



NARRATING LIVES



The narration of lives surrounds us. As a genre, it extends from antiquity to the present, from hagiography to confessional television, from letters and diaries to blogs. It exists in every continent and culture.

The study of life narrative also involves us as scholars. The stories of our professional lives help expose the work of humanities in the world.

The 2011 MLA convention in Los Angeles will feature some sixty sessions, listed inside, devoted to different aspects of this groundbreaking Presidential Forum theme. I hope you'll be able to attend some of them, and I look forward to seeing you there.

Sidonie Smith
2010 MLA President



Narrating Lives is the theme of the Presidential Forum at the 2011 MLA Annual Convention.

The following are the programs for the Presidential Forum and its linked sessions.

Presidential Forum

Friday, 7 January

207. Lives and Archives: Finding, Framing, and Circulating Narrated Lives Now

10:15 a.m.–12:00 noon, Platinum Salon D, J. W. Marriott
The Presidential Forum. *Presiding:* Sidonie Smith, Univ. of Michigan, Ann Arbor

1. “Lives beyond Archives,” Marianne Hirsch, Columbia Univ.; Leo Spitzer, Dartmouth Coll.
2. “Cosmopolitan or Creole Lives?” Françoise Lionnet, Univ. of California, Los Angeles
3. “Between Lost and Found,” Nancy K. Miller, Graduate Center, City Univ. of New York
4. “Virtual Vérité,” Chon A. Noriega, Univ. of California, Los Angeles
5. “Embedded Lives: The House of Fiction, the House of History,” David Palumbo-Liu, Stanford Univ.
6. “Vandalizing Life Writing at Illinois: Heap of Birds’s Signs of Indigenous Life,” Robert Warrior, Univ. of Illinois, Urbana

336. Lives and Archives: Giving, Taking, and Circulating Testimony

3:30–4:45 p.m., Platinum Salon C, J. W. Marriott

A linked session arranged in conjunction with the Presidential Forum. *Presiding:* William Leake Andrews, Univ. of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

1. “What Was I?: Literary Witness and the Testimonial Imperative,” Leigh Gilmore, Scripps Coll.
2. “Needing Permission to Write: Human Subject Research,” William Craig Howes, Univ. of Hawai‘i, Mānoa
3. “Letters from Nowhere,” Gillian L. Whitlock, Univ. of Queensland

505. Lives and Archives in Graphic and Digital Modes

12:00 noon–1:15 p.m., Platinum Salon C, J. W. Marriott

A linked session arranged in conjunction with the Presidential Forum. *Presiding:* Julia Watson, Ohio State Univ., Columbus

1. “Comics Form and Narrating Lives,” Hillary L. Chute, Harvard Univ.
2. “Automedial Ghosts,” Brian Rotman, Ohio State Univ., Columbus
3. “What Is Worth Saving? The Salvage Work of Comics,” Theresa Tensuan, Haverford Coll.

Presidential Forum Participants



William Leake Andrews

is E. Maynard Adams Professor of English and Comparative Literature and senior associate dean for the Fine Arts and Humanities at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

He is the author of *The Literary Career of Charles W. Chesnutt* and *To Tell a Free Story: The First*

Century of Afro-American Autobiography, 1760–1865. He is coeditor of *The Oxford Companion to African American Literature* and *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature* and general editor of *North American Slave Narratives*. He won the Norman Foerster Prize from *American Literature* in 1976 and the William Riley Parker Prize from *PMLA* in 1990.



Hillary L. Chute is Neubauer Family Assistant Professor in the English department at the University of Chicago. Her book *Graphic Women: Life Narrative and Contemporary Comics* examines the work of Aline Kominsky-Crumb, Phoebe Gloeckner, Lynda Barry, Marjane Satrapi, and

Alison Bechdel. She is coeditor of the special issue of *Mfs: Modern Fiction Studies* on graphic narrative. She is associate editor of Art Spiegelman's forthcoming *MetaMaus*, and her work has appeared in *American Periodicals*, *F. Scott Fitzgerald Review*, *PMLA*, *Postmodern Culture*, *Twentieth-Century Literature*, *Literature and Medicine*, and *Women's Studies Quarterly*.



Leigh Gilmore has been professor of English at Ohio State University and is the first holder of an endowed chair in gender and women's studies at Scripps College. She is the author of *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony* and *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women's Self-Representation* and coeditor of *Autobiography and Postmodernism*. She has published

articles on autobiography and feminist theory in *Feminist Studies*, *Signs*, *Women's Studies Quarterly*, *Biography*, *American Imago*, *Genders*, and numerous collections.



