JULES VERNE

The Definitive Biography

WILLIAM BUTCHER
Foreword by SIR ARTHUR C CLARKE

Jules Verne (1828-1905) is a phenomenon: the world's most translated writer and one of the greatest accumulated sales. With *Journey to the Center of the Earth*, *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Seas*, and *Around the World in Eighty Days*, the Frenchman reshaped global literature. He still dominates the U.S. box office and pervades our life and culture.

But behind all the success lay a tormented man: a sexual misfit, a plagiarist, then a sad and lonely recluse. Now at last comes an authoritative biography worthy of this controversial figure. William Butcher combines groundbreaking research on Verne's childhood and bohemian decades with the revelation of an unknown contemporary biography and of Verne's first book.

He brilliantly recounts the novelist's money woes and amorous escapades, Scottish ancestry and right-wing connections, court cases and near-murder. This erudite but highly readable narrative reveals the man inside the legend.

Hongkonger William Butcher has been one of the leading authorities on Verne for twenty years. His countless articles and eleven books have led to an unparalleled knowledge of this multi-faceted figure. He is the only scholar to have read the brilliant sections cut from the best-known novels.

Reactions to *Jules Verne*:

“magnificent,” *Rain Taxi*

“quite remarkable”, Agnès Marcetteau-Paul

“deservedly subtitle[d] the ‘Definitive Biography,’ ” Kieran O’Driscoll

“far surpass[es] previous efforts,” Prof. Arthur B. Evans

“eclipses anything published before in English,” Peter Costello

“a vivid read,” *Washington Post*

“Verne gave us the earth and the moon. Now Butcher gives us the real Verne. Bravo!” Ray Bradbury

“A fascinating portrait of a flesh-and-blood human being,” Volker Dehs

“The most documented, detailed, and accurate biography,” Count Piero Gondolo della Riva

“un outil superbe,” Jean-Michel Margot

“a remarkable achievement,” Ron Miller

“opens a box of goodies whose key should have been jimmied long ago,” Tom McCormick

“radiates fascination,” *Booklist*

“every page is full of interest and insight,” *Science Besieged*

“the best modern biography of Verne,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*

Jules Verne

The Definitive Biography

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Foreword by Arthur C. Clarke

Revised Edition, 2008

Chapter 3. Schoolboy Writer: 1840–46

In 1837, after an eight-year gap, Jules acquired a sister and the following day acted as stand-in godfather for her baptism in Holy Cross. Sophie felt delighted to finally have a daughter, although her husband (whom she called "Verne") was always getting doo-doo on his knees.[1] Anna was soon followed by Mathilde (1839) and Marie (1842), whom Jules again held over the baptismal font.[2] Anna, Jules's favorite (RD 21), would be brunette and bright, learning to sight-read piano music. Punning Mathilde would be blonde and graceful, looking like Jules, with her "Greek chin, smiling and witty mouth." Marie, with magnificent red hair, would become elegant and witty, "a charming little imp with a rebellious air," laughing and dancing all day long.[3]

[1] [3 May 37] from Sophie to Pierre's mother, reproduced by Volker Dehs in *J.V.*, 31 (1994), 20–21.

[2] Ducrest astonishingly says that "Pierre moved into Quai Jean Bart, near his practice, and a little later into Rue Kervégan . . . but the family moved out after a few years. So Jules spent his earliest years on Feydeau" (14). The biographer may have been thinking of the boy's birthplace on Rue de Clisson, since the building was on the corner of Kervégan, or Pierre may simply have had an office there. In any case, the Vernes must have spent much time with Dame Sophie.

[3] RD 21; [Feb. 55]; "Impromptu Verses," *Annales de Nantes*, no. 187 (Jan.–June 1978), 16–18.

1 Anna, Jules's First Sister (Self-Portrait)

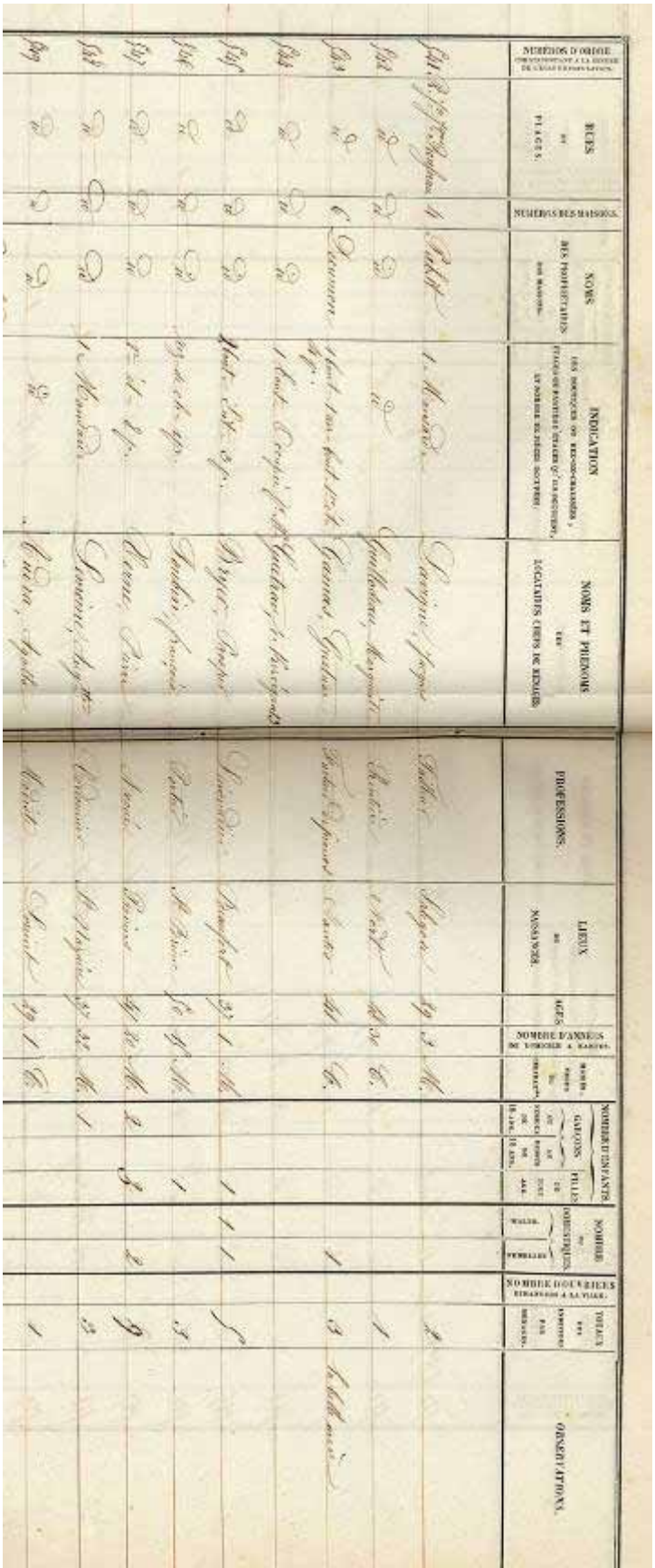
2 Mathilde, Jules's Second Sister

3 Marie, Jules's Third Sister

By 1840 Pierre had made his practice the busiest in town (JJV 4). To have more room, the family moved, renting for the moment but later buying; Pierre also bought Chantenay only in 1846 (as shown by the land deeds). The new apartment, again on a corner, was really two put together, with entrances at both 6 Rue Jean-Jacques Rousseau and 2 Rue Santeuil. Jules usually gave Santeuil or Jean-Jacques as the address, so that the dangerous freethinker's name would not scorch his lips.

4 Extract from the 1846 Census

At the bottom of the street stood a bookshop and publisher, famous for reactionary politics and tempting charts and maps; further up was another, run by the literary Monselets. Directly across the street lived General Viscount Cambronne, reputed for his defiance at Waterloo ("*Merde!*"), and about whom Jules was to write a naive poem, all gung-ho and derring-do.



Uncle and Aunt Châteaubourg were neighbors, in fact on the same intersection, at 8 Rue Jean-Jacques, or 30 feet from Jules's window. Their two fourth-story façades met at an acute angle, rounded off by a gracefully curving window. From the Verne living room, it looked too thin to live in, although it was a palatial 2,000 square feet once one got inside. The three Allotte families were therefore living cheek by jowl,[4] seeing each other at least once a day. Jules spent much of his time shouting across the street: "come over for dinner tomorrow" or "have you got any brown sugar?" He had few contacts outside the family and the handful of family friends (RD 9).

Just visible up Jean-Jacques stood the magnificent Place Graslin, with a brand new theater. At the end of Rue du Chêne, the continuation of Santeuil, Jules contemplated the changing seasons in the gardens. At the bottom of Jean-Jacques flowed a stretch of river, including the beloved La Petite Hollande and the busy commerce on the Loire. The tallest ships in fact swayed over the downstream housetops (JJV 4) to the hammering and sawing from the nearby shipyards.

5 ***Théâtre and Place Graslin***

The move had one important consequence for Pierre. The parish now became Saint-Nicolas; the family priest, and friend, a Félix Fournier. Very

[4] "Together" in Ducrest's phrase (16).

popular locally, a newly promoted conservative open to social change, he planned to knock down crumbling Saint-Nicolas Church, dark and medieval, and build a shiny new Gothic creation in its place, with a spire soaring 270 feet towards the heavens. Pierre Verne gave generously and would soon become Secretary of the Rebuilding Committee (JD 37).

6 Saint-Nicolas, the Verne Parish Church, ca.1840–87

On entering the Vernes' proud new third-floor apartment, one discovered an imposing, eight-room palace, with two live-in maids, probably as cook and chambermaid. From the entrance hall, a tiled corridor on the

right led to Pierre's law cabinet. Other doors opened into the parents' and boys' bedrooms, circular living room, dining room, and sisters' rooms.[5]

After dinner everyone would gather around the hearth in the parents' room. Conversation revolved around the family's doings, events in Nantes, and the children's reading and schoolwork. Pierre's great memory and erudition, his alter egos as man of letters and man of science, lent interest to all he said. Jules began to find a human being under the ascetic martinet.

On the mantelpiece of Pierre's study stood a bronze clock, two Empire vases, and two Empire candlesticks. Three work tables filled the center, for files and business correspondence, law treatises and reviews, and his in-tray. Jules and Paul not only studied and read there, but chatted for hours, making it the room they spent most time in.[6]

Beside the courtyard window stood a side table with a large telescope. To the left of the window, the fireplace wall ran towards the front of the building, with a superb Louis XVI desk bearing an "electric machine, [with] footstools with glass feet and Leyden jars," as well as "microscopes and jars containing animals and chemicals."[7]

Bookshelves covered three walls: law tomes, with precious old editions of Roman law; complete illustrated classical poets and historians; rows of ancient and modern history; French, Latin, Greek, Italian, and English authors, often in the original, including Charles Dickens, well-known from 1837; journals and voyages and discoveries, including Classical geographies; and a special shelf containing magazines for young people. Jules probably focused on the last two sections.

He read keenly, books forming his main entertainment. Early on he may have read *The Adventures of Baron Münchhausen* (1793) (*Int*. 232); but his favorite remained Wyss: "of all the books of my childhood, the one I loved most was *Swiss Family Robinson*. How many years I spent on their island! How passionately I joined in their discoveries! How jealous I was of their destiny!" (MCY).

He read mostly desert island tales: "The Robinsons were the books of my childhood, and I still retain an indelible memory of . . . Mme Mallès de Beaulieu's *Twelve-Year-Old Crusoe* [1818] and Mme de Mirval's *Robinson*

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[5] The whole tour is again courtesy of Ducrest (17–19), who lived there for much of his childhood.

[6] "Jules and Paul lived in this study; the father himself initiated them to all these curiosities with conversations and explanations" (RD 19).

[7] RD 18. However, this testimony dates from the 1860s at the very earliest, and may be affected by the distorted views of Jules Verne prevailing in 1930.

of the Desert Sands [1837]."[8] He also appreciated Alexander Selkirk, Crusoe's real-life model; Louis Desnoyers's *Adventures of Robert-Robert*; Ernest Fouinet's *Crusoe of the Ice* (1835); and Catherine de Woillez's *The Misses Robinson* (1835).[9] Later came Captain Frederick Marryat's *The Wreck of the Pacific* (1836) and *Masterman Ready* (1840) and Cooper's *The Crater* (1847). "At 12," he later told an interviewer, he "had begun to think of writing stories of shipwrecks."[10]

Jules's family subscribed to the *Journal des enfants*, *Magasin pittoresque*, and *Musée des familles* (founded in 1819, 1832, and 1833) (RD 17). All three magazines contained lavish illustrations, with an emphasis on education and popularization.

That year of 1840 proved exciting, as Jules saw the sea for the first time. For this landmark occasion Paul and he traveled grandly by steamboat:

> One day, my brother and I finally get permission to travel on *Pyroscaph No. 2*. What joy, we're over the moon! . . .
>
> We leave behind the ports of call to right and left, Couëron, Le Pellerin, Paimboeuf. The pyroscaph cuts across the broad estuary. We see Saint-Nazaire, its embryonic pier, its old church with the leaning slate tower, and the village, just a few houses and cottages . . .
>
> A few leaps are enough to rush . . . over the seaweedy rocks, palm some sea-water, and taste it.
>
> "But it isn't salty," I say going pale.
>
> "Not a trace!"
>
> "We've been had!" I exclaim in deepest despair.
>
> What idiots! The tide was out, and we had simply gathered Loire water from a rock pool! When the sea came back in, we found it salty beyond our wildest dreams (MCY).

That same 1840, the "ambitious Robinson" (MCY) and Paul switched school again, to the St. Donatien Junior Seminary (Petit Séminaire Saint-Donatien). Of good reputation, it was on Rue Saint-Clément, again in the countryside, nearly a mile northeast of Jean-Jacques. Directly across the street sprawled one of the best girls' schools, the Convent of the Adoration.

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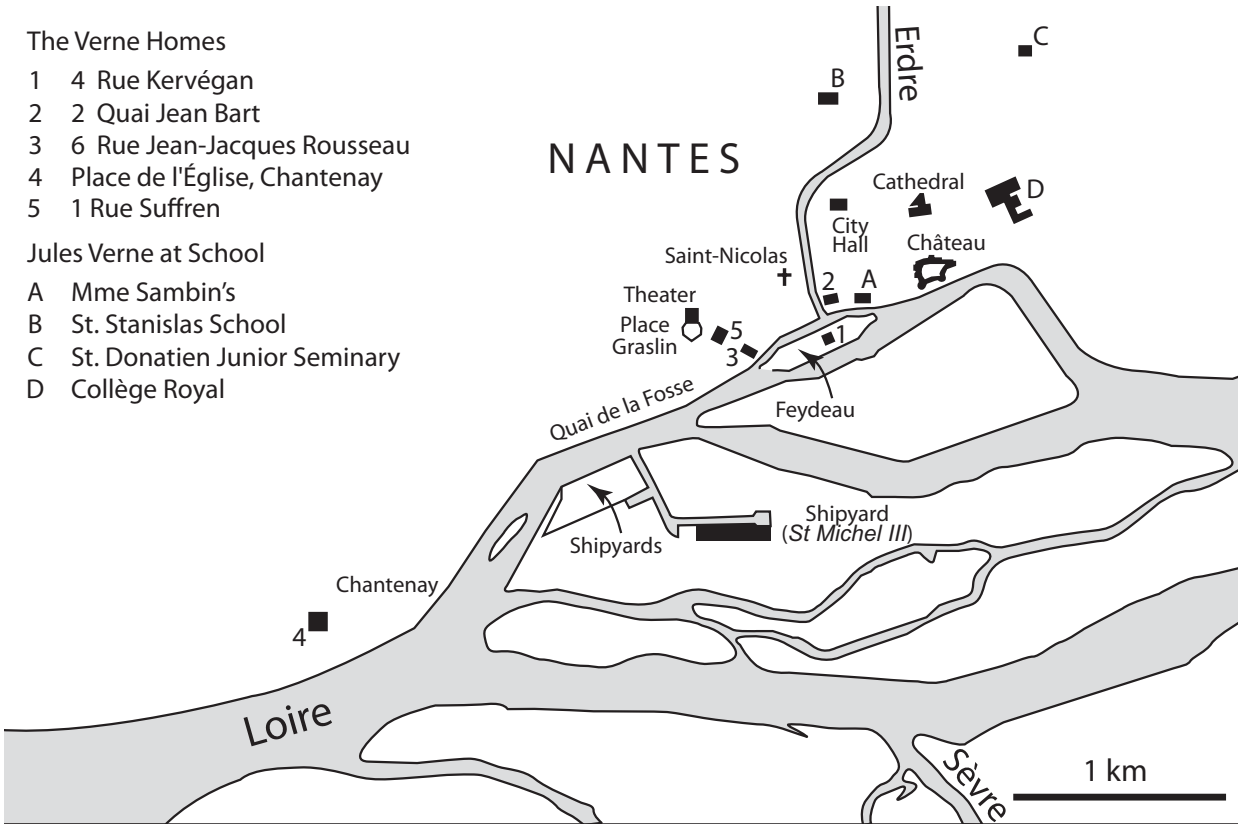
[8] Preface published only in the first illustrated edition of *Second Homeland* (1900). Instead of "Mallès," Verne wrote "Mollar."

[9] Preface in the first illustrated edition of *Second Homeland*. Woillez and Desnoyers are mentioned only in the draft of the preface.

[10] "Jules Verne at Home: The Beginning of his career as a writer of adventure," *The Quincy Daily Whig*, 13 Aug. 1887.



7 Nantes, Showing Jules's Successive Homes and Schools

Generally only state *lycées* could prepare for the baccalaureate examination, but some junior seminaries, including St. Donatien, enjoyed a special authorization. The school was "principally intended to receive young people preparing for the ecclesiastical condition."[11] Parents like Pierre, unhappy with the freethinking of the state-run Collège Royal, could choose this devout establishment.

