



SFRA Awards Presented at the 2025 “‘Trans People are (in) the Future’: Queer and Trans Futurity in Science Fiction” Conference at The University of Rochester

Student Paper Award

The Student Paper Award is presented to the outstanding scholarly essay read at the annual conference of the SFRA by a student.

The winner of the 2024 award is Joanna Kaniewska for “Re-enchanting the future: Witches in Feminist Science Fiction”

Mary Kay Bray Award

The Mary Kay Bray Award is given for the best review to appear in the *SFRA Review* in a given year.

This year’s awardee is Mehdi Achouche for “Review of *The Wandering Earth II*” (*SFRA Review* 54.1)

SFRA Book Award

The SFRA Book Award is given to the author of the best first scholarly monograph in SF, in each calendar year.

This year’s winner is Kimberly Cleveland for *Africanfuturism: African Imaginings of Other Times, Spaces, and Worlds* (Ohio University Press, 2024).

Honorable Mention: Jordan S. Carroll for *Speculative Whiteness: Science Fiction and the Alt Right* (University of Minnesota Press, 2024).

Thomas D. Clareson Award

The Thomas D. Clareson Award for Distinguished Service is presented for outstanding service activities—promotion of SF teaching and study, editing, reviewing, editorial writing, publishing, organizing meetings, mentoring, and leadership in SF/fantasy organizations.

This year’s awardee is Keren Omry.



SFRA Innovative Research Award

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 Virginia L. Conn for "Formal Fictions: 'Chinese' 'Science' 'Fiction' in Translation," in *Chinese Science Fiction: Concepts, Forms, and Histories*, edited by Li Hua, Nathaniel Isaacson, and Song Mingwei.

SFRA Award for Lifetime Contributions to SF Scholarship

Originally the Pilgrim Award, the SFRA Award for Lifetime Contributions to SF Scholarship was created in 1970 by the SFRA to honor lifetime contributions to SF and fantasy scholarship. The award was first named for J. O. Bailey's pioneering book, *Pilgrims through Space and Time* and altered in 2019.

This year's awardee is Takayuki Tatsumi.

Student Paper Award, Committee Remarks

Chair: Kathryn Heffner

This committee received many strong papers this year which demonstrated both creative and critical approaches to science fiction. Many of the papers that were received spoke to contemporary issues of disability, class, race, gender, sexuality and the oligarchic conditions in which we live in. However, one paper in particular offered a critical historiography of sf scholarship, an exemplary argument of intersectional feminism in utopic sf, and a charge for scholars to explore 'witch feminist science fiction.' The committee is happy to award Joanna Kaniewska's "Re-enchanting the future: Witches in Feminist Science Fiction." Kaniewska's paper deeply interrogated the role of the feminist science fiction in popular culture and drew on scholarly texts from Lisa Yaszek, Ann and Jeff Vandermeer, Janet Fiskio, Haraway, and others. "Re-enchanting the future" is an invitation for us to explore the many layered identities of women represented in science fiction.

Mary Kay Bray Award

Chair: Nora Castle

The Mary K Bray Award Committee has the distinct pleasure tonight of awarding Mehdi Achouche this year's prize for his review of *The Wandering Earth II*. Mehdi's review shined with his distinctive authorial voice and his incisive attention to detail. His intermingling of close

readings of particular visual moments in the film with his analysis of the sociotechnical, historical, and political background that underpins and is imbued in the film added a richness to his piece from which his readers have greatly benefited. We look forward to reading more of his work, and congratulate him on this excellent achievement!

SFRA Book Award

Chair: Sean Guynes

Committee: Karen Hellekson, Amy Butt, and Sean Guynes (chair)

The SFRA Book Award is given to the author of the best first scholarly monograph in SF studies published in each calendar year. It's judged by a committee panel of sf scholars representing a range of research specialties and currently includes Karen Hellekson, Amy Butt, and Sean Guynes (chair).

It is truly a great pleasure to serve on the SFRA Book Award committee and also a daunting responsibility. How does a committee choose just one book? What should that book represent? These are serious challenges for scholars who thrive on multiplicity. In discussions with the committee, I have suggested that our award winner should be chosen based on the significance of the book as an intervention into sf studies broadly. The books that win the award should be considered future required reading for scholars in the field. Our selection should also keep in mind that some of the best sf scholarship moves beyond the field and offers insights for broader critical inquiry.

