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View of Chicago's lakefront from the north

2014 MLA Delegate Assembly Meeting

MLA members are invited to attend the meeting of the 2014 Delegate Assembly during the convention in Chicago. Members may speak to any of the items on the assembly's agenda. These items include regular staff and committee reports on association activities, a report from the president on the reorganization of MLA divisions and discussion groups, and new proposals submitted by members for the assembly's consideration. Any new proposals received will be posted at the MLA Web site in early December (see www.mla.org/dameeting_agenda) and will be printed in the first issue of the *Convention Daily*, available online before the convention and on-site in Chicago.

The assembly meeting will begin at 1:00 p.m. on Saturday, 11 January, in Grand Ballroom III of the Chicago Marriott. Because the assembly meeting is open-ended, even latecomers will have a chance to join in important discussions of association policies.

Aldo Scaglione, MLA Benefactor, 1925–2013

Aldo Scaglione, a major benefactor of the Modern Language Association, died in June 2013. In 1987 Scaglione established the Aldo and Jeanne Scaglione Endowment Fund to honor the memory of his late wife, Jeanne Daman Scaglione, whose life is commemorated in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The endowment, the largest ever donated to the MLA, funds eight MLA book prizes for work in languages other than English and includes awards for comparative literary studies, for translations of literary works and scholarly studies, and for French, Germanic, Slavic, and Italian studies.

Aldo Scaglione, a member of the MLA since 1957, taught at universities in Europe and the United States and served on the MLA Executive Council from 1981 to 1984. His published books include *Nature and Love in the Late Middle Ages*; *Ars Grammatica*; *The Classical Theory of Composition*; *The Theory of German Word Order*; *The Liberal Arts and the Jesuit College System*; *Knights at Court: Courtliness, Chivalry, and Courtesy from Ottonian Germany to the Italian Renaissance*; and *Essays on the Arts of Discourse: Linguistics, Rhetoric, Poetics*.

See page 6 for news on the number of positions advertised in the 2012–13 Job Information List.



Collaborating on Collaboration

MLA President Marianne Hirsch and First Vice President Margaret Ferguson have collaborated on this column to discuss proposed revisions to the association's divisions and discussion groups.

Hirsch: It may be because we belong to the same feminist generation that I did not hesitate to invite Margie Ferguson to cochair the Working Group on the MLA's Divisions and Discussion Groups as soon as she was elected Second Vice President. It was clear to me that the work of reviewing the association's traditional structures of knowledge had to be undertaken collaboratively and that we would need to invent a process of extensive and inclusive consultation—one that

would not only allow a large number of members to participate but that would still move forward expeditiously. Together, I hoped, with the advice of the working group, the Executive Council, and the Program Committee, and aided by the association's new collaborative digital platform *MLA Commons*, we could devise such a process and imagine a renewed structure (see groupsdiscussion.commonsm्ला.org).

I've not been able to shake my collaboration habit. The addition dates back to my first years as an assistant professor, and I venture to say that it has sustained me through several decades of academic work. I've cochaired academic programs, centers, institutes, and committees; coedited books and journal issues; cowritten articles and a scholarly book—some of these before the advantage of e-mail, *Dropbox*, and *Google Docs*. It's not just that I like writing and thinking in conversation with others, the stimulation and surprise of it, the security of sharing responsibility. In fact, collaboration is never without conflict: it can be agonistic and profoundly uncomfortable. Rather, it's that, in the emergence of feminist political and scholarly work in the 1970s and 1980s, when I first entered the academy, problems benefited from being approached from multiple, interdisciplinary angles, from being argued, challenged, and debated. I hoped that this long-term experience with the practice of feminist collaboration and conflict would prove useful in the task of reviewing the MLA's intellectual structures.

