Minutes of the MLA Executive Council

[Note: The Executive Council voted to approve these minutes at its February 2014 meeting.]

THE COUNCIL MET ON 25–26 OCTOBER 2013 AT THE MLA OFFICE IN NEW YORK. President Marianne Hirsch presided. The officers present were First Vice President Margaret W. Ferguson, Second Vice President Roland Greene, and Executive Director Rosemary G. Feal. The Executive Council members present were Samer M. Ali, Barbara K. Altmann, Jonathan Arac, Lawrence I. Buell, Debra Ann Castillo, Alicia M. de la Torre Falzon, Donald E. Hall, Dorothea Heitsch, Lutz Koepnick, Paula M. Krebs, Richard M. Ohmann, and Mecca Jamilah Sullivan. María Herrera-Sobek and Lanisa Kitchiner were absent. The MLA staff members present were Director of Administration and Finance Terrence Callaghan, Director of Bibliographic Information Services and Editor of the *MLA International Bibliography* Barbara Chen, Director of Scholarly Communication Kathleen Fitzpatrick, Director of Programs and ADFL Nelly Furman, Associate Executive Director and Director of Publishing Operations Judy Goulding, Director of Convention Programs Maribeth T. Kraus, Director of Research and ADE David Laurence, and Assistant to the Executive Director and Coordinator of Governance Carol Zuses. Controller Arlene Barnard was present for discussions of the MLA budget (see item 1, below).

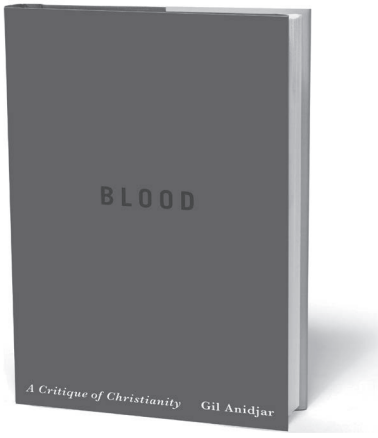
In the morning on 25 October, the council began by meeting with the Delegate Assembly Organizing Committee (DAOC), which had convened on 23–24 October to review assembly and other association business. Jennifer Wicke, the chair of the DAOC, introduced the two resolutions that members had submitted for consideration by the 2014 Delegate Assembly, and she and committee members reviewed with the council the suggestions for revision that the committee had given to the resolutions' proposers. Wicke then presented the topic that the DAOC had chosen for the open-discussion portion of the assembly's agenda, Strategies for Strengthening Humanities Education as a Public Good, and the discussion prompts that the committee had formulated. To prepare assembly members for the open discussion, the committee planned to identify background reading material for each of the discussion prompts. Wicke summarized the DAOC's other business and concluded the committee's report by announcing that Julie Rak had been elected chair of the DAOC for the term from 13 January 2014 through 11 January 2015. The president concluded the joint meeting of the council and the DAOC by thanking the members of the committee for their report. Also present for the joint meeting was MLA Parliamentarian Jeanette N. Williams.

After the meeting with the DAOC, the council began to work through the action items on its agenda in regular session. The council convened in executive session before lunch and then convened again in regular session after lunch to continue its work on

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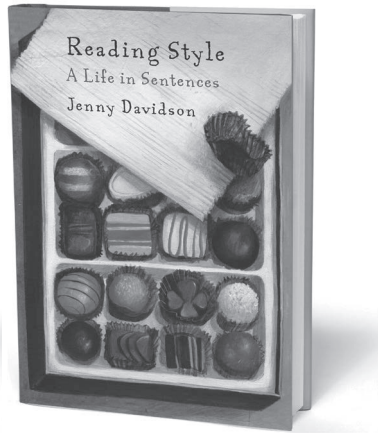
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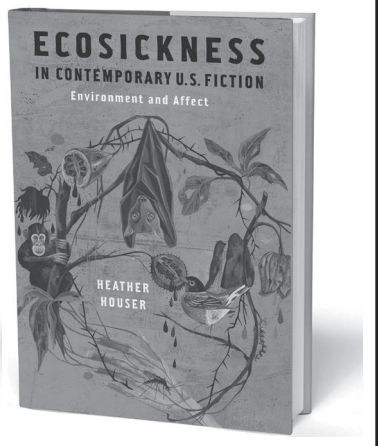
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agenda items. On 26 October, the council's three strategic-planning subcommittees held separate meetings (see item 8, below), after which the full council reconvened to hear the reports of the subcommittee chairs. The council then held two more regular sessions to complete work on the action items on its agenda. The council adjourned at 3:00 p.m., having concluded all the business before it.

