



Contact: Paula M. Krebs  
646 576-5102, awards@mla.org

**MLA'S MATEI CALINESCU PRIZE AWARDED TO JEAN-CHRISTOPHE CLOUTIER  
FOR *SHADOW ARCHIVES*; BEN CONISBEE BAER RECEIVES HONORABLE  
MENTION FOR *INDIGENOUS VANGUARDS***

New York, NY – 14 December 2020 – The Modern Language Association of America today announced its fifth annual Matei Calinescu Prize for a distinguished work of scholarship in twentieth- or twentieth-first-century literature and thought. The winner is Jean-Christophe Cloutier, associate professor of English at the University of Pennsylvania, for *Shadow Archives: The Lifecycles of African American Literature*, published by Columbia University Press. Ben Conisbee Baer, associate professor of comparative literature at Princeton University, will receive an honorable mention for *Indigenous Vanguards: Education, National Liberation, and the Limits of Modernism*, published by Columbia University Press.

The Matei Calinescu Prize was established in 2016 in honor of Matei Calinescu, a Romanian poet and scholar who taught at Indiana University, Bloomington. The prize is one of eighteen awards that will be presented on 9 January 2021, during the association's annual convention, to be held online. The members of the selection committee were Emily Apter (New York Univ.); Darryl Dickson-Carr (Southern Methodist Univ.); Paula M. L. Moya (Stanford Univ.); Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan (Univ. of California, Irvine); and Jamie H. Trnka (Xavier Univ.), chair. The committee's citation for the winning book reads:

An essential and elegantly written continuation of the archival turn that has dominated literary studies since the mid-1990s, Jean-Christophe Cloutier's *Shadow Archives: The Lifecycles of African American Literature* redefines our understanding of archives by analyzing how African American lives and literature have struggled to find their way into accessible collections. With remarkable attention to evolving archival practices, Cloutier illuminates the lives of Claude McKay, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, and Ann Petry to make those lives synonymous with the notes, journals, letters, photographs, comics, and unpublished manuscripts they read, produced, and revised. Based in part on his groundbreaking discovery of McKay's novel *Amiable with Big Teeth*—published seventy-six years after its completion—Cloutier's painstaking research “retrieves the sunken record” in each subject's oeuvre, revealing how these authors both resisted and encouraged the archival imperative. Cloutier compels us to reconsider in the twenty-first century how African American lives matter.

The committee's citation for the honorable mention reads:

A tour de force, Ben Conisbee Baer's *Indigenous Vanguards: Education, National Liberation, and the Limits of Modernism* enacts a deep and substantive dialogue across the asymmetrical divide between the modernity of the ex-colonizer and that of the ex-

colonized. Rigorously aware of the overlapping but discrepant history that relates the indigenous to the metropolitan avant-garde, Conisbee Baer offers a theory as well as a genealogy of geomodernism with rare perspectival sensitivity. Through a combination of strategic theorizing, historical argumentation, and superb close reading, this work coordinates a coeval ensemble where the Harlem Renaissance, the *negritude* movement in colonial French Africa and the Caribbean, the Mexican Revolution, and the *Swadeshi* movement in India illuminate one another in a relationship of reciprocal pedagogy. This is indeed comparatist work of the highest order and is guaranteed to provoke lively debates across the postcolonial continuum.

The Modern Language Association of America and its over 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. More information on MLA programs is available at [www.mla.org](http://www.mla.org).

The prize 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 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 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. A complete list of current and previous winners can be found on the [MLA website](#).