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Anna Deavere Smith Receives the Phyllis Franklin Award

The sixth Phyllis Franklin Award for Public Advocacy of the Humanities will be presented to the playwright and performer Anna Deavere Smith during the MLA Awards Ceremony on 7 January 2017. MLA President Kwame Anthony Appiah will present the award in recognition of her advocacy of the arts and humanities.

Anna Deavere Smith is University Professor in performance studies at New York University and founder and director of the Institute on the Arts and Civic Dialogue. The IACD supports artists addressing the world's most pressing problems; creates a meeting place for artists, scholars, and audiences to exchange ideas; and supports arts education. Her plays *Fires in the Mirror: Crown Heights, Brooklyn and Other Identities* (nominated for a Pulitzer Prize), *Twilight: Los Angeles, House Arrest*, and *Let Me Down Easy* were constructed using material from extensive interviews with a variety of people and were performed by Smith herself. She is the author of *Talk to Me: Listening between the Lines* and *Letters to a Young Artist*. She has appeared in films such as *The American President* and in television shows such as *The West Wing* and *Nurse Jackie*. Smith is the recipient of the National Humanities Medal, a MacArthur fellowship, the Dorothy and Lillian Gish Award, two Tony nominations, and two Obies. In 2015 the NEH named her the Jefferson Lecturer for the Humanities, the highest honor the government confers for distinguished intellectual achievement in the humanities.

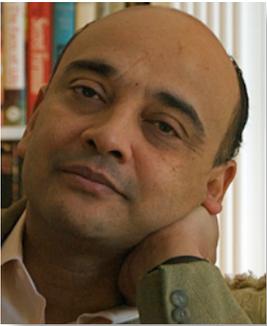


JEFF RIEDEL

The award was established to honor Phyllis Franklin, who died in August 2004. Franklin served as the MLA's director of English programs and then as executive director from 1985 until 2002. Previous winners of the award are Senator Edward M. Kennedy (2003), William G. Bowen (2005), Richard J. Franke (2007), Terry Gross (2010), and John Sayles (2013).

Deadlines for the 2017 Convention

- 2 Oct. Early registration deadline
- 5 Dec. Hotel reservation deadline
- 7 Dec. Regular registration deadline
- 5–8 Jan. 2017 MLA convention held in Philadelphia
- 6 Jan. Postmark deadline for registration refund requests



Setting Boundaries

Some years ago, I resolved to organize my books. There were a lot of them, acquired over a few decades spent on three continents, and I wanted a system where I could readily locate any volume I pleased. As any librarian would have warned me, quandaries quickly arose. I could try to sort philosophy books into metaphysics and epistemology, on the one hand (alphabetized by author within the topic), and political and moral philosophy, on the other. But this did no favors to books about moral epistemology. Should books on anthropological theory go with anthropology, or did they consort more naturally with cultural theory? Waverley Root's midcentury classic *The Food of France*: should this go with books about food or books about France? Books not in

English: should they be tethered to their tongue or scattered by subject? Do accounts of African Americans visiting Africa camp out with the Africa books or the African American books? Should hierarchies be imposed within the realm of fiction, or should it be one companionable democracy, embracing both Agatha Christie and Ágota Kristóf? Then there was a book that described itself, on its cover, as "a novel in the form of a memoir," and on its title page as "a memoir in the form of a novel": dear God, which? Each title could be assigned multiple topical coordinates. There were better ways of organizing things and worse, but there seemed to be no one best way.

And, of course, that holds true for academic life at large. The political science department brings together comparativists and international-relations folks with quantitative model builders, who might prefer speaking with colleagues in the economics department—except that, in the economics department, the economic historians often have more to say to their colleagues in the history department. High-energy experimental physicists often have little in common with math-minded string theorists, who are mostly as experimentally gifted as the average professor of German. And, of course, areas of interest shift, not merely within fields but within a scholarly career. A philosopher colleague of mine once advertised a belief that history was irrelevant to the contemporary pursuit of analytic insight, just as it was in molecular biochemistry, and that any book on philosophy older than a decade could probably be discarded (recalling David Hume's suggestion that most earlier work on philosophy and religion should be "committed to the flames"). But the last time we spoke he was telling me animatedly about the Heidegger seminar he was teaching. His view about the irrelevance of history? That was history.

