BRANKA ARSIĆ TO RECEIVE MLA’S JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL PRIZE FOR *BIRD RELICS: GRIEF AND VITALISM IN THOREAU*

New York, NY – 5 December 2017 – The Modern Language Association of America today announced it is awarding its forty-eighth annual James Russell Lowell Prize to Branka Arsić, of Columbia University, for her book *Bird Relics: Grief and Vitalism in Thoreau*, published by Harvard University Press. The prize is awarded annually for an outstanding book—a literary or linguistic study, a critical edition of an important work, or a critical biography—written by a member of the association.

The James Russell Lowell Prize 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 selection committee members were Paul Anthony Bové (Univ. of Pittsburgh); Laura Schaefer Brown (Cornell Univ.); Phillip Brian Harper (New York Univ.), chair; Alberto Moreiras (Texas A&M Univ., College Station); and Ramie Targoff (Brandeis Univ.). The committee’s citation for the winning book reads:

A subtle, consequential, and original study that evades ruling academic paradigms, Branka Arsić’s *Bird Relics: Grief and Vitalism in Thoreau* is an example of literary criticism at its finest—brilliantly researched, beautifully written, and passionately argued. Through powerful readings of one of America’s most significant nineteenth-century authors, the book illuminates crucial questions in naturalism, philosophy, and psychology, deftly combining close attention to the literary texts and broad attention to the world that makes those texts so vibrant. Promising to change entirely the way we read Thoreau, the book also offers a concrete response to current debates about the status of “critique,” the implications of materialism and vitalism, and the place of ontology, ecology, the environment, and the posthuman in literary study.

Branka Arsić is the Charles and Lynn Zhang Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University and specializes in literatures of the nineteenth-century Americas and their scientific, philosophical, and religious contexts. She is the author of *On Leaving: A Reading in Emerson and Passive Constitutions; or, 7½ Times Bartleby* and the coeditor of *The Other Emerson*, with Cary Wolfe, and *Melville’s Philosophies*, with Kim Evans. Arsić’s work has appeared in such journals as *Common Knowledge*, *Diacritics*, *ELH*, *J19*, *Leviathan*, *New England Quarterly*, *Nineteenth Century Prose*, *Qui Parle?*, *Telos*, and *Textual Practice*. She is working on two book projects, *Dust Archive: Melville’s Poetics of Matter* and *Being Scattered: The Happiness of Emily Dickinson’s Late Poetry*.

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.

First presented in 1969, the James Russell Lowell Prize is awarded under the auspices of the MLA’s Committee on Honors and Awards. Recent winners of the prize have been Laura Marcus, Isobel Armstrong, Laura Dassow Walls, Phillip H. Round, Simon Gikandi, Stephen Greenblatt, Sianne Ngai, David Rosen and Aaron Santesso, Anna Brickhouse, and Caroline Levine. In recent years honorable mention has been awarded to Joseph Litvak, Andrew F. Jones, Leah Price, Michael North, and Ramie Targoff.

Other awards sponsored by the committee are the William Riley Parker Prize; the MLA Prize for a First Book; 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 Bibliography, Archive, or Digital Project; 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.

James Russell Lowell (1819–91) was a scholar and poet. His first important literary activity came as editor of and frequent contributor to the *National Anti-slavery Standard*. In 1848 Lowell published several volumes of poetry, criticism, humor, and political satire, including *The Vision of Sir Launfal* and the first *Biglow Papers*, which firmly established him in the galaxy of American writers of his day. In 1855 he succeeded Henry Wadsworth Longfellow as Smith Professor of French and Spanish at Harvard. Lowell was the first editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* (1857–61) and was later minister to Spain and Britain. James Russell Lowell served as second president of the MLA from 1887 until his death in 1891.