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Abstract
Latin America saved the world—and didn't—many times over in texts written in the 1950s, the incubation period for genre sf in the region. The forward-looking 1950s produced much source material for today's retrofuturist longings, rather than generating many of those longings of their own. This article draws from some twenty-five fictional works by Latin American authors published in the Argentine magazine Más Allá [Beyond], an affiliate of Galaxy Science Fiction, between 1953 and 1957. I'm interested in exploring these past images of the future to think about questions such as to whom the future belonged in Latin American sf, what those futures looked like, and which of those past futures we are—and are not—living in today and why. I'm especially interested in how Latin American writers did—and didn't—challenge Northern assumptions about the future and about the genre and in the impact this has had on subsequent genre writers and readers.

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Comments
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Rachel Haywood Ferreira

How Latin America Saved the World and Other Forgotten Futures

Latin America saved the world—and didn’t—many times over in texts written in the 1950s, the incubation period for genre sf in the region. Despite the tremendous growth in research on genre production in Latin America in recent years, with the 1950s we are once again in somewhat sparsely populated territory, where the process of establishing a corpus of primary texts is particularly challenging and particularly relevant. This paper is part of a larger study on the Latin American science fiction of the space-race era, and the selection process for the texts I’m going to talk about is a microcosm of the bibliographical choices for the project as a whole. For our purposes today, I’m drawing from the twenty-five-odd fictional works by Latin American authors published in the Argentine magazine Más Allá [Beyond] between 1953 and 1957. The forward-looking 1950s produced much source material for today’s retrofuturist longings, rather than generating many of those longings of their own. I’m interested in exploring these past images of the future to think about questions such as to whom the future belonged in Latin American sf, what those futures looked like, and which of those past futures we are—and are not—living in today and why. I’m especially interested in how Latin American writers did—and didn’t—challenge Northern assumptions about the future and in the impact this has had on subsequent genre writers and readers.

Retrofuturismo Soy Yo. The backward gaze, then, is my own. Thinking, reading, and dialoguing about the theme of this symposium have re-emphasized to me the significance of the eye of the beholder, even as we seek to maintain the useful illusion of critical distance and impartiality. Some of the things that have been cycling through my mind are Rob Latham’s positing of sf criticism itself as a form of retrofuturist discourse (344); Paweł Frelik’s insights on the importance of the viewer profile, of what we bring with us to the table (213, 219); and Art Evans’s description, in his Symposium talk, of the retrospective gaze as both a seeking gaze and a projecting gaze (204). So I want to preface my discussion of these retrofutures by talking about some of the retrofuturistic maneuverings—the mindset and methodologies—of the sf scholar displaced from these futures in time and also in space.

Displacement in Time. Scott Bukatman has written that “the return to the retro-futures of the 1920s through the 1950s speaks to a perceived loss of subjective comprehension of, or control over, the invisible cyberhistories and cyberspaces of the present” (16). The lure of these futures, then, can be that of a simpler time we feel better able to grasp, encompass, and understand. For my present purposes, this way lies the danger of oversimplification, of
being reductive with regard to the imaginings of yesteryear out of a false sense of superiority lent by hindsight. In addition to nostalgia for a perceived simpler time, there is also nostalgia for a more heroic time, for a more optimistic time when, for example, the entire American nation was behind a very active space program. And herein lies the danger of rose-colored glasses, either mediating our retrospective gaze back at times we have lived or at times we wish we had lived. I belong, for example, to the first generation of readers/critics for whom the moon landing is not the memory of a live feed, but a mediated attempt to bridge the distance and capture that live experience.

Displacement in Space. Putting Latin America into the mix adds the additional twist of displacement in space. By this I mean not only my own geographic displacement from the texts I’m writing about, but also the displacement of Latin American writers and their texts from the historic center of the genre in the North. When comparing Latin American science fiction to sf produced in the North, I periodically find it necessary to perform something of a reality check, particularly where questions of influence and originality are concerned. This reality check is twofold. First, the predominance of Northern science fiction in the field and the fact that sf is largely a niche market in Latin America might lead one to be overhasty to perceive aspects of a work of Latin American sf to be the result of Northern influence. At the same time, it is natural to question one’s own objectivity as a Northerner, perhaps guilty of giving undue emphasis to the familiar or just finding what one is looking for, as Columbus famously did when seeing *manatee* and understanding *mermaid*. And, strangely enough—because I do believe that science fiction is a truly global genre—I sometimes slip into thinking of it as more global, more uniform than it is. Second, in these reality checks of mine, I must be sure not to claim more for Latin American originality and difference than is supported by Latin American sf production, or to claim a greater impact for the genre in Latin America than is borne out by the facts. (If I begin a sentence with “Well, you know Borges wrote the introduction to the Spanish translation of *The Martian Chronicles*...” that is just being accurate—but if I use a rather defensive tone, you’ll know I’m approaching that slippery slope.)

