Minutes of the MLA Delegate Assembly

THE DELEGATE ASSEMBLY MET ON 29 DECEMBER 2006 AT THE PHILADELPHIA MARRIOTT Hotel. First Vice President Michael Holquist presided. The assembly was called to order at 1:10 p.m. The chair made some preliminary announcements about the conduct of the meeting, called for a demonstration of the electronic voting system to be used during the meeting, and announced the quorum for the meeting, which was 70 delegates, because 140 delegates had signed in for the meeting at the beginning. [Note: Of the 263 delegates, 181 (69%) attended all or part of the meeting (see the list that follows for the names of the delegates in attendance).]

1. On behalf of the Delegate Assembly Organizing Committee (DAOC), Michelle Massé moved the adoption of the agenda that had been sent to the members. The motion occasioned no discussion and no objections and was adopted by unanimous consent.

Massé then offered a motion on behalf of the DAOC that the rules presented to the assembly be adopted with the following change: the deletion of the provision limiting participation in the assembly's open discussion (see item 3, below) to elected delegates. The motion occasioned no discussion and no objections and was adopted by unanimous consent.

Again on behalf of the DAOC, Massé moved that the assembly approve the minutes of the 2005 meeting as printed in the May 2006 issue of *PMLA*. The chair asked if there were any corrections. Since no corrections were offered, the chair declared the minutes approved as published.

2. The assembly elected two of its members, Bonnie Kime Scott (English, San Diego State Univ.) and Cynthia Skenazi (French, Univ. of California, Santa Barbara), to the DAOC for three-year terms (2007–09). Voting from a slate of nominees selected by the 2006 officers of the association, the assembly elected Sara Clarke Kaplan (American, Univ. of Illinois, Urbana), Lucille Kerr (Spanish, Northwestern Univ.), Adalaide Morris (English, Univ. of Iowa), and John Richetti (English, Univ. of Pennsylvania) to the Nominating Committee for two-year terms (2007–08). Voting from a slate of nominees selected by the DAOC, the assembly elected the following persons to the Elections Committee for two-year terms (2007–08): Chris Castiglia (Loyola Univ., Chicago), Katie Hogan (Carlow Univ.), and Roberta L. Krueger (Hamilton Coll.).

The assembly also elected Louise Erdrich and Jacques Roubaud to honorary fellowship in the association.

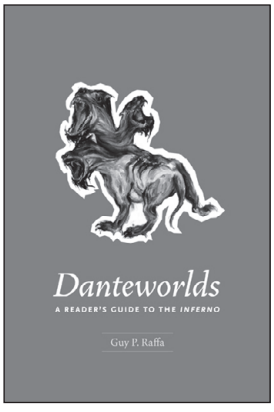
3. The assembly held an open discussion of two topics selected by the DAOC, outcome assessment and the relations between and among language studies, area studies, and international studies, on which delegates had received background information

The listings of forthcoming meetings and conferences and of professional announcements are no longer printed in *PMLA*. They have been moved to members-only pages of the MLA Web site, where they are updated twice a month (www.mla.org/resources).

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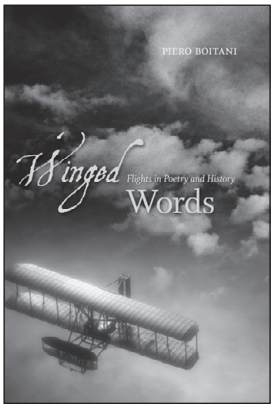
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Literature & Philosophy
New from Chicago



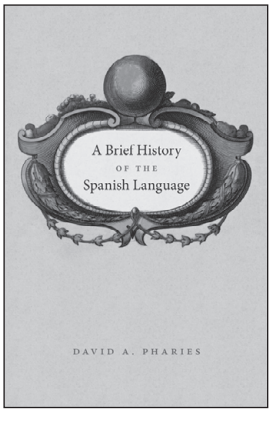
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in advance of the assembly meeting. The chair asked Second Vice President Gerald Graff to preside over the open discussion. Graff reminded all present that one hour had been set aside for the open discussion, thirty minutes for each topic. He also reminded those in attendance of the rules that would govern the open discussion.

