

News Release

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Sam Kean wins the 15th Premio Letterario of Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany

- **The jury's Honourable Mention goes to Paolo Zellini**
- **Final evening to be held in Rome on July 13th, young winners of creative writing competition will also receive their awards**

Rome, Italy, June 20, 2017 – Leading science and technology company Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany today announced the winner of the 15th Premio Letterario of Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany. The Premio jury awarded its prestigious first place to Sam Kean for his essay *The Violinist's Thumb* [*Il pollice del violinista*, Adelphi 2016]. The jury decided on an honourable mention for Paolo Zellini for his essay *La matematica degli dèi e gli algoritmi degli uomini* (Adelphi 2016). The award ceremony will take place on Thursday July 13th at 7 p.m., in Villa Miani, Rome. The Premio Letterario of Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany is assigned to authors whose works succeed in bringing together science and literature.

"The Premio Letterario of Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany aims to foster positive cross-pollination of scientific and humanistic culture. While we are routinely in contact with the tangible results of scientific research, science is often seen as something distant, a subject for the elite few. This raises the question of making scientific knowledge accessible to all, growing interest in the general public so that people wonder about the complex themes that underpin development, growth and changes in our society," explains Antonio Messina, Managing Director of Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany's biopharma business in Italy.

Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany sees the promotion of literature as part of its social responsibility. In addition to health and the environment, culture is a strategic sphere of activity of the company's sustainability efforts. The Premio Letterario of

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Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany is one of five literature prizes that the company currently awards or promotes worldwide. In Germany, it sponsors the Johann Heinrich Merck Award of Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany, which builds bridges between literature and empathetic understanding. By contrast, building bridges between cultures is at the forefront of the literature awards in Japan and India, as well as Russia, which Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany grants in cooperation with the Goethe Institut.

The awardees

SAM KEAN. A US author and scientific journalist who contributes to some of the most prestigious press, from the *New York Times*, to *Slate*, *Mental Floss* and *Psychology Today*. His book *The Disappearing Spoon* [published in Italian by Adelphi in 2012 as *Il cucchiaino scomparso*], and *The Violinist's Thumb* [published in Italian by Adelphi in 2016 as *Il pollice del violinista*] are international bestsellers.

The Violinist's Thumb is the story of Niccolò Paganini and is perfect for explaining how DNA works. Kean likes to cross-pollinate human stories with scientific discovery, historic figures and experiments, musical notes and chromosomes. Paganini's story is exemplary: a DNA defect spurred him to become a great musician, but his surroundings were equally important as he grew up. Had the genetic anomaly occurred in another context he might well not have become a violin virtuoso. An important lesson learned is that we are the result of genes and habitat working together. Kean's tale shows how genetics and biology are not necessarily synonymous. Genetics are also to be found in archaeology, history, music, art, IT. An amazing story of the geneticists whose research cast light on the mysteries of living matter and opened new frontiers not only in biology and medicine, but also in philosophy and even politics. A touching and thrilling tale of human DNA and its adventurous journey through every period of world history.

PAOLO ZELLINI is a professor of numerical analysis at Rome's Tor Vergata University. One of the most intriguing Italian mathematicians and intellectuals of our time, he has written authoritative books of international acclaim. In Italy his work is published by Adelphi and includes *Breve storia dell'infinito*, *La ribellione del numero*, *Gnomon*, *Numero e Logos*, and most recently, the 2016 *La matematica degli dèi e gli algoritmi degli uomini*. The latter is a lovely book. For the first time and with heartfelt emotion, in this unique text Zellini describes how mathematics engages with the world, from divine origins to algorithm. It is not the story of

mathematics but an adventure of the mind and the world. In this fascinating story, mathematics become a character so powerful that even the author was intimidated. It represents mathematical efficiency. The book scales dizzying heights, proving mathematics to be not only knowledge of the world but understanding of the world. Above all, it is the adventure of a mathematician, a refined intellectual, driven in this lifelong research by reasons that he himself may well not understand, and perhaps enhancing the mystery of this story told with such appeal.

“La Scienza Narrata” Creative Writing Competition

With the aim of fostering a connection between scientific and humanistic culture, Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany created La Scienza Narrata, an educational award for young people and a natural addition to the Premio Letterario. The award ceremony will acknowledge the three winners of the creative writing competition reserved for high school students and now in its 11th year.

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About Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany

Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany, is a leading science and technology company in healthcare, life science and performance materials. Around 50,000 employees work to further develop technologies that improve and enhance life – from biopharmaceutical therapies to treat cancer or multiple sclerosis, cutting-edge systems for scientific research and production, to liquid crystals for smartphones and LCD televisions. In 2016, Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany, generated sales of € 15.0 billion in 66 countries. Founded in 1668, Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany, is the world's oldest pharmaceutical and chemical company. The founding family remains the majority owner of the publicly listed corporate group. Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany, holds the global rights to the „Merck” name and brand. The only exceptions are the United States and Canada, where the company operates as EMD Serono, MilliporeSigma and EMD Performance Materials.