

MLA AWARDS FENIA AND YAAKOV LEVIANT MEMORIAL PRIZE IN YIDDISH STUDIES TO DEBRA CAPLAN FOR *YIDDISH EMPIRE* AND TO NAOMI SEIDMAN FOR *THE MARRIAGE PLOT*; HARRIET MURAV RECEIVES HONORABLE MENTION

New York, NY – 14 December 2020 – The Modern Language Association of America today announced it is awarding its tenth Fenia and Yaakov Leviant Memorial Prize in Yiddish Studies for an outstanding scholarly work in the field of Yiddish to Debra Caplan, assistant professor of theater at Baruch College, City University of New York, for *Yiddish Empire: The Vilna Troupe, Jewish Theater, and the Art of Itinerancy*, published by the University of Michigan Press, and to Naomi Seidman, Chancellor Jackman Professor of the Arts at the University of Toronto, for *The Marriage Plot; or, How Jews Fell in Love with Love, and with Literature*, published by Stanford University Press. An honorable mention is being awarded to Harriet Murav, professor of Slavic languages and literatures and comparative and world literature at the University of Illinois, Urbana, for *David Bergelson's Strange New World: Untimeliness and Futurity*, published by Indiana University Press. The prize is awarded each even-numbered year and is given alternately to an outstanding translation of a Yiddish literary work and to an outstanding scholarly work in English in the field of Yiddish.

The Fenia and Yaakov Leviant Memorial Prize in Yiddish Studies 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 this year's Leviant prize selection committee were Kathryn Hellerstein (Univ. of Pennsylvania), chair; Anita Norich (Univ. of Michigan, Ann Arbor); and Allison Schachter (Vanderbilt Univ.). The committee's citation for Caplan reads:

Debra Caplan's *Yiddish Empire: The Vilna Troupe, Jewish Theater, and the Art of Itinerancy* tells the gripping story of how a ragtag group of refugee amateurs became an international phenomenon for a global audience by embracing itinerancy as an organizing principal of their theatrical project. Tracing the various itineraries of the members of the Vilna Troupe as they negotiate the uncertainties and upheavals of the interwar period, Caplan brings theater into the larger conversation about Yiddish cultural modernity as well as interwar theater history. Unearthing this story, Caplan's work shows the interwar Yiddish stage to be a vibrant site of Jewish mobility and creativity, at a pivotal moment in Jewish cultural history.

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

In *The Marriage Plot; or, How Jews Fell in Love with Love, and with Literature*, Naomi Seidman shows how, from the nineteenth century onward, Jewish Eros defined the act of reading for traditional European Jews coming into modernity and formed national and individual identities. Arguing that the post-Enlightenment *yidisher roman* translates as both "Yiddish novel" and "Jewish romance," Seidman theorizes the development of a

modern Jewish literature as the encounter between text and sex in Yiddish, Hebrew, and other languages. *The Marriage Plot* transforms our understanding of how the modern Jewish canon grew and changed the culture of its readers. This magnificent book is already reshaping the study of Yiddish literature.

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

Harriet Murav's *David Bergelson's Strange New World: Untimeliness and Futurity* is a magisterial study of one of the most important modernist writers of the twentieth century. Murav places Bergelson in the context of such major theorists as Henri Bergson, Walter Benjamin, and Sigmund Freud, thereby illuminating some of the most pressing political, philosophical, and cultural concerns of his day and ours. A model of interdisciplinary study, Murav's book offers new interpretations of Bergelson's fiction and of the questions about temporality and memory that animate his writing.

The Modern Language Association of America and its 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.

Established in 2000 by the family of Fenia and Yaakov Leviant, the award honors those writers who have published an English translation of Yiddish literary works and scholars who have written a cultural study or critical biography in the field of Yiddish or edited a work on Yiddish folklore or linguistics. 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 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 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 prizewinners can be found on the [MLA website](#).