

## Convention Returns to New York City

We're excited to have the 2018 MLA Annual Convention return to New York City, the MLA's home for the past nine decades. From 4 to 7 January 2018, we invite you to share in the many wonderful experiences the city has to offer.

Did you know?

- The very first MLA Annual Convention took place in New York City in 1883, with forty attendees, the same year that the Brooklyn Bridge opened to the public.
- Nearly one quarter of the MLA's membership lists their primary residence as New York, New Jersey, or Connecticut.
- Convention hotels are located within easy walking distance to major New York City attractions like MoMA, Carnegie Hall, Times Square, and Central Park.

Diana Taylor's presidential theme for the convention is #States of Insecurity, and the convention's hundreds of sessions and events will take place in the Hilton New York, the Sheraton New York, and the Marriott Marquis New York.

Information about convention hotels, travel arrangements, and preregistering at member rates will be available at [www.mla.org/convention](http://www.mla.org/convention) in September. In the meantime, visit *MLA Commons* and check #mla18 on *Twitter* for discussions about the MLA convention.



A view of the Manhattan Bridge from Brooklyn

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## Nominations for 2017 MLA Elections

**Second Vice President.** The 2017 Nominating Committee has selected three nominees for second vice president of the MLA: Michael F. Bernard-Donals, Univ. of Wisconsin, Madison; Peter Brooks, Princeton Univ.; and Judith Butler, Univ. of California, Berkeley. The person elected will take office on 8 January 2018 and will automatically become first vice president in 2019, serving in that office through the close of the January 2020 convention, and president of the MLA in 2020, serving in that office through the close of the January 2021 convention.

**Executive Council.** The Nominating Committee has selected seven nominees for the MLA Executive Council: Douglas M. Armato, Univ. of Minnesota Press; Thadious M. Davis, Univ. of Pennsylvania; Gail E. Finney, Univ. of California, Davis; Jean Elizabeth Howard, Columbia Univ.; Elizabeth Mathews Losh, Coll. of William and Mary; Steven Mailloux, Loyola Marymount Univ.; and Ramon Saldivar, Stanford Univ. The three candidates elected will serve four-year terms that will begin 8 January 2018 and run through the close of the January 2022 convention.

**Delegate Assembly.** The 2017 Elections Committee has arranged twenty contests for professional-issues seats and twenty-one contests for regional seats. The term of office of those elected will be from 8 January 2018 through the close of the January 2021 convention.

More information on the elections and candidates can be found at the MLA Web site after 17 April ([www.mla.org/nominations-2017](http://www.mla.org/nominations-2017)).

**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/About-Us/Governance/MLA-Constitution](http://www.mla.org/About-Us/Governance/MLA-Constitution)). Petitions must reach the executive director before 1 July.



## Becoming WE

I remember the moment it occurred to me that I might want to assume a leadership position in the MLA. For the association's 2014 convention, Marianne Hirsch organized her presidential forum around the topic of vulnerability. I spoke of Subcomandante Marcos and the Zapatistas, who had been rebelling against the Mexican government and had, over more than twenty years of resistance, developed a notion of a world in which there is room for many worlds. *I are WE*, one Zapatista mural declared. This political construction of the WE did not signal conformity of opinion, background, or belief. But it did underline the awareness that WE are in this together. The urgent problems they faced—discrimination, violence, inequality before the law, conditions of extreme

precarity—called them to acknowledge themselves as a collectivity composed of individuals determined to struggle together for justice. Their WE, rather than a shared identity or worldview, reflected a strategic *linking up* to defend the issues they care about. I looked up and asked the MLA members in the room: When will we become a WE?

Now is the time to become a WE.

Not a royal WE.

Not a nationalist or populist WE.

But a collective, negotiated WE advocating for the right and the access to a world-class education for all.

