

**DAMION SEARLS RECEIVES THE MLA'S LOIS ROTH AWARD FOR HIS
TRANSLATION OF *ANNIVERSARIES* BY UWE JOHNSON; ASSELIN CHARLES AND
DONALD RAYFIELD EACH RECEIVE HONORABLE MENTION**

New York, NY – 4 December 2019 – The Modern Language Association of America today announced it is presenting its twelfth Lois Roth Award for a translation of a literary work to Damion Searls, of Brooklyn, New York, for his translation of Uwe Johnson's *Anniversaries: From a Year in the Life of Gesine Cresspahl*, published by New York Review Books. An honorable mention will be given to Asselin Charles, of Toronto, Canada, for his translation of Frankétienne's *Dézafi*, published by the University of Virginia Press, and to Donald Rayfield, emeritus, Queen Mary University of London, for his translation of volume 1 of *Kolyma Stories* by Varlam Shalamov and published by New York Review Books. The late Lois W. Roth worked for the United States Information Agency as an advocate for the use of literary study as a means of understanding foreign cultures.

The prize is awarded annually for a translation into English of a book-length literary work. From 1999 until 2016, the prize was offered biennially, alternating years with the Aldo and Jeanne Scaglione Prize for a Translation of a Literary Work. The two prizes are now both offered annually. The members of this year's selection committee were Esther Allen (Graduate Center and Baruch Coll., City Univ. of New York); Jeffrey Angles (Western Michigan Univ.); Kathleen P. Long (Cornell Univ.); Janet Poole (Univ. of Toronto); and Marjorie Attignol Salvodon (Suffolk Univ.), chair.

The selection committee's citation for the winning translation reads:

Damion Searls is an esteemed writer and prolific translator from German, Norwegian, French, and Dutch. Searls's translation of Uwe Johnson's *Anniversaries: From a Year in the Life of Gesine Cresspahl*, a novel considered to be one of the most significant of the twentieth century, is a stunning feat. Likened to Joyce's *Ulysses*, *Anniversaries* soars high. Searls's superb translation represents an admirable command of language that leads the reader from one side of the Atlantic to the other, weaving through complex, interwoven narratives reflecting profound personal, national, and global crises. Searls has accomplished something monumental with this intimate yet sprawling and absorbing novel about individual lives at a fraught historical moment.

Damion Searls is a translator of German, French, Norwegian, and Dutch and a writer in English. He has received Guggenheim, Cullman Center, and NEA fellowships for his translations and was awarded the 2011 PEN Center USA Translation Award for Jon Fosse's *Aliss at the Fire* and the 2011 Schlegel-Tieck Translation Prize for Hans Keilson's *Comedy in a Minor Key*, which was also a National Book Critics Circle Award finalist and *New York Times* Notable Book. Searls edited the one-volume abridgment of Henry David Thoreau's *The Journal: 1837–1861*. He is the author of *What We Were Doing and Where We Were Going* (stories), *The Inkblots* (a history of

the Rorschach test and biography of its creator, Hermann Rorschach, which has been translated into ten languages), and the forthcoming *The Philosophy of Translation*. Searls's translation of *Anniversaries* also received the 2018 Helen and Kurt Wolff Translator's Prize.

The committee's citation for Charles's work reads:

A scholar of comparative literature and a translator, Asselin Charles has deftly translated Frankétienne's *Dézafi*—a foundational book written by one of the most important Haitian writers alive today. The first novel published in the Haitian language Kreyòl, *Dézafi* is written in a provocative experimental style and includes a myriad of voices combining myth, poetry, allegory, magical realism, and social realism. *Dézafi* tells the tale of a plantation that is run and worked by zombies for the financial benefit of the living owner. With great vitality and imagination, Charles's compelling translation conveys the culture and history of Haiti.

Asselin Charles is an independent scholar, editor, and literary translator. Charles holds a BA from Suffolk University, an MA from Concordia University, and a PhD from Pennsylvania State University. He has taught at various institutions in the United States, Canada, Taiwan, Nigeria, and Haiti. He is the translator of Anténor Firmin's *The Equality of the Human Races* and his translations of René Depestre's short stories have appeared in journals such as *The Savannah Review* and *Metamorphoses*. Charles's articles and reviews have appeared in journals such as *Journal of Pan-African Studies* and *Haitian Studies Journal*. His research focuses on the parallels and intersections in black Atlantic literatures, particularly in Harlem Renaissance writing and in the francophone, creolophone, and anglophone literatures of the Caribbean.

The committee's citation for Rayfield's translation reads:

Donald Rayfield is an eminent literary translator and scholar of Georgian and Russian literature. His translation of Varlam Shalamov's important work *Kolyma Stories* is at once relentlessly harrowing and compelling as it recounts the depth of human suffering. Each story's carefully detailed narrative arc conveys the terrifying brutality of the gulag. Rayfield's massive achievement is significant because his work enriches our understanding of humanity and its behavior in the most adverse of circumstances. Through Rayfield's skillful use of language and persuasive prose, these rich and formidable stories make an important contribution to the field of Russian studies.

Donald Rayfield is the managing editor of Garnett Press and professor emeritus of Russian and Georgian at Queen Mary University of London. He received his BA and PhD from Cambridge University. Rayfield is the author of numerous publications, including *Anton Chekhov: A Life*, *Edge of Empires: A History of Georgia*, and *Stalin and His Hangmen*. His many translations include Nikolai Gogol's *Dead Souls*, Hamid Ismailov's *The Devil's Dance*, and Tamar Bartaia's *Toy Gun*. In 2003, Rayfield was made an Officer of the Order of the British Empire and in 2010 received an Order of Merit from Georgia. *Sketches of the Criminal World*, volume 2 of Rayfield's translations of Shalamov's stories, is forthcoming.

The Modern Language Association of America and its over 25,000 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 2020 convention in Seattle is expected to draw over 5,000 attendees. More information on MLA programs is available at www.mla.org.

Previous winners of the Lois Roth Award are Mark Harman, John Felstiner, Geoffrey Brock, Joel Agee, Edwin A. Cranston, Adnan Haydar and Michael Beard, John Woodsworth and Arkadi Klioutchanski, Royall Tyler, Maureen Freely and Alexander Dawe, Liam Mac Con Iomaire and Tim Robinson, and Susan Bernofsky.

The Lois Roth Award is presented under the auspices of the MLA's Committee on Honors and Awards. Other awards sponsored by the committee are the William Riley Parker Prize; the James Russell Lowell Prize; the MLA Prize for a First Book; 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 Collaborative, Bibliographical, or Archival Scholarship; 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 MLA Prize for an Edited Collection; 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.

While a graduate student in sociology at Columbia University, Lois Wersba Roth won a Fulbright grant to Uppsala University in Sweden, after which she worked for the American Scandinavian Foundation in New York. Her only literary translation, *Roseanna*, the first of the Martin Beck series by Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö to appear in English, was published in 1967, the same year that she began working for the United States Information Agency. While with the USIA, she lived abroad and learned Persian, Italian, and French. Her work was devoted to literary concerns, notably translations. She was instrumental in the establishment in France of the Maurice Coindreau Prize for best translation of American literature. The Lois Roth Award was established to enhance recognition of translation as a humanistic discipline. Lois Roth died in 1986. Her husband, Richard T. Arndt, and David Lee Rubin, of the University of Virginia, established the award.