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Indian Science Fiction: Maps and Myths of the Future

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ContactZone is an international double-blind peer-reviewed e-journal which publishes scholarly work on Science Fiction and the Fantastic connecting different languages, non-mimetic genres, and fields of study. It is the journal of the Italian Association for the Study of Science Fiction and the Fantastic. The areas of research range from literature to cinema, from media to comics and video games touching a wide spectrum of critical approaches, which includes literary criticism, ecocriticism, film studies, gender studies, cultural studies, postcolonial studies, linguistics, translation studies, critical race studies, queer studies. The journal welcomes papers from scholars, authors, teachers, and librarians supporting an innovative insight into texts written in English, but also in other languages, in order to promote a lively dialogue among critics and other specialists on an international level. *ContactZone* will focus on themes and topics dealing with the representation of imaginative and/or alternative worlds in the realms of science fiction and the fantastic.

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Introduction

Indian Science Fiction: Routes of the Past in the Future

Esterino Adami and Oriana Palusci
DOI: 10.26379/1590

Indian science fiction is a field that has progressively emerged and evolved, enriching the worldwide debate on Science Fiction studies, highlighting a number of themes. Stemming from a double matrix tied to the heritage of Indian culture (in particular the Hindu or Vedic body of traditions) and the imperialist experience (with the introduction of colonial Western knowledge), Indian science fiction constitutes a wide domain in which artists from different epochs and backgrounds have appropriated, manipulated or reinvented tropes and codes to give voice to a series of questions, from Kylas Chunder Dutt's *A Journal of Forty-Eight Hours of the Year 1945*, published in 1835 and recognised as the first example of Indian speculative discourse, to the works of ground-breaking authors such as Salman Rushdie and Amitav Ghosh (whose novel *The Calcutta Chromosome*, 1987) was the first Indian recipient of the Arthur C. Clarke Award), and more recently important writers such as Vandana Singh, Manjula Padmanabhan and Samit Basu.

Generation 14: A Postnational Dystopia

Suparno Banerjee

DOI: 10.26379/1591

Abstract

Most Indian dystopian fiction written in English focuses on the idea of the Indian nation (directly or metaphorically) and various forms of postcolonial identity politics associated with it. However, works like Priya Sarukkai Chabria's *Generation 14* (2008) and Shiv Ramdas's *Domechild* (2014), although still engaging in power and identity politics of the above kind, marks a movement beyond the discourses of the nation. This essay argues that *Generation 14* explicitly deploys postnationalist strategies to attack the ideology of domination at a much wider scale, while still inspired by Indian culture and history. Avoiding the East/West discourses dominant in the dystopian fiction preceding it, *Generation 14* suggests that oppression has been a major human quality throughout history, and so has been resistance. Mapping the novel on Althusser's concepts of Ideology and subject formation and Adorno's theory of genocide as complete integration of the Other, this essay presents *Generation 14* as a statement against ideologies of oppression not contained within the borders of the nation.

Archaeologies of the Future in Vandana Singh's Speculative Fiction

Oriana Palusci
DOI: 10.26379/1592

Abstract

Vandana Singh's short stories – *The Woman Who Thought She Was a Planet and Other Stories* (2008) and *Ambiguity Machines and Other Stories* (2018)– and novellas question conventional Western science fiction themes and blend an approach based on Indian myths and Indian contemporary life with a postmodern/postcolonial consciousness dealing with the complexity of environmental issues and the connection (or “entanglement”) between humankind and advanced technologies, and the natural world.

Singh's scientists, mainly (but not exclusively) young women, fight with themselves and the surrounding background in order to give a sense to their own dual identity and to an unstable human future. Their research leads them to the mysterious regions of the Arctic Ocean or of interplanetary space, teeming with alien life. The question of alienness is at the heart of the ambitious novella *Of Love and Other Monsters* (2007), centred upon the languages of science fiction and the effectiveness of their imaginative interpretation of the world.

Mapping and Identity in Rushdie's *Grimus*

Anupam Siddharth

DOI: 10.26379/1593

Abstract

Leaning on Eric D. Smith's reading of *Grimus* as anticipating the transnational reality of globalisation and the neutralization of this space through its utopian configuration as void, this article will examine the validity of mapping as constitutive of identity formation, in an age insisting upon the obsolescence of drawing, marking borders and their recognition as such. Or to what extent mapping as praxis is constitutive for identity, in an age characterised by mobility and displaced subjects? While delving into such questions the article attempts to triangulate the relation between subject, mapping and totality and how the form of science fiction affects these considerations. Against the belief that the novel fails to provide a "well-defined identity," the article would locate the lack not in the narrative form of the novel, but of traditional apparatus such as mapping as offering stable coordinates for identity constitution once confronted with increased dimensionality or in other words with the shape-shifting transnational space.