Laura Rosenthal provided an introduction to the first topic, outcome assessment. She said that outcome assessment was a means to evaluate the effectiveness of programs. As such, it was not new to language and literature departments or to higher education in general. She noted, however, that some departments had recently taken up outcome assessment in response to external pressures and that major educational accrediting agencies were beginning to adopt a new standard for accreditation: evidence of outcome assessment. She added that the growing outcome-assessment movement had both critics and defenders and that some departments have actively resisted the movement while others have tried to find ways to benefit from the process. She concluded her presentation by asking for comments on the role the MLA should play with respect to the assessment of learning in language and literature and the assessment movement in general. She asked if the MLA should become involved in the assessment movement and undertake to investigate the potential impact of outcome assessment on the teaching of language and literature; if the MLA should develop model language and guidelines, thereby serving as a resource for departments that are developing assessment mechanisms; and if the MLA should develop a professional response to the demands for outcome assessment.

While some speakers urged resistance to the assessment movement, most speakers agreed that calls for assessment could not be ignored and that it was necessary for language and literature departments to identify and promote the kinds of assessment that would be appropriate for the field. Concerns were expressed about the possible imposition of inappropriate standardized tests, but it was noted that departments could gain valuable knowledge from a well-designed assessment process. The MLA's involvement in identifying models and establishing guidelines that take account of different institutional types was encouraged. It was also suggested that the office of institutional research on individual campuses could provide resources to departments working on assessment mechanisms and that colleagues in elementary and secondary schools who had experience with assessment could provide important insights. Several speakers mentioned the work that other organizations had done in this area (e.g., National Council of Teachers of English, Conference on College Composition and Communication, American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages) and urged cooperation. Others said that it was necessary to separate language from literature in any consideration of outcome assessment and that proficiency might be a better criterion for assessment mechanisms than learning outcomes would be. Speakers also noted the need to protect faculty members against the possible misuse of program assessments as merit reviews and expressed the concern that inappropriate connections between assessment and accreditation and between assessment and federal funding could be established.

Suzanne Pucci provided an introduction to the second topic, the relations between and among language studies, area studies, and international studies. She said that educators and business and government leaders had begun to stress the importance of internationalizing curricula and campuses and of promoting greater cross-cultural and foreign language competence among students and citizens, but she noted several recent trends (e.g., declining numbers of majors in foreign language fields, small numbers of students who take advantage of study-abroad opportunities, declining government funding for programs that prepare citizens for advanced foreign language proficiency, fear of foreign cultures) that ran counter to stated goals of educating students for global citizenship. She asked the assembly to consider the role that the study of language and literature should play in this context and the role that the humanities should play in helping students to achieve a higher level of cultural and linguistic knowledge and understanding.

Several speakers said that it was necessary to take advantage of the sense of urgency created by world events and to promote new approaches to the study and teaching of language and literature at all levels so that more students could gain the kind of appreciation and understanding of other cultures needed for meaningful cultural interchange. At the same time, it was necessary to avoid narrow conceptions of cultural competence and a limited and limiting focus on "critical" languages as defined by the government. One speaker noted several obstacles to an increased emphasis on language and literature study at the university level: the labor-intensive nature of language instruction, which makes it inefficient in the corporate university; the dominance of Spanish at the secondary level, which continues in the university, at the expense of enrollments in other languages; and the resistance to language study seen in such area-studies disciplines as economics and political science. Another speaker noted that faculty members control the foreign language requirements in their institutions and can therefore revise the requirements to promote different sorts of competence at both the undergraduate and the graduate levels. It was also suggested that teacher-education programs needed to take account of new emphases on cultural competence so that all levels of schooling could pursue similar goals.

The open discussion came to a close after one hour, at which point First Vice President Michael Holquist returned to the chair.

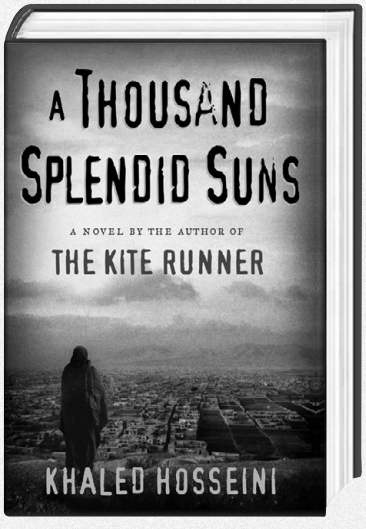
4. The assembly received the DAOC's annual report. The chair called on Michelle Massé, chair of the DAOC, to present the report. After she had done so, the chair asked if there were any questions on the report. There were none.

