



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

**MLA'S KATHERINE SINGER KOVACS PRIZE AWARDED TO NICHOLAS R. JONES
FOR *STAGING HABLA DE NEGROS*; LAURA J. TORRES-RODRÍGUEZ RECEIVES
HONORABLE MENTION**

New York, NY – 5 January 2021 – The Modern Language Association of America today announced its thirtieth annual Katherine Singer Kovacs Prize for an outstanding book published in English or Spanish in the field of Latin American and Spanish literatures and cultures. The winner is Nicholas R. Jones, assistant professor of Spanish at Bucknell University, for his book *Staging Habla de Negros: Radical Performances of the African Diaspora in Early Modern Spain*, published by Penn State University Press. Laura J. Torres-Rodríguez, associate professor of Spanish at New York University, has received an honorable mention for her book *Orientaciones transpacíficas: La modernidad Mexicana y el espectro de Asia*, published by the Department of Romance Studies at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

The Katherine Singer Kovacs Prize was established in 1990 by a gift from Joseph and Mimi B. Singer, parents of the late Katherine Singer Kovacs. 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 Persephone Braham (Univ. of Delaware, Newark); Laura G. Gutiérrez (Univ. of Texas, Austin); Michelle Hamilton (Univ. of Minnesota, Twin Cities); Elizabeth Scarlett (Univ. at Buffalo, State Univ. of New York), acting chair; and Oswaldo Zavala (Coll. of Staten Island, City Univ. of New York). The committee's citation for Jones's book reads:

The originality of *Staging Habla de Negros: Radical Performances of the African Diaspora in Early Modern Spain* cannot be overstated. In this important, well-founded exploration of an underrepresented topic, Nicholas R. Jones posits that an African diasporic identity was formed in Spain about three hundred years before the typical chronology situates its ascent on the other side of the Atlantic. With authoritative yet delightful prose, Jones remedies the neglect and oversimplification of representations of people of color in early modern Spanish literature. Black African characters and their Africanized Castilian language are studied insightfully in a corpus of dramatic and poetic texts ranging from Rodrigo de Reinosa through Lope de Rueda, Góngora, and Calderón de la Barca. A chapter on dances imported from sub-Saharan Africa and their reception in Spanish discourse is especially informative. Race theory, performance theory, and Black feminist criticism enrich this addition to European Renaissance and baroque, Africana, and Hispanic studies.

The committee's citation of Torres-Rodríguez's work reads:

With *Orientaciones transpacíficas: La modernidad mexicana y el espectro de Asia*, Laura J. Torres-Rodríguez addresses a gap in cultural studies that often orientates Mexico toward Europe or the twin referents of indigenous cultures and Europe. In this view,

the transatlantic often obscures the transpacific. Torres-Rodríguez turns in another direction as an important corrective, suggested by thinkers such as Alfonso Reyes and Octavio Paz and with some foundation already laid by Rubén Gallo (in art history) and others. Her execution of the concept is top-notch, balancing Lacanian and Derridean theory and Said's notions of Orientalism (tempered by Sara Ahmed) with economic and social history. With a rigorous and painstaking approach, Torres-Rodríguez examines the *Japonisme* of the poet José Juan Tablada and the photographer Manuel Álvarez Bravo; the writings of José Vasconcelos; the intellectual Roger Bartra; the novel *El complot mongol* (*The Mongolian Conspiracy*), by Rafael Bernard; and the fin de siècle of our time. The result is compelling and should prove indispensable for further study.

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.

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 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](#).

Katherine Singer Kovacs completed her undergraduate studies at Tufts University, where she was elected to Phi Beta Kappa, and earned her MA and her PhD (in 1974) at Harvard University. She is the author of *"Le Rêve et la Vie": A Theatrical Experiment by Gustave Flaubert* and articles and reviews on Latin American literature, culture, and film and on comparative literature. Kovacs was a specialist in Spanish and Latin American literature and film. She taught at Stanford University, the University of Southern California, and Whittier College. She was associate editor and coeditor of *Humanities in Society*, a member of the executive committee of the *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, and a consultant for *Latin American Perspectives*. Kovacs died in May 1989.