

De la terre a la lune

J. Verne

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I remember reading it in a Swedish translation as a child not without some pleasure and excitement. In fact so much of it that now I to turn to the French original with some expectations. But when rereading it I am surprised that I could have derived any satisfaction from it all back then. For one thing it contains long tedious passages I certainly could not have enjoyed as a child, (but maybe those were excised in the Swedish translation and editing, after all those who translated books for children and youth took great liberties in their translations ostensible to serve the potential readers well) and then it ends rather abruptly and anti-climactically with a cannon ball in orbit around the Moon. Anti-climactic unless meant as a cliff hanger with an inevitable sequel? In fact there is a sequel. And if so my version must have combined both into something more readable and rounded off with a satisfying conclusion.

But what do I remember? For one thing the city of Baltimore, of which I had not heard before, and in fact ever since that city has been imbued with a certain fondness in my memory, totally undeserved no doubt. Another thing which stands out in my memory is the reported rivalry between the people designing more and more powerful cannons and those who design protective sheaths against their onslaughts. This is about all I am able to recall.

Verne has a fondness for numbers and facts which may almost be seen as touching. Those also gives to the story a degree of reality in spite of the fantastic event it chronicles. This is of course the base of the fascination with science fiction. That when the ordinary and mundane is extrapolated, incredible things ensue. And apart from that it provides a didactic opportunity to teach his readers about the distance to the Moon, favorable windows for a shot at it, as well as the necessary speed required.

Does this book contain anything of interest? If so it must be of so called period interest. That the Moon has no atmosphere and is an inhospitable region to life ought to have been known in the mid 1860's, and the knowledge is of course hinted at, yet the main characters are shown to believe that the moon would be a world not that different from our own. Then how would that projectile land on the moon, and how would they go back? Nothing of this is is discussed, but maybe it does not have to, after all a piece of fiction is meant as an exercise of withholding judgment. On the other hand given the realistic approach, in which problems are displayed in some detail, be it spurious, one wonders why. After all the main architect of the enterprise comes up with an elaborate way using water to soften the sudden impact of the caused by the strong change of speed caused by the forceful expulsion out of the cannon. Which would of course not have been sufficient to ameliorate the destructive forces of the rapid acceleration. The method of travel displayed is of course impossible, but that only adds retroactively to the quaintness of the book.

The setting is just after the Civil War and as a reader you are made privy to the lay of the land at that time, how much was still wilderness and unexploited, such as the southern

part of Florida, just boasting one small town - Tampa - and the surrounding country still having 'wild' Indians roaming around. It is a nice touch to realize that in the future the launching pads for American rockets would be in Florida - Cap Canaveral - maybe for reasons actually given in the book.

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