This displacement-in-space twist is not one-sided. To give a current example, in his article in the latest issue of *Alambique* on Brazilian pulps, or “revistas de emoção,” Roberto de Sousa Causo describes the presence of a “pulp-saudosista” aesthetic in some circles of contemporary Brazilian sf (28).² Causo notes the failure of Brazilian *revistas de emoção* “to create local precursor references,” and he describes Brazilian writers who instead look North when they look back, “seeking the exotic distinctive aura of Anglo-American pulp magazines and authors” (28). In the best case scenarios, there is room for some quality Brazilian historico-literary anthropophagy here, but in other scenarios, this might essentially be nostalgia for somewhere else’s past. It is, therefore, with great care and constant reality checks that I look back at *Más Allá* and choose which of its futures to talk about and why.
“La nostalgia suele ser enemiga de la objetividad” [Nostalgia tends to be the enemy of objectivity], is the opening line of Pablo Capanna’s 1993 retrospective article on Más Allá.3 “Among Spanish-speaking science fiction fans, and in particular among Argentines,” he continues, “nostalgia is called Más Allá: a publishing phenomenon that it is difficult to analyze objectively today … due to the feelings it awakens” (“Prestigios de un mito” 12). With its forty-eight consecutive issues, Más Allá was not only one of the longest-running Latin American sf magazines but also had a circulation of around 20,000 issues per month, a number never equaled in Latin America before or since. As can be seen in the above list of international subscription rates published in the magazine, Más Allá also reached many other Latin American countries and the Iberian Peninsula (“Tarifas de suscripciones anuales” 122).

We have little information on the subscriber statistics or the marketing and distribution networks of Más Allá, so the extent of its reach abroad is unclear. But from the addresses of the readers who wrote in to the magazine, we can confirm readers in the majority of the countries on the subscription price list as well as others such as Chile, Costa Rica, Cuba, Nicaragua, Paraguay, France, and the Soviet Union. The impact of the magazine on the field has been impressive and long-lasting. In 1973 the Spanish magazine Nueva Dimensión [New Dimension] (1968-1983) paid tribute to its Argentine antecedent in its forty-ninth issue (remembering that Más Allá stopped publication after forty-eight). In the editorial for this issue, the editors describe the 1950s as “the romantic and golden age of space travel,” adding, “thanks to Más Allá we experienced them” (Martínez, Santos, and Vigil 7). In 1985, the digital—now online—magazine Axxón dedicated its forty-eighth issue to Más Allá.

Más Allá was an affiliate of Galaxy Science Fiction.4 The relationship between the magazines is an incarnation par excellence of the global-local and North-South negotiation that is a constant in Latin American sf. When I first
began to work on Más Allá, I thought that my process of reality checking might be superfluous here, since this was a clear case of direct influence, identified and verified by others. I soon saw, however, that this project is actually a long string of reality checks, because it is challenging to make the Galaxy-Más Allá equation add up. While there are clear similarities between the two magazines, from covers to layout to content to approach to the genre (see figures 2, 3, and 4), Galaxy + Spanish translation ≠ Más Allá. For there are important differences in the publication, the reception, and the impact of the Galaxy material, not to mention the inclusion of original Argentine content in Más Allá. Más Allá is much more than just an affiliate magazine: in Argentina—indeed in Latin America—it enjoys mythic status in sf circles. I am interested in the relationship between these two iconic magazines because,
rather than being a clear case of imitation—of South attempting to replicate North—it manages to be something quite different. The story of Más Allá is the story of the creation of an international cultural product that is at the same time decisively local.

Más Allá was launched only three years after Galaxy, but in very different circumstances. Galaxy entered the US market in the wake of the Golden Age of US science fiction, and it came amid a veritable boom in sf magazine publication. It emerged in a market with an established fan base and, by the time Más Allá came onto the scene, it was already extremely successful, with a circulation of 100,000. Galaxy spawned a number of international editions and is, according to the Encyclopedia of Science Fiction, “amongst the most translated of all sf magazines” (Ashley, Edwards, and Nicholls). Más Allá was one of the earliest affiliates, and the only case in which Galaxy went South. Contact was initiated by Cesare Civita (1905-2005), the Italian-Argentine director of the great publishing house Editorial Abril, who in 1952 wrote to Robert Guinn, president of Galaxy Publishing Corporation, seeking the rights to publish material from Galaxy in Argentina (Civita 1 Oct. 1952). Civita believed that the Argentine market consisted primarily of novice sf readers, writing to Guinn in 1952: “We must start with easier material … as soon as our publication will prove that a substantial [sic] interest exists for science fiction, we’ll be able to include higher quality material and eventually base nearly all of it on your magazine” (Civita et al. 18 Nov. 1952).

