

ContactZone

Rivista dell'Associazione italiana per lo studio della fantascienza e del fantastico

Indian Science Fiction: Maps and Myths of the Future

Editors: Esterino Adami and Oriana Palusci



(2021) Vol. N° 1 (maggio) – ISSN 2723-8881

PAOLO
LOFFREDO





ContactZone

n. 1 (maggio) 2021

ContactZone

An International Peer-Reviewed
E-Journal

CHIEF EDITOR

Oriana Palusci

aisff.starfiction@gmail.com

ADVISORY BOARD

Esterino Adami,

University of Turin, Italy

Silvia Albertazzi,

University of Bologna, Italy

Giuseppe Balirano,

University of Naples 'L'Orientale', Italy

Suparno Banerjee,

Texas State University, USA

Maria Teresa Chialant,

University of Salerno, Italy

Bianca Del Villano,

University of Naples 'L'Orientale', Italy

Vita Fortunati,

University of Bologna, Italy

Paola Gorla,

University of Naples 'L'Orientale', Italy

Giulia Iannuzzi,

University of Trieste, Italy

Carlo Pagetti,

University of Milan, Italy

Patrick Parrinder,

University of Reading, UK

Salvatore Proietti,

University of Calabria, Italy

Eric S. Rabkin,

University of Michigan, USA

Valentina Romanzi,

University of Verona

Umberto Rossi,

Independent Scholar

Darko Suvin,

McGill University, Canada

Nicoletta Vallorani,

University of Milan, Italy

COPY EDITOR

Antonio Fruttaldo - afruttaldo@unior.it

Roberta La Peruta - rlaperuta@unior.it

PUBLISHER

Paolo Loffredo Editore srl

via Ugo Palermo 6

80128 Napoli - Italy

P.IVA 05014040876

R.E.A. NA 931959

+39 3248382362

www.loffredoeditore.com/it/

paololoffredoeditore@gmail.com

GRAPHIC LAYOUT

Nexus Advanced Technologies, Milano

www.nexusat.it/digital-editing

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.

Director: Luca Sarti

Authorisation n. 60 issued by the Court of Naples on 16/04/2019

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 4 Introduction
Indian Science Fiction: Routes of the Past in the Future
Esterino Adami and Oriana Palusci
- 10 *Generation 14: A Postnational Dystopia*
Suparno Banerjee
- 23 Archaeologies of the Future in Vandana Singh's Speculative Fiction
Oriana Palusci
- 38 Mapping and Identity in Rushdie's *Grimus*
Anupam Siddharth
- 53 Feeling the Future: Text World Theory, Emotions and Reader Response in
Indian Science Fiction Short Stories
Esterino Adami
- 69 Subverting Reason, Thinking Futurity. Climate Change, Posthumanism
and Bengali Science Fiction
Binayak Roy
- 84 Visions of the Pandemic in the Bengali Science Fiction Webzine *Kalpabiśva*
Daniela Cappello
- 100 The Eaton Collection of Science Fiction and Fantasy at UC Riverside: Pasts,
Presents, and Futures
Andrew Lippert and Sandy Enriquez
- 106 Notes on Contributors

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 fungi, 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.

ContactZone

Rivista dell'Associazione italiana per lo studio della fantascienza e del fantastico

Fantastic Modes in Postcolonial Literatures

Editors: Silvia Albertazzi and Oriana Palusci



(2021) Vol. N° 2 (dicembre) – ISSN 2723-8881

PAOLO
LOFFREDO





ContactZone

n. 2 (dicembre) 2021

ContactZone

An International Peer-Reviewed

E-Journal

CHIEF EDITOR

Oriana Palusci

aisff.starfiction@gmail.com

ADVISORY BOARD

Esterino Adami,

University of Turin, Italy

Silvia Albertazzi,

University of Bologna, Italy

Giuseppe Balirano,

University of Naples 'L'Orientale', Italy

Suparno Banerjee,

Texas State University, USA

Maria Teresa Chialant,

University of Salerno, Italy

Bianca Del Villano,

University of Naples 'L'Orientale', Italy

Vita Fortunati,

University of Bologna, Italy

Paola Gorla,

University of Naples 'L'Orientale', Italy

Giulia Iannuzzi,

University of Trieste, Italy

Carlo Pagetti,

University of Milan, Italy

Patrick Parrinder,

University of Reading, UK

Salvatore Proietti,

University of Calabria, Italy

Eric S. Rabkin,

University of Michigan, USA

Valentina Romanzi,

University of Verona

Umberto Rossi,

Independent Scholar

Darko Suvin,

McGill University, Canada

Nicoletta Vallorani,

University of Milan, Italy

COPY EDITOR

Antonio Fruttaldo - afruttaldo@unior.it

Roberta La Peruta - rlaperuta@unior.it

PUBLISHER

Paolo Loffredo Editore srl

via Ugo Palermo 6

80128 Napoli - Italy

P.IVA 05014040876

R.E.A. NA 931959

+39 3248382362

www.loffredoeditore.com/it/

paololoffredoeditore@gmail.com

GRAPHIC LAYOUT

Nexus Advanced Technologies, Milano

www.nexusat.it/digital-editing

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.

