

**INTRODUCTION TO FILM**  
GEORGE MELIES *A TRIP TO THE MOON*

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ PERIOD \_\_\_\_\_

BASED ON THE INFORMATION FROM THE TEXT:

1. **WHERE DID GEORGE MELIES STUDY IN PARIS?**
2. **WHAT IS CONSIDERED BY THE AUTHOR TO BE MELIES' PRINCIPLE CONTRIBUTION TO CINEMA?**
3. **WHAT EFFECT DID MELIES' JAMMED CAMERA HAVE ON FILM?**
4. **WHAT DID MELIES DISCOVER IN THE OCCURRENCE OF HIS JAMMED CAMERA?**
5. **WHAT FILM TECHNIQUES DID MELIES PIONEER?**
  - A.
  - B.
  - C.
6. **WHAT AWARD FROM FRANCE DID MELIES RECEIVE FOR HIS CONTRIBUTION TO CINEMA?**
7. **WHAT STORIES AND AUTHORS WERE THE BASIS FOR MELIES' *A TRIP TO THE MOON*?**
  - A.
  - B.
8. **WHERE DOES THE OPENING SCENE OF MELIES' *A TRIP TO THE MOON* TAKE PLACE?**
9. **IN MELIES' *A TRIP TO THE MOON*, WHAT IS THE GROUP TOLD THEY WILL WITNESS IF THEY ASCEND TO THE ROOF?**
10. **IN MELIES' *A TRIP TO THE MOON*, WHERE DOES THE ROCKET SHIP FIRST LAND?**

11. **IN MELIES' *A TRIP TO THE MOON*, HOW DOES PHEBUS PUNISH THE TRAVELERS?**
  
12. **IN MELIES' *A TRIP TO THE MOON*, WHO ARE THE MOON INHABITANTS?**
  
13. **WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE MOON INHABITANTS ARE TOUCHED IN MELIES' *A TRIP TO THE MOON*?**
  
14. **ULTIMATELY, WHAT HAPPENS TO THE PRESIDENT IN MELIES' *A TRIP TO THE MOON*?**

# GEORGE MELIÈS



Maries Georges Jean Méliès was born in Paris in 1861 and from a very early age he showed a particular interest in the arts which led, as a boy, to a place at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris where Méliès showed particular interest in stage design and puppetry.

In 1884, Méliès continued his studies abroad, in London at the request of his parents - they insisted he learn English after which they intended him to work at his father's footwear business. While in London, he developed a keen interest in stage conjury after witnessing the work of Maskelyne and Cooke.

On his return to Paris he worked at his father's factory and took over as manager when his father retired. His position meant that he was able to raise enough money to buy the famous Theatre Robert Houdin when it was put up for sale in 1888.

From that point on Méliès worked full time as a theatrical showman whose performances revolved around magic and illusionist techniques which he studied while in London as well as working on his own tricks.

When the Lumière brothers unveiled their Cinématographe to the public on December 28 1895 Méliès was a member of the audience. What he witnessed clearly had a profound effect upon him. After the show he approached the Lumière Brothers with a view to buying their machine - they turned him down.

Determined to investigate moving pictures, Méliès sought out Robert Paul in London and viewed his camera - projector building his own, soon afterwards. He was able to present his first film screening on April 4th 1896.

Méliès began by screening other peoples films - mainly those made for the Kinetoscope but within months he was making and showing his own work, his first films being one reel, one shot views lasting about a minute.

Méliès' principle contribution to cinema was the combination of traditional theatrical elements to motion pictures - he sought to present spectacles of a kind not possible in live theatre.

In the autumn of 1896, an event occurred which has since passed into film folklore and changed the way Méliès looked at filmmaking. Whilst filming a simple street scene, Méliès camera jammed and it took him a few seconds to rectify the problem. Thinking no more about the incident, Méliès processed the film and was struck by the effect such an incident had on the scene - objects suddenly appeared, disappeared or were transformed into other objects.

