

Science Fiction

September 9. Wells, Rokeya.

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Newcomers

write me a note with your:

full name

name you'd like to be called by

year

major(s) and minor(s)

anything else you'd like me to know

Last time

The approach

genre(s)

history (literary+)

individual texts and their media

Opening texts—what we noticed

the world that is other than ours (“the *novum*”)

status of human individuality & the natural in question

divergences are difficult but not *too* difficult

moral seriousness?—other generic affinities

Fans

objectivity/enthusiasm; ingroups/outgroups

modes of *participation* (not just consumption)

Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain

(1800s–early 1900s: Bengal Renaissance)

1880 b. Pairaband, Bengal (then British, now Bangladesh)

1896 married

1903– publishes essays (mostly in Bengali)

1905 “Sultana’s Dream” in *Indian Ladies’ Magazine* (Madras)

1909 Establishes girls’ school (moved to Calcutta 1911)

1916 Founds Bengali Muslim Women’s Association

1932 d.

(December 9: Rokeya Day in Bangladesh)

Conditions of emergence (I)

SF is contextualized by forms of *modernization*
esp.: new literacies, new technologies
cultural capital & other forms of power redistributed
(but...)

Does not imply that SF is always about modernity

Does not imply that SF advocates some form of modernity

modernization

“Our good Queen liked science very much. She circulated an order that all the women in her country should be educated. Accordingly a number of girls’ schools were founded and supported by the government. Education was spread far and wide among women.”

“Sultana’s Dream” (1905)

by the founder of the
Sakhawat Memorial Girls’ School (1909)

modernization

“Our good Queen liked science very much. She circulated an order that **all the women** in her country should be educated. Accordingly a number of girls’ schools were founded and supported by the government. Education was spread **far and wide** among women.”

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modernization

What forms does Rokeya's story imagine?

reverse the polarity

How does the “*mardana system*” mirror the *zenana*?
How doesn't it?

For a long time, we have been used to seclusion. Therefore, we—especially I myself—had nothing in particular to say against seclusion. If one asks a fisherwoman, “Does rotten fish smell good or bad to you?” how would she answer that?

Introduction to *The Secluded Ones*, ca. 1917

How does the form of Rokeya’s story answer these rhetorical questions?

estrangement

the familiar, made strange

strong version: taboo violation

why the technological surplus—solar beams and balloons?

“Their guns...were burned down by means of the same heat...Since then no one has tried to invade.”

“We are all very busy making nature yield as much as she can.”

“Gentlemen are kept in the mardanas to mind babies.”

in utopia, who will rule? who will work?

H.G. Wells

1866 b. Kent to a gardener and a lady's maid

1880 Works in shops, autodidact

1884 Normal School of Science

1887 Teaching; writes a biology textbook

1895 *The Time Machine* makes his fame;
more scientific romances follow

1900–1910 Joins Fabian society; pursues
literary reputation with realist novels

1914 Ministry of Propaganda in WWI

1915 Attack on Henry James in satire *Boon*

1920 *Outline of History*, a longtime transatlantic
bestseller

1946 d.



Wells, 1890s. CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0
National Portrait Gallery, London

conditions of emergence (2)

modernization (industrialized)

1. Mass literacy and mass education
(the men at the mathematician's lecture)
2. Widespread, low-cost print media
(the *Graphic*, 1897)
3. Realignment of generic system in fiction
(“scientific romance”—Sherlock Holmes—decadents)

conditions of emergence (2)

modernization (industrialized)

4. Increasing cultural authority of science
“scientific people, however, found the intelligence remarkable enough” (40)
5. Increasing diffusion and importance of technical skills
“The schoolboy...puzzled it out for himself” (43)
6. Intensification/consolidation of industrial production towards the “second spirit of capitalism”
“of the saving of laws and books **and machines**” (49)

utopia again?

The world ends again: how differently from Rokeya?

“the new brotherhood that grew presently among men” (49)

What is different about how Wells imagines utopia?

estrangement (2)

“The Martian astronomers...were naturally profoundly interested by these things. They saw them from their own standpoint of course.” (49)

next time

Reflections on genre:

Gernsback

Suvin

Gelder

TVTropes

(Digitized sources; bring in if possible. Make notes.)