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5. The assembly received a report from the Ad Hoc Committee on the Structure of the Annual Convention in which the ad hoc committee asked the assembly to endorse two recommendations that the committee planned to present to the Executive Council at the council's February 2007 meeting. The first recommendation was to change the dates of the MLA Annual Convention to the first Thursday through Sunday following 2 January each year; the second recommendation, which was contingent on the first, was to eliminate two late-evening paper-reading session slots, 8:45–10:00 p.m. on the first day and 9:00–10:15 p.m. on the third day of the convention. Rosemary Feal, the chair of the ad hoc committee, presented the report and explained that the first recommendation was based on a survey of twenty thousand MLA members and others, seventy-five percent of whom supported the proposed change in the dates of the convention. The second recommendation represented one aspect of the ad hoc committee's overall rethinking of the convention. Feal explained that if the convention began on a Thursday, it could start earlier in the day than the current dates allow, thereby clearing the way for the elimination of the late-evening sessions. This adjustment in the convention schedule would allow the ad hoc committee to propose other changes in convention activities that would enhance opportunities for intellectual, professional, and social exchange.

At the conclusion of Feal's presentation, the chair asked for a motion so that the assembly could discuss the ad hoc committee's proposals. Cristel Mejía moved that the assembly endorse the ad hoc committee's recommendations. The chair opened the floor for discussion of the ad hoc committee's first recommendation, on changing the dates of the annual convention, and he noted that no amendments to either recommendation would be allowed. Speakers asked questions about or commented on the following: how the date change would affect those who teach at institutions where classes resume at the beginning of January, how the date change would affect those who live on the West Coast, other dates that had been considered, when the proposed change would take effect, the possibility that nonmembers who could not attend the convention on the current dates might join the MLA if the dates were changed, and the need to select convention sites farther in advance than the association does now. Feal and other members of the ad hoc committee answered the questions and emphasized the importance of the date change to the committee's overall charge to rethink the convention and find ways to make it more intellectually, professionally, and socially stimulating, productive, and satisfying for more attendees. In response to a question from the floor, the chair asked if there were any objections to proceeding to a vote on the question. There were none, so the chair asked the assembly to vote. The assembly endorsed the ad hoc committee's first recommendation, on changing the dates of the convention, by a vote of 138 yes and 9 no.

The chair then opened the floor for discussion of the ad hoc committee's second recommendation, on eliminating two late-evening paper-reading session slots. Discussion focused on the potential difficulty of eliminating session slots at a time when more people might be attending the convention and seeking access to the convention program. Feal noted that there would be no net loss in session time, since the convention would begin earlier on the first day. She also said that the ad hoc committee planned to continue its rethinking of the convention and would therefore welcome additional comments from delegates and others about this proposal as well as about other aspects of the convention. In response to a comment, the chair asked if there were any objections to proceeding to a vote on the question. There were none, so the chair asked the assembly to vote. The assembly endorsed the ad hoc committee's second recommendation, on eliminating two late-evening paper-reading session slots, by a vote of 126 yes and 6 no.

6. The assembly received the report of the executive director and the Finance Committee report. The chair noted that no action was required on these reports but that comments and questions were welcome. Delegates had no comments or questions on these reports, so the chair asked the assembly to turn to the annual reports it had received from the following association committees: *PMLA* Editorial Board, Publications Committee, Committee on Scholarly Editions, Committee on the New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare, Advisory Committee on the *MLA International Bibliography*, Committee on Honors and Awards, Committee on Academic Freedom and Professional Rights and Responsibilities, Committee on the Literatures of People of Color in the United States and Canada, Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession, Committee on Information Technology, Radio Committee, Committee on Disability Issues in the Profession, and Committee on Community Colleges. After noting that no action was required on these reports but that comments and questions were welcome, the chair called on Michelle Massé of the DAOC to present the reports. She said that the DAOC wished to give more recognition to the important work accomplished by the association's committees and to find ways to increase the assembly's interactions with committees. The DAOC had therefore decided to review each committee report briefly during the assembly meeting and to highlight committee achievements. Massé then called on six members of the DAOC in turn, each of whom had prepared overviews of two or three committee reports. At the conclusion of these presentations, the chair opened the floor for questions and comments. There were none.