Marianne Hirsch is William Peterfield Trent Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University and codirector of the Center for the Critical Analysis of Social Difference. Her current interests include cultural memory, testimony, and photography.

She is coauthor, with Leo Spitzer, of *Ghosts of Home: The Afterlife of Czernowitz in Jewish Memory*; author of *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism* and *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory*; and editor or coeditor of *Conflicts in Feminism*, *The Familial Gaze*, *Teaching the Representation of the Holocaust*, and the forthcoming *Rites of Return*.



William Craig Howes is director of the Center for Biographical Research, coeditor of the journal *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly*, and professor of English at the University of Hawai'i, Mānoa. His book *Voices of the Vietnam POWs: Witnesses to Their Fight* was a Choice

Notable Book, and his coedited collection *Teaching Life Writing Texts* was published in the Options for Teaching series by the MLA. A coproducer of the television documentary series *Biography Hawai'i*, he is the list manager for IABA-L, the principal source of information for members of the International Autobiography and Biography Association.



Françoise Lionnet teaches French, francophone, and comparative literature at the University of California, Los Angeles, and codirects the Mellon postdoctoral program Cultures in Transnational Perspective. She is

president-elect of the American Comparative Literature Association. Her books include *Postcolonial Representations: Women, Literature, Identity* and *Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture*; the coedited volumes *Minor Transnationalism* and *The Creolization of Theory*; and the forthcoming *The Indies, Otherwise: Creolization and Transcolonial Comparison*. Her special issue *Between Words and Images: The Culture of Mauritius* is forthcoming from the *International Journal of Francophone Studies*. Recent essays appear in *French Forum*, *Yale French Studies*, and *French Global: A New Approach to Literary History*.



Nancy K. Miller is Distinguished Professor of English and Comparative Literature, the Graduate Center, City University of New York. She has published extensively as a feminist literary critic, specializing in women's writing and autobiography. Her books include *Bequest and Betrayal: Memoirs of a Parent's Death* and *But Enough about Me: Why We Read Other People's Lives*. She is coeditor of *Extremities: Trauma, Testimony, and Community*, as well as the forthcoming *Rites of Return* and *Picturing Atrocity: Reading Photographs in Crisis*. A family memoir, *What They Saved: Pieces of a Jewish Past*, is forthcoming.



Chon A. Noriega is professor in the Department of Film, Television, and Digital Media and director of the Chicano Studies Research Center at the University of California, Los Angeles. He is the author of *Shot in America: Television, the State, and the Rise of Chicano Cinema*, coauthor

of *Phantom Sightings: Art after the Chicano Movement*, and editor of nine books, two book series, and *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies*. His awards include the Getty Postdoctoral Fellowship in the History of Art, the Rockefeller Foundation Film/Video/Multimedia Fellowship, and the Ann C. Rosenfield Distinguished Community Partnership Prize.



David Palumbo-Liu is professor of comparative literature at Stanford University. He is the coeditor, with Nirvana Tanoukhi and Bruce Robbins, of *Immanuel Wallerstein and the Problem of the World: Culture, Scale, System* and is completing *The Deliverance*

of *Others: Reading Literature in an Age of Globalization*. He is the founding editor of the e-journal *Occasion: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Humanities*.



Brian Rotman has a doctorate in mathematics from London University and is Humanities Distinguished Professor in the Department of Comparative Studies at Ohio State University. His writing has appeared in a range of scholarly journals as well as in the *Guardian*, *London Review of*

Books, *Times Literary Supplement*, and *Higher Educational Supplement*. His books include *Signifying Nothing: The Semiotics of Zero*, *Ad Infinitum . . . : The Ghost in Turing's Machine*, *Mathematics as Sign: Writing, Imagining, Counting*, and *Becoming Beside Ourselves: The Alphabet, Ghosts, and Distributed Human Being*. He is the author of a number of stage plays and a radio drama.



Sidonie Smith, the MLA president, is Martha Guernsey Colby Collegiate Professor of English and Women's Studies and chair of the Department of English at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. She was a member of the MLA Executive Council from 2000 to 2003. Her research interests

include autobiography studies, feminist theories, and women's literature. Among her recent publications are *Human Rights and Narrated Lives: The Ethics of Recognition* (coauthored with Kay Schaffer); *Moving Lives: Twentieth-Century Women's Travel Writing*; and *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (coauthored with Julia Watson).