So how to shelve ourselves? (The MLA addressed this question a couple of years ago, reorganizing itself into forums that, we hope, more accurately reflect members' scholarly interests.) Why does one English department think it crucial to support an Anglo-Saxonist, who, at another university, would reside in a department with Norse and Celtic?

Should people who teach students how to speak and read in a foreign language really share a berth with those who instruct them specifically in the literature and cinema of those languages? Must the scholar of posthumanism be forced to forage among the humanists? Should the diasporic scholar be roped to the region whence her diaspora dispersed? Survey any particular configuration, and alternative configurations invariably suggest themselves. We talk about interdisciplinarity, but intradisciplinarity is no less fraught. One could slice: build a department of modelers, say, from departments of sociology, politics, economics, and so on, aggregating elements from one configuration and creating a new one. One could split: cleave one department or program into, say, the quantitative and the qualitative (inevitably cleaving the very heart of certain scholars). One could lump: merge the various language-themed departments into one with an exciting new title like, oh, "comparative literature." One could slice and split and lump all at once. Each arrangement would have virtues and vices, bringing certain intellectual tropisms to the surface while submerging others.

There never has been an academic Treaty of Westphalia (or, dare I say, Congress of Berlin). As members of departments, programs, centers, and institutes, all we can do is be mindful that our scholarly boundaries could have been drawn very differently. The artifactuality of these lines should be especially salient to people who work in the realm of languages and literature, a veritable hive of cultural, intellectual, and methodological diversity. In the program for the upcoming MLA convention, this eclecticism is splendidly on display. Its pages are an assemblage whose guiding principles can be as mysterious as Borges's division of animals into fourteen kinds, including, you will recall, "suckling pigs," "stray dogs," and "those drawn with a very fine camel's hair brush." Reading the abstracts, you're reminded that someone a little off to the side in one department would be completely central to the work of another, differently conceived department. She could be spearing cheddar cubes at the holiday party with a very different set of colleagues. She

(cont. on p. 3)

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(cont. from p. 2)

could have been shelved under gender, not medieval studies. Under religion, not East Asian studies. We have found no unique set of optima, and we never will, not even if we consecrate a department of organizational studies.

The disciplinary boundaries we need won't keep people out; they will bring us together. At the same time, they will fit us imperfectly. We will, as enthusiasms shift, reassess and redraw them over time. We'll rail at their distortions and constrictions. And we'll recognize—meager consolation—that there's no right way of drawing them. But if they let students find their teachers, and scholarship find its readers, they will be good enough. Waverley Root: I'm thinking *food*. What do you think?

K. Anthony Appiah

Note

I hope that you can join me and your colleagues in Philadelphia this January for the MLA Annual Convention and that you are able to attend the Presidential Plenary: Boundary Conditions: The Inhumanity of the Other (227) and its linked sessions, The Refugee Crisis: At-Risk Students and Scholars (356) and New Classroom Boundaries (482).

Work Cited

Borges, Jorge Luis. "The Analytical Language of John Wilkins." *Other Inquisitions, 1937–1952*, translated by Ruth L. C. Simms, U of Texas P, 1993, p. 103.

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

Membership Ratification Vote

The 2016 Delegate Assembly took several actions—the approval of six constitutional amendments and one resolution—that were submitted to the membership for ratification votes this past spring. All 2016 members as of 18 April were eligible to vote. Of the 21,494 eligible voters, 1,756 (8.2%) returned ballots. Voting results are presented below.

