

Editor's Note: "The SF in Translation Universe" is a regular column appearing in the Features section of SFRA Review (beginning with issue #325).



The SF in Translation Universe #8

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WELCOME back to the SF in Translation Universe! It might seem like we've been living in a dystopian novel or postapocalyptic wasteland, but the books are still being printed and reviews are still being written, so at least there's that.

Between May and August, we've been treated to Golden Age French science fiction, World War II-era Belgian Weird, a genre-bending Bengali story cycle, Swedish horror, and so much more. With this variety of genres, languages, and cultures, it's no wonder that readers are turning to SF in translation to nourish their brains.

Thanks to the intrepid Wakefield Press, we have *two* collections of Weird tales by Francophone authors who wrote under the cloud of Nazi occupation. Jean Ray's *The Great Nocturnal: Tales of Dread* (tr. Scott Nicolay), out in June, offers us a sampling of the stories that solidified his reputation as the face of the Belgian Weird. Interrogating the depths of surrealist horror that lie just beneath everyday reality, Ray writes about alternate dimensions, strange and terrifying symbols, and horrifying transformations. Marcel Brion, too, turned to the fantastic during this dark time, publishing in 1942 the stories that make up *Waystations of the Deep Night* (tr. George MacLennan and Edward Gauvin), out in July. Like Ray, Brion draws on classic horror tropes to destabilize our sense of reality: a painting puts onlookers under a spell, an underground city erupts onto the surface . . . and then there are the dancing cats.

In keeping with this surrealist theme, we have Cuban author Miguel Collazo's 1968 novel *The Journey* (tr. David Frye), out in July from Restless Books. Blending science fiction and a dream-like metaphysical exploration of our place in the universe, Collazo's novel imagines a planet colonized long ago by scientists, whose descendants have become nomadic visionaries. The members of a new generation have discovered in themselves unprecedented psychic abilities and begin to look forward to a transformation that they call the "Journey." This sounds very similar in tone to Yoshio Aramaki's *The Sacred Era* (1978, tr. 2017), a Japanese New Wave text

that discusses surrealist art, post-Christian dogma, reincarnation, and spaceships fueled by human consciousness.

Metaphysical concerns are also at the heart of Arkady and Boris Strugatsky's nested novel *Lame Fate / Ugly Swans* (tr. Maya Vinokur), out in August from Chicago Review Press. While *Ugly Swans* was first published in English translation in 1979 as a standalone text, it is now presented with the *Lame Fate* framing story that the Strugatskys wrote in the 1960s when Soviet censors were bearing down. In *Lame Fate*, an author (Felix Sorokin) is asked by the Soviet Writers' Union to submit a manuscript for analysis by a computer program to determine its "objective value." Sorokin is torn between sending a story that the censors will find acceptable and his unpublished masterpiece (entitled *Ugly Swans*), itself a story about a disgraced author who returns to his hometown to discover that supernatural masked strangers have hypnotized the town's teenagers. If you enjoy nested stories, also check out the Polish novel *Nest of Worlds* by Marek Huberath (which came out in English in 2014).

June saw the release of Trailokyanath Mukhopadhyay's *The Epic of Damarudhar* (tr. Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay), a work of genre-bending Bengali literature first published between 1911 and 1917 (collected in 1923). *Damarudhar*, like Angelica Gorodisher's *Trafalgar*, features an eponymous storyteller entertaining his listeners with tales that range from science fiction, myth, and fantasy to social commentary and the absurd. In a similar vein, Pergentino José's *Red Ants* (tr. Thomas Bunstead) tells the stories of indigenous Mexicans via a magical realist lens turned onto themes of family and love. The first literary translation from the Sierra Zapotec, *Red Ants* (out in August from Deep Vellum) is an exciting addition to the growing list of SF in translation from Mexico.

If you're looking for some horror fiction to get your mind off of the horrors of reality, check out *Road of Ice and Salt* and *The Home*, both out in August. Published in English thanks to a successful Indiegogo campaign, *Road of Ice and Salt* (tr. David Bowles, Innsmouth Press) is a cult horror novel from Mexico that will expand our understanding of the country's speculative fiction tradition. Hop over to Sweden for more horror- Mats Strandberg's *The Home* (tr. uncredited, Jo Fletcher Books) tells the story of a nursing home where the residents (many with dementia) have turned into violent strangers with terrifying new mental abilities.

Looking instead for some classic science fiction? Flame Tree Press released Francis Carsac's *The City Among the Stars* in May (tr. Judith Sullivan and Margaret Schiff).

This first English translation of the French Golden Age novel imagines what would happen if a lieutenant serving the Earth Empire is rescued from his damaged ship by beings that call space (and their spaceship) home. These “People of the Stars” despise those who live on planets, but they want the technology that allows the Empire to track ships through hyperspace. The lieutenant won’t tell the People of the Stars what he knows, though...

If you want more Cuban science fiction, look no further than Restless Books and the two other novels that they published in July: Yoss’s *Red Dust* (tr. David Frye) and Agustín de Rojas’s *Spiral* (tr. Nick Caistor and Hebe Powell). The former is the fourth Yoss novel in English in five years and tells the story of a positronic robot detective (à la Raymond Chandler) on a quest to capture dangerous alien criminals and save the space station he calls home. The publication of de Rojas’s *Spiral* is especially noteworthy because Anglophone readers now have access to all three novels in a trilogy that includes *A Legend of the Future* and *The Year 200* (Restless Books, 2015 and 2016, respectively). A space opera that examines the ethics of scientific exploration and human interactions in a way that comments on the Cold War clash of superpowers and ideologies, *Spiral* is an important addition to the canon of Cuban science fiction.

As always, you can find excellent short SFT in print and online this spring and summer. As of this writing (mid-July), we have SFT from the Bulgarian, French, Japanese, and Chinese published in *Clarkesworld*, *Compelling Science Fiction*, *Future Science Fiction Digest*, and *Daily Science Fiction*.

Thanks for reading, and I’d love to hear what you’re reading now and/or looking forward to: rachel@sfintranslation.com.

Until next time in the SFT Universe!