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**MLA PRIZE FOR A FIRST BOOK AWARDED TO AKSHYA SAXENA FOR
VERNACULAR ENGLISH; DOUGLAS S. PFEIFFER AND SARAH M. QUESADA
RECEIVE HONORABLE MENTIONS**

New York, NY – 6 December 2023 – The Modern Language Association of America today announced it is awarding its thirtieth annual Modern Language Association Prize for a First Book to Akshya Saxena, assistant professor of English at Vanderbilt University, for *Vernacular English: Reading the Anglophone in Postcolonial India*, published by Princeton University Press. Douglas S. Pfeiffer, associate professor of English at Stony Brook University, State University of New York, is receiving an honorable mention for *Authorial Personality and the Making of Renaissance Texts: The Force of Character*, published by Oxford University Press. Sarah M. Quesada, Andrew W. Mellon Assistant Professor of Romance Studies and gender, sexuality, and feminist studies at Duke University, is receiving an honorable mention for *The African Heritage of Latinx and Caribbean Literature*, published by Cambridge University Press.

The MLA Prize for a First Book was established in 1993. It is awarded annually for the first book-length publication of a member of the association that is a literary or linguistic study, a critical edition of an important work, or a critical biography.

The MLA Prize for a First Book 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 members of the selection committee were Patrick E. Dove (Indiana Univ., Bloomington); Octavio R. Gonzalez (Wellesley Coll.); Tobias Menely (Univ. of California, Davis), chair; Rajani Sudan (Southern Methodist Univ.); Karen Thornber (Harvard Univ.); and Michelle Zerba (Louisiana State Univ., Baton Rouge). The committee's citation for Saxena's book reads:

A highly original contribution to postcolonial studies and comparative literary studies, Akshya Saxena's *Vernacular English: Reading the Anglophone in Postcolonial India* argues that English in India has, since Independence, served as a language of everyday life and local struggle, female empowerment, and Dalit self-representation. Writing with verve and theoretical sophistication, Saxena tracks the circulation and repurposing of English through India's diverse linguistic contexts and media ecologies; in Bollywood films, protest poems, and bestselling novels; as well as in hashtags, slogans, and even a mother's voice. *Vernacular English* fundamentally reassesses our understanding of global English, posing profound questions about the social life of language, as a medium of contested meaning and identity but also of touch and desire, alienation and aspiration.

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

Douglas S. Pfeiffer's *Authorial Personality and the Making of Renaissance Texts: The Force of Character* is a tremendous achievement. In this substantial volume, Pfeiffer traces the phenomenon of author centrism to the scholarship of early Renaissance humanists. Focusing on several well-chosen case studies, this deeply researched multilingual monograph brings welcome new interpretations and insights not only to Renaissance studies but to literary studies more broadly. Pfeiffer demonstrates how the act of reading for the author's person and creatively filling in the blanks was a prevalent practice in many circles from the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries that used sources from classical antiquity in ways that resonate with our contemporary critical dilemmas.

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

Sarah M. Quesada's *The African Heritage of Latinx and Caribbean Literature* is a groundbreaking work in world literature and transatlantic studies that fundamentally reorients discussions of race, cultural memory, and decolonialization in the Global South. Combining detailed literary analysis of major writers with the exploration of historical *lieux de mémoire* represented by sites on the UNESCO slave route, Quesada develops an illuminating method of "visiting text while reading sites" to exhume a Latin Africa that has been largely overlooked in Eurocentric accounts of world literature.

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.

Before the establishment of the MLA Prize for a First Book in 1993, members who were authors of first books were eligible, along with other members, to compete for the association's James Russell Lowell Prize, established in 1969. Apart from its limitation to members' first books, the MLA Prize for a First Book follows the same criteria and definitions as the Lowell Prize

The MLA Prize for a First Book is awarded under the auspices of the association's Committee on Honors and Awards. Other awards sponsored by the committee are the William Riley Parker Prize; the James Russell Lowell Prize; 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](#).