Ferguson: "Conflict" and "collaboration," along with "conversation," "commons," and "compromise," belong to a large family of English words indebted to the Latin root "co," meaning "together." The best experiences I've had of collaborative work—and I've had many, resembling Marianne's—have made time and space for conflicts to emerge. The task is to discern which ways of practicing conflict are crucial for the health of a collaborative project and which might become destructive. Marianne and I both recognize the necessity of disagreement to the immensely complicated collaborative task we have invited all MLA members—that's a group of nearly 28,000—to participate in this fall. When Marianne asked me to cochair the working group with her, I remember muttering phrases like "Herculean labor," "Borgesian taxonomies," and "Kafkaesque story of metamorphosis." As I began to learn more about the groups that wanted the association's elected officers to respond to their persistent calls for structural change, however, and as I studied a list of current divisions and discussion groups that I (along with many MLA members,

I suspect) had never looked at carefully, I came to see this revision project as urgent.

What I learned made me think in new ways about a collaborative process of revision. How could it acknowledge new fields of scholarship and teaching while respecting long-established groups? The answer to this question is not easy, and we are not going to arrive at even a compromise version of it without robust debate that moves many of us out of our comfort zones by asking us to think about the profession as a changing whole greater than the sum of its new and old disciplinary parts.

Moving beyond our disciplinary "homes" involves taking a step back from the important question of how many guaranteed convention sessions a given area of scholarly inquiry and teaching will retain—or acquire—under the proposed revision plan. Although we agree that the real estate issue is important, if it becomes the dominant issue, then it will be impossible for a truly collaborative decision-making process to occur. Why? Because the draft proposal aims to make qualitative as well as quantitative changes to the map of our evolving field represented (imperfectly) on the current lists of divisions and discussion groups (www.mla.org/divisions_groups). There were moments in the meetings of the working group when I thought we were all in a race like the one in Zeno's famous paradox of Achilles and the tortoise, a paradox designed to prove that all motion is an illusion. And there were moments when most of us wanted a more sweeping revision than the incremental one we eventually posted on the *Commons*. We all agreed, however, that no merely arithmetic logic can guide us in reconceiving a structure that operates according to vastly different scales of time, space, and disciplinary approach. The draft revision does not aim to standardize groups, although it does aim to encourage communication among those members

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who affiliate under a given group's old, new, or revised name.

We are learning a great deal from the comment process—as much from objections to some of our proposals to amalgamate groups as from the demand for new field formations. The next version of the proposal will reflect this continuing collaborative education, which has been humbling, frustrating, and enlightening and which has deepened our awareness that no scheme for representing intellectual affinity groups in the MLA will solve the practical and theoretical problems attendant on the concept of representation.

Ferguson and Hirsch: Whom do we represent when we are elected to MLA committees or offices? Some of us are elected as faculty members or graduate students, as representatives of our regions or our subfields. Presidents are nominated, alternately, from “English” or “Languages Other Than English.” Professional allegiances and identities are profound, and we have learned to mobilize them strategically to defend our fields against administrative and legislative cutbacks. But we have found that a different logic motivates our work as officers of the MLA.

We began the review of the MLA divisions and discussion groups with the whole profession in mind. But our visions of the whole were partial, limited by our experience and expertise. Through multiple conversations with individuals and groups (and individuals speaking *for* groups), we have had our concepts of the MLA tested, expanded, corrected, and—in short—changed. The most extraordinary of the collectivities with whom we have conversed is the one still forming on the *Commons* in response to the proposal for a revised structure. On that site, “conversations” are multiple and occur in jazzy rhythms at different levels of generality. This unprecedented collaboration has already improved the draft that we posted in September and promises to continue to do so. Note that comments on this draft are open until 20 November. A revised version will be open for comment after the January convention.

The total number of sessions that can be held at any given convention is, of course, finite—approximately eight hundred. But the intellectual range and quality of sessions can't be measured by an additive logic. Those who plan guaranteed sessions—and who therefore don't have to compete for convention space—have an opportunity every year to think about topics that might interest MLA members outside as well as inside their own knowledge territories. If we want to renew our fields by considering them as parts of a larger whole that cannot be found at specialized conferences, we need to work together in creative ways and check the tendency to compete for turf. The exciting collaborative sessions at the last few conventions provide a model for how members of new and old divisions and discussion groups can think and work together in ways that stress translation across and beneath the boundaries delineating what are now all too aptly named “divisions.”



