MLA PRIZE FOR A FIRST BOOK AWARDED TO MICHAEL ALLAN FOR IN THE SHADOW OF WORLD LITERATURE AND TO CHRISTY WAMPOLE FOR ROOTEDNESS: THE RAMIFICATIONS OF METAPHOR

New York, NY – 5 December 2017 – The Modern Language Association of America today announced it is awarding its twenty-fourth annual Modern Language Association Prize for a First Book to Michael Allan, of the University of Oregon, for In the Shadow of World Literature: Sites of Reading in Colonial Egypt, published by Princeton University Press, and to Christy Wampole, of Princeton University, for Rootedness: The Ramifications of Metaphor, published by the University of Chicago Press.

The MLA Prize for a First Book was established in 1993. It is awarded annually for the first book-length publication of a member of the association that is a literary or linguistic study, a critical edition of an important work, or a critical biography.

The MLA Prize for a First Book is one of eighteen awards that will be presented on 6 January 2018, during the association’s annual convention, to be held in New York City. The members of the selection committee were Dympna Carmel Callaghan (Syracuse Univ.); Raúl Coronado (Univ. of California, Berkeley); George E. Haggerty (Univ. of California, Riverside), chair; Todd C. Kontje (Univ. of California, San Diego); and Yoon Sun Lee (Wellesley Coll.). The committee’s citation for Allan’s book reads:

Michael Allan’s In the Shadow of World Literature makes a momentous intervention into discussions about the global status of literary culture by way of modern Arabic writing and in doing so poses the big questions of our time about the nature and operation of literature. Allan asks how certain forms of writing come to be designated as world literature and addresses the secular and colonial energies that underpin that categorization in relation or opposition to, among other things, illiteracy, premodernization, and scripture. This is a timely and trenchantly argued book; Allan’s examination of the putative opposition between the reading practices and sensibilities applied to the Qur’an and those derived from the West could hardly be more urgent.

Michael Allan is an associate professor in the Department of Comparative Literature at the University of Oregon. He received his BA from Brown University and his PhD from the University of California, Berkeley. His work has appeared as book chapters and articles in journals such as Modernism/Modernity, Journal of Arabic Literature, and PMLA (forthcoming), and he has edited or coedited special issues of Philological Encounters and Comparative Literature. Allan is the recipient of many grants and awards, most recently an Alexander von Humboldt Fellowship. His current book project is entitled Picturing the World: The Global Routes of Early Cinema.
The committee’s citation for Wampole’s book reads:

In this delightfully engaging study, Christy Wampole asks us to return with her to the “paganistic idea of embeddedness in nature” and then see it get “refashioned time and again, lyricized through literature and legitimated through politics, philosophy, and science.” Her rhizomic analysis of literature and culture leads us into the richness and complexity of the metaphor of rootedness as connection. Her opening theoretical discussion, beautifully done, leads into a compelling discussion of the texts. Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone Weil, and Paul Celan are a few of the writers and thinkers whose work opens up here in new and exciting ways. Rootedness: The Ramifications of a Metaphor offers an expressive as well as an interpretive alternative that transforms our thinking about the very world we inhabit.


The Modern Language Association of America and its 24,000 members in 100 countries work to strengthen the study and teaching of languages and literature. Founded in 1883, the MLA provides opportunities for its members to share their scholarly findings and teaching experiences with colleagues and to discuss trends in the academy. The MLA sustains one of the finest publication programs in the humanities, producing a variety of publications for language and literature professionals and for the general public. The association publishes the MLA International Bibliography, the only comprehensive bibliography in language and literature, available online. The MLA Annual Convention features meetings on a wide variety of subjects; this year’s convention in New York City is expected to draw 7,000 attendees. More information on MLA programs is available at www.mla.org.

Before the establishment of the MLA Prize for a First Book in 1993, members who were authors of first books were eligible, along with other members, to compete for the association’s James Russell Lowell Prize, established in 1969. Apart from its limitation to members’ first books, the MLA Prize for a First Book follows the same criteria and definitions as the Lowell Prize. Recent winners of the prize include Dana Luciano, Matthew G. Kirschenbaum, Andrew Piper, Vivasvan Soni, Nergis Ertürk, Meredith Martin, Raúl Coronado, Sadia Abbas, Lital Levy, and Supritha Rajan. Recent honorable mentions have been presented to Matthew P. Brown, Martin K. Foys, Eric Slauter, and Eugenie Brinkema.

The MLA Prize for a First Book is awarded under the auspices of the association’s Committee on Honors and Awards. Other awards sponsored by the committee are the William Riley Parker Prize; the James Russell Lowell Prize; the Howard R. Marraro Prize; the Kenneth W. Mildenberger Prize; the Mina P. Shaughnessy Prize; the MLA Prize for Independent Scholars; the Katherine Singer Kovacs Prize; the Morton N. Cohen Award; the MLA Prizes for a Scholarly Edition and for a Distinguished Bibliography; the Lois Roth Award; the William Sanders Scarborough Prize; the Fenia and Yaakov Leviant Memorial Prize in Yiddish Studies; the MLA Prize in United States Latina and Latino and Chicana and Chicano Literary and Cultural Studies; the MLA Prize for Studies in Native American Literatures, Cultures, and Languages; the Matei Calinescu Prize; the Aldo and Jeanne Scaglione Prizes for Comparative Literary Studies, for French and Francophone Studies, for Italian Studies, for Studies in Germanic Languages and Literatures, for Studies in Slavic Languages and Literatures, for a Translation of a Literary Work, and for a Translation of a Scholarly Study of Literature; and the Aldo and Jeanne Scaglione Publication Award for a Manuscript in Italian Literary Studies.