5-2008

Back to the Future: The Expanding Field of Latin-American Science Fiction

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

Follow this and additional works at: http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/language_pubs

Part of the Graphic Communications Commons, International and Intercultural Communication Commons, Latin American Studies Commons, and the Publishing Commons

The complete bibliographic information for this item can be found at http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/language_pubs/135. For information on how to cite this item, please visit http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/howtocite.html.
Back to the Future: The Expanding Field of Latin-American Science Fiction

Abstract
This article examines the exponential growth of the field of Latin American science fiction in recent years, first through an evaluation of a series of critical/historical studies of the genre, and then by tracing the textual histories of a number of the region's earliest works of sf. The contemporary interest in identifying, retrolabeling, and republishing the works that form the local roots of Latin American science fiction is indicative of the growing maturity of the genre there, as it stems from a desire to understand the nature and extent of participation in this global yet Northern-centered genre in areas heretofore viewed as periphery. These recent trends mean that writing, reading, teaching, or researching in the field of Latin American science fiction is now a vastly different experience from even a few years ago.

Keywords
science fiction bibliography, science fiction criticism, science fiction in Argentina, science fiction in Brazil, science fiction in Chile, science fiction in Mexico, science fiction in Latin America, science fiction in the nineteenth century, science fiction in Peru, science fiction in the twenty-first century

Disciplines
Graphic Communications | International and Intercultural Communication | Latin American Studies | Publishing

Comments
This article is published as “Back to the Future: The Expanding Field of Latin-American Science Fiction.” Hispania 91.2 (2008): 352-62. Posted with permission.
Abstract: This article examines the exponential growth of the field of Latin American science fiction in recent years, first through an evaluation of a series of critical/historical studies of the genre, and then by tracing the textual histories of a number of the region’s earliest works of sf. The contemporary interest in identifying, retrolabeling, and republishing the works that form the local roots of Latin American science fiction is indicative of the growing maturity of the genre there, as it stems from a desire to understand the nature and extent of participation in this global yet Northern-centered genre in areas heretofore viewed as periphery. These recent trends mean that writing, reading, teaching, or researching in the field of Latin American science fiction is now a vastly different experience from even a few years ago.

Key Words: science fiction bibliography, science fiction criticism, science fiction in Argentina, science fiction in Brazil, science fiction in Chile, science fiction in Mexico, science fiction in the nineteenth century, science fiction in Peru, science fiction in the twenty-first century


In 1985 the Argentine critic Pablo Capanna declared the growing independence of Latin-American science fiction from Northern models: “Lo más importante es que se ha superado la etapa de recepción—crítica a veces y acrítica las más—de una literatura ajena. La madurez está llegando” (“Ciencia ficción y los argentinos” 56). In 2000, the writer and critic Gabriel Trujillo Muñoz reaffirmed this trend, describing Mexican readers’ increasing identification with the genre: “En nuestro país, por su cada vez más obvia presencia en la cotidianidad de nuestras vidas, se ha vuelto un género popular, una literatura propia, cercana, comprensible” (Biografías 362). Although the genre does not yet enjoy the market share or the level of what Veronica Hollinger has termed “institutional ‘respectability’” that it has in the North (232), science fiction is beginning to come into its own in Latin America. Not only has there been a wave of publication in science fiction in the past two decades, but there has been an exponential increase in critical studies of the genre, particularly in the areas of bibliography and genre history. These recent trends have meant that writing, reading, teaching, or researching in the field of Latin American science fiction is now a vastly different experience from even a few years ago.

Let us establish 1992 as a benchmark for purposes of comparison in our discussion of the recent developments in this field. Fifteen years ago, well into what Ramón López Castro has described as a publication “boom” in Latin American science fiction (10), it was still relatively difficult, from either inside or outside Latin America, to identify many texts belonging to the genre, to gain access to those texts, to locate their place in the trajectory of science fiction production in Latin America, or to perceive the shape of that trajectory. The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction, which has since become the international reference work of record in the field, was still in its first edition in 1992, under the title The Science Fiction Encyclopedia (1979), and Latin America had no entry of its own. In the fairly brief entry for “Spain, Portugal and South America,” written by Maxim Jakubowski, a British expert in French science fiction, all references to South America come in a sixty-six-word paragraph at the end. Only the countries of Argentina...
The Expanding Field of Latin-American SF

