

# 'AROUND THE WORLD IN EIGHTY DAYS'

Jules Verne's *Tour du Monde en Quatre-vingt Jours* was published in an English translation as *Around the World in Eighty Days* in 1874. It was his biggest commercial success, earning him additional income through serialisations, translations and a spectacular stage version.

According to author Brian Aldiss, *Around the World in Eighty Days* differs from most of Verne's other adventure novels because the hero, Fogg, 'forges no new pathways' but instead 'travels well-known routes, since his objective is to defeat not space but time'. It is firmly based on known facts and inventions rather than speculative submarines, spaceships or lands where dinosaurs still roam. In his introduction to the Oxford University Press edition of the book, William Butler writes:

*[Verne's] heroes have penetrated the heart of Africa, conquered the Pole, urgently plumbed the ocean's and Earth's depths, and even headed breezily for the moon. Now they have only one task left: that of summing up the whole travelling experience.*

Verne as narrator revels in reciting the poetic names of distant places to convey large amounts of information he has learnt from travel books. Contemporary readers shared Verne's fascination with travel and transportation, and the possibility that a once unimaginable trip around the world was now within their grasp. Modern readers can still share that excitement as they are carried breathlessly through the book's fast-turning pages. Writer Allen Foster describes the book as 'a race against time to save face and fortune; a thrilling, humorous adventure, and a classic of travel in a bygone age'. Verne nicknamed it 'the novel of perpetual motion'. So full is it of incident, that the reader scarcely notices that what in any other book might be a major set piece – the rescuing of Passepartout from the Sioux – takes place off stage.

Prior to its publication in book form in January 1873, the story was initially serialised in the newspaper *Le Temps*. It was an immediate success and circulation of the paper nearly



Illustration by  
James de la Rue  
for The Great Reading  
Adventure's children's book.

tripled, readers devouring each episode just as those in the book devoured 'the column-inches devoted to the Phileas Fogg case'. The serial finished on 22 December 1872, coinciding with the concluding date of the story itself. When extracts were published in British and American newspapers, some readers, carried away in the excitement, placed bets on the outcome, thinking it was a real event, and steamship companies offered Verne large sums of money if he would bring the travellers home in triumph on one of their ships.

The dramatist Edouard Cadol had approached Verne for permission to adapt the story for the stage before the serialisation in *Le Temps* had ended. He was unable to find a producer and the project languished until a new stage version, adapted by Adolphe d'Ennery, opened on 7 November 1874 at the Porte Saint-Martin Theatre. It was a hit, running for 415 nights and attracting widespread interest: Cadol successfully sued for a share of the royalties, to Verne's annoyance. Among the astonishing stage effects was the arrival of a live elephant, the first many Parisians had seen since the one in the Paris Zoo was eaten during the Prussian siege.

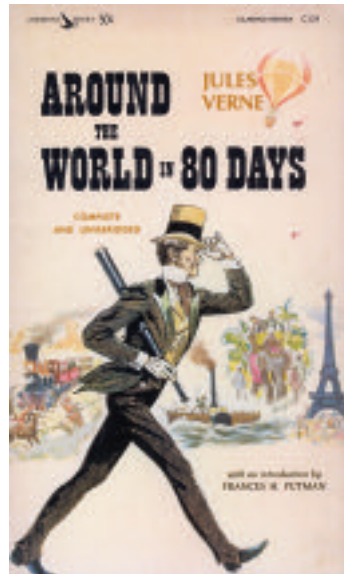
Although Verne gave little away regarding the sources of the novel, in writing of London life he is likely to have referred to his own unpublished book *Journey to England and Scotland*, based upon his trip of 1859, and to Francis Wey's *Les Anglais Chez Eux* (1854). Accounts of 80-day round the world trips had appeared in the periodicals *Le Tour du Monde* and

*Nouvelles Annales*. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 and the completion of the Great Indian Peninsular Railway and the Union Pacific Railroad in the USA had cut travel time considerably, along with improvements in steam travel, and coordinated timetables had been published such as Fogg's 'bible' *Bradshaw's Continental Railway Steam Transit and General Guide*. Verne would also have had access to a wealth of information during his researches in the National Library and at the library of the Société de Géographie in Paris.