In 1953 Argentina had not yet experienced its own Golden Age of science fiction—indeed, at that time no sf genre magazine there had lasted more than three issues; nor, in fact, had Argentina experienced the US Golden Age of science fiction of the 1940s to any significant degree. Más Allá could not, therefore, count on a significant existing fan base. A graph, cited by Capanna in his El mundo de la ciencia ficción, compares the number of sf magazines published in the US, Great Britain, and Argentina (175). In contrast to the several dozen magazines being published in the North in the mid-1950s, including Más Allá, Argentina now had a total of … one. On the other hand, Capanna recognizes, beginning without any baggage also had its benefits; he writes: “[W]hat arrived to the Argentine public was the second generation of American sf magazines, cleansed of space operas, BEMs, and all the vices of the pulps: without a doubt,” he concludes, “it was a good point of departure” (Mundo 179).

Al Revés. I have been making my way around Más Allá on and off for some four or five years now, so the time has come to commit fully and to explain why I have been working “backwards.” I have worked with the magazines’ covers, including Más Allá’s licensed reproductions and almost-reproductions of Galaxy covers and original cover art by Argentine artists (see figures 2, 5, 6, 7, and 8). I have researched the correspondence between Galaxy Publishing Corporation and Editorial Abril regarding publication rights and sf markets in both countries. I have pondered the lack of information about the publication process of Más Allá in contrast with the sizable amount of detail available on
Galaxy (see figures 3 and 4); likewise the mystery of the anonymous editor(s) in Más Allá versus the clearly staked-out territory of H.L. Gold at Galaxy. The scientific elements of the magazine have fascinated me, including translated articles by the likes of Willy Ley and Wernher von Braun, original articles by José Westerkamp and others, and, especially, the monthly features Espaciotest [Spacetest] (a near-impossible science quiz) and Contestando a los lectores [Answering the Readers] (highly detailed Q&A on scientific themes), for what they reveal about the interest in science and hard sf in Latin America.
I have also been intrigued by the readers of Más Allá, the self-denominated “masallistas” or “masalleros” who before my eyes were forming Argentine—and, to a certain extent, Latin American—fandom. In addition to their scientific questions, readers responded to the magazine’s surveys about their taste in reading material, and they wrote in to another section titled Proyectiles dirigidos [Guided Missiles] to comment on the fiction published in the magazine and also to make contact and form groups with other readers. And finally, I have reflected on the invisibility of Galaxy in Más Allá. Unlike in the nineteenth century, when an explicit association with Northern sf was considered good marketing strategy, to my surprise the only mention of Galaxy in Más Allá is in a letter from a reader who praises Más Allá, saying: “la única revista que he leído comparable a MÁS ALLÁ es la revista ‘Galaxy’. Otra no hay” [the only magazine I have read that is comparable to Más Allá is the magazine Galaxy. There is no other like it]—the unsigned answer from the magazine’s editor reads merely “¿En qué quedamos?,” loosely translated: “Now what?” or “Make up your mind!” (Solvey 56).

Los Cuentos. What I have left until last is to examine in depth the Latin American science fiction of Más Allá. The texts written by Latin Americans form 10% of the total number of fictional works published in Más Allá: twenty-five poems, short stories, and short novels by seventeen authors from Argentina, one from Mexico, and one from Peru. But for a long time I had an attitude of “yes ... but tomorrow” toward this corpus. Besides the other fascinating aspects of the magazine that clamored for my attention, I think my lack of urgency stemmed from the curious apparent lack of impact of these texts. At the time of publication they rarely did very well with readers, either in survey responses or in the monthly section of reader rankings called “Sin apelación” [No Appeal]. More significantly still, as far as I have been able to discover, none of these texts has ever been reprinted in any of the countless anthologies that came out in the following decades, nor has one ever been the subject of a critical study. Which raises the question: What is it that these texts of apparently negligible influence in their own right contributed—or not—to this magazine that has been so very influential? What is it that these forgotten futures can tell us about Latin America and Latin American science fiction in the 1950s and about how the genre has evolved in the region since? And what can they tell us about the strengths and the limitations of Northern science-fictional imaginings?