In his unfinished novel *A Priest in 1839* (ca.1846), Verne gave a description of a new seminarian's life at "Rue Saint-Clément." The seminary seemed a relatively "good place to board," for "alongside a murderer, the common thief becomes an angel." The inmate wore

> too broad square shoes . . . and a too narrow waistcoat buttoned hermetically to the neck (obviating the need for a white shirt) . . . The tie had originally served another purpose . . . [The uniform] was black mixed with dark gray and a subtle reddish-brown tint, an indeterminate color normally found only on junior undertakers (xxi).

[11] OD 23, citing Robin 27; however, this citation does not appear on that page.

The headmaster, “tall, thin, and dry, of a hard appearance,” described his establishment: “The ecclesiastical students pay just half, but the lay ones double, so as to make up the loss.” Worship was mandatory: “By overwhelming [the boys] with prayers, Masses, sermons, catechisms, Vespers, and Benedictions, we end up forcing a few religious ideas into their heads” (xxi).

Pierre or Sophie would visit at least once a week and the boys were sometimes allowed out. Twelve-year-old Jules was now in eighth grade. He did lots of Latin versification and poetry, including learning parts of Virgil and the *New Testament* by heart, his sole distinction being a seventh place for recitation from memory in tenth grade; to judge from *Paris in the Twentieth Century* (i), he hated prize days anyway. Paul started in seventh grade, proving more successful.

Jules’s 26 classmates often behaved unpleasantly, like Cain. The teaching failed: “The other institutions which buried young proselytes in the caverns of pedantry totally lacked competence . . . among several ciphers one had to choose the least worthless” (xxi).

Verne’s story “The Marriage of Monsieur Anselme des Tilleuls“ (ca.1855) has a hero with unruly blond hair, who in 1842 dreams of “palpitating virginal bodices,” taught by a grotesque Latin teacher, confirmed bachelor Naso Paraclet. The novel *Hector Servadac* (1877) lampooned an egotistical physics master, tormented by a noisy and cheeky student who gets “500 lines for tomorrow” for sabotaging experiments (II i). It has been claimed that Brutus Villeroi (1794–1874), who in 1832 built and tested one of the very first submarines at the mouth of the Loire, taught Verne mathematics or design in 1840 or 1842,[12] but no evidence has ever emerged.

Jules was perhaps right to doubt the value of his education, for his first surviving letter to Pierre contains nearly a dozen spelling mistakes:

> I was very sorry to learn you had fallen ill and were obliged to stay in bed . . . From last week on nobody came to see us . . . Mum told us leeches had been applied and maybe would have to be put on again, which upsets me . . . Your son who loves you with all his heart.
>
> Jules Verne—Junior Seminary (30 May *40*, in CNM 22–23).

What may have added to Jules’s frustration was knowing that playmate Caroline, her virginal 14-year-old bodice now burgeoning, lived, breathed, slept, and bathed only 20 feet away, behind bars in the inaccessible convent. In August 1839, the two families had stayed at Uncle Prudent’s, roaming the countryside together.[13] Did his cousin help Jules with

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[12] E.g., Costello 102.

[13] Compère 35.

his homework, her long blonde hair brushing his hand? Did he sometimes carry her books home, trying not to look at her body too often?

After Jules's first prose and verse travel dreams and "invocations," he produced more compositions from about 1840, to please his family this time: "It was all poetry then . . . a 'compliment' [I composed for my father's birthday]—was thought very good" (*Int*. 87).

A fascinating poem by Pierre (1842) provides our first eye-witness description of Jules:

Jewel-like Loire where softly slide
Undulating waters cradling a smack
Leagues from men, already in the beyond
Elevating boys on its dreamy ride
Salt-sea bound
On its calm waters frolic children
In their smack already midshipmen
Pyroscaphs and dinghies advance
Amongst the billows they dance,
United in a great heaving romance
Leans and sways a dense woodland.[14]

This revelation of 2005 shows the father's great poetic talent, love for the two brothers, and, more important, their predilection, at ages 13 and 14, for navigation and dreams of becoming naval officers.[15] The acrostic form resoundingly confirms the message, for the first letters read "J U L E S . . . P A U L."

An even more important composition reads:

Puff! Puff! says the steam engine
In deafening commotion
The child openmouthed with admiration
Lives full hours of contentment
Tomorrow, tonight, in a few rhymes
He will narrate the sea, the far climes
The parting boats he will paint
Yonder, far from time, from any habitant
He will say, mother do not lament
Your young Jules shall be a savant

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[14] Maudhuy 80.

[15] Ducrest confirms that "from his earliest childhood [Paul] showed a very strong predilection for a naval career and everything to do with it. Everything drew him to it: his mind, more scientific than his brother's, more directed towards new discoveries in navigation, his very strong taste for travel, and his reading."

More than a boat-captain.[16]

In this first-hand contemporary description, whose juvenile language implies an original composition going back many years, “the child” gapes at a fixed steam engine, necessarily at Indret, and writes poetry of an autobiographical and romantic bent. Jules prefers isolation and escape from present-day society, despite Sophie’s apprehension. He seems to be already planning a writing career, certainly an intellectual profession involving research, possibly as a scientist, lawyer, or teacher. But the sea, always the sea, will remain at the heart of his universe.

Jules wrote his first surviving letter to Sophie from boarding school:

> I learned from Father yesterday that you were relatively well; I know that it is quite natural for you to be tired now. I long to see you, but don’t bother to come and see me, my dear Mother, it’s too far . . . Paul has a bad cold . . . As for me, the clogs you sent won’t stay on because the straps . . . are too narrow . . . Now dear Mother I forgot to ask Father to send me a set-square . . . Please also ask him to send me the romance “Farewell my Beautiful Ship” . . . because my class teacher asked me to get it for him.
>
> . . . God be with you.
>
> Your son who loves you dearly, Jules Verne.[17]

The style is formal but fluent, signing with both names and not even mentioning the birth of Jules’s sister, a week before; but childishly direct about school life. His teacher clearly liked him; but his parents no longer visited.

A week later Jules wrote Sophie a poem:

> Rush, my child, into the arms of your mother;
> Suffering and weariness, torment and pain,
> To give you life she accepted every sacrifice . . .
> If, despite every care and tenderness,
> You voice some complaint, she hastens to your side,
> Presents you her breast, feeds you abundantly
> With that nourishment God plans for small children;
> Then she kisses you and in a quiet, gentle voice
> Sings her child sweet little songs
> Her voice waning while the little one slumbers . . .
> How much caring for her son in his first year;

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[16] Maudhuy 82.

[17] [12 Dec. 42] in CNM 23. There is a P.S.: “Many things to Father, sisters, Auntie, and Grandma who, I hope, is well. I was pleased to learn Uncle no longer had sore eyes,” probably referring to Sophie’s brother, Auguste Allotte. The romance “Adieu mon beau navire” has not been traced, although the words occur in the poem “Matelots,” in Tristan Corbière’s *Les Amours jaunes* (1873), dedicated “To the author of the *Négrier* [*Slaver*].”

Then without cease she nurtures his mind,
Inculcates virtue, guides, molds.
That is what your bountiful mother did;
Prove to her, my child, your gratitude.[18]

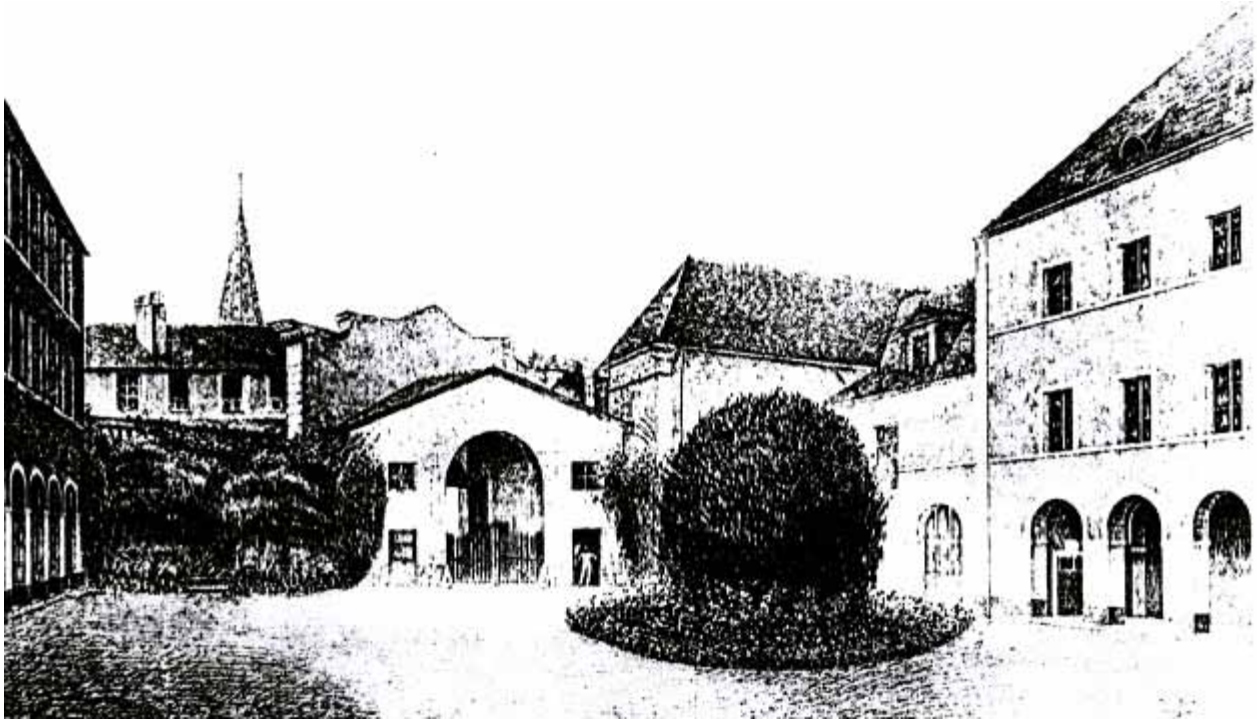
The attempt reads well, poetic but not too much so, although communicating little apart from maternal and filial tenderness and the implication that the birth in question proved difficult. The bared breast comes as a shock, for a child who can rush up seems too old to suckle. Indeed the ambiguity between present and past, newborn and toddler, second and third person, normal intimacy and sexual baring of generous breast, culminates in the surprising realization, given Marie's birth a fortnight before, that the child is male.

[18] Robin 250.

8 Sophie with her Three Daughters (ca.1844)

Jules's other compositions at this time included a prayer, word games, anagrams, epigrams, parodies, and a poem, "The Return," dedicated to Pierre. This is perhaps the same as an eight-page poem in alexandrines, starting "Dear Father . . ." (ca. 1845). It is headed "Les Sables [d'Olonne], 24 July," presumably meaning that Jules went to the seaside resort of that name for a summer vacation, although doubt has been cast on the authorship of the poemm.

In 1843 Jules attended the Collège Royal, but now living at home.[19] Despite Pierre's hatred of the school's "Voltaireanism," the move may have been to increase the brothers' chances at the baccalaureate, help Paul's naval career, or circumvent the religious and boarding restrictions of St. Donatien.[20]



9 The Collège Royal

By 1844 Jules had only reached eleventh grade. So he must have been ill for a year or, more probably, repeated tenth or eleventh grade, meaning he may easily have failed the first part of the baccalaureate.

The school, again on a hill, had been restored and energized by a new headmaster a few years before, growing to 620 students. Because it was half a mile from the center, he arranged a special student price of five centimes on the omnibuses.[21]

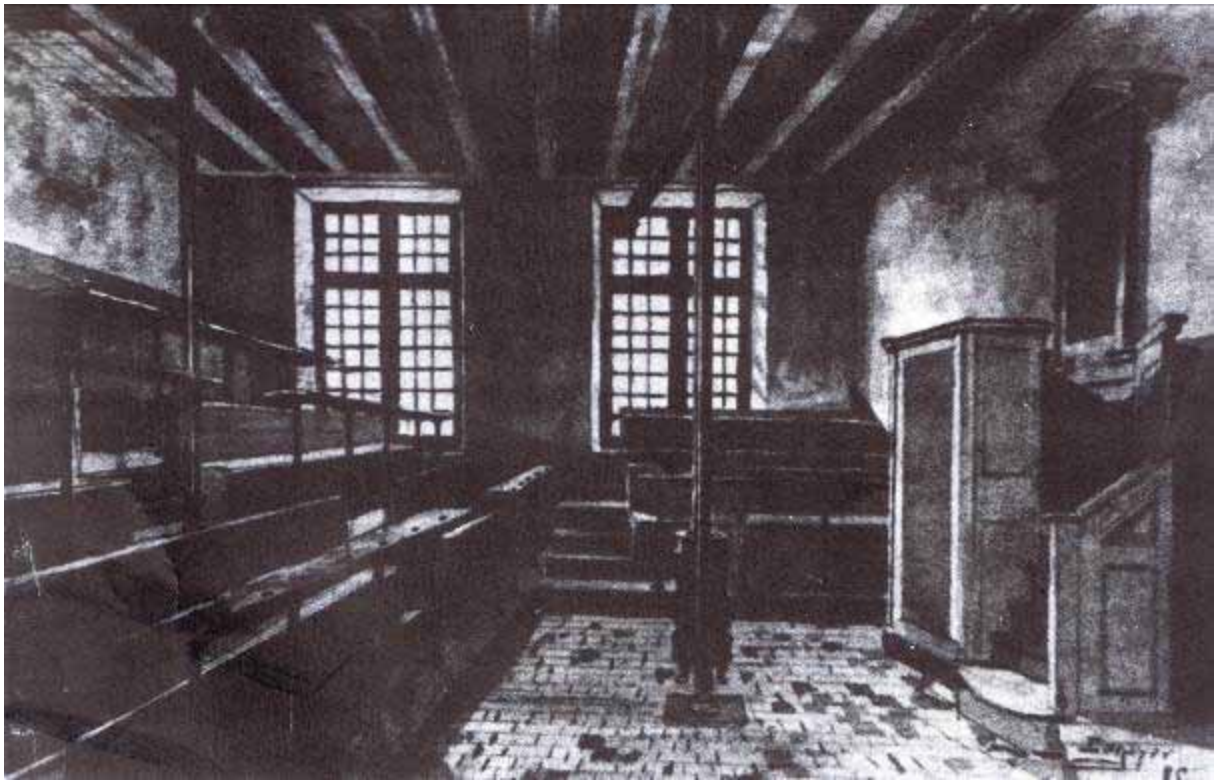
Jules's teachers included Plihon for English, Lemonnier and Deladérère for math, and the 41-year-old Pierre Sivanne for "arts and rheto-

[19] D'Ocagne 280.

[20] Paul transferred in 1844, but entered the two-year special preparatory class for the Naval, Military, and Forestry Schools; he did well in mathematics, history and geography, translation into Latin, and general performance.

[21] Compère 20.

ric": a schoolmate presented him as "a fellow who fortunately didn't torture anybody or know anything . . . He taught [his students] almost nothing."[22] Others may have been Auguste Damien, who taught tenth grade, described as stupid and cruel enough to make his charges cry, and Eugène Talbot for Classical literature: a great fan of Hugo's *Orientales*, "gracious and brilliant . . . loving aphorisms . . . inventing puns and epigrams about his pupils."[23]



10 Jules's Classroom at the Collège Royal

The adolescent did not exert himself excessively. A surviving Latin textbook,[24] although bearing on its front a carefully calligraphed "Jules

[22] Jean-Louis Liters, "Jules Verne au Collège Royal de Nantes," *Cahiers du Musée Jules Verne*, no. 12 (1992), 28–39, although the source for this information is not indicated; Vallès, *Les Souvenirs d'un étudiant pauvre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1930).

[23] Vallès, *Souvenirs d'un étudiant pauvre*; Paul Eudel, *Centenial Yearbook* (1909), 287.

[24] Alfred de Wailly, *Nouveau dictionnaire de versification et de poésie latines* (1837).

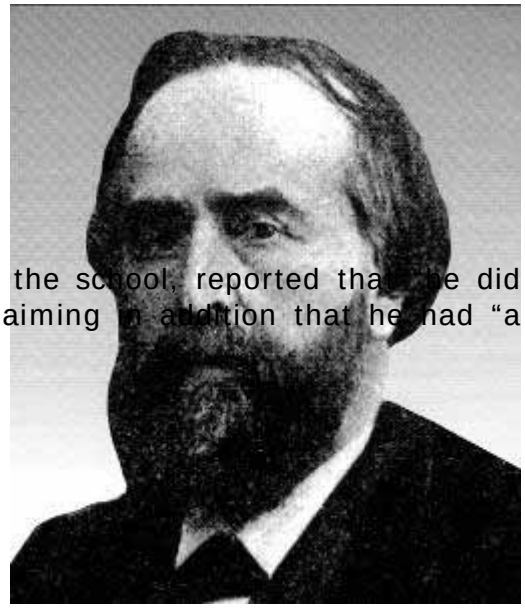
Verne. Collège Royal of Nantes. The Twenty-Second of February the Year Eighteen Forty-Five," also contains repeated doodles of "Verne," in a variety of sizes and styles, undoubtedly a sign that Jules's mind wandered. The school's *Centennial Yearbook* (1908) boasted of its many celebrated alumni, like Georges Clemenceau and General Georges Boulanger, but put down the most famous one: "His successes were few and far between and did not presage [his] future." The disappointed, understated innuendo surely avenged the authors' long-gone reports from frustrated schoolmaster savants. And the judgment seems harsh in the light of Jules's seventh place for French speaking in eleventh grade and eighth for translation into Latin the following year; he may have also got a reasonable place in geography.[25]

On 29 July 1846 young Verne took his baccalaureate in arts in Rennes, getting the overall grade of Fairly Good (*Assez Bien*). His individual results varied: Latin and Mathematics, Good (*Bien*); Greek and Philosophy, Fairly Good; Composition, French, History and Geography, and Physics and Chemistry, Pass (*P.*). It is not clear how much English, if any, Jules did—vanishingly little to judge from his subsequent competence. The irony, of course, remains that the educational authorities failed to detect his world-beating ability at French and geography.