The council took the following actions:

1. *Administration and Finance.* The council received a report from the staff Finance Committee on the fiscal year just ended (2012–13) and on the final budget for the current fiscal year (2013–14). The committee projected that the association would conclude the 2012–13 fiscal year with a surplus of $538,460 in the association's unrestricted fund. The committee attributed the surplus to *MLA International Bibliography* revenue that was higher than projected and to savings from the deferral to the 2013–14 fiscal year of expenses associated with several development projects.

The council reviewed the final budget for the fiscal year 2013–14, which projected a deficit of $594,050 in the unrestricted fund. Feal explained that the deficit was higher than projected in May (see Jan. 2014 *PMLA* 130) for two reasons: reduced revenue projections, which the Finance Committee had adjusted after considering the outcome of the 2012–13 fiscal year, and increased expenses due to the development projects that were deferred from 2012–13. Feal said that the current year's surplus offset the projected deficit for 2013–14 but added that the association needed to identify new revenue sources for the future, given the downward trend in publication revenue in recent years. Council members asked about project expenses and the possibility of fund-raising for special projects. This discussion led to the formation of a council working group (Donald Hall, chair; Samer Ali; Barbara Altmann; Alicia de la Torre Falzon; Paula Krebs) that will brainstorm the fund-raising process for projects. The council voted to approve the final budget for the fiscal year 2013–14.

2. *Revision of MLA Style and New Business Model for the Next Edition of the* MLA Handbook. The council received a report on the preliminary work the staff had done over the last year to develop principles that would underlie the revised MLA documentation style to be presented in the eighth edition of the *MLA Handbook*. The new edition will address the present-day proliferation of publication formats and platforms and the migration of works from one medium to another. The report also discussed the development of a new business model for the *Handbook*, which involves the creation of new products and resources for teaching and learning MLA style. The staff outlined plans to gather feedback on the new style from groups of MLA members and from instructors and librarians who have expressed interest in the future of MLA style. The staff will provide a progress report to the council in 2014. After discussing the revisions planned for the new edition of the *Handbook*, the council approved the changes in MLA style and the new business model.

3. *Trustee Appointment.* The council reappointed Malcolm B. Smith, a former president of General American Investors, Inc., both as a trustee of the association's invested funds and as managing trustee for the term 2014–16.

4. *Revision of the Executive Council Statement on Investment Policy.* The council received the report on the performance of the socially responsible instruments (SRIs) in the MLA's endowment portfolio that it requested in February 2013 (see Oct. 2013 *PMLA* 1012). After considering the report, the council decided to revise its statement on investment policy. The council reiterated its support for the inclusion of SRIs in the MLA's portfolio but replaced the reference to the allocation of a specific percentage of the MLA's funds to SRIs with a more general statement: that the percentage invested in SRIs should be based on the long-term performance of these funds as compared with that of the other, traditional instruments.

5. *Approval of the May 2013 Council Minutes.* The council approved the minutes of its May 2013 meeting for publication in the January 2014 issue of *PMLA*.