Looking back at the relevant books published in the field during 2024, the committee read and considered twenty-five monographs from eleven publishers. Each book was the author's first book-length work in sf studies. There were, of course, many critically exciting and theoretically energizing books on our nominee list that collectively testify to the vibrancy of sf scholarship today.

From among these we selected Jordan Carroll's *Speculative Whiteness*, published by Minnesota, as our honorable mention. It appeared in Minnesota's Forerunners series and offers an important study of the far right's disturbing speculative imaginaries. Thank you to Jordan for this book.

The winner of the 2025 SFRA Book Award is Kimberly Cleveland's *Africanfuturism: African Imaginings of Other Times, Spaces, and Worlds* published by Ohio University Press as part of the Africa in World History series. For those who might not know, OU Press is one of the foremost publishers of work in African Studies and Cleveland's book is a wonderful representative of their output.

Cleveland's *Africanfuturism* is, to say the least, a damn good book. It's the most recent in a growing body of important, theoretically rigorous, and critically necessary work on African and Afro-diaspora sf and its relationship to the global literary and media landscape. Cleveland's project undertakes the difficult task of navigating the recent explosion of scholarship on both Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism. She delineates both term's conceptual histories and outlines critiques of Afrofuturism (as a concept) from an African perspective, and more. Cleveland goes well beyond Okorafor's often cited concerns with Afrofuturism as the label for her own work, and brings in an astounding and admirable range of African and Afro-diaspora critics and texts, moving fluidly across media to offer a wonderfully capacious understanding of Africanfuturism. Crucially, Cleveland reorients discussions in the field to be from Africa and outlines major themes—space and time, (neo)colonialism, worldmaking, technology, religion and spirituality, and myth, among others—that bring a necessary Africanfuturist perspective to sf studies. And Cleveland does this all while resisting the temptation, so common in our scholarship, to reduce Africanfuturism to a singular thing.

There's no doubt among the committee members that Cleveland's *Africanfuturism* is required reading for the field. So thank you for writing this book, Kimberly, and for helping us collectively work through some of the tangled knots at the heart of the field today.

Thomas D. Clareson Award for Distinguished Service

Chair: Graham J. Murphy

This year the committee members for the Thomas D. Clareson Award for Distinguished Service —i.e., Graham J. Murphy (outgoing chair), Stina Attebery, and Alison Sperling—are thrilled to recognize this year's winner, Keren Omry, a scholar whose indefatigable work has benefited not only the academic community but the SFRA organization of which we all belong.

Keren Omry earned her Ph.D. from the University of London, and she has been enriching her students' lives as a Senior Lecturer with the Department of English Language and Literature at the University of Haifa. Her first book, *Cross-Rhythms: Jazz Aesthetics in African-American Literature*, published by Continuum Press, explores the crucial roles blues and jazz play in such African-American authors as James Baldwin, Ralph Ellison, Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, and Toni Morrison. While Keren continues to explore the intersections of jazz and African-American literature, including contributions to *African American Review*, *The Explicator*, and *American Literary History*, an early article on cyborg performance, gender, and Octavia Butler for *Phoebe: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Feminist Scholarship*, *Theory and Aesthetics* (renamed *Praxis: Journal of Gender & Cultural Critiques*) perhaps foreshadowed Keren's future scholarship in Science Fiction Studies. She has since produced sf scholarship on a range of topics, including (but not limited to) alternative futures, the juxtaposition of Nalo Hopkinson and Toni Morrison in post-9/11 global colonialism, the central function of emotional stability in Denis Villeneuve's *Blade Runner: 2049*,

the role of sympathy and metonymy in William Gibson's *The Peripheral*, the musical sf of Beck, Kutiman, Björk, and Amon Tobin, and an overview of Israeli Science Fiction for our very own *SFRA Review*. Her in-progress work, *Slipping Sideways*, focuses on slipstream literature and other forms of speculative fiction to address such notions as futurity, historicity, contemporaneity, and utopia. Finally, Keren has served as co-editor of *The Routledge Companion to Gender and Science Fiction* and, along with her fellow co-editors, has worked to inspire all of us to "put science fictional ideas into practice [...] inspire us to create both new modes of art and new modes of kinship based on the celebration of communal activity and the politics of affinity rather than conventional ideas of individual excellence and biological identity" (41).