Margaret Ferguson and Marianne Hirsch

The *MLA Commons* allows for collaboration to occur around specific areas of interest, informally, and to maintain smaller or larger field formations. The new three-year seminars provide additional opportunities for scholarly exchange. Groups will continue to be able to gain additional convention sessions by collaborating with other entities. And whatever new structure is adopted at the end of this process will be subject to regular self-study, review, and periodic renewal. This is, perhaps, the best that could come out of this round of collaborations—an evolving conversation about the shapes and scales of our fields and the stakes of our work.

Margaret Ferguson
Marianne Hirsch

Members are invited to comment on the president's column at president.commonsonline.org.

Elections Committee Seeks Candidates

The MLA Elections Committee will meet on 31 January 2014 to begin the process of identifying candidates for twenty special-interest and thirty-six regional Delegate Assembly seats. Those elected in 2014 will serve in the assembly from 12 January 2015 through the close of the January 2018 convention and must attend the meetings of the assembly in January 2016, January 2017, and January 2018.

The Elections Committee is charged not only with nominating candidates and overseeing the elections but also with ensuring that the various groups within the MLA find representation in the Delegate Assembly. Committee members are therefore interested in hearing from all MLA members who are willing to be candidates in next year's Delegate Assembly elections. Members who would like to be considered should write to the Elections Committee, c/o Carol Zuses, at the MLA office (czuses@mla.org).



Professor No Longer: On Capacity and Risk

This fall, during the week of 22 September, I served as the guest blogger for *PhDs at Work*, a Web site where people like me who earned PhDs but do not hold academic appointments describe the daily activities they perform in their jobs. I welcomed this opportunity, because I think it's important for those of us who use our degrees outside the classroom to speak about our positions and to offer our guidance to others who wish to pursue alternative academic careers. What follows is a modified version of [my blog post for Friday, 27 September](#).

My workweek draws to a close, and I'm satisfied with what we've accomplished on staff. Rather than tell you about my day—the highlight of which was wonderful discussions with the Publica-

tions Committee and the Committee on Assessing Student Learning—I'd like to reflect on my response to one of the statements *PhDs at Work* asked me to complete: "If I had to do it all over again, I would. . . ." What I wrote was this: "I would have been less conventional and more of a risk taker when young. I'm making up for that now." What does this mean for my career? To most academics, I probably appear to be conventional, at least more conventional than they are. I hold an administrative position in an association that runs like the not-for-profit enterprise it is. Lawyers, auditors, fund managers, and consultants all pass through my office. I study the bottom line, I assess progress on strategic priorities, I assemble creative teams, I run workshops, and I work long hours in the office and on the road.

Yes, I recognize the conventional in me, yet I know I take more risks now than I did in my professorial days. I always had many interests, and learning languages, which came naturally to me, served as a connector to the larger world. By the time I was seventeen, I had spent a summer in France with a school group and a year in Guatemala as an exchange student. If you'd asked me back then what I wanted to do for a living, I would have said (and did say, in fact) "secretary of state." Yet I didn't pursue an academic path that might have led to government service. Instead, excelling at languages meant that I majored in French and Spanish and studied literature. I didn't know that I would love doing the literary part or that I'd have a talent for it. In my senior year, I half-heartedly applied to law school (just one) and wasn't admitted, and I also applied to a PhD program in Spanish—and was courted. The conventional path begins here, and, in some ways, it was the path of least resistance.

The usual stages of an academic career ensued: TA, MA, ABD, adjunct, PhD, more adjunct, postdoc, assistant professor, associate professor, full professor, department chair. During those twenty years I wrote a few books and dozens of articles, gave conference papers, continued expanding my scholarly range, taught tons of courses,

got very involved in the MLA, and so on. None of these things could be construed as "outside the box" or risk taking. I suppose some of the scholarly work I did treated unconventional topics, but it was all in the service of a typical academic career.