and Brazil are mentioned, no titles are included, no secondary works, and only eight authors ("Jorge Luis Borges, Biyo Casares, Cortazar and Ernesto Sabato [sic] [...], André Carneiro, J.[erônim] Monteiro, Dinah de Queiroz and Geraldo Mourão"). Only a few monographs on Latin American science fiction were in existence at this time in English, Spanish, or Portuguese. Two of the earliest and most widely consulted are Pablo Capanna's 1966 El sentido de la ciencia ficción and André Carneiro's 1967 Introdução ao estudo da "science fiction." These works are fairly representative of secondary sources available from the 1960s to the 1980s. Capanna's well-written study, while it addresses the Argentine reader of science fiction, does not include information about science fiction written by Argentines; and of the 140 pages of Carneiro's text, just under seven are devoted to Brazilian science fiction, with the remainder a discussion of Northern sf. Latin-American science-fiction magazines and fanzines also tended to emphasize the publication of translations of texts by Northern authors, but some Latin American writers and critics were first published in these venues. Unfortunately these publications had limited, local distribution, and they tended to be short-lived (with several significant exceptions, a typical run for a magazine was around three issues).

There were occasional academic dissertations and articles published in the field before 1992, but the most frequent and widely distributed sites for criticism were in anthologies of national or regional science fiction. The prefaces, introductions, author presentations, chronologies, bibliographies, and so forth that surrounded the selections were of uneven quality and reliability. It would not be difficult to draw some skewed conclusions from an examination of a good number of these works: that science fiction is a purely space age genre in Latin America, that it is always highly derivative of Anglo-American science fiction, that there are few if any early examples of science fiction written there. A few anthologies that stand out from the small crowd are, to use examples from the relatively strong and consistent Argentine science fiction movement, Los argentinos en la luna (1968), for its pioneering efforts to trace and republish early national science fiction; Los universos vislumbrados (Sánchez 1978, 2nd edition 1995), for the quality of its selections, for the historical and bibliographical depth of its prologue by Elvio Gandolfo, and for its annotated chronology of Argentine science fiction (1947–1977); and Marcial Souto's La ciencia ficción en la Argentina (1985), for its introduction and for the inclusion of the contributing writers' answers to a questionnaire on their work, their influences, and their ideas on science fiction as a genre. However, the importance of personal contacts, word-of-mouth, and private collections cannot be over-emphasized.

Three particularly significant bibliographies of Latin-American science fiction have been produced since 1992. The second edition of The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction ("ESF" in Table 1 below), published in 1993, contains an entry on Latin America written by Mauricio-José Schwarz, a Mexican writer-editor-critic, and Braúlio Tavares, a Brazilian writer-critic. In 2000 the team of Yolanda Molina-Gaviñán, Miguel Ángel Fernández Delgado, Andrea Bell, Luis Pestarini, and Juan Carlos Toledano (Latin Americans and Northerners; academics, freelance critics, writers, magazine publishers, and librarians) combined to produce the "Cronología de cf latinoamericana: 1775–1999," published in Spanish in the journal Chasqui. The same team, with the addition of M. Elizabeth Ginway, has just produced an updated, English-language version of this bibliography in Science Fiction Studies entitled "A Chronology of Latin American Science Fiction, 1775–2005" ("SFS" in Table 1 below). Although these bibliographies were published in Great Britain and the U.S., the international reach of the publication venues and the diversity of the contributors are evidence that the stimuli behind these efforts at cataloguing the geographic and temporal diversity of Latin American science fiction are coming from within as well as from without.

While none of these bibliographies claims to be exhaustive—indeed all indicate their incompleteness and invite contributions—they are convenient landmarks for a comparative overview of the development of the field during the last fifteen years. The tables below underline four of the trends revealed by the bibliographies. First, although science fiction has been written in virtually every Latin-American country, some countries have historically produced more sf than others.
(Table 2). Second, there has been an exponential increase in the number of primary and secondary sources of Latin American science fiction during the present wave: approximately 350 primary works have been published since 1992, versus approximately 800 works published in the previous 200 years (Table 1). Third, there has also been intense activity in the area of (re-)locating and/or retroactively labeling, or retrolabeling, both primary and secondary works of science fiction in Latin America. Reading horizontally across the row, “Works of sf through 1992” in Table 1, for example, shows an increase in the number of identified primary works from 100 in 1993, to 600 in 2000, to 800 in 2007. Fourth, a comparison of the three bibliographies reveals that one of the most dramatic retrolabeling efforts has been made in the area of early-Latin-American science fiction, with the seven pre-1926 works listed in *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* ballooning to fifty-eight in 2000, and eighty-one in 2007.4

**Table 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Works of sf through 1992</td>
<td>100 = total</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works of sf through 1999</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>725 = total</td>
<td>1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works of sf through 2005</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>1150 = total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works of sf through 1926 (early sf)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary sources through 1999</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>125 = total</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary sources total (through 2005)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>250 = total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All numbers are rounded down to the nearest multiple of 25 to allow for variations in the grouping of shorter works. The exception is the category “Works of sf through 1926,” for which exact numbers are given.