Keren's commitment to service is no less impressive, particularly when it comes to this organization. She served as SFRA Vice President from 2015 to 2016, president from 2017 to 2019, and chair of the SFRA Book Award from 2019-2023. She is the current Science Fiction Division Head for our sister organization The International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts. Finally, Keren's legacy in Science Fiction scholarship was arguably secured when she co-founded Palgrave SFF: A New Canon for Palgrave, a book series she co-edited from 2020 to 2023 that has produced 14 volumes since its debut.

In sum, 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, and Keren Omry is a distinguished recipient of this award. Thus, the Thomas D. Clareson Awards Committee takes great pleasure in presenting this much deserved award to the 2025 winner, Keren Omry.

Innovative Research Award Speech for SFRA Banquet, 2025

Chair: John Rieder

I want to thank my fellow committee members, Sumeyra Buran and Ciarán Kavanagh, for their hard work reading, evaluating, and judging the many excellent essays nominated for this award. Thanks also to everyone who nominated an essay. Without their participation in the process, this award could not happen. We did receive quite a few more nominations this year than in either of the previous two years when I was on the awards committee, and as in the previous two years, there were numerous high quality essays worthy of special recognition. Indeed, it was not just the sheer number of nominations that made this choice difficult, but the rigorous research, nuance, and argumentation that SF Studies, as a field, is currently enjoying, and which was represented so strongly by the nominated works. Our choice came down at last to Virginia L. Conn's "Formal Fictions: 'Chinese' 'Science' 'Fiction' in Translation."

Conn's incisive argument concerning how Chinese SF is being framed and received in Anglophone literary spaces challenges assumptions about cultural authenticity, translation, and genre identity. Observing the hype generated by Cixin Liu's winning the Hugo Award for *The*

Three-Body Problem, amid proclamations that Liu “was the first Chinese author to win, that this was the first Chinese novel to win, that this was the first Chinese science fiction to be popular in the West: the first Chinese everything,” Conn asks what exactly do we mean by Chinese science fiction? What does it mean, more precisely, “for a historically contested genre, [science fiction], to be modified by an historically contested –national? ethnic? linguistic?—adjective?” (99)

In answer, Conn’s rigorous scholarship focuses on the problem of translatability between the genre systems and epistemologies of the Chinese and those of the English-speaking world. The way Conn then follows the twists and turns and terminological complexities of early twentieth century Chinese understanding of Western science and the implications of that understanding for ideas about the Chinese nation and its place in modernity (where “China” and “modernity” were definitely just as porous and slippery as “science”) reminded one committee member of the great historicizing work of Raymond Williams. Conn follows this tour de force survey of the history of these ideas in pre-World War II China with a description of the transformation of practices of writing and classifying science fiction under Mao, adopting the social realist policies of the USSR. Here to a certain extent a utopian element tied to fantasy replaces the technological emphasis on achieving modernity prevalent in the earlier period, but the predominant emphasis is on using sf as “a predictive model utilizing realist narratives and unremarkable technologies” (114) in concordance with the revolutionary state’s project of “bring[ing] the masses to the future through literary means” (115).

As we approach the present, understandings of the genealogy and definition of science fiction draw on different elements of this complicated history for different purposes. Overly eager translations of Chinese writing in and about the genre called science fiction in English are in danger of substituting the Anglophone world’s expectations and values for the complex ambiguities attached to its terms and self-understanding in China itself. Conn’s summary of the consequences of the argument in the final paragraph is crystal clear and powerful: “identifying Chinese SF as a specific form is a process that is inextricable from the larger English hegemony that defines literary value and practices of circulation within certain genres, “science fiction” included. Without problematizing any of the adjectives involved—“Chinese,” “science,” or “fiction”—the entire concept of the genre becomes embedded in a [false] presumption of shared vocabulary” (116).”

It is my honor to be able to recognize this important essay by awarding Virginia Conn the SFRA’s Innovative Research Award for 2025.

