

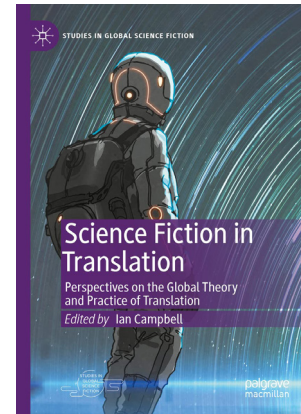
### *Science Fiction in Translation*, edited by Ian Campbell



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Ian Campbell, ed. *Science Fiction in Translation: Perspectives on the Global Theory and Practice of Translation*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2021. Studies in Global Science Fiction. eBook. 359 pages. \$109.00. ISBN 9783030842086. Hardcover ISBN 9783030842079. Softcover ISBN 9783030842109.

Science fiction (often abbreviated throughout this volume as SF), as a genre, has far more potential than just to provide scaffolding for media franchises that have dominated Anglophone ‘fandom’ spheres, such as *Doctor Who* or *Star Wars*. Modern translation studies and its dissemination into other fields, such as SF, carries the tools to decenter and destabilize the Anglocentrism of these media ventures. And it is precisely at these intersections that Georgia State University’s Ian Campbell makes a powerful case for inclusivity in SF. A scholar of Arabic science fiction and its translation into English, he binds together articles incredibly diverse not only in language and/or place of origin, but in genre and across time. Campbell dispenses this attitude readily to the intersection of SF and translations studies—a mission statement from the volume’s beginning:



SF as a genre evolved largely—though by no means exclusively—in English and in Anglophone cultures. In these cultures, even readers who don’t care for SF will likely have a clear understanding of the characteristics of the genre; they will be accustomed to the tropes and discourse of SF to an extent that readers in other cultures may not. There are many languages and cultures where SF has a firm presence: Russian and French at first, then Japanese, Spanish and Korean, and Chinese and some of the languages of the Indian subcontinent. There are still other cultures (notably, in sub-Saharan Africa) where literature is often written and read in English but where SF is a comparatively new phenomenon. This is in no way to say that people from such cultures cannot or do not understand SF: of course they can, and among other things, the expansion and distribution of SF film and television have gone a long way toward bridging that gap. (Campbell 7)

This volume does not show up empty handed or without evidence for Campbell’s vision for international science fiction. It does, though, fight for inclusion in a field dominated by ‘angloisms’ and by extension, one that has historically been white, misogynist, and queerphobic. Painfully so. An antidote is to bring attention to other canons, authors, ideas, and corpses, moreso by

introducing the Anglo world to non-Anglo SF instead of the other way around. Walt Disney Studios and its affiliates have that market cornered.

So in conducting a review for an essay anthology on translation, naturally I find myself trying to bring my own parable to the rather long and oblong table of discourse Campbell puts together neatly in *Science Fiction in Translation: Perspectives on the Global Theory and Practice of Translation*. To start, looking from my primary field of English medieval literature(s), I see the work of science fiction and translation both together and separately in this anthology as a reckoning of an irresistible force and immovable object, not unlike the most memorable section of Venerable Bede's (c. 673-735) *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. Therein, he sought to translate "Caedmon's Hymn" (aka, the first 'poem' in English) from the Old English to Latin and subjects the reader to the force and object which complicate translation (signaled in **bold**, emphasis and translation mine):

Hic est **sensus**, non autem ordo ipse **verborum** quae dormiens ille canebat; neque enim possunt carmina, quamvis optime composita, ex alia in aliam linguam ad verbum sine detrimento sui decoris ac dignitatis **transferri**.

(This here is the **sense**, though not the order **of the words** themselves, of which he was singing while sleeping. Although they are not able to be "sung", however excellently composed, out of one language to another, it is not possible to **translate** without hurting the charm and merit of them.)

In translation studies, then, from Bede to Campbell, there is the teleological battle between conveying the **sensus verborum** (sense of the words) and the methods **transferri** (to carry over, to translate). The tension between this 'force(s)' and 'object(s)', and the subsequent consequences of prioritizing one over the other, is the joy and angst inherent in works of translation. Now, applying the metaphor to science fiction and its speculative relatives, we, the initiates of this field, see a similar tension between the conventions of what is 'hard' or 'soft' SF, hard SF being speculative literature whose diegesis explicates the fiction in terms of mathematics, physics, engineering, or otherwise what may be construed as 'STEM,' while 'soft SF' may focus instead on the framings of psychology, sociology, history, or the legacy of literary lineages that converge onto the text.

On the whole, the wide array of science fiction materials may necessarily use both hard and soft SF in the development of worldbuilding, narrative scaffolding, and aesthetics, just as the translator carefully balances the sense of the words against how to *translatu*s them—that is: "trans" (across) and "latus" (been carried). So then, the exegesistic direction across the essays—crafting theses on corpuses ranging from Swedish sci-fi epics to Cuban enslavement narratives in verse, feminist utopias found from Spain to Quebec, international translations of subversive Anglo SF tomes from Phillip K. Dick to *A Clockwork Orange*—runs along and around the political ramifications, consequences, and contexts surrounding the works of translation and precisely how they came to be.

Science fiction, famous for encompassing rich and original (and English-language-based) worlds such as those found in Butler's *Dawn Trilogy* and even the ill-fated *Cyberpunk 2077*, is shown in Campbell's anthology to be more composite and diverse than the dichotomy of hard and soft SF. The breadth of geography and genres themselves expand in SF, together and separately, when 'anglophonics'—that is the collocation of both Anglo and Americans literatures, media and mores – is no longer the dominant corpus that is expanded upon and invested into. Touching on the Swedish sci fi epic *Aniara* and its subsequent translations, Dr. Daniel Helsing, Linnaeus University, writes that:

[t]raditional poetic metaphors evoke images that are unspeakably insufficient to capture the universe, yet they may lead to a sense of comprehension. They are thus not only ineffective when trying to grasp the universe; they may also be misleading. In this sense, traditional metaphors can be said to use domesticizing strategies when translating the findings of science into any natural human language. (86)

Traditional literary devices, systems, and ambitions, no less traditional audiences, is where SF and its international author base meets the hard work to convey the majestic sublime of space and all the hopes it can contain for the reader and author alike. However, staples of 'the classics' definitely do contain speculative and SF imaginings. I would, though, as a premodern scholar, further emphasize that speculative and science fiction has its origins long before Jules Verne. Geoffrey Chaucer's *Squire's Tale* (c. 1390s) or Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) are both powerful exempla of premodern speculative fiction—one in verse and one in prose. An understated job of translation is not only carrying over the sense of the words, but also being able to translate time: looking to the past and looking for the future within it. That is, traditional devices of literature do not have to exclude science fiction or international visions of it. In fact, they can help and historically have shaped speculation in literature. However, we as critics also able to separate and diminish the mores of exclusion that movements of literature historically have. Science fiction has us looking to the stars—and they should be shining as brightly as possible.

Campbell's volume is an indispensable collection of new voices and media spanning from at least the 1830s to the close of the 2010s, which not only makes the case for inclusion within the field but provides a tangible, though far reaching, web from which to choose a new vision for SF. This involves, for the casual reader or the adherent, letting go of certain attachments to what SF can and cannot be. It may involve breaking through at least two well-established binaries: the dichotomy of hard and soft SF, and from translation studies down from Bede's time: the angst between *sensus verborum* (the sense of the words) and *transferri* (what is actually carried across from translations). In a world where the lenses of SF and conscious reality seem to blur more and more, Campbell's volume and the authors included are a beacon of hope.

## NON-FICTION REVIEWS

### *SF in Translation*

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