**Table 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Works of sf through 1926 (early sf)</th>
<th>Totals through 2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuba</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>336</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total of all countries</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>1160</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This final trend illustrates the scope of developments in the field of Latin-American science fiction. The contemporary interest in locating and retrolabeling Latin-American roots for science fiction is indicative of the growing maturity of the genre there, as it stems from a desire to understand the extent of local participation in a global genre and to obtain local as well as Northern historical legitimacy for that genre. This retrolabeling makes the production of a truly panoramic vision of science fiction in Latin America possible for the first time. Only now that the temporal extent of the genre is becoming known can its trajectory be perceived and works from all eras be properly contextualized. The earliest works of Latin-American science fiction have often been victims of misplacing, mislabeling, and misrepresentation. Once re-identified, reclaimed, and re-evaluated in light of their ties to the genre, they have proven to be valuable tools for reaching a broader understanding of Latin-American culture and cultural production as well as contributing new perspectives on the science-fiction genre as a whole. An examination of the publication, citation, and retrolabeling histories of some of the earliest works of Latin-American science
The Expanding Field of Latin-American SF fiction will show that the textual histories of these works parallel and explicate the development of Latin American science fiction as a genre and as a field. Significant groundwork has now been laid upon which further scholarship can be based.

The Emergence, Re-Emergence, and Retrolabeling of Latin-American Science Fiction: 1875, 1957, 2000

The story of the earliest texts of Latin-American science fiction is almost universally one of first appearance followed by relative disappearance, then sporadic signs of re-emergence, and finally retrolabeling in conjunction with permutations of critical consideration, republication, and widespread name recognition. For purposes of reference and clarity, analysis of these textual histories will be centered around three representative dates: 1875 for the period when the texts were originally published; 1957 for the time when they were first recovered or republished in part and when, concurrently, new works of genre sf were appearing in increasing numbers; and 2000 for the time when each early text had definitively been retrolabeled and accepted as “science fiction” by the current wave of Latin-American sf scholars, writers, and readers.

1875

As a general tendency, the earliest texts of Latin-American science fiction were written during periods of political change or unrest in their nations of origin, but when, at the same time, processes of national consolidation, economic development, and/or advances in science also made for optimism regarding the future. Advances in transportation and communication technology in particular—railroads, the steamship, the telegraph, and the prospect of guided air travel—held great promise for facilitating national unification, improvements in internal and international trade and cultural exchange, and industrial development. In short, there was promise for Latin-American nations to move into more prominent positions on the world stage. For such reasons most of the texts published around this time showed the authors’ marked technophilia and a political bent, and many contained utopian representations of national futures, which included satires on less ideal nineteenth-century realities and specific agenda for bringing about the improvements envisioned. Most of these works were first published in the periodical press; a few were subsequently published as novels, and several originally appeared in book form. For our purposes of tracing the evolution of the genre in Latin America, we will follow the vagaries of the histories of five texts from Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina with additional supporting information provided on several other works (please see the above-mentioned bibliographies for more complete listings of early works from these and other countries). I have discussed the content of these individual texts in greater detail elsewhere, but some specific information on each is useful at this point.

The two-page, futuristic sketch “México en el año 1970” was published in 1844 in El Liceo Mexicano. Its author, like many of the contributors to this literary magazine, wrote under a pseudonym. The self-designated “Fósforos-Cerillos” paints a picture of a twentieth-century Mexico in which problems from political corruption to public sanitation to cultural isolation have been surmounted by citizens who are unified by cutting edge methods of transportation and communication, who embrace modern ideas of specialization in their field of study and work, and who would be almost unrecognizable to certain, unnamed nineteenth-century leaders referred to as “seudo hombres grandes” (348).

