

**MLA PRIZE FOR A FIRST BOOK AWARDED TO AMANDA JO GOLDSTEIN FOR  
*SWEET SCIENCE* AND TO MELANIE YERGEAU FOR *AUTHORING AUTISM*; COREY  
MCELENEY AND BRITT RUSERT TO RECEIVE HONORABLE MENTIONS**

New York, NY – 5 December 2018 – The Modern Language Association of America today announced it is awarding its twenty-fifth annual Modern Language Association Prize for a First Book to Amanda Jo Goldstein, of the University of California, Berkeley, for *Sweet Science: Romantic Materialism and the New Logics of Life*, published by the University of Chicago Press, and to Melanie Yergeau, of the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, for *Authoring Autism: On Rhetoric and Neurological Queerness*, published by Duke University Press. Receiving honorable mention are Corey McEleney, of Fordham University, for *Futile Pleasures: Early Modern Literature and the Limits of Utility*, published by Fordham University Press, and Britt Rusert, of the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, for *Fugitive Science: Empiricism and Freedom in Early African American Culture*, published by New York University 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 5 January 2019, during the association's annual convention, to be held in Chicago. The members of the selection committee were Dymrna Carmel Callaghan (Syracuse Univ.); Margaret Homans (Yale Univ.); Todd C. Kontje (Univ. of California, San Diego); Yoon Sun Lee (Wellesley Coll.), chair; and Phillip Usher (New York Univ.). The committee's citation for Goldstein's book reads:

Ambitious, learned, and extraordinarily precise, *Sweet Science: Romantic Materialism and the New Logics of Life* magnificently reshapes our understanding of life and the forms through which it is given to experience. Revealing how poets and thinkers of the Romantic era and beyond conceived of life as neither drive nor telos but as transient, contingent assemblages, Amanda Jo Goldstein offers us a new poetics and a new politics of alliance, contact, context, and commingling of subject and object, knower and known. She reveals that the atoms so vividly imagined by Lucretius gave modern thinkers new ways to depict form, meaning, and bodily identity as historical, material events occurring in a strange and wonderful natural universe common to all and composed by all.

Amanda Jo Goldstein is an associate professor of English at the University of California, Berkeley, where she received her PhD in Comparative Literature in 2011. She was previously an assistant professor at Cornell University and a postdoctoral fellow in biopolitics at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Her essays have appeared in journals such as *Representations*, *History and Philosophy of the Life Sciences*, and *The Wordsworth Circle*. *Sweet Science: Romantic*

*Materialism and the New Logics of Life* has also received the Kenshur Prize, awarded by the Center for Eighteenth-Century Studies for an outstanding monograph of interest to eighteenth-century scholars.

The committee's citation for Yergeau's book reads:

Rejecting commonplace representations of autistic people as prisoners of a faulty neurology, this ambitious and sophisticated book subverts the medicalized storying of lack that pervades contemporary autism discourse. Melanie Yergeau wrestles agency away from discourses about impairment and linguistic passivity—"We, the autistic, are merely the residues of rhetoricity"—by affirming that autism is a deeply rhetorical phenomenon that should and can be studied as such. Within a neuroqueer framework, she offers a compelling reevaluation of autism as an inventional site, which necessarily involves a sustained questioning of language itself. This is a deeply learned, rigorous, passionate, and important study. Bold and brave, *Authoring Autism: On Rhetoric and Neurological Queerness* is philology at its best.

Melanie Yergeau is an associate professor of English language and literature at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Her scholarly interests include digital studies, queer rhetorics, and disability studies. Her work can be found in *Kairos*, *Computers and Composition Online*, *Disability Studies Quarterly*, and *College English*, among other places. With Patrick Berry and Tim Lockridge, she serves as an editor for *Computers and Composition Digital Press*, an imprint of Utah State University Press / University Press of Colorado; for their work, the editors received the 2017 *Computers and Composition* Michelle Kendrick Outstanding Digital Production/Scholarship Award. Active in the neurodiversity movement, Yergeau has previously served on the board of the Autistic Self Advocacy Network, a nonprofit organization run for and by autistic people, as well as the board of the Autism National Committee.

The committee's citation for McEleney's book reads:

*Futile Pleasures: Early Modern Literature and the Limits of Utility* argues that the tensions inherent in Renaissance concepts of poetic value characterize the current crisis in the humanities and, indeed, have also shaped the terms in which that crisis can be addressed. Whereas the queer, the effete, the useless, and the idle have long been associated with pleasure, the robust, the masculine, the useful, and the active have been associated with literary utility and social and political relevance, and Corey McEleney shows that it is to this second side of the equation that defenses of literature invariably tend. *Futile Pleasures* is a subtle and eloquent investigation into the early modern roots of discussions about the most pressing academic debate of our time—the relevance of literary studies.

Corey McEleney is an associate professor of English at Fordham University, where he specializes in the fields of early modern literature, literary and cultural theory, and queer studies. His essays have appeared in the journals *ELH*, *GLQ*, and *differences*, as well as in the volumes *New Formalisms and Literary Theory*, *The Age of Thomas Nashe*, and *Queer Milton*. He is currently working on a book project tentatively titled "The Art of Overanalyzing: Reading, Deviance, Madness."

The committee's citation for Rusert's book reads:

*Fugitive Science: Empiricism and Freedom in Early African American Culture* constructs a new archive, expanding what constitutes science in the antebellum United States to include fugitive projects ranging from a black gravedigger's authoritative knowledge of human skulls to Sarah Mapps Douglass's health activism among African American women in Philadelphia. It shows not only how such projects refuted dominant, white

supremacist racial science that made black bodies into objects of exhibition and experimentation but also how they mobilized empiricism to advocate for the equal personhood and emancipation of black subjects. Exploring with subtlety and tact the outer limits of this archive where, because of slavery's ban on literacy, further acts of scientific inquiry remain unrecorded, Britt Rusert makes readers newly aware of the courage and innovative thinking present in early African American culture.

Britt Rusert is an associate professor in the W. E. B. Du Bois Department of Afro-American Studies at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. She is the coeditor of *W. E. B. Du Bois's Data Portraits: Visualizing Black America*. Rusert received her PhD from Duke University. Her research and teaching focus on African American literature and visual culture, Afrofuturism, speculative fiction, science and technology studies, gender and sexuality, and critical theory, especially Marxism, psychoanalysis, and black radical thought. She is currently working on a monograph about William J. Wilson's "Afric-American Picture Gallery," a text that imagines the first museum of black art in the United States. With Adrienne Brown, she is also editing W. E. B. Du Bois's short genre fiction. Their edition of Du Bois's fantasy story "The Princess Steel" was published in *PMLA*.

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; the 2019 convention in Chicago is expected to draw 7,000 attendees. More information on MLA programs is available at [www.mla.org](http://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 Matthew G. Kirschenbaum, Andrew Piper, Vivasvan Soni, Nergis Ertürk, Meredith Martin, Raúl Coronado, Sadia Abbas, Lital Levy, Supriya Rajan, Michael Allan, and Christy Wampole. Recent honorable mentions have been presented to 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. Mildener 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.