As scholars and students in the humanities, we agree on the value of education in a democratic society, even though we have different ideas about how to prioritize and address the challenges that face us. As members of an evidence-based community trained in critical thinking, we recognize that the perennial problems continue to intensify. The humanities are undervalued and underfunded in most areas of educational and public life. Departments of languages and literature are shrinking or being clustered in catchall entities that require less specialization and, thus, fewer faculty members. Not enough public schools offer training in languages other than English, and the “teach to the test” pedagogy means many high school students never read full texts as part of their course work. Our graduate students have trouble finding full-time postsecondary teaching jobs in their areas of study, and adjunctification now seems an existential condition in addition to an acute labor issue we need to fight. Alongside these and related problems, the new United States presidential administration has ushered in a series of positions aimed at the “deconstruction of the administrative state” (in Steve Bannon’s words), including education (Rucker).

Apparent followers of Paul de Man, administration leaders aim to delink speech from meaning, lauding the virtues of education while placing the Department of Education in the hands of a person who has long attacked the public school system. In a move to privatize education through a charter school system, the new secretary of education made it clear: “We must open up the education industry—and let’s

not kid ourselves that it isn’t an industry—we must open it up to entrepreneurs and innovators” (Strauss). The president’s budget provides zero funding for the NEH and NEA and the Department of Education’s international education programs. Bills are being proposed to eliminate or cut back on free-lunch programs. DACA students (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals), who have until recently been allowed to pursue their educations, are being deported. Other students, faculty members, and guest speakers from abroad have been denied entry into the United States.

The challenges posed to education at all levels are inter-related. WE, as members of the MLA, need to link up strategically to face these threats on several fronts. In addition to the work the MLA can do on a national level, we can participate in our neighborhood schools, go to town hall meetings, contact our legislators, and write op-eds in our local newspapers to advocate support for the humanities, for our schools, and for all students. In our universities, we can campaign actively to increase the number of tenure-track positions and to make sure that our adjuncts have appropriate pay and as much job security and as many professional advancement opportunities as possible. While some of these issues seem beyond our grasp as individuals, by linking up strategically we form a very strong WE. The MLA is currently putting resources in place to help us act individually and as a strategically linked collective ([www.mla.org/Advocacy-Initiatives](http://www.mla.org/Advocacy-Initiatives)). This is the time to make our voices heard in defense of education and the humanities, together as the MLA and as individual educators and members of the humanities workforce.

Several scholarly organizations across disciplines, like the MLA, are currently discussing the degree to which they should involve themselves in the political debates. Professional standards of behavior have long held that being vocal in the public arena and addressing a general public are to be avoided. Some scholars are understandably reluctant to speak out. Some of us fear we might face ostracism or be passed over for professional advancement. James Hansen,

*(cont. on p. 3)*

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a leading scientist of climate change, was ridiculed, harassed, and arrested for addressing an audience about the human factors contributing to global warming. Now scientists and their allies are marching in Washington on 22 April in support of scientific research and evidence-based policies. The long-observed practice of delinking researchers from the publics affected by their findings does not serve anyone well.

Those of us in the MLA can't sit on the sidelines while the educational system is being "deconstructed." The MLA is part of a larger WE, a community of scholars and academics across the spectrum that also understands the need for action. WE can link up with others to pursue broader, shared goals. It is not an exaggeration to say that the future of education in the United States is playing out right now. WE need to have a part in shaping that future.

Diana Taylor

### Works Cited

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Comment on this column at [president.mla.hcommons.org](http://president.mla.hcommons.org).

## 2017 Ratification Ballot

At its meeting on 7 January 2017 in Philadelphia, the Delegate Assembly approved two constitutional amendments and two resolutions. The assembly's actions are not final, however, since the MLA constitution (art. 11.C.7) requires the membership to ratify the assembly's actions. Because the level of participation in ratification votes in recent years has been low, the Executive Council wishes to encourage all members to review the actions that are subject to ratification and to exercise their right to vote.

The ratification vote will be conducted at the MLA Web site and by paper ballot. All members in good standing as of 17 April who were also members on 7 January, the date of the assembly meeting, will have access to the ratification ballot. Notifications will be sent by e-mail to eligible voters who have e-mail addresses on file with the MLA; all other eligible voters will be notified by letter. Online balloting will begin on 19 April and will close at 5:00 p.m. (EDT) on 1 June. There will be a link to the ratification ballot at the bottom of the home page. Eligible voters who prefer a paper ballot should contact the coordinator of governance to request one (MLA, 85 Broad Street, suite 500, New York, NY 10004-2434; e-mail: [governance@mla.org](mailto:governance@mla.org); fax: 646 576-5107). The deadline for requesting a paper ballot is 15 May.