Joaquim Felício dos Santos (1828–95) published Páginas da história do Brasil escrita no anno de 2000 (hereafter Brasil 2000) over a series of four years (1868–72) in the regional newspaper O Jequitinhonha. Felício dos Santos was a republican from Minas Gerais living in a time when a monarchy based in Rio de Janeiro meant centralized political and economic structures. He wrote in direct reaction to preferential treatment bestowed upon the Conservative party by Dom Pedro II in 1868; and he used his text to satirize the regime, the king and his partisans, and the
unpopular war with Paraguay and to comment on other issues of the day. The text involves both a history book that travels back through time from the year 2000 and a king who travels forward in time to the year 2000. When he arrives in the future, Dom Pedro is forced to confront the successful reversal of his policies in a decentralized, republican utopia.

A Portuguese-born Brazilian, Augusto Emílio Zaluar (1825-82), published the novel *O Doutor Benignus* in 1875. Zaluar’s title character invokes Jules Verne and his literary creations and the scientific precepts of Camille Flammarion as he sets out on a journey into the heart of the Brazilian *sertão*. There he finds proof that Brazil is the cradle of humanity, makes contact with a more advanced species of Sun Beings because of his scientific worthiness, and establishes a utopian community in conjunction with representatives from Europe and the United States.

The Argentine scientist, educator, and literary innovator, Eduardo Ladislao Holmberg (1852–1937), published two science-fictional texts beginning in 1875: *Dos partidos en lucha* (1875) and *Viaje maravilloso del Señor Nic-Nac* (1875–76, hereafter *Nic-Nac*; see bibliography for full-length title). The first work is described by Marcelo Montserrat as “la primera profesión pública del credo darwinista” in Argentina (25). After a description of a first debate between porteño Darwinists and Creationists – la the T. H. Huxley versus Bishop Wilberforce debate of 1860, Holmberg extrapolates a second trip by Darwin to Argentina in order to make a second debate a definitive victory for the believers in evolution and, symbolically, to pass the torch of scientific leadership on to the New World in general and to the Argentines in particular. Holmberg’s *Nic-Nac* was published in the folletín section of the newspaper *El Nacional* between November 1875 and March 1876, and the publisher of that newspaper subsequently came out with the text in book form. In the frame of this work, Señor Nic-Nac purports to have just returned, in November 1875, from a trip to Mars. Nic-Nac publishes the account of his journey and of what he has learned about the alternately utopian and allegorical inhabitants of the Martian nation of Aureliana, with emphasis on science, religion, and politics.

Almost certainly none of the aforementioned writers had read any of the science-fictional texts by the others, and the texts rarely remained in cultural memories long enough to influence the next generations of national writers. It is not, therefore, possible to talk of self-sustaining national or continental science fiction traditions in Latin America in the nineteenth century. But this clustering of science-fictional texts appearing circa 1875 consists of too many works to be explained away as mere coincidence. Above and beyond propitious cultural, political, economic, and technological contexts such as those discussed above, the principal pattern that emerges from a study of these works is that the connection these writers had to what was rapidly coalescing into the science fiction genre was global rather than national in nature. While these early texts represent Latin-American participation in a global genre, they were not known to a global readership, and even local readers soon lost track of them. Contributing factors to their virtual disappearance were the particularly time-stamped nature of the content of most of these texts; the relatively ephemeral media upon which they were printed and/or small print runs; the technophobia of the next, turn-of-the-century generation; increasing disillusionment with local political processes and economic progress; the growing primacy of literary realism; and the fact that the authors themselves subsequently went on to other literary and/or nation-building projects for which they are better known. In 1940, in one of a few scattered references to any of these texts, a Brazilian critic referred to *Brasil 2000* as a “raridade bibliográfica,” valuing the text not as an example of early Brazilian science fiction, but as a “curiosíssimo e profético panfleto,” and he recommended it to those who would live to see the year 2000, “se até lá não desaparecerem das nossas bibliotecas públicas os poucos exemplares que elas possuem, e houver alguém que benemeritamente o reedite e divulgue” (Magalhães qtd. in Machado Filho 210n7). Republication was not to come about to any degree until 1957.