SFRA Lifetime Contributions Award 2025

Chair: Andy Hageman

It is a thrill and an honor to present the 2025 Award for Lifetime Contributions to Science Fiction Scholarship to Dr. Takayuki Tatsumi, Professor Emeritus at Keio University in Tokyo,

Japan. Dr. Tatsumi's research has explored a formidable range of subjects and made significant contributions to scholarship within Japan and in a global and globalizing context. His work has consistently promoted rigorous critical thinking in intellectual history and literary theory, promoting transnational dialogue through science fiction studies.

Many of us here will know Dr. Tatsumi through his 2006 book, *Full Metal Apache: Transactions Between Cyberpunk Japan and Avant-Pop America*. The chapters of *Full Metal Apache* move across creators and media. He investigates the recursive influence loops between Japan and the US in their cyberpunk representations by William Gibson among other notables. Dr. Tatsumi brings queer critique and Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto" into innovative approaches to J. G. Ballard's and Richard Calder's speculative novels. Other chapters dive into fiction by Ryūnosuke Akutagawa and Edgar Allan Poe. On the latter, Poe has been a consistent through line of Dr. Tatsumi's critical focus and a key figure in his development of scholarship that addresses multiple audiences with a flexible awareness of how Japanese and non-Japanese scholars may respond to his theoretical insights and arguments.

In addition to his own work as a critic, Dr. Tatsumi has promoted international awareness of science fiction more generally. He co-edited the volume *Robot Ghosts And Wired Dreams*, which contains essays translated into English by multiple authors on a wide range of Japanese science fictional texts, covering works from the 1930s to the present. He has served on award committees for science fiction writing in both Japan and the United States; for instance, in 2007 he was on the committee that awarded the Otherwise Award (formerly known as the Tiptree Award) for work that expands and explores our understanding of gender. Throughout his career, Dr. Tatsumi has called attention, both in Japan and in the United States, not only to cyberpunk science fiction, but also to feminist science fiction.

Dr. Tatsumi has already gained considerable recognition for his work in science fiction criticism, by receiving a number of previous awards. In 1994, together with Larry McCaffrey, he won the SFRA Innovative Research Award (formerly known as the Pioneer Award) for their jointly-authored article, "Towards the Theoretical Frontiers of Fiction: From Metafiction and Cyberpunk through Avant-Pop". In 2001, Dr. Tatsumi received the 21st Japan SF Grand Prize for his edited anthology *Japanese SF Controversies: 1957-1997*. And in 2010, Dr. Tatsumi received the Distinguished Scholarship Award from the International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts.

Here I have mostly focused upon the work by Dr. Tatsumi that is written in, or that has been translated into, English; but it is important to note that he has a voluminous Japanese-language bibliography. Overall, Dr. Tatsumi has advanced science fiction research in many ways: as a translator, as an editor, as an organizer and featured speaker at international conferences and conventions, and as a scholar who actively promotes collaboration among scholars. He has been a force for introducing science fiction critical theory from around the world into Japan and for infusing science fiction critical theory with Japanese perspectives, voices, and texts. One of our jury members observed the transformational power of Dr. Tatsumi as featured speaker of the 2017

Mechademia Conference at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design where he energized the audience with creative arguments that combined sharp insight with connections across borders.

Please join me and the rest of the committee (Andy Hageman and Lisa Yaszek) in congratulating Dr. Takayuki Tatsumi for his lifetime contributions to science fiction scholarship, in works that foster inclusive and pluralistic dialogue and critique, understanding, trust, and respect.

Student Paper Award: Joanna Kaniewska

This is going to be a speech of gratitude; I'm just going to say a few "thank yous." A full list would be very long and probably start around my parents, but I'm going to spare you that. Let's cut to the chase: I have three big "thank you" to give.

First one goes to the dynamite duo of my supervisors, Agnieszka Kotwasińska and Paweł Frelik. Without them, I would not be standing here. They provide so much support at every step of what I do, and I cannot express my gratitude properly for that. Thank you. Please, applaud them.

The second "thank you" goes to the award committee – I'm really sorry Kathryn cannot hear it in person, but I guess she will read it afterwards... It is my educated guess that, like many people in academia, she and the other members of the committee were thinking: "Why are we doing this to ourselves? Why are we doing this, on top of everything else that we do?" I want them to know that their work is seen, it is appreciated, and it is important to me and many other people who have gotten this award before or will get it in the future. Please, also applaud them.