With his baccalaureate under his belt, and Chantenay and extended family stretching before him, Jules Verne, 18, was a free agent.

"My brother Paul was . . . my dearest friend . . . from the first day that I can remember" (*Int*. 87). Little information survives of any friends outside Jules's relatives until his late teens. However, according to Ducrest (34), Jules and Paul

> had been friends with several boys in Nantes since the Collège Royal and boarding schools, with whom they kept faithful friendship over the long years that followed: . . . Genevois, Hignard, Bonamy, Serpette, G. Schwob, a whole constellation of young people, intelligent, enthusiastic, and of varied taste, some musicians, others poets, artists, or writers. They met often, as they had done near the *lycée* entrance, constituting the Nonboarders Club [*Club des externes*]. All were ambitious.



11 Aristide Hignard, Verne's Friend and Collaborator

[25] Eudel (197), nine years his junior at the school, reported that "he did good Classical studies, but nothing more," claiming in addition that he had "a marked taste for mathematics."

The secret seven dated back, then, to at least the age of 11. Other friends of Verne's in the Nonboarders Club included Émile Couëtoux du Tertre from Blain and probably Stéphane Halgan, later politician, and writer. The Club met "in old Bodin's bookshop" on the Place du Pilori, just around the corner from Holy Cross, quarter of a mile from the school.[26]

Like Jules, Ernest Genevois,[27] Édouard Bonamy, and Halgan were born in 1828, the first three destined to become lawyers; shipowner's son Bonamy lived in Rue de Clisson, beside Jules's birthplace. Unlike Verne, Genevois, Bonamy, and Halgan won top prizes at the Collège Royal.[28] In contrast, future journalist and editor Georges Schwob, if he did indeed live in Nantes,[29] was a surprising six years older; as was Aristide Hignard, son of the chief medical officer at the Hôtel Dieu Hospital, living in Jean-Jacques, later a composer, and reportedly homosexual (Maudhuy 112): "gentle, witty, a little nonchalant, slightly slow, legs a bit short for him to be a great walker, but very artistic" ("Joyous Miseries").

Other good friends were Charles Maisonneuve, also born in 1828 and later a banker and lawyer, and Émile Lorois, born in 1831, the son of the Prefect of Morbihan and later lawyer, government engineer, and deputy of Morbihan himself. Other twelfth grade classmates included Victor Marcé, a brilliant student of the same age,[30] later Verne's physician, and David Pitfold, six months senior, probably a friend from St. Donatien days.[31] Of British ancestry but born in Guadeloupe, he was a pious boarder, winning top prize for religious knowledge.

Among others Verne knew at the Collège Royal may have been Ernest Boulanger, who died as a volunteer in the American Civil War, plus "Jules Vallez, Chassin, Poupart-Davyl, Paul Chauves, Étiennez, Dubigeon," all at least three years his junior.[32] Poupart-Davyl would later be his

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[26] ADF 22–23, who further reports that Jules, Couëtoux du Tertre, Genevois, and Maisonneuve passed the baccalaureate together.

[27] Genevois's father, Ange, was a businessman and president of the Nantes Chamber of Commerce in the 1830s. Serpette must have been related to the West African oil and soap and shipowning business Serpette and Co. (active in Nantes 1840–80) and to Nantes musician Gaston Serpette (1846–1904).

[28] Liters, "Jules Verne au Collège Royal de Nantes," 28–39.

[29] In a private communication, Dehs reports evidence that Schwob was brought up in Rouen rather than Nantes.

[30] Norbert Percereau, "'Marie se marie,' mais le marié n'est pas Marie," *BSJV* 149:21.

[31] When Pitfold died in 1853, Verne wrote "I was his oldest companion and his death caused me great sadness" (14 Mar. 53).

[32] JJV 24; Liters 28.

printer;[33] the other Jules V. (1832–85), adopting the spelling Vallès, would also become a famous writer, with *The Child* still read widely today.

One final school friend was Paul Perret, two years Verne's junior and initially closer to Paul, but with whom Jules was soon to share accommodation. Later a theater critic and author of guide books and 50 novels, including erotica, he was regularly invited to Chantenay in 1847, with one or two friends. The group "would practice firing pistols during the holidays . . . it would continue until a terrified servant came and begged us to stop, because the little girls cowered in absolute terror, crying hot tears," whereupon they would retreat into Jules's private wing on the corner.[34]

As Verne's boyhood draws to a close, a witty letter sent from Uncle Prudent's depicts a fitting Indian summer. Present were the Tronson family and, in an over-casual reference, the smart and energetic, blond, Germanic-sounding Nanou Gruast (or Gruau?). The young man started by admitting that, although he had forgotten to pack his shirt, stockings, and nightcap and arrived soaked to the bone, he could not bear to leave "this place of pleasures":

> My uncle spends his nights in his wine presses and his days grape-picking; Grandpa was shaved in Le Pellerin today; Aunt Tronson puts into practice the culinary theory she took lessons in long ago and surprises us with unbuttered beans and charred gruel. Her young ladies have also livened up and choose their games, playing the wallflower or mangling stockings; Hilaire distinguishes himself by his ever-increasing grime, Henri remains a charming small monkey.
>
> That's the personnel of La Guerche, ah! I was forgetting golden-haired Nanou Gruast, whose actions are proportional to her wit.
>
> We go for walks, we work, I am the too-patient teacher of a willful pupil who shows me that everything is not as rosy in the teaching profession as formerly appeared. We visit the picturesque surroundings and the charming environs of La Guerche, leaving now a clog in the earth, now a stocking on a path, climbing stiles, mounting gates, crossing muddy brooks, and floundering in swamps which are not too dry (*15* Sep. 45 in CNM 25–26).

Of significance is the mention of games of "wallflower or mangling stockings" by Caroline, 19, and Marie, 15; Jules's sessions as an apprentice teacher, presumably of Marie and now Hilaire, 13; and the implication that the various parents rarely cooked their own meals. Fascinating is the discreet eroticism of much of the passage, heightened by the presence of

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[33] Poupart-Davyl printed *Journey to the Center of the Earth* and *From the Earth to the Moon*, although later going bankrupt. In 1856 he fought a duel with Vallez.

[34] Volker Dehs, "Emergence d'un ami d'enfance: Paul Perret," *BSJV* 150:5.

three attractive girls. The long walks, natural beauty, girls' enlivenment, obsession with stockings, ascending of obstacles, probable baring of much flesh in the mud, the striptease-like items strewn behind, and the climax of removing a stocking on a secluded path—Caroline's, Marie's, or Nanou's?—everything shows that, whether or not anything actually happened, Jules lived in a pastoral paroxysm, all quivering with suppressed sensuality in that place of physical pleasures.

Jules's character had now come more into focus. While the young man's soul still proved elusive, his behavior traits shone out loud and clear. The young man appeared "attractive, albeit always badly dressed, but with a fine profile and magical eyes; his reddish-blond locks of hair, naturally wavy or curly, always dropped over his brow" (ADF 25).

From his father, a "legal eagle with the soul of a classical poet," he inherited a "love of travel, discovery, and exploration stories."[35] From his mother he got an "Allotte imagination," with a sly sense of humor: his jokes, delivered with imperturbable seriousness, misled some and, when too smutty or close to the bone, shocked many (RD 30).

Verne always presented himself as pure Breton, meaning stubborn, faithful in friendship, clannish, and slightly mystical. Energetic but with a melancholy, even depressive, side, he retained equanimity even in tragedy. His characters will often be externally cold and impassive but volcanic inside, stoical in the face of adversity but manic-obsessive. Very sensitive, Jules hid his sentimental Celtic side under a disconcerting frankness or even brusqueness.

All his jokes hid inner tension, as did the idea of running away from home. A romantic, both in his literary taste and in his love of nature and the intangible, he lived for the water, whether Loire boating, his belated encounter with the sea, the wider horizons of ocean navigation, or dreams of becoming a sea-captain. One heartfelt cry sums up his longings: "I cannot see a vessel put to sea, whether warship or fishing smack, but my entire being sails off with her."[36] His romance- and adventure-based writings already reflected a dichotomy: sentimentally positivist, effeminately rugged, and poetically scurrilous.

What really counted for him? The answer was deceptively simple: machinery, the river, and poetry: "This Indret factory, or excursions on the Loire, and my scribbling of verses were the three delights and occupations of my youth" (*Int*. 88).

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[35] ADF 19; RD 15.
[36] *The Green Ray* (xiii).

All three centered on Chantenay, his dream and his reality, his home from home, his paradise on earth. The strength of Verne's later writing came from his early combination of security and freedom, land and water, solitude and crowds, and family and near-incestuous urges.

Chapter 4. What Use are Girls?: 1846–48

On his long country walks, alone with birdsong and babbling brooks, contemplating the Loire, coolly following its private destiny down to the ocean, Jules surely wondered about his life so far and where it could be going. The rich countryside around structured so much of his life. Since he didn't own a boat, the river pointed tantalizingly to exotic destinations just around the next bend but also formed a barrier. In Nantes, bridges abounded but the far bank still represented terra incognita. In Chantenay, his domain ranged similarly far and wide but seldom southward.

His thoughts came closer home. Paul had appeared a little cool lately. His brother seemed more like Father, stronger on technical details like mathematics and spelling: the poor boy tried hard to cultivate his imaginative side, but lacked some inner sense. He couldn't put his finger on it, could it be something to do with Mother's crazy fantasies? Was it really Breton, or did French people have it too? It felt nice having a brother so close in age—and luckily Paul usually recognized who was the older. But what should they do about girls? Often they liked the same one; did the girls do it on purpose? Paul planned to be a captain and travel to the ends of the earth. So easy for him! As long as he could remember, Father had dropped heavy-handed hints about *his* father and his father's father, cloistered in law offices all day with rogues and crooks and dusty files. Lawyers had no money worries, but, try as he might, he couldn't see himself sitting at an ancient rolltop desk, supervising spotty clerks and maintaining black was white. In any case he wanted to leave Nantes, for two good reasons. Firstly people were so conservative, they hated even the mildest of jokes: so pompous, as if they had batons up their derrières, who did they think they were? And secondly their daughters . . . He'd never been bold enough to pick up working girls. Even if he did, where could he take them? Nantes was such a small town, people knew everything. As for girls of his own class—to sound like Father—the rules beat the *Napoleonic Code* for inflexibility and caveats. His friends boasted what they had gotten away with, and with whom, and how many times, but he didn't quite know whether to believe them. Every time he fell for a girl, which was happening increasingly often, she seemed to stop talking like a human being. It was obviously a trick: to make you so desperate you'd propose—after which you stood some chance of getting under those frilly petticoats. But

it never worked out as he dreamed. Even pouring out his romantic poetry just produced blushes, giggles, and frenetic fan-beating.

His only hope lay in Paris, where things were different, as he knew from glimpses. People spoke freely, they went to cafés—sometimes they lived in sin and had breakfast together. The artistic set seemed to spend its whole time doing exactly what he wanted to.

As Jules checked the westerly horizon for signs of cooler weather, he realized how attached he was to this neck of the woods. He knew every shortcut, every branch, every cartwheel track. He had calculated every combination to get back home by a different route, while avoiding the neighbors' domains, where you had to stop and chat.

At least his schooldays had come to a close. He hated some of the lessons and wondered how the teachers could spend year after year spouting such inanities. Boarding school had been much worse, though. No escape for months at a time, no secrets, every hour catered for so as to stop idle hands and evil thoughts. And all that religious babble! Even if you believed every last word in the Bible, all that empty ceremony, all that off-key platitudinous chanting! How could any boys become trainee priests? Did they really want to shut themselves off from the world before even trying it, or did their parents decide for them? Of course no need to worry about the next meal. And plenty of like-minded fellows, no need to look far for a companion, if you liked that sort of thing.

All his thoughts seemed to keep focusing on the future, but girls, profession, and location kept getting entangled. Maybe it was best to eliminate certain possibilities, starting with Nantes, in order to get away from all his failures. But luckily there was no need to decide just yet, since he could do a bit of law—it couldn't do any harm—and see where he got to. No doubt it would all come out in the wash.

From puberty, Jules had often thought about his cousin Caroline, quiescent periods alternating with waves of great passion. Was it real love, or just a combination of lust, availability, and the invigorating country air? In any case he ecstatically breathed in the "perfume she exhaled" (*Poems* 14). Slightly older, precocious and flirtatious, she made the most of her generous body, smooth skin, and doe-like eyes, reportedly accepting the Chantenay flowers he had pushed through the visitors' grill at the Convent of the Adoration (ADF 24).

They not only ventured onto the path of romance, but also into joint literary endeavors. According to Ducrest, Jules, Paul, Caroline, and Marie had often begun composing collaborative works of a romantic nature, but either not finished them or not kept the results (RD 30). The two brothers had also written verses dedicated by name to the two sisters; Jules, at

least, reportedly declaimed his to Caroline with great feeling, although irony kept raising its cleft head (RD 30–31).

These early phases probably culminated in some sort of childish betrothal, subject to parental consent. Although some biographers have cast doubt on the depth of this juvenile passion, the documentary evidence for it seems strong. The *Poems*, published in 1989, record the stations of Jules's cross. In a poem dedicated to Caroline, Jules at long last declares his love. The "little girl" blushes and smiles: "you are kind; you need to seek my parents' permission" (*Poems* 14). The second stage occurs in the play *Broken Straws* (1850):

> In my missal I keep the poor violets
> He gathered beside the path
> And bore to his lips while taking my hand.
> In my schoolbooks I concealed them
> To accompany my solitude with their gay perfume.

The same piece refers to the convent girl's dreams of "eternal love," leading to blissful domestic scenes with her "husband . . . the adorable cousin who gave her the flowers." In the culminating stage:

> The supreme moment
> Drew near very tardily
> Finally arrives the great day
> Already nudging the bank,
> The boat of love;
> The girl climbs in . . .
> He detaches the rope . . .
> Sail, sail off forever! (*Poems* 15).

All these literary elements probably reflect a reality: Caroline accepted love tokens from Jules and held hands with him on a country idyll, dreaming of married bliss. But did the two lovers realize how impossible it all was? Marriages between first cousins were permitted but, as in most countries, frowned upon. Nevertheless, the four parents were brought in, and Caroline's father opined that neither possessed the maturity needed to found a home.[1] Jules's father simply thought of her breathtaking magnetism: "Ah, God! How beautiful she was."[2]

In about 1845, the young beauty came out at balls given by the mothers of her Chantenay friend Angèle Desgraviers and Nantes friend Herminie Grossetière. Dancing in white chiffon with a pink belt, she captivated scores of suitors. Was it here that Jules made hesitant declarations, as Marguerite suggests? In any case, Caroline did not take them seriously (ADF 24).

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[1] Guillon 127.
[2] Guillon 132.

All the previous promises counted for naught; Verne's unhappiness came close to breaking his heart. Caroline left a deep mark because she was Jules's first love and because of his passionate nature. The blow to his pride felt all the greater when Caroline preferred another cousin called Jean Cormier, then changed her mind again, and got betrothed to a man 19 years her senior. On the very day of the wedding, Jules was still dedicating an anguished poem to her.[3]

Although Jules had eventually to accept that he could not avoid his cousin for the rest of his life, traces of his anguish would be transferred to her brother Hilaire, whom he never liked. The traces would perhaps still smolder on 40 years later, for the lovers of *Family without a Name* perish, their love unconsummated, down Niagara Falls, in a burning boat called . . . the *Caroline*. In *Claudius Bombarnac* (1892), Caroline Caterna is "still a pretty blonde with blue eyes, but a deteriorating complexion" and poor taste in clothes (iii).

Probably on the rebound, Verne fell for Caroline's friend Angèle, the same age as her and whom he had seen growing up at Chantenay. "With a gait full of nobility and distinguished diction," witty but lacking in poise,[4] she had a strong character, sometimes defying her family's wishes. Despite his passion for her, Angèle in turn got engaged and married, a few months after Caroline. Did it make things worse for poor Jules that her doctor husband had a pseudo-aristocratic handle to his name and that her new parents-in-law were also Chantenay neighbors?

To get over Caroline and Angèle, Verne "tried distractions of all sorts," apparently involving whole nights out (ADF 26, RD 39). At that time a continuum ran from actresses, through working-class girls on the side, courtesans, and mistresses, to brothels with coarse ladies painting themselves on doorsteps; the most convenient ones lay at the top of Jean-Jacques and all along the Quai de la Fosse. Given the indignation with which Ducrest greets Marguerite's innuendo (RD 39), the young man possibly did sample the wares.

Now free of the *lycée* shackles, Verne had to decide what to do with the rest of his life. He is reported to have thought briefly of teaching.[5] One factor in deciding his future was his frustrated passion for Caroline, whose engagement must have been announced in fall 1846. He confessed his

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[3] Reprinted in *BSJV* 123:11–13 (it is in fact another version of the poem quoted above (*Poems* 15)).

[4] [Apr.? 53]; 15 Jun. 56.

[5] Daniel Compère, *Jules Verne: Parcours d'une oeuvre* (Amiens: Encrage, 1996), 11.

bitterness to friend Aristide Hignard, already studying music at the Paris Conservatory, whereupon his friend urged him to come to the capital to forget his misery (ADF 25).

But in his father's game plan, Jules would take over his thriving law practice. The Vernes had been lawyers for three generations, as Pierre often repeated, after all Jules was the oldest son and dowries would be needed for the three girls. The father insisted his son stay in Nantes until springtime, and meanwhile begin law study. Jules reluctantly agreed, although supposedly indicating his refusal ever to follow a legal career (ADF 25, cf. RD 35—"supposedly," because Marguerite often massages the chronology to achieve greater dramatic effect). Since there was no law faculty, or indeed university, in Nantes, Pierre tutored Jules, using the standard textbooks (JJV 10).