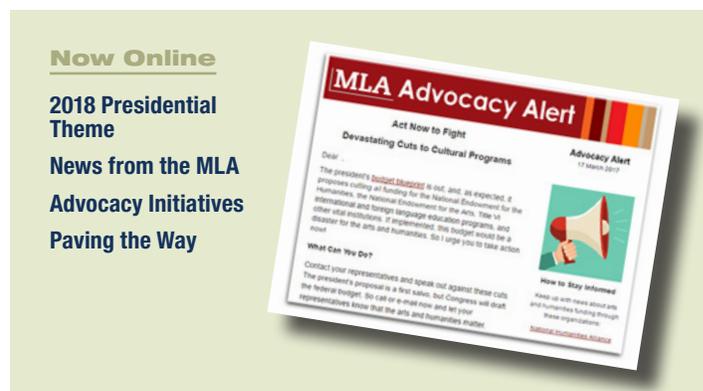
## PMLA Special Topic: Varieties of Digital Humanities

Digital humanities (DH) may not be a full-fledged discipline, but it has advanced beyond "the next big thing" to become a reality on many campuses. Like many fields that have received a great deal of attention, DH derives energy from internal combustion and external friction—dissenters, supporters, and detractors see different sides of what may after all be too large a variety of practice to cohere as a field in the future. This moment, then, seems a good time to ask, What is next for DH? And what can we learn from what has come before?

*PMLA* invites essays that will help assess the past of DH, outline its current state, and point to its future directions among diverse participants, allies, and critics. The special issue welcomes well-informed critical essays that articulate varieties of digital experience with DH as it is commonly understood and as it is practiced in a more expansive, even contested, way. Issues and themes might include accessibility, sustainability, standards of evidence, transforming the academic career, changing or pursuing further the abiding questions in the discipline. The coordinators of the special topic are Alison Booth (Univ. of Virginia) and Miriam Posner (Univ. of California, Los Angeles). The deadline for submissions is 12 March 2018. For a complete description of the topic and for submission guidelines, please see [www.mla.org/pmla\\_submitting](http://www.mla.org/pmla_submitting).

## 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](http://www.mla.org/honorary-members). Details on nomination procedures can be found at [www.mla.org/nominations-hon](http://www.mla.org/nominations-hon), or you may contact Annie Reiser for additional information (646 576-5141; [awards@mla.org](mailto:awards@mla.org)). The deadline for submitting nominations is 31 January 2018. (Note: The Executive Council is not currently accepting suggestions for honorary members.)



## ADE and ADFL Summer Seminars

Each summer the Association of Departments of English and the Association of Departments of Foreign Languages arrange three seminars where chairs and other leaders in ADE- and ADFL-member departments share information and discuss issues facing departments and the field. The ADE and ADFL network helps department leaders identify the broader context they need to succeed in their administrative work. Hosted by Emory University, Georgia Institute of Technology, Georgia State University, and Agnes Scott College, ADFL Summer Seminar East takes place in Atlanta from 24 to 27 May. Hosted by the University of Minnesota, ADE-ADFL Summer Seminar Midwest takes place in Minneapolis from 1 to 4 June. Hosted by a consortium led

by Bridgewater State University and Rhode Island College, ADE Summer Seminar East takes place in Providence from 12 to 15 June.

Each seminar features a preseminar workshop for new chairs, where those about to start or just completing their first year as department chairs can gather practical advice and have questions about all aspects of chairing answered by seasoned administrators. ADFL Summer Seminar East will also offer preseminar workshops on managing small programs and on teaching language through literature, as well as an advocacy teacher-training program using Pre-Texts. ADE-ADFL Summer Seminar Midwest will offer preseminar workshops on reversing the decline in the number of

English majors and on dismantling the “two-tier” curriculum divide in language programs. ADE Summer Seminar East will offer preseminar workshops and special sessions for directors of undergraduate study and directors of graduate study, as well as a workshop on using data to advocate for English departments.

