

SFRA Innovative Research Award 2019



The SFRA Innovative Research Award (formerly the Pioneer Award) is given to the writer or writers of the best critical essay-length work of the year.

This year's awardee is Susan Ang for her essay "Triangulating the Dyad: Seen (Orciny) Unseen," *Foundation*, vol. 48, no. 132.

Raino Isto received an honorable mention for his essay "I Will Speak in Their Own Language': Yugoslav Socialist Monuments and Science Fiction," *Extrapolation*, vol. 60, no. 3.

Committee Statement

Joan Haran (chair), Stefan Rabitsch, Ben Robertson

FROM an apparently simple starting point—the ampersand that joins the two cities in the title of China Miéville's *The City & the City*—Susan Ang raises questions of profound complexity. These questions not only bear upon the novel in question but also the hidden histories of language and the fraught relationship between epistemology and ontology in weird fiction and the wider literary landscape. As Ang writes, "*The City & The City*, viewed through the metaphor of the ampersand, becomes readable as an enquiry into the epistemological workings of metaphor as a mechanism or model of productive thought." As Ang makes clear, this sort of productivity characterizes *The City & the City* and much of Miéville's fiction (including *Kraken* and *Embassytown*). More importantly, Ang's essay continues the scholarly inquiry into the larger generic ramifications of Miéville's work, in which the ampersand and related "meta-metaphors" both create and maintain, on one hand, and undermine and destroy, on the other, the boundaries among science fiction, fantasy, and other generic categories that subtend all such scholarly discussions. In Ang's words, in both Miéville's position as a writer and theorist of science fiction, fantasy, and the weird and Tyador Borlu's position as a member of Breach at the conclusion of *The City & the City*, "there is an implied need to bide one's time and maintain the boundaries in order that the boundaries might eventually be worn down."

For her attention to a seemingly small, perhaps even insignificant detail of this novel and insofar as she demonstrates the importance of that detail to this novel

as well as to the scholarly conversations that SFRA cultivates, Susan Ang is well-deserving of this award.

Awardee Statement

Susan Ang

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WHEN I received the email from Gerry Canavan telling me I was the recipient of this year's SFRA innovative research award, my first instinct was that I must be dreaming. That's not quite the cliché it sounds like; the email came in about 3 or 4 am Singapore time and the "bing" from my ipad woke me up. I read it, didn't take it in, and went back to sleep. When I woke up properly, I was sure I must have dreamt it, except that the email was actually in my inbox.

My surprise was mostly because while I quite like the article which the SFRA has so kindly and generously selected for the award, it has a modest history, starting out life as an undergraduate lecture on Mieville's *City & The City* for a module on sf, which I then tidied and wondered what to do with. I should explain that I'm terrified of sending off work to journals, and that my work tends to go way over the word limit decreed by most journals which makes the matter all the more difficult. I looked at *Foundation*, which, if I recall, wanted work no longer than 6000 words; my article at that point weighed in at about 10,000. I apologetically (and somewhat dismally) emailed Paul March-Russell, asking whether he would even be willing to read it at that length, and was resigned to the prospect of being sent off with the proverbial flea in my ear. Paul, however, is the kindest and most generous editor I've ever met, and he said "send it on," and to my surprise, took it, although not without chops and edits.

My most grateful thanks, therefore, go first to Paul, for that generosity of spirit, and for all his editorial guidance. My thanks also to Gerry Canavan for that lovely shocked moment when I realized his kind email wasn't a dream. I am also tremendously grateful to the judges—not for the award per se—but for the enormous investment of their time and care given to reading through a year's worth of publications before somehow deciding on mine. I am immensely humbled to have been given this award—with so much being published in the field that is brilliant and incisive, I

would never have expected to be in the running at all. This is not rhetoric but fact. I'm just secretly thrilled that people liked the piece. And last but not least, I'd like to thank my students—who inspired the lecture and responded to it; there are some students who spur one on to write lectures that hope not to disappoint, and those, too, whose rigorous arguments which run counter to sections of my own reading push one to find what one hopes will be satisfactory rebuttals. I'd therefore like to add my ex-students Lim Zhan Yi and Shawn Lim to the list of those without whom this article would not have seen the light of day.

In the current situation it seems hubristic to plan any kind of travel. But if COVID is under control, I hope to be able to offer my thanks for this award in person next year. Till then, please keep safe and well.