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MATT COHEN TO RECEIVE MLA'S JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL PRIZE FOR *THE SILENCE OF THE MISKITO PRINCE*; LEE EDELMAN AND RÉGINE MICHELLE JEAN-CHARLES TO RECEIVE HONORABLE MENTIONS

New York, NY – 6 December 2023 – The Modern Language Association of America today announced it is awarding its fifty-fourth annual James Russell Lowell Prize to Matt Cohen, professor of English at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln, for his book *The Silence of the Miskito Prince: How Cultural Dialogue Was Colonized*, published by the University of Minnesota Press. Two honorable mentions are being awarded, to Lee Edelman, professor of English at Tufts University, for *Bad Education: Why Queer Theory Teaches Us Nothing*, published by Duke University Press, and to Régine Michelle Jean-Charles, Dean's Professor of Culture and Social Justice and professor of Africana studies and women's, gender, and sexuality studies at Northeastern University, for *Looking for Other Worlds: Black Feminism and Haitian Fiction*, published by the University of Virginia 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 twenty-two awards that will be presented on 5 January 2024 during the association's annual convention, to be held in Philadelphia. The selection committee members were Catherine Adams (Claflin Univ.); Stacy Alaimo (Univ. of Oregon); R. A. Judy (Univ. of Pittsburgh), chair; Yoon Sun Lee (Wellesley Coll.); Justin Read (Univ. at Buffalo, State Univ. of New York); Carlos Rojas (Duke Univ.); and Salamishah Tillet (Rutgers Univ., Camden). The committee's citation for the winning book reads:

Matt Cohen's *The Silence of the Miskito Prince: How Cultural Dialogue Was Colonized* is a virtuoso performance of philological scholarship. Taking the episode recounted in Olaudah Equiano's *Interesting Narrative* of his failed attempt to convert the Miskito prince, George, to Christianity as his point of departure, Cohen challenges scholars of early America to eschew the concepts of colonial domination inherent in the very discourse they use in depicting communications between Native Americans and European Settlers. Critically interrogating five concepts commonly used in constructing solutions to problems of cross-cultural communications—understanding, cosmopolitanism, piety, reciprocity, and patience—Cohen proposes a different way of doing postcolonial humanistic scholarship.

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

Lee Edelman's provocative book, *Bad Education: Why Queer Theory Teaches Us Nothing*, conceptualizes queerness as a figural name for the void, itself unnameable, around which the social order takes shape. Construing queerness in relation to Jacques Lacan's "ab-sens" and in dialogue with feminist and Afropessimist thought, Edelman argues, in a remarkable performance of critical scholarly acumen, that queer theory's

engagement with queerness necessarily results in a bad education that is destined to teach us nothing.

The committee's citation for Jean-Charles's book reads:

Régine Michelle Jean-Charles's *Looking for Other Worlds: Black Feminism and Haitian Fiction* brings together Black feminist and Haitian literary studies to pose and address the question, What would it mean to reorient the study of Haitian literature toward ethics rather than the themes of politics, engagement, disaster, or catastrophe? Exploring the "ethical imagination" of three contemporary Haitian authors—Yanick Lahens, Kettly Mars, and Évelyne Trouillot— Jean-Charles contends that the way ethics and aesthetics operate in relation to each other through these writers' novels is germane for understanding twenty-first-century Black feminist writing not only in Haiti but also globally.

The Modern Language Association of America and its over 20,000 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 750 scholarly and professional development sessions. More information on MLA programs is available at 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 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, for a Translation of a Scholarly Study of Literature, for African Studies, for East Asian Studies, for Middle Eastern Studies, and for South Asian Studies; 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.