2012

From Global North to Global South

Rachel Haywood Ferreira
Iowa State University, rachelhf@iastate.edu

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From Global North to Global South

Abstract
Globalization and science fiction are reflected—and refracted—in the globalization of science fiction. Much of my work on early Latin American sf has examined the great degree to which science fiction is and has long been a global genre, read and written around the world, forming a planet-spanning continuity—or, to use Damien Broderick's terminology, a “megatext web” made up of “collective intertextualities” (“Megatext,” The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction. Online. 18 Aug. 2012). Yet I am constantly tripping over ways in which sf is not global or at least not so global as I had unconsciously slipped into assuming it was.

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SYMPOSIUM ON SF AND GLOBALIZATION

381

stories. Thus, the sf genre becomes a type of proverbial toolbox that can be used by writers of all cultures. Some of the best-known representatives of this trend, perhaps because they write in English, are Nalo Hopkinson, Amitov Ghosh, and Karen Tei Yamashita, to cite only a few, but I think the practice extends to writers all over the globe, as they use the genre in order to portray technology and its impact on their culture and society or to imagine a different political past or future. The language barrier is a considerable hurdle in many cases. Contests for translation undertaken by the International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts and the SF and Fantasy Translation Awards are admirable steps towards increasing the readership of global sf, but in most cases we must still depend on critics and academics to familiarize us with these new additions to the genre.

One of the dangers of the new global awareness is the temptation to write about other cultures without knowing them well. Let us recall that in the first chapter of Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899), the narrator/protagonist mentions that in his youth he often gazed at maps of exotic locales, the apparent “blank” spaces of the cultural unknown. As Edward Said and others in postcolonial studies have observed, Western authors often fill in the “blank spaces” of a lesser-known culture with stereotypes and preconceived ideas. The ideal would be to have “global science fiction” speak for itself. In the meantime, we can forge ahead to continue the dialogue between cultural centers and peripheries, grateful for writers, academics, and critics who continue to explore connections and exchanges between the sf genre and its culturally diverse manifestations around the globe. —Libby Ginway, University of Florida

From Global North to Global South. Globalization and science fiction are reflected—and refracted—in the globalization of science fiction. Much of my work on early Latin American sf has examined the great degree to which science fiction is and has long been a global genre, read and written around the world, forming a planet-spanning continuity—or, to use Damien Broderick’s terminology, a “megatext web” made up of “collective intertextualit[ies]” (“Megatext,” *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*. Online. 18 Aug. 2012). Yet I am constantly tripping over ways in which sf is not global or at least not so global as I had unconsciously slipped into assuming it was.

The term that keeps resurfacing is access. Positivistic fantasies imagine science and technology—with science fiction hot on their heels—stretching out to cover the globe in a continuous grid: exponential growth in telegraph lines and homes with telephone/tv/pc/www, etc. The Internet lulls us into a sense of universal interconnectedness, universal access. Certainly reading and research options continue to be revolutionized by email, social media, webzines, digitized archives and bibliographies, and more. But the reality remains that access to sf is uneven, for all of us—access to works themselves, to readership via publication and distribution of one’s work and via translation, to local communities of sf, and to the global collective intertext.

In science fiction, currents of influence have tended to flow from Northern to Southern hemispheres (for this Latin Americanist’s “North” and “South,” fill in the [inter]cardinal points or other terms of your choice: Anglophone/Non-
Anglophone, Center/Periphery, First/Developing World, producers/consumers of science and technology...); and writers, fans, and critics in the periphery have needed to establish their own voices in the face of such hegemony. While the North-to-South current endures, intra-Southern connections have also been increasing for some time. What is most lacking is a stronger current running South-to-North. Colonial and imperialist terminologies of “discovery” and “acculturation” have largely given way to less unidirectional concepts such as “encounter” and “transculturation”; still, the conversation remains overly one-sided—or at least one side does not always hear or understand what the other is saying.

What is changing most slowly in the globalization of science fiction is access across language barriers. One of the next challenges for the genre is to further translation efforts all round, and to further globalize ourselves. We have begun to meet this challenge with globally focused conference themes, special issues and anthologies, the Jamie Bishop Memorial Award for scholarship on sf/f in languages other than English, the SF and Fantasy Translation Awards for fiction, and expanded coverage of non-Anglophone sf in reference works, to name but a few. But who am I to talk? I need to find time to learn Hindi ... or maybe Romanian....—Rachel Haywood Ferreira, Iowa State University

Global SF as Cosmopolitan Mutant. My book Postcolonialism and Science Fiction was published at the very end of 2011 in the UK, and the very beginning of 2012 in North America. The moment it was published, it became hopelessly out of date. And that is a wonderful thing indeed.

In early 2005, I first made the mental connection between science-fictional otherness and postcolonial Other-ness, and started work on my PhD soon after. At the time, there wasn’t very much academic work on sf and postcolonialism, or very much postcolonial science fiction explicitly identified as such; Nalo Hopkinson and Uppinder Mehan’s So Long Been Dreaming: Postcolonial Visions of the Future (2004) had just recently been published. It felt as if I was in a new analytical space (which is of course very exciting to a PhD student and aspiring academic), and in a way, I was.

On the other hand, I really wasn’t. Not in the least.

As John Rieder has pointed out in Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction (2008), “science fiction exposes something that colonialism imposes” (15). Science fiction has always been, in some way, about colonialism, about the imposition of power, about the encounter with the other.

And, of course, I have spent the past several years gazing in wonderment at the richness, variety and deep and foundational generic hybridity of the science fiction being published and filmed. Nalo Hopkinson, Nnedi Okorafor, Lauren Beukes, Minister Faust, Saladin Ahmed, Lavie Tidhar, Aliette de Bodard, Kaaron Warren, Vandana Singh, Neil Blomkamp ... I could continue with the names for an entire page, but that’s not my purpose here. My point is that the vast majority of these writers and filmmakers have come to prominence in the field in the last ten years—many in the last five. It wasn’t me who was entering this new space: it was them.