Méliès discovered from this incident that cinema had the capacity for manipulating and distorting time and space. He expanded upon his initial ideas and devised some complex special effects.

He pioneered the first double exposure (*La caverne Maudite*, 1898), the first split screen with performers acting opposite themselves (*Un Homme de tete*, 1898), and the first dissolve (*Cendrillon*, 1899).

Méliès tackled a wide range of subjects as well as the fantasy films usually associated with him, including advertising films and serious dramas. He was also one of the first filmmakers to present nudity on screen with “*Après le Bal*”.

Faced with a shrinking market once the novelty of his films began to wear off, Méliès abandoned film production in 1912. In 1915 he was forced to turn his innovative studio into a Variety Theatre and resumed his pre-film career as a Showman.

In 1923 he was declared bankrupt and his beloved Theatre Robert Houdin was demolished. Méliès almost disappeared into obscurity until the late 1920's when his substantial contribution to cinema was recognized by the French and he was presented with the Legion of Honour and given a rent free apartment where he spent the remaining years of his life.

Georges Méliès died in 1938 after making over five hundred films in total - financing, directing, photographing and starring in nearly every one.

## A TRIP TO THE MOON



● Voyage dans la Lune, *Le/A Trip to the Moon* (France, 1902), the screen's first science fiction story, was a 14 minute masterpiece, created by imaginative French director and master magician Georges Melies (1861-1938) in his version of the Jules Verne story. [The silent film's plot was inspired by Jules Verne's *From the Earth to the Moon* (1865) and H. G. Wells' *First Men in the Moon* (1901). Melies wrote the whimsical script, acted in the film in the lead role, designed the sets and costumes, directed, photographed, and produced the film!] As a film pioneer and producer of over 500 short films, he made up and invented the film medium as he directed. The sets or scenery backdrops in the film are simple, painted flats. It has all the elements that characterize the science-fiction genre: adventurous scientists, a futuristic space voyage, special effects such as superimpositions, and strange aliens in a far-off place.

The primitive, nostalgia-inducing film, composed of approximately thirty scenes (or skits) opens in a scientific meeting/congress of a French astronomical society - the Astronomic Club. The astronomers enter and are given their telescopes by six female assistants/menservants. A white-bearded, academic professor named Professor Barbenfouillis (Georges Melies himself), the president of the society, enters and takes his chair, and explains to the members of his plan for an exploratory trip to the moon. On a blackboard behind him with a basketball-looking Earth and a small moon in the upper right hand corner, he illustrates how a rocket will be fired from Earth from a great space gun toward the lunar surface.

His scheme is approved by many, but one member violently objects. When order is finally restored after the president throws his papers and books at the dissenter's head, the trip proposed by the president is voted upon. Five learned men/explorers make up their minds to go with him. The female assistants/menservants bring traveling suits for them to change into.

The five men who accompany the president arrive at the interior of a workshop where smiths, mechanics, carpenters and inventors construct the projectile rocket ship for the mission. One of the clumsy astronomers falls backwards into a tub of nitric acid. The group is told that if they ascend to the roof where the foundry will cast the space-gun, they will witness "a splendid spectacle" - the casting of the cannon. They climb onto the roof from a ladder, where against the horizon they see chimneys belching volumes of smoke. Suddenly, a flag is hoisted, and at the signal, the mass of molten steel is directed from the furnace into the mold for the cannon. The molding process produces flames and vapors, causing the enthusiastic astronomers to rejoice.

On the tops of the roofs of the town, pompous preparations have been made. At the launch site, the rocket shell is in position, ready to receive the travelers. The travelers

arrive - they respond and reply to the acclamations of the crowd and then enter the steel-riveted shell (their space vehicle). A scantily-clad female assistant closes the door behind them. Many more female assistants/gunners push the shell up an incline into the mouth of the cannon - and it is closed. Everyone anxiously awaits the signal to start the shell on its voyage to the moon - viewed in the far distance. An officer gives the signal for a man on a ladder to ignite the gun. The rocket shell is fired out of a monstrous iron cannon pointed into space.