When I say I take risks now and am making up for the conventional years, that's an exaggeration. First off, it never really occurred to me to take risks by exploring nonacademic jobs when my life as a professor seemed to be unfolding so well. Had I not obtained a tenure-track position (I worked for three years off the tenure track after I finished my PhD), I would have surely sought out other options. Yet I do wish I would have known I had so much untapped capacity in me. Whenever I describe the varied responsibilities of my current position, most of which I learned on the job, I can hardly believe that the trained academic has become a proficient executive. But why not? I see models all around me now that I know where to look.

Knowing that I have a depth of potential, and that I have already realized a good chunk of it, means I can take risks. In fact, leading an association requires an entrepreneurial spirit and a willingness to calculate risk and then go for it when warranted. I have led major change (though hardly by myself!), and this is decidedly not your mother's or grandmother's MLA. Not only do I want to pursue the right kind of change, I also want to shake things up in more ordinary ways that reflect my personality. Come to my party at the annual convention, and there may be a conga line, much to the surprise of those who are accustomed to a tweedy kind of dignity. I have found ways to carry out my duties with the seriousness required of the position while also managing to "be myself," because who else is going to do that?

In my professorial days I was raising a child, which added to my sense of inhabiting conventional limits. Now, my after-work hours belong to me. Since becoming executive director of the MLA, I have trained for and completed two half marathons, joined a hiking group, learned meditation, attended four silent retreats, walked the English Way of the Camino de Santiago, and, just this fall, taken sailing lessons and achieved my basic keelboat certification. My job energizes me to learn more, try something new, reach a bit further. It also pushes me to take leisure time and use it for something other than work whenever possible. I'll be back on a sailboat this weekend, enjoying a few hours on the Hudson River, too busy tacking and jibing to worry about drafting and revising.

On the MLA Web Site

[News from the MLA](#)

[MLA Commons](#)

[Ratification Ballot](#)



Postscript: More than one person who read this text as it was originally published on *PhDs at Work* remarked that my going to graduate school for a PhD could hardly count as a conventional thing to do. Even though the year was 1977 and the gains of feminism were fairly well established, I had no family members after whom to fashion a postgraduate career path. My father had a high school education, and my mother, who immigrated as an infant to the United States from Sicily, attended what was then called Buffalo State Teachers College. Her parents studied reading and writing in primary school, and they were proud that their daughter became an elementary school teacher. If my mother had graduated in 1977, she surely would have been seen as “PhD material.” In truth, I’ve been a risk taker from the moment I boarded a plane for France at fifteen, as were my immigrant, working-class family members who sailed on a ship bound for Ellis Island nearly one hundred years ago.

Rosemary G. Feal

Members are invited to comment on this column at execdirector.commonsmembers.org.

New Director of Foreign Language Programs and of ADFL

Dennis Looney, professor in the Department of French and Italian Languages and Literatures at the University of Pittsburgh, will become the director of programs and of the Association of Departments of Foreign Languages this coming January when Nelly Furman retires. A scholar of Italian language and literature, Looney has served as department chair and as assistant dean of humanities. He has also served as a member and chair of the MLA Division on Medieval and Renaissance Italian Literature and as a member and president of the ADFL executive committee. Looney completed his BA in classical Greek and his MA in sacred poetics at Boston University and earned his PhD in comparative literature from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. His research interests include Renaissance studies, reception of the classical tradition in European literature and culture, vernacular classicism, Dante, and Ariosto. Looney has published *Freedom Readers: The African American Reception of Dante Alighieri and the Divine Comedy* (winner of the American Association of Italian Studies Book Award), *“My Muse Will Have a Story to Paint”: Selected Prose of Ludovico Ariosto*, and *Compromising the Classics: Romance Epic Narrative in the Italian Renaissance* and has edited and translated *Carmina: Ariosto’s Lyric Poems* (with Mark Possanza). He is the recipient of the Ronco Scholarship in Nineteenth-Century Studies and the Vatican Film Library Mellon Fellowship.

In his MLA position, Looney will develop new and continuing foreign language programs, edit the *ADFL Bulletin*, organize annual ADFL Summer Seminars and MLA convention sessions, and work with other organizations and with college and university foreign language departments on issues affecting the study and teaching of foreign languages.