7. In the category of new business, there were two motions that had been received by the 1 October submission deadline and so could be discussed and voted on by the assembly. The first motion (labeled Motion 2006-1) was submitted by Gaurav Desai and read as follows:

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> Whereas the 2006 meeting of the Modern Language Association was originally scheduled to be held in New Orleans,
>
> Whereas Hurricane Katrina brought devastation to the city and region making the venue a difficult place to meet,
>
> Whereas the New Orleans business district and the French Quarter are now back in full service and in a position to host conventions,
>
> Whereas the city and parish depend heavily on such revenue from tourism and conventions,
>
> Whereas other large organizations such as the American Library Association have successfully held their annual meetings in New Orleans since Hurricane Katrina,
>
> Therefore be it moved that the Delegate Assembly urges the executive officers of the MLA to actively pursue the city of New Orleans as the site of its next open conference venue.

Laura Rosenthal of the DAOC presented the motion to the assembly. The chair explained the two-stage process of consideration for motions and resolutions with preambles. He would call first for debate and amendment of the *resolved* clause or clauses and then for debate and amendment of the preamble before putting the full text of each item to a vote. The chair stated the question on Motion 2006-1 and called for discussion of the *resolved* clause. Michelle Massé told the assembly that the DAOC recommended acceptance of the motion. After brief discussion of the *resolved* clause, the chair called for discussion of the preamble. Since there was none, the chair asked the assembly to vote. The assembly approved the motion as submitted by a vote of 102 yes and 4 no.

The second motion (labeled Motion 2006-2) was submitted by Christopher Cobb. It read as follows:

> Whereas at its 2005 meeting the MLA Delegate Assembly approved a motion for the MLA to adopt a policy of union preference for convention hotel contracts; and
>
> Whereas the Informed Meetings Exchange provides information useful to the enactment of this policy;
>
> Therefore we move that the MLA Executive Council be thanked for its decision to subscribe to the Informed Meetings Exchange in order to enact effectively the MLA's policy of union preference.

Yolanda Martínez–San Miguel of the DAOC presented the motion to the assembly along with the DAOC's recommendation that the assembly approve the motion. No one came forward in response to the chair's call for discussion of the *resolved* clause, so the chair asked the assembly to discuss the preamble. There was a question about union disputes that might interfere with a West Coast convention. Rosemary Feal responded that the unions and hotels had settled their differences and that planning for a 2008 convention on the West Coast could go forward. Since there was no further discussion, the chair asked the assembly to vote on the motion. The assembly approved the motion by a vote of 100 in favor and 6 opposed.

8. Also in the category of new business, there were two regular resolutions that were received by the 1 October submission deadline for resolutions. The first resolution, which was referred to as Resolution 2006-1, was submitted by Grover Furr on behalf of the Radical Caucus in English and Modern Languages. It read as follows:

> Whereas undocumented workers, through their labor, contribute greatly to the economy of the USA; and
>
> Whereas they are shamefully deprived of most legal rights other workers enjoy; and
>
> Whereas they are super-exploited as a result; and
>
> Whereas the MLA is appropriately concerned about the use of language and about access to higher education;
>
> Resolved that the MLA urge that the phrase "undocumented workers" be used in place of the abusive term "illegal aliens";
>
> Resolved that every state guarantee undocumented workers who live there in-state tuition.

Joanna Brooks of the DAOC presented the resolution to the assembly along with the DAOC's recommendation that the assembly approve the resolution. The chair stated the question on the adoption of the resolution and called for discussion of the *resolved* clauses. No one came forward, so the chair called for discussion of the preamble. Again no one came forward. The chair therefore asked the assembly to vote on the motion to adopt the resolution. The assembly approved the resolution by a vote of 73 yes and 30 no.