As the hollow, bullet-shaped shell moves through space, the moon approaches [in a sophisticated, multi-plane process shot] and is magnified. As in a fairy tale, it turns out to be a huge smiling face of "colossal dimensions" - it is one of the most recognizable images in film history. The rocket ship shell moves closer and closer to the moon, and then crashes into the pie-face, smack into the right eye of the Man in the Moon. Extremely unreal but very memorable, when the human-faced moon grimaces. After "landing," the scientists' team steps onto the desolate lunar surface through the shell's door, delighted by the unfamiliar landscape marked by craters. Against the moon's horizon, the visitors from another planet

(dressed in Victorian garb) look back and see the Earth slowly rising into space. [The illusion of its rising is created by the descent of some of the backdrops.] As they are about to explore, a violent explosion (volcanic?) sends them in all directions. To rest their fatigued bodies after a "rough trip," they stretch themselves out on the ground under blankets.

As they sleep, seven gigantic stars slowly appear in the blackness behind them. Out of the center of each of the stars emerges the face of a beautiful woman. All seem annoyed by the presence of the intruders on the Moon. The astronomers see passing comets and meteors in their dreams. Then, the stars are replaced by a lovely vision of Phebus on a crescent moon, of Saturn in his globe surrounded by a ring, and of two charming young girls holding up a star. By order of Phebus, they punish the terrestrials by causing a snowstorm, covering the ground with a white blanket of snow. The unfortunate voyagers wake up half-frozen in the cold. They decide without hesitation, and in spite of the danger, to descend into the interior of a great moon crater for shelter. They disappear, one by one, as the storm rages.

In the lunar underground kingdom, the scientists arrive at a mysterious grotto filled with enormous mushrooms of every kind. One of them opens his umbrella to compare its size to the mushroom, but the umbrella suddenly takes root and transforms itself into a mushroom and soon grows to gigantic proportions. Strange beings making contortions, moon inhabitants (Selenites - acrobats from the Folies Bergere), emerge from under the mushrooms. One of the fantastic beings rushes at one of the astronomers who defends himself with his umbrella. With a jab of the umbrella, the creature bursts into a thousand

pieces in a puff of smoke. A second creature suffers the same fate from the explorers/colonizers.

After taking flight, the terrified astronomers are captured when overwhelmed by large numbers of moon people. The group of terrestrials are bound and taken to the palace of the King of the moon people. On his planet's splendid throne, the King is surrounded by living stars. President Barbenfouillis makes a dash at the King of the Selenites, picks him up, and violently dashes him to the ground, causing him to burst like a bombshell. Although pursued, all of them manage to defend themselves, reduce their fragile adversaries to dust with a whack from an umbrella, and escape back to the rocket ship shell - a dissolve moves from one scene to the next.

The astronomers shove themselves into the rocket's interior - all except for the President, who is left behind - outside the shell. To propel it back to Earth, he climbs down a rope that hangs from the front of the shell. His weight as he slides down the rope gives the rocket enough impetus to cause it to fall off the edge of the moon. One of the Selenites hangs on the flat end of the projectile and accompanies it on the trip as the rocket drops in space and falls "down" to Earth. The brief journey is a vertical tumble through space. The shell falls rapidly and splashes into the sea - the Atlantic Ocean. It continues down to the bottom of the ocean, where seaweed, jellyfish, live lizards (?) and a sunken boat appear. The shell balances and rights itself, and then slowly rises to the surface due to the "hermetically-sealed air in its interior." Its movement upward puzzles the fishes. The shell is rescued, picked up by a steamer, and towed to a French port. The scientists are greeted by a general ovation/grand march for their happy return and decorated as heroes.