The membership voted to ratify the six amendments, all of which were prompted by the anticipated effects of the implementation of the new convention forum structure on the size and composition of the Delegate Assembly. The first amendment, to article 10.A.1, provides for the election of a forum delegate by that forum's membership instead of the forum's executive committee. The vote on this amendment was 1,556 yes and 88 no. The second amendment, to article 10.A.2, allotted an equal number of delegates to each of the seven electoral regions, the number to be determined by the assembly. It was ratified by a vote of 1,496 yes and 132 no. Amendment 3, to article 10.A.3, eliminated the requirement for proportional representation of graduate students within the seven electoral regions. It was ratified by a vote of 1,456 yes and 173 no. The fourth amendment, to article 10.D.1,

Proposed Amendments to the MLA Constitution

This year, the Committee on Amendments to the Constitution worked on two proposals for constitutional amendments, one to align the provision for paid life membership in article 3.C with the new criterion for the granting of life membership after fifty years that the 2016 Delegate Assembly approved and the other to provide representation on the Executive Council for part-time faculty members.

As required by the MLA constitution (art. 13.B), the texts of the amendments formulated by the committee have been published at the MLA Web site (www.mla.org/proposed-amendment). Brief explanations of the amendments are also provided. The committee will present the amendments to the Delegate Assembly at the assembly's meeting on 7 January 2017 in Philadelphia. If approved by the assembly, the amendments will be submitted to the members of the association in 2017 for ratification.

Members who wish to comment on the proposed amendments may do so at either the open hearing of the Delegate Assembly (6 Jan., 12:00 noon, Grand Ballroom Salon D, Philadelphia Marriott) or the assembly meeting itself (7 Jan., 11:00 a.m., Grand Ballroom Salon GH, Philadelphia Marriott). Written comments are also welcome, but they must be received at the MLA office by 16 December so that the Delegate Assembly Organizing Committee may review them before its meeting at the convention. Comments can be addressed to the coordinator of governance at the MLA office or sent by fax (646 576-5107) or e-mail (governance@mla.org).

was a conforming amendment entailed by amendments 2 and 3. It was ratified by a vote of 1,534 yes and 90 no. The last two amendments, to articles 10.A.4, 10.D.3–4, and 10.E, provided for representation in the assembly for professional issues instead of special interests and allowed the assembly to determine the number of professional-issues seats and the concerns to be addressed. They were ratified by a vote of 1,548 yes and 78 no. All six amendments have been incorporated into the text of the constitution at the Web site (www.mla.org/About-Us/Governance/MLA-Constitution).

The resolution that the 2016 Delegate Assembly approved, which called on the MLA to "support faculty members and students who challenge Islamophobic rhetoric and the increased militarism, xenophobia, and racism associated with the upsurge in Islamophobia," was not ratified by the membership. Article 11.C.7 of the MLA constitution states that resolutions "must be ratified by a majority vote in which the number of those voting for ratification equals at least ten percent of the association's membership." Of the 21,494 eligible voters, only 1,279 (6.0%) voted yes on the resolution. The tally of no votes was 410.

About the Job Information Center

All candidates, departmental representatives, and interviewers who wish to use the facilities of the MLA Job Information Center must be registered for the convention. The center will be located in Ballroom 204A-B in the Pennsylvania Convention Center. The center will be open from 8:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. on 5 January, from 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. on 6 and 7 January, and from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon on 8 January. The center provides several services to candidates.

1. Information on Interview Locations. Job candidates can find the location of their interviews by visiting the center (the information is not available by telephone).

2. Sign-In Procedures for Departments. Departmental administrators or representatives who plan to hold job interviews during the convention, whether in their hotel suites or in the interview area of the Job Information Center, are encouraged to sign in at www.mla.org/jil_dept to ensure interviewees can find them. Alternatively, interviewers may come to the Job Information Center during the hours listed above to provide their interview locations.

3. Counseling Service. Experienced departmental administrators will be available to discuss individual employment problems from 10:15 a.m. to 5:15 p.m. on 6 and 7 January. Appointments can be arranged through the staff member on duty in the interview area. Each counselee should bring a cover letter and vita.

4. Interview Area. Tables in the interview area will be assigned to departmental representatives on a first-come, first-served basis. Staff members will be available in the area to assist interviewers and candidates.

5. Vacancy Notices. A list of openings will be posted on bulletin boards in the center. Departmental representatives should submit detailed descriptions of any last-minute vacancies to an MLA staff member in the center.

