

Masonry in 19th Century Science Fiction: Journey into the Earth

Jules Verne is noted as an author, poet, playwright and is often bestowed with the title “father of science fiction.”

His Masonic heritage however, is hinted at only; what can be assumed is that some knowledge of the craft was available to him. His relationship with notable Freemason, Jean Mace’ is well documented and is referenced in Verne’s ‘20,000 Leagues Under the Sea’ where a novel by Mace’s finds its way into the story. Verne also had a close relationship with the Dumas family; Alexander Dumas having helped his first play get published. Dumas also is unconfirmed as a Mason; however, refers to Masonry explicitly in novels such as the ‘Count of Monty Christo.’

The tenuous leap that Verne was in fact a Mason is not needed to find Masonic allegory in his collected work. In ‘A Journey to the Centre of the Earth’ published in 1864, the most shared interpretation of the volume is that it is an allegory for going within the unconscious self and emerging transformed.

With this line of thought, there are certain conclusions which can be made about the human psyche according to Verne. The way to the center of the earth was revealed when, after days of cloud cover until the sun appeared and lit the path forward. Then, as the party made their way deeper below the surface, danger upon danger beset them, and only deep thought and decisive action could overcome these obstacles. Finally the journey coming to conclusions about the beginning of Man after seeing giant proto-humans before they are violently expelled from the most inner reaches of Earth and escape for the better.

As Masons the concept of betterment through self-reflection is referenced in not only the initial degrees but found in other Rites found in Masonry, as is the concept of finding what was lost.

Using the Journey to the Center of the Earth as a Masonic Lens and assuming Verne intended his work to be mediums for the transmission of Masonic ideals we can likely agree with the allegory that the Journey to the Center of the Earth is reflective of the delving into the unconscious mind and freeing it from vices and basal desires to emerge changed.

One could agree that the interpretations of the text are incomplete without Masonic study that the allusions of self-betterment through self-reflection and faith are too easy to align; however, the allegory of death and rebirth is more exactly fit upon the story. Through the Lens of the first three degrees in masonry we can trace a masonic journey through the novel. Entering in darkness as candidate, finding faith as Axel, the young nephew, finds himself alone, buried under the earth and with a failing lantern. “When I saw myself thus wholly cut off from human succor, incapable of attempting anything for my deliverance, I thought of heavenly succor...I began to pray, little as I deserved that God should know me when I had forgotten Him so long; and I prayed fervently.”

Finding resolution in prayer Axel makes a determined procession to find his companions, finding himself in the dark and descending rapidly he finds his head struck as he falls and assumes himself dead. An unknown amount of time passes and Axel awakens in the light with his party tending to his care.

This awaking is directly before the proto-humans or beastly ancient humans are seen but not engaged and eventually the party finds themselves ejected from the earth, reborn from the chthonic womb of the earth in a violent apotheosis.

Some with interest in esoteric masonic thought might look to the interplay of light and dark, the Masculine and Feminine elements and how they drive the story forward; however, those with a new found interest in Masonry or better still newly made Master Masons might find their path emulated in the story of the three intrepid travelers; the youthful nephew, the journeyman eiderdown hunter, and the wise old geologist.

Upon completion of “Journey to the Center of the earth,” for other stories of delving into the earth with clear Masonic resonance I suggest Etidorpha by Dr. John Uri Lloyd (1895), which is easily found for free. The pseudo-scientific novel uses the kidnapping of William Morgan and the start of the Anti-Masonry movement as well as other Masonic references and allegory to the craft such as the passage below.

“The secret workers in the sacred order of which you are still a member, have ever taken an important part in furthering such a system of evolution. This feature of our work is unknown to brethren of the ordinary fraternity, and the individual research of each secret messenger is unguessed, by the craft at large. Hence it is that the open workers of our order, those initiated by degrees only, who in lodge rooms carry on their beneficent labors among men, have had no hand other than as agents in your removal, and no knowledge of your present or future movements.”