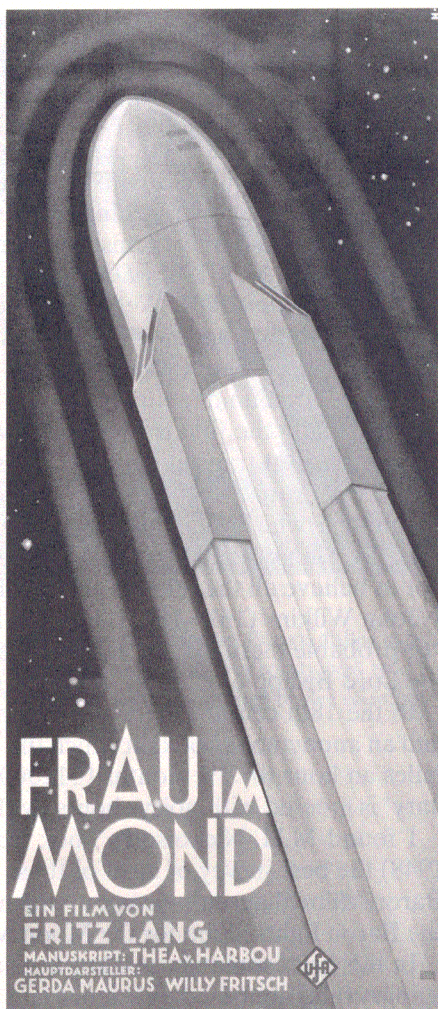


Title 184

Science fiction films are as popular as science fiction books, particularly if they deal with space travel to the Moon. Georges Méliès, the French film pioneer since 1896 and the first ever to film any fiction, had by 1902 made the first film of this genre, *Le Voyage dans la Lune* using Jules Verne's canon propulsion. By 1928 Fritz Lang's film *Frau im Mond* used rocket propulsion thanks to theoretical work by Oberth and others. *Poster design by Alfred Hermann, courtesy foundation Deutsche Kinemathek.*



La fonte. (Page 91.)



Title 184

Producing a giant **Vertical Canon** to fire a manned projectile to the Moon must have exercised the mind of Jules Verne for some time, or it was perhaps the engraver who found the answer. A very large circle of 30 independent foundries had to be established as well as the underground mould and central mandril, before at a given signal the molten metal would be allowed to flow down the slope simultaneously from all sides. *Engraving signed: Pannemaker – Doms jè. Author's Collection.*

Although, while in the USA, I did not have much spare time while writing my reports and looking after the inevitable household chores, like car hire, motel bookings, clean laundry and so on, my thoughts returned often to the predictions of the many writers who had forecast how man would reach the Moon and what he would find and do there. I had collected many of their books, read and remembered much.

These tales kept the dream alive through the centuries until I was privileged to see the Apollo's crew reaching the Moon. Some of the NASA scientists and engineers told me that they themselves had been inspired in their youth, particularly by Jules Verne's (1823-1905) *De la Terre a la Lune* 1865, and by H.G. Wells' *The first Man in the Moon* 1901. Wells used the fictitious anti-gravity substance 'Carvorite' for his flight and found intelligent ants on the Moon. Verne was wrong to use a cannon [see Title 176] but was wise to choose Florida for the launch, the ocean for return, the Moon uninhabited.

Historically the first to speculate, was Lucian of Samosata (about 125-190 AD) and the earliest translation into English I could buy was his *True Histories*, a book printed in Oxford in 1664. He described how travellers in a great sailing ship were caught in a 'whirlwind' and after seven days came to the Moon. There they fought, with the Men of the Moon against the Men of the Sun. Lucian warned his readers not to believe all the tales of his travellers.

John Wilkins (1614-1672) stated in his *The Discovery of a new World* 1638, that "tis probable there may be another Habitable World in the Moon". As Wilkins was the Lord Bishop of Chester, his book gained a wide readership.

In the 18th century there were many maps of the Moon based on observations and an anonymous book, in which the unknown author described travelling at 1000 miles an hour for 8½ months (6120000 miles!) and on reaching the 'nearest luminary' is greeted with noisy shouts by the Men of the Moon.

I found M.H. Nicholson's book *Voyages to the Moon* (MacMillan, New York 1948) the best survey of most of these imaginary voyages, although she left out the Baron Münchhausen's voyage—which is in fact an exact plagiarism of Lucian's, but the Baron fights alone for the Moon Men.

In this brief summary, Arthur C. Clarke must not be forgotten, although his imaginary tales are based on science and on the far future. May they be more accurate predictions than those of previous authors, none of whom, except Jules Verne in some details, got anywhere near the true facts. These books were inspiring and they served to remind us of our destiny, they kept the dream alive until science and technology were ready to make it come true.