Leo Spitzer is the Vernon Professor of History emeritus and Brownstone Professor of Jewish Studies at Dartmouth College. His interests range from questions concerning emancipation and reactions to exclusion and domination in Latin America, Africa, and Central Europe to issues

of historical memory, refugeehood, and representations of trauma in photography. He is coauthor of *Ghosts of Home: The Afterlife of Czernowitz in Jewish Memory* and author of *Hotel Bolivia: The Culture of Memory in a Refuge from Nazism* and *Lives in Between: Assimilation and Marginality in Austria, Brazil, and West Africa*. He coedited *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*.



Theresa Tensuan teaches contemporary American literature and culture in the English department and the Gender and Sexuality Studies Program at Haverford College. She is the author of *Breaking the Frame: Comics and the Art of Social Transformation* (forthcoming) and is working with the filmmaker Mary DiLullo on

A Cartoonist in the Classroom, a documentary on Lynda Barry that is being produced with the support of the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts. She is currently at work on a new project on conversion narratives.



Robert Warrior is director of American Indian studies at the University of Illinois, Urbana, and professor of American Indian studies, English, and history. An enrolled member of the Osage Nation, he is the author of *The People and the Word: Reading Native Nonfiction; American*

Indian Literary Nationalism (with Craig Womack and Jace Weaver); *Like a Hurricane: The Indian Movement from Alcatraz to Wounded Knee* (with Paul Chaat Smith); and *Tribal Secrets: Recovering American Indian Intellectual Traditions*. He is serving as immediate past president of the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association and as a member of the Executive Committee of the American Studies Association National Council.



Julia Watson is professor of comparative studies and associate dean in Arts and Sciences at Ohio State University. She is the coauthor, with Sidonie Smith, of *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narrative* and “Women, Gender and Autobiography after 2000:

New Genres, New Subjects” and the coeditor of five collections of essays on aspects of life narrative. She is the author of essays on counterethnography and on Alison Bechdel’s *Fun Home*. With Leigh Gilmore and Gillian Whitlock, Watson and Smith are working on a project on autobiographical hoaxes.



Gillian L. Whitlock is an Australian Research Council Professorial Fellow researching the archives of asylum-seeker letters held at the University of Queensland. Her book *Soft Weapons: Autobiography in Transit* is a study of life narrative and the war on terror. Her book *Postcolonialism and Life Narrative* is forthcoming.

2011 Presidential Theme Sessions

The following is a list of sessions on Narrating Lives arranged by divisions, discussion groups, allied and affiliate organizations, and individual members.

Thursday, 6 January

15. Stories of Souls: Women’s Spiritual Narratives

12:00 noon–1:15 p.m., 304B, LA Convention Center
A special session.

31. In and out of the Archive: Biography, Autobiography, and Constructing the “Self”

12:00 noon–1:15 p.m., Platinum Salon A, J. W. Marriott
A special session.

38. Narrating Tortured Lives in East Asia

12:00 noon–1:15 p.m., 309, LA Convention Center
Program arranged by the Division on East Asian Languages and Literatures after 1900.

48. Hacking the Profession: Academic Self-Help in an Age of Crisis

1:45–3:00 p.m., 407, LA Convention Center
A special session.

49. Translation and the Construction of Transcultural Memory

1:45–3:00 p.m., 309, LA Convention Center
A special session.

64. Biographical Truth: Literary Biography and Experiments with Form

1:45–3:00 p.m., 304B, LA Convention Center
A special session.

71. Conversion Narratives

1:45–3:00 p.m., 303B, LA Convention Center
Program arranged by the Division on Literature and Religion.

74. Queerness and Disability

1:45–3:00 p.m., Atrium I, J. W. Marriott
Program arranged by the Division on Women’s Studies in Language and Literature.

110. Women Narrating Their Lives: The Feminine as Agent and Icon of Textual Production

3:30–4:45 p.m., 304B, LA Convention Center

Program arranged by GEMELA: Grupo de Estudios sobre la Mujer en España y las Américas (pre-1800).

112. Confessions, Hoaxes, Revelations: Canadian Nonfiction for Impolite Readers

3:30–4:45 p.m., Olympic I, J. W. Marriott

Program arranged by the Discussion Group on Canadian Literature in English.

142. Lives across Borders (1400–1700): Travel and Transformation

5:15–6:30 p.m., 303A, LA Convention Center

Program arranged by the Division on German Literature to 1700 and the Division on Comparative Studies in Renaissance and Baroque Literature.

145. Lives without Narrative?

5:15–6:30 p.m., Platinum Salon B, J. W. Marriott

Program arranged by the Division on Autobiography, Biography, and Life Writing.