Sessions 1, 2, 4, 5, 71, 73, 78, 178, 328, 329, 400, 414, 498, 563, 590, 604, 699, and 757 may be of particular interest to job seekers and hiring committees.



Theatre of Life by Meg Saligman, part of the Philadelphia Mural Arts Program

PHOTO BY BRYAN LATHROP FOR PHLOVE

Five Reasons to Look Forward to Philadelphia

Join us as the convention returns to Philadelphia! Since the MLA was last there in 2009, the city has new museums, restaurants, hotels, and other attractions—so be sure to explore the new offerings as well as the old favorites.

- **Insider access**—all sessions will take place in the Philadelphia Marriott and the Pennsylvania Convention Center, which are connected by an interior skyway. The exhibit hall and job center are centrally located in the convention center.
- **Reading Terminal Market**—an array of shops, eateries, coffee outlets, and Philadelphia's hometown ice cream, all right next door to the convention center.
- **Philadelphia Museum of Art**—the museum has expanded to the nearby Perelman Building, with six new galleries. While the MLA convention is in town, the museum will feature exhibitions on African fashion and Mexican modernism, as well as a retrospective of Bruce Nauman's art. Museum admission also permits you to visit the Rodin Museum.
- **Art across Philly**—through the Mural Arts Program, detour into some of the city's beautiful neighborhoods and discover amazing artworks, delve into Philadelphia's history, and explore the public murals that decorate Philadelphia.
- **History**—from 1776 to 2016, Philly has been the site of many of our nation's firsts. Brush up on your constitutional knowledge at the National Constitution Center, or visit the African American Museum and many other sites on the [Historic Philadelphia Trail](#).

The 2017 convention includes nearly 800 sessions and events, many addressing the presidential theme, *Boundary Conditions* (read Kwame Anthony Appiah's column on page 2). Connected Academics is once again sponsoring a variety of activities, including sessions on networking, career diversity, writing for a broader audience, and reinventing the PhD; for more information, please visit <https://connect.commonsmmla.org/connected-academics-2017-mla-convention-activities/>.

Travel Assistance

The MLA provides \$400 convention travel grants to graduate students, unemployed members, non-tenure-track faculty members, and members residing outside the United States and Canada. To learn more about these awards and application requirements, visit the MLA Web site (www.mla.org/financial-assistance).

For additional information or details on how to apply, please contact Annie Reiser (646 576-5141; areiser@mla.org).



Your Professional Development: To Be Continued (at the Convention)

As most of you already know, more and more departments are shifting their in-person first-round interviews for academic positions to videoconferencing platforms such as *Skype*.¹ Yet candidates may still envision the MLA convention primarily as a job market, during which they interview, if they are fortunate, and attend ADE- and ADFL-sponsored demonstration interviews or sessions on graduate school life or the academic workforce. The faculty members who conduct interviews generally describe their convention experience as time spent in a hotel room with the same colleagues for long mornings and

afternoons, leaving them few occasions to attend sessions, go to the exhibit hall, or participate in one of the MLA-sponsored cultural excursions. Not ideal for anyone, especially in a brutal humanities job market.

When we surveyed members recently, we learned how they want the convention to change. Many said they would like to see even more opportunities for career development than already exist. As part of the MLA's current strategic plan, that's exactly the direction the convention has begun to take. We have started to expand the scope of offerings at the convention to reflect members' burgeoning interest in new forms of career development. Of special interest in this regard are the sessions linked to [Connected Academics](#), the MLA project, funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, to prepare humanists for a wide variety of careers. Workshops focus on transferable skills, writing for broader audiences, networking, and job-search strategies. For the second year, we are showcasing the diverse and rewarding careers of humanities PhD recipients. Attendees have an opportunity to discover the wide range of employment possibilities available within and beyond the academy. Presenters, available for one-on-one discussions about their jobs and the career paths that led to them, include PhDs who work in universities, secondary education, nonprofit fundraising, finance, management consulting, public humanities, journalism, and public policy. For a complete list of convention sessions related to Connected Academics, see <https://connect.commonsmcla.org/2017-mla-convention-activities/>.

