

# The 2010 ASN Book Prize

At the EAAS Conference in Dublin in 2010, the American Studies Network, a group of 17 European centers involved in the study of the United States, awarded its biennial prize for a remarkable monograph published in English in the field of American Studies to Peter Messent and Christopher Bigsby.

## Remarks by Prize Committee Chairman Axel Schäfer on the 2010 ASN Book Prize

Fifteen books were submitted to the prize committee (Axel Schäfer, Keele, Gert Buelens, Ghent, and Clara Juncker, Odense). It was a difficult decision, because the overall quality of submissions was very high. The prize committee's shortlist still had eight books on it! We finally split the prize between two winners. However, we also felt that two runners-up should receive an honorable mention. The two prize winners are:

Peter Messent, *Mark Twain and Male Friendship: The Twichell, Howells & Rogers Friendships* (New York: Oxford UP, 2009)

Written with tremendous insight and knowledge not only about Mark Twain but also the historical and sociocultural contexts, Pete Messent's book is a solid, carefully argued book that exemplifies American Studies scholarship at its best. Messent effectively embeds his analysis of Twain within a discourse on masculinity and friendship, and a discourse on religious, literary and business elites in the late nineteenth century. Twain's long and lasting friendships with three men serve as a prism through which light is refracted onto the whole emotional spectrum of American society of the Gilded Age. Well-researched and inspiring, this is very much a book in the multidisciplinary American Studies tradition.

Christopher Bigsby, *Arthur Miller: 1915-1962* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2009)

This massive, detailed, eminently (even compulsively) readable biography is a magisterial work on a major American literary figure. Based in part on interviews with Miller, the book truly stands out by breaking new ground about a canonical author. Bigsby excels both owing to his sensitive treatment of every aspect of Arthur Miller's life and his intimate knowledge of the social, economic, political context. Not just a very well-written book, but also one that wears its impressive scholarship lightly, it firmly establishes both Miller's legacy and his place in the pantheon of American dramatists.

Honorable mentions went to:

Patrick Hagopian, *The Vietnam War in American Memory: Veterans, Memorials, and the Politics of Healing* (Amherst: U of Mass. Press, 2009)

Combining history, cultural analysis and heritage studies, this erudite analysis is steeped in thorough primary source research. In particular, we were impressed with the way the author dissects representations of the past as part and parcel of efforts to perpetuate historical amnesia.

Kristiaan Versluys, *Out of the Blue: September 11 and the Novel* (New York: Columbia UP, 2009)

This sophisticated study of 9/11 as the mother of all traumas provides a convincing analysis of literary reactions that will shape the study of the field in years to come.