148. Performances of Black Cultural Trauma and Memory

5:15–6:30 p.m., Atrium I, J. W. Marriott

A special session.

Friday, 7 January

168. Routes or Roots: Travel and Globalization

8:30–9:45 a.m., 303A, LA Convention Center

Program arranged by the Discussion Group on Travel Literature.

176. Exploring Victorian Subjectivity: Nineteenth-Century British Diaries

8:30–9:45 a.m., Olympic I, J. W. Marriott

A special session.

177. Narrating Illness and Disability: Risks and Rewards

8:30–9:45 a.m., Olympic II, J. W. Marriott

A special session.

186. Federman's Fictions: Writing the Recombinant Life

8:30–9:45 a.m., Atrium I, J. W. Marriott

A special session.

189. Medieval and Early Modern Lives

8:30–9:45 a.m., 304A, LA Convention Center

Program arranged by the Division on Autobiography, Biography, and Life Writing.

261. African Women Writers: Living New Lives, Telling New Stories

12:00 noon–1:15 p.m., 304B, LA Convention Center

A special session.

265. Narrated Lives, Mediated Histories in the Oeuvre of Claude Lanzmann

12:00 noon–1:15 p.m., 306A, LA Convention Center

Program arranged by the Division on Twentieth-Century French Literature.

269. Teaching Lives: Our Work as Teacher-Scholars in Settings That Focus on Undergraduate Teaching

12:00 noon–1:15 p.m., Atrium II, J. W. Marriott

Program arranged by the Community College Humanities Association.

281. Gendered Evidence: Ethics and Human Rights

12:00 noon–1:15 p.m., 303A, LA Convention Center

Program arranged by the Women's Caucus for the Modern Languages.

303. Life Writing across Languages

1:45–3:00 p.m., 303A, LA Convention Center

A special session.

314. Narrating Shakespeare's Life

1:45–3:00 p.m., Platinum Salon D, J. W. Marriott

Program arranged by the Division on Shakespeare.

316. Surplus Value, Surplus Life

1:45–3:00 p.m., 304C, LA Convention Center

Program arranged by the Division on Sociological Approaches to Literature.

331. The Open Professoriat: Public Intellectuals on the Social Web

3:30–4:45 p.m., Plaza I, J. W. Marriott

A special session.

343. Difficulties in Biographical Research and Narrating Lives

3:30–4:45 p.m., 309, LA Convention Center

A special session.

348. Interpretations of the Imagined and the Real: Narrating Lives in Premodern China, Korea, and Japan

3:30–4:45 p.m., 303A, LA Convention Center

Program arranged by the Division on East Asian Languages and Literatures to 1900.

354. Vision Neglect: Revealing Contingent Faculty Identities

3:30–4:45 p.m., Atrium II, J. W. Marriott

Program arranged by the Discussion Group on Part-Time Faculty Members.

363. Telling Life Stories of Korean American Adoptees: Testimony, History, and Politics

5:15–6:30 p.m., Olympic I, J. W. Marriott

A special session.

384. Autofiction and Immigration in Contemporary Spain

5:15–6:30 p.m., 303A, LA Convention Center

Program arranged by the Division on Twentieth-Century Spanish Literature.

397. The Lives That Digital Archives Write

5:15–6:30 p.m., Plaza I, J. W. Marriott

Program arranged by the Division on Comparative Studies in Eighteenth-Century Literature.

Saturday, 8 January

420. Crossing Genres, Connecting Centuries: Life Stories in the Celtic World

8:30–9:45 a.m., 301B, LA Convention Center

Program arranged by the Discussion Group on Celtic Languages and Literatures.

421. Narrating Their Lives: Women Writers and the Nordic Tradition

8:30–9:45 a.m., 304B, LA Convention Center

Program arranged by the Discussion Group on Scandinavian Languages and Literatures.

449. Where Are We Now? Ecocriticism and Narrative Scholarship

8:30–9:45 a.m., Platinum Salon B, J. W. Marriott

A special session.

450. Narrating Human Genomes

8:30–9:45 a.m., Olympic I, J. W. Marriott

A special session.

464. Narrating Lives: An Indigenous Perspective

10:15–11:30 a.m., 405, LA Convention Center

A special session.

470. Narrating the (After)Life of a City: Sighting, Sounding, and Moving in Detroit

10:15–11:30 a.m., Platinum Salon F, J. W. Marriott

A special session.

490. Selves, Personae, and Other Fictions

10:15–11:30 a.m., Olympic I, J. W. Marriott

Program arranged by the Division on Seventeenth-Century English Literature.