Members frequently tell me they have few chances to learn what it's like to teach at institutions that don't resemble their own. The Philadelphia convention offers several sessions to guide members in this regard. Session 329, Teaching at Teaching-Intensive Institutions, elucidates the rewards and challenges of careers at schools with 4-4 and 5-5 teaching loads. Attendees are invited to bring their CVs and cover letters for practical assistance. Session 414 features faculty members in English and foreign languages who discuss career opportunities in community colleges, focusing on job seekers who are starting their careers. Panelists in session 495, Career Training for Humanists:

Best-Case Scenarios, consider innovative public humanities programs, multi-institutional initiatives, faculty best practices, and career center workshops. In the words of the session organizers, "[t]hese talks recalibrate career training as essential to our discipline: a way of acting on our values, challenging academic and public boundaries, and articulating our purpose."

As we plan future conventions, we are thinking about the kinds of support that our members want across the arc of their careers. Graduate students may wish for information about building an online research profile or making connections with scholars in their fields. Early-career faculty members might seek guidance as they take on new responsibilities in student advising, personnel matters, or curricular development. Senior scholars seeking new career challenges might want to explore possibilities for moving into administration. Some members will want to focus on grant writing, journal editing, national humanities advocacy, or collective bargaining as developmental areas in which to engage. The convention will, of course, remain a site for scholarly exchange and informal networking, which have always been its heart and soul. Yet in expanding the range of professional opportunities at our annual meeting, we think more members will find attending the convention an even richer experience, one that might produce anything from discovering effective ways to restore shared governance to forging a new career path. If you have ideas for the kinds of professional-development workshops you'd like to see, please let us know by writing to execdirector@mcla.org. I hope to welcome you to the 2017 convention in Philadelphia!

Rosemary G. Feal

Note

1. ADE and ADFL guidelines for remote interviewing may be found at <https://ade.mcla.org/remote-interviews/>.

Members are invited to comment on the editor's column at [execdirector.commonsmcla.org](https://connect.commonsmcla.org).

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2016 MLA Elections

The 2016 MLA elections for second vice president, Executive Council, Delegate Assembly, and forum executive committees will be conducted both online and on paper. All 2016 MLA members who have provided an e-mail address will be notified by e-mail when balloting becomes available at the Web site during the third week in October. All other 2016 members will receive a letter with instructions for obtaining a paper ballot.

Online ballots must be submitted before 12:00 midnight (EST) on 10 December; paper ballots must be received at the MLA office no later than 10 December to be counted. Members who vote online do not have to complete the ballot in one session but may exit the system and return as many times as necessary to finish voting.

Online voters have easy access to candidate information within the ballot system. Members who request a paper ballot will receive a printout of the candidate information along with the ballot.

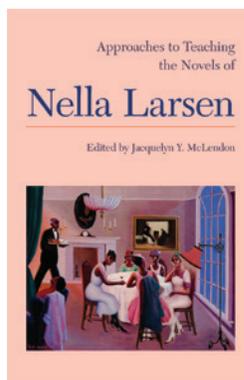
Both ballots provide a means for members to suggest candidates for the 2017 forum executive committee elections.

If you are an eligible online voter and do not receive an e-mail notification by 28 October, please check your spam folder before contacting the coordinator of governance. Requests for paper ballots must reach the coordinator of governance (Carol Zuses, MLA, 85 Broad Street, suite 500, New York, NY 10004-2434; telephone: 646 576-5103; fax: 646 576-5107; governance@mla.org) by 16 November.

Call for Contributions to MLA Volume

The volume *Approaches to Teaching The Romance of the Rose*, edited by Daisy Delogu and Anne-Hélène Miller, is now in development in the MLA Approaches to Teaching series. The survey and call for essay proposals for this volume can be found at www.surveymonkey.com/r/att-the-rose.

New and Forthcoming Titles



- *Approaches to Teaching the Novels of Nella Larsen*
- *Teaching the Literatures of the American Civil War*

For complete information on these and other new titles, and to place orders, please visit www.mla.org/newtitles. MLA members receive 30% off list prices. These MLA titles will also be available in e-book formats.