Feeling the Future: Text World Theory, Emotions and Reader Response in Indian Science Fiction Short Stories

Esterino Adami
DOI: 10.26379/1594

Abstract

Indian science fiction is a complex literary domain that attracts and puzzles readers, in particular in light of its hybrid origins, at the interface between Indian and western cultures. In this article, I focus on the challenging nature of some Indian science fiction short stories to investigate the textual mechanics that produce involvement and reaction in readers. For this purpose, I adopt and adapt an interdisciplinary approach drawing on the theoretical framework of postcolonial studies and cognitive stylistics, and I address three overlapping aspects, namely the multi-layered presence of text-worlds in Indian SF, the emotional effect of the language and the response from readers. I examine “Upgrade” by Manjula Padmanabhan and “Mother” by Shovon Chowdhury, both from the volume *Avatar. Indian Science Fiction* (2019). However, since Indian science fiction is a narrow and porous arena, I also consider the stories contained in *Cyberabad Days* (2009) by Ian McDonald, a British author, who contributes to, and endorses, the emerging canon of Indian SF.

Subverting Reason, Thinking Futurity. Climate Change, Posthumanism and Bengali Science Fiction

Binayak Roy

DOI: 10.26379/1595

Postcolonial theory is skeptical of modernity for its imperialist incursions, reductionist rationality, stereotypical racism, and blind will to power. Conceived as objective, disinterested and truth-seeking, Western science ultimately turned out to be a tool of colonization and of world domination. Bengali science fiction writers during colonial times reappropriated the genre of science fiction to revert the gaze by dismantling the stereotypes that European science fiction perpetuated. J.C. Bose's short narrative anticipates not only the scientific concepts of surface tension and butterfly effect but also predates much of the concerns of the present theorists of climate change. Premendra Mitra's stories, written in the historical backdrop of the two World Wars, however, evade the nationalist-scientific bias and provide a global and larger humanistic dimension to Bengali science fiction.

A modern humanist that he is, Satyajit Ray holds the balance even between aesthetics and ethics, and thereby eschews the twin evils of nationalist propaganda and didacticism. The article seeks to explore how Bengali science fiction matured from the days of writing back to the empire to finally explore posthumanist and environmental issues and become transnational. Writing in the 1970s, Ray certainly anticipated the speed of technological advancement, the innovative programming techniques and adaptive capabilities in androids at the turn of the century which have provided them with a semblance of "understanding" or even "having an internal subjective existence – whether they have it or not", as Braidotti puts it.

Visions of the Pandemic in the Bengali Science Fiction Webzine *Kalpabiśva*

Daniela Cappello
DOI: 10.26379/1596

Abstract

The return of traditional practices as means to cope with the trauma of the pandemic in India shows that people are drawn to existing repertoires of myths and significations associated with epidemics. Yet the global dimension of this viral outbreak is unprecedented, having generated a transcultural imaginary of “pandemic” that is deeply entrenched in the authority of science and rationalism. I analyze three contemporary science fiction stories from the Bengali webzine *Kalpabiśva* (2020) to see how this genre has engaged with ethical and cultural problems related to the “pandemic” (*atimārī*) in India. The stories contain typical ingredients of a transcultural imaginary of ‘disease’: international scientific collaboration, bio-laboratories testing vaccines in Calcutta, but also man-eating funguses, housemaid robots, and vaccines developed out of ritual offerings to Hindu gods. I argue that these stories reinvent a post-pandemic world in a utopian rather than in a dystopian fashion to help make sense of the trauma of Covid-19 by stressing the power and authority of science and biotechnologies.

The Eaton Collection of Science Fiction and Fantasy at UC Riverside: Pasts, Presents, and Futures

Andrew Lippert and Sandy Enriquez
DOI: 10.26379/1597

Conclusion

From rather humble beginnings, the Eaton Collection of Science Fiction and Fantasy has continued to grow and serve as a leading research collection for the fields of speculative fiction. We hope to further build on the legacies of Dr. Eaton and Professor Slusser as we continue to shape the collection to reflect the ever evolving landscape of speculative fiction. Much as it was under Slusser, teaching and outreach will continue to be a point of emphasis for the collection. We look forward to what the future will bring and believe the Eaton Collection will continue to serve as a valuable resource for current and future researchers and fans.