522. Whither Posthumanism?

12:00 noon–1:15 p.m., Olympic I, J. W. Marriott

A special session.

529. The Center Cannot Hold: My Journey through Madness

12:00 noon–1:15 p.m., Plaza I, J. W. Marriott

Program arranged by the American Psychoanalytic Association.

532. Electronic Lives

12:00 noon–1:15 p.m., Plaza III, J. W. Marriott

Program arranged by the Division on Autobiography, Biography, and Life Writing.

550. “Persons and Things”: Barbara Johnson’s Legacy

1:45–3:00 p.m., Diamond Salon 3, J. W. Marriott

A special session.

552. Drawing Women’s Lives

1:45–3:00 p.m., Platinum Salon J, J. W. Marriott

Program arranged by the Discussion Group on Comics and Graphic Narratives.

556. Autobiographies from the Arab World in European Languages

1:45–3:00 p.m., 303A, LA Convention Center

A special session.

576. Lives of the Mind

1:45–3:00 p.m., Olympic I, J. W. Marriott

Program arranged by the Division on Literature of the English Renaissance, Excluding Shakespeare.

581. Transmedial and Interdisciplinary Narrative Theory

3:30–4:45 p.m., Platinum Salon F, J. W. Marriott

A special session.

587. Baleful Postcoloniality: Narratives of Life and Death on the Margins

3:30–4:45 p.m., 304B, LA Convention Center
A special session.

591. Life Writing in Early Modern Spanish and Colonial Literature

3:30–4:45 p.m., 304A, LA Convention Center
A special session.

638. Personal Narratives of Home and Displacement: Mexico and the USA

5:15–6:30 p.m., 304A, LA Convention Center
A special session.

640. Narrating (Later) Lives

5:15–6:30 p.m., Olympic I, J. W. Marriott
A special session.

648. Multilingual Lives

5:15–6:30 p.m., 303A, LA Convention Center
Program arranged by the Division on Language and Society.

654. Private Correspondence, Self, and Story: Letters in Russia and Eastern Europe

5:15–6:30 p.m., 304B, LA Convention Center
Program arranged by the American Association of Teachers of Slavic and East European Languages.

Sunday, 9 January

687. Prison Writing in Transnational Contexts: Forms, Rhetorics, and Politics

8:30–9:45 a.m., Atrium II, J. W. Marriott
A special session.

698. Women's Life Writing: Gender, Genre, Authorship

8:30–9:45 a.m., Olympic II, J. W. Marriott
A special session.

700. Theorizing Jewish American Life Writing

8:30–9:45 a.m., Platinum Salon G, J. W. Marriott
Program arranged by the Discussion Group on Jewish American Literature.

716. Telling Lives: New Approaches to Literature of the Iranian Diaspora

10:15–11:30 a.m., Atrium II, J. W. Marriott
A special session.

725. Life Writing in the Early Modern Hispanic World

10:15–11:30 a.m., 404A, LA Convention Center
Program arranged by the Division on Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Spanish Poetry and Prose and the Division on Colonial Latin American Literatures.

742. Lives across Borders (1400–1700): Mobility and Narrative

10:15–11:30 a.m., 303B, LA Convention Center
Program arranged by the Division on Comparative Studies in Renaissance and Baroque Literature.

747. Memory Writing from the Perspective of Neuroscience

10:15–11:30 a.m., 402B, LA Convention Center
Program arranged by the Division on Comparative Studies in Twentieth-Century Literature.

756. (Un)Told Stories: Narratives from the Global Sex Trade

12:00 noon–1:15 p.m., 306A, LA Convention Center
A special session.

758. Narrating Professional Lives: The Stories We Tell about Academia

12:00 noon–1:15 p.m., Olympic II, J. W. Marriott
Program arranged by the Women's Caucus for the Modern Languages.

782. Yiddish in Life Narratives: Biography, Autobiography, Bildungsroman

12:00 noon–1:15 p.m., 304B, LA Convention Center
Program arranged by the Discussion Group on Yiddish Literature.

786A. Lives of Remarkable People: Biography, Autobiography, and Memoir in the Slavic World

1:45–3:00 p.m., 409A, LA Convention Center
Program arranged by the Division on Slavic and East European Literatures.

788. Teaching Life Writing Now

1:45–3:00 p.m., Platinum Salon F, J. W. Marriott
Program arranged by the Division on the Teaching of Literature and the Division on Autobiography, Biography, and Life Writing.

805. Ethnography and Life Writing

1:45–3:00 p.m., Atrium II, J. W. Marriott
Program arranged by the Division on Anthropological Approaches to Literature.

