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Convention Comes to Austin

From 7 to 10 January 2016 the MLA Annual Convention will be held in Austin for the first time. Offering a mild winter climate and a wide variety of cultural attractions, the city promises to be an ideal destination for MLA members.

Roland Greene's presidential theme for the convention will be *Literature and Its Publics: Past, Present, and Future*. All convention sessions and events will take place downtown, in and near the Austin Convention Center.

Information about convention hotels, travel arrangements, and pre-registering at member rates will be available on the MLA Web site (www.mla.org/convention) in September. In the meantime, visit *MLA Commons* and check #mla16 on *Twitter* for discussions of the MLA convention.



AUSTIN CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

Nominations for 2015 MLA Elections

Second Vice President. The 2015 Nominating Committee has selected three nominees for second vice president of the MLA: Michael F. Bernard-Donals, Univ. of Wisconsin, Madison; Anne Ruggles Gere, Univ. of Michigan, Ann Arbor; and Keith Gilyard, Penn State Univ., University Park. The person elected will take office on 11 January 2016 and will automatically become first vice president in 2017, serving in that office through the close of the January 2018 convention, and president of the MLA in 2018, serving in that office through the close of the January 2019 convention.

Executive Council. The Nominating Committee has selected seven nominees for the MLA Executive Council: Lenora Hanson, Univ. of Wisconsin, Madison; Steffen Kaupp, Duke Univ.; Amanda Licastro, Graduate Center, City Univ. of New York; John B. Lyon, Univ. of Pittsburgh; David Pan, Univ. of California, Irvine; Daniel Powell, Univ. of Victoria; and Rafael A. Ramirez Mendoza, Univ. of California, Los Angeles. The three candidates elected will serve four-year terms that will begin 11 January 2016 and run through the close of the January 2020 convention.

Delegate Assembly. The 2015 Elections Committee has arranged contests to replace seventeen special-interest delegates and thirty-five regional delegates. The term of office of those elected will be from 11 January 2016 through the close of the January 2019 convention.

More information on the elections and candidates can be found at the MLA Web site after 15 April (www.mla.org/nominations2015).

Right to Petition. Any member of the association may initiate a petition proposing additional candidates for second vice president, for the Executive Council, and for the Delegate Assembly. Procedures for filing petitions are described in articles 6.E, 8.A.2, and 10.E of the MLA constitution (www.mla.org/mla_constitution). Petitions must reach the executive director before 1 July.

DANIEL ROOT



Closing the Circle

What should the MLA be five and ten years from now? In a time of acute change in higher education, how should the association adapt to serve its members and our profession? These are questions the officers, the Executive Council, and the staff are considering as we make plans for the near future. I would like to outline three challenges the MLA will confront over the next several years and mention briefly how we are already addressing them. There is much to be done, however, and in the coming months we will want to hear from you.

Representation. First and foremost, the MLA is a scholarly association and a membership organization that exists to promote the shared interests of all those who study language in its various

manifestations. For this reason, the Executive Council considers having a broad base of members important, not for the sake of numbers but to ensure that the association represents the diverse interests of those teaching, studying, researching, and practicing the humanities. As the workforce changes, the MLA is committed to increasing participation by those who have been less represented in the past—including teachers and scholars in disciplines other than literature, community college faculty members, and of course the full-time and part-time contingent faculty members who do most of the teaching in United States (and, sometimes, Canadian) institutions. While new incentives for being an MLA member can be offered, this challenge finally comes down to people wanting to join or renew because the association promotes their values and gives them a voice.

In this, we are making progress. The new intellectual structure—in which redrawn forums have replaced the old divisions and discussion groups, and the annual convention has changed accordingly—is a step forward; the council is imagining further changes to make the convention more accommodating to new and emerging groups. Now all members may nominate themselves (or any other member) to serve on committees of the association, an opportunity we hope more will take. Around half of those appointed to committees this year came from the online nomination process. The Nominating Committee is determined to keep a range of professional standpoints (including those of adjuncts, community college faculty members,

and graduate students) on the Executive Council. Looking outward, we are strengthening our ties with associations such as the National Council of Teachers of English. As this past February's National Adjunct Walkout Day began to take shape, the MLA launched a complementary initiative, Action for Allies, which provided hundreds of full-time faculty members a platform to declare their solidarity with the most exploited segment of our profession and to take action on their campuses. The work of advancing representation continues.

The MLA Convention. In-person job interviews at the convention became indispensable in the 1960s as an egalitarian reaction against the clubby customs of earlier decades. For nearly all of us, the only MLA convention we have known has been colored by the tensions of the job market. The gradual decline of in-person interviews at the convention in favor of online media means that, for the first time in generations, we have an opportunity to rethink the nature of our annual meeting. How should we envision a convention in which the apparatus of the job market is only a small part and where our intellectual connections can thrive in new ways?