And the final "thank you" goes to the entire community of SFRA and to the University of Rochester. It has been said many times over the past few days, but I think it is really important to say it again. One: it is not obvious that we all gathered here. Actually, it is a kind of miracle, and I appreciate it even more after hearing about the struggle with the organization. And the second thing: having a trans-themed conference right now, in the United States, in times of fear of transgender mice and whatnot... It takes resilience, it takes courage, and I think we are all very courageous, so... Thank you for that. And please, applaud yourselves, you deserve it.

Mary Kay Bray Award: Mehdi Achouche

I am absolutely honored at receiving the Mary Kay Bray Award, and I want to thank the committee for choosing my modest contribution. I also want to thank my editor, Leimar Garcia-Siino, who had great advice for me and helped make the review stronger, leaner and much more to the point. She did a great job. I loved writing this review, and I do believe reviews are and should be seen as a crucial form of academic writing, which can teach a lot to readers but also to their writers. Thank you again.

The SFRA Book Award: Kimberly Cleveland

It is an honor to be recognized with the SFRA Book Award for *Africanfuturism: African Imaginings of Other Times, Spaces, and Worlds* (Ohio University Press, 2024). I want to express my gratitude to the Book Award Committee, chaired by Sean Guynes, and to SFRA President Hugh O'Connell. It truly takes a village to bring a publication to fruition. At Ohio University Press, I extend my appreciation to Beth Pratt, Rick Huard, Sally Welch, Tyler Balli, and Africa in World History series editors Betsy Schmidt and Dave Robinson. I also want to thank Ainehi Edoro-Glines for her wonderful foreword, and my colleagues in the School of Art & Design at Georgia State University. Lastly, I am forever grateful to my family for their support.

I did much of the work on this publication during the Covid pandemic when many people around the world were isolated, separated from friends and loved ones, shut in their homes, and uncertain how long the situation was going to last. I found myself thinking a lot about the future, and how speculative expression can help societies meet the challenges of the present and the yet to come. In the first Pan-African anthology of science fiction by African authors, the volume's editor expressed why it was crucial for African creatives to generate speculative interpretations in light of the continent's position in the world order: "SciFi is the only genre that enables African writers to envision a future from our perspective. . . . The value of this envisioning for any third-world country, or in our case continent, cannot be overstated nor negated. If you can't see and relay an understandable vision of the future, your future will be co-opted by someone else's vision, one that will not necessarily have your best interests at heart."i Indeed, it is African-oriented real-world possibilities that frequently galvanize African creatives to generate their speculative work and which, consequently, may positively influence audiences going forward. *Africanfuturism* illuminates Africa's place in the worlds of science fiction and fantasy, and how *Africanfuturist* work builds on the continent's own traditions of speculative expression. It was a pleasure to highlight the rich contributions of African intellectuals and creatives in this study. Being recognized with the SFRA Book Award is a great honor, and reaffirms the importance of acknowledging and exploring African visions of future worlds.

Honorable Mention: Jordan S. Carroll

I am grateful to receive the honorable mention for the SFRA Book Award for *Speculative Whiteness: Science Fiction and the Alt-Right*. I'd like to thank the SFRA and the award selection committee. Let me also take this opportunity to express my appreciation for my editor Leah Pennywark and everyone else at the University of Minnesota Press's Forerunners Series.

We live in a moment when the far right fights for control over our futures. This means that as science fiction scholars we have two crucial tasks: we must face the long history of fascist elements within the science fiction field, and we must continue to defend the genre's emancipatory and

utopian potential from those who would extinguish it. Thank you all for this recognition, and I hope that this inspires others to take up the struggle against fascism in science fiction culture.

Innovative Research Award: Virginia L. Conn

Thank you, John, Hugh, and members of the awards committee; and thank you, too, to everyone here tonight, here with us virtually, and here with us in spirit. In many ways, the essay being recognized is about what kinds of communities we build, belong to, and recognize in the first place, and being recognized by a community of such incisive, critical scholars is quite an honor.

In the opening to my essay, I ask: what does it mean to identify a text as “Chinese science fiction” in the first place? Is “Chinese” a linguistic descriptor? An ethnic identification? A national origin? An implication of certain political ideologies? Simply a convenient publishing signifier? It’s certainly true that, no matter how one defines it, something called “Chinese science fiction” is having somewhat of a global moment, but in that very inflection of a literary genre as somehow recognizably othered, we implicitly create dialectical literary and publishing communities that often go unremarked. I want to remark on them here.