In Which No Latin Americans Save the World. Capanna has described Más Allá as “the only magazine that had prepared the [Argentine] public for the coming of the space era” (“Prestigios” 15). Strangely enough, however, a fair number of the Latin American stories in Más Allá that focus most clearly on space travel are among the least original, and Latin America is notably absent from their pages. These stories are suffering from mild-to-severe cases of A Síndrome do Capitão Barbosa [Captain Barbosa Syndrome]. The dread dis-ease was originally diagnosed by author and critic Bráulio Tavares; its symptoms...
have been summed up by a Brazilian journalist as follows: “the Brazilian public would reject as unbelievable a science fiction story in which a ship like the Enterprise was commanded by a ‘Captain Barbosa’” (Costa). In the Más Allá story “Boomerang” (1953) by Jorge Mora, for example, the astronauts (Barry, Rocky, and Spencer) launch their voyages to the Moon and to Mars from San Francisco. Félix Vosalta also uses Northern characters and setting in “El payaso espacial” [The Space Clown] (1957), a tale of how the heroic astronaut Clifford Rayburn overcomes a psychological trauma that occurs during his crew’s journey to Mars—unfortunately the story is not as sophisticated as it sounds (rescuing a cat from a ferris wheel cures his deep trauma instantly and permanently). Vosalta’s Rayburn does at times demonstrate an awareness that there are portions of Earth outside the US borders. In his description of the astronaut’s calling, he says: “Habíamos sido los escogidos para realizar el eterno sueño del hombre” [We had been chosen to carry out the eternal dream of mankind] (22). Like Mora, however, Vosalta appears uninterested or unable to imagine even his own future countrymen (let alone women!) as participants in space travel. To add insult to injury, Vosalta’s hero celebrates his recovery with the line, “¡Había vuelto a ser uno de los conquistadores del espacio!” [I was once again one of the conquerors of space!], using the historically charged term “conquistador” with no indications of irony or of Latin American cultural memory of any kind (25). Similarly loaded terms appear in a number of other stories by Latin American authors in Más Allá. “Descubrimiento” [Discovery] (1956), by Juan Pedro Edmunds, disappointingly fails to explore the full ramifications of its title, as does “Materia prima” [Raw Material] (1955) by Julián de Córdoba, while both “Materia Prima” and “Incomprensión” [Incomprehension] (1956), by Pablo Capanna, appear oddly flagrant yet oblivious in their deployment of the terms of the classic Latin American dichotomy “civilization” and “barbarism.”

It is confusing when a writer doesn’t mention the elephant in the room, when the historical baggage of terms such as “discovery” and “conqueror” is not addressed. The most insidiously perplexing cases are those in which national self-image comes into play, when writers replicate stereotypes of their own cultures, usually concurrent with an overblown image of Northern cultures. Why the unadulterated glorification of conquest in “El payaso espacial”? In “Materia prima,” why would imitation of “advanced” cultures be recommended (there is even an “índice global de civilización” [global index of civilization, 73]), even as European-style colonialism is criticized? These works are textual embodiments of modernization theory, buying at least to some extent into the idea that Latin America is not so different from the North, just behind on some predetermined developmental track. Of course, modernization theory was cutting edge in the 1950s; it’s perhaps unfair to project my twenty-first-century expectations onto these texts. But art so often exceeds expectations, painting outside the neat lines social scientists have traced to describe reality, that I have become spoiled.
In Which We Hear Voices. North-South navigations are not always easy to chart. One of the most usefully perplexing cases for me, one that adds further nuance to the imitation vs. originality debate, is a story that appeared in the August 1956 issue of Más Allá, “Para todo servicio” [At Your Service] by Maximiliano Mariotti. It is the story of a butler robot (model 2211, named Jeremías) that has belonged to three generations of a once-wealthy family, but whose last scion is down to his last pennies. Jeremías, always the perfect servant, reveals the existence of an ultimate circuit in his programming: “el despido del mayordomo” [the dismissal of the butler] (59), and he has his master dismantle him and sell his parts to pay the family debts. Throughout the story the human master wavers between thinking of Jeremías as “una máquina, fría, insensible” [a cold, insensible machine] and thinking of him as his last friend: “miraba a aquel robot alto, viejo, pasado de moda, como si fuera una persona enferma, tan triste como él mismo” [he looked at that tall, old, out-of-date robot, as if he were a sick person, as sad as he was himself] (59).

As I read this story, I hear two voices. I feel constantly pricked by both an ingrained memory as old as my childhood and by the analysis of a literary critic whose work has been so important for my own. First (because it is the older memory? because it is the greater influence on the writer?), I hear Isaac Asimov’s First Law of Robotics: “A robot may not injure a human being, or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm”; and in the back of my mind is Robbie the robot and his devotion to his small mistress. (As part of my reality check here, I searched for the first Spanish-language translation of I, Robot—and there it was, Yo, Robot, listed for sale on eBay for over $1,000, original publication date: 1956.) At the same time I wonder if perhaps M. Elizabeth Ginway’s discussion of the representation of robots in Brazilian sf in her book Brazilian Science Fiction might be pointing us in a more fruitful direction. She writes: “[T]heir roles have little to do with technology, other than to give the appearance of modernity; in fact, traditional social structures, gender roles, and race relations remain virtually intact” (51). The story does not really give us enough information to decide—perhaps it is both: musing on the potential humanity of advanced machines and a reflection of traditional social structures—just via the masallista’s faith in technocracy. Jeremías is the perfect servant, but also the perfect example of Susan Calvin’s description of the role of robots in the Introduction to Asimov’s I, Robot: “Now [mankind] has creatures to help him; stronger creatures than himself, more faithful, more useful, and absolutely devoted to him…. They’re a cleaner, better breed than we are” (17).