Informed by a recent survey of members, the Executive Council is starting to think about this question. The possibilities include a less populous, more intellectually concentrated event; deeper attention to matters of mentoring and professionalization; and more occasions to engage with our allies in other disciplines and sectors, such as curators, librarians, and humanities PhDs in the tech industry. I suspect that how we respond creatively to this evolutionary change in the life of our fields will do much to define the MLA for the next several generations.

Closing the Circle. The MLA of recent decades has advocated for the profession by bringing people together, gathering information, and making recommendations for standards and practices. As we carry out these vital operations, we are committed to following through. We must ask: what results came from our advocacy, and what can we do next? How can you put this information to use in your department? Were the recommendations adopted, and what happens next? As the Executive Council and staff have heard me say, this is about closing the circle. This imperative has many

JON BENJAMIN PHOTOGRAPHY



2015 MLA Convention in Vancouver

dimensions, from developing *MLA Commons* into our town square to encouraging the Delegate Assembly to serve as a year-round source of advice and insight to the council as well as a site of activity on professional matters.

A few weeks ago, during a visit to Indiana University, I was asked to speak to a group of graduate students and faculty members about the work of the MLA. Their hopes for the association—as a force for improvement in a dispiriting professional climate, and as a community in which their voices will be heard—reminded me how important it is to maintain our progress on the challenges I have mentioned here, and more. Key to closing the circle will be MLA members themselves. The broad survey of the membership is already under way. As we reach out, I want to hear from more of you: what do you think the MLA should be in the next decade? I promise to use your responses to shape our action agenda.

Roland Greene

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

Interview-Suite Arrangements

The e-mail notification about reserving a hotel suite for the convention in Austin will be sent in mid-August to the person who is listed as department chair for 2014–15 on the ADE or ADFL membership record as of 1 June 2015. Departments must be members of the ADE or the ADFL and department chairs must be MLA members by 1 June 2015 to receive the early notification. This notification is a privilege of membership in these associations, but it is not a guarantee that a suite will be available.

If you will be away from your office in mid-August, please alert a staff member to look for this e-mail message. ADE- and ADFL-member department chairs who want a suite for interviews are urged to make reservations immediately because the number of suites is limited. Chairs should also make certain that, if a two-bedroom suite is requested, another MLA member is listed as a second occupant and that all suite or room occupants involved in a field related to the study of language and literature are preregistered for the convention. Once registration and housing are open to the entire MLA membership (two weeks after the e-mail message is sent to ADE and ADFL members), department chairs may reserve additional suites; these suites will be assigned on a first-come, first-served basis.

Nominating Honorary Fellows

The MLA invites members to nominate individuals for honorary fellowship. Honorary fellowship is given to distinguished men and women of letters, usually creative writers, of any nationality. A list of honorary members and fellows appears online at www.mla.org/honorary_members. Details on nomination procedures can be found at www.mla.org/nominations_hon, or you may contact Annie Reiser for additional information (646 576-5141; awards@mla.org). The deadline for submitting nominations is 31 January 2016. (Note: The Executive Council is not currently accepting suggestions for honorary members.)

New Convention Executive Committee Members

The MLA's divisions and discussion groups—soon to be renamed forums—added new members to their executive committees in the last election cycle. The list of executive committee members at the MLA Web site has been updated accordingly (www.mla.org/convention_executive). Executive committee listings will also be published in the November 2015 issue of *PMLA*.



Pennybacker Bridge, Austin

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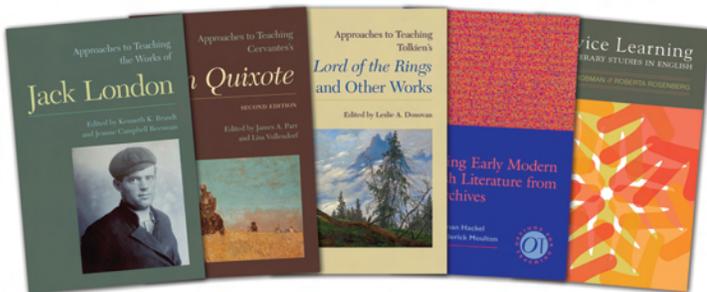
Suggestions Invited for PMLA Editor

At its meeting in February 2015, the MLA Executive Council appointed a subcommittee to oversee the process of selecting a new editor for *PMLA*. The members of the subcommittee are Roland Greene (chair), Lutz Koepnick, and Vicky Unruh. The subcommittee invites suggestions from the membership; suggestions should include information about scholarly credentials and editorial experience. Please send your suggestions to Judy Goulding (jgoulding@mla.org) by 15 July 2015.