**1957**

Science fiction continued to be published in Latin America between 1875 and 1957,
The Expanding Field of Latin-American SF

particularly prior to 1920, but, consistent with the theory of Latin-American participation in a
global rather than a local genre tradition, subsequent writers rarely read the texts written by the
genre’s local “founding fathers.” In fact, no second editions were published of any of our five
works during this time period. This began to change in 1957 for reasons that range from very
deliberate early efforts at genealogy-building to the purely coincidental. The year 1957 is the
chosen axis for this stage in the genre’s history in part for its symbolic import as the launch date
for Sputnik and the space race. As can be seen from articles in the science fiction magazines that
were springing up in a number of Latin-American countries at this time, Latin Americans were
neither immune to the lure of space nor isolated from news of related scientific advances pro-
duced in the North. These magazines were some of the first sustained efforts at the publication
of science fiction periodicals in Latin America, although, as we have said, much of their content
consisted of translations of Northern works or of entire Northern sf magazines. In 1957 we are
also at the doorstep of the first golden age of Latin-American science fiction, an official start date
for which has been cited as 1959, with the publication of the Chilean Hugo Correa’s Los altísimos
(Bell and Molina-Gavilán 7–8).

It took some time for any contributors to this wave of genre sf to show any interest in genre
history or criticism, however, so the occurrence in 1957–58 of the first three events of the re-
emergence of early Latin-American science fiction must be attributed for the most part to
coincidence. The year 1957 saw the publication of the first compilation of Holmberg’s short
stories by Antonio Pagés Larraña in the volume Cuentos fantásticos. The science fictional tale
“Horacio Kalibang o los autómatas” (1879) is included in this collection, and Pagés Larraña’s
discussions of both Dos partidos en tucha and Nic-Nac in his “Estudio Preliminar” were for
many years the source for much of the information about these difficult-to-obtain texts. Despite
this seemingly science-fiction-packed year for Argentina, however, Pagés Larraña never refers to
Holmberg’s treatment of space travel nor mentions the term “science fiction” with regard to any
of these three texts. Also in 1957, the Brazilian literary scholar Alexandre Eulálvio republished fifty-
odd pages of Brasil 2000 in the Revista do Livro. Eulálvio includes a statement of his intention to
republish the work in its entirety, which he was never to do for reasons unknown, but it is clear
that he deemed it worthy of republication mostly for its historical value. He makes no connection
between Brasil 2000 and the science fiction genre. In Mexico in 1958, Pablo González Casanova
included a chapter on an even earlier Mexican science fictional text, Sizigias y cuadraturas
lunares by Fray Manuel Antonio de Rivas (1775), in his book La literatura perseguida en la
crisis de la colonia. González Casanova does not discuss this work as a precursor of genre sf, but
as part of “el género de los relatos fantásticos” (105; see Dziubinskyj for a complete textual
history of this work). The 1960s brought greater depth to the field of Latin-American science
fiction with the publication of important critical works on the genre such as the aforementioned
books by Capanna and Carneiro, with the founding of specialized publishing houses such as
Ediciones Minotauro and Gumercindo Rocha Dorea’s GRD, and with the first true act of claiming
one of our earliest works for the genre: Eduardo Goligorsky’s 1968 anthology of Argentine
science fiction, Los argentinos en la luna, begins with the republication of seven of the forty
original chapters from Holmberg’s Nic-Nac. Although abating somewhat, this trend continued in
the 1970s. Several key landmarks in this decade are anthologies such as Los universos vislum-
brados and Ross Larson’s Fantasy and Imagination in the Mexican Narrative, an important
work for the identifying and retrolabeling of Mexican sf texts such as Sizigias y cuadraturas
lunares and later works by writers such as Julio Torri, Amado ?ervo, Martín Luis Guzmán, and
Eduardo Urzaís [sic, also Urzaiz Rodríguez] (Larson 51–61).

This golden age, in sum, saw a rise in the publication of works by Latin-American sf writers,
the early stages of sf criticism in Latin America, the formation of networks of readers in the
beginnings of organized fandom, and the first evidence of importance being given to the location
of and access to the genre’s earliest local examples. By the end of this wave of science fiction in
Latin America, however, only two of our five texts had been republished in part, and only one had
been retrolabeled as science fiction. Despite important steps taken toward a more critical
understanding of the genre during this stage, much remained to be done.8