We are all of us here tonight part of at least one community—the SFRA. Membership and cohesion within any community requires certain elements, and ours is no exception: shared linguistic forms, shared regulative rules, and shared cultural concepts. If you don’t speak the language, you might say, no one can understand where you’re coming from.

But having a shared point of reference is increasingly difficult in a place and time such as ours, where reality seems to be outpacing fiction in terms of its almost hallucinatory strangeness. Chinese actually has a specific word for this phenomenon: “chaohuan,” typically rendered in English as the “ultra-unreal.” The literal meaning of “chaohuan” is “surpassing the unreal” or “surpassing the imaginary,” and it’s increasingly a feature of modern life no matter which country you’re in. Many of us feel that the world we knew even a year ago no longer exists. Our institutions are in flux. Academia itself is increasingly precarious. The shared points of reference that used to—or at least we imagine used to—define at least national citizenship, if not individual politics, have become increasingly defined by isolationist beliefs and conceptual silos. Where does that lead us as scholars of science fiction?

I don’t want to pretend that all of us here in this room are united in our beliefs. We’re not, and I think that’s a good thing, ultimately. But what I do believe we’re united in is our conviction that science fiction can provide us with the tools to imagine something different. It doesn’t even have to be better! But different.

Being able to imagine alternatives—futures, social or economic or political outcomes, communities—is the first step to making those alternatives actionable. We cannot build what we

cannot imagine. By reading, writing, and studying alternatives to our current reality, each of us has already taken the first step towards changing that reality.

Imagining is only the first step, of course. But every change begins with a first step. And as we continue to step forward into the future together, I hope that that journey is one that's expansive enough to imagine possibilities for trans people, immigrants, the shamefully unnamed victims of genocide, different languages and literary traditions, and I hope we're brave enough not to flinch in the face of such differences while also being brave enough to see what cuts across community boundaries. Thank you again.

The Thomas D. Clareson Award: Keren Omry

It's an incredible honor to be awarded the Thomas D. Clareson Award for Distinguished Service. I've been coming to SFRA for 15 years and this has been without question one of the most significant communities I've been part of. I've held some offices, been on many of the committees, edited some SF volumes, I've been the second reader for quite a few of your all's work, and throughout I am overwhelmed by the generosity, collegiality, professionalism and sense of humour of this SFS community. It's an ongoing privilege to do what I can to keep it going.

Teaching SF in Israel, advocating for and supervising research in speculative fiction, supporting science fiction events and activities in my region can often feel like a frivolous luxury. Living where I do makes the potential awfulness of reality a very real experience. There's nothing hypothetical, or abstract, or political about rushing to a bomb shelter at 4:00 in the morning with your kids, again. And mine is a lite version of living in war. But then, later that day – this was during lockdown so everyone was working from home – I would meet my students on zoom and talk about Afrofuturism, or utopian fiction, or time travel. Not everyone realizes this but at the University of Haifa, where I teach, about 47% of the student body are Arab Israelis, Druze, and Palestinians. In the English department, which I chair, it's more like 75-80% Arabs. This is no accident. For many of my students, most non-native speakers, English language offers a levelling ground which reshuffles the demographic hierarchies, and they all grapple with ideas from a rare but equal footing. Think about this: with missiles flying overhead, people fleeing their homes, hostages, refugees, soldiers and innocents dying around you daily, I get to sit in a classroom with Muslims and Jews and Christians, together, and talk about *Earthseed*, and *Lagoon*, and *Man in the High Castle*. I don't need to tell you all this but Science Fiction matters. Together my students and I can imagine other possibilities, other ways of being together. Through science fiction my students can talk to one another about the real problems, the fears and aspirations that guide them. This is not always easy. But it is always rewarding. And with each SF seminar paper that I mark or dissertation that I send out to the world, connecting my students to realities outside our lived experience and to you all, your scholarship and your ideas and your professional support, I am reminded that there's nothing frivolous about promoting speculation around the world.

With deep and humble gratitude thank you the Claeson Committee and to you all.

The SFRA Award for Lifetime Contributions to SF Scholarship: Takayuki Tatsumi

Acceptance speech is a peculiar literary genre. It is usually considered to be a form of acknowledgment. However, in receiving this special SFRA Award for Lifetime Contributions to SF Scholarship, I feel obliged to begin by describing quite a few coincidences that made possible my long engagement with science fiction as a way of life.