6. *Confirmation of Actions Taken between Council Meetings.* The council took two actions between its May and October meetings. (1) It issued a statement, as the American Historical Association had done, opposing interference in curricular matters by government officials. (2) It approved the offering of JPASS, a subscription service for individual scholars from JSTOR, to MLA members at a discount, as a new membership benefit. When these actions were proposed, the council's procedure for making decisions between meetings was implemented (see Jan. 2005 *PMLA* 278 and Oct. 2010 *PMLA* 1102), and the full council was given the opportunity to discuss the actions on its electronic discussion list. Since the council was unanimous in its approval of the proposed actions, it was not necessary to ask the council's advisory committee to act. At the present meeting, the council confirmed these decisions.

7. *Document Outlining the Association's Strategic Priorities.* On 25 October, Marianne Hirsch presented to the council a draft document that outlined the strategic priorities—the major aims and activities—of the association. Hirsch explained that the development of the document was prompted by discussions in which she and Margaret Ferguson had participated, in 2012 and 2013 respectively, during the annual leadership seminar sponsored by the American Council of Learned Societies. The document will serve to orient new council members to their work and to summarize the MLA's priorities for the membership and the wider public. Given the nature of the document, it should be reviewed and updated by the council regularly.

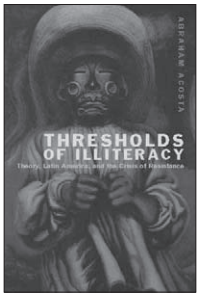
Council members commented on the draft and suggested revisions. The council reviewed a revised draft on 26 October; further revisions were suggested. At the conclusion of the discussion, the council voted to approve the strategic-priorities document in principle. The final draft of the document was to be circulated after the meeting.

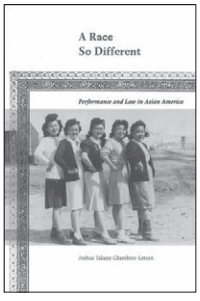
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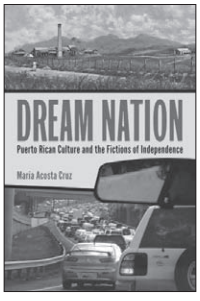
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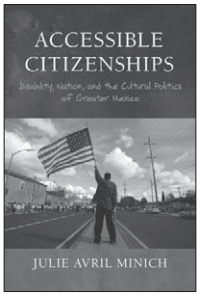
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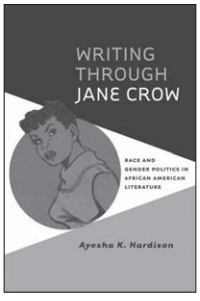
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8. *Strategic-Planning Subcommittees.* Meeting on 26 October, the council's three strategic-planning subcommittees continued the discussions they had begun in May (see Jan. 2014 *PMLA* 130).

The subcommittee on K–16 collaborations (Margaret Ferguson, chair; Lawrence Buell; Debra Castillo; Alicia de la Torre Falzon; Donald Hall; Paula Krebs; Richard Ohmann) focused on the Common Core standards that are being implemented in most states and on ways for the MLA to intervene in discussions of their implementation.

The subcommittee on internationalizing the MLA (Roland Greene, chair; Samer Ali; Barbara Altmann; Lutz Koepnick) reviewed a proposal for the first MLA international symposium. The proposal outlined the symposium topic and format and identified potential cosponsors. The symposium is being planned for June 2016; the main conference venue is expected to be Heinrich Heine Universität Düsseldorf. The subcommittee transmitted the proposal to the full council and recommended that the council implement it (see next item). The subcommittee also recommended that the council establish a planning committee with a more stable membership than the subcommittee.

The subcommittee also discussed its charge in the light of the concept of reach, taken from the strategic-priorities document that the council discussed (see previous item), and decided to expand its charge to cover outreach to other relevant communities (e.g., composition and rhetoric).