2000

The millennial year 2000 is the target date for a number of early Latin-American euchronian fictions such as Brasil 2000, it is the year in which the Chasqui chronology was published, and it falls squarely within the most active period of retrolabeling in the history of Latin American science fiction. In addition to the three bibliographical projects described in the introductory section of this essay, a broad base of other factors has contributed to the development of this most recent wave of Latin American science fiction and sf criticism. Technological advances, especially the internet, have meant that international library cataloging is available to all. E-zines have made publication more accessible to Latin American writers, even in the midst of hyperinflation. Writers, readers, fans, critics, and/or scholars have networked and become more group-conscious via list serves, on-line discussion groups, and e-mail. Increasing economic and political stability has influenced this wave, as have the postmodern, post-colonial, Post-Boom trends in literature and literary criticism, which have trained scholarly focus on “marginal” or popular literatures and brought cultural studies to the fore. Prizes for science fiction in Latin America (such as the Más Allá in Argentina, the Premio Puebla in Mexico, the David in Cuba) have stimulated the growth of the genre, as have conventions, conferences, and symposia. The impact of the extraordinary efforts of individuals and of happy coincidence should not be discounted. All of these factors have combined to produce a critical mass of primary and secondary sources and to foster a spirit of historical and bibliographical inquiry that are contributing to the construction of a more complete and complex understanding of the genre in Latin America. Additionally, subsequent generations will be better able to build upon these accomplishments, as the field is unlikely to contract in the future to the extent that it has between past waves in the genre. The works being published or republished are more durable in terms of publication venue, breadth of distribution, and/or physical medium, and they are thus better equipped to withstand the challenges posed by time, political and economic situations, or literary fashions.

It is not possible to include anything like a complete listing of recent contributions to the field, but a representative sample of landmarks from 1984–2007 will give an idea of the depth attained. In 1984 the magazine Ciencia y Desarrollo of the Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología in Mexico launched the Concurso CONACyT Puebla de Ciencia Ficción (see López Castro 140–41). This magazine three years later published the paper “Una primitiva ciencia ficción en México” by the historian Anne Staples along with the text she had rediscovered and retrolabeled, “México en el año 1970.” The text was later republished and its place in the sf canon reaffirmed in Gabriel Trujillo Muñoz’s anthology El futuro en llamas: Breve crónica de la ciencia ficción mexicana. Developments in magazine publication and the impact of the internet are perhaps clearest in the case of Axxón: Ciencia ficción en bits. In 1989 this Argentina-based science fiction magazine was distributed via computer disk, in 1996 it went on-line, and it has just posted its 180th issue (all issues are available at <http://axxon.com.ar/axxon.htm>).

An early bellwether in science-fiction criticism during this wave is Capanna’s 1992 monograph El mundo de la ciencia ficción, a revised second edition of his El sentido de la ciencia-ficción from a quarter century earlier. Capanna appends a new thirteen-page section on Argentine science fiction to the work; on the first page he crowns the retrolabeling efforts begun by Goligorsky in 1968, declaring, “Se considera que el zoólogo Eduardo L. Holmberg […] fue el iniciador de la cf en Argentina” (177). It is also circa 1992 that Bráulio Tavares produced a catalog of Brazilian sf under the auspices of the Biblioteca Nacional of Brazil.9 The turn of the millennium saw the publication of other works of criticism. Andrea Bell gave an early overview of the genre in the section on Latin America in the article “Current Trends in Global SF.” Cosmos Latinos, edited by Bell and Molina-Gavilán, became the first anthology of Latin American science fiction available in English translation and the first Latin-America-related volume in Wesleyan University Press’s Early Classics of Science Fiction series. Brazilian Science Fiction: Cultural
The Expanding Field of Latin-American SF

Myths and Nationhood in the Land of the Future is one of a number of monographs appearing in the field; in this volume Ginway discusses Brazilian science fiction written since the 1960s as well as possible approaches to the analysis of science fiction written in the periphery. Expanding scholarly activity can also be noted in the increased number of dissertations in the field, and in the conference panels and symposia devoted to it.10

Republication of and/or renewed access to the earliest works of Latin-American science fiction has proceeded apace in recent years. In 1994, for example, Gioconda Marín edited a critical edición príncipe of Olimpio Pitango de Monalia, a much later science-fictional work by Holmberg, and researchers from the Fundación Casa de Rui Barbosa published a second edition of O Doutor Benignus. In the early 1990s Bráulio Tavares rediscovered part of the text of Brasil 2000 in a library in Belo Horizonte, and he retrolabeled it as science fiction in The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction (1993) and in other articles. Sizigias y cuadraturas lunares was republished in 1992 by Ana María Morales and again in 2001 by Fernández Delgado. There has been a veritable frenzy in Holmberg reeditions since 2000, including both Dos partidos en lucha and Nic-Nac. Another accomplishment worthy of mention is the digitization and web-posting of a number of the earliest texts of Chilean sf as part of the Memoria Chilena project, under the auspices of the Dirección de Bibliotecas, Archivos y Museos (see <http://www.memoriachilena.cl/mchilena01/ temas/index.asp?id_ut=literaturadecienciaficcionchile>).