The committee approved the following criteria for the next editor:

1. A wide range of intellectual interests, including a commitment to a variety of scholarly approaches and an understanding of more than one language
2. An awareness of contemporary literary scholarship and critical methods and an openness to new technologies and methodologies
3. An ability to work within the structure of the MLA and *PMLA*, including a commitment to the principles guiding current editorial policy and a recognition of the journal as the organ of a large membership organization reflecting diverse scholarly and critical views
4. Past experience with *PMLA* (as author, referee, Advisory Committee member, or Editorial Board member) or substantial editorial experience with another scholarly journal in the field

Since 1985, when the editorship was separated from the executive directorship, there have been seven editors of *PMLA*: John W. Kronik (1985–92), Domna C. Stanton (1992–97), Martha Banta (1997–2000), Carlos J. Alonso (2000–03), Marianne Hirsch (2003–06), Patricia Yaeger (2006–11), and the current editor, Simon Gikandi, whose term began in 2011 and will end in June 2016.



New and Forthcoming MLA Titles

- *Approaches to Teaching the Works of Jack London*
- *Approaches to Teaching Cervantes's Don Quixote, second ed.*
- *Approaches to Teaching Tolkien's Lord of the Rings and Other Works*
- *Teaching Early Modern Literature from the Archives*
- *Service Learning and Literary Studies in English*

For complete information on these and other new titles, and to place orders, please visit www.mla.org/newtitles. These MLA titles will also be available in e-book formats.



Long Center for the Performing Arts, Austin

PMLA Special Topic: Cultures of Reading

Literary studies has a long-standing commitment to ideals of close and critical reading. As the scope of our discipline has broadened, however, so has our conception of what reading entails. A new readiness to explore the physical, temporal, and spatial modalities of reading has led scholars to scrutinize the material conditions of this activity at a time when our reading matter appears on a screen as often as it does in a codex. The *PMLA* Editorial Board invites essays that build on these explorations of reading as a plural activity and that consider readers and the social institutions of literacy in any period or cultural tradition. Potential contributors are encouraged to think about reading expansively—and to consider it as a social practice that enrolls the reader in textual communities or as an integral aspect of particular forms of subjectivity or of memory. The coordinators of the special topic are Evelyne Ender (Hunter Coll., City Univ. of New York) and Deidre Lynch (Harvard Univ.). The deadline for submissions is 7 November 2016. For a complete description of the topic and for submission guidelines, please see www.mla.org/pmla_submitting.

Call for Contributions to MLA Volumes

The volume *Approaches to Teaching the Works of Federico García Lorca*, edited by José I. Badenes and Cecelia J. Cavanaugh, is now in development in the MLA Approaches to Teaching World Literature series. The survey and call for essay proposals for this volume can be found at www.mla.org/approaches. The volumes *Teaching Twentieth-Century Chinese Women's Writing*, edited by Amy Dooling, and *Teaching the Harlem Renaissance*, edited by Venetria K. Patton, are now in development in the MLA Options for Teaching series. The calls for essay proposals can be found at www.mla.org/options.



#Ferguson2MLA: Had to Be There

If you were at the MLA convention in Vancouver on 9 January, you participated in one of the most transformative uses of energy and space imaginable. I've attended annual meetings for nearly four decades, and I've never seen anything like it. I'm talking about the Ferguson to MLA (#Ferguson2MLA) action, planned by a small group of members and carried out by hundreds. The organizers let me know about their plan, and my colleagues in the convention office worked with the Vancouver Convention Centre staff to make sure the event went smoothly.

Several members of the MLA Committee on the Literatures of People of Color of the United States and Canada took an organizing role before, during, and after the 9 January action. Members of the com-

mittee and their invited guests have been using *MLA Commons* to reflect on the experience, and I want their words to be read as widely as possible by all MLA members. So I turn my column over to Koritha Mitchell, Amber Riaz, and Pranav Jani.

What #Ferguson2MLA Means to Me

Koritha Mitchell

Motivated by the belief that #BlackLivesMatter, a diverse group of scholar-activists began organizing a solidarity action that would take place during the 2015 MLA convention in Vancouver. Since August, I had turned down every radio show invitation that had come my way. Though I had been using *Facebook* and *Twitter* to speak out, I realized that my stepping back from speaking at #Ferguson2MLA was only the most recent example of my silencing myself. I needed to face the truth: My country has long been sending me a clear message about how little it values me and mine, and that message was having its intended effect. Realizing my pattern of self-censorship, I reached out to the organizers and asked to be reinstated as a planned speaker.

