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THE MLA'S WILLIAM SANDERS SCARBOROUGH PRIZE TO BE AWARDED TO MECCA JAMILAH SULLIVAN FOR *THE POETICS OF DIFFERENCE*; HONORABLE MENTIONS GO TO SHANNA GREENE BENJAMIN AND TO ELIZABETH MCHENRY

New York, NY – 7 December 2022 – The Modern Language Association of America today announced it is awarding its twenty-first annual William Sanders Scarborough Prize to Mecca Jamilah Sullivan, associate professor of English at Georgetown University, for her book *The Poetics of Difference: Queer Feminist Forms in the African Diaspora*, published by the University of Illinois Press. An honorable mention will be awarded to Shanna Greene Benjamin, professor of African American studies at Wake Forest University, for *Half in Shadow: The Life and Legacy of Nellie Y. McKay*, published by the University of North Carolina Press, and to Elizabeth McHenry, professor of English at New York University, for *To Make Negro Literature: Writing, Literary Practice, and African American Authorship*, published by Duke University Press. The prize is awarded for an outstanding scholarly study of African American literature or culture.

The William Sanders Scarborough 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 members of the selection committee were John Drabinski (Univ. of Maryland, College Park), chair; Meta DuEwa Jones (Univ. of North Carolina, Chapel Hill); and Amritjit Singh (Ohio Univ., Athens). The committee's citation for Sullivan's book reads:

Mecca Jamilah Sullivan's *The Poetics of Difference: Queer Feminist Forms in the African Diaspora* is an ambitious and creative work, precise in its characterizations and imaginative in its engagements. Written in lively prose, it thoroughly documents the structure and significance of Black queer women's writing and expressive life. Sullivan's deeply researched sources buttress her challenge to, and rewriting of, some of Black literary and cultural theory's central concepts, including intersectionality, historiography, interstitial language and modes of interpretation, and the relations among race, gender, queerness, and erotic life. The study illuminates the central importance of social media movements and popular and visual cultures of the everyday, reshaping our understanding of the complexity of Black queer feminist cultural production, cultural politics, and literary language. This is a book that widens and sharpens the edges of literary theory, poetics, and how we understand the language and literature of the African diaspora.

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

Shanna Greene Benjamin's *Half in Shadow: The Life and Legacy of Nellie Y. McKay* is an immensely important literary biography of an understudied field-builder in Black women's studies and African American literary studies. Benjamin takes no half steps in this meticulous documentation of McKay's life, intellectual and professional journey, and

interventions in an academic culture frequently hostile to, while dependent on, the innovative contributions to feminist and womanist theory and pedagogy cultivated by Black women scholars and writers. In water-clear prose that sparkles throughout, Benjamin maps an institutional genealogy that illuminates why McKay is central to the development of African American literary studies and the Black feminist literary tradition. The book's situated methodology, blending personal narrative, historical storytelling, and archival treasures, treats McKay with depth and complexity. Our understanding of Black feminism, literature, and intellectual life is expanded beyond measure.

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

Elizabeth McHenry's *To Make Negro Literature: Writing, Literary Practice, and African American Authorship* furnishes a fresh narrative of the development of "Negro literature" and exposes numerous hidden chapters, subsumed stories, and disregarded ventures and genres in and of African American literary history in the decade following the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision. McHenry compellingly examines successful literary ventures and offers astonishing insights through productive inquiry in the failure, precarity, and unsettledness of Black literary production. Focusing on African American authorship, the process of racialized genre construction in the making of authorial imaginations, and on our view of who counts as an author, McHenry explores new territory in unpublished materials while also helping us look at familiar material with new eyes. Her efforts yield rich rewards and show respect for a diversity of perspectives, forms of literary activity, and readerships.

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.

The William Sanders Scarborough Prize was established in 2001 and named for the first African American member of the MLA. It is awarded under the auspices of the 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. Mildenberger 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 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](#).

William Sanders Scarborough (1852–1926), brought up in the South, was a dedicated student of languages and literature. He attended Atlanta University and graduated in 1875 from Oberlin College, where he later received an MA. After teaching at various Southern schools, Scarborough was appointed professor of Latin and Greek at Wilberforce University. He later served as president of the university from 1908 through 1920. Scarborough's published works include *First Lessons in Greek* (1881) and *Birds of Aristophanes* (1886) and many articles in national magazines, including *Forum* and *Arena*. In 1882 he was the third black man to be elected for membership in the American Philological Association. Scarborough's areas of interest included classical philology and linguistics with an emphasis on African American dialects.