

Early American Literature Book Prize for 2021

**Rodrigo Lazo, *Letters from Filadelfia: Early Latino Literature and the Trans-American Elite*
University of Virginia Press 2020**

Rodrigo Lazo, Professor of English and Spanish at the University of California, Irvine, has been selected to receive the 2021 *Early American Literature* Book Prize, which is awarded in even calendar years to a first monograph published in the prior two years, and in odd years to a second or subsequent book. Lazo's *Letters from Filadelfia: Early Latino Literature and the Trans-American Elite* was published by the University of Virginia Press in 2020 as part of its "Writing the Early Americas" imprint. The prize selection committee consisted of: *Early American Literature*'s Co-Editor for Reviews, Katy Chiles; our Advisory Editor, Sandra Gustafson; incoming Chair of the Modern Language Association's Early American Forum, Martha Elena Rojas; and prior President of the Society of Early Americanists, Gordon Sayre, with *EAL* Editor Marion Rust as an *ex officio* member. We thank our publisher, the University of North Carolina Press, for continuing to support the award, which carries a \$2,000 cash prize. It should be noted that there were more prize submissions this year than ever, due in large part to the stupendous work of *EAL* Assistant Editor Alex Gergely.

The prize committee praised *Letters from Filadelfia* for its archival depth and theoretical innovation: in the words of one committee member, "we'll never look at Philadelphia in quite the same way again." As the most important Spanish-language printing center in the United States from the 1790s through the 1830s, 'la famosa Filadelfia' served as a hub for, in Lazo's words, "intellectuals on the run" from colonial governments in the southern Americas. *Letters* pays particular attention to "cartas" – ranging from deathbed letters to political philosophy to theological treatises – whose "epistolary effects" illuminate a "problematics of intimacy" within "public modes of identification." Reading Spanish-language texts, which he translates with a fantastic balance of precision and sensibility, alongside English-language publications, Lazo communicates the energy of those seeking to "remake their home societies" according to "principles of equality articulated in the documents that constituted the United States." At the same time, he emphasizes the elitism inherent in these efforts, given that "aspirations to spread those principles did not always extend to a direct consideration of the large numbers of indigenous and slave populations in Central and South America and the Caribbean," nor to an awareness of systemic misogyny. As a result, the body of work discussed here speaks to "the failure of American governments north and south to extend notions of equality and economic opportunity to populations suffering from racial and gender hierarchies." In its reconsideration of a region long identified with Anglophone culture, *Letters from Filadelfia* testifies to the mutuality of US and Latin American Studies and presages further work in the interstices of these two fields.

Next year's prize will be awarded to an author's first book; monographs published in 2020 and 2021 are eligible. The deadline for submission is March 15, 2022. Please consult the journal's website at eal.uky.edu/ for additional information.