The twist at the end of the novel depends upon the gaining of a day. Edgar Allan Poe's short story 'Three Sundays in a Week', published in 1841, had demonstrated how three individuals can have three Sundays: for the one who stays put, Sunday is today, for the one who travels west around the world, Sunday was yesterday, and for the one who travels east around the

world Sunday is tomorrow. Verne admired Poe, writing an article on him for *Le Musée de Familles* in 1864 in which he referred to the 'Sundays' story as 'a cosmographic oddity recounted in a curious way'.

At the heart of Verne's novel is the comic double-act of the unflappable, unfathomable Fogg and the excitable, expansive Passepartout. The reserved English traveller is indifferent to everything but the schedule and his games of cards. It never crosses his mind to look around Suez, for example, 'being of that breed of Britons who have their servants do their sightseeing for them'. When they reach India:



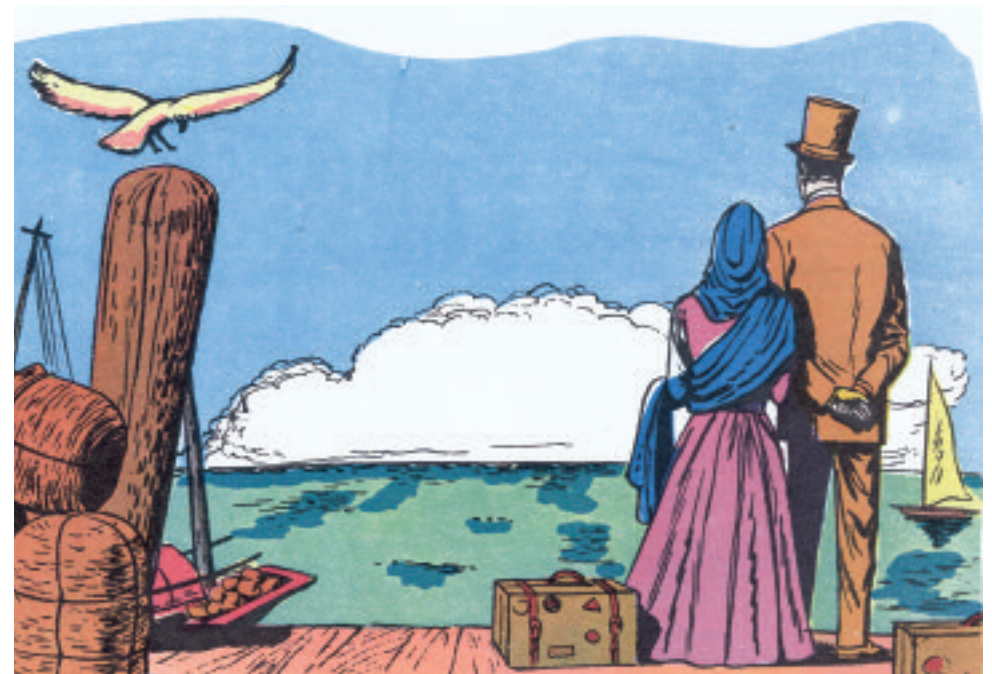
Cover from 1960s paperback edition (author's collection).



*[Fogg] did not think of visiting any of Bombay's wonders: not the Town Hall, the magnificent library, the forts, the docks, cotton markets, bazaars, mosques, synagogues, Armenian churches, or the splendid pagoda of Malabar Hill with its twin polygon-shaped towers. He had no wish to see the masterpieces of the Island of Elephanta with its mysterious hypogea, hidden to the south-east of the harbour, nor the Kanheri Grottoes on Salsette, those wonderful ruins of Buddhist architecture.*

Sir Frances Cromarty, the British officer they meet on the train to Calcutta, thinks of Fogg as 'a heavy body moving in orbit around the terrestrial globe, following the rational laws of mechanics', not travelling 'but describing a circumference'. By contrast, the talkative Frenchman is filled with curiosity, despite his anxiety not to lose the bet, and it is through his eyes that we see the wonders of the world whisking by. After walking around Aden he remarks: 'Fascinating, it's all fascinating... It's really useful to travel, if you want to see new things.'