The original idea for digitizing these rare early Chilean works came from the self-described “amateur entusiasta” of science fiction, Omar Vega. Vega’s account of his work in tracing the roots of Chilean sf is useful as an example of the retrolabeling process and for shedding further light on how and why Latin-American sf has been expanding as a field of study:

Siempre me ha gustado la ciencia ficción desde niño y mis ídolos fueron Verne, Wells y Asimov. […] Un día de 2004, explorando la web, me encontré con un foro de escritores latinoamericanos de CF. Participé en sus discusiones, escribí cuentos y artículos para ellos, y me enteré que la CF latinoamericana y chilena tenía una larga data, y quedé fascinado. Seguí investigando y recopilando información hasta que pude consolidar en una lista única toda la información existente sobre nuestra CF antigua. Después me puse a investigar, en forma independiente, en la Biblioteca Nacional, y en todas las fuentes que pude, hasta llegar a tener un panorama relativamente acabado sobre el tema. […] Me di cuenta de la fragilidad de nuestros registros históricos, pues muchos de ellos dependían de un solo libro almacenado en la biblioteca. […] Debido a ese sentido de urgencia, convencí a un amigo que dirigía el e-zine más importante de Chile, TauZero (<www.tauzero.org>) que le mandáramos una carta a Memoria Chilena para pedirles que nos digitalizaran los clásicos de la CF chilena. Gentilmente accedieron, y hoy tenemos algunos de esos documentos en la red. […] Tengo la seguridad que existen muchas joyas todavía ocultas en espera de ser descubiertas. […] En todo caso, el mismo hecho que cada país anuncie sus descubrimientos bibliográficos ha hecho que estemos en una carrera de quien descubre los libros más antiguos y más valiosos. Es una sana carrera “chovinista” pero amistosa que hará crecer el conocimiento que tenemos del pasado. (Vega)

With an early familiarity with Northern science fiction as a point of departure, then, a fan-writer-critic of Latin-American sf pursues his interest in the genre and develops his craft by networking throughout Chile and Latin America via the web. Participation in the current wave of science fiction gives rise to an interest in earlier local wave(s) and the roots of the genre in Latin America. Upon locating some early national examples of sf, he finds that these roots are in imminent danger of permanent disappearance due to the few copies that are extant, to the condition of these copies, and to a universal lack of knowledge regarding their literary and/or cultural value. Through the combined efforts of an individual, a genre magazine, and a national institution, and with the aid of recent advances in technology, these early texts of Latin-American science fiction are both preserved in a modern format and made easily available planet-wide. As a result, knowledge of the genre’s Latin American past is not only more possible, it is more probable. Similar processes are ongoing in many countries in Latin America today thanks to the efforts of other “entusiastas,” both amateur and professional.11
Successful retrolabeling of a text is denoted by references in bibliographies and other reference works, citations in critical histories and analyses of the genre, renewed availability and circulation, and, eventually, the passing of the name of the text into common parlance. While the earliest works of Latin-American science fiction appeared, in 1992, to be of minimal numerical or critical importance in a small field, in 2007 they are an exponentially increasing segment of a greatly expanding area of creative and scholarly endeavor. Of the five texts discussed in this essay, all, with the exception of Brasil 2000, have now been reprinted at least once, and references to them and discussions of them are appearing everywhere from academic venues to prefaces of sf anthologies to Wikipedia. What remains is for these and other such works to be still more widely read and studied, thus taking their rightful places in the cultural memory of their countries and continents of origin and as part of the global roots of the science-fiction genre.

NOTES

1 The trajectory of the science-fiction genre is commonly described as consisting of waves, clusters, eras, ages. In Latin America, the majority of science-fiction production falls into either the fin-de-siècle / national-consolidation-to-modernista cluster (c. 1870–1920); the space race era / (first) golden age (c. 1959–74); or the second wave / post-dictatorship / mass culture stage that began in the mid to late 1980s and continues today. For discussions of groupings of Northern science fiction, see Suvin (87) and Nicholls (“History of SF”). For more on the waves of science fiction in Latin America and individual Latin-American nations, see Bell, Bozzetto, and Gomel (“Current Trends” 441–42), Bell and Molina-Gavilán (3–13), Capanna (Mundo 177–89), Ginway (14, 137–38), and Trujillo Muñoz (Biografías 14–24, 345–63).

