

 **BIBIANA** - International House of Art for Children

VERNE'S STORIES



BY KAREL ZEMAN

BIBIANA - International House of Art for Children
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JULES VERNE IN THE WORK OF KAREL ZEMAN

"I must admit that even in my youth I fell under the spell of the prophetic imagination of the famous French author... That is why as a film-maker I often wondered how it would be possible to film Verne's novels in such a way as not to lose the charm of their fantastical world, which still dazzles his readers, in spite of the fact that the rapid development of technology has in many ways outstripped his utopias...

In the course of time, I came to the conclusion that the attraction of Verne's novels arises in part from the romantic, fantastic nature of his tales of adventure, combined with very clear artistic images, which the original illustrators of his novels - Riou, Bennet and others - managed to evoke in the minds of his readers. This was achieved mainly with woodcuts and steel engravings, which in Verne's time, and for a long time after, served the same purpose as today's photographs. The illustrations were, then, an inseparable part

of the best. He is a writer with imagination, moral feeling and an excellent sense of humour, every page of his works is packed with inspiration. Whoever reads him feels proud to be a human being... He is simply fascinating and his novels will lose nothing in value for as long as it is necessary to bring boys up to be real men, honest, full of courage and enthusiasm."

"For many generations of readers Jules Verne is a symbol of romance and of daring fantasy. And in his novels we find above all respect for human values, for spiritual strength, for self-sacrifice and a sense of justice." This is how Karel Zeman rounded off the words of Ray Bradbury.

Of particular interest and importance to us is the fact that in the science fiction genre, one of whose inventors was Jules Verne, Zeman sensed an artistic sphere that had a close affinity with his own creative work.

The ability to "open" with the key of the imagination the most complicated problems of human life, to touch on profound levels of moral behaviour and social relations, to create universal characters, types - it is these ancient merits of the fantasy world that are fully made use of by contemporary literary imagination. And Karel Zeman seemed to have foreseen its promising future, its social and artistic significance. He did not agree with those who considered Jules Verne to be an out-of-date and naïve writer.

It is very interesting that in this respect his opinions and assessments concur with the opinions of a great expert and one of the leading representatives of contemporary science fiction, Ray Bradbury. When journalists asked him who his favourite science fiction author was and why, Bradbury answered: "Jules Verne, because he was one of the first and even today he is one

of Verne's novels. And thus I became convinced that my film version of Verne must be based not only on the spirit of the work itself, but also at the same time on the characteristic form of the original illustrations, with the appearance of the engravings outwardly preserved."

"Ever since I was a child I was fascinated by films as the art of our age. It is the most beautiful creative activity I can imagine. Animated films have enabled me to seek a way of expressing the world of motion and to find new worlds of fantasy, worlds which no other art form can offer the creator."

"My vocation is to think through images. Just as the painter has his paints, brushes and canvas, I have my optical equipment, light, technical media. I believe in films and in their ability to thrill and to teach people how to live. That is, of course, possible in any field that depends on the work of talented and honest creative artists. I personally was fascinated by Georges Méliés, who at the very beginnings of cinematography discovered a principle which made it possible to express

rare things. Sailing under the sea, flying in space, simply anything at all..."

"A good film fairytale can hope to discover a large part of the world, it becomes a good-will mission, a visiting card of our culture, it propagates our ideas, which fall on the fertile soil of children's hearts."

To have imagination is one thing, but to know how to give it to others is not granted to everyone. Karel Zeman was one of those to whom this was granted. It was imagination, boyish curiosity, a wonderful feeling for narration and a technical talent accompanied inevitably by a little good luck that led Karel Zeman, originally a draughtsman and window dresser, to film advertising in Baf'a's studios in Zlín and resulted in him looking for new possibilities for the art of films at the beginning of the nineteen forties. To be more exact, developing the possibilities which others before him had hinted at elsewhere in the world. He based his work on national artistic and generally cultural traditions.

Karel Zeman was one of those inventors whose interest in technology and technical progress was inseparable from art. His technical experiments were never made simply for their own sake, they always served an artistic purpose. His aim was not to astound his viewers with them, but to use them to tell his film story in the most effective way possible. They were always an integral part of the structure of his work and its poetic expression, which they helped to create, poetic expression that is born of fantasy and serves the narrator - no matter whether he is telling a fairytale or a romantic adventure story.

Jules Verne had been Zeman's favourite writer ever since he was a child and his novels occupied his mind for many years. Zeman discovered the Verne of his films over a long period of time and in his own way. He considered the writer's works to be wise tales of the new age, whose realisation on the film screen was no easy matter. He devoted half his life and work to carrying out this aim.