The subcommittee on the activities of the divisions and discussion groups (Marianne Hirsch, chair; Jonathan Arac; Dorothea Heitsch; Mecca Sullivan) reviewed the status of the draft proposal to reorganize the association's divisions and discussion groups, which had been posted on *MLA Commons* for membership comment. The subcommittee also discussed the next steps: the working group would meet in December to revise the draft proposal in the light of members' comments; the revised proposal would be discussed at the 2014 convention, during an open hearing and at the Delegate Assembly meeting; and the council would receive the final version of the proposal at its February 2014 meeting. The decision to implement the proposal would rest with the council.

9. *Proposal for an MLA-Sponsored International Symposium.* After reviewing the proposal for an international symposium and the recommendation from its subcommittee on internationalizing the MLA (see previous item), the council authorized the staff and the subcommittee to pursue planning for a symposium to be held in Düsseldorf in June 2016. It was noted that the budget for the current fiscal year included $10,000 to cover initial planning for the symposium. Council members also discussed the size of the conference and the balance between American and other attendees, how to extend the reach of the symposium beyond those in attendance, and ways to build interest in the symposium in advance.

10. *Grant Funding to Support the Development of* MLA Commons. The staff reported to the council on the status of two grant applications that had been submitted after the council authorized the seeking of grant funding in February 2013 (see Oct. 2013 *PMLA* 1010). The association received a planning grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation that will allow the MLA and partner associations across the humanities to explore the possibility of creating a federation of Web sites that would form a *Humanities Commons*. Still pending is an application to the National Endowment for the Humanities for a grant that would enable the MLA to work with Columbia University on the development of an open-access document repository that *MLA Commons* users would have access to. The staff requested the council's authorization to continue to pursue outside funding that would defray the costs of future *MLA Commons* development. The council gave the requested authorization.

11. *Grant Funding for Nonacademic-Careers Project.* In December 2012, the MLA and the American Historical Association received grants from the Mellon Foundation for a project that aims to broaden the career horizons of humanities graduate students and scholars. Rosemary Feal reported to the council on the first phase of that project, which focused on gathering information on the career paths of recent PhD recipients and on identifying the range of nonacademic careers that humanities scholars might pursue. Feal asked for and received the council's authorization to discuss with Mellon funding for a second phase of the project, which involves the development of a prototype for a colloquium focused on expanding graduate students' perspectives on careers. After being tested on some campuses, the colloquium would be replicated elsewhere.

12. *Report on Book Publications.* The council received a staff report on the evolution of the association's book publication program brought about by the changes in the scholarly communication environment that led in 2011 to the creation of the MLA Office of Scholarly Communication. The report outlined the office's streamlined acquisitions process for books and e-books and previewed plans for traditional and born-digital publications.

13. *Report on Membership Trends.* The council received a staff report that analyzed membership patterns and renewal and retention rates, members' movement through dues categories, and connections between membership and members' career stages and convention attendance. The data in the report will allow the staff to devise recruitment and retention strategies as well as professional-development services that will attract members. The council thanked the staff for the report, and council members offered advice on recruiting and retaining members.

14. *Guidelines on Letters of Recommendation.* Margaret Ferguson presented to the council a revision of the guidelines on letters of recommendation for graduate students seeking academic employment that she had shown the council in May (see Jan. 2014 *PMLA* 130). She said that the May draft had been revised according to council members' comments and comments received at

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the ADE and ADFL summer seminars and that the revised draft had been posted on *MLA Commons* in July along with a solicitation for comments from MLA members. The council discussed the substance and format of the revised document. Since council members agreed that the guidelines should cover letters of recommendation for tenure and promotion as well as those for job applications, it was not possible to produce the final draft of the document during the present meeting. Ferguson said she would circulate another revision after the meeting.

15. *Review of the Executive Council's Report to the 2014 Delegate Assembly.* At its February and May 2013 meetings, following the provisions of article 7.B.2 of the MLA constitution, the Executive Council considered the steps to be taken to implement the motion approved by the Delegate Assembly in January 2013 (see Oct. 2013 *PMLA* 1016 and Jan. 2014 *PMLA* 130) and made plans to forward an implementation report to the 2014 assembly. At the present meeting, the council reviewed and approved a draft of its report to the assembly.