In Which Latin America is “Aventurable.” Other Latin American contributors to Más Allá were more overt in their references to Latin America in text and subtext. Not only do we find them including Latin America in their work on the surface levels of setting and character, but many also represent Latin America as a locus and a culture in which science fiction can happen. To use Juan Sasturain’s terminology, they make the region “aventurable” (121).
Many also portray Latin America and Latin Americans as science-savvy and as significant actors in global and post-national scenarios—others less so.

(1) In Which a Latin American Saves the World, or (2) In Which We Sort of Wish a Latin American Hadn’t Saved the World, or (3) In Which My Sense of Humor is Out of Sync(?). “Saturnino Fernández, Héroe.” How clear could it be? It’s in the title: Saturnino Fernández, hero. An Argentine citizen saves the world. Yet we might kind of wish there’d been another way. It’s December 1956, sixteen months after the date on the issue of Más Allá in which the story appears. The Soviet leader is calling the situation with the arms race “insostenible” [unsustainable] (Covarrubias 73) and that is also the fear of a re-elected Dwight Eisenhower (campaign slogan: “I like Ike again” [75]). As 11:00 pm strikes in each longitude of the globe, an alien substance resembling white feathers falls from the sky, “freezing” people in their tracks—except for drunks (see figure 9). Saturnino Fernández just happens to be one of those drunks; this Argentine reporter on his daily bender starts and leads the movement to destroy the alien substance and save the world. Three years later, scientists from three Northern institutes have confirmed that drunkenness is the only defense for the citizens of the new World Government, and historians sing the praises of “la figura magnífica del héroe y mártir Saturnino, caído gloriosamente en la defensa de nuestro planeta” [the magnificent figure of hero and martyr Saturnino, fallen gloriously in the defense of our planet], who has died of cirrhosis of the liver (76-77). I couldn’t quite settle on a descriptive subheading for this particular story—(1) do I celebrate Latin American agency, such as it is? (2) Do I hold out for a hero who can walk a straight line? (3) Am I taking the story too seriously and is my
retrospective gaze out of focus? Contemporary readers didn’t exactly latch onto the story as the model for future Latin American sf either, ranking it 3 out of 4 in the reader poll. Or is this writer just being realistic? Was the only believable way for an Argentine to save the world—and to contribute options to the genre—through an unexpected, accidental, unscientific, unheroic-ish hero? Let’s consider a few other options.

**In Which a Latin American Leads the Way—Deus Ex Artigio.** In the not-too-distant future described in “Las fantasías de Rino” [The Fantasies of Rino] (1957), Julián de Córdoba essentially sets out an extremely idealistic plan for the “nacimiento de una nueva era” [birth of a new era] that will bring “un futuro mejor, sin guerras, sin prejuicios. Sin penurias, sin soldados, sin resfríos” [a better future, without wars, without prejudice. Without scarcity, without soldiers, without the common cold] (110, 119). This global harmony will be brought about via a reformulated United Nations, wherein the negative effects of the nationalism of political representatives is mitigated by giving greater power within the organization to scientists, whose idealism allows them to think beyond the present and the local, and to work for the permanent and universal good (117). Argentina goes beyond mere participant status in this endeavor; it is a leader, a role model. But this status rests on the shoulders of a single Argentine boy-genius, Rino, and two of his fantastic inventions: one gadget that makes things invisible (see figure 10), and another that negates the effects of gravity. I am not particularly interested in the *deus ex gadget* aspect of the story; I am, however, intrigued by the author’s emphasis that building these gadgets “no necesitaría, como la primera bomba atómica, de los recursos de una nación poderosa” [unlike the first atomic bomb, would not require the resources of a powerful nation] (100)—that this time there will be equal access to science and technology for all. Likewise, the story is a portrayal of a most “adventurabe” Latin America. Not only are Argentina and Brazil the sites of...
major portions of the action, but it is emphasized that only in a world and a nation in which the scientific and sociopolitical environment was favorable could Rino’s genius have flourished (96).

**In Which Latin America Saves the World & In Which Latin America Doesn’t Save the World But....** Among the Latin American stories in Más Allá are some daring ventures that challenge genre assumptions and that bring innovation and thus expansion to the genre as a whole.

