

## 2018 AUHE Judges Report

### Winner: Ben Etherington, *Literary Primitivism*

*Literary Primitivism* is a highly ambitious and brave work of criticism in which Ben Etherington argues persuasively for a reconceptualization of the project of primitivism and a re-evaluation of its significance. Distinguishing it from modernism and expressionism, Etherington demonstrates how primitivism was historically delineated across both the West and non-West and took on multiple forms of appearance. In limpid prose, Etherington argues that primitivism was mobilised by a longing for social worlds that were not structured by a totalising form of capitalism and that held to a decolonial horizon. Through admirable slow readings of major literary figures like Aimé Césaire, Franz Fanon, D.H. Lawrence, and Claude McKay, Etherington demonstrates how literary primitivism was an aesthetic practice and project that sought to unite authentic immediate experience and reflection. That is, he shows how it sought to revive the remnants of “primitive” social realities all the while cognisant of their very impossibility. In establishing precise historical parameters for the concept of literary primitivism, Etherington acknowledges that questions remain around aspects of gender and sexuality in the pursuit of immediacy. Finally, Etherington suggests that the rise in literary primitivism parallels the current theoretical resurgence in world literature. Indeed, he argues that it marks the transformation of world literature from a positive and anticipatory concept to one that is negative and utopic.

### Runner-Up: Julian Murphet, *Faulkner's Media Romance*

In *Faulkner's Media Romance*, Julian Murphet demonstrates how Faulkner's texts renegotiate the novel's debt to the genre of romance by troping romance in the language of modern mediatic technologies. Murphet identifies two sources of Faulkner's narrative innovation: a rhetoric of absent events and a new mediatic tropology that reinvents or masks romance. In consistently beautiful prose, Murphet explores the significance of romance as an often-disavowed kernel of the novel and narrative impulse itself. He argues that while romance persistently underscores the South's understanding of its own historical and regional difference, it also informed new cultural economies of nation and the modern that undoes such particularity. Murphet argues that Faulkner's modernism borrows from a transforming media ecology in order to understand a transformation of his life-word. The resulting radical uncanniness demonstrates both an affective pull and ambivalence towards romance. This volume persuasively argues that Faulkner's modernism heralds a new aesthetic regime and offers a means to navigate the fate of localism and understand more systemic phenomena. Through subtle readings of Faulkner, it re-theorises modernism, American literary history and literature's relation to modern technology.