



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

**KEVIN QUASHIE TO RECEIVE MLA'S JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL PRIZE FOR
BLACK ALIVENESS; OR, A POETICS OF BEING; ERICA R. EDWARDS AND JINI KIM
WATSON TO RECEIVE HONORABLE MENTIONS**

New York, NY – 7 December 2022 – The Modern Language Association of America today announced it is awarding its fifty-third annual James Russell Lowell Prize to Kevin Quashie, professor of English at Brown University, for his book *Black Aliveness; or, a Poetics of Being*, published by Duke University Press. Two honorable mentions are being awarded, to Erica R. Edwards, professor of English and African American studies at Yale University, for *The Other Side of Terror: Black Women and the Culture of US Empire*, published by New York University Press, and to Jini Kim Watson, professor of English at New York University, for *Cold War Reckonings: Authoritarianism and the Genres of Decolonization*, published by Fordham 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 nineteen awards that will be presented on 6 January 2023, during the association's annual convention, to be held in San Francisco. The selection committee members were Catherine Adams (Claflin Univ.); R. A. Judy (Univ. of Pittsburgh); Justin Read (Univ. at Buffalo, State Univ. of New York); Carlos Rojas (Duke Univ.); Chereke Monique Sherrard-Johnson (Univ. of Wisconsin, Madison), chair; Jonah Sebastian Siegel (Rutgers Univ., New Brunswick); and Salamishah Tillet (Rutgers Univ., Camden). The committee's citation for the winning book reads:

Kevin Quashie's *Black Aliveness; or, A Poetics of Being* is an astounding work of poetic criticism that recognizes the urgent need for vibrancy and joy in a climate of anti-Blackness. Quashie astutely guides readers through entire poems, which he excavates as exemplars of Black world making. This is a book that readers will want to return to over and over to discover new vistas opened by patient and practiced inquiry that models a synthesis of autotheoretical and formally attuned analysis. Providing guidance on how to cultivate a philosophy indebted to and informed by Black feminist theorists, Quashie points to ancestral and contemporary ciphers of how to be in the world. The lyric wonder of *Black Aliveness* emerges from expert exegesis that matches the vibrational excellence of the poems themselves.

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

Erica Edwards's *The Other Side of Terror: Black Women and the Culture of US Empire* revisits US predilections for endless war through cultural productions that manifest and challenge imperialist practice. Of particular focus is the relationship between Black feminist artistic production and the war on terror instantiated after 9/11. Edwards's cogent analysis illuminates the survival skills embedded in classic civil rights novels like

Toni Cade Bambara's *The Salt Eaters* while illustrating how seemingly progressive images of Black success mask and reinscribe imperial grammars. Within these pages, Olivia Pope—the protagonist of Shonda Rhimes's television sensation *Scandal*—is read alongside the narrative statecraft of former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to produce a truly revelatory and chilling study of surveillance culture.

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

Jini Kim Watson's *Cold War Reckonings: Authoritarianism and the Genres of Decolonization* is an extraordinarily ambitious, groundbreaking book that opens new terrain for postcolonial studies. Authoritarianism and the transition from colonialism to independence are given a new look through detailed assessment of cultural productions from South Korea, the Philippines, Singapore, Indonesia, and Taiwan as Watson maps out the complicated lines linking the violent anti-communist struggles associated with the Cold War to the economic structures that characterize these nations during the apotheosis of globalization. Written in lucid prose that introduces complex ideas and sophisticated works of literature, this book resolutely challenges long-standing conventions in postcolonial studies and neoliberal nostrums. *Cold War Reckonings* is an object lesson in careful attention to literary form as well as in nuanced engagement with theory and history.

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 meetings on a wide variety of subjects. 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 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, 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.