The seminar registration fee covers meals. Registration is \$575 for ADE- or ADFL-member departments and \$850 for nonmember departments; online registration forms are now available. There is a \$175 charge for preseminar workshops, covering meals and materials. For more information on the seminars, visit the ADE or ADFL Web site ([ade.mla.org](http://ade.mla.org); [adfl.mla.org](http://adfl.mla.org)) or contact Roy Chustek ([rchustek@mla.org](mailto:rchustek@mla.org); 646 576-5133).



Minneapolis, site of the joint ADE-ADFL Summer Seminar Midwest

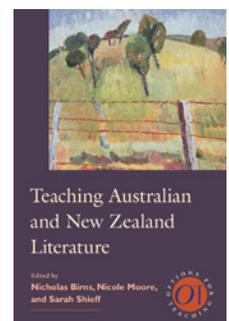
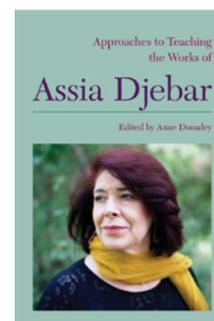
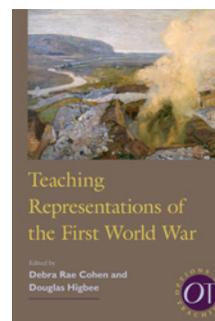
## Forthcoming MLA Titles

*Approaches to Teaching the Works of Assia Djebar*

*Teaching Australian and New Zealand Literature*

*Teaching Representations of the First World War*

For complete information on these and other new titles, and to place orders, please visit [www.mla.org/newtitles](http://www.mla.org/newtitles). MLA members receive a 30% discount on all titles. These MLA titles will also be available in e-book formats.





## “¡Miel, éste es el Trópico!”: Survival American

As I stood near the Hotel Inglaterra on the Parque Central in Havana in early March, I was consciously occupying Guillermo Cabrera Infante's vantage point as represented by the cover image of *La Habana para un infante difunto*. It shows a photographer reclining against a lamppost with his old-fashioned camera, ready to snap pictures of tourists and locals, a custom I saw repeated on my visit nearly four decades after Cabrera Infante's work was published (“Photo, lady?”). My knowledge of Cuba had come through literature, history, art, and scholarly writing, and I was eager to put my feet on Cuban soil now that travel to the country had been eased.

Little in my theoretical training prepared me for the lived realities of contemporary Cuba. I expected

Havana to be a mix of beautifully restored buildings and crumbling colonial-style ruins, and I was not disappointed. I had not imagined Centro Habana's stray dogs and cats scavenging for food in the roads, where pedestrians walked because the rubble-filled sidewalks were often impassable. I knew that daily life presented major challenges for Cubans, who have lived with the United States embargo for over half a century and have endured the Special Period following the collapse of the Soviet Union nearly two decades ago. Seeing the store shelves empty of basic goods brought home to me what scarcity means on a daily basis. Watching Cubans compete for my *peso convertible*—the currency that can purchase household goods, a restaurant meal, or an airline ticket, if authorization to leave the country can be granted—made me feel constantly solicited.

Everyone knew that I was a foreigner, even though I speak Spanish fluently and do not look the blond *gringa* type. People asked, “Where you from, lady?” as I passed by. In situations where I had to give an answer, I didn't always say “the United States,” mostly because of the legacy of my country's actions toward Cuba since the nineteenth century. My spoken Spanish links me to the *madre patria* of Spain, but I quickly inflected the mother tongue with a Caribbean accent and, Canadian dollars in hand (to avoid the 10% penalty levied on US dollars), passed as some hybrid (North) American. *Vaya gringada*.

It's a particularly potent time to reflect on what it means to be an American (read: citizen of the United States). The Cubans with whom I spoke were eager to talk about “Troomp” and seemed well aware of many aspects of American culture, knowledge gained through the weekly download of the underground *el paquete*, delivered by hand on a flash drive to anyone with the convertible pesos to pay for it. The guard in the museum of Cuban art asked me if we had paintings like the ones by Wifredo Lam in the United States, and she quickly moved to the question of how much my airline ticket cost, noting many Cubans would like to leave the country. I didn't anticipate such openness to the United States. Yet the positive attitude makes sense, given the age of these Cubans (the revolution is all they've known) and the cultural influence of American media, consumer goods, and even food.

