MLA’S MATEI CALINESCU PRIZE AWARDED TO SHARON LUK FOR THE LIFE OF PAPER

New York, NY – 5 December 2018 – The Modern Language Association of America today announced its third annual Matei Calinescu Prize for a distinguished work of scholarship in twentieth- or twentieth-first-century literature and thought. The winner is Sharon Luk, of the University of Oregon, for her book *The Life of Paper: Letters and a Poetics of Living beyond Capacity*, published by the University of California Press.

The Matei Calinescu Prize was established in 2016 in honor of Matei Calinescu, a Romanian poet and scholar who taught at Indiana University, Bloomington. The prize is one of eighteen awards that will be presented on 5 January 2019, during the association’s annual convention, to be held in Chicago. The members of the selection committee were Claudia Breger (Indiana Univ., Bloomington); Odile Marie Cazenave (Boston Univ.); Amy J. Elias (Univ. of Tennessee, Knoxville), chair; Eric Hayot (Penn State Univ., University Park); and Ricardo L. Ortiz (Georgetown Univ.). The committee’s citation for the winning book reads:

Sharon Luk’s *The Life of Paper: Letters and a Poetics of Living beyond Captivity* examines in moving, instructive, and poetic ways what letters can mean to people whose lives were and are radically disrupted by racialized incarceration and regionalized state confinement. Luk helps us see the epistolary genre chronotopically, both as more complex than we may have imagined and as more relevant to the contemporary period than we may have assumed. Focusing on the archives of migrants from China between 1890 and 1920, families of Japanese ancestry interred in camps during World War II, and letters reflecting the socialities of blackness in the post-civil-rights era, Luk constructs a poetics that links capitalism with forms of apartheid. This is an important, well-researched, and fascinating theoretical and historical meditation and will add significantly to sociopoetics, studies of California history, histories of incarceration, investigations of ethnoracial United States politics, and theories of care and technologies of the self.

Sharon Luk is an assistant professor in the Department of Ethnic Studies at the University of Oregon. She received her BA from Brown University, an MA in education from the University of California, Los Angeles, and an MA and a PhD in American studies and ethnicity from the University of Southern California. Luk was born and raised in the San Francisco Bay Area. Before pursuing an academic career, she worked mainly in fields of independent media and youth and community development, with training in domestic violence counseling and nondiscursive techniques in abuse recovery. Broadly, her fields of study include racism and racial capitalism, ethnic ontologies, epistemology, social movements, feminisms, and ephemeral archives. Her
teaching and research focus on anthropologizing Western civilization and exploring the role of cultural production in communal survival and sustainability.

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; the 2019 convention in Chicago is expected to draw 7,000 attendees. More information on MLA programs is available at www.mla.org.

The prize is presented under the auspices of the MLA’s Committee on Honors and Awards. The previous winners of the prize are Paul K. Saint-Amour and Jed Rasula; Rebecca L. Walkowitz and Alex Woloch have received honorable mentions.

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. Mildenberger 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 a Bibliography, Archive, or Digital Project; 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 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.