

JOEL AGEE, TRANSLATOR OF HANS ERICH NOSSACK'S *THE END: HAMBURG 1943*, TO RECEIVE THE MLA'S LOIS ROTH AWARD FOR A TRANSLATION OF A LITERARY WORK

New York, NY – 30 November 2005 – The Modern Language Association of America today announced it is presenting its fourth biennial Lois Roth Award for a Translation of a Literary Work. The winner is Joel Agee, of Brooklyn, New York, for his translation of Hans Erich Nossack's *The End: Hamburg 1943* (*Der Untergang: Hamburg 1943*), published by the University of Chicago Press. The late Lois W. Roth worked for the United States Information Agency as an advocate for the use of literary study as a means of understanding foreign cultures. The award established in her memory consists of a \$1,000 check and a certificate containing the selection committee's citation for the winning translation.

Established in 1997, the Lois Roth Award is one of eighteen that will be presented on 28 December 2005 during the association's annual convention, held this year in Washington, DC. Previous winners of the Lois Roth Award are Mark Harman, John Felstiner and Geoffrey Brock. The members of the selection committee were Margaret W. Ferguson (Univ. of California, Davis); Daniel Heller-Roazen (Princeton Univ.), chair; Efrain Kristal (Univ. of California, Los Angeles); Sherry Simon (Concordia Univ.); and Xudong Zhang (New York Univ.). The committee's citation for the winning book reads:

Published in English as *The End: Hamburg 1943*, Joel Agee's translation of Hans Erich Nossack's *Der Untergang* makes available to the English-speaking world a work of capital literary, political, and cultural significance, which bears witness to one of the major events of twentieth-century history. Originally published a few years after the end of the Second World War, this testimony to the destruction of a city demands today to be read and reread. Joel Agee has rendered this deeply moving account of the bombing

of Hamburg in 1943 in a prose that is supple, precise, and all the more powerful for its restraint and sobriety.

Joel Agee is the author of *Twelve Years: An American Boyhood in East Germany*, a memoir of his life behind the Iron Curtain from age eight to twenty, and *In the House of My Fear*, a memoir of sanity lost and recovered in the late 1960s. His essays and stories have appeared in publications such as *Harper's*, the *New Yorker*, the *Yale Review*, and *The Best American Essays*. He is also known as a translator of German literary works, among them Rilke's *Letters on Cézanne* and Elias Canetti's *The Secret Heart of the Clock*. He has received a Guggenheim fellowship and a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. In 1999 he won the Helen and Kurt Wolff Translation Prize for his translation of Heinrich von Kleist's verse play *Penthesilea*. Forthcoming is his translation of an edition of Friedrich Dürrenmatt's works.

The MLA, the largest and one of the oldest of American learned societies in the humanities (est. 1883), exists to advance literary and linguistic studies. The 30,000 members of the association come from all fifty states and the District of Columbia, as well as from Canada, Latin America, Europe, Asia, and Africa. *PMLA*, the association's flagship journal of literary scholarship, has published distinguished scholarly articles for over one hundred years. Approximately 9,500 members of the MLA and its allied and affiliate organizations attend the association's annual convention each December. The MLA is a constituent of the American Council of Learned Societies and the International Federation for Modern Languages and Literatures.

The Lois Roth Award is presented under the auspices of the MLA's Committee on Honors and Awards. 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. Mildener 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 Distinguished Scholarly Edition and for a Distinguished Bibliography; the William Sanders Scarborough Prize; the Fenia and Yaakov Leviant Memorial Prize; the MLA Prize in United States Latina and Latino and Chicana and Chicano Literary and

Cultural Studies; and 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, for a Translation of a Scholarly Study of Literature, and for a Manuscript in Italian Literary Studies.

While a graduate student in sociology at Columbia University, Lois Wersba Roth won a Fulbright grant to Uppsala University in Sweden, after which she worked for the American Scandinavian Foundation in New York. Her only literary translation, *Roseanna*, the first of the Martin Beck series to appear in English, by Sjøgren and Wahlöö, was published in 1967, the same year that she began working for the United States Information Agency. While with the USIA, she lived abroad and learned Persian, Italian, and French. Her work was devoted to literary concerns, notably translations. She was instrumental in the establishment in France of the Maurice Coindreau Prize for best translation of American literature. The Lois Roth Award was established to enhance recognition of translation as a humanistic discipline. Lois Roth died in 1986. Her husband, Richard T. Arndt, and David Lee Rubin, of the University of Virginia, established the award.