So that autumn Jules studied at home, getting practical experience with his father's back-office clerks. His friends at this stage remained Ernest Genevois, Émile Couëtoux du Tertre, Charles Maisonneuve, and Édouard Bonamy. In December the student wrote the mayor a rather dry letter requesting permission to take books out of the city library—presumably literary as well as legal ones—as his "studies and occupation" prevented consultation at the normal hours (30 Dec. 47 in CNM 32). The library was near Saint-Nicolas, so he could watch as the Gothic monster rose slowly from the ruins of the medieval masterpiece, thrusting out here an ambitious flying buttress, there a bulging rump, here a tempting belvedere, there spurting gargoyles, rudely angled and bulging at just the right place.

From about 1845, Verne produced a large literary output. His cultured home environment provided one stimulus, but his biggest literary inspiration was Victor Hugo, and the Nonboarders Club also had a great influence on him (RD 34):

> It was on the corner of the table of old Bodin's bookshop that Verne wrote a tragedy whose name has not survived. He took it to the manager of the Riquiqui puppet theater on Sauvetout Bridge . . . but was refused. Even worse, when Jules solemnly read his tragedy to Caroline in Uncle Prudent's press-house . . . she listened coldly and his male cousins catcalled. Their opinion was that rather than the elegiac, he should stick to caustic, bawdy, Rabelaisian farces. Only Marie Tronson understood. The author thanked her in a sonnet [referring to her] "caresses" (ADF 22).

12 Marie Tronson

In line with his cousins' advice (at least according to Marguerite), Jules wrote a frivolous vaudeville, hidden from his father but secretly circulated—and praised—in the local Cagnotte Literary Club (ADF 27).

His first surviving completed play, revised in May and June of 1847, is the fascinating five-act *Alexander VI*, about the hypocrisy of organized religion. This tragedy may have backhandedly commemorated his great-uncle Alexandre Allotte, who had died the year before. It depicts the sadistic reign of terror launched by the medieval Pope and his illegitimate son Cesare Borgia: Alexander forces his papal attentions on a girl called Rosa while his grasping son assassinates cardinals. With scenes of murder, rape, and incest, the play possessed a cruel precision and considerable tragic presence.

The young man may have already completed short stories and humorous verses (RD 34). One strand of his imagination was a highly developed social observation, mocking the pompous or the rigid. At this period he wrote three chapters and a synopsis of a novel, "Jedediah Jamet," where the covetous hero pursues, from Tours to Holland and the Rocky Mountains, an inheritance from an uncle, prosperous businessman and soldier in the War of Independence. He nearly finished *A Priest in 1839*, a turgid, Hugo-esque horror-cum-love story set in a Nantes church, featuring a Jules Deguay from Nantes, a lawyer, and an evil defrocked priest called Pierre.

In 1847–48 Verne also composed a large number of poems, consciously imitating his father (*Int*. 100). The subject and form varied: one

with a dedication in Greek characters, borrowed from Victor Hugo, one from Byron, one for Anna's First Communion, one about fifteenth-century St. Peter's Cathedral in Nantes, and even an obscene one about the gallows, "where so many hideous people famed for their criminal depravity / Finished their lives with erections so as to honor public morality." One doggerel employed vulgar slang: "I began as a bigshot, / Even quite a toff; / But it didn't give me the hots, / So grabbing all I f . . . ed off" (*Poems* 132; 162; 79; 109).

A surprising number focused on politics, like the diatribes against Louis-Philippe's progressive government or the attempts of the pretentious Duchess of Berry to restore the monarchy (1832). One general theme was government abuse, viewed from a near-anarchist perspective: an allegory of Corruption being literally conceived by Power; the Praslin Affair, where an adulterous peer massacred his wife; or the scandal-laden "Brigand" Cabinet (1840–47) and its dramatic downfall (*Poems* 40; 49; 42). The most interesting was a "Song of the Barricades," in favor of the overthrow of the monarchy (*Poems* 125).

When Jules mentioned he might try to make a career out of writing, Pierre blew his top (RD 34).

In spring 1847, Jules wanted to join Paul, embarking as cadet officer on the merchant ship *Régulus* for a few weeks of coastal trading. Paul had longed to sail to distant parts for as long as he could remember, and had finally begun to satisfy his dream, perhaps with help from Uncle Châteaubourg. However, Pierre refused Jules permission.

He studied all that winter, but his mind was not really on it—in fact he was a "somber agitated lunatic" (ADF 25). As the year turned, his family began to plan Caroline's wedding, sewing gowns, booking venues, arguing guest-lists, meeting family. By providential luck, Jules had an engagement of his own: first-year law exams, conveniently distant in Paris.

This is the first record of his having traveled alone. Even with his family, the only long-distance trip, apart from Provins, was to stay with one Mme Mispreuve, when Jules broke his chamber pot, and Pierre saved the day by using his hatbox to smuggle in a replacement (5 Aug. 48).

At the beginning of April Jules steamed up the Loire as far as Tours on a pyroscaph. After lunch he caught a stagecoach, then the new Orléans railroad (JD 56), to stay under the wing of Great-Aunt Rosalie Charruel, 69, sister of his grandfather Gabriel Verne who had died the year before.

She lived at 2 Rue Thérèse, near the National Library. Jules hated the experience, later describing his great-aunt as “moderately stupid” and her apartment as “a shaft without air or wine.”[6]

After his exams and a fortnight in the capital, he did his own packing for once. It had been decided he would stay with Pierre’s newly-widowed mother and the cooing spinster sisters, in Provins, a small town 50 miles south-east of Paris, known for its medicinal roses. Despite the rickety carriage, he enjoyed a delightful journey through the Brie countryside and valley of the babbling Voulzie, “which a giant could drink in one gulp.”[7] He probably filled the time in Provins by writing historical tragedies.

Back in Chantenay at the beginning of May, he worked fitfully at his plays and second-year law books. But without the company of Caroline or Paul, he was bad-tempered, moody, silent (ADF 26). The family circle that had meant so much to him now seemed restricting, as he longed for wider horizons. Even listening to virtuoso Anna on the piano, or singing and acting sketches with the family, could no longer console him (JJV 11).

He wrote dejected letters to Hignard and Genevois, and upset his mother with his frequent disappearances. She sent him to society balls, where he said not a word to the girls. Mme Louise Macé de la Barbelais declared him boring as mud and not sociable at all (ADF 26–27).

He did have some admirers, though, for one flattering portrait read:

> Although rather wild and quite mad he had an extraordinary fascination. Not very tall, but extremely slim with strong shoulders; an eccentric manner so you didn’t know what he’d say next except it would be witty, perhaps disconcertingly so . . . Then profound silences. An unforgettable look, wonderful teeth, and a shock of hair like a flame. Sometimes he affected a bohemian style of dress, sometimes he posed as an exquisite dandy.[8]

That same year, Jules fell for the love of his life, one who would break his heart and whom he would never forget.

Her name was Herminie Arnault-Grossetière. She was four months older than Jules, the daughter of landed proprietors—a step above the student son of a commercial lawyer with not quite enough blue blood. Blond, blue-eyed, slim, delicate, and beautiful, but with a haughty expression and “not very witty” (15 Jun. 56), she was apparently a talented mu-

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[6] 21 Sep. 53 in *Dix lettres inédites* (Nantes: Société des Amis de la Bibliothèque Municipale de Nantes, 1982); ADF 26.

[7] “An Ideal City.”

[8] Kenneth Allott, *Jules Verne* (London: Cresset Press [1940]), 12, citing Mmes Levesque and Le Breton of Nantes, apparently in 1848.

sician (JJV 167). Another friend of Caroline's, she too had danced at the balls where the flighty cousin had displayed her maidenly allures.

Did the young man's infatuations for Caroline, Angèle, and Herminie overlap? Certainly, although his active attempts to court Herminie were concentrated in the second half of this decidedly fatal 1847.

In nearly 30 poems Jules poured out his entreaties, often explicitly naming the girl. One, undoubtedly of April, the same month as the Carolinian dedication, announced that he wept for lack of her smile, the first letters, using his father's literary device, reading "H E R M I N I E." Voyeuristic eroticism creeps into the elegy of the girl who goes to sleep "leaving her dress to float open to the winds" (*Poems* 30). One inebriated poem implies a favorable response, declaiming:

> Never had a heart, a beloved heart
> Said "I love you!"
> So, day of happiness, day of peace in the heavens,
> Day of drunken intoxication,
> That tender phrase placed on my blessed brow
> That tender caress! (*Poems* 14).

However, another is headed "Oh, if only it were true!" (*Poems* 31).

Jules also lost no. 3. He apparently blamed it on the gossip of a 64-year-old "Mme C . . . ," C. not being her initial, but the swear word, as he did for f . . . His 2,000-word diatribe attacked the looks, intelligence, and politics of that "Jesuitess . . . the most perfect incarnation of the devil on earth":

> Let it be graven on her tomb
> Here lies a stupid woman
> Wicked, corrupting, eccentric bigot
> Base, lying, ugly
> Tight and foul (*Poems* 94).

Clearly, she had said something about him. It may all have been connected with his practical jokes, which had produced stories that had gotten back to his parents (RD 35).

Whatever brought on the heartbreaking rupture, Herminie got engaged, like the others, in early 1848; and married one Armand-Joseph-Auguste-Marie Terrien de la Haye in Nantes on 19 July. Probably the noble owner of a manor at La Chauvellière, Armand was well over twice her age, in line with the previous pattern.

Jules felt angry beyond measure, and never reconciled himself to the situation, tormenting himself with it for decades. As the mismatched couple consummated their vows, he was still obsessed with her, although doing his best to conceal it: "Good heavens, I was forgetting: there's something else I can't get out of my mind . . . What's happening about the

wedding . . . ? I'd be glad to know exactly what the situation is" (21 Jul. 48).

The wedding season again providentially coincided with the exam period. But as if Jules's heart were not broken enough, a revolution broke out while he was planning his journey. It did quiet down, but just when he should have been packing, it flared up again.

In February 1848 Louis-Philippe had been forced to abdicate, inaugurating the Second Republic, with a moderate parliament elected by universal male suffrage for the first time. At these elections, Verne distributed voting slips in Nantes in favor of the provisional government.[9]

13 Insurrection of Paris (Place Maubert) [Dekiss 25]

However, the left-wing elements who had introduced democracy objected to the results, provoking demonstrations and riots, which culminated on 23 June in the. In response, a brutal repression began, under General Eugène Cavaignac. Several thousand workers died, together with two generals, Monsignor Affre, Archbishop of Paris, and more officers than in the entire Napoleonic Wars.[10]

A fortnight after the fall of the last bastion at Faubourg Saint-Antoine on 26 June, Pierre judged it increasingly urgent to pack Jules off, despite

[9] Letter from Robert Godefroy to Frédéric Petit (31 Jan. 88), in *L'Herne* 119–30.

[10] Costello 33.

his mother's resistance, provided he promised not to get into fights (ADF 27).

Great-Aunt Charruel had fled to her country residence, so Jules was due to stay with his cousin Henri Garcet. Thirteen years older, Garcet was Pierre's nephew and a mathematics teacher at the Latin Quarter Lycée Henri IV, one of the best high schools in France. Once in Paris, however, Jules lived alone, at least from 11 July, arranging his own food, room, and even laundry (17 Jul. 48).

14 Henri Garcet, Verne's Cousin

One of his first things he did was wander around Paris, studying the damage. He supported the center-right student movement based in Rue de Poitiers, in the Seventh Arrondissement,[11] as well as Adolphe Thiers's "quiet moderation" (21 Jul. 48). Thiers opposed the 1848 Republic, campaigning for a constitutional monarchy and emphasizing law and order; but he supported Prince Louis-Napoléon in the presidential elections. Verne's position, in sum, was moderate conservative. The same year, he wrote a long essay entitled "Is There a Moral Obligation for France to Intervene in the Affairs of Poland?" in which he answered his own question with an impassioned no.

The 14th of July passed without major disturbance, although Paris remained messy:

> I visited the various points of [Right-Bank] Rues Saint-Jacques, Saint-Martin, and Saint-Antoine, Le Petit-Pont, and La Belle-Jardinière, seeing houses riddled with bullets and traversed by cannonballs. You can follow the track of the balls along the streets as they broke and swiped [*sic*] balconies, signs, cornices on their passage: a terrible sight (17 Jul. 48).

[11] All arrondissements indicated are the modern ones.

15 The Chamber of Deputies in 1848 [Dekiss 24]

He went to the Chamber of Deputies, thanks to a card from Monsieur Braheix, a deputy and a lawyer from Nantes. Debate centered on the arbitrary arrest of a prominent journalist and playwright, Émile de Girardin. Poet-politician Alphonse de Lamartine attended, together with Cavaignac, Girardin himself, and several other renowned politicians and writers, including Verne's great hero, Hugo: "to see him properly I knocked down a lady and tore the lorgnettes from a total stranger's hands" (5 Aug. 48).

During this time, Jules's social contacts were his parents' friends. He dined at Mme Arnous's, a shipowner's wife, and, several times, with Henri and Eugénie Garcet, taking along ex-Nonboarder Charles Maisonneuve, now a financier (21 Jul. 48).

Amid the political and social effervescence, Verne was revising intensively for four subjects: Criminal Instruction, Penal Code, Procedure, and Civil Code. But he still worried about the orals, in the heart of the Latin Quarter:

> The examiners . . . must have great fun looking for all the most difficult and unexpected questions to throw in your face and then say, I covered it in my lectures (21 Jul. 48).

> I fear I'm going to be in the odorous position of Sancho's laxatives when he removed the strap from the top of his breeches and an unusual perfume came to tickle Don Quixote de la Manche's olfactory nerve! Fortunately there are toilets on Place Saint-Sulpice! (30 Jul. 48).

Eleven days after Herminie's fatal wedding day, Jules's heart overflowed, and he wrote his mother a delirious, surrealistic letter-cum-short story. The literary inspirations included E. T. A. Hoffmann, Victor Hugo, Gérard de Nerval, and the whole Romantic movement:

> Alas, dear mother, life is not all roses, and fellows who build shining castles in Spain don't find them even in their own land . . . *Consommatum* [*sic*] *est*, like St. Louis's, please excuse the Latin, and the anapestico / o / o / o / o / o / oc of Aeschylus would seem appropriate in the circumstances.
>
> Besides, Morpheus opened the ivory gates for me one night and a fateful dream came to beat its bat-wings with curved nails over my leaden eyelids! . . .
>
> Two young spouses were preparing to tie an altar knot capable of resisting the sharpest divorce blade. Both were good-looking and, as Jean-Jacques says, their bodies made to lodge their souls! The bride wore white, symbolizing her fiancé's naive soul; the groom, black, an allusion to the color of her soul! . . .
>
> And outside a man, with holes in his elbows, a black goatee . . . a florid complexion, and legs finely worked and machine-finished, was sharpening his teeth on the doorknocker . . .
>
> The bride felt cold to the touch and something like a strange idea of old loves shivered through her . . .
>
> As the bridal chamber opened to admit the trembling couple, heavenly joys flooded their hearts while . . . a sulfurous and bitter smoke filled the joyless, darkened rooms . . .
>
> I shall console myself by killing the big cat on the first occasion . . .
>
> My heart needed to overflow! That funereal ceremony needed to be couched on paper so that one day I could say: *Exegi monumentum* [I have built a monument] (30 Jul. 48).

Was Jules drunk or drugged ("Morpheus")? He had been out for a society dinner that evening, and appreciated his wine, although the conclusion is perfectly lucid. In any case, he fully revealed his frustration, jealousy, and bitterness, inaugurating a comparison between marriage and funerals for the next 60 years. At least one modern literary critic would base part of his distinguished career on little more than an interpretation of this letter.[12] Many of the details admittedly do remain unclear: were the holes in the man or his jacket, and was it a self-portrait?

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[12] Marcel Moré, *Le Très curieux Jules Verne* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960) and *Nouvelles explorations de Jules Verne* (Paris: Gallimard, 1963).

As if regretting the outpouring, which marked the ending of his childhood, Jules would henceforth be less open with his parents. His letters to his father, especially, became little more than mere material enumerations, useful for understand his life in Paris but not the workings of his soul.

After taking his oral examinations on 3 August Jules had his baccalaureate in law. That same evening he left for another few days in Provins, packing his meager possessions in a hatbox. He spent much of the summer writing or planning tragedies and going for long solitary walks around Chantenay, now entirely bereft of charm. In September Paul came back for a few days, with fascinating stories of Martinique, Réunion, and Pondicherry, eager to once more practice four-handed piano with his brother.

Having gotten some of his feelings about Herminie out of his system, Jules found that more kept flooding back in. For long months after, he wrote vengeful sonnets forecasting her unhappiness. Then he went through them and crosshatched her name in the dedications. In the end he had about 60 poems, the majority implicitly or explicitly about Herminie, which he carefully copied into a notebook bought at the bottom of Rue Jean-Jacques. He then kept the notebook until his death, like a final regret, although it is not clear how he prevented his wife from stumbling across it.

Some poems expostulate and threaten: "*Catinetta mia* [my enchained], I tell you, be careful!" (*Poems* 169). Some recount the seduction of the young bride: "At the dark rendezvous . . . / She has to leave aunt, parents, sister, husband! . . . / She must betray them all; I'm on tenterhooks" (*Poems* 31). One or two others speculate on the consequences: "A noble gentleman with his lucre / Robbed that girl from my honest love! . . . / He caresses sons he thinks are his / Fashioned by sweet union in a joint account" (*Poems* 167).

Thirteen years later, when asked to inscribe an album for a friend, Verne copied out one of the Herminie sonnets.[13]

As the summer turned to autumn, Jules still seethed with resentment and anger at both Caroline and Herminie. He hated their hypocrisy, their self-interest, their betrayal of the ideal of love. In part of his mind he was convinced Herminie still loved him, but had been forced to marry a man old enough to be her father.

His fury extended to the whole of Nantes, for they were all fools and philistines, unable to judge his true worth:

Of knowledge a people incapable

---

[13] Eudel 194.

Always filthy about it
A few thousand empty brains
Incorrigibly stupid . . .
The fairer sex anything but,
An inept clergy, a stupid prefect,
No fountains: this is Nantes!!! (*Poems* 35)

The objects of his rage included himself, for wasting his love on such unworthy objects. This would be the only known extended fit of blazing anger in his life. Later, when he became depressed, indignant, upset, he would invariably keep an icy, almost British, calm.