2 The definition for “sf” in The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction declares it to be “pronounced ‘ess-eff,’ the preferred abbreviation of ‘science fiction’ within the community of sf writers and readers, as opposed to the journalistic sci fi” (Nicholls, “SF” 1062). This abbreviation is also commonly used by scholars of science fiction in the U.S.

3 These three bibliographies have been chosen for their scope and for the prominence and availability of their publication venues. This is not to discount the many country-specific bibliographies and essays, from which these three bibliographies have undoubtedly profited. A few key bibliographers, scholars, and living resources on Latin American sf not mentioned by name in the body of this essay are: Eduardo J. Carletti (Argentina), Moisés Hassón (Chile), Gerson Lodi-Ribeiro (Brazil), Iván Molina Jiménez (Costa Rica), R.C. Nascimento (Brazil), Marcello Simão Branco (Brazil), and Roberto de Sousa Causo (Brazil). My apologies to any unintentionally excluded; I refer the reader to the print and electronic sources cited in this article for more complete listings.

4 The watershed date of 1926 is given as dividing “early” science fiction from “science fiction” proper because it is the year in which Hugo Gernsback (for whom the Hugo Award is named) began the formal process in his magazine Amazing Stories of giving the name “science fiction” to the phenomenon that had been coalescing into a genre for some time. It also functions well as an upper-end limit to the first cluster of Latin-American science fiction (see note 1 above).

5 Felício dos Santos and Zaluar knew each other, at least by reputation, and each mentions the other in his text. They were on opposite sides of the political spectrum, however, and Felício dos Santos includes Zaluar in Brasil 2000 as an example of a poet who is a toady to the monarchy. Apparently lacking any knowledge of this negative portrayal, Zaluar names Felício dos Santos in Doutor Benignus in his capacity as a respected historian of a region through which his characters were traveling.

6 The only example of a fairly uninterrupted tradition of Latin-American science fiction is that of the Rio de la Plata. It is possible to trace direct influence—though not necessarily an influence that was principally in the arena of science fiction—from Holmberg to Leopoldo Lugones (1874–1938), to Horacio Quiroga (1878–1937), and to Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986) and Adolfo Bioy Casares (1914–99).

7 For examples of scientific and space-related articles for the general public, see the Argentine sf magazine Más Allá.

8 For a discussion of the “trough” in Latin-American sf during parts of the 1970s and 1980s following this golden age, see Bell and Molina-Gavilán (9–10).

9 This is an undated, English-language catalog published with the goal of facilitating the translation of the...
works listed. Because, therefore, “only those books the authors or publishers of which could be traced” could be included, this catalog, while a valuable resource, has not been discussed as a bibliography (5).

A few examples of the non-print dialogues taking place in the field of science fiction in Latin America and the periphery are: the panel “Imagining Peace in Latin American Science Fiction” at the 2003 convention of the Modern Language Association; the 2004 International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts (ICFA), Here There Be Dragons: The Global Fantastic, headlined by representatives of Latin America and also Spain, with Daina Chaviano as guest of honor and Marcial Souto as guest scholar; the 2005 international symposium at the University of Florida, Latin America Strikes Back: Science Fiction in the Global Era; and the 2007 MLA panel “Science Fiction in the ‘Third’ World.” It should also be mentioned that the annual ICFA, now in its twenty-ninth year, consistently has multiple panels on Latin-American sf under the aegis of the Division of International Fantastic Literatures (one of eight divisions of the International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts). In 2007 the ICFA instituted the Jamie Bishop Memorial Award for an Essay Not in English; the first award went to the Argentine critic Carlos Abraham (for more information see <http://www.iafa.org/>).

Journals such as Science Fiction Studies and the IAFA’s Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts regularly publish articles on Latin-American sf. Most recently, in November 2007 Science Fiction Studies came out with a Special Issue on Latin-American SF, in which the Molina-Gavilán et al. “Chronology” appears.

A recent occurrence of retralabeling and republication in Bolivian sf, for example, is of the text “Lima de aquí a cien años” by Julián M. del Portillo. The text reappears in the print and online journal, Ajos & Zafiras. See also Haywood Ferreira (“Emergence,” “First Wave”).

WORKS CITED


—. Viaje maravilloso del señor Nic-Nac en el que se refieren las prodigiosas aventuras de este señor y se dan a conocer las instituciones, costumbres y preocupaciones de un mundo desconocido: Fantasía espiritista. Buenos Aires: El Nacional, 1875.

