

Laurie Shannon Wins Annual Elizabeth Dietz Award
Rice University, Houston, November 9, 2015

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 186 qualifying publications, the judges for 2015 have selected Laurie Shannon, Franklyn Bliss Snyder Professor of English Literature at Northwestern University, for her publication *The Accommodated Animal: Cosmopolity in Shakespearean Locales*. The book is published by the University of Chicago Press. Professor Shannon joined the Northwestern faculty in 2008; she served as department chair 2012–15 and will serve as chair again 2016–19. Previously she taught at Duke University, where she was awarded the Robert B. Cox Distinguished Undergraduate Teaching Award and The Dean's Award for Graduate Mentoring. Professor Shannon is also author of *Sovereign Amity: Figures of Friendship in Shakespearean Contexts* (University of Chicago Press, 2002), and is working on an edition of John Caius's 1576 text, *Of English Dogges*, the first extensive analysis of the treatment of dogs to be printed in English. She is now at work on a new project titled "Hamlet's Kindness: A Natural History of Human Being circa 1600," which returns to the question of humanity in its frailer and defrocked form, reconsidering it in the light of a species-comparative, ecosystemic perspective.

As the judges report, *The Accommodated Animal* is "ambitious, exciting, and often moving." One judge notes that Shannon, "who has expertise as both a lawyer and a literary critic, shows numerous ways in which early modern animals could be imagined as part of a broader legal and political 'cosmopolity' in which relations between humans and animals could be seen as something more closely resembling a continuum than an absolute dichotomy." The same judge went on to say that in this "timely book," Shannon "shows, pre-Descartes, it would not have occurred to many thinkers to suppose that animals did not have legal rights, albeit limited. She is particularly interesting on texts that associate human dominion with tyranny: the poem 'Ister Bank' from Sidney's *Arcadia*, written under the influence of Continental Calvinists like his mentor, Hubert Languet, and using a world of 'beastly policy' to critique the excesses of monarchy; and *King Lear*, where Lear's vision of the paltriness and undress of the 'bare forked animal' man marks not the low point of Lear's aberrant misanthropy but a particularly powerful early modern articulation of the 'species coordinates of happiness and misery, freedom and necessity, and creaturely capacity to judge them' (p. 134)." Another judge praised Shannon's "fresh and fascinating contributions to both early modern and modern animal studies and ecocriticism": "She never lets us as moderners forget our Cartesian inheritance in an oppositional way of thinking that has justified an 'out-of-sight,' sequestered experimentation and slaughter of animals so as to avoid confronting by close proximity what many early moderners recognized as a fact of life: that humans were interconnected with all kinds of animals in a broad community of creatures that shared affective, social, and legal bonds."

The judges for this year's contest were Leah Marcus, Edwin Mims Professor of English, Vanderbilt University; Barbara Fuchs, Professor of English and Spanish, University of California, Los Angeles; and Patricia Fumerton, Professor of English, University of California, Santa Barbara.

The Dietz Award will be presented to Professor Shannon and the University of Chicago Press at a ceremony and reception hosted by *SEL Studies in English Literature*

1500-1900 to be held in Austin 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 Shannon responded that she was “thunderstruck by this award. *SEL*’s commitment to English literature between 1500 and 1900 and its signature comprehensive reviews of research have established it as a crucial journal for our discipline, and also one of the critical works that I admire most in early modern studies and a major inspiration for me (De Grazia’s transformative book on *Hamlet*) is a previous recipient. Reviewing the list of all the scholars who have received this prize over the years, I feel I am in some very elevating company.”

Previous winners have been 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; Zachary Lesser, Professor of English at the University of Pennsylvania; Robert N. Watson, Neikirk Distinguished Professor of English and Associate Vice-Provost for Educational Innovation at UCLA; Charles C. Whitney, Professor of English at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas; Alison Shell, formerly Professor of English at Durham University, England, now Reader in English Language and Literature at University College London; Margreta de Grazia, Emerita Sheli Z. and Burton X. Rosenberg Professor of Humanities at the University of Pennsylvania; and (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.

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