York College Professor Wins Award for Henry James Essay

A York College of Pennsylvania professor has won the 10th Leon Edel Prize sponsored by The Henry James Review. Colbey Emmerson Reid’s essay “The Statistical Aesthetics of Henry James, or Jamesian Naturalism” earned the top prize aimed at young academics and graduate students.

Reid is an Assistant Professor of Modern Literature in the Department of English and Humanities at York College. She teaches courses in nineteenth- and twentieth-century British and American literatures, the Harlem Renaissance, salon culture, love and sex in literature, and interdisciplinary writing about the emotions. A graduate of the University of Florida, Reid earned her Ph.D. at the University of Washington.

“This essay contends that James’s late fiction subscribed to notions of form and taste best described as statistical, and that statistics was in the first place modeled on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century aesthetics,” Reid writes in the article’s abstract. “James’s interest in statistics suggests that we can understand him as a naturalist writer, but in doing so we must reevaluate the commonplace understanding of naturalism as the discourse of social determinism.”

The Henry James Review, published by the Johns Hopkins University Press, brings together the best contemporary scholarly, critical, and theoretical work on a major American writer. The journal publishes critical essays and reviews by new as well as established critics of James.

The Edel Prize brings together writers who have not held a full-time academic appointment for more than four years. Reid joined the YCP faculty in 2005. The winning essay was published in the Spring 2009 issue of the Review. Edel wrote a Pulitzer-Prize winning biography of James.

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