Because the purpose of violence is to mark who belongs and who does not, violence is best understood as *know-your-place aggression*. The goal is to tell certain people that they should not feel secure in claiming space, even if they have done all the things that the nation claims to respect, such as work hard and achieve according to accepted rules and standards. Studying violence my entire adult life, there's no question in my mind: the success of marginalized groups inspires aggression as often as praise. They don't have to be criminals or do anything wrong to be attacked; their success is more often the "offense" that will make them a target.

In this light, it matters that I began crying while marching a couple months ago in a #BlackLivesMatter event in Columbus, Ohio, as soon as the chant became *Whose streets? Our streets!* For me, this is a claim not of ownership but of belonging, and I was struck by how little I felt that American streets are my streets. Still, I couldn't help but notice the energy and empowerment I gained from seeing and hearing and feeling people of all backgrounds prioritize the assertion of an *our* with their words and actions. Whoever we are and wherever we are, we can choose to insist, *Whose space? Our space!*

A Rationale for Speaking Up

Amber Riaz

When I decided to speak up at the #Ferguson2MLA gathering, I was motivated by Koritha Mitchell's assertion that

we, as academics of color, belong to the academy, not only because we are exceptional—given how much harder we have had to work to "prove" ourselves—but also because we *earned* the right to be there by following their rules. We worked hard, and it is because we worked hard that we get to assume positions of authority. It wasn't enough, however, to simply speak up. What was more important for me was walking up to center stage, claiming the space and then proclaiming my identity, to show that I can occupy the space because I belong in this organization as an equal, not a marginalized identity. This is what #AllBlackLivesMatter means to me: it is a movement that seeks to lay claim to spaces that have been denied to Black bodies.

I have been told by students that I do not have the right to teach English writing to them. The fact that students felt emboldened enough to tell me (to my face) that I did not belong in my authoritative role is telling in itself. It is a symptom of state machinery that is predicated on principles of racism and violence. This violence must be rigorously questioned.

I write today as an academic who has spent most of her career working on, writing about, state-sponsored violence against "minorities" and "marginalized" people. I am writing because I wholeheartedly believe that the voices and actions of instigators of violence, and perpetrators of that violence (regardless of nationality or religion), should be drowned out by the voices of those who believe that violence is unacceptable. When the state sponsors violence, it tells a segment of its population that they don't belong, as Mitchell has pointed out. Violence, in all its myriad forms, must end. All Black voices must be heard.

Mitchell's reframing of the discourse as one about reclamation of space and of citizenship spoke to me at an emotional level. Having been told in numerous ways that I did not belong, I found power and energy in the collective reclamation of space. As a Pakistani Muslim mother, I choose to insist: *I belong!*

Reflections on Solidarity

Pranav Jani

The energy of the #Ferguson2MLA action came from the conviction, among the nearly two hundred gathered there, that we would not be silent while atrocities were going on, when a movement was going on. And that we would challenge "business as usual."

As I was inviting people in, I was asked by an African American colleague, "Why is it that all of a sudden South Asians are interested in Black people?" The comment

(cont. on p. 6)

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(cont. from p. 5)

smarted a bit. But I said, “Well, I understand why you might say that. We have anti-Black racism in our own community. We sometimes think we’re white. We sometimes swallow the ‘model minority’ myth ourselves.”

But I also said, “I’m a socialist of color. There’s nowhere else for me to be. I identify because of my racial and ethnic identity, but I can’t be reduced to that. What’s in my head matters as much as who I am. And that means, right now, saying yes, #BlackLivesMatter.”

I’m coming to you from Ohio, the state where twenty-two-year-old John Crawford was gunned down in a Walmart department store for holding a fake gun. Where twelve-year-old Tamir Rice was gunned down for holding a toy gun in a public park. Ohio is alive with struggle today, with young, Black activists taking the lead.

More activity means more questions. What is solidarity? How do we build it? Solidarity is hard, but it’s a responsibility. Imagine if only Black people were outraged today, and no one else showed up to #BlackLivesMatter events? That itself would be an outrage. Solidarity is grounded in firm convictions: I have your back. I am here in alliance with you to create a space for your voice and your suffering. And my liberation is tied in with yours.

Their side wants to divide and conquer. Our side needs to unite and pull together.

We need to examine tendencies within the movement and academia that use theories of difference not just to ask critical questions about unity, which is necessary, but to make unity impossible. Because if the movement is right, if scholars are right, that this is not just about police incompetence or a few bad apples but that this is systemic and institutional, then it’s going to take all of us to defeat white supremacy and anti-Black racism.

I am so grateful to the association’s members for organizing this event, for making sure that it happened at the convention, where it was front and center, visible, and audible. The event was moving, and I was briefly overcome. In a way, you had to be there, in Vancouver, to experience #Ferguson2MLA. Yet through conversations on *MLA Commons* and elsewhere, MLA members are continuing the work started in Ferguson and taken to Vancouver.

Rosemary G. Feal

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