Cubans talked to me with dismay (which I share) about the wall between Mexico and the United States that Trump has threatened to build and the ban against citizens from majority-Muslim nations. The Modern Language Association has communicated a collective sense of outrage

against immigration policies that violate human dignity and opposed the drastic cuts in the 2018 federal budget that would eliminate funding for the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), the National Endowment for the Arts, and other cultural and educational programs. Cuba is a country in which prominent writers like Nicolás Guillén and Miguel Barnet have participated actively in the intellectual and political life of the nation. It is true that they must align themselves politically with the regime to play such a role, something that writers like Cabrera Infante ultimately refused to do. Yet, it should be noted, intellectual freedom in Cuba was a fraught issue long before the 1959 revolution; for example, the United States-backed dictator Gerardo Machado had the writer Alejo Carpentier arrested in 1927 for subversion and shut down the university in 1930 in the face of student protests.

And what of the writers, historians, literary scholars, artists, poets, and other practitioners in the United States, with its vast material riches and tradition of infrequent government interference in cultural production, especially in the modern era? The United States government offers relatively little economic support to the humanities community. Less than 1/21,000th of the federal budget goes to fund the NEH annually, an amount that is barely more per capita than the cost of a postage stamp. The NEH might be seen as the forgotten research and education outreach institution in Washington: it represents less than one percent of the federal budget for scientific research and less than one tenth of one percent of the federal research-and-development budget. In the current political climate, in which public defunding and privatization are rapidly becoming the norm, the NEH, even costing the minuscule amount that it does, is endangered. The federal budget functions as a mechanism for setting policy, and by eliminating funding for the NEH, we as a nation would be saying that the humanities don't rank at all among our priorities. This sorry state of affairs is certainly not as dire as government censorship and persecution of writers in Cuba like Reinaldo Arenas, but make no mistake: it constitutes neglect and ostracism of our intellectual heritage. It calls for “survival American,” a continual public discourse of resistance and opposition to the threats to our humanistic work that emanate from our government.

In Cabrera Infante's first novel, *Tres tristes tigres*, the interplay between Spanish and English constitutes a major component of the pleasure that the work offers to readers who know both Spanish and a fair amount of conversational English and

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American popular culture. In the section “Los visitantes,” the story of a cane is purportedly told and retold by Mr. and Mrs. Campbell, then corrected by Rine Leal. The mistranslations from English to Spanish and vice versa give the text its nonsensical quality, but the reader’s ability to read between languages rescues it from unintelligibility. Mrs. Campbell, on arriving in Havana for a weekend, supposedly observed to her husband, “¡Miel, éste es *el* Trópico!” (186). In Spanish, *miel* (“honey”) does not connote endearment, and the oral stress on the definite article, unlike in English, fails to transmit emphasis (the stress would fall on the noun) and thus sounds rather silly. I realized I was at moments seeing Havana through the language of Cabrera Infante. I observed myself as the American who, despite proficiency in the common Spanish language that allows me to travel to so many countries and be understood and despite having studied so much about Cuba for decades, knew so little on the ground that I might as well have uttered “¡Miel, éste es *el* Trópico!” myself. And that is because humanities learning always starts anew. Survival of the humanities requires continual personal, societal, and governmental commitment and investment. The America that makes me proud upholds and supports its writers, thinkers, artists, and creators, and it’s an America well worth fighting for.

Rosemary G. Feal

**Work Cited**

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Members are invited to comment on this column at [exccdirector.mla.hcommons.org](http://exccdirector.mla.hcommons.org) and to visit the *MLA Newsletter* archive ([www.mla.org/Newsletter-Archive](http://www.mla.org/Newsletter-Archive)) to read earlier columns in Feal’s “survival” series: “Survival Spanish” (Summer 2007), “‘Tan cerca de Dios’: Survival Poqomchi” (Spring 2008), “Return of the Pensative Daughter: Survival English” (Spring 2011), and “Tamales for Dollars: Survival Guatemalan” (Spring 2013).



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