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Elizabeth B. Bernhardt Receives ADFL Award

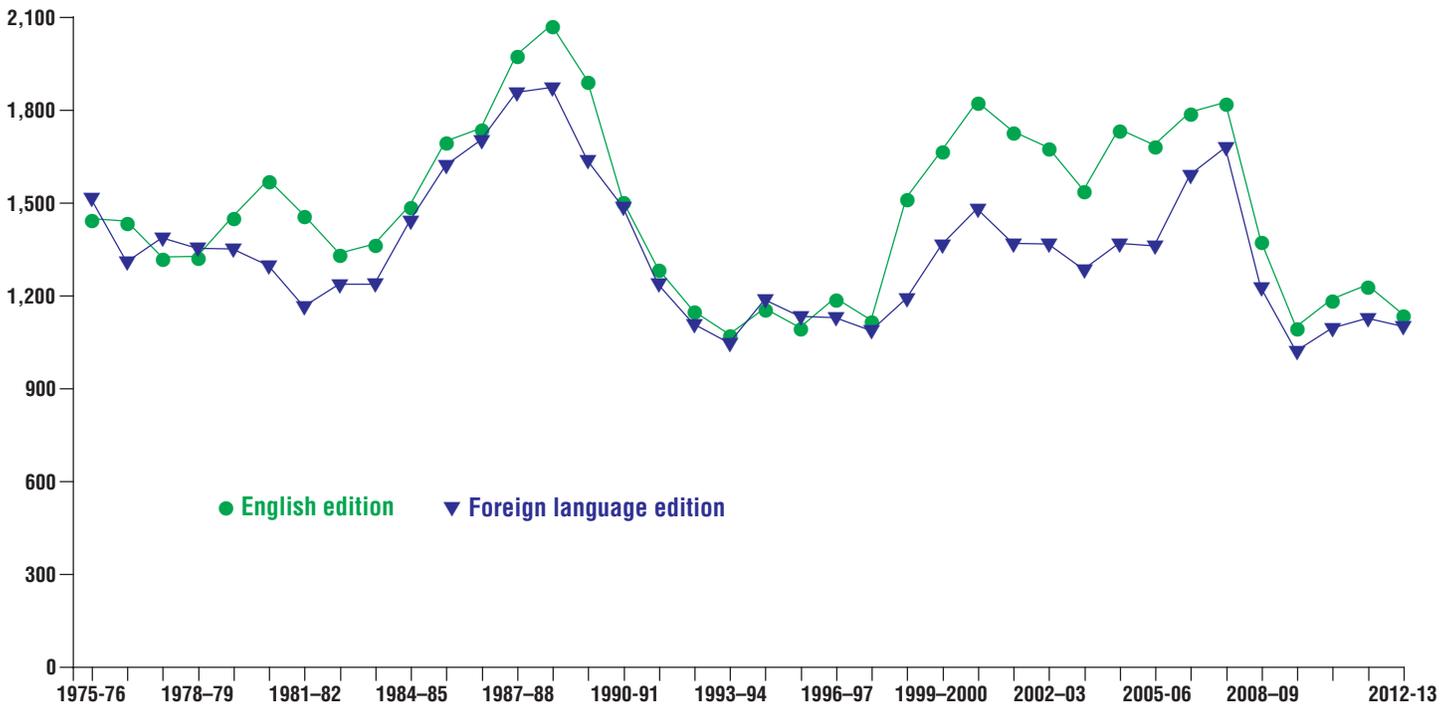
The ADFL Executive Committee will present the ADFL Award for Distinguished Service to the Profession to Elizabeth B. Bernhardt during the MLA Award Ceremony on 11 January 2014 at the MLA Annual Convention in Chicago. The award honors eminent scholar-teachers who serve the profession in the larger community. Elizabeth Bernhardt is the John Roberts Hale Director of the Language Center and professor of German studies at Stanford University, where she is also professor of education. She holds a PhD in second languages and culture education from the University of Minnesota. At Stanford, Bernhardt has created a nationally emulated language center devoted to second language teaching and learning. A preeminent researcher in second-language reading, Bernhardt is the author of research-based protocols for assessing reading comprehension. She is an outspoken leader in national discussions of language program governance.