In the early 1960s I started reading science fiction as an elementary school student. The first novel I read as a first grader was *The Lost World* by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, originally published in 1912, in which dinosaurs that strode the earth some 170 million years ago are still alive and well now deep in the heart of the amazon rainforest. Without this book I would not have been fascinated with Japanese “kaiju” as represented by Godzilla, as well as a master of fantasy and science fiction Ray Bradbury, whose short story “The Fog Horn” (1951) was a remote origin of today’s monsterverse. While Leslie Fiedler discussed the return of the vanishing American in his magnum opus, I have always speculated on the dramatic return of the vanishing species.

The early 1960s coincided with the Japanese period of High Growth in which the defeated nation experienced a miraculous resurrection. As I recollected in the acknowledgments section of my monograph *Full Metal Apache* (Duke UP, 2006), as a child in downtown Tokyo I was shocked by the destruction of the Institute for Nature Study in my neighborhood, an incredibly beautiful botanical garden, right in the path of construction for the Tokyo Metropolitan Expressway. Civilization destroyed nature. My favorite playground was invaded by the ugly machinery that deformed its original landscape. However, I soon found myself enjoying the in-between atmosphere of the construction, discovering a new playground in the chaotic fusion of the natural forest with the high-tech expressway. It is this primal scene that induced me later to find Leo Marx’s theory of “machine in the garden” and J. G. Ballard’s idea of “technological landscape” very intriguing. The post-apocalyptic Tokyo as described in Otomo Katsuhiro’s *Akira* (1982-90) was my own city. Therefore, majoring in American Renaissance writers in the graduate school in the late 1970s, I kept reading science fiction and cutting-edge critical theories as championed by Darko Suvin and Fredric Jameson in *Science Fiction Studies*.

In 1984, a Fulbright scholarship enabled me to study at Cornell University as a Ph.D. student. It is Dr. Elizabeth Ann Hull, one of the former presidents of the SFRA, who kindly invited me to join the annual SFRA meeting held at Kent State University in the summer of 1985, when that year’s Pilgrim Award was given to Samuel “Chip” Delany, most of whose works I had long perused and admired. Thus, after that first encounter with Chip at Kent State I conducted an interview with him at Novacon in Pennsylvania in the fall of the same year, and showed the transcription to Professor Henry Louis “Skip” Gates, Jr, one of my Cornell teachers whose African-American Literature course reading list included Chip’s *The Einstein Intersection*. He enthusiastically

recommended my Delany interview for publication in *Diacritics* in 1986 (published in Vol.16, No.3) and Professor Donald “Mac” Hassler of Kent State University generously published the revised version of my term paper on The Einstein Intersection in *Extrapolation* in 1987 (Vol.28, No.3). The year of 1985 saw the genesis of my SFRA days.

In the meanwhile, 1985 coincided with the rise of the cyberpunk movement, in which I was recruited by Stephen P. Brown, editor-in-chief of the then-new critical magazine *Science Fiction Eye*. With him as non-academic mentor I interviewed William Gibson, Bruce Sterling, John Shirley and Donna Haraway, making every effort to build an interface between western science fiction and Japanese science fiction. I can’t forget the moment I first talked with John Shirley as one of the guest writers of the 1986 annual conference of SFRA held at San Diego State University, together with Veronica Hollinger.

Since the 1990s I have luckily collaborated with a number of academic friends. First, I joined forces with my longest collaborator Professor Larry McCaffery of San Diego State University, the missionary of postmodernism and editor of cyberpunk casebook *Storming the Reality Studio* (1991), to promote the literary and cultural strategy of Avant-Pop, negotiating between the cutting-edge writers and artists of the US and Japan, as is found in our co-edited New Japanese Fiction issue of *Review of Contemporary Fiction* (2002). Larry and I feel very proud that our collaborated article “Toward the Frontiers of ‘Fiction’: From Metafiction and Cyberpunk, through Avant-Pop,” published in *Science Fiction Eye* #12 in 1993, was selected as the winner of the 5th SFRA Pioneer Award in 1994. After the award ceremony Joan Gordon generously invited me and my wife Mari to her house in Long Island.