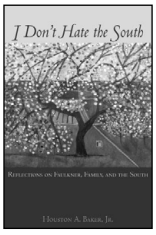
The second resolution (designated Resolution 2006-2) was submitted by Richard Ohmann on behalf of the Radical Caucus in English and Modern Languages. It read as follows:

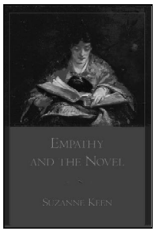
> Whereas, in the wake of hurricane Katrina, city, state, and federal governments have taken apart the New Orleans public school system; reconstituted it as a melange of chiefly charter schools; greatly reduced democratic control of K–12 schooling; laid off all teachers and thus eliminated their union; and widened the gap of racial inequality in education;
>
> Whereas, conservative groups and the Bush Administration have in this context pressed for voucher schemes;
>
> Resolved: the MLA condemns the dismantling of the New Orleans public school system after Katrina, and the wider privatizing movement that has fed upon this disaster.

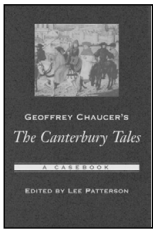
Luca Somigli of the DAOC presented the resolution to the assembly along with the DAOC's recommendation that the assembly approve the resolution. The chair stated the question on the adoption of the resolution and called for discussion of the *resolved* clause. No one came forward, so the chair called for discussion of the preamble. Again no one came forward. The chair therefore asked the assembly

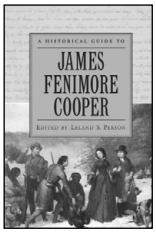
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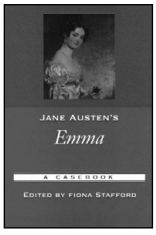
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to vote on the motion to adopt the resolution. The assembly approved the resolution by a vote of 93 yes and 16 no.

9. Michelle Massé presented a report on an emergency resolution that had been submitted to the DAOC on 28 December, during the Open Hearing on Resolutions. It dealt with the status of ethnic studies programs and referred to the situation of Ward Churchill at the University of Colorado, Boulder. She explained that, while Delegate Assembly bylaw 7 provides for the consideration of resolutions "occasioned by emergencies arising after 1 October," the DAOC determined that the situation addressed by the resolution had not changed since 1 October. Therefore, the DAOC decided that the resolution did not qualify under the provision for emergency resolutions for consideration by the Delegate Assembly. In response to a question from the floor, the chair noted that discussion of the resolution was not in order but that questions about the DAOC's decision were. Massé was asked about a past emergency resolution that had been introduced onto the floor of the assembly despite the lack of the kind of emergency described in the Delegate Assembly bylaws. She replied that the DAOC's decision was in keeping with recent committee efforts to adhere to all constitutional and bylaw provisions pertaining to regular and emergency resolutions so as to ensure continued access to the resolution process.

10. The chair called for the announcement of other items of new business, noting that any new proposals could be discussed but could not be voted on until the next assembly meeting. No one came forward.

11. The chair called for announcements. There were none.

12. Since there was no further business before the assembly, the chair declared the 2006 meeting of the Delegate Assembly adjourned sine die at 4:00 p.m.

Delegates in attendance:

Divisional Delegates: Hena Ahmad, Misty G. Anderson, Stephen Arata, William Baker, Pat Belanoff, Christopher Bell, Yelena Belyaeva-Standen, John C. Beynon, Rebecca E. Biron, Virginia L. Blum, Eloise Brière, Galen Brokaw, Anne J. Cruz, Nicholas K. Davis, Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, Susan V. Donaldson, Karen M. Eng, Cristina Ferreira-Pinto Bailey, Katharina Gerstenberger, John M. González, Marshall Grossman, Robin Hackett, Nathalie Hester, Hilde M. Hoogenboom, Sue E. Houchins, Carol V. Kaske, De Witt Douglas Kilgore, Kathleen L. Komar, Susan Larson, Caroline Levander, Joseph Loewenstein, Michèle Longino, Consuelo López-Morillas, Jean Marie Lutes, Peter M. McIsaac, Cristanne Miller, John D. Niles, Crystal Parikh, C. George Peale, James Petterson, Sara S. Poor, Megan Quigley, Laura L. Runge, Iñigo Sánchez-Llama, James R. Siemon, Cynthia Skenazi, Leonard A. Slade, Jr., Zachary Sng, Jackie E. Stallcup, Andrea Tarnowski, Gordon Teskey, Daniel Torres, Marjorie Tussing, Alessandro Vettori, Susan Wells, Frederick H. White, Gillian L. Whitlock, Takayuki Yokota-Murakami.