Illustration of Fogg and Aouda from children's edition (author's collection).







Passepartout carrying Aouda from the funeral pyre  
(author's collection).

In later works Verne became more critical of the English for their nationalism and their pride, but although he suggests in *Around the World in Eighty Days* that their behaviour could seem cold-hearted or perplexing he also suggests that English gentlemen had a quality that could be admired. When Lord Albermarle, the old man who is alone in backing Fogg, is questioned about the wisdom of his supporting such a foolhardy enterprise, he declares that 'it is fitting that an Englishman should be the first to do it!' The methodical Fogg stands for order and self-discipline, demanding the same 'extraordinary punctuality and reliability' of others as he expects of himself, as his unfortunate servant James Forster discovers when he brings him shaving water two degrees colder than expected. But he is also, when needs must, able to respond effectively to any inconvenience, 'always prepared, economical with his steps and movements'. He adheres to a self-imposed set of rules and in playing the game is led to the brink of financial ruin and, it is implied, to the only honourable way out for a 'thorough gentleman', suicide. The fickle public turn on him when newspaper reports suggest he is a thief – his unconventional behaviour, seclusion and sudden departure now seem suspicious – but gather to cheer when that misunderstanding is cleared up and he is once again toasted as 'the most honest of gentlemen, mathematically performing his eccentric voyage around the world'.

Passepartout too can be admired, his capacity for getting into scrapes matched by his bravery, warm heart and enthusiasm. He sees it is his duty to stick by his master through all the hair-raising escapades along the way, just as Fogg sees it is his duty to stick by him, risking not only the bet but also his life in rescuing him from the Sioux. Passepartout is first won over by Fogg when he sees him give his card-game winnings to a beggar-woman and even when the dogged detective Fix casts doubt in his mind about Fogg's honesty, it is not enough to shake him from his loyal attachment as he is 'caught up in this rash gamble'. He 'had a faith in his master that would move mountains'.

For Fogg 'The unforeseen does not exist', but he could never have predicted that he would fall in love on his way around the world. Although Aouda gets little opportunity to establish herself as a fully-realised character within the novel, she is clearly no shrinking violet, but an intrepid woman, determined to see the journey through, no matter what complications present themselves, and proving handy with a gun. It seems a little unfair to a modern reader that it is Fogg she acknowledges as her saviour rather than Passepartout – the one who actually carried her out of the flames – but it is a class convention that the high-born princess will fall in love with an elegant member of the social elite rather than his servant. Any difficulties her colour may pose for Victorian readers looking for a romantic resolution to the novel are eased by stressing her British education and manners, that she is 'as white as a European' and 'that this young Parsee had been transformed by her upbringing'. She may have the exotic charms of the Queen of Ahmadnagar, as extolled by the poet-king, Yusuf Adil – even Fix, who is obsessed by Fogg's capture, can see she is captivating – but she is also a suitable match for a respectable English gentleman. It is she who has to take the initiative and offer a marriage proposal, knowing that if she does not pop the question, the buttoned-up Fogg will let the opportunity go by.

The book is riven with errors and confusions in matters of geography (the mixing up of left and right, north and south, the names of states and capitals), chronology (for example, the Bank of England robbery takes place on 28 *and* 29 September, the *Carnatic* is scheduled to leave on 5 *and* 6 November) and terminology (a Hindu temple is described as having an apse as if it were a Christian church), and other mistakes (for example, Aouda says the schooner took them to Yokohama when it was Shanghai) that have been left unchanged in modern editions. This makes for a sometimes unreliable and bewildering storyline. Such occasional carelessness is undoubtedly due to Verne's haste in writing the book and poor copy-editing on the part of Hetzel and Company but, as writer Allen Foster says, 'since the reader is whisked so fast through the story, without a dull moment to stop and notice the inconsistencies, it does not really matter'.





Thomas Cook world map, 1924 (Thomas Cook Archives).



Despite the difficulties encountered by the central characters, for most readers, it is the joy of travelling to distant lands that comes through this book – both the first-hand experience and that of the armchair traveller. The French surrealist, Jean Cocteau, who made his own journey around the world in the footsteps of Fogg writes:

*Jules Verne's masterpiece, under its red-and-gold book-prize cover, and the play derived from it, behind its red-and-gold curtain in the Châtelet, stimulated our childhood, and taught us more than all the atlases: the taste of adventure and the love of travel.*

Echoing this, in the introduction to the book *Around the World in Eighty Days* which accompanied his popular BBC tv series, Michael Palin writes:

*The compulsive urge to travel is a recognised psychical condition. It has its own word, dromomania, and I'm glad to say I suffer from it. The ambition of every dromomaniac is a circumnavigation of the planet, but it's a less fashionable journey now than in Jules Verne's day. Part of the reason is that you can do it by air in 36 hours (a technological feat that Verne would have greatly appreciated). But air travel shrink-wraps the world, leaving it small, odourless, tidy and usually out of sight. There are contained vessels which will take you round in 63 days, but you will see only water on 58 of those. The reason why Phileas Fogg's 80-day journey retains its appeal is that it is still the minimum time needed to go around the world and notice it. To see it, smell it and touch it at the same time.*

Illustration from children's edition (author's collection).

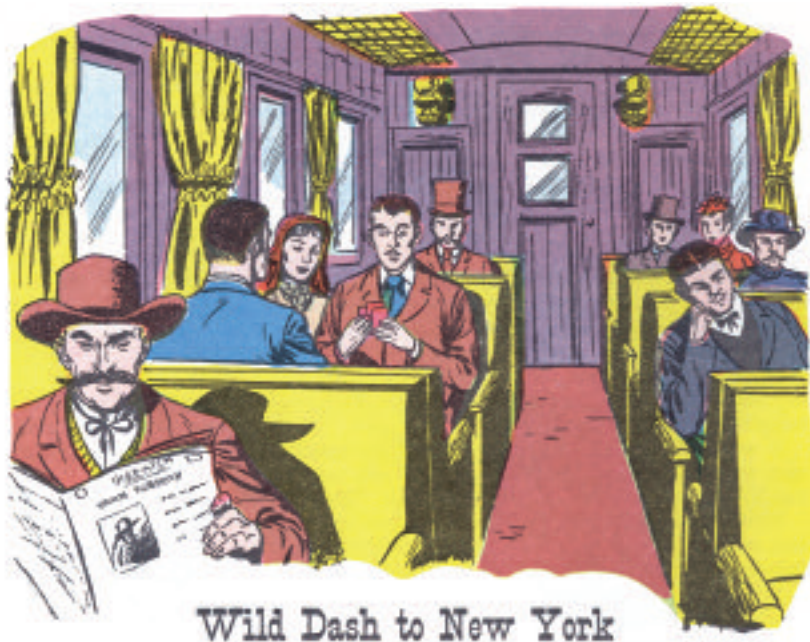


Illustration of sled from children's edition (author's collection).

As it happens, Fogg does little by way of seeing, smelling and touching, so focused is he on proving he can keep to time, but he does gain something beyond price and expectation from his journey. The book ends:

*So Phileas Fogg had won his bet. He had completed the journey around the world in 80 days. To do so, he had used every means of transport: steamship, train, carriage, yacht, cargo vessel, sled, and elephant. In all this the eccentric gentleman had displayed his marvellous qualities of composure and precision. But what was the point? What had he gained from all this commotion? What had he got out of his journey?*

*Nothing, comes the reply? Nothing, agreed, were it not for a lovely wife, who – however unlikely it may seem – made him the happiest of men!*

*In truth, wouldn't anyone go around the world for less?*