One such tale appeared in a special issue of Más Allá on UFOs and UFO stories. “17 monedas de 20” [17 Twenty-Cent Pieces] (1955), by Claudio Paz, tells the story of first contact on Earth between Gy’Mbel, a recon expedition member from Aldebaran III, and Pereira, a vagrant out roasting stolen birds in the countryside in an unidentified Latin American country (see figure 11). Pereira is described as “eminently practical” and “intelligent,” despite his fondness for drink (77, 80). Pereira is not just street smart, however; he is also a reader of popular science magazines and, as a result, at least somewhat scientifically informed. Aldebaran III is a technologically advanced interplanetary empire constantly searching for farm planets, and the Earth is a prime candidate. Gy’Mbel tells Pereira that the Aldebarans eliminate any intelligent species from such planets unless they are mentally similar to themselves. Gy’Mbel is not impressed by Pereira’s ability to communicate with him telepathically (a dog understands simple commands from his master), nor by human cities (anthills are similarly complex), nor yet by human technology (machines that are merely designed to conform to what the environment demands). No, he is interested in human “máquinas de razonar” [reasoning machines] so that, he says, humans can be preserved if they prove mentally equal to Aldebarans. He shows Pereira a syllogism-verifying machine to

![Fig. 11. Artwork by Guillermo Camps for “17 monedas de 20” by Claudio Paz. Courtesy of Michigan State Univ. Library.](image-url)
demonstrate. Pereira immediately understands what is up, and he takes Gy’Mbel to a local establishment to demonstrate what he terms a similar human machine: the coin-operated water-polo game in the corner pub. Gy’Mbel takes off for home with the machine in tow, concluding that humans are a strange combination of low technology and incomprehensible logic, and should therefore be left strictly alone. For Pereira has indeed understood the Aldebaran’s true intentions regarding any mentally similar races, that “una raza que había conquistado un imperio enorme valiéndose de su inteligencia, no estaba dispuesta a admitir en sus dominios a otra raza semejante” [a race that had conquered an enormous empire using its intelligence was not willing to admit a similar race into its dominions] (81). The Latin American had recognized the lies of the would-be colonizer when he heard them and had outsmarted the alien at his own game. Elsewhere I have referred to first contact in Latin American science fiction as “second contact” due to the colonial history and the postcolonial reality of the region (see Haywood Ferreira, “Second Contact”). It is no accident, then, that a Latin American sf writer might posit a situation in which the lower-tech species comes out on top and in which an unknown—and unappreciated—hero from the periphery saves the world.

The final story I want to talk about is “Cuidado con el perro” [Beware of the Dog] (1953), by Héctor Sánchez Puyol, a pseudonym of the well-known comics writer Héctor Germán Oesterheld, subsequently author of El Eternauta [The Eternaut] (1957-1959). Like Félix Vosalta and Jorge Mora, Oesterheld uses Northern names for his astronauts, but for a very different purpose. “Jack” and “Fred” don’t go to space as everyman’s astronaut like Rayburn or Barry, Rocky, and Spencer, but rather for conquest and economic gain. They are clear representatives of the modern colonial powers on Earth. In the story, these Northern Terrans initiate contact with the inhabitants of Venus. Jack and Fred are actually the second expedition sent, as members of the first expedition were killed by what was presumed to be an unknown Venusian microbe that caused extreme corporeal desiccation. But this second group successfully travels to Venus and brings the Venusian a-Kia back to Earth on an initial fact-finding trip. The story is told by a-Kia, and Terran things, actions, and conversations are estranged by way of the filter of this narrator, who understands little but who possesses perfect recall. A-Kia addresses his account to “mi Señor,” a master of whom the Terrans appear unaware. The dialogues he overhears between the astronauts and among the leaders on Earth make Terran plans quite clear: they believe Venusians to be technologically and mentally inferior, and they intend to use them as disposable slave labor to mine the Earth’s core under terrible conditions that many won’t survive.