Special-Interest Delegates: Moneera Al-Ghadeer, Mark L. Amdahl, Susan Amper, Serena Anderlini-D'Onofrio, Julie A. Baker, Barclay Barrios, Laura L. Behling, Margaret H. Beissinger, Bret Benjamin, Norma E. Cantú, J. Elizabeth Clark, Deborah Clarke, Lawrence Coates, Carol Colatrella, Eva L. Corredor, Diane Davis, Alicia M. de la Torre Falzon, Barbara C. Foley, James D. Hayes, Cara Hersh, Margaret E. Johnson, James Kyung-Jin Lee, Sara Lennox, Teresa Mangum, Robert McRuer, Helen G. Morris-Keitel, Susan Y. Najita, Ellen Rooney, Bonnie Kime Scott, Lewis C. Seifert, Barbara A. Silliman, Elizabeth Stewart, Adrienne Ward, Keith Williams, Vershawn Ashanti Young.

Regional Delegates: Hosam M. Aboul-Ela, Michael Adams, Rachel Adams, Scot T. Allen, Thomas M. Allen, Eric Gary Anderson, Geoffrey Baker, Elizabeth Barnes, Michael Bennett, Nina Berman, Carol L. Bernstein, Catherine Bordeau, Cristina Vischer Bruns, Larisa Tokmakoff Castillo, Katy L. Chiles, Shawn Anthony Christian, Matt Cohen, Mary Jean Corbett, Roselyn Costantino, Peter Coviello, Cynthia Davis, Theresa Delgadillo, Mary Ann Dellinger, Jamie Thomas Dessart, Meadow Dibble-Dieng, Terry Engebretsen, Sue W. Farquhar, Elizabeth Fay, Licia Fiol-Matta, Margaret Gates Frohlich, Shane Graham, Kristen Guest, Catherine Jaffe, Maureen Jameson, Dalia Kandiyoti, Katie Kane, Bridget Keegan, Brian Kennelly, Daniel Y. Kim, Debra Walker King, Matthew J. Kinservik, Julie Klassen, Kerry Larson, Typhaine Leservot, Nancy J. Levine, Benjamin Liu, John Wharton Lowe, Patricia W. Manning, Gergana May, Patrick A. McCarthy, Cristel Mejía, Chris Micklethwait, Joyce Irene Middleton, Robert Mitchell, Karoliina Nilsson, Marianne Novy, Elizabeth Petrino, Christopher Porter, Denis M. Provencher, José G. Ricardo, Francesca Canadé Sautman, Patricia Juliana Smith, Geoffrey Turnovsky, Alison Van Nyhuis, Samantha Webb, Alexandra K. Wettlaufer, Cynthia A. Young, Sandra A. Zagarell, Rimas Žilinskas.

Delegates Representing Regional MLAs: Elizabeth J. Abele, Salah J. Khan, Catherine Kunce.

Officers and Members of the Executive Council: Charles Altieri, Dorian F. Bell, Marilyn Gaddis Rose, Gerald Graff, Michael Holquist, Mary N. Layoun, Yolanda Martínez–San Miguel, Paula Rabinowitz, Nicolas Shumway, Guy Stern, Priscilla Wald.

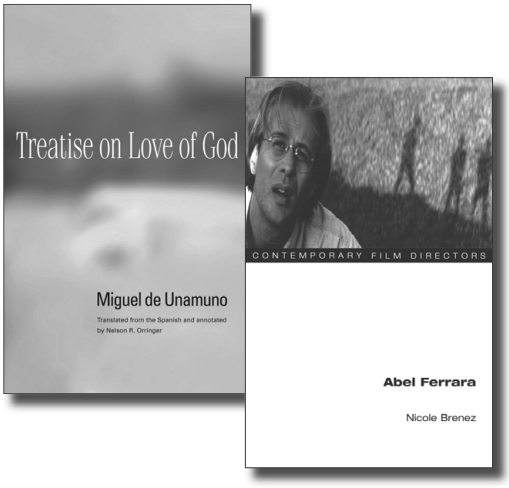
Members of the Delegate Assembly Organizing Committee: Joanna Brooks, Michelle A. Massé, Suzanne R. Pucci, Laura J. Rosenthal, Luca Somigli.

Parliamentarian: Martha S. Grise.

Clerk: Rosemary G. Feal.

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