Director: **Luca Sarti**

Authorisation n. 60 issued by the Court of Naples on 16/04/2019

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 4 Introduction
The Life of Richard Parker
Oriana Palusci
- 9 Ben Okri. A Way of Being Fantastic
Silvia Albertazzi
- 17 A Magical Realist Language? From the ‘chutnification’ of English to Multi-lingualism in Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* and its Film Adaptation
Mirko Casagrande
- 33 Fantastic Tropes and Indigenous Female Gothic in Alexis Wright’s *The Swan Book*
Valérie Tosi
- 51 Between the Fantastic and Myth in New Zealand: Tina Makereti’s *Once Upon a Time in Aotearoa*
Paola Della Valle
- 67 Between Faith and Irreverence: Magical Realism in Leone Ross’s *This One Sky Day*
Valentina Chiesa
- 81 Eco-crime Fiction in Randolph Stow’s *Suburbs of Hell*
Salhia Ben-Messahel
- 94 The Fantastic as Ecological Warning in Rudy Wiebe’s “The Angel of the Tar Sands”
Françoise Besson
- 107 Notes on Contributors

Introduction

The Life of Richard Parker

Oriana Palusci
DOI: 10.26379/1680

Le fantastique [...] ne dure que le temp d'une hesitation: hesitation commune au lecteur et au personnage, qui doivent decider si ce qu'ils percoivent releve ou non de la "realite", telle qu'elle existe pour l'opinion commune. A la fin d'histoire, le lecteur, sinon le personnage, prend toute-fois una decision, il opte pour l'une ou l'autre solution, et par la meme sort du fantastique. (Todorov 1970:46)

Is Todorov's definition on "*litterature fantastique*" still valid today?" It is very difficult to define the fantastic or fantasy in the new millennium after the postmodernist age that has shred the boundaries between genres and deconstructed the literary (western) canon. Today, we still appreciate Christine Brooke-Rose's scholarly approach in *The Rhetoric of the Unreal* (1981). A novelist and a structuralist critic, she compares different interpretations of *romance/fantasy/fantastic* by Northrop Frye, Tzvetan Todorov, Darko Suvin, and the different peculiarities of non-mimetic genres. However, we are actually more concerned with intertextual practices and generic hybridities.

Ben Okri. A Way of Being Fantastic

Silvia Albertazzi

DOI: 10.26379/1681

Abstract

In 1997 the Nigerian author Ben Okri published a small collection of nonfiction pieces called *A Way of Being Free*, whose value for the student of storytelling and fantastic literature appears to be inversely proportional to its size. In this sort of poetic claim for the primacy of storytelling (seen as fantastic by definition) in the Internet era, three sections are devoted to “the joys of storytelling”. The third section, which is composed of 101 aphorisms and fragments, is particularly interesting for the purposes of this essay. Okri’s aphorisms are commented in the light of Walter Benjamin’s famous essay on the storyteller and confronted with Salman Rushdie’s recurring pronouncements on the “unreality of realism”, from the interviews he gave in the early Eighties of the last century, on the wake of the success of *Midnight’s Children*, to his latest collection of essays, *Languages of Truth* (2021).

A magical realist language? From the 'chutnification' of English to multilingualism in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and its film adaptation

Mirko Casagranda

DOI: 10.26379/1682

In 1982, Salman Rushdie defined the language of *Midnight's Children* a literary idiolect derived from a process of 'chutnification', i.e. the incorporation of elements of Indian languages and dialects into English. Creatively resorting to inflection and derivation, borrowing, compounding, neologisms, and Indian expressions,

Rushdie's 'chutnified' English contributes to the magical realist narrative mode of the novel and its subversion of western paradigms of historical representation. In the homonymous film directed by Deepa Mehta in 2012, instead, parts of the novel have been 'translated' into Hindi and Urdu in order to provide the audience with a mimetic representation of Indian multilingualism. By privileging code-switching over an impossibly hybrid language, however, the film adaptation fails to convey the magical realism of the novel and its discursively disruptive power.

