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## Charles Bernheimer Prize, 2025

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### Co-Winner: "Untimely Forms: Late Modernism, War, Essayistic Form" by Denis Topalovič

Denis Topalovič's dissertation, "Untimely Forms: Late Modernism, War, Essayistic Form" is an elegant, highly original investigation of the flourishing of what he calls 'the long-form, genre-defying essay' under the pressures of geopolitical crises. Very different formal ripostes to the looming violence of war subsequently "solidified into a highly inventive and formally exuberant model for writing historical crisis," though its products scarcely resembled one another. Focusing on two periods, World War II and the Cold War, and on a heterogeneous selection of authors in English, German, and Italian, *Untimely Forms* argues that the essay, once seen as a genteel form for topical ruminations, was expanded into a much looser, extended response to the experience of being in history, eventually giving rise to the "creative non-fiction" of our own age. Five chapters brilliantly explore works that apparently differ radically from one another: from the earlier period, Rebecca West's *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, Cyril Connolly's *The Unquiet Grave* and Alberto Savinio's *Nuova enciclopedia*, and from the 1980s and 1990s, Claudio Magris's *Danube* and W.G. Sebald's *The Rings of Saturn*. The encyclopedic tendencies of such modernist works as Joyce's *Ulysses* resurface in works that "proceed not by flaunting encyclopaedic gravitas, but by more modestly donning essayistic lightness" as they attempt to record fragmentarily what one knows of one's age. Learned, fascinatingly digressive, and beautifully written, this deeply comparative engagement with quirky, little-known works is a pleasure to read.