The whole 12 months remained blighted for him. Perhaps inevitably, it was decided (by whom is not entirely clear) to distance him from the disgusting activities of the six newlyweds. This time, it would be a definitive rupture from his social circle, from the locus of his frustrations and humiliations, without possible return. On future visits to Nantes, he would see only his family and a few friends who had returned (RD 36). For the rest of his life he would remain in proud exile.

Sophie worried about the continuing Revolution and the thousands of deaths in the past few weeks. Against that could be used the argument that ex-Nonboarder Édouard Bonamy was already reading law in Paris (JD 57). Exactly the same age, Bonamy showed little sign of independent thought. It may have been his dull conventionality that convinced her.

Later Jules invariably insisted he was pushed, "sent" by his father.[14] However, it must also have been his own idea, supported by Paul, to increase his exam chances by attending law lectures in Paris, from which the questions were often taken.

His grandmother, mother, and sisters did his packing (ADF 28). Just before leaving, the student sent one last half-self-pitying, half-pompous shot across Herminie's bows: "Fine, I'm leaving, because they didn't want me, but men and women will see what wood that poor young man called Jules Verne was made of."[15]

He was perhaps better out of it, after all. The gutters ran with the blood of half a million Africans torn from their homes, tortured, and worked to death. From the failure in love of the "poor young man" would spring one of the greatest imaginations of the century.

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[14] *Int*. 89; Lemire 7.
[15] Letter to Hignard in ADF 28.

Chapter 5. Law Student in the Literary Salons: 1848–51

At 9 P.M. on Friday, 10 November 1848, the snowy Place Graslin witnessed a humdrum scene which would change the course of French literature. Verne and Bonamy climbed excitedly into the stagecoach (ADF 31). As it pulled away, their tearful mothers no doubt told them to tuck in their scarves; their gruff fathers, to write the moment they arrived.

The boys were dying to reach Paris to join the street party for the Second Republic. The star was that dangerous romantic poet, Lamartine; but at least Monsignor Sibour, Archbishop of Paris—replacing poor martyred Affre—would be sanctifying things with a solemn Te Deum (ADF 31).

At the railhead in Tours, Verne and Bonamy tried to slither aboard a National Guard train. “But where are your uniforms, my young men?” “In our luggage.” “And your mayor’s authorization?” The two quietly slipped away again. They finally steamed in on the Sunday, just in time to see candles mockingly smoking across the garbage-strewn Place de la Concorde (ADF 32).

The two trudged through the sludge and up many a dark, dank stair, doubting that they could live in such windowless eighth-floor closets. At last they found 24 Rue de l’Ancienne Comédie, on about the sixth floor (27 Nov. 48). This bookshop-lined street in the Sixth Arrondissement, home to Louis XIV’s Comédie-Française, led from the glorious Luxembourg Gardens down to the eternal Seine. At the throbbing heart of the Latin Quarter, steeped in 2,000 years of history, the building looked out on the Place de l’Odéon, scene of the battles of young romanticism. Opposite stood Café Procope, perhaps the oldest in the world, where Lt. Bonaparte had left his hat as deposit and where Diderot, Franklin, Voltaire, and Robespierre had set the world to rights. An address to die for, one dripping with literary destiny. Sprinting up and down the flights, Jules couldn’t believe his luck. The images of Herminie became slightly less hallucinatory.

16 The Café Procope

The landlady, one Mme Martin—instantly nicknamed Lamartine—brought up fresh milk and bread, washed the dishes, and slopped out the chamber pots (22 Feb. 49; 21 Nov. 48). Verne paid 30 centimes per garment to an out-of-town washerwoman. He soon told his mother that his shirts "no longer ha[d] a front or indeed a behind" (14 Oct. 52). He owned only two pairs of socks and had no bathing facilities. Fortunately the temperature stayed below zero.

Although the idea of cooking on his wood stove apparently never crossed Verne's mind, he did manage to make himself a breakfast of coffee and two rolls, to keep him going until dinner (21 Nov. 48). He was careful to dilute Seine drinking water (27 Nov. 48) and claimed to walk two miles to a one-franc tavern on the Right Bank. "I eat beefsteaks as hard as Uncle Prudent's soles after trekking to La Guerche," he supposedly wrote; "the meat filling me must have pulled many a Paris bus" (ADF 52).

For him, body and spirit were one: "I've virtually no literature, producing nervous cramps whenever I pass a bookshop" (6 Dec. 48). He indulged in a fine complete Shakespeare, devouring him on a boulevard bench, then lived three days on dried Chantenay plums to pay for the indulgence (ADF 34).

He paid about FF 80 ($240 in modern values) a month for food, FF 30 for rent, FF 10 for wood and oil, and FF 4 for linen (6 Dec. 48). Jules's letters emphasized his expenses, but with some of the details airbrushed out, on the pretext of arithmetical incompetence. His father picked up the tab for "misc.," into which Jules slipped law-books, travel, and 100 stamps a month.

To twist the knife, the young poet revealed: "as I've been poorly, the doctor's ordered more food" (12 Dec. 48). He told gut-churning stories of intestinal eruptions and enema-provoked explosions, uncontrolled vomiting and dire emergencies in public toilets (21 Nov. 48). Imagining he had cholera, he still managed brave jokes about all the two-way rectal traffic.

The heart-rending tales of freezing, starving, and bodily flows produced the desired effect. Tender-hearted Sophie secretly sent money, plus trunkloads of sheets, shirts, socks, lime-blossom tea, figs, and the jam that had first enraptured Pierre (ADF 33). Eventually even Pierre's stony heart melted and—after double-checking his son's figures—the allowance rose to FF 125, then to the giddy sum of FF 150, three times more than an unskilled worker (Mar. *51*).

What did Verne do for sex? In response to his mother's concern, Verne said he loved bachelorhood: "I can think of no happier state for a man" (9 Mar. 50). Much later, in comments on the Latin Quarter lifestyle, he described himself as "a man about town (boulevardier)" and emphasized the easy conquests and working-class kept women ("*grisettes*") (*Int*. 129; 89). We don't know whether he nudged or winked as he did so.

Then came a shock: "I've stopped taking the pills and haven't used the prick ointment" (16 Nov. 49)! Although the vulgar term must have flabbergasted his father, Dr. Dumas's book does read "*pommade Chibré*," probably meaning penile cream. Jules wrote with astounding frankness about intimate health problems; and soon after, his father did blow up about something.

We can only conjecture what the ailment was, and how he caught it.

Of Verne's schoolmates, Ernest Genevois was also studying law in the capital, and Charles Maisonneuve already worked in finance. Maisonneuve and Hignard possibly lived on the same landing as Verne and Bonamy.[1] Nearly all of his other Paris friends consisted of Nantes schoolfellows, six or seven years older and still unmarried, now studying music. Although Verne felt close to Victor Massé (later a famous composer)—"an excellent friend and a good comrade," about whom he would soon publish an article—Hignard's name came up most. Thanks to Aristide, Verne joined a

[1] Robien claims that Maisonneuve, Hignard, and Verne's rooms were "adjacent" (40).

musical set in pianist and composer Adrien Talexy‘s salon, on Right-Bank Rue Louis le Grand.

17 Adrien Talexy

In a different category were his parents’ friends, invariably upper crust and interconnected. He was successively wined and dined by Bonamy’s father, the Garnier family, Paul Championnière (former neighbor of Prudent’s), and Messrs Braheix and Prévôt, whose “oldest daughter is very pretty” (2 Apr. 49). Jules continued to resent Great-Aunt Charruel, as she forgot his New Year present and “ordered” a poem from him “about a china pooch she’s giving to some girl” (2 Apr. 49). Refined Mme Arnous-Rivière, wife of the Verne soirée regular, lived in the center: Verne picked up his luggage there and often went back (ADF 32). Still keeping an eye on him was Henri Garcet.

More importantly, Uncles François de Châteaubourg and Auguste Allotte unexpectedly arrived shortly after Jules, declaring themselves “unmarried husbands” for the duration (27 Nov. 48). They invited the delighted youth to a Meyerbeer comic opera perhaps starring Jenny Lind, who, however, attracted Verne’s scorn for making “18 million francs,” although a “poor singer” [22 Aug. 52].

Châteaubourg, above all, took Jules into society, starting with Madame Jomini’s political salon. Verne marveled at everything the ladies knew, or at least could talk about, but felt tongue-tied and provincial, and

did not return (ADF 34). But he loved Joséphine de Barère's literary salon, in nearby Rue Ferme des Mathurins. Joséphine was a youngish bluestocking, a seasoned traveler, and an excellent caterer.[2]

All the dinner invitations and resulting opera tickets, including one where he spotted President-elect Napoléon Bonaparte, caused just one problem. Verne and Bonamy owned only one outfit between the two of them. They took it in turns to go out, making a great joke of their penury (ADF 34).

With his literary culture, good looks, sensibility, and breeding, the ugly duckling blossomed. Shining in his new freedom, Verne soon met the oh-so-young Count de Coral, editor of the *Liberté*. The Count promised to introduce him to Victor Hugo and the whole Romantic set (6 Dec. 48).

Verne was over the moon. In one part of his mind, though, he remained calculating, for it was still his ambition to meet the literary insiders. He wanted his writings to be read and instantly recognized for their real worth. But thousands of young men had the same dream, and he knew the odds against him. Reaching such heady heights after less than one month, he decided to keep his powder dry.

People thought him wonderful, he reported, because he always agreed with fools: "Twenty years old, 20 years old! One day I'll get even with them!" (29 Dec. 48).

Two authorities report that Verne did meet Hugo at this time.[3] But in any case his mind soon turned to other matters, for at Joséphine's he was introduced to Chevalier Casimir d'Arpentigny, the famous palm-reader (*JVEST* 45). Although distinctly uninterested in chiromancy, Verne made a good impression, and was quickly invited into his salon (ADF 35).

18 Alexandre Dumas *fils*, Verne's Friend and Collaborator

The Chevalier was on excellent terms with Alexandre Dumas, *père* (1802–70) and *fils* (1824–95) (*JVEST* 217). Decades later, Dumas *fils* still defended the "misunderstood, unknown science" of palmistry and d'Arpentigny, its "founder." Dumas had found instant stardom with his

[2] 6 Dec. 48, 21 Nov. 48.
[3] RD 39, d'Ocagne 281.

novel *La Dame aux camélias* only months before. With his planned stage adaptation *Camille*, and soon Verdi's operatic version *La Traviata*, as well as his flood of popular plays, he would shortly become France's leading dramatist.

Going beyond his wildest dreams, the fresh-faced provincial met Dumas *fils* at the beginning of January 1849. With only four years between them, the two hit it off from the beginning:

> the friend to whom I owe the deepest debt of gratitude and affection is Alexandre Dumas the younger . . . We became chums almost at once. He was the first to encourage me. I may say that he was my first protector . . . He introduced me to his father; he worked with me in collaboration (*Int*. 90).

By 8 February, Verne could casually tell his father that he and Dumas *fils* were close, as was "old Dumas who I see occasionally" (8 Feb. 49).

Dumas *père* had been one of the most famous men in the world since *The Three Musketeers* (1844) and *The Count of Monte Cristo* (1844–46). When Verne met him, he had just become manager of the Historic Theater and was about to reopen it with much ado. His own lavish *Youth of the Musketeers* premiered to huge fanfare on 10 (or 17) February. Jules Verne was the guest of honor: "I sat in [Dumas's] stage-box, what a privilege! . . . Old Dumas was incredible about his play. He couldn't help telling us what was about to happen. I saw a lot of well-known people who came into the box" (22 Feb. 49).

19 Alexandre Dumas *père*

Verne was not exaggerating, for that evening he met drama critic Jules Janin, novelist Théophile Gautier, and Girardin, whom he had seen

at the Chamber of Deputies. He must have been perpetually rubbing his eyes.

Dumas *père* spent much time at Monte Cristo, his two-year-old oriental-romantic-baroque castle in Saint-Germain en Laye, near Paris. With exotic servants, lakes, grottoes, and a complete menagerie, the parties lasted entire months. Verne was soon sitting in the celebrated gardens, working on a play with Dumas *fils*.

He couldn't conceive greater happiness. Instead of solitary scribbling, he shared a give and take where all his ideas bubbling up were heeded and even treated seriously. At the same time, he found it humbling when the expert unerringly homed in on his weak exchanges and penned witty new dialogues almost as quickly as he could read them.

Verne devoured Dumas *père*'s over-rich concoctions, but wondered about their origin, "without name in or on any tongue" (ADF 35). One of his interviewers later added:

> Between two serial installments, Dumas *père* would descend to the kitchen to whip up his magical mayonnaises. Although silver was lacking—not greatly surprising those present—the champagne bubbled, the women were pretty, and nobody complained about having to share a glass with the girl beside him (*Int*. 135).

Monte Cristo had in fact gone bust in January 1848, with the furniture sold off in May, followed by the castle itself in May 1849. No wonder the guests sat outside and the cutlery seemed so sparse.

20 Monte Cristo

Did Verne marvel at the distance covered in four months? A lovelorn adolescent with no immediately visible talent had met the only person to review his novels seriously for the next 40 years, plus one of the globe's most influential people, and collaborated on an equal footing with the new world star. So dizzying was the ascent that Verne surely again swore to himself not to blow his chances by showing his true colors. He had learned how unfair people could be. He had often gotten so near a desired goal, only to unerringly say the wrong thing in the wrong place. He just had to hope that Paris literary society would be freer than Nantes, a little more accommodating of anyone who thought differently.

In 1848–49 Verne was voraciously reading the romantics, especially Dumas, Alfred de Vigny, Alfred de Musset, Goethe, and Friedrich Schiller. But his greatest love remained the granddaddy of them all: "I was greatly under the influence of Victor Hugo, indeed, very excited by reading and rereading his works. At that time I could have recited by heart whole pages of *Notre Dame de Paris* [*The Hunchback of Notre Dame*]" (*Int*. 89).

From the start in Paris he thought only of money, enemas—and a literary career. His studies at the world-famous Law Faculty opposite Garcet's *lycée*, like his father before him, hardly registered. When his father predictably blew up, Verne beat around the bush. On 21 November, he had written that a law career would give him the means to *also* lead a life of letters, but three weeks later that he much preferred verse to . . . politics: "I couldn't care less about ministers, President, and Chamber while one poet remains in France to steal our hearts away." Although he planned to do a degree in French literature (27 Dec. 48), his interest in the matter remained, he emphasized, purely academic: "it's fantastic . . . to be in close touch with literature, to sense the direction it's going . . . there are seminal studies to do on the present period, and on the genre to come" (12 Dec. 48).

Verne somehow forgot to mention that he was a full-time author himself, composing a prodigious three or four volumes a year. Three main outlets were available at the time: poetry, the novel, and drama. But the greatest of these was playwriting, the genre to come and the one Verne thought himself best at.

His first plays, on which he had been hard at work since 1846, imitated Hugo's. In one five-act tragedy, *The Gunpowder Plot*, Guy Fawkes plans to blow up the Protestant monarchy. Another verse tragedy of heartrending intensity, *A Drama under Louis XV*, abounds with torrid love scenes, with much rape and murder, but could not be completed because of official censorship (26 Jan. 51).

Whether because of the world's failure to recognize his talent, an improvement in his mood, or a change in public taste, Verne's writing evolved. He penned a long series of vaudevilles, full of farcical quid-pro-quos, bedroom scenes, and risqué jokes, with corrosive satires of the bourgeois thrown in for free: the one-act *Sea Outing*, an 1820 skit about French smuggling and the Scottish aristocracy, full of "grog"; *Rabelais's Quarter-Hour*, with a jilted girl taking revenge; *Sometimes You Need Someone Smaller*, about rivalry in love; the two-act "Don Galaor," where true love conquers all; and the three-act "The Savants," supposedly based on learned neighbors of Uncle Prudent's, Messrs Championnière (ADF 42).

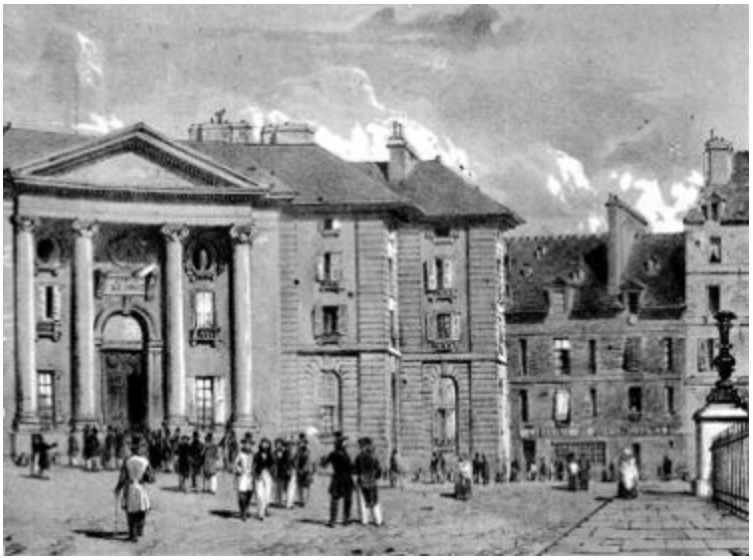
His libretti for comic operas included the one-act *The Grouse*, in synopsis form only, where a woman dreads marrying a 50-year-old, and two-act *Abdullah*, about an Arab visiting Versailles and risking the death penalty for love of a Frenchwoman. *Abdullah* was probably revised by Georges Schwob in 1849 (Lemire 7).

By 1850–51 Verne had completed a score of plays, often containing brilliant comic shafts and striking one-liners. While most still make interesting reading, none had yet found a home. His nightmares surely swam with misplaced manuscripts and brutally casual rejection slips.

While still on the high of his carefree social life and literary creation, Verne quoted Goethe's "Nothing is illusion that makes us happy" (12 Dec. 48). He also—perhaps a mistake—sent his father a verse composition boldly uniting sex and politics: "the Republic is just a whore / Quite shameless / Top people, and even further up / She accosted to run her store / And paid for their pimping services!" (*Poems* 160). He may have let it drop that although one of his plays might finally be staged, his degree would not be finished until at least August . . . (24 Jan. 49).