Second, it was in the early 21st century that I co-edited with Christopher Bolton and Istvan Csicsery-Ronay the first-ever textbook of Japanese science fiction entitled *Robot Ghosts and Wired Dreams: Japanese Science Fiction from Origins to Anime* in 2007 (U of Minnesota P) including major contributors such as Susan Napier, Livia Monet, Sharalyn Orbaugh, William Gardner, Mari Kotani, Hiroki Azuma and Tamaki Saito. Since the first-ever World Science Fiction Convention in Asia, nicknamed “Nipponcon,” took place also in 2007 in Yokohama, Kanagawa Prefecture, I chaired an SF scholarship panel with Bolton and Napier as panelists.

In the 2010s Thomas Lamarre and Frenchy Lunning became new collaborators. Without the friendship with Tom the “Parallel Futures” project (2012~) of the University of Minnesota Press, which published the American editions of the masterpieces of Japanese speculative fiction, that is, Chiaki Kawamata’s *Death Sentences*, Yoshio Aramaki’s *The Sacred Era* and Mariko Ohara’s *Hybrid Child*, would not have been possible. Without the partnership with Frenchy, editor-in-chief of the *Mechademia: The Second Arc* project, I could not have guest-edited the special Japanese science fiction issue in 2021.

Lastly, I cannot ignore another secret collaborator Professor Darko Suvin, distinguished scholar-critic and one of the founding fathers of *Science Fiction Studies*. As I disclosed in my own afterword to the anthology *Science Fiction Controversies* in Japan (2000), the winner of the 21st

Japan SF Grand Prize, the Japanese equivalent of Nebula, it was in the early 1990s, when Darko was visiting Japan very often, that he suggested to me that someday we co-edit a collection of legendary but still controversial essays written by Japanese science fiction writers and critics. Without his suggestion I could not have come up with the idea of compiling my own anthology in 2000, which is a small step for me but a giant leap for transnational science fiction; the publication of *Science Fiction Controversies* in Japan in 2000 invited a number of transnational scholars and students to see and work with me in Japan and/or in the United States. I'm not sure if Darko still remembers what we talked about in Tokyo more than three decades ago. Nonetheless, with the special Science Fictions issue of *Mechademia: Second Arc* (Fall 2021), featuring a lot of controversial articles, I feel I could partially carry out the promise with Darko.

The science fiction we used to know came to be gradually metamorphosed into something else in the wake of cyberpunkish techno-orientalism coinciding with the discourses of "Japan as No. 1," "Pax Japonica," and "Cool Japan" in the past four decades. As fin de siècle Western literature enjoyed the taste of Japonisme around the year of 1900, the new turn of the century saw the rise of the "Asian," and especially "Japanesque" mode in science fiction, empowering Japanese science fiction as such and transgressing the generic boundaries between prose, manga, anime, and gaming. At this point science fiction critics in Japan are prescient; in his ambitious article "Science Fiction as a Literary and Cultural Strategy" (1963), Takashi Ishikawa defined science fiction as "the literature destabilizing the sense of normalcy" much earlier than Darko Suvin's "cognitive estrangement" defined in *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* (1979) whereas Yoshio Aramaki completed a history of Euro-American science fiction in the 1968 much earlier than Brian Aldiss's *Billion Year Spree* (1973).

In the third decade of the 21st century, it is getting more and more difficult to witness the present of science fiction, not because it covers a variety of literary and cultural representations but because the rapid evolution of AI made it hard for us to distinguish the imaginary worlds science fiction has long described and the mostly science fictional world we are inhabiting now. Nonetheless, I'm convinced that the more paranoid the current president gets, the more poignant science fiction criticism becomes.

I have so far emphasized the significance of collaboration, because in the introduction to my newly co-edited collection of essays with Yoshio Aramaki *The Art of Science Fiction Criticism* published in 2014 (Takanashi Shobo Publishers), I theorized the "collaborative imagination" since Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* as the archetype of science fiction. Without her conversation with Lord Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley and John William Polidori she could not have come up with the idea of artificial intelligence. Likewise, without my discussion with SF scholar critics I could not have demonstrated transactions between Cyberpunk Japan and Avant-Pop America. I strongly hope to further develop my critical collaborations with SFRA. A million thanks for providing me with this prestigious award!