussian War (1870–1871) in which Verne was conscripted as a coastguard; he was having money difficulties (his previous works were not paid royalties); his father had died recently; and he had witnessed a public execution, which had disturbed him. Despite all this, Verne was excited about his work on the new book, the idea of which came to him one afternoon in a Paris café while reading a newspaper (see "Origins" below). The technological innovations of the 19th century had opened the possibility of rapid circumnavigation and the prospect fascinated Verne and his readership. In particular three technological breakthroughs occurred in 1869-70 that made a tourist-like around-the-world journey possible for the first time: the completion of the First Transcontinental Railroad in America (1869), the linking of the Indian railways across the sub-continent (1870), and the opening of the Suez Canal (1869). It was another notable mark in the end of an age of exploration and the start of an age of fully global tourism that could be enjoyed in relative comfort and safety. It sparked the imagination that anyone could sit down, draw up a schedule, buy tickets and travel around the world, a feat previously reserved for only the most heroic and hardy of adventurers. Verne is often characterised as a futurist or science fiction author but there is not a glimmer of science fiction in this, his most popular work (at least in English). Rather than any futurism, it remains a memorable portrait of the British Empire "on which the sun never sets" shortly before its peak, drawn by an outsider. It is interesting to note that, as of 2006, there has never been a critical edition. This is in part due to the poor translations available, the stereotype of "science fiction" or "boys' literature". However, Verne's works were being looked at more seriously in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, with new translations and scholarship appearing. It is also interesting to note that the book is a source of common notable English and extended British attitudes in quotes such as, "Phileas Fogg and Sir Francis Cromarty ... endured the discomfort with true British phlegm, talking little, and scarcely able to catch a glimpse of each other" as in chapter 12 when the group is being jostled around on the elephant ride across the jungle. In chapter 25, when Fogg is insulted in San Francisco, Detective Fix acknowledges that "It was clear that Mr. Fogg was one of those Englishmen who, while they do not tolerate dueling at home, fight abroad when their honor is attacked." The closing date of the novel, 21 December 1872, was the same date as the serial publication. As it was being published serially for the first time, some readers believed that the journey was actually taking place — bets were placed, and some railway companies and ship liner companies lobbied Verne to appear in the book. It is unknown if Verne submitted to their requests, but the descriptions of some rail and shipping lines leave some suspicion he was influenced. Although a journey by balloon has become one of the images most strongly associated with the story, this iconic symbol was never deployed by Verne – the idea is briefly brought up in chapter 32, but dismissed, it "would have been highly risky and, in any case, impossible."

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