The father's reaction was devastating. A long, aggressive reply declared that consorting with dissolute artists was Not a Good Thing. Pierre's outraged missive consisted mostly of moralistic diktats and below-the-belt blows. Jules responded robustly that: he had always tried not to appear eccentric, at least in his own eyes; you shouldn't believe all the tittle-tattle you heard; he *had* read his mother's letters and *was* sending news home; if his letters often seemed incomprehensible, his thoughts were much clearer; the word "salon" probably frightened his father more than the reality; pleasure and happiness shouldn't be confused; he *had* worked hard for his exams; perhaps he did look down ever so slightly on the provinces, for the girls were so much prettier in Paris; and although "I always said I'd be a lawyer," a writer was "the finest position any man can have in this world . . . although we haven't quite got to that stage" (24 Jan. 49). The

surface Jules tried Jesuitically to mollify, but the underlying Verne remained entirely subversive. He knew where he was going.



21 The Paris Law School in the 1840s [Dekiss 24]

Verne thought *The Gunpowder Plot* and *A Drama under Louis XV* best suited the Historic Theater. But Bonamy preferred *Broken Straws* and so, early in 1849, Verne submitted all three. Dumas *père* reportedly rejected the tragedies, but found the comedy promising (ADF 37).

It must have been an early draft, since the Monte Cristo collaboration involved this same *Broken Straws*. Although Dumas *fils* did not list it among his collaborative works, Verne later affirmed: "Dumas *fils* gave me the subject, as far as I remember"; "we wrote a play together called [*Broken Straws*]."[4] He dedicated it to Dumas *fils*, who, he told his father, had "saved" it (28 Jun 50). In return, the student almost certainly ghost-wrote books for his busy senior, although we can only guess which.[5] On the basis of their work together, in both directions, Dumas *fils* later wrote that Verne shared with his prolific father "imagination, verve, good humor, invention, health, clarity, and that virtue looked down on by the impotent: fecundity."[6]

In the completed *Broken Straws*, the aged Count d'Esbard, jealous of his teenage wife, locks her up. They play the game of "Broken Straws," where the first to accept something from the other loses. The Count

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[4] 3 Dec. 89 to Abraham Dreyfus (in *Europe*, no. 613 (1980), 141); *Int*. 90.

[5] Dumas published at this time *Dr. Servans* (1849), *Césarine (*1849), *Diane de Lys* (1851), and *Regent Mustel* (1852).

[6] *Nouvelles littéraires*, 24 March 1966.

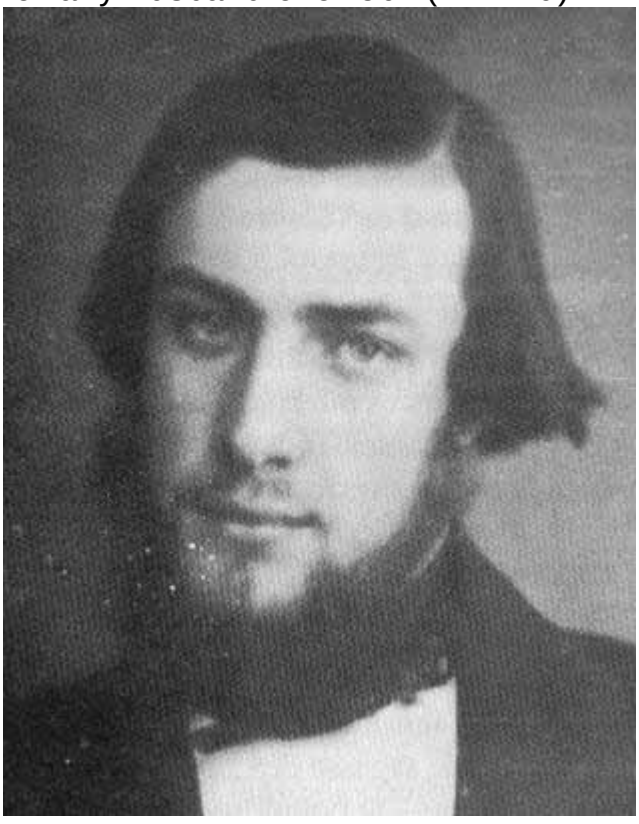
bursts into the wife's room, the lover hides in the wardrobe, and the husband demands the key—so losing the game. Among the bedroom scenes, Verne worked in mocking references to the pumped-up self-importance of Nantes's most prominent figures.

Verne probably submitted the revamped play in person, since Dumas *père* regularly invited him to his home (9 Mar. 50). In any case, the upshot again exceeded what could reasonably have been dreamed of.

Broken Straws opened at the Historic Theater on 12 June 1850, the first performance of a play by Verne. It ran for 14 full nights, with all of Verne's friends coming along to laugh at the right places, helping with the reviews. The FF 15 ($45 in modern values) profit even covered his expenses, and Adrien Talexy threw one of his famous parties to fete the new dramatist. As icing on the cake, the play opened at the Graslin Theater five months later; all Jules had to do was brave the notables' angry protests. Local critics reportedly considered it "truly a work of art," but the plot "so risky that only the author's grace and wit rendered [it] acceptable" and the moral "desperate news for any husband over 50" (ADF 40).

The waking dream continued with publication of the play, arranged by Dumas *fils* and bankrolled by Charles Maisonneuve.[7] Telling his father of his first time in print, Verne cautioned that the play might seem a little risqué: "I've never claimed a mother could take her daughter to it, I'm not responsible for educating French virgins." All his friends wanted copies, but he thought they could buy them in the bookshop.

During all the excitement, events had continued apace. In March 1849 Verne had drawn a lottery number that meant he avoided conscription. In response to his father's complaint, Verne said he detested the military (12 Mar. 49).



22 Verne at 22

[7] 28 Jun. 50; ADF 39.

That same month Bonamy left Paris, receiving a valedictory sonnet, and Verne happily moved to a new room on the third floor (12 Mar. 49). His whole day was now spent within four walls, broken only by dinners and invitations. But the creative opportunities surely outweighed the occasional depression and doubts about his future. He admitted to feeling lonely when he made a visit abroad without his brother, presumably to Belgium, Switzerland, or Germany (16 Nov. 49).

In any spare moments, Verne studied ("crashingly boring but not difficult") (6 Dec. 48). After writing a dissertation in Latin he ended up with a total of two "passes" and two "distinctions." In August 1849 he mentioned to his father, rather cruelly, that the paper work had been ready for ages and that to become a lawyer he now just needed to take the oath.

The first surviving portrait of Verne dates from this time. A striking stereoscopic photograph shows a man with smooth skin and warm, intelligent eyes (*BSJV* 150:10). He boasts a wispy moustache, a roman nose from his Mediterranean ancestors, long fairish hair from his Scottish ones, and a Romantic pose that proclaims his new profession to the whole world.

Did his law studies help his writing? Stendhal claimed to read two or three pages of the *Napoleonic Code* every day to find the right tone for his writing. If culture is what remains when you've forgotten the rest, Verne seems to have merely stripped the stylistic veneer off his legal studies, for the precision of his language sometimes seems decidedly statute-like. In any case the law degree served mostly as a stepping-stone to escape his father's shadow, to avoid what he had seen at breakfast every day, to deny provinciality and religiosity. And yet Jules was sufficiently cautious, or willing to please his father, to finish it.

At this stage, he felt he stood on the brink of . . . well, he wasn't quite sure, but knew it would change his life. He was doing what every young man dreams of: finding himself and exposing himself to wider horizons.

Parrying his uncomprehending father, alternately fighting and giving in to his sensual urges, combining work and play, slipping from adolescence into precocious fame, Verne's character was complex. He himself felt clear about only three things, his incompatibility with the legal profession, his literary star, and his instinct for subversion: "Don't believe I'm having fun, for fate keeps me tied here. I may become a good writer, but only a poor lawyer as I invariably see the comic or artistic side of things, missing their precise reality" (26 Jan. 51).

Although his unconventionality, comic invention, and belief in a manifest literary destiny had failed him in Nantes, they seemed to possess some value in the capital. But he had no idea just how hard it would get.

23 Jacques Arago

At the beginning of 1851 Verne met the famous Jacques Arago (1799–1855), thanks to Evariste Colombel, mayor of Nantes and family friend (13 May *51*?). Although almost blind, Arago had had visited the Antarctic, South Seas, and the stratosphere. Among his dozens of books, *Journey Around the World* (1839), written without using the letter *a*, appeared on every bookshelf. His brother General Jean Arago had fought for Mexican independence under Santa Anna and scientist brother François Arago was a household name. Jacques Arago immediately took Jules under his wing, with the two becoming firm friends. He took him on errands around town, told him tales of adventure, and invited him home (14 Rue Mazagran), to meet the throngs of travel writers, geographers, and scientists hobnobbing there. The two even embarked on writing a play together (29 Jun. *51*).

For one July weekend that year, although "harassed and ill," Verne could not resist taking the new train to Dunkirk to see his Uncle and Aunt Auguste Allotte. Even if the trip to the "pretty little seaport, very Dutch," with friend Pitre Gouté took his last five-franc piece, he was able to write, with great satisfaction: "I have seen the North Sea" (29 Jul. *51*). From a well-to-do family, Gouté, "slightly pernickety" but "faithful in friendship," composed music with Hignard.[8] Given his lifelong obsession with travel, it

[8] Reputed to have had a dissolute youth, he wished to marry only to get rich; he showed interest in Anna Verne, but Jules advised his father against pursuing the matter (23 Mar. 55).

seems significant that Verne's first known destination lay due north, in an Arctic whaling port in a scarcely Gallic region: traditionally Flemish-speaking, the "flat country" had been French for only 20 years.

By that same 1851, Verne had written two further short stories, "The First Ships of the Mexican Navy" and "A Balloon Journey." Verne read both to Arago and submitted them to the director of the *Musée des familles*, an upscale literary and encyclopedic *Reader's Digest*, modeled on British magazines. An eight-page weekly, with a pronounced religious emphasis, it covered "manners and customs, history, nature studies . . . trade, industry, mechanics, astronomy, travel, geography, and cities," with a massive circulation of 300,000.[9] Fellow Breton, Collège Royal alumnus, and family acquaintance Pierre Chevalier had written several books on Nantes and Brittany (OD 61). Within a fortnight he accepted both stories. However, he forgot to consult about an important change to the title: as the 23-year-old writer pointed out, "The First Ships . . .: South America" should have been "North America" (29 Jul. 51).

24 Pierre Chevalier, Verne's Publisher and Collaborator

Verne's first published prose work already bears his trademark exotic setting and information overload: "On 18 October 1825, ship of the line *Asia* and eight-gun brig *Constanzia* lay off Aguijan,[10] one of the Marianas." Having got rid of the captain, a mutinous lieutenant plans to sell the *Asia* to the Mexican Revolutionaries. Surviving an avalanche, he climbs Popocatepetl, but two loyal sailors cut a bridge he is crossing, and virtue and the Spanish colonial government finally triumph. The dramatic descriptions and nautical terminology blend well with the geography, history, and inspired dialogue. But shocking racial and bestial obsessions lurk, with names for each combination of "miscegenation" between Spanish, Indians,

[9] Lottman 8; Martin, Ph. D., 574.

[10] However, the surface plausibility of some of Verne's information is misleading, for he was served by poor copyediting, perpetuated worldwide over hundreds of millions of copies. Here "Aguijan" is Guajan; and the *Constanzia* should logically be the *Constancia*; henceforth I will silently correct spelling (but not factual) mistakes by Verne and others.

and Blacks, or the offspring "of a coyote and a mulatto [or] . . . a coyote and an Indian woman" (iv).

In "A Balloon Journey," an innovative craft is launched, but a crazy stowaway takes control of the narrative, recounting a long history of aerial navigation; after a long struggle the madman falls to his death. The story, with five fine engravings, was quasi-plagiarized;[11] and shows the influence of Verne's English reading. P. Chevalier mislabeled "The First Ships" a "Historical Study," despite all the dialogue, and "A Balloon Journey," an "article."

The stories made little impact, and Verne underplayed their significance: "First Ships" was "just a simple adventure . . . in Cooper's manner" (Mar. 51). Although asking his father to resubscribe to the *Musée*, Verne got upset when rumors of fantastic payment circulated in Nantes, saying money was hardly the incentive; only much later did he actually admit the stories were unpaid.[12]

In fact these early essays, only with hindsight "the first indication of the line of novel that I was destined to follow" (*Int*. 90), did not divert Verne from his chosen path. The breakthrough of *Broken Straws* had spurred him on, aided by sibling rivalry, for Paul had put on a mime play in Martinique, capturing the hearts of the languorous young beauties (ADF 50). The older brother switched to higher gear and began to churn out three plays a year.

People meeting Verne for the first time often had an inaccurate impression, for timidity and taciturnity hid his virtues. But certain characteristics were beginning to emerge: a sardonic wit when relaxed or aroused; a preference for male companionship, combined with a strong sensuality; a homosexual leaning, that would become more pronounced in later years; a remarkable capacity for sustained work and abundant output; an ambition for his plays to reach a wide audience; and an energetic temperament allowing him to face adversity and convert crisis into opportunity.

He would never totally become Parisian, if by that we mean smoothness and superficial cosmopolitanism. However, he could already pass for an adopted Parisian, with his vivacity, culture, and freedom from convention. Honoré de Balzac pointed out that we all belong to the generation of our twenties. In 1848 a movement ran like wildfire across Europe, liberating attitudes and lifestyles, akin to 1968 for a later generation. Verne indeed shared the aspirations of the whole Romantic age, the yearning for individuality, creativity, freedom, something beyond our ken. His late-

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[11] Jacques Noiray, *Le Romancier et la machine* (Paris: Corti, 1982), 20.
[12] 29 Jun. 51; 2 Dec. 52; *Int*. 136.

Romantic, or early-modern, generation lived in the Latin Quarter village at a magical moment before that community disappeared. The new ideas had freed society from the weight of the past, but gas and steam had not yet besmirched Europe with their relentless search for productivity and their mechanization of human relationships. Verne was very much a man of 1848.

Chapter 6. Plays and Poverty: 1851–54

Like most writers, Verne attached great importance to his surroundings. Possibly in late 1850 he lived on the Right Bank, in Rue Louis le Grand, along from Talexy's salon, perhaps on a first floor.

He lived with fellow gunman Paul Perret,[1] also theoretically studying law while actually pursuing literature. Perret had an unfettered imagination, often erotic in bent. At one stage the flatmates were in danger of being dragged off to the police station on charges of breaking their courtyard windows.[2] It is not known whether their advanced legal knowledge helped them on this occasion.

In about February 1851 Verne moved into a furnished room in a hotel, possibly at 47 Rue des Martyrs[3]. He complained about his bohemian neighbors, in uproar day and night, "exactly like a public square, making me perpetually chase my ideas" (ADF 43). On Jules's request, Pierre reluctantly agreed to bankroll first his board and lodging, then a real apartment (Mar. 51).

Friend Aristide Hignard lived on the top floor of 18 Boulevard Bonne Nouvelle, at the intersection with Rue Mazagran, 50 yards from Arago's place. The boulevard area, housing most of Paris's theaters, had been created by Georges-Eugène Haussmann, as he cut broad swathes through the medieval quarters of the Right Bank. The eighth floor planed majestically "at the brain" of the block, 120 stairs up from a tobacconist's.[4] Since accommodation was available across the corridor from Hignard's, Verne moved in, on 9 April. He delightedly reigned over "a light and airy room in which I can put my ideas in order" (ADF 46), facing due south. By student standards, it was a palace, with windows on four sides, two main rooms plus an entrance cubby-hole, en-suite bathroom and kitchen, a stove, washbasin, and chest of drawers in one room, a marble chimney in the other, and a sofa for entertaining visitors. Verne proudly positioned his large work desk and modest bookshelves in the dining room.

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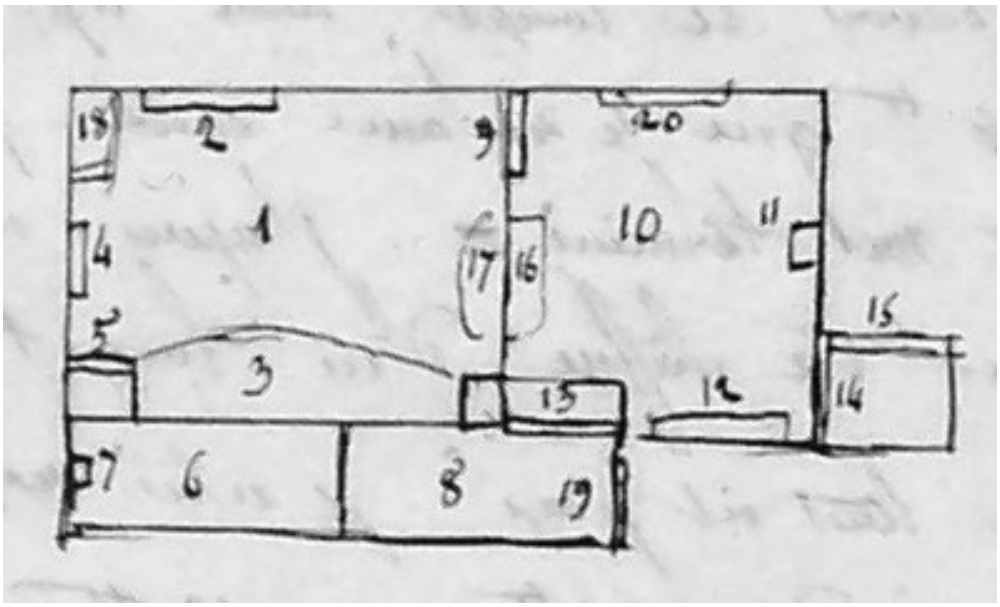
[1] 19 Sep. 96 to Perret in *BSJV* 150:6.

