MLA AWARDS WILLIAM RILEY PARKER PRIZE FOR ARTICLE IN PMLA TO THOMAS C. CONNOLLY; IRENE SIEGEL RECEIVES HONORABLE MENTION

New York, NY – 5 December 2017 – The Modern Language Association of America today announced the winner of its fifty-fourth annual William Riley Parker Prize for an outstanding article published in PMLA, the association’s journal of literary scholarship. The author of this year’s winning essay is Thomas C. Connolly, of Yale University. His article “Primitive Passions, Blinding Visions: Arthur Rimbaud’s ‘Mystique’ and a Tradition of Mystical Ekphrasis” appeared in the January 2017 issue of PMLA. Irene Siegel, of Brooklyn, New York, is receiving honorable mention for “A Judeo-Arab-Muslim Continuum: Edmond Amran El Maleh’s Poetics of Fragments,” which also appeared in the January 2017 issue of PMLA.

The William Riley Parker 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 members of the selection committee were Nergis Ertürk (Penn State Univ., University Park); Toral Gajarawala (New York Univ.), chair; Enrique García Santo-Tomás (Univ. of Michigan, Ann Arbor); Paul North (Yale Univ.); and Beth H. Piatote (Univ. of California, Berkeley). The committee’s citation for the winning article reads:

“In his beautifully written and theoretically adventurous essay, “Primitive Passions, Blinding Visions: Arthur Rimbaud’s ‘Mystique’ and a Tradition of Mystical Ekphrasis,” Thomas C. Connolly offers us the concept of mystical ekphrasis as a way to understand Rimbaud’s prose poem “Mystique,” putatively inspired by Van Eyck’s Adoration of the Mystic Lamb. The essay asks whether speculation can yield critical insight. Connolly argues that mystical ekphrasis may be more than a way to understand acts of poetic creation and might also be a mode of interpretation, offering the field of literary study a critical tool by which to imagine the strange world of cultural intertexts, which rarely provides neat historical answers. This scholarly and well-executed essay galvanizes a debate on the old problem of literary influence and suggests a hermeneutic by which we might move beyond it.

Thomas C. Connolly is an assistant professor and director of undergraduate studies in French at Yale University. He studied modern languages at Oxford University, was a member of the Sélection internationale at the École normale supérieure in Paris, and completed his PhD in comparative literature at Harvard University. He is the author of Paul Celan’s Unfinished Poetics: Readings in the Sous-Oeuvre. His articles on nineteenth- and twentieth-century French and German poetry and the visual arts have appeared or are forthcoming in MLN, Mosaic, Romanic Review, Romance Notes, Modern Philology, French Studies Bulletin, and Comparaison. He is working on a book project that examines the impact of visual cultures on the development of modern North African poetry in French.
The committee’s citation for Siegel’s article reads:

Irene Siegel’s “A Judeo-Arab-Muslim Continuum: Edmond Amran El Maleh’s Poetics of Fragments” considers the Moroccan Jewish writer Edmond Amran El Maleh and what Siegel reads as his dynamic, intertextual poetics. Siegel’s delicate literary analysis offers us a different way to consider Jewish diaspora, by paying particular attention to the textual interlopings and the unkempt narrative scraps that mark El Maleh’s work. These scraps allow Siegel to theorize what she refers to as a poetics of tikkun, or repair, drawing on Benjamin’s kabbalistic shard. Siegel’s piece offers us a deft way to read the fragments and shards characteristic of modern fiction, as well as other forms of diasporic affiliation.

Irene Siegel is a New York–based performer, educator, writer, translator, scholar, caregiver, and community organizer. She teaches Arabic, Hebrew, Jewish studies, yoga, and movement in the United States and internationally and holds a PhD in comparative literature from the University of California, Berkeley.

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.

The MLA’s oldest award, the prize for an outstanding article in PMLA was first presented in 1964. In 1968 the prize was named in memory of a distinguished former editor of the journal and executive secretary of the association, William Riley Parker. Recent winners have been Pauline Yu, Nergis Ertürk, Enrique García Santo-Tomás, Paul Benzon, Toral Jatin Gajarawala, Tobias Menely, Margaret Ronda, Christopher Cannon, Gordon Fraser, and Yasser Elhariry.

The William Riley Parker Prize is awarded under the auspices of the MLA’s Committee on Honors and Awards. Other awards sponsored by the committee are the James Russell Lowell 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.

William Riley Parker (1906–68) was executive secretary of the MLA and editor of PMLA from 1947 to 1956. In 1959 he was elected to serve as the MLA’s sixty-ninth president. Internationally known as the founder and director (1952–56) of the MLA’s Foreign Language Program and author of major studies and essays about foreign language education in the United States, Parker was a scholar of English literature and author of major books and articles on Milton and other
British poets and writers. At the time of his death, he was distinguished professor and chair of the Department of English at Indiana University, Bloomington.