

Remarks on the Thomas D. Clareson Award for Distinguished Service 2020



Sherryl Vint

The Thomas D. Clareson Award for Distinguished Service recognizes excellence in science-fiction teaching, editing, reviewing, editorial writing, publishing, organizing meetings, mentoring, and leadership in sf organizations. This year's winner, Grace Dillon (Anishinaabe), is an exemplary model of transformative service. It is no exaggeration to say that her work has established a new area of scholarship within sf studies, that of Indigenous Futurisms.

At Portland State University, Grace is a professor of Indigenous Nations Studies in the School of Gender, Race, and Nations. This school brings together work in Black, Latinx, gender, sexuality, and Indigenous Studies and is a remarkable innovation in academic organization within the US system overall. Grace's many contributions to the campus played a role in making it possible to establish the school through her pioneering work in bringing together Indigenous theory and science fiction scholarship. As anyone who has the pleasure of meeting Grace's students at conferences can attest, she is a dedicated and caring mentor who takes seriously the responsibility to nurture the next generation of voices, thus to enable them to build on the solid foundations she has developed. She teaches a wide range of courses, from Native American and Indigenous studies, to science fiction; from Indigenous cinema, popular culture, race and social justice, to early modern literature.

Trained as a Shakespearean scholar, Grace's scholarship on Indigeneity and sf has built a bridge between the fields of sf studies and Indigenous studies. From this space created by her scholarly, editorial, and pedagogical work has emerged some of the most exciting work in the field. From her early generosity in curating and sharing short films created by Indigenous artists at the annual International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts, to her two edited collections—*Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction* (U of Arizona P, 2012) and *Hive of Dreams: Contemporary Science Fiction from the Pacific Northwest* (Oregon State UP, 2003)—Grace has introduced the field and the world to previously neglected artists and frameworks. This editorial work is important work of both curation and theorization: it brings into prominence neglected voices and offers a new framework through which to understand how Indigenous cultures and knowledges produce distinctive kinds of science fiction.

Today Grace Dillon is one of the most sought-after keynote speakers for conferences on social justice and activism, futurity and imagination, Indigenous cultures and the arts; these invitations recognize the centrality of her role in creating the conditions for the more diverse field we all benefit from today. With Nalo Hopkinson, Kristine Ong Muslim, Sunil Patel, and Nisi Shawl, she co-edited a special issue of *Lightspeed Magazine* (June 2016): "People of Colo(u)r Destroy Science Fiction!"—an issue that celebrates the ever-expanding range of voices and experiences finally

receiving their due recognition as part of sf. Grace's pioneering work in bringing recognition to the work of Indigenous authors and filmmakers through her scholarship, her organizing work of discussion panels and screenings, and her mentoring of artists and students was integral to starting this journey toward a more inclusive and politically engaged sf field.

Many of you probably knew about these accomplishments already because Grace is such a shining star in our midst. But she is also the most generous and modest of scholars, promoting others rather than her own work, smoothing the path for others who follow after her rather than seeking simply to rise. The Imagining Indigenous Futurism Award, now in its 11th year, and the annual competitions that have promoted even more work in the field, can be directly traced to her interventions and support. We all—existing scholars, students, and creators, and those yet to come—inhabit a better and more innovative field because of her transformative contributions.

In short, it is difficult to imagine a more deserving recipient of the Distinguished Service Award than Grace Dillon. She embodies the generosity and care that characterize true service and community building. The Clareson Awards Committee takes great pleasure in presenting this much deserved award to the 2021 winner, Grace Dillon.