Carol T. Christ Receives ADE March Award

The ADE Executive Committee has named Carol T. Christ the recipient of the 2013 Francis Andrew March Award. She will receive the award at the MLA Annual Convention’s awards ceremony in Chicago on 11 January 2014. Christ received her doctorate in English from Yale University. She chaired the English department at the University of California, Berkeley, where she was also dean of humanities, mathematics, and natural sciences and provost of the College of Arts and Sciences. She was president of Smith College from 2002 to 2013.

The ADE Francis Andrew March Award was established by the ADE Executive Committee in 1984 to honor exceptional service to the profession of English. The award is named for Francis March (1823–1911), professor of English at Lafayette College and the first professor of English in America.

Number of Jobs Advertised in the MLA *Job Information List*, 1975–76 to 2012–13



Report on the MLA *Job Information List*

In 2012–13 the number of jobs advertised in the MLA *Job Information List (JIL)* fell by 93 (7.5%) in the English edition and by 26 (2.3%) in the foreign language edition, compared with 2011–12. The *JIL*'s English edition announced 1,142 positions, compared with 1,235 in 2011–12; the foreign language edition announced 1,102 positions, compared with 1,128 in 2011–12. The decreases this year follow two years of modest increases after the severe drop over the two years 2008–09 and 2009–10, when the number of jobs advertised declined

by 726 (39.8%) in English and by 658 (39.2%) in foreign languages. The figure above shows the trend lines for the number of jobs advertised from 1975–76 to 2012–13. The 1,142 positions advertised in this past year's English edition remain 684 (37.5%) below the 2007–08 peak of 1,826; the 1,102 jobs advertised in the foreign language edition remain 578 (34.4%) below the 2007–08 peak of 1,680.

The complete report is available on the MLA Web site (www.mla.org/jilreport201213).

MLA Book Awards

Is your book eligible for an MLA book award? The MLA Committee on Honors and Awards invites authors and editors to compete for the association's publication prizes. There are eight annual and sixteen biennial MLA prizes that honor outstanding work in languages, literatures, and interdisciplinary studies and in specific genres (e.g., translation, bibliography, letters, scholarly edition). For information on the individual prizes, their deadlines, and the application process, please visit the MLA Web site (www.mla.org/award_competitions). You may also request detailed information on any MLA prize by contacting the programs office (646 576-5141; awards@mla.org).

Winner of the Modern Language Association's
2011 MLA
Aldo and Jeanne Scaglione
Prize for Comparative
Literary Studies

Frédérique Aït-Touati
Aldo and Jeanne Scaglione Prize for Comparative Literary Studies

"[While] natural philosophers were discovering in literature new strategies and techniques for their discourse, . . . poets and storytellers were finding inspiration in natural philosophy: between science and literature common codes and languages were being established, precisely at the moment when the two disciplines were beginning to distinguish themselves from one another."

FICTIONS OF THE COSMOS
Science and Literature in the Nineteenth Century
FRÉDÉRIQUE AÏT-TOUATI
Translated by Steve Dowd

VIDEO BY PAM ROLLER

Screenshot from the video of 2012 MLA-prize-winning books

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3. Paid Distribution outside the Mails including Sales through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, Counter Sales, and Other Paid Distribution outside USPS®	1,927	1,595
4. Paid Distribution by Other Classes of Mail through the USPS (e.g., First-Class Mail®)	116	117
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1. Free or Nominal Rate Outside-County Copies	0	0
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Rosemary G. Feal, Executive Director

Making Suggestions for Committee Appointments

This year the MLA Executive Council will make appointments to seventeen standing committees of the association. The council invites members to consider suggesting themselves or other members for one of the fifty-one anticipated vacancies on the seventeen committees. Members' suggestions will be accepted at the Web site (www.mla.org/commsugg) from mid-November through early February. The Web page for suggestions provides information on the factors relevant to this new round of committee appointments. Because these factors change from year to year, suggestions made the previous year are not brought forward for the council's consideration. Members will therefore need to deposit new or updated suggestions after consulting the new Web listing of vacancies.