Believing they have confirmed all of their assumptions about Venusians, the Terrans speak freely in front of a-Kia as they show him around areas of the Earth’s surface that are far from the mines. If only they could read the contents of what they assume to be a-Kia’s scribblings, they would be far less complacent about their judgment of his intelligence as elementary. If only they noticed the radioactivity counter on his belt, they might question their judgment.
that Venusians are “seres sin técnica alguna, muy inferiores aún al hombre prehistórico” [beings with no technology at all, very inferior even to prehistoric man] (58). Throughout a-Kía’s account are constant references to his orders from “mi Señor”: “Mi Señor me ordenó escribir” [My Master ordered me to write], “mi Señor me ordenó agradarles siempre, hacer cuanto ellos me dijeran” [my Master ordered me to please them always and to do whatever they told me], “Mi Señor me ordenó no tocar para nada el radiomarcador” [My Master ordered me never to touch the radioactivity counter].... (56, 57). These repeated evocations of “mi Señor” mark the rhythm of the account, suggesting a more ominous Venusian agenda, as do a-Kía’s frequent descriptions of humans as “llenos de sangre” [full of blood], which also suggests an alternative explanation for what happened to the first Terran expedition to Venus. The astronauts return to Venus with a-Kía to implement their plans for the enslavement of his kind—of what they assume are all Venusians. But it turns out that a-Kía’s “Señor” is a member of a more evolved swamp-dwelling species that also happens to be in possession of what he describes as “armas invencibles” [invincible weapons] and a huge appetite (literally) for the abundant radioactivity on Earth (59). The Venusians now have the information they need to conquer Earth. A-Kía eliminates his disposable chauffeurs, Jack and Fred, and sits back and waits for his reward: his species’ foodstuff of choice produced by the juicy herds of humans.

Consider, then, the assumptive tendencies not only of Northerners but of Northern science fiction that are uncovered and unmasked in Oesterheld’s narrative. (1) Appearances may be deceiving. Never assume that you are the more intelligent / stronger / more advanced / superior species, even if you are the one with the big shiny spaceship. (2) Not everyone shares your understanding of the “rules” of first contact. When you say “Take me to your leader,” do not assume they actually will—after all, leaders often show up for political negotiations, but in scouting, invasion, and war they are usually well behind the front lines. And (3) never assume that you understand the other: its role, its desires and motivations, its mission, or even its diet.

In both “17 monedas de 20” and “Cuidado con el perro” the more technified—or apparently more technified—culture possesses the tragic and ultimately fatal flaw of hubris, expressed as greed, overconfidence, and an inability to perceive the universe in any way other than the one in which its members expect and want to see it. In both Argentine stories of first contact, the tables are turned: the initiator of contact and would-be conqueror loses, the “other” wins. In “17 monedas de 20” the “other” is an Argentine who proves to be an able representative of Earth. And in “Cuidado con el perro,” the Venusian “others” overcome the Northern-styled Terrans, in the process revealing the weaknesses in their self-narrative and in their all-too-well-rehearsed protocols for first contact.

Latin America doesn’t necessarily have to save the world in order for the region to be “adventurable,” for it to add new options to the sf megatext, or to question established tenets of sf dogma. We have seen globalized futures with Latin American participation, futures in which Latin America remains on
the margins due to the continuation of imperialist practices, futures in which characters profit from lessons of colonialism learned, futures where the measurement and perception of “advanced” and “superior” are redefined, futures that challenge the center to reexamine the status quo.

¿Por Qué No? While the twenty-five Latin American fictional works published in Más Allá do not yet form part of the emerging canon of Latin American science fiction, the inclusion of these stories sealed the Argentine / Latin American identity of the magazine. After the publishers shut Más Allá down in 1957 (because of what are widely cited as unrealistic expectations that sales numbers would reach the lofty heights of their Disney titles), a significant coterie of the Argentine authors went on to make contributions to the field, the most famous being Héctor Germán Oesterheld as editor and writer, and Pablo Capanna, as critic and editor. Where, in the years after WWII, the early Latin American genre magazines published only translated material from Northern magazines, in the years after Más Allá it became increasingly common for magazines to publish at least some sf by national writers—for example, Géminis (1965) in Argentina, Crononauta (1964) in México, the Magazine de Ficção Científica (1970-1971) in Brazil, and Espacio-tiempo [Space-Time] (1965) in Chile. Other frequently cited evidence of the emergence of genre sf in Latin America during the late 1950s and 1960s are the publication of landmark works such as Los Altísimos [The Superior Ones] (1959) by Chilean author Hugo Correa and the appearance of specialized publishers such as Edições GRD in Brazil, Novario and Diana in Mexico, and Minotauro in Argentina. It is also important to note that the development of genre sf in the region culminates with the beginnings of the identification and retrolabeling of works of early Latin American sf in the 1960s (see Haywood Ferreira, Emergence, especially 1-7). This retrospective interest in establishing a local lineage for the genre represents a coming of age for genre writers and readers in Latin America. Not coincidentally, the earliest retrolabeling gesture of which I’m aware is in Más Allá itself, with the very deliberate editorial reclamation of Peruvian author Manuel González Prada (1848-1919) for the genre, with the publication of his homonymous poem “Más allá, más allá.”

Let me close with a final reality check. The Latin American sf published in Más Allá is undeniably uneven in quality. Yet I’m still concerned that my interest in works that question and subvert Northern-dominated futures and Northern sf models might lead me to pass over virtues in stories that seem to merely superficially adopt and adapt Northern norms. Like Columbus, might I find only the mermaids I think I’m looking for, and miss the marvels—and conundrums and complexities—of what is really before me? And so: reality checks on my own perceptions and judgments, as I seek to represent the panorama of the genre in these important developmental years and some of the works that describe it and define it.

