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 215 qualifying publications, the judges for 2019 have selected two publications for the award, a first in Dietz Award history. The two winning texts are *Poetry in a World of Things: Aesthetics and Empiricism in Renaissance Ekphrasis* by Rachel Eisendrath, Assistant Professor of English and Chair of Medieval and Renaissance Studies at Barnard College, and *On Not Defending Poetry: Defence and Indefensibility in Sidney’s “Defence of Poesy”* by Catherine Bates, Research Professor in the Centre for the Study of the Renaissance at the University of Warwick. In announcing the tie, the judges noted “Eisendrath’s *Poetry in a World of Things* may have a somewhat heavy if striking subtitle but is itself witty, provocative, and original, while our other winner, Bates, writes with depth and impressive—indeed, almost intimidating—learning. These two significant and likeable studies work together splendidly. Students of the English Renaissance are lucky to have these two volumes, one with a sharp focus on one major text explored with almost terrifying erudition, and the other shorter in page numbers but with a broad view and impressive sweep. No wonder that this year we must offer a double prize.”

*Poetry in a World of Things*, published by the University of Chicago Press, “is immediately striking” due to “the boldness of the position it takes with regard to literary criticism in its current instantiation. Identifying with an emergent but still minority group of critics and theorists, Eisendrath argues that the aesthetic—the term absent or missing from much historicist and ideological critique—needs urgently to be reinstated. This is a brave position for someone to take at the launch of their career and testifies to a degree of intellectual integrity not always evident in today’s intensely competitive market with its scramble for job and book contracts. That Eisendrath has chosen to take this antiestablishment position suggests not only an intellectual courage and honesty, but a commitment to and good faith in her subject that is deeply admirable. What is so exciting about Eisendrath’s analyses is that she does not simply revalorize the subjective over the objective (a move that could be tantamount to sentimentality). Instead, she develops a much subtler argument in which subjectivity itself is constituted by the dialectical interplay between the two. Eisendrath quietly but insistently revises our notion of the humanist subject. Instead of reverting to Jacob Burckhardt’s self-made, self-fashioned, autonomous Renaissance individual—the prototypically male *l’uomo singulare*—she proposes a quite different subjectivity, one that has all the qualities of serious art. Self-conscious, self-referential, self-reflecting, self-critical, and nonidentical with itself, this subjectivity is always unfolding, permanently in process, never less than a mystery, never fully known or understood, endlessly interpretable, always open to difference (and perhaps more prototypically female, therefore), always alive. In short, Eisendrath is one of those few critics who is actually capable of changing the way we think. Depth is the abiding quality of her thought, and this gives her work the edge, the authority to present a real and powerful challenge to the critical orthodoxies of the day.”

Pleasures: Early Modern Literature and the Limits of Utility) the determination to turn away from the constrictive grasp of the profit motive in literary and aesthetic production and consider lost or suppressed values associated with various expressions of futility. Extending the observations of Marc Shell and Jean-Joseph Goux in the new economic criticism, Bates mounts a counterintuitive but ultimately convincing argument for the essentially ‘de-idealist’ ethos of Sidney’s poetics. For Bates, Sidney’s intuitive grasp of the perilous complicity of idealist thought with the notion of ‘bankable’ value (p. ix) introduced by the money form led him to produce, in the Defence, a wittily serious model of poetry that “could only be described as indefensible (profitless, masochistic, perverse),’ thereby recasting poetry’s ‘courtly’ associations with “everything the bourgeois ethic of growth, productivity, and functionality is not’ (p. ix). Deeply learned, this book strips away encrusted habits of thought that have dulled the critical spark of Sidney’s treatise, and it also shows how Sidney’s argument asks exactly the right question in addressing contemporary concerns over the value of the humanities. Bates has produced an indispensable book.”

A panel of omnibus reviewers considered nominations for the Dietz Award, with Anne Lake Prescott, Senior Scholar and Emerita Helen Goodhart Altschul Professor of English at Barnard College, serving as deciding judge.

Upon learning of the judges’ decision, Prof. Eisendrath noted, “I’m overwhelmed and very grateful to learn that Poetry in a World of Things has received the distinguished Dietz Award. SEL is the journal that sets the standard for rigorous critical reviews of work in early modern studies, and it’s a great and happy honor to find my book associated with the previous winners of this award and with this year’s co-winner—theirs are innovative, intellectually adventurous books that have helped shape a world of thought. My own book emerges from long-sustained conversations with thinkers, writers, and readers living not just in the past but also now. Heartfelt thanks to the judges of this award, to my students, to my teachers, to my family, to the University of Chicago Press, to my far-flung scholarly interlocutors, and especially to my friends and colleagues at Barnard College, Columbia University, whose company sustains me.” Prof. Bates similarly extended her “heartfelt gratitude to the nominator and judges” of this year’s award, expressing her “total and utter surprise” and “delight at this most unexpected of outcomes.”

The Dietz Award will be presented to Professors Eisendrath and Bates at a ceremony and reception hosted by SEL Studies in English Literature 1500-1900 to be held in Seattle 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 Kathleen Canning and the English Department, chaired by Professor Rosemary Hennessy.

Previous winners have been Jeffrey Masten, Professor of English and Gender and Sexuality Studies at Northwestern University; Henry Turner, Professor of English and Director of the Center for Cultural Analysis at Rutgers University; Zachary Lesser, Professor of English at the University of Pennsylvania; 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, Academy Professor Emeritus 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.

Please contact Logan Browning (brownin@rice.edu), publisher and executive editor of SEL, for additional information.