16. *Selection of a Site for the 2016 Annual Convention.* The council selected Austin, Texas, as the site of the January 2016 convention.

17. *Recommendations from the Program Committee.* The council received and acted on the Program Committee's recommendations regarding allied organizations. The council renewed for seven years the allied organization status of eighteen societies: American Association of Teachers of German, American Association of Teachers of Slavic and East European Languages, American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese, American Boccaccio Association, American Comparative Literature Association, American Folklore Society, American Humor Studies Association, American Name Society, American Philological Association, Association for Computers and the Humanities, Association for Documentary Editing, Association for the Study of American Indian Literatures, Association of Teachers of Technical Writing, Byron Society of America, Community College Humanities Association, John Clare Society of North America, North American Heine Society, and Society for the History of Authorship, Reading, and Publishing. The allied status of the Simone de Beauvoir Society, whose review had been deferred for one year (see May 2013 *PMLA* 834), was renewed for six years. Four organizations—American Association of Professors of Yiddish, American Dialect Society, Instituto Internacional de Literatura Iberoamericana, and National Communication Association—informed the council that they no longer wished to organize sessions for the MLA convention; the council discontinued their allied status. The allied status of the Twentieth-Century Spanish Association of America was discontinued because the association is defunct.

18. *Annual Reports from Standing Committees.* The council received annual reports from the editor of *PMLA* and from the following standing committees: Publications Committee, Committee on Scholarly Editions, Committee on the New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare, Advisory Committee on the *MLA International Bibliography*, 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, Committee on Disability Issues in the Profession, Committee on Community Colleges, Committee on the Status of Graduate Students in the Profession, Committee on Contingent Labor in the Profession, and Steering Committee on New Structures for Languages in Higher Education. The council accepted these reports with thanks.

19. *Executive Council Liaison to the Committee on Contingent Labor in the Profession (CLIP).* For the final three years of her term on the council, Dorothea Heitsch served as the council's liaison to CLIP. Anticipating the end of Heitsch's term, the council appointed Paula Krebs as the new committee liaison.

20. *Revision of Policies Followed by Prize-Selection Committees.* At its May 2012 meeting, the council established a policy for the association's prize-selection committees that set no limits on the number of honorable mentions and cowinners that prize committees could name (see Jan. 2013 *PMLA* 248–50). The implementation of the new policy prompted the council to reconsider it. At the present meeting, the council voted to limit prize committees to naming two honorable mentions and two cowinners.

21. *Appointments to the* Profession *Editorial Collective.* The council reviewed a list of potential appointees to the new *Profession* Editorial Collective (see Oct. 2013 *PMLA* 1012–14). The council approved the list and authorized the staff to draw future appointees from the list, as needed. The council noted, however, that the list did not provide full coverage of relevant areas of study, institutional types, and faculty categories. The council therefore planned to expand the list of potential appointees at a future meeting.

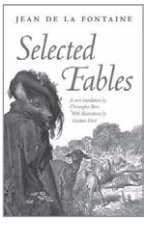
22. *Response to Senator's Comments on the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH).* In an October letter to the NEH, Senator Jeff Sessions (AL) criticized the agency's program Bridging Cultures for what he viewed as the promotion of Islamic culture at the expense of Christian and Jewish cultures. The council began drafting a response to Sessions's criticism during the meeting and completed the response soon afterward using its electronic discussion list. The statement was copyedited and posted on the Executive Council Actions page of the MLA Web site on 30 October.

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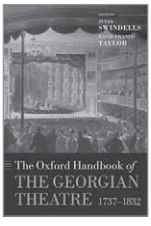
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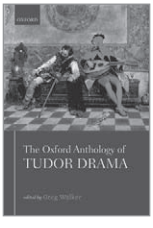
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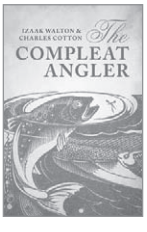
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