

Zachary Lesser Wins Annual Elizabeth Dietz Award
Rice University, Houston, November 14, 2016

The Elizabeth Dietz Memorial Award, established in 2005 by Rice University in memory of Professor Dietz, is given in alternate years to either the best recent book in English Renaissance studies or the best recent book in Tudor and Stuart Drama. Out of an exceptional field of some 206 qualifying publications, the judges for 2016 have selected Zachary Lesser, Professor of English at the University of Pennsylvania, for his publication *Hamlet after Q1: An Uncanny History of the Shakespearean Text*. Lesser thus becomes the first author to have his work receive the Dietz Award twice. The book is published by the University of Pennsylvania Press. Professor Lesser joined the Penn faculty in 2006, having previously taught at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. He is the author of *Renaissance Drama and the Politics of Publication: Readings in the English Book Trade* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), which won the inaugural Elizabeth Dietz Award; general editor of *The Arden Shakespeare* (fourth series), along with Peter Holland and Tiffany Stern; and, with Alan B. Farmer, co-creator of DEEP: Database of Early English Playbooks, <http://deep.sas.upenn.edu>.

As the judges report, *Hamlet after Q1* is “an intriguing and highly readable” book that “contributes importantly to a lively recent trend of giving Q1 its due as a serious text. Lesser’s thesis is that, until now, we have not properly understood the ways in which the accidental discovery of Q1 has profoundly affected our conception of *Hamlet*. Lesser’s plan is thus to investigate a series of detailed textual instances in which our preconceptions about *Hamlet* have been reoriented by the uncanny history of Q1.” Another judge praised Lesser for demonstrating “how meticulous book history can disrupt the assumptions of those critical methods—including both historicist and presentist criticism—that implicitly separate the meaning of a text from its physical instantiation”: “Lesser shows how arguments mobilized to locate Q1 in an acceptable relationship to *Hamlet* have had a profound impact upon contemporary ideas about Shakespearean texts, Shakespearean authorship, and some of the things we all think we know about Shakespeare’s best known play. This is a book that illuminates the history of argumentation around Q1, that makes a strong case for book history as an essential component of cultural, literary, or intellectual history, and that has quite a lot to say as well about the contested prehistory of many of the assumptions about Shakespeare currently enshrined within our inherited disciplinary commonsense.”

The judges for this year’s contest were Roland Greene, Mark Pigott KBE Professor in the School of Humanities and Sciences, Stanford University; Curtis Perry, Professor of English (with appointments in Classics, Medieval Studies, and Criticism and Interpretive Theory), University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign; and David Bevington, Phyllis Fay Horton Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus, University of Chicago.

The Dietz Award will be presented to Professor Lesser and the University of Pennsylvania Press at a ceremony and reception hosted by *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500–1900* to be held in Philadelphia during the annual Modern Language Association Convention. The prize is administered by *SEL*, a quarterly journal publishing since 1961 scholarly articles on English literature, on behalf of Rice University Dean of Humanities Nicolas Shumway and the English Department, chaired by Professor Rosemary Hennessy.

Upon learning of the decision, Professor Lesser remarked, "I consider the Dietz Award a special kind of honor since it emerges out of the *SEL* omnibus reviews, which have been such a valued part of our field for so many years. I am particularly honored to have been selected by esteemed scholars Roland Greene and Curtis Perry, whose work I have long admired, and by the outside expert David Bevington, who is of course one of the world's leading critics, bibliographers, and textual editors, and who has himself written a wonderful book on *Hamlet*. So I am truly gratified that they found my book worthy of the Dietz Award."

Besides Professor Lesser, previous winners have been Laurie Shannon, Franklyn Bliss Snyder Professor of English Literature at Northwestern University; Brian Cummings, Professor of English and Related Literature at the University of York; Andrew Hadfield, Professor of English and Director of Research and Knowledge Exchange at the University of Sussex; Richard S. Dutton, Humanities Distinguished Professor and Chair of the Department of English at Ohio State University; (jointly in 2011) Gary Taylor, Distinguished Research Professor at Florida State University and founder of the interdisciplinary History of Text Technologies program and John Lavagnino, Reader in the Department of Digital Humanities and the Department of English at King's College London; Margreta de Grazia, Emerita Sheli Z. and Burton X. Rosenberg Professor of Humanities at the University of Pennsylvania; Alison Shell, formerly Professor of English at Durham University, England, now Reader in English Language and Literature at University College London; Charles C. Whitney, Professor of English at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas; and Robert N. Watson, Neikirk Distinguished Professor of English and Associate Vice-Provost for Educational Innovation at UCLA.

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