Fantastic Tropes and Indigenous Female Gothic in Alexis Wright's *The Swan Book*

Valerie Tosi
DOI: 10.26379/1683

The Swan Book (2013) by Aboriginal author Alexis Wright is a novel with cultural, political, and ecocritical implications. Set in a dystopian future in which wars and climate change have destroyed the Western world, it tells the story of Oblivia, a mute Aboriginal girl who is torn away from her people and forced to become the first lady of a fictitious indigenous country named Broлга Nation. Based on Propp's model for the study of the fairy tale and Todorov's characterisation of the fantastic, I intend to investigate *The Swan Book* from a genre fiction perspective. Wright draws on uncanny elements typical of fairy tales and gothic fiction to depict Oblivia's abduction, her confinement in a post-apocalyptic city, her encounters with nonhuman beings, and her journey home. My focus will be on how the author uses fantastic tropes to produce multiple levels of reality that puzzle the reader and challenge a unique interpretation of the events narrated. The spectral entities that accompany Oblivia in her hallucinatory life in the city and during her long walk across the remotest areas of central Australia can be seen as inhabitants of different realities that overlap without melding, namely uncanny articulations of 'cultural difference' (Bhabha 1994: 60).

Between the Fantastic and Myth in Aotearoa New Zealand: Tina Makereti's *Once Upon a Time in Aotearoa*

Paola Della Valle

DOI: 10.26379/1684

Magic realism has been conceptualized as a mode that transgresses ontological, political, geographical, and generic boundaries. Māori writers, however, have always considered magic realism an “invention” of the West, an aesthetic approach that has nothing to do with the deep structure of Māori values and their metaphysical underpinnings. According to Māori *mātauranga* (understanding), the supernatural and the mythical are naturally part of everyday life. History and myth overlap in the literary genre of *whakapapa* (genealogy), which underlines the centrality of ancestry in Māori culture. In *Once Upon a Time in Aotearoa* (2010), Māori writer Tina Makereti follows this principle. Her short stories explore Māori myths and legends, which are rewritten to explain the present. At the same time, she depicts the gods living in a contemporary world and motivated by human concerns. Old and new worlds coexist, characters connect with each other through ancient wisdom.

Between Faith and Irreverence: Magical Realism in Leone Ross's *This One Sky Day*

Valentina Chiesa

DOI: 10.26379/1685

This paper aims at exploring the connection between fantastic modes and indigenous cosmologies, in particular with reference to Leone Ross's third novel *This One Sky Day* (2021), whose fictional Caribbean archipelago setting, i.e. Popisho, is a community where magic is commonplace. After identifying the basic formal properties of magical realism in Leone Ross's novel, the paper uses the categories which Christopher Warnes identifies in his *Magical Realism and the Postcolonial Novel* (2009) to argue that both categories coexist in the novel, i.e. the anthropological, faith-based magical realism, and the irreverent, or discursive magical realism. On the one hand, Ross creates a fascinating portrait of Jamaican people and uses magical realism metonymically to grant access to the modes of perception (Warnes 2009) that characterise the Jamaican worldview. On the other hand, Leone Ross gives voice to those minorities who, for different reasons, have no voice. In *This One Sky Day* the supernatural is used to challenge received discourses the patriarchal and heteronormative discourse and the values that accompany it, how it is used in the perpetuation of privilege (men's) and oppression (women's and homosexuals'), how it takes on the status of truth.

Eco-Crime in Randolph Stow's *The Suburbs of Hell*

Salhia Ben-Messahel

DOI: 10.26379/1686

This paper focuses on Randolph Stow's last published novel, *Suburbs of Hell* (1984). It analyses the transposition of real events into fiction and demonstrates how the narrative strategies of crime-fiction are reflected in the environment. In this novel, the displacing of real Australian events into the fictionalized space of the country-town of Harwich, Essex, designs a counter-space, a heterotopia that relies on processes of translation and a heterochronic vision of history. Taking into account the novel's postcolonial emphasis on place and intersection with the genre of crime-fiction, I argue that Stow designs a psychogeography tracing the danger and violence within the community so that the domestic and the familiar are nothing but mere illusions. Thus, home, the rural and urban (suburban) space, the self, surface as places of otherness subjected to the subversive and uncanny effects of gothic imagination.

The Fantastic as Ecological Warning in Rudy Wiebe's "The Angel of the Tar Sands"

Francoise Besson
DOI: 10.26379/1687

In Canadian novelist Rudy Wiebe's fantastic short story "The Angel of the Tar Sands," an archaeological find becomes a supernatural figure denouncing the destruction of nature. Its fantastic presence revealing the destructive pollution of the soil affecting all creatures, denounces the destruction that takes place in Canada as well as in the United States, where the exploitation of tar sands and shale gas destroys wide areas and the populations, particularly the Native communities, living there. The opposition between nature and industry on which the story is based, brings about a new opposition between nature and supernature, in which the messenger whose fantastic body is found in the soil, speaks for all creature affected by industrial pollution. In this short story the fantastic is both a warning messenger and a poetic weapon making people aware of the threats on land, water and communities. A parallel can be made with photographs by Louis Helbig and Sebastiao Salgado showing "beauty sleeping in the lap of horror."