The council will be making appointments to fill these vacancies at its February 2014 meeting. Any questions about committee suggestions should be addressed to Carol Zuses at the MLA office (czuses@mla.org).

Calls for Papers for the 2015 Convention

The 2015 MLA Annual Convention will be held in Vancouver from 8 to 11 January. Calls for papers may be submitted through the MLA Web site (www.mla.org/cfp_main). Submissions will be accepted until 21 February 2014. Organizers are responsible for responding to all inquiries.

Calls for papers may be viewed online at www.mla.org/conv_papers. Members should familiarize themselves with the guidelines for the MLA convention, which appear on the MLA Web site (www.mla.org/conv_procedures), before writing to the organizers listed in the calls for papers. If not provided, organizers' addresses are available in the members' directory on the MLA Web site. All participants in convention sessions must be MLA members by 7 April 2014. A member may participate (e.g., by facilitating a workshop, reading a paper, or serving as a speaker, presider, or respondent) only twice at a convention.

Participants must indicate their audiovisual needs when they respond to a call for papers and should check with the chair of the session or with the MLA convention office to be sure that the necessary equipment has been ordered by 1 April 2014. Because the need for audiovisual equipment is a major factor in the scheduling of meetings (and because the movement of equipment is both costly and hazardous), the 1 April deadline is firm.

Members without Internet access who need a printout of the calls for papers should write or call the MLA office to have a copy mailed to them (membership@mla.org; 646 576-5151).



TOURISM VANCOUVER / AL HARVEY

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PMLA Special Topic: Literature in the World

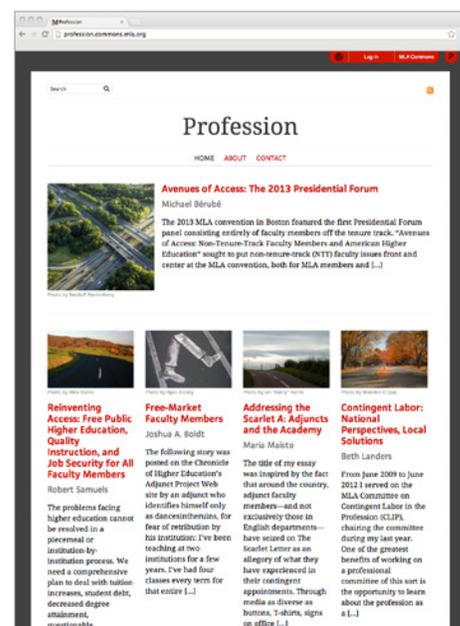
The *PMLA* Editorial Board invites essays on literature in a diverse and multilingual world. The special issue will seek to provide a critical reflection on the diversity of both dominant and less-taught languages and of their spheres of use, to engage with the vernacular and the indigenous as critical categories, and to consider conceptual or thematic structures that invite literary studies to move outside the rubrics of nation, state, and national language. The coordinator of the special topic is Simon Gikandi (Princeton Univ.). The deadline for submissions is 3 November 2014. For a complete description of the topic and for submission guidelines, please see www.mla.org/pmla_submitting.

Honorary Members and Fellows

Members are encouraged to submit nominations for honorary members and fellows of the association. Honorary members are distinguished foreign scholars, and honorary fellows are distinguished men and women of letters of any nationality. Those recently elected include Lina Bolzoni, Louise Erdrich, Adrienne Kennedy, Jacques Roubaud, Albert Wendt, and Mo Yan. The current rosters of honorary members and fellows can be found at the MLA Web site (www.mla.org/honorary_members).

Members who would like to recommend honorary members and fellows should refer to the instructions at www.mla.org/nominations_hon.

Dated Material
Please deliver by 22 November



Presentations that were part of the Presidential Forum at the 2013 MLA Annual Convention have now been published on the new Profession site at MLA Commons. Additional pieces will be added to the site later this fall and will be available in an e-book format.