[2] 19 Sep. 96 to Perret in *BSJV* 150:6.

[3] The cover of *Beside the Adour* (1855) has "18 Boulevard Bonne Nouvelle," crossed out and replaced by "47 Rue des Martyrs."

[4] Mar. 51. Later, Verne mysteriously says "Incidentally, in April I'm going to live at 11 Boulevard Bonne-Nouvelle" (4 Mar. 53).



25 Verne's Floorplan of his Apartment at Bonne Nouvelle (1851)

Aunt Garcet helped buy linen and a mattress and sew his curtains.[5] He appreciated his mother's food parcels, with fruit from Chantenay, but even more the money she secretly sent him.[6] Contemplating Paris as from the top of the Pyramids (Apr. 53), Verne felt like a Napoleonic conqueror. He found room for a FF 25 pre-Revolutionary piano.[7] On either side of the chimney hung Mathilde and Anna, as he put it, facing a wrecked fishing smack in Uncle Châteaubourg's best storm-tossed style.[8]

It was not all sitting in front of a blank sheet of paper. Verne and a whole circle of friends would crowd into Hignard's rooms, musicians Massé and Talexy to work (Lemire 14), Maisonneuve and Félix Duquesnel (1832–1915) to play. Musical performances turned into baccarat sessions, the stakes escalating astronomically from 50 centimes. The young crowd would leave late, "after the curfew had sounded, slamming the door, lighting a few wax friction matches, and gaily singing poetry as they descended."[9]

Henceforth, Verne would use "we" to describe his activities, not needing to mention Hignard. Crossing the corridor one evening to write to-

[5] *3* Apr. *51*; [6 Apr. 51].
[6] JJV 22; ADF 53.
[7] 21 Sep. 53 in *Dix lettres inédites.*
[8] 21 Jun. 55; 14 Dec. 54.
[9] Bastard 339–40.

gether, Jules forgot to lock his own door. When he returned, his gold watch had disappeared. The two young men went to the police, who licked their pencils and enquired whether it was an “escapement watch.” “Not half!” Verne is meant to have exclaimed, departing with roars of laughter.[10]

When Prince-President Bonaparte seized absolute power as the self-proclaimed Emperor Napoléon III, Verne excitedly wrote of the fighting: “the shops have all shut. Barricades are going up everywhere: people are being arrested and dragged along by their hair”; “there were fierce battles at the bottom of the street, houses destroyed by cannons!”[11]

The discussions about Jules’s future dragged on for more than half a decade. He took several unambitious jobs, starting with no. 5 supernumerary clerk in Monsieur Gamard’s law office at FF 50 per month, but soon abandoned it in disgust at the exploitation. He tried working in a bank, but soon switched to private law tuition. Pierre was not amused, especially when he realized Jules had sold some of the things bought for Ancienne Comédie; the lessons soon stopped (Mar. *51*). Jules approached Monsieur Vernes [*sic*], the Protestant banker, on the pretext of a search for shared ancestors, although a job may have been uppermost in his mind (17 Jan. *52*).

In the end Pierre sent an ultimatum: Jules must either come back to Nantes for two years’ legal apprenticeship or work as a lawyer in Paris. His son responded: “a job in a law practice means 7:30 in the morning till nine at night . . . literature above all, as that’s all I can do well . . . If I practiced both . . . one . . . would win out, and . . . the bar would have a low life expectancy” (Mar. *51*).

He accepted, however, to work seven or eight hours a day for lawyer Paul Championnière (1798–1851) (Mar. *51*). Championnière had trained and practiced with Pierre back in 1825; he was distantly related to the Allottes by marriage; and he and his brother had supposedly been lampooned in Verne’s “The Savants” (ADF 42). However, before Jules could check in, Monsieur Championnière caught cholera and died, shocking the would-be lawyer: “He was the first person I knew in the prime of life who’s left us!” (*7* Apr. 51). After this bolt from the heavens, Jules Verne, Esq., abandoned the idea of any sort of work as “a litigious, quibbling hurler” (6 May 53). While continuing to sign “lawyer,” notably at his own

[10] Bastard 339.
[11] 4 Dec. 51; [6 Dec. 51].

and his sisters' weddings, he was now committed to becoming a writer—or bust.[12]

In January 1852 Pierre made one last attempt, offering Jules his entire legal practice, worth about FF 120,000 (7 Sep. 56). "Anyone else would be crazy not to jump at your offer . . . I know what I am, I understand what I may one day become . . . [The] practice . . . would just wither away" [mid-Oct. 51]. Two years later, Pierre finally gave in, sold his hard-won practice, and retired.

From about 1852 Verne began to visit the library "very often" (31 May *52*). His reading at this time included Samuel Richardson, especially *Clarissa* (1748); Balzac, in bed every evening; and two textbooks by his cousin Garcet, *New Lessons in Cosmography* (1853) and *Elements of Mechanics* (1856).[13] The resulting intellectual stimulation may have been one factor behind his slow evolution from drama to historico-geographical prose.

With Monte Cristo closed down, Dumas *fils* invited Verne several times to his home, north of the Tuileries, to eat his celebrated flambé omelets, and perhaps to work.[14] Dumas was about to announce ambitious plans for a series of novels following the Wandering Jew down through the centuries, although he would complete only the 700-page *Isaac Laquédem* (1852–53). Verne is meant to have talked of his own research and plans for a similarly multi-volume epic (RD 43). This "novel of science" would supposedly be a vast fresco, "a viaduct with a hundred arches thrown from yesterday's romanticism to tomorrow's symbolism, a simultaneously realistic and lyric work of art" (ADF 44). In this version of events, Dumas keenly supported the idea, resulting in some of Verne's early short stories. However, these three-quarters-of-a-century-old recollections of Verne as planning a "novel of science" and as a remarkably precocious precursor of symbolism are almost certainly distorted by his false reputation for anticipation—although Dumas certainly proposed some major form of collaboration, which Verne did accept [29 Apr 53].

Verne soon published a third historical story in the *Musée*, "Martin Paz" (1852). Staying with Arago for a few months was a talented Peruvian artist called Ignace Merino, founder of the Lima Academy of Fine Arts. He

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[12] Nevertheless, Verne wrote "I'm actively looking for a place, I'm going to see Ferdinand Favre" [mid-oct. 51]. Favre was a pro-Louis-Philippe politician, mayor of Nantes (1832–48 and 1852–57), and sugar-refining and shipping businessman. Verne was presumably seeking a business or law job.

[13] Aug. 52; 8 Dec. 52; ADF 64.

[14] In Rue Amsterdam. Martin, *Jules Verne*, 27; Allott 17.

had brought over with him a documentary album: Verne's locale, inspiration, and even characters came from Merino's watercolors, with the illustrations to his text also based on them. When "Martin Paz" came out, the author was "Jules Vernes": perhaps just an unfortunate slip, but an identical error occurred the following year, before being "corrected" to "Charles Verne" the year after (Lottman 38). To lose *one* wife might be careless, but to mislay an author three times . . .

According to the presentation preceding it, the story resembled Cooper's *The Spy* (1821) and *The Pioneers* (1823); it had "history, races, customs, landscapes, styles of dress . . . poignant scenes, wild tableaux, and outlandish characters." With its geographical insight and impossible love between an Indian and a Spanish woman, "Martin Paz" remains readable today. Despite its disturbing anti-Semitism ("The Jew Everywhere a Jew" who "descended from the Judas that delivered his master for 30 pieces of silver"), it revealed two of Verne's strengths: his tight narrative and dramatic scenes drawn from an inner eye. "Most people like it and just couldn't wait for the ending," he modestly wrote; in fact critical reaction was good.[15]

26 Sketch of Verne at 24

Pleased by Verne's efforts, Chevalier ordered "a very long article on *Lucia* [*di Lammermoor*]" (22 Mar. *52*), Donizetti's opera (1835), based on Walter Scott's *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1819). The importance of the command was not only that Verne added a music-criticism cord to his bow, but that the location was Edinburgh and Scotland, for Verne was soon to start a three-book series set in the same locale.[16]

That same year the *Musée* published Chevalier and Verne's comedy *Castles in California*. Literary collaboration was probably the reason the

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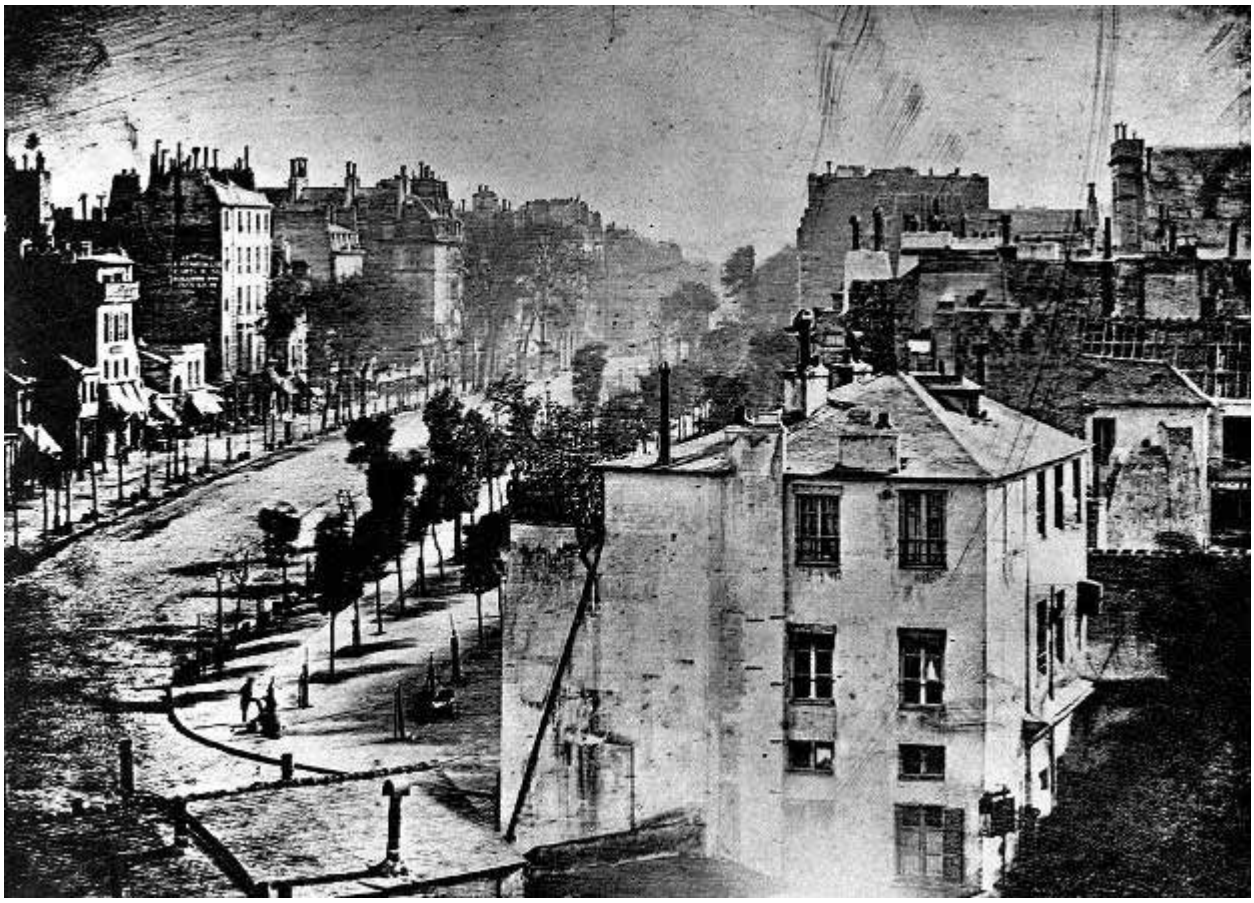
[15] 22 Aug. 52; RD 45.

[16] Verne staged Donizetti's operetta *Elisabeth* at the Lyric on 4 January 1854 in a double bill with *Blind Man's Bluff* (JD 278).

new author stayed two days with his editor in Marly.[17] The play, full of mangled proverbs, shows a disillusioned ‘49er returning from newly-American California to his conventional middle-class home, an allusion to Arago‘s adventure, but also a regret from a brief dream that Verne himself had entertained. The publisher continued his autocratic ways: for *Castles*, “what was highly annoying was that the engravings were done in advance: I had to write a text which fitted around them and add totally unnecessary characters” [Jul.? 52].

Perhaps Verne refused his father’s FF 120,000 offer because a more interesting one was in the works. At 23, he started his first real job, as secretary of the Théâtre Lyrique, under director Edmond Seveste (17 Jan. *52*). The Lyric, on the Boulevard du Temple, was the new name of the Historic Theater, of *Broken Straws* fame, built by Dumas *père* in 1847 but gone bust twice in the meantime. The position may have been thanks to Dumas’s string-pulling, for Verne met Seveste through him (JD 101). The director, however, died in February, surely making Verne think he hexed his bosses. His brother Jules Seveste took over.

[17] [Jul.? 52], cf. [29 Apr. 53].



27 Boulevard du Temple (1838 or 1839)

Verne's aim seems to have been greater visibility, by getting to know the leading authors, composers, and critics; he was indeed to meet Scribe and Auber.[18] But despite doing all the theater's donkey work virtually single-handedly, his humble job-title meant he got little credit. Although he was paid FF 100 a month (17 Jan. *52*) for the first few months—compared to diva Marie Cabel's 6,000—Jules Seveste cut this to nothing, promising in return to stage one Verne play each year; the secretary also made a few carriage trips at FF 2 per hour.[19] Verne later vehemently denied he had ever been paid (2 Dec. 52). So upset were his parents by his new position that he "forgot" to tell them that he had returned to it, presumably after the summer break.[20]

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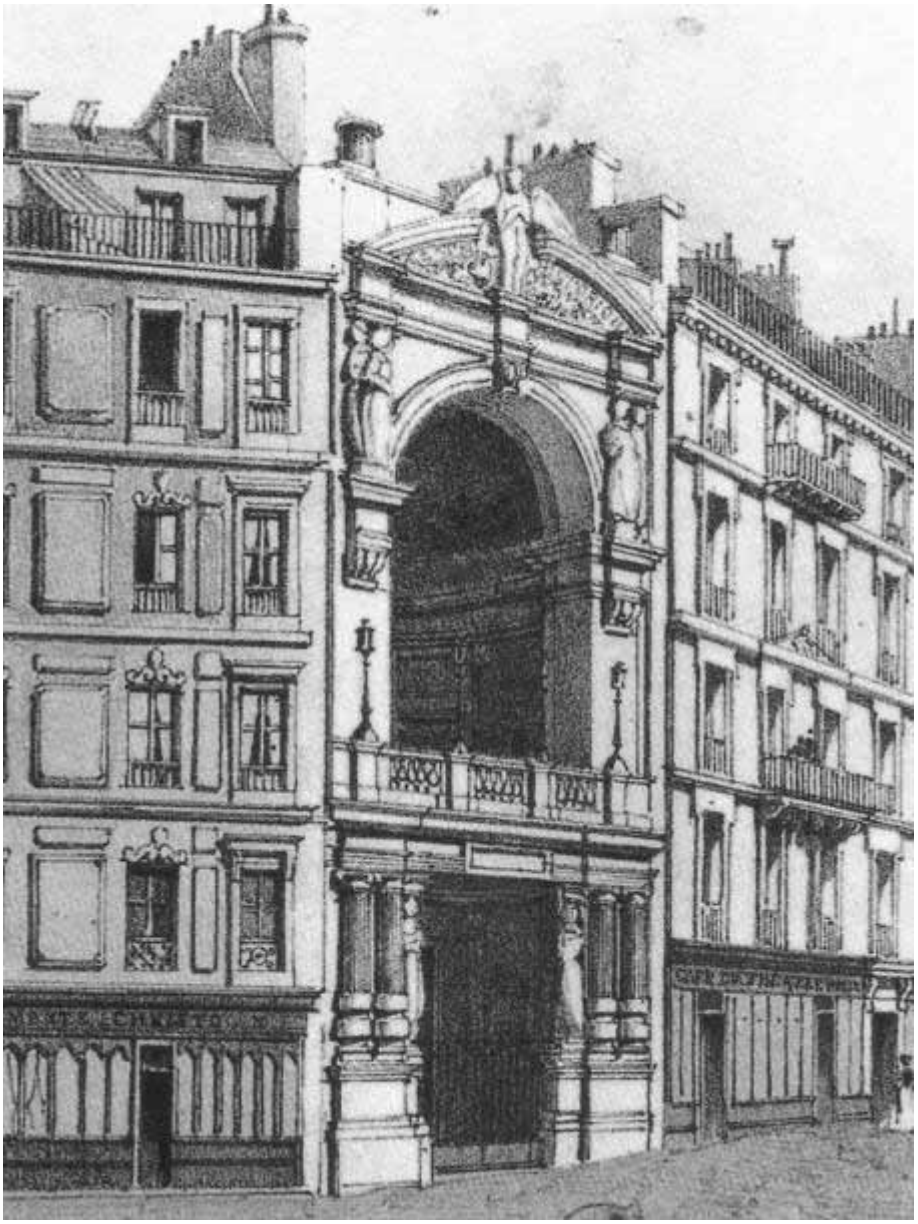
[18] If the careers of two later secretaries of the Lyric are any guide, the job carried long-term financial rewards, for both became owner-managers (JJV 22).

[19] Volker Dehs, "Nous boirons, nous rirons," *BSJV* 143:14.

[20] 8 Dec. 52, cf. 2 Dec. 52.



28 The Lyric Theater, Verne's Workplace

The secretary's work started at midday and filled his evenings (2 Dec. 52). He huddled in a dark, draughty little office on Rue Vieille du Temple, not far from his apartment and on the edge of the medieval Marais, picturesquely dank and crumbling. But he had the run of the magnificent building, with its elliptical auditorium, 2,000 seats in five tiers, enormous stage, and plush red and gold hangings (JJV 21).