A reader wrote in to Más Allá wondering why there was not more Argentine content in the magazine, and the editor replied: “Estados Unidos es la patria de la fantasía científica” [The United States is the country of science
fiction] (Pinciroli Reinoso and Editor 84). Still, I prefer the editor’s answer to another reader who asked, “Is [the study of atomic science] possible here?” (Parera 123); the editor replies: “¿Por qué no?” [Why not?]. Más Allá has passed on that “Why not?” to many subsequent writers and readers of science fiction in Latin America and beyond.

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NOTES
1. On Bukatman and on the lure of these past futures, see also Latham (342-43).
2. “Saudosista” comes from the Portuguese “saudade,” widely seen as an untranslatable word, but “longing” will do in a pinch.
3. All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated. Spanish originals are given for all literary quotations and in other situations in which it seems appropriate.
4. It was hoped by both parties that Más Allá, like many of the international editions of Galaxy Science Fiction, would carry some version of the Galaxy name. Another firm had trademarked the name in Argentina several years previously, however, so Editorial Abril eventually settled upon Más Allá as a translation of Galaxy’s soon-to-be-launched sister magazine, Beyond Fantasy Fiction (Civita later rejected the content of Beyond for inclusion in Más Allá, calling it “strict fiction, not science fiction” [emphasis in original]) (Civita 20 Feb. 1953, 17 Mar. 1953, 13 Sept. 1954; Guinn 12 Mar. 1953).
5. Translations of Galaxy were published abroad in eight countries: France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Italy, and Argentina. It is notable that Más Allá, with its 48 consecutive issues, had the third-longest run of the non-Anglophone international Galaxy affiliates (behind France’s two Galaxie series and the Italian Galaxy; it far surpassed all the others). See Lawler (307) and Hall and Ashley (847-901).
6. In the magazine Geminis (1965), Oesterheld’s attempt to revive Más Allá, the connection to Galaxy was not only clear but prominently displayed in large, bold font on the inside back cover: “Por acuerdo especial con la Galaxy Publishing Co., de los Estados Unidos, la mayor parte del material literario de ‘GEMINIS’ proviene de la revista ‘GALAXY’” [By special agreement with Galaxy Publishing Co. of the United States, most of the literary material of “GEMINIS” comes from “GALAXY” magazine].
7. Ten percent of the fictional works were by Latin Americans when counting number of titles; that number would be much lower when counting number of pages. Two out of two poems published in Más Allá were by Latin Americans, 20 of 195 short stories, 3 of 31 short novels, but 0 of 19 novels.
8. A formal survey was included in issue #4 (with results discussed in the editorial for #7). Más Allá #24 also contains a useful retrospective of the first two years of the magazine, including statistics on the contents (“Estadística de Más Allá). “Sin apelación” was included in Más Allá issues #23-31.
[Pennant of Hope], Flavio Medeiros Jr. finds one way to tackle the syndrome through his protagonist, Captain Gideão Barbosa.

10. A pseudonym for Jorge Oesterheld, brother of Héctor Germán Oesterheld. HGO describes trimming down and focusing this story by his brother. See Oesterheld, “El (¿último?) gran reportaje” (14).

11. Edmunds is the only Mexican author published in Más Allá (Abraham 145n18).

12. I do think this weaponized “snowfall” may have been a really sideways inspiration for the deadly snowfall in El Eternauta by Héctor Germán Oesterheld (Hora Cero, Editorial Frontera, 1957-59).

13. One reader does eventually write in to the magazine to protest so many protagonists being drunks. She doesn’t acknowledge, however, that two of the three are Latin American representations of homegrown heroes. See Valle.


15. The editor did then note that the international presence of the genre was growing and directed the reader to a story by Julián de Córdoba in that issue (#22 “Veraneo”).

WORKS CITED


Latin America saved the world—and didn’t—many times over in texts written in the 1950s, the incubation period for genre sf in the region. The forward-looking 1950s produced much source material for today’s retrofuturist longings, rather than generating many of those longings of their own. This article draws from some twenty-five fictional works by Latin American authors published in the Argentine magazine Más Allá [Beyond], an affiliate of Galaxy Science Fiction, between 1953 and 1957. I’m interested in exploring these past images of the future to think about questions such as to whom the future belonged in Latin American sf, what those futures looked like, and which of those past futures we are—and are not—living in today and why. I’m especially interested in how Latin American writers did—and didn’t—challenge Northern assumptions about the future and about the genre and in the impact this has had on subsequent genre writers and readers.