



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

**LYNN FESTA TO RECEIVE MLA'S JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL PRIZE FOR  
*FICTION WITHOUT HUMANITY*; YOGITA GOYAL TO RECEIVE HONORABLE  
MENTION FOR *RUNAWAY GENRES***

New York, NY – 14 December 2020 – The Modern Language Association of America today announced it is awarding its fifty-first annual James Russell Lowell Prize to Lynn Festa, professor of English at Rutgers University, New Brunswick, for her book *Fiction without Humanity: Person, Animal, Thing in Early Enlightenment Literature and Culture*, published by the University of Pennsylvania Press. Yogita Goyal, professor of English and African American studies at the University of California, Los Angeles, is receiving an honorable mention for her book *Runaway Genres: The Global Afterlives of Slavery*, published by New York 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 9 January 2021, during the association's annual convention, to be held online. The selection committee members were Susan Bernstein (Brown Univ.); Ivonne del Valle (Univ. of California, Berkeley); Sabine Hake (Univ. of Texas, Austin), chair; Jeremy A. Lopez (Univ. of Toronto); John K. Noyes (Univ. of Toronto); Nicholas D. Paige (Univ. of California, Berkeley); and Katharina Natalia Piechocki (Harvard Univ.). The committee's citation for the winning book reads:

The ideology of Enlightenment rationality, we are often told, imperiously separates humankind from the world. In a study of dazzling theoretical range and readerly care, Lynn Festa reveals the work necessary for the production and maintenance of the fantasy of human difference. For Festa, it is in the so-called minor genres—fables, riddles, trompe l'oeil painting—that early modern writers and artists learned to experiment with nonhuman perspective, thereby robbing humanity of its traditional dominion over creation while simultaneously, by dint of self-consciousness, asserting a new but permanently anxious superiority. The fictions of art thus perform a humanity whose strength lies in being able to imagine a world without us. With *Fiction without Humanity: Person, Animal, Thing in Early Enlightenment Literature and Culture*, Festa offers us an early Enlightenment tonally appropriate to our late-Anthropocene moment.

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

Yogita Goyal has written an important study on the afterlives of slave narratives, linking them to wider political struggles around slavery, race, and migration in the world today. She asks us to rethink what it means to write and read about slavery, proposing a novel theory about how the persistence of the slave-narrative genre reveals unresolved political problems on a global scale. In a subtle discussion of analogy, she provides a rich model for understanding the tensions that dominate discussions of human rights, caught

between sentimentalism and action, between the narrative repetition of forms of abuse and their unveiling in narrative. By concentrating on the rhetoric of race, Goyal is able to read narratives of injustice at the heart of several normalized discourses. *Runaway Genres: The Global Afterlives of Slavery* skillfully shows how enslavement is written into narrative form.

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).

First presented in 1969, the James Russell Lowell Prize is awarded 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 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 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. A complete list of current and previous winners can be found on the [MLA website](#).

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.