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Fritzsche's New Book Looks at World Science Fiction Films

July 16, 2014

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.— American science fiction films have long dominated the genre worldwide because of their big budgets, expansive distribution networks and cultural dominance.

Science fiction (SF) literature expert Sonja Fritzsche recognizes this fact, but disputes the notion that the quality of such films begins and ends in Hollywood. Her desire to draw attention to non-English language films has resulted in the publication of a book that guides readers on topics ranging from the dinosaur myth that became Godzilla to Brazilian science fiction comedy.

Fritzsche, associate professor of German and Eastern European Studies at Illinois Wesleyan University, is the editor of *The Liverpool Companion to World Science Fiction Film* (Liverpool University Press, 2014). The critical analysis contains 14 chapters written by experts from around the world, with film traditions presented from Argentina to India to Poland. Each chapter includes a brief overview of science fiction history along with in-depth analyses of two or three films from the featured country.

The project began as an article commemorating the 50th anniversary of *Extrapolation*, the first academic journal in the U.S. to publish work on science fiction and fantasy. Fritzsche serves on the journal's editorial board, and as she searched archival issues, she recognized the journal had emphasized primarily English-language film and literature.

“It really bothered me that there is now so much more film that is accessible worldwide, and so much of it had been dismissed because of narrowness of focus along with a lack of access,” Fritzsche explained. “For example, some material was available only in country, and in other cases, libraries or archives didn't have films because they didn't deem the material worthy of study. And in the past many films weren't subtitled, so language was a problem.”

YouTube changed that, however, as more and more subtitled SF films from around the globe began to appear on the video-sharing website. Fritzsche contacted colleagues and almost immediately received proposals for what became half the book.

“This companion to world science fiction film is intended to enable scholars to scrutinize and broaden the established ways of talking about science fiction film,” Fritzsche writes in the book's introduction. In order to truly understand the global appeal of Hollywood's SF films, it's necessary to study SF film globally, Fritzsche said.

Influence goes both ways, she said, as directors around the world reinterpret and even explode contemporary understandings of science fiction. “It's very common to dismiss some foreign science fiction films as copies of Hollywood, but these directors are taking what Hollywood is doing and making it their own and even making fun of Hollywood in their films,” said Fritzsche. “This



Sonja Fritzsche

interplay was fascinating for me to uncover.”

The book contains a guide to film viewing. Each chapter author was asked to list five films they would recommend for a beginner to view SF films from a particular country. A chapter on digital shorts is also included.

Fritzsche hopes the book provides groundwork for further study of a genre that can be misunderstood or trivialized. “There is a school of thought that Hollywood has determined how science fiction film is made, and that since Hollywood created the genre and the technology for it, everyone else is constrained to this paradigm,” she said. “I completely disagree with this.

“Science fiction film was after all an international genre from the very beginning,” she adds. “It was not founded by Hollywood,” citing the work of Georges Méliès, Yakov Protozanov and Fritz Lang, among others.

It is a literature of the fantastic, she said, a genre that has us look at ourselves from the vantage point of another time period or another planet.

“Science fiction is a way of ‘othering’ ourselves,” she adds. “I’m hoping the book ‘others’ Anglo-American science fiction so we look to the rest of the world to see what they are doing.”

Fritzsche joined the faculty at Illinois Wesleyan in 2001. She is currently chair of the **Department of German, Russian, and Asian Languages**, and regularly serves as the IWU Coordinator for Russian and Eastern European Studies concentration in International Studies. Fritzsche also serves on the Executive Committee of the Association of Departments of Foreign Languages. She earned a Ph.D. in German Studies from the University of Minnesota, and is the editor of the new book series World Science Fiction Studies with Peter Lang.

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