29 Marie Cabel [Wikipedi fr]

Verne spent much of his time on posters, décors, complimentary tickets, contacts with critics, and settling arguments between the temperamental Belgian soprano Cabel (1827–85) and her companions and singing partner (ADF 65). According to one contemporary account, he felt cold one day and borrowed a sumptuous fake-ermine cloak from the wardrobe-master. The actors and actresses delightedly watched Jules mincing about in a superb parody of the diva. When she discovered, Cabel was not amused.[21]

30 Verne at 24

Verne got on well with his boss, with genuine mutual affection. But the theater's activities were savaged by the critics ("childish"—*Revue des deux mondes*, cited by ADF 67): although Seveste bore the brunt, the secretary was equally responsible.

In 1853, a young musician friend from Talexy's salon, Léo Delibes, later a famous composer, became accompanist and chorus master at the Lyric. After two years Verne was hoping to do something at the Odéon or Gymnase in the summer (17 May 54). To tell the truth he felt decidedly fed up with "that tiresome Lyric" (19 Apr. 54), probably because it took so much time. He tried to resign—but Seveste refused to let him go.

In June 1854, however, Seveste caught cholera in turn and died a few hours later. The hex was working overtime, compelling Verne away from any stable position. "I was very fond of him but . . . at last I'm free of the theater" [1 Jul. 54]. Legally free, perhaps, but moral pressure perhaps made him stay on as much as another 14 months (*BSJV* 143:14), and even then, he was not released without a struggle. Verne claimed that the interim director—who beat Jacques Offenbach to the position—"offered to make me theater director . . . with a share in the profits . . . I refused; I want to be free and prove what I have done."[22] Under Jules's hand, the

[21] Allott 24–25, reporting the contemporary but untraced "Haucilly," presumably du Hautcilly (or Duhaut-Cilly).

[22] Dehs, "Nous boirons," 14; [end 54].

theater had lost about FF 500 a day, about the same as his successors.[23] At the age of nearly 28, permanently broke but believing he just needed to capitalize on his previous efforts, Verne told his father he had renounced the directorship.

If it was true, Verne's double-or-quits renunciation of such a prestigious and powerful position seems distinctly rash. He may have regretted it over the next eight years.

[23] Extrapolated from figures provided by Volker Dehs, "Une 'Bonne nuit' compromise," *BSJV* 156:7–8.

31 Invitation ("Tuesday 6 July [1852] — 6.30 at Brébant's / Delioux") to the Eleven without Women, with 15 Sketches, including Verne (Center Right) [Dekiss 30]

Perhaps with the initial self-confidence gained from the Lyric, Verne founded, in 1851 or 1852, a weekly dining club called The Eleven without Women ("Les Onze sans femmes"), sworn to never admit a woman and initially drawn mostly from Talexy's musical set. The Eleven met in a pri-

vate room at the restaurant Brébant, or Café Vachette, 30 Boulevard Poissonnière, nearly next door to Verne's.[24]

Verne would play practical jokes, perform in a mini-orchestra conducted by Hignard, read out the rude parts of his letters, or recite his love poetry, possibly including a scurrilous poem sometimes attributed to him, "Lamentations of a Fanny Hair." This text runs the whole gamut of obscenity, with descriptions of urine, menstruation, crabs, cunnilingus, and venereal disease, and the passage of schoolboys, Academicians, and decrepit old men—not bedtime reading.

All eleven were struggling young musicians, writers, or painters, mostly conservative in politics. We have already met four: pianist Talexy himself, schoolmates David Pitfold and Ernest Boulanger, and rowdy serenader Charles de Béchenec, soon to work for the Lyric. The six others would make a mark in their chosen fields: comic opera virtuoso Charles Delioux, as a famous composer; art student Stop, as caricaturist on the satirical magazine the *Charivari*; Eugène Verconsin, as author of one-act comedies for salons and casinos; career civil servant Ernest L'Épine, as author of comedies with Alphonse Daudet; Henri Caspers, as author and comic librettist; and witty Parisian Philippe Gille, who had exhibited at the Salon in 1851–52, as literary editor of the *Figaro*.[25]

Others dropped in from time to time, including such familiar figures as Hignard, Massé, Maisonneuve, Lorois, and Delibes. Charles Bertall would become an illustrator and photographer, taking a picture notably of Verne himself; Henri Larochelle, director of the Porte-Saint-Martin Theater; "Bazille" (presumably François Bazin), composer for Labiche's comic operas; teenager Raymond Fournier-Sarlovèze, soldier and politician; Félix Duquesnel, stockbroker and director of the Châtelet Theater; Pierre Véron, librettist and editor of the *Charivari*; Philoxène Boyer, publicist and author; Count Henri d'Ideville, writer, diplomat, and publicist; Gustave Nadaud, author of songs later performed by Georges Brassens; and Hippolyte de Villemessant, director of the *Figaro*. By some trick of fate, all of Verne's misogynous companions, although mostly unknown then, would a generation later form a roll-call of the good and great.

However, Verne's closest friends formed a tight-knit Nantais group: Genevois, Lorois, a Charles Liton, and Pitre Gouté, with whom he had traveled to Dunkirk [end of Mar. 55].

When two good friends died, Verne was shocked. He wrote a long letter in praise of author Jules Lorin, although, or because, he had been living in sin with a married woman; Lorin had dedicated a romantic poem,

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[24] JD 102; *Int* 20.
[25] ADF 38–39, JJV 24.

"Beside the Lake," to Paul Verne. The death from consumption of ex-Nonboarder and Bachelor David Pitfold also greatly upset him (14 Mar. 53).

From his mid-twenties, Verne felt left on the shelf and lonely in Paris, where at first he had seemed so gloriously free. His provincial dream of taking the capital by storm had not worked out; and as time went on, his poverty became increasingly hard to bear. His social, sexual, and financial problems emerged in a series of letters begging his mother to find him a mate, any mate: "Marry me off, any wife you choose. I'll take her eyes shut and purse open"; "Find me a hunchbacked woman with private means . . . Jules Verne who, the devil take it, longs to marry a rich young woman"; "I don't see why in Paris society I couldn't dig up a rich young woman who's made a mistake, or might be ready to do so—and Bob's your uncle."[26] He indulged in much greater crudeness with Genevois, invariably connecting sex and diarrhea, money and love: "the bosom is important, I will admit . . . but I prefer [my wife] to have only one breast and an extra farm in Beauce, a single buttock and huge pastures in Normandy."[27]

Verne's parents still hoped to marry their eldest son in Nantes. When his mother thought she had found the perfect match—who may be the same as the "pretty little Creole face" Paul was pining after—Verne feigned horror at her origin and temperament, but exulted at her 15,000 a year private income: "a Creole! But that's marrying Vesuvius and Etna! How many Pompeiis and Herculaneums our lavas would cover . . . all the same I authorize the young . . . woman to officially request my hand."[28] He confirmed his desire, "provided my Creole agrees to come and live in Paris."[29]

Another might-have-been was a Louise François, whose parents were friends of the Tronsons. For ages and ages Jules fantasized about one girl, undoubtedly her: "Tell me about Mlle . . . What's-her-Name . . . She . . . has the privilege of being the only thing I've thought about for several months" (5 Nov. 53). Soon afterwards Louise got engaged to a fellow property owner.

Then came Laurence Janmar, the fifth in Jules's serious hopefuls and again driving him mad. A notable's daughter with private means herself,

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[26] 23 Apr. [51?]; [10? Dec. 53]; 21 Jun. 55; [19 Feb. 56].

[27] In Soriano 68–69.

[28] "Impromptu Verses" 17; 14 Mar. 53.

[29] [25 Mar. 53], extract in *Jules Verne à Dinard* (Dinard: Mairie, [2000]), 77.

probably still boarding at a Nantes convent while her parents were in Paris, Laurence possessed strikingly beauty, with alluring eyes of velvety darkness, a pale complexion, and a fine, supple, sinuous body; with an English-style deportment, she was reputed fickle and capricious.[30]

To avoid upsetting Seveste , Jules requested his father to write about urgent family business (JJV 25). He went home for a week or two at the turn of 1853–54, the main purpose being to pursue Laurence at a fancy-dress and masked ball given by Count Eugène Janvier de la Motte, precocious chief justice at the county court. Although the Count later attracted a reputation for consorting with actresses and working-class girls, this particular occasion seemed highly respectable.

Verne went in the tight-fitting eighteenth-century dandy costume once worn by womanizing Uncle Augustin Allotte. Proper dandies wore a ridiculously short jacket, top hat, and whitish mid-calf breeches. Flimsy dancing slippers and skintight stockings highlighted the soft, tight covering of every genital crack and bulge—no modest codpieces in France. Laurence came as a Spanish gypsy, flaunting her lithe body, impossibly slender waist, irresistible eyes, and rich brown ankles, despite a recent papal ban on such displays as likely to engender uncontrollable lust. Also present were her close friend, Ninette Chéguillaume, and a certain Charles Duverger.

In the middle of the ball, the dancing stopped for Jules and two friends to perform a one-act comedy of his composition, making the girls fix their eyes on the young author.[31] Jules and Laurence were getting on well when he overheard her whisper to Ninette that her whalebone corset was killing her ribs. His repartee was the pun “Oh, why can’t I have a ‘costal’ whale of a time?”—perhaps too daring for Nantes. Someone intervened, although Laurence’s eyes continued to speak volumes to Jules over Duverger’s shoulders (ADF 62).

After the ball Pierre reportedly approached Laurence’s family with a view to marriage, but without success. All the while, in Jules’s own words, Laurence had had “two irons in the fire at the same time, [making] a poor young man like Jules Verne die of love” (19 Apr. 54). Inevitably, the bewitcher soon got engaged. As the betrothal continued, Jules was still achingly yearning for her, consoling himself the marriage hadn’t been consummated yet.[32] The wedding took place in August.

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[30] Lottman 55; ADF 61.

[31] Charles-Noël Martin, “Les Amours de jeunesse de Jules Verne,” *BSJV* 29–30:103–20; ADF 61.

[32] 7 Apr. 54; 29 Apr. 54.

No. 6 came soon after. In April 1854, Verne traveled to Mortagne, a market town southwest of Paris, ostensibly to repair his health. The trip was his mother's idea, to meet "Erménégilde," daughter of Count Fernand de Bouillé, family friend and extreme reactionary (ADF 63). In Jules's description of the visit, we must, as so often, strip off the humorous exaggeration to find a mostly sincere message beneath:

> It's the perfect moment to marry me off, dearest mother . . . serve me up as succulently conjugal . . . cry me as your ware ("Try my fine son") and put me in the hands of some nice young lady with plenty of money. If necessary, I'll move to Mortagne . . . As for the daughter, she's neither pretty nor ugly, stupid nor intelligent, amusing nor disagreeable, and gives me a son or daughter every nine months as regular as clockwork . . . Don't think I'm joking: I love country life, I adore domesticity, I worship children . . . if you agree to lend a hand, I swear you'll be a grandmother by the end of the year (7 Apr. 54).

No. 7 was another raven-haired beauty, Héloïse David from Chantenay, older but still rather "naïve and guileless" (15 Jun. 56). Turning up one day at the Lyric with her father in tow, she asked for complimentary tickets. Feigning wariness at her short fuse and blatant sensuality, Jules reportedly denied all interest: "heavens above, what has Mlle Héloïse come to the capital for? A husband? Could it be me? That girl is temperamental to the eyeballs. I wouldn't be the one to get her going for all the tea in China!" (ADF 59). He duly fell in love with and paid court to Mlle David (14 Dec. 54), who shortly after got betrothed to a white-haired quinquagenarian.

No. 8 was Chantenaysian Ninette Chéguillaume. Following the portentous ball, Paul had become enamored of this friend of Laurence and of sister Anna, eight years his junior, and very well off. Pierre received a discreet overture from her cotton-merchant father—who seemed in fact to prefer the older brother! Jules declared himself only too keen to pursue the matter, and sent choice Lyric tickets to "the father of young Ninette (his young Ninette!)."[33] Verne may even have been interested in another Mlle Chéguillaume, as he seemed strangely upset by the very existence of Ninette's brother-in-law (21 Jun. 55).

Ninette's flightiness was to prove even more damaging than Laurence's, for a year later Chéguillaume reactivated his plan to marry off his daughter. After all the usual procedures had been gone through, the formal engagement of Paul and Ninette was announced with appropriate pomp. The only condition was that Paul had to resign his naval commis-

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[33] [Jun. 55]; 21 Jun. 55.

sion. When he did so and returned in May 1857, his bride-to-be had changed her mind—leaving poor Paul with no wife and no career (JJV 48).

No. 9, with Sophie as perpetual go-between, was a long shot called Pauline(?)[34] Méry, "as brilliant a match as Ninette," apparently on the rebound, but worth a go on an all-or-nothing basis: "drive to her family . . . and ask for the young lady's hand on my behalf. They'll immediately ring for a servant, who'll show you to the door" [Nov.? 55].

As Jules dispiritedly exclaimed, "all the girls I honor with my munificence marry soon after!" (14 Dec. 54). Every single bit of skirt he glimpsed, such as Eloïde and Pauline Bourgoin at Uncle Prudent's, left "many regrets and little hope!"[35] Just the first league, without mentioning the quickly extinguished flames, read impressively, as the years tolled out the successive blows to Verne's hopes: Caroline, 1847; Angèle, 1848; Herminie, 1848; Louise, 1853; Laurence, 1854; "Erménégilde," 1854; Héloïse, 1854; Ninette, 1855; Pauline, 1855. Nine serious attempts, nine degrading rebuffs.

Jules clearly felt frustrated at his repeated failures, especially as by 28 no liaison whatsoever with a girl was recorded. He cynically considered that girls at balls dreamed of many simultaneous suitors (17 Apr. 53). In the same vein, marriage, joyless sex, and adultery melded, as he wrote ribaldly to Genevois:

> you're now about to get married . . . it is a great b . . . You will certainly get a stomach . . . can you then rest on top for 12 consecutive hours . . . or is the wife able to remain on top for a set amount of time? . . . You'll be beaten by your wife . . . In case . . . I was forced to play . . . the role of a consoler I beg you to choose her brunette and well endowed.
>
> The lover of a married woman saves on a servant and two maids.[36]

After all his heartbreaking disappointments, Jules would systematically associate, in both his life and works, nuptials and last rites, virginal white and mourning black, loss of maidenhood and loss of life. As just one example, when his doctor and friend Victor Marcé got hitched: "I went to Saint-Germain des Prés for the interment. I must admit I was singularly moved when the funeral procession arrived" (17 Apr. 56).

One contemporary solution was to pay for sex. Verne wrote as a fine connoisseur to Genevois about the brothels of the boulevard area:

> You also seem to believe I don't make any conquests! Ungrateful wretch! Have you forgotten the best houses of the Rue d'Amboise or Rue Montyon

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[34] Mlle Pauline Méry of Nantes (1835–71) married a . . . Chéguillaume, Joseph-Paul-Auguste (1825–97), in Nantes in 1854.

[35] "Impromptu Verses" 17.

[36] 5 Nov. 54 in *BSJV* 151:10; Alain Genevois, *Annales*, 15.

> where I'm received like the family darling (what am I saying), the spoilt child of the family! Am I not loved for myself, when I have the chance to waste a few score francs there.[37]

In other words, Verne regularly visited at least two brothels, conveniently around the corner from Boulevard Poissonnière.

The names were immediately familiar to any Parisian. Since at least the eighteenth century, such establishments had represented discretion and "decency . . . actresses, dancers, and courtesans of the first order." All-in-one packages of dinner and accommodation were available in Amboise; and a certain Mme Blondy kept a house on Boulevard Bonne Nouvelle for a wide range of purses, with "girls and women, French and foreign, reasonable and over the hill."[38] What was more, the second floor of the seventeenth-century mansion at 8 Rue d'Amboise was a well-known brothel inhabited by Toulouse-Lautrec from about 1893, where he painted 16 of his most celebrated works. In that year indeed he produced the fur-coated, redheaded *Madame de Gortzikoff*, the elegant poster silhouette of *Le Divan japonais*, and the cancanning *Jane Avril*. It seems unlikely Jules watched the same Venetian blond putting back her bun as in Toulouse-Lautrec's mature *Femme de maison refaisant son chignon*. But we can dream that he contemplated the same garish wallpaper, imprinted the same double bed as in *Dans le lit*, or gazed postcoitally through the same double windows as the *Femme à sa fenêtre*.

Despite the release afforded by commercial sex, Verne's urges seem to have been blocked so long as to be displaced from their normal locus, his only clear interest in the erogenous zones implying an infantile regression and ambiguous sexuality: "I saw His Highness the Prince Imperial, and his wet nurse, very pretty; I would have loved to have changed places—with the wet nurse I mean" [27 Jun. 56].

In a preliminary stage of perversion, he planned, in unmistakably vulgar terms, the defilement of Great-Aunt Charruel: "we'll have to take her by assault . . . seize her demilunes . . . fire the cannon on the day of the capitulation." When playing a piano whose color and discordance approached hers, he continued, "I sometimes even imagine I'm touching the excellent aunt, a woman who is hardly touched any more; the comparison particularly disgusts me when I play down there."[39] The crudeness, in a letter to his mother, betrayed the depths of his sexual disturbance.

Procreation, which most of the belles engaged in within a year of captivating his enraptured gaze, may also have been tarred with the same

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[37] Soriano 69 ; the letter is from about 1854.
[38] J. Dillon, *Les Bordels de Paris* (Paris, 1790).
[39] 21 Sep. 53 in *Dix lettres inédites.*

brush. Certainly, when he reluctantly agreed to meet Caroline, he made a characteristic dig about her numerous children: “I’ll be as nice as my peculiar character permits . . . it seems [she]’s slightly less pregnant than usual” (6 May 53).

Trawling fashionable salons for a mate got him little further (RD 50). But often the light is darkest near the end of the tunnel. As his bachelor friends dwindled—”One more down!”; “only [Paul and me] left”—he announced plans to leave “for Amiens, as my friend [Auguste] Lelarge is marrying Mlle Aimée de Viane. I’ll be away for two days.”[40]

[40] [Mar. 56]